the grampian speleological group

bulletin

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Web Site: http://www.sat.dundee.ac.uk/~arb/gsg/
Editorial:

As the dust and euphoria of the Olympics settles like yesterday’s snow upon a recession-strapped UK, perhaps it is time once again to ponder the health of speleology in this country. For several years, various grant-giving bodies have curtailed or wound back their support for non-competitive activities such as caving and climbing in order to concentrate on ‘The Greatest Show on Earth’ (which by and large it was, to be fair), but I would be the last one to moan about there being less money about for training, infrastructure or promotion. Caving started out as private enterprise, carried out by free-thinking people who were looking for escape from regimentation and civil control, not seeking to introduce the same complex bureaucratic nonsense we have to suffer in everyday life. Certain obligations come along with grant aid which can stifle, rather than expand, what we seek to do.

Nor, in my view, should caving be viewed as an ersatz classroom, a ‘journey’ comprising the acquisition of ‘skills’ (a few born of, and in thrall to, distorted health and safety issues). Caving should be as defined by André Bourgin in the classic text ‘One Thousand Metres Down’ (1955):

“Curiosity and love of adventure, the passionate desire to know, to know with scientific certainty, that is the one great motive in exploration........our speleologist, a Sunday explorer, seeks for further knowledge of the bowels of the Earth in the modest hills that rise near the place where he was born and works......The various motives of scientific interest, of developments in technique or desire for adventure have their part to play, but that of pure human adventure is certainly the root of the matter.”

Love of adventure - for me also that is the central truth. When committing oneself wholly to underground exploration, technique evolves naturally as obstacles are encountered and addressed. Keeping oneself safe and well while so occupied is obviously sensible, but not an excuse for certification or control, a road several European countries have taken. Hidden in such an arrangement is the spectre of state control over what you do and how you do it, anathema to the true potholer.

I imagine this desire for a life unshackled by interference, where excitement and a sense of achievement are there for the taking, would be appealing to the youth of today, largely starved of physical activity. It is of course expressed in street crime, rebellion, gang culture and any number of other socially negative pursuits, but we have an opportunity here to steer at least some of them into a more worthwhile enterprise. Insofar as this concerns the GSG I feel the issue requires action, otherwise the club will slowly atrophy from increasing age and commitment. It is the 18-25 year olds who, without ties, bond into hard teams devouring every Grade 5 pot in sight, gaining valuable expertise which in turn can be directed at new exploration in Scotland – and elsewhere. They are also the future; without them, the club will not last. In view of my opening remarks, it will be clear I am not advocating any formal recruiting drive that organises them into a ‘system’, despite what some may think is demanded by the triumvirate White Man’s Burden (HSE/insurance/lawyers). Just get them along, let them cover themselves in mud and water, scramble about over rocks and generally have a hell of a time. Then tell them they can do it again, and again, and again, until they are hooked. Let them bring their mates, and their mates, and we’ll be off!

Naturally we will in the first instance have to seek such people out, perhaps via youth leaders who, professionally, deal with our potential recruitment pool every day. And we must be prepared to offer support, especially transport and equipment. Crucially, though, once ‘bedded in’ they should be allowed to take up the operational reins for running the club, to do things their way - the future is after all, for them. Our experience and oversight should be there, but kept in the wings, so to speak, while newcomers get their teeth into the cheapest stimulating sport on offer, one that positively insists on the use of old clothes! Are YOU able to help?

* * * *
Every generation comes to caving with fresh eyes and perhaps firmer determination. The amazing developments on Leck and Casterton Fells testify how dreams can come true. Not only is the Three Counties System a reality, but new ways down into major pots such as Lost John’s Cavern seem to be opened up almost monthly. The same story is repeated on Mendip and in South Wales, so this could justifiably be called another ‘Golden Age’. Perhaps it is not surprising therefore to find a new GSG team dedicating itself to a fresh campaign in Argyll. As articles in this issue show, their efforts have already been crowned with success and at least two sizeable new caves have been added to the Appin total. Pleasingly too, this team is largely comprised of relatively recent members of the Group and their successes look likely to continue. The potential of the Appin limestones to produce new sporting systems is comparatively large. Our first great burst of exploration in the late 1970s by no means covered all the available territory and despite Malcolm McConville’s persistent work later in Glens Creran and Duro, club attention was inevitably diverted by the spectacular rewards being offered in Sutherland’s Uamh an Clonaite. All hail the new champions then! I wish them every success and am proud that, once again, the GSG is at the forefront of Scottish caving. This is certainly a golden age for us.

Alan L. Jeffreys, Editor

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MEET REPORTS (to 10.8.2012 ) (Edinburgh logs only)

Quite a varied selection of meets since the previous Bulletin, and it is gratifying to see Argyll once more playing a major role in club activity. Things have been quieter on the Yorkshire front but new finds in Applecross, Sutherland and Appin help to ‘balance the books’.

ARGYLL

An area near Ballachulish, initially checked 30 years ago, was re-examined by George Kennedy and friends in February and they were successful in finding several promising sinkholes including one, the Dragon’s Lair, first found by Jim Salvona in 1980, which the following weekend was pushed into a rift passage with such intimidating boulders that further penetration was abandoned.

In March a team of five trudged up to rarely visited Coire Mulrooney to check out the caves there and in Owl Hole, Andy Morgan achieved a small addition, creating a tiny round trip within the system. May saw a rare trip to Ardnamurchan Point, where the limestone caves were checked out. Also visited were the old lead mines at Strontian.

At the end of June a seven strong team examined Coire Buidhe on the south side of Glen Creran and in a narrow band of limestone not shown on average scale geological maps, found a group of open sinks and eventually a splendid 50m stream cave named ‘Tight’Un’. The same month John Glover carried out a solo visit to schist caves around Lochgoilhead.

Coire Buidhe was re-visited in July when other outcrops of limestone were noted and small sinks found. At the end of the month there was a trip to Glenstockdale where several known caves were entered and what was thought to be a new find, but subsequently established as Glenmuckrach Pot, forced by Tamlin Barton into a very respectable system of 100 metres or so, ending at a spacious sump (see this issue). This extension was entitled ‘Hugo Boss’. Also, in August David Morrison paid a flying visit to Fish-hooks and South caves.

At the beginning of August, Roger Galloway and Annie Audsley paid another visit to Ardnamurchan, checking out sea caves and surveying Cave of the Maclains (see this issue).

More work was carried out in Glenstockdale at the end of August when roughly 30 metres of new cave was explored in a pot some 30 metres from Glenmuckrach Pot. Simultaneously, a BBC reporter was fed into the entrance of this latter (not getting past the squeeze 8 metres in), but GSG divers managed the carry to the sump where some three metres of submerged tunnel were pushed to a rather tight section where the roof appeared to
be rising slightly.

AYRSHIRE

During a holiday excursion in May, Iain Greig visited the Culzean Castle caves.

DERBYSHIRE

An abortive mid-week trip to Creswell Crags in June by Goon revealed these decorated caves are only open at weekends! Impressive visitor centre though.

DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY

Iain Greig, on holiday in the south-west during May, visited Sawney Bean’s Cave, St Ninian’s Cave and Bruce’s Cave, Kirkpatrick, this last a mere chiselled cavity in sandstone.

EAST LOTHIAN

In February, as a follow-up to investigations at Wallace’s Cave, Goon re-located the partially blocked entrance to Garelton Haematite Mine, first explored by the Group in 1965. In April, clearance continued at the effluent tunnel on the shore at Thorntonloch, and the same month a thorough investigation was made of Seacliff Cave near North Berwick (see this issue).

MIDLOTHIAN

A mysterious tunnel in Bilston Glen near Edinburgh has been dug intermittently by members. In February, Derek Pettiglio carried out three solo trips which were successful in gaining some 80 metres to the base of a solidly choked upward shaft.

MORAYSHIRE

In August, Robin Taviner took advantage of a stay in Keith to visit a group of spectacular sea caves between Burghead and Cullen, some with Pictish carvings.

PERTHSHIRE

Iain Greig went through the old Glenfarg railway tunnels in April, both some 480 metres in length, and in May, Simon Brooks attempted a dive in Trinafour Lower Cave downstream sump, making six metres of progress along a low, bendy passage to a point where the floor began to slope down. He retreated here, feeling the need for backup before pushing onward.

ROSS-SHIRE

In May, three members spent time on Skye, visiting the Elba Copper Mine, Breakish Caves, High Pasture Cave and various other holes in the Coille Gaireallach.

Thanks to a repaired road and dry weather there were two descents of Uamh nam Fior Iongantais in June, on the second occasion Toby Speight and David Morrison adding some 30 metres off Ripley’s Chamber.

At the end of August, Toby Speight took fellow RRCPC member into Ripley’s Chamber to survey Austrian Cheese Crawl, adding a couple of metres after boulder clearance. The following day they also descended
Cave of the Kings at Kishorn and opened a new hole nearby, ‘Thistle Do Pot’ which is currently two metres deep but seen to continue. It will need hammer and chisel work.

SOMERSET

Andy Morgan and Julie Hesketh examined Pinetree Pot in March, but wisely turned back before the bitter end of Easy Street due to its tortuous tightness.

On Mendip in May for Snab’s (and Robin Gray’s) 70th bash at the Hunters, Goon and Tangent had a very pleasant stroll down to sump 2 in Swildon’s Hole.

SOUTH WALES

At the invitation of Kate Janossy, some members journeyed to South Wales in April for excellent trips into Craig y Ffynnon and Agen Allwedd and two separate forays into Ogof Draenen.

SUTHERLAND

In mid-February Martin Hayes conducted a solo dig in Uamh Cailliche Peireag and the following month a nine-strong party continued boulder clearance and digging in Claonaite’s Concrethead, which was crowned with success when entry was made into Claonaite 6. The same day an inspection of Cuil Dubh plateau revealed that Cave of the Deep Depression appeared to have re-opened by flood water. There was also some digging in UCP. The following weekend witnessed tourist trips into Clashnessie Cave and Cnoc nan Uamh.

In April, Jamie Yuill’s stag do at the hut provided an opportunity for descents of Cnoc nan Uamh, UCP and Malcolm’s Myth overlooking Loch Urigill, where a little digging was carried out. The next weekend all krabs and maillons in Rana Hole pitch were renewed and some time spent with transceivers pinpointing possible dig sites for a sump 5 bypass from Concrethead. There was also an opportunity to survey Claonaite 6 with a DistoX. A mass assault on Campbell’s Cave resulted in 280 kibbles being removed.

In early May some accurate radio location was carried out in Antler Chamber, Uamh an Claonaite, but attempts to survey the environs of Tibesti Chamber failed due to caver size. Simon Brooks undertook another dive into Traligill Rising where he laid 28 metres of line into sump 2 which he found to be deeper than expected in a substantial thrust plane passage.

Later the same month there was another solo trip to Cuil Dubh to establish that Deep Depression was indeed accessible and Storm Cave found to have suffered some substantial alteration. The next Monday, Goon returned to Storm Cave to properly examine the newly revealed voids (see this issue).

In mid-June, Martin Hayes soloed trips to Cuil Dubh, Storm Cave, Deep Depression, UCP, Campbell’s Cave and Uamh an Claonaite, and at the end of the month there was a tourist trip via Rana into Claonaite.

In July there was a very brief trip to the Bone Caves to obtain footage for the Claonaite movie and Derek Pettiglio went down Rana to replace the rope in Black Rift, thereafter visiting parts of Claonaite he had not seen before. A few days later there were tourist trips into the Bone Caves, Rana Hole, Claonaite, 3Gs and Campbell’s Caves.

On 26th August, as a break from block building at the hut, four members trekked up to examine Storm Cave and Cave of the Deep Depression.
YORKSHIRE

A small number of trips to the Dales saw a variety of caves descended, starting at the end of January with a thorough exploration of Bull Pot of the Witches. In May a small group went into the Mistral, exiting via Link Pot, and the following weekend carried out a through trip from Pippikin Pot.

The club was delighted to acquire a permit for Robinson’s Pot in June and fielded a maximum team (11 actually) for a trip into the most unusual entrance in Yorkshire. The whole system was checked, including wet side passages during a route-finding interlude. Simultaneously a party went into Kingsdale Master Cave.

Sunday 10th June was the ‘Founder’s Day’ meet when old woollies were worn and rope ladders used for a trip down Alum Pot from Long Churn. At the same time four members roped down Diccan Pot and three others did Calf Holes to Browgill.

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MEET NOTE: Bilston Glen Tunnel

In the summer of 2010 Mark Stanford examined a blocked tunnel some 12 metres long in the side of Bilston Glen, south of Edinburgh. It was dug a little until his gas alarm went off and he retreated, but he persisted with digging for a while into winter 2010.

In February and March 2011, I carried out a series of solo digging sessions at this site and on the first trip gained some 13 metres of easier going until the way on was blocked by roof breakdown. A compass bearing showed it ran at 235 degrees while the tower which local folklore would have you believe the passage connects to is on a bearing of 155 degrees.

A week later I returned, dug past the new blockage to enter comfortable going with a firm, scalloped mud floor showing no sign of human footprints. Forty metres later, still at 235 degrees, I deemed a return prudent, having no gas detector with me. Five days later, now armed with a detector, I continued past my previous end point but after only ten metres the passage turned sharp left at 175 degrees. Two metres later it closed down to a low arch half a metre high mostly filled with sand, silt and stone. There was a strong sound of running water from beyond the blockage. A long digging session gained two metres but the solid roof ended and it looked to me like I was at the bottom of a filled shaft. The water sounds were louder, in front and below me. Oxygen dropped to 20.1% at this point but quickly returned to 20.9% as soon as I moved back down the passage. There are some nice calcite formations in the tunnel and as I exited I found the skull of a carnivore, probably a fox.

Derek Pettiglio

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

GSG Publications available:
Decades in the Dark - Jubilee History volume: £20 + £2 postage.

Cave Guides [non-member price quoted in every case]

Caves of Assynt 2nd Ed. £8.50
Caves of Skye £8.50
Caves of Applecross and Kishorn £6
Appin Cave Guide + Supplement £4.50 all £1 postage
De Profundis: A Miscellany of Verse for the Jubilee: £3 + 50p postage
Transcript of Taigh nam Famh Hut Log, Vol.9 (2010-2011) £3 + £1 postage

Many back issues of the GSG Bulletin are still available at £2 each, plus £1.50 postage each issue.

-------oOo-------
ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY  (to 10.9.2012)

1. BOOKS

Beck, G. (2011) Beneath the Dark Ice [adult caving novel]
Gee, M. (1979) Under the Mountain [children’s caving novel]
Buckland, Rev. W. (1823, rep 2010) Reliquiae Diluvianae

3. CAVING JOURNALS

Bristol Exploration Club, Vintager’s Bulletin April, 2012
British Caving Association, Handbook 2012 (for 2013)
BCRA Caves and Karst Science Vol.39 Nos.1,2 (2012)
BCRA Cave Radio & Electronics Group, Journal No.77 (2012)
Cave Diving Group, Newsletter Nos. 183,184 (2012)
Chelsea Speleological Society, Newsletter Vol. 54 Nos. 3/4, 5/6, 7/8 (2012)
Craven Pothole Club, Record Nos. 106,107 (2012)
Descent Nos. 225,226,227 (2012)
Italian Speleological Society ‘Speleologia’ Year 33 No.66 (2012)
NAMHO Newsletter March, June, Sept. (2012)
Red Rose Cave & Pothole Club, Newsletter Vol.49 No.2 (2012)
Shepton Mallet Caving Club Journal Series 12 No.9 (2011)
Subterranea Britannica ‘Subterranea’ Nos. 29,30 (2012)
UBSS Proceedings Vol.25 No.3 (2012)
Wessex Cave Club, Journal Nos.83,85,86,89,90,91,93,96,99,100,103, 104,120,125,126,130,138,149,151,162,163, 171 (1962-1978)
Wessex Cave Club, Journal Indexes Vols. 7,8,9
Wessex Cave Club, Supplement to Vol.8 Hillgrove Hutlogs (26.6.54 -7.10.63) (1964)
Wessex Cave Club, Newsletter No.1 (2012)
Westminster Spelaeological Group, Newsletter Nos. 2012/1,2012/2

4. MAPS

OS 1: 50,000 Landranger Sheet 120: Mansfield and Worksop.

5. CAVING GUIDES, ABSTRACTS ETC.

42. No. 1423
Creswell Crags Heritage Trust (no date) Ice Age Art at Creswell Crags.10pp. No. 1431
Creswell Crags Heritage Trust (no date) Creswell Crags Inspiring Stories, Amazing Discoveries, Stunning Landscape, Incredible History, Exciting Experiences, Fantastic Adventures. 67pp. No. 1432

6. DVDS, VIDEOS ETC.
DVD No. 50. The Underground Journey. Lead Mine Soughs Beneath Cromford (1968)
No. 51. The Hidden River of Allt nan Uamh (2012)
No. 52 Glenamuckrach Pot. BBC 28.8.12

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**Taigh nam Famh**

The GSG Field Hut is available for accomodation in Scotland’s finest caving region. Equipped with all mod cons, visitors may enjoy fantastic views of Assynt scenery from the comfort of the conservatory. Drying room, hot showers, fully fitted kitchen, bunk rooms and toilets are all provided. Fees for non-members are £5 per night and £2.50 for members, discounts for children and OAPs.

Application should be made at: hutbookings@gsg.org.uk

-----oOo-----
Every six months or so Martin Hayes and I make solo inspection tours of potential sites in Assynt, particularly those affected by seasonal floods. It was on just such an occasion in 2005 that Martin discovered the then recently exposed entrance to Storm Cave. Earlier this year (2012) he reported that further collapse at the entrance appeared to have altered the topography but did not enter due to being in surface clothes.

On Saturday 19th May I took a look at this cave. The entrance has indeed enlarged: a massive lintel of clean-washed dolostone gives access straight into a rubbly crawl leading directly at roughly 320° to the top of the main chamber some seven metres in. Daylight can still be clearly seen from this inner point. In fact, the whole north-western face of the entrance depression has been washed out, revealing a wide but low bedding plane, extending in a number of new directions.

On the west side of the crawl mentioned above, two routes were seen to head off, one approximately parallel to the entrance and probably heading for upstream depressions in the usually dry river bed, the other, on a bearing of 240°, seemingly heading for unknown territory. I stuck my head into the latter and heard a strong sound of running water but, like Martin, I was in ‘street clothes’ so did not pursue the matter in the face of wet peat and small puddles.

On Monday 4th June in very dry conditions I returned, fully armed. Entering this low passage I quickly established that it possessed three distinct characteristics. On the extreme left, a squared off rock wall was partially obscured by a peat bank. The central route was initially an easy shuffle over mud and rubble with a flat, slightly sloping roof, while rolling under a ceiling lip to the right, access was gained to a trench high enough to stand up, with another wall of peat on the right. I was disappointed to realise that this latter was the trench at the top of the main chamber, and the noise of running water originated from the inlet shown on the survey (1). This trench rapidly diminished into a blocked-off alcove.

Returning to the central crawl, I pushed on another three metres until a very low section caused a problem. About three metres beyond I could just make out a slightly higher section of right angled rock and blocks heavily stained by peat but could only make progress by entering feet first. This position debarred me from seeing where the passage was going (if anywhere) and reversing led to my becoming stuck until, helmet removed and the floor excavated a trifle, I managed to wriggle free. There was no discernable draught or noise, but I cannot be absolutely sure there is no way forward from this point. Total passage length was 11 metres. I was accompanied by Bingo the dog the whole way.
Very close to the entrance, the second new passage consisted of a wide (3-4 metres) but quite low bedding with progress hindered by breakdown on the floor. In order to penetrate any distance I would have needed to spend a considerable amount of time clearing these blocks away so left it for another day. I could see perhaps 8-10 metres to a point where the left hand wall turned north and obscured the view. I felt a cool draught here which is probably explained by a number of small holes in the grassy bank above.

Evidently, the upper southern sections of Storm Cave consist of wide bedding plane passages crowded with flood debris and breakdown and persistent digging at the western ends of the new crawls might intersect water coming from Cuil Dubh Sink, itself not an enormous distance away. Obviously the stream in the main chamber comes from there so there is potential for upstream extension if a route drops down to water beyond my furthest point reached. It seems very likely that both new crawls end immediately above, but slightly to the south-east of, the current end of the active inlet to the main chamber so at the least a small round trip might be realisable here, if not a further section of active streamway towards Cuil Dubh.

This new topography is extremely difficult to reconcile with the published survey and the first of the crawls described is probably a modification of the half moon shape at the bottom of the 2005 survey. The second crawl is definitely a new addition. An attempt has been made to place my grade 2 plan on top of the published survey but this was not very successful and will likely add to the confusion! The good news is that the cave is very unlikely to be re-blocked by winter floods and might indeed benefit from a thorough wash-out. The new area is named ‘The Cold Front’ and totals some 20 metres of new territory.

Reference:
DIVING IN THE TRALIGILL AND TRINAFOUR
(AKA “Yet More Esoteric Scottish Dive Sites for the Unwary”)
By Simon Brooks

Saturday 5th May 2012
Traligill Rising, Inchnadamph
NC 26742122

Thanks to Lord Vestey’s house building project currently taking place in the lower part of the Traligill Valley, the track leading up to Glenbain Cottage was open. I checked at the Lodge and was informed that I was unlikely to get locked in and more importantly they could get a key if later I was. I parked up at Glenbain Cottage, which significantly shortens the walk to the Rising, changed and kitted up at the car with a pair of not quite full 4 Ltr cylinders and walked more or less fully kitted to the cave.

Thrutching the 30 metres or so along the awkward and typically Scottish thrust plane entrance passage I reached the sump pool and found the water to be at its ‘normal’ Spring/Summer level, essentially just flowing out over the lip of the sump. The line that I had laid in May 2011 proved to be in good condition, still well belayed, and more remarkably the belay to flake on the roof at the upstream end was still intact and solid. Putting another snoopy on the belay for good measure, I de-kitted and made a solo sherpa of kit along the 42 metres of again very awkward Scottish thrust plane passage in Traligill Rising 2 to reach sump 2, at some points having to go back and forth a few times with separate bits of equipment.

Finding a reliable belay for the line I entered sump 2, expecting it to be a relatively simple and shallow dive that would connect to the downstream sump in nearby Disappointment Cave (lying a little further up the valley from the Rising). However, as caves have a pleasant habit of doing, this proved not to be the case. The sump descended first steeply to -3 metres and then more gently and I laid 28 metres of line to a depth of -6.5 metres on a bearing of 120° in a submerged thrust plane passage, in places up to 1.2 metres high and 4 metres wide. From here the sump could be seen to continue for at least another 5 to 6 metres to a depth of -8 metres, with no end in sight. With only some 7 metres of line left on the reel, and no suitable belay to tie the line off to, I exited from the sump removing the line as I went.

I then made an uneventful, albeit awkward, exit from the cave with my diving suit looking somewhat tattier than when I started as testament to the rather compact, nobbly and awkward nature of the Traligill Rising passages. Upstream sump 2 is very much ongoing and a return is planned, certainly with more line, rather fuller cylinders and most essentially, an assistant to help carry the gear between the sumps.

Monday 7th May 2012
Trinafour Lower Cave, Perthshire
NN 72131 66139

Trinafour Lower Cave, as some GSG members will know, is a pleasant little cave and it and Trinafour Rising, to which it is hydrologically connected, were discovered by the GSG in 2008, being surveyed and explored by the Group in the same year. The Lower Cave (sink) and Rising (resurgence) are some 200 metres apart with the Lower Cave having some 75 metres of passage and the Rising around 120 metres with the current ends of the two caves being some 75 metres apart. Whilst visiting the cave with other GSG members on the Saturday prior to the club’s Jubilee Dinner in June 2011, I noted that the small sump in Lower Cave was diveable, having previously been observed as too tight.

Anyway, on driving to Sutherland for the latter part of the 2012 annual Mendip Migration I noted the Trinafour signpost as I sped up the A9 and a plan was hatched. Three days later, when returning from the Assynt caving area I took the opportunity to call in at Trinafour, en route to Roger and Annie’s at Uphall, and dive the un-entered downstream sump. Stopping off in a layby near to Trinafour I phoned Roger and Annie, told them of my plan and suggested that if I did not call them by about 6pm, or stop by at the house, someone might want to think about driving up to Trinafour to look for me.
With the necessary ‘get out of jail-ish’ option in place I parked at the small lochan near the cave, changed and walked over the small hill to the entrance. This was found without too much difficulty and I began a solo carry to the downstream sump with only a small 2.5 Ltr cylinder and a single valve. I soon found that the passage was much more compact now that I was wearing my diving semi-dry in contrast to what I experienced in June 2011 when wearing a normal caving oversuit and thin wetsuit. So much so that any excess equipment I was carrying (in this case leads and a belt) were abandoned at the first squeeze some 30 metres inside the cave. On reaching the sump I found that I barely had room to turn around, let alone kit up, so I retreated some 10 metres back up the passage where it was a little larger, in order to do so.

Once kitted up I wriggled backwards down the final section of passage to reach the sump and entered it feet first, only to find it was very compact making it difficult/impossible to use a line reel in the traditional way. I exited from the sump and, not wishing to waste the effort of getting this far, abandoned the line reel and re-entered the sump feet first without a line, as there seemed little chance of losing the route anyway. In appalling visibility the sump was penetrated for approximately six metres (three body lengths), negotiating a couple of slight bends, to a point where it felt like the floor was dropping and the sump was getting a little larger. Feeling the need for a second cylinder and valve - and an assistant, the latter both for moral support and to base-feed a line, I exited from the sump and wriggled back through the cave to the entrance. I returned to the car, changed, phoned Roger to tell him to put the kettle on and headed south. Having proved the site is diveable a return at some point in the future is a possibility, although I will probably have to leave it long enough for less enchanting memories of the trip to fade. One of Scotland’s more esoteric dive sites indeed.

   Bull GSG 4th Series 3(5) pp. 23-27

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APPLECROSS AND SKYE TRIP
2nd-5th JUNE 2012

By Alex Latta

A second long holiday weekend within two years, courtesy of the Royal Family, saw Carol Dickson, Bob Somerville and Alex Latta head north again for another short summer caving expedition to Applecross and Skye. The journey once again was made in Alex’s trusty (rusty?) Ford Transit van and we rolled in to the Applecross campsite on the Saturday afternoon to glorious weather and, as is normal in cases of long distance travel, decided that some acclimatisation was required before caving commenced so after pitching the tents we retired to the Applecross Inn to re-hydrate and fuel up with good food after the long drive north.

Caving activity proper started on Sunday morning, the main target being the new Uamh nam Fior Iongantais, which we had searched for and failed to find the previous year, only to discover on our return home that we has missed the entrance by only 50 metres or so, with local club members likely to have been inside at the time. This time, with a better description and directions on where to look, we found it within minutes of arriving on the hill. Once we were suited and booted up I went feet first into the fairly tight squeeze of the entrance. Our main worry after coming all the way up from Edinburgh was that we would find the place completely flooded and impenetrable, but early signs looked good as I could see up the canal passage there was nearly a metre of airspace between water and roof. By this time Carol had manoeuvred herself through the entrance as well. Then Bob’s feet appeared through the entry hole. However after much turning, squeezing and cursing it was obvious that Bob’s larger frame wasn’t ever going to fit through the first half metre of entrance boulders without the aid of a rope and winch (to pull him through) or some major re-engineering of the hole. With some disappointment Bob had to sit this out out, a shame really as it seemed there was only one large boulder at the portal preventing entry; beyond it there didn’t appear to be much from stopping slightly larger folk from enjoying this cave. Is there any hope of a larger front door being installed for them in future I wonder?

Carol and I followed the canal and found to our relief that the water was indeed low enough for entry to the
cave proper and we soon found ourselves surrounded by some of the best formations I at least had ever seen. We took in all the large passage we could find, having climbed the short wire ladder going up towards the breakdown chamber and beyond, but having left Bob outside we were conscious of not wanting to be away for a worrying length of time after having given him some estimate of how long we would be inside and out of contact. We took a few photographs and retreated happy back outside, meeting up with Bob and heading back down the hill bathed in warm sunshine - always a bonus when you are soaking wet. Not having explored every single small passage means there will be more to see when we go back again.

Monday saw us drive to Skye to attempt our other planned targets of the two Breakish caves and High Pasture Cave (this time with a new Peli case purchased to get my camera beyond the duck safe and dry). We found (literally stumbled into) Lower Breakish Cave within a few minutes, but on appearing to be mostly comprised of flat out grotty wet crawl in a streamway, we decided to give this system a miss and pressed on upstream in search of the other cave. Initially we didn’t find it and headed too far upstream, finding instead a small tube on the opposite bank in a small cliff that looked like it went at least five or six metres when looking in with a torch. I tried to enter feet first but found it was too tight for even my feet and legs. I did reckon it was more of a ‘Carol-sized’ hole, but she couldn’t be persuaded to reverse her smaller frame inside even when offered the end of a rope to hold onto, in order to aid rescue if required. To be honest I couldn’t blame her - we were a long way from both home and the main body of SCRO. While walking back downstream on the same bank as Breakish Cave, we found a small shelf of limestone further up the bank that is slightly undercut and can be seen to be filled with silt and sand. This requires further investigation and may even have been an original entrance for water into the Breakish system and may lead towards some of the crawls found inside fairly recently by Dave and Toby. Sadly I did not GPS this nor take a distance measurement from Breakish Cave itself. It’s quite far away but not too distant to be connected to this cave system and should be easy to find again.

On walking even further downstream I recognised some more cliff features and on climbing up the bank confirmed we had managed to find Breakish Cave after all. I edged into the fairly tight entrance tube backwards with my Peli case towed behind me, and Carol followed shortly after dragging my camera tripod behind her.

Bob didn’t attempt to come this time. He had previously read the cave survey and had counsel from other club members that this entrance was a tight one and so hadn’t even bothered to put it on his individual ‘to do’ list. We spent 45 minutes or so exploring the main passages and left the smaller stuff to keener club members. I also tried to take some photographs but all were failures, mostly due to lots of condensation from our breath. We exited Breakish Cave and with Bob headed off to Broadford to sit outside a small cafe in the sunshine and consume a well deserved portion of burger and chips. By now, due to all the concurrent crawling, thrutching, bending, crouching and recent consumption of food, any sort of movement whatsoever was proving slightly uncomfortable but regardless of that we headed down the road towards Torrin and parked up near High Pasture Cave, taking some time out for a breather and simply enjoying the continuing sunny weather that so far was surprisingly devoid of unbearable midge clouds.

Eventually we stirred ourselves into motion with Carol deciding that a third caving trip in one day was pushing things a little far but she still came up to High Pasture along with Bob and myself to its huge entrance (in comparison to the other visits so far) and we spent an hour inside exploring passages and in my case playing with my camera and LED torches as multiple lighting sources till all their batteries started to die. With my camera lights fading we decided to call time and exited the cave back into warm sunshine for more snacks and beer down beside the van at the roadside.

The advantage as it turned out of not being able to obtain a camping pitch at the ‘Site Full’ Broadford camp site meant that we were going to have to wild camp somewhere else and so decided to do so just along the road from High Pasture Cave at the Coille Gaireallach area roadside. With some time now having passed and a little enthusiasm having returned, the three of us set off up the hill for a walk around the woods and a light survey tour of what the local GSG club members have been testing out their caving attire’s durability on. We were pretty sure we looked in at Cave of the Seed and Ivy Hole, but didn’t attempt to try and identify everything
we came across.... there were far too many individual sites to do that easily. It was while Bob and Carol were looking at other digs that I’d started to wander a little further around the hill randomly poking lumps of moss with my feet and was even more surprised when my foot almost disappeared down a hole. I called the others over while clearing the surrounding moss and we later used a rope to measure the depth of a clean, completely vertical tube in the limestone to approximately four metres at NGR 60138 19734, taken from a hand-held GPS. There is no reference for this pothole so far in ‘Caves of Skye’, but it was too late to do much more than record the cave at this point, which Carol also marked with sticks, as the evening was getting very late and we were now under sustained attack from hordes of midges on top of our long day’s tiring exertions. As our plan was to leave for home early the next morning, we will hopefully get a chance to look at this find as soon as we get a chance to return.

I rose the next sunny morning to answer nature’s call from the beer monster’s passing and afterwards strolled around the lower flat area not far from the road, finding two other small holes that will also receive further investigation when we return, at NGR 59970 19976 near the road and 60142 199948, which is in a depression beside a large boulder close to a large raised circular area midway around the lower flat grassy area. It looks like there is clearly still much of interest to cavers to be found in the general area which appears full of promise for future trips. Perhaps it’s just me, but I seemed to be able to visualise a circular raised area here similar to the one at High Pasture Cave. Carol is going to try to find out if there is any recorded archaeology at this spot.

[Ed’s note: Carol is now of the opinion that this feature is natural, and is not likely to be anything significantly ancient, given that the area has been thoroughly surveyed many times over the past century and all places suspected or known to be of archaeological interest adequately recorded.]
A BRIEF VISIT TO THE CAVES OF THE FRENCH AND SWISS JURA

By Ross Davidson

As those who keep on top of meets emails will know, I tried to arrange a club trip to the Jura at the end of July. Sadly, the number of people who could make it hovered around the four to five mark for a while, with only a couple looking at a two week holiday, so it never really grew wings. Fraser Simpson had already booked a non-caving holiday with Dawn around the time we’d originally planned and as it turned out I also had a work trip to Lyon, so we arranged to meet up for a long weekend anyway. We based ourselves in the village of Ornans, right in the middle of the caving and also well situated for lots of other activities. The campsite, ‘le Chanet’ has good facilities, although it is quite family oriented and has grown more so since I was there in 2006, filling up lots of camping space with static caravans and charging quite a lot for tents (18 euros for a single person in a tent, 23 for a couple, although the caravans are relatively reasonable working out at around 15-20 euros per head for two people). There is also a 12 person bunkhouse, in which I booked a space and was fortunate to be the only one there, so in the end I had a gîte to myself for 10 euros a night!

We spent three days in the French part of Jura. Initially we were joined by Thomas Arbenz, who lives near the Swiss part of Jura, for an idyllic canoe trip down the River Loue, which runs through Ornans. Thomas was only able to visit for one day, so after the canoe trip myself and Fraser had a go at the nearby via ferrata. That evening we managed to make contact with Belgian caver Luc Funcken, who has a holiday home in the area. We met up with Luc the next morning to borrow some rope and also got an invite for dinner that evening. Our first cave was the Baume St. Anne, located near to the village of Nans Sous St. Anne. This is located in a good sized doline 200m from the road, making access quite straightforward. A good-sized shaft bells out about 25m below the surface into a huge chamber, at the base of which a massive debris cone fills it right to the edges, at times giving the impression of going hill walking rather than caving! These two features have given the cave a degree of publicity, as a photograph of the debris cone high lighted by a thin beam of sunlight coming down the entrance shaft has featured in a Petzl poster. One side of the debris mountain heads down to a mud bath with some tree stump-like stal in the middle. Ascending back up the hill and down the other side we found an in-situ Tyrolean traverse over a deep lake, which provided some fun and a short cut across to the inlet some 8m above the lake on the other side. We followed this for 100m or so, but didn’t reach an end by our turnaround time. Arriving at Luc’s house with an appetite, we found a hearty feast being cooked over an open fire and enjoyed some great hospitality.

The next day we went into the Grotte Baudin, which forms the exit of the famous Verneau Traverse. An initial crawl is quite long and rather muddy, but various planks acting as makeshift bridges keep you out of the worst of the gloup. This cave has the strongest draught of any I’ve been in, a howling wind in the smaller passages, making a trap for the unwary - just because it’s roasting hot on the surface, don’t assume the same is true underground! Eventually the first pitch is reached, where we rigged over the top of an in-situ rope. This pitch has an awkward take-off as it is free hanging from the ceiling with only a steep greasy slope to flail your feet about on in a vain attempt to try and get some purchase. Reaching the bottom we realised that this was bypassed by an in-situ handline, leaving us somewhat confounded as to the reason for rigging a pitch there at all. When we visited, all the pitches had in-situ ropes which were in good condition, and for the subsequent pitches we...
used these. At the bottom of the first pitch we took a wrong turn and headed off down a very wet and grotty side passage which ends in a boulder choke. Regaining the correct route a short crawl led to the head of the second pitch, a short 5m drop, then another flat out section (in a ‘refreshing’ hurricane) reaches the third pitch at a small window high in the huge terminal chamber of the main collector - a breathtaking contrast from the mud of Grotte Baudin. Rather than dropping into the pool at the base of the chamber, an airy pendulum across to a fixed aid - a steel cable traverse - keeps you high up in the chamber, until you eventually slide across to meet the ascending passage.

The main drain of this cave is truly stunning, with numerous sculpted pools decorated with ribs and thin remnant slices of rock carved into elaborate shapes. One large chamber has an almost perfect oval bowl in the ceiling scooped out from heavily layered rock, giving the impression of an upside down velodrome. We followed this for a kilometre or so of sporting caving, hopping between various protrusions from the walls in an effort to stay out of the deep pools. A large calcited inlet marked our stopping point, with the main passage continuing on through deep pools, and the inlet giving the impression of carrying on for some distance too. We made a swift return, with the sudden emergence into the hot air on the surface providing welcome relief, despite the fact that we had been mostly cowering away from the heat on previous days. My lasting impression is that it is a stunning cave, and I’m gagging to get back and complete a traverse of the whole system. To do it would require at least two teams of three or four, and three days caving (with a rigging and a derigging trip at each end) plus probably a recovery day in between!

We travelled to Switzerland the next day to stay with Thomas, and were welcomed with a fabulous barbeque (for which we were rather late, having under-estimated the drive and had some slow traffic). This was Swiss National Day, the biggest day of celebration in Switzerland, and there were fireworks and flags everywhere. Sadly Fraser and Dawn had to head off, but I was able to go caving the next day with Thomas into Nidlenloch. This is a relic cave in the Swiss Jura, on the Weissenstein (white rock) Mountain overlooking the city of Solothurn, with the pleasant feature of a restaurant near the entrance which holds both the key and changing facilities. This was generally a downward trending rift, with a few sporting climbs, three fixed stainless steel ladders and only a small amount of crawling. The cave is very heavily used (and abused) by tourists, with around 6,500 visits per year. Consequently there is a lot of graffiti evident, and a large amount of wear and polishing on the rock. This makes route finding quite straightforward - just follow the polish - but inevitably with the large number of novices they have a few rescues each year, enough to warrant stainless tethers being permanently attached to the walls at various points for stretcher hauling. AGN (Thomas’ other club!) also does quite a few trips to remove everything from tables to fondue sets which the tourists leave behind.

We had a great, if rather too short, time in this gorgeous area. There is so much to do around here that nobody could be bored. When not caving, climbing, walking, cycling etc there is lots of good food, beautiful villages or outdoor beer drinking which can be enjoyed while observing a game of pentanque. This served as a useful scouting trip to suss out where everything is and how to go about doing things. (I had been about eight years ago, but I couldn’t remember much of that trip). Both Fraser and I felt that we’d be eager to go back. Many thanks are due to Luc and Thomas for their great hospitality and help in ensuring our access to rope and information, both of which enabled things to go smoothly.
On 31st March 2012, Esty Willcox, George Anthill, Julie Hesketh, Tam Barton, Toby Speight and I headed off to Owl Hole in the Coire Mulrooney. On 10th December 2011, one of the coldest days of the year, the same group, along with Ross Davidson, had attempted to make the trip to the cave which is at an altitude of about 610 metres. We turned back as the slopes were too icy, and we really needed ice axes and crampons, not wellies and shuffling on our bums. Owl Hole, at about 150 metres, is one of the longest caves in Appin, hence we thought it could be a good trip, plus our failure to reach it before and another abortive attempt by other members of the group, meant it was becoming a bit of a Holy Grail for us.

This day in March the weather was fine, and Tam had decided on a good route up to the cave from Glen Creran car park, following a wall through the forest and then contouring around the hillside. There weren’t any trees planted along the wall, so it was a good path up - avoiding the trees in Appin is a huge blessing. Although it was a bit of a slog up the hill, it wasn’t too hot and we had fine views of the surrounding Munros, and we could even see as far as the Isle of Mull. We got to the entrance after an hour and a half, and the large shakehole that the entrance lies in was easy to spot from a distance.

In the cave Tam led, and we followed the stream to a point where Esty couldn’t get through a squeeze. She pulled out a few rocks and tried it head first and feet first, but couldn’t get through. There was no sign of Tam, so we presumed that he had gone through the squeeze - Tam being like a rat up a drainpipe in these tight Appin caves! George attempted the squeeze feet first and got a delicate part of himself caught on a protruding rock. While George was stuck in the squeeze Tam appeared behind us, upstream in the passage; he hadn’t actually been through the squeeze but gone down a dry passage parallel to the streamway, and had come back to find us.

We didn’t have the survey with us, or a description, so we didn’t know the layout of the cave. I thought I would try the squeeze, as it could have been a way on. I tried it feet first to start with - it’s no fun getting stuck in a downwards squeeze head first! I couldn’t get through that way so had to reverse upslope and around the corner for about four body lengths before there was enough space to turn around and go head first so I could look at the squeeze. There were several large rocks forming the constriction, and I managed to shift them, which significantly widened the squeeze, allowing me to drop through it. I started laughing, as it looked after all our efforts that it immediately ended at a sump about two metres from the squeeze. However, as I inserted myself further into the passage I could see that at the end of the passage there was a 90° bend to the left. This was also tight, and it was certainly better to go through feet first. I had to reverse back up the passage to do this, to where the others were. As I was cold from lying in the stream for a while, I decided to warm up by going with the others as they went along the dry passage.

The dry passage was an interesting meandering canyon, with some calcite on the walls. At the end was a low tube with a tricky to negotiate U-bend. This passage dropped down into a streamway. Tam headed downstream to the sump, while George and I headed upstream, up a few waterfalls. George got to a point that he realised
was the squeeze we had tried to get through, and now I had enlarged it, managed to climb up through it, completing a round trip. After our visit, looking at the survey made by University College London Speleological Society, who were the original explorers in 1972 (1), the streamway is not shown as continuous (see the area in the reproduction of the survey marked with a circle). We had made a minor discovery, creating a new round trip. This new piece of passage has two left hand bends, so I’m not sure how it fits into the previous survey, but it joins two pieces of passage that are shown to head directly for each other. The original survey has no listed grade, but I suspect it is only BCRA grade 1. We were hoping to resurvey it in time for this Bulletin, but we’ve had distractions finding other new cave in Appin (see elsewhere in this issue), and in getting the enthusiasm to do the long slog up the hill! The squeeze has been named ‘Skweeze me, Pleeze Me’, after the Slade hit which has always seemed a potentially good name for a squeeze in a cave, plus the name has a certain irony as George will testify!

Tam and I headed out of Owl Hole via a somewhat tight passage with a squeeze at its start and its middle to emerge out of a tiny entrance onto the moor, where we had to push the moss and grass surrounding the entrance out of the way. We thought this may have been a new entrance due to its tightness, but it was shown on the survey. The others headed out of the main entrance. We spent the rest of the time in the coire popping in and out of holes in the moor, including Primrose Hole, Poll Pot and Allt Coire Sheileach, plus a few tiny unrecorded holes, before heading down the hill. The limestone these caves are in is a very small band about 30 metres wide and 200 metres long at the most. If you can be bothered to walk up the hill to them, you won’t be disappointed.

Footnote:

For those searching references in the future, this cave has three slight spelling variations of its Gaelic name. In Scotland Underground it is ‘Uamh a Chomaichag’ (2), in the Appin Cave Guide it is ‘Uamh a’Chomaichag’ (3) and in the Appin Cave Guide Supplement (2010 update) it is ‘Uamh a ’Chromaichag’ (4). In the UCLSS article, it was only listed as ‘Owl Hole’. The correct spelling ‘a’Chomhachag’ is used in this article and will be used in the still to be written Caves of Appin.

Editor’s note: The first published version of this name, as Uamh a Chomaichag, was by John Tillson (1974) Bull. GSG 2nd Series 1(1) p.29.

References:

(1) [ Sanders, J.] University College London Union Speleological Society (1972) Expedition to Scotland June-July 1972, p 24-26


UAMH a CHOMHACHAG
Coiré Mulrooney, Argyll
NN035512, Alt. 610m

Entrance

Survey Grade 1, UCLSS 1972. Connecting passage, grade 1, Andrew Morgan, 2012
Among the plethora of published archaeological sites excavated by amateurs in the early and mid 19th century we find an 1832 report on Seaciff Cave, situated above the beach three miles east of North Berwick. This cave is very shallow, only some 9 metres to the back wall and 8.5 metres wide at its mouth. The roof commences with a height of 6 metres (at the time of excavation, it is now only some 3.3 metres - more on that later) but, steadily dipping inside at roughly 40°, diminishes to nothing at the back. Evidently its discoverer (George Sligo, occupant of the house at Seaciff) was of the opinion that Seaciff Cave is artificial and certainly there seems no other viable reason for its existence. Archaeologically, the site is fascinating, although no further research appears to have been carried out since 1905 - see Layard (1933) - and in the light of modern advances in Iron Age knowledge, it is perhaps time the site was re-assessed and put into context.

In terms of caver interest, the only references I can trace are short mentions in ‘British Caving’ (both editions, both incorrectly stating the excavation date as 1872), a wholly erroneous entry in the Glasgow SS Journal Vol.1 No.4 page 15 which refers to a ‘St Baldred’s Cave’ at Whiteberry Head, and a brief note by Jim Salvona in British Caver Vol.77 p.39 where he also makes mention of a sea cave at Auldhame, which must be just to the west of Tantallon. These are all summarised in Oldham’s ‘Caves of Scotland’ which repeats the Cullingford error of 1872. I therefore visited the cave on Saturday 28th April 2012, carried out a rough survey and examined features on the beach below without finding any further ‘caves’ in the immediate area.

Marked on the OS 1:50,000 sheet 67 at NT 604 845, Seaciff Cave lies at the foot of a prominent spur of trachytic agglomerate overlying soft Old Red Sandstone which is very evident below the high tide mark. Situated some eight metres above this high water mark, it lies right beside a car park - access to which incidentally costs £2 to operate an automatic gate just past Auldhame House - and can be reached by following the well maintained track down to the beach. The site is then hard to miss although a photograph provided by Layard (3) is misleading, suggesting the cave faces north. In its defence though, it is taken from Gin Head, a long way off west of Tantallon Castle and in relation to Seaciff House the indication is generally fair. Perhaps because of its location, currently the floor is comprised of rubble and rubbish which has filled the cave to a depth of at least three metres when compared to the 1831 excavation measurements so there is really nothing to see nowadays. Judging by the illustrations and description provided by Nina Layard in 1933 the cave was, in 1905, still largely in the condition left by the excavators a century before, but when examined by the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments in 1962 much of the current rubbish had already been deposited. A jagged roof certainly speaks of artificiality and in addition there is a curious collection of shot holes at knee height in the left hand wall. At the mouth of the cave stands a truly massive boulder, interpreted as an altar in the 19th century, but otherwise there are no distinguishing features. My measurement recorded its dimensions as: width at mouth: 8.9 metres; maximum depth from entrance arch: 5.6 metres; maximum height at entrance: 3.3 metres.

The story of its discovery is interesting. In May 1831 George Sligo undertook some improvement work on his cave.
estate to create better access to the beach, which involved removing masses of wind-blown sand that had accumulated against the basaltic knoll. After a large amount of this had been removed an entrance was revealed, and workmen continued shovelling out sand until flat stones were encountered. They began levering these up for removal, but Sligo had noted charred wood ash, bones and limpet shells amidst the spoil and ordered a halt in proceedings. A far more careful excavation revealed that the cavity had been floored with a crude pavement in a two circle pattern, the inner one rather spoilt by his workmen who had removed over half of it. Sligo’s plan of the cave is reproduced as figure 1.

The massive altar, pear shaped and retained in its location by stone packing underneath, is roughly flat on top and, when unearthed, showed a dark stain, probably by fire, on the top and down the east side. Deciding this stone required further stabilisation Sligo replaced some of the packing stones and revealed underneath the ‘altar’ two skeletons of children, no more than 18 months of age. He surmised that others might lie under the undisturbed area of the altar stone. Overlying the paved floor a quantity of ash and animal bones, including sheep, pig, dog and horse lay in a bed some half a metre thick. There was a plentiful supply of limpet shells, some fragments of Iron Age pottery and a bone knife handle. The presence of horse remains in a sea cave, albeit on a raised beach site, probably indicates that the animal was either sacrificed in a cult or used as food, there being knowledge that people of that time did eat horse flesh.

Sligo’s conclusions, so far unchallenged in the literature, were that Seacliff Cave had been a primitive cultic site, where ceremonials included human and animal sacrifice. He cites in support of this theory, the altar and remains buried beneath along with signs of burning and possibly blood spill both on top and down one side, a large flat stone at the back of the cave which, he states, would have been where victims were slain, and the quantity of bones and ash lying on the site. Considering that if proven, this would be a unique find in the UK, I do wonder if all this resulted from a quantum leap of Victorian romanticism. A date of early Iron Age was established from the pottery by Dr Graham Callander (all finds are now in the National Museum of Scotland) which suggested to Sligo a Scandinavian Edda cult, where possibly sacrifices were made to mother earth - mostly animal but patently including humans. However, inquiries to Norway and Sweden could not throw up any comparable examples in those countries’ caves, providing no direct analogy. The human burials at least point to a significance at which we can only guess at this remove and it is true the immediate region is rich in archaeology. Sligo also unearthed a very similar deposit at the base of a cliff some 300 metres south, and fragments of another building can be seen on the rocky promontory called St Baldred’s Boat directly seaward of the cave. Iron Age activity may be traced all around the district in kitchen middens, flat-stoned pavements and hut foundations so it is certainly justified to conclude some reli-
gious or cultic significance. Similar occupation, or cultic use, of caves occurs at East Wemyss where fill of the same composition was found. Much Celtic and Norse practice from this time remains obscure, but far more research is required before human sacrifice can be firmly established.

All of which brings me to the name(s) attributed to the cave. These days it is usually called St Baldred’s Cave, as are a collection of geographical features nearby. St Baldred is believed to be a saint who first preached the gospel here in the sixth century, dying in 607 AD. He founded the local church at Auldhame (the current building is a replacement for the original which was destroyed). Opinions differ on whether everything was named after him or, as was commonly the pragmatic practice in those days, he utilised an existing religious site where worshippers were accustomed to foregather. In support of the latter, Sligo cites the name of ‘Balder’, the second son of Odin who was worshipped as the sun. The cave faces east and at certain times of the year the sun would rise shining directly into the interior. Thus ‘Balder’ morphs into ‘Baldred’. In support of this, Sligo carried out further research into Icelandic place name derivations. The ‘Gegan’, a peninsula below Tantallon Castle, once spelled ‘Gagin’ seems to be related to the Icelandic word ‘Skagin’ meaning a rocky promontory. Some way to the south is another such, called Scougall Rocks, probably descended from ‘Skogall’ which also means a promontory in Icelandic. It is all circumstantial, but there is a case to be made for a Norse settlement here. Other local names for the cave are Altar(s) Cave, Auldhame Cave and, of course, Seacliff (sometimes Seacliffe) Cave.

Figure 1

All in all, an un-resolved archaeological find, involving what is almost certainly an artifically created cave. Bearing in mind that the site was buried for over 1,000 years, it begs the question of how many more discoveries await the inquiring digger?
References:


SCOTTISH SPELEOPHILATELY (2)
By Martin Mills

In the March 2005 Bulletin I detailed known items, principally from the islands of Staffa and Rona. One further Cinderella issue has come to light. These are locally/privately produced stamps which are not valid for prepayment of postal items in the national postal system. However they are increasingly being produced, principally to generate income on the pretext of repayment for postal items from remote islands to connect with the national Royal Mail system. These Cinderella issues are variously described as carriage labels, stamps and local carriage stamps.

To the list may now be added Bass Rock and depicting the huge sea cave which cuts right through the base of the island from east to west. When the stamp was issued is not known, but with a £3 value (!) suggests recently. That standard reference work, Haswell Smith’s ‘The Scottish Islands’ (1996 edition), reveals that the island is uninhabited since the lighthouse was automated, but there are boat trips from North Berwick in the summer months.

Reference:

Mills, M.T. (2005) Scottish Speleophilately (1)

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NEW FINDS AND OLD FINDS IN APPIN

By Julie Hesketh

A recent fixation by a number of GSG in the Appin limestone has resulted in a rash of visits to the area over the past nine months or so with an interest in both ticking off some of the ‘classic’ caves of the district as well as prospecting a region which still holds so much promise. Appin isn’t so much a limestone region in itself, more a series of small Duror limestone outcrops. It really is a very small area of limestone - more’s the pity as what limestone there is seems to yield excellent and sporting cave.

Allt Buidhe feeds Loch Creran and we headed there on the recommendation of a reccy by local member George Kennedy. On 30th June 2012, we met George in the layby near Druimavuic (grid reference NN 00830 45036) and walked up the track through woodland into the beautiful Glen Buidhe which is reasonably hidden from the road. The valley is punctuated by a number of small limestone gorges and outcrops are apparent on both sides with the remains of a number of sheilings near the main burn. We stomped off into the late June drizzle to see what we could find. Soon enough George Antill was head-first into an obvious fissure set under a small limestone crag on the right hand side of the river (looking up the valley). It was duly and uninspiringly christened Rowan Tree Hole. Amber MacLeod and Toby Speight set about surveying it to a couple of metres long with a diggable rubbly terminus. A further two small fissures were explored (mostly by George A.). Amber describes the ‘Antill’ method of cave hunting and the discovery of Eaten Hole: “This is a relatively straightforward approach whereby one wanders about jabbing at any and all apparent soft spots in the hope that they will give. Any and all appendages are used in this method of exploration; simply find a soft spot, jump up and down on it.... stuff an appendage into it... and see if it turns into a cave! And of course this can be a bit hazardous. George was bouncing up and down and saying ‘This seems pretty soft’ when poof, he suddenly disappeared up to his armpits. Fortunately a good caver always wears his safety kit when exploring and his trusty tackle sack (no doubt containing only his lunch) save him from plummeting further into the bowels of the earth”. The cavity was duly named Eaten Hole! The team didn’t need the DistoX to record that the hole was only ‘George-deep’ though on further inspection, a small trickle of water was found at the base of a short two metre or so passage.

A final Antill hole was duly dug and boulders the size of George K’s three wee Jack Russells were heaved out. Bitchlicking Hole was christened in honour of one of our furry friends getting friendly with George K. It was entitled ‘Tri Gallaghan’ (Three Bitches) in Gaelic for GSG members with more sensitive dispositions. [Note: Shown as ‘Bechlikyng’ Hole on photograph above.]

Around only 200 metres or so further up the valley and fairly close to the stream, Tam Barton was seen waving his arms and shouting. Julie nipped over to see what the excitement was all about, only to discover that Tam had disappeared off down an open cave entrance taking a small stream, shouting ‘I’ve found a real cave!!’ Julie followed him down a wet crawl to a vertical and flow-covered climb of around 1.2 metres into a standing sized alcove with the stream heading off. Downstream crawling over cobbles led to a junction with a tight...
looking continuation that was later pushed to a possible tight wet duck or sump by Toby. Upstream at the junction led to a short further section of crawling and into standing sized passage with a small cascade of water heading in from a boulder filled bedding plane around five metres ahead. Just back from the end of the cave was an open fossil flat-out crawl at head height which eventually led back to the alcove near the entrance forming another small fossil loop.

Chuffed to bits to have found something new (with the vague niggle that someone may have been there and recorded it), Tam and Julie headed back to the surface to share the (hopefully) good news, only to find that the others were off up the valley looking for further leads. That gave us time to mull over a name for the cave which is provisionally called ‘Tight’Un’ on account of Tam commenting that the valley looked good for prospects but we were hardly likely to come across Titan nearby....

When we eventually regrouped in the driving rain, we had between us sauntered into around 70 metres of new and open passage - the others (George A., Amber and Toby) having located various other small entrances further up the valley.

It is difficult to tell if there are any further prospects for Tight’Un due to the odd weather this summer has brought. Whilst much of the UK has been soaked in summer rain, this part of Scotland has been dry with lower than average rainfall for the area. The day of discovery (30th June) was a particularly wet day and the stream flowing into the too-tight end was healthy. Who knows whether a return trip on a drier day would yield more easily accessible passage? The cave ends approximately 80 metres from the main burn in the valley.

Wet and cold we headed back to our vehicles, but a second wind suddenly spurred us back to Ballachulish to check out the sinkholes that George K. had previously explored. George, who had left by now to go kayaking, gave us instructions on how to get to them. Parking in the village, we walked up past the wee school and some houses, through a gate into open fields. The caves appeared to be known to the locals as when we initially set off up the wrong track wearing our caving kit, a helpful local woman shouted over to us directions to the caves.

Following the track up the incline for about ten minutes and through a gate into open fields, we passed a small, old quarry, now full of trees and with a small stream flowing out of it. Behind the quarry are a series of sinkholes - the biggest of which is about 30m by 15m wide and tree filled. At the base of this is a dry sink (a small stream sank about 15 metres further upstream though still in the large shakehole) in obvious limestone leading down into a walking sized passage with surprisingly poor air quality. The limestone beyond this point became more like conglomerate and the passage dropped down into a crawl with a horrible dodgy loose ceiling and popped out again into roomier, sometimes standing height passage. Julie and George explored, Julie deciding to leave to George the finer details of the hanging death in the nether reaches of the cave. Toby later took the same decision and chose life over digging, leaving Dragon’s Lair at about 30 metres in length.

Since the trip, it transpired that Jim Salvona had described this cave in 1980 and reached the same very unstable area of roof before making his own exit. Brave diggers with industrial strength underpants only need apply! Newsletter No.151 refers to the rock possibly being volcanic. Another theory offered by Julie is that it is more likely to be old conglomerate that is being dissolved - this can often give a pock-marked appearance, reminiscent of pumice, but with the warm, lighter colour of limestone.
From the Archives:
Carol Jeffreys at the entrance of Uamh Cul Eoghainn, Sutherland, November 1967.
Photo: Alan Jeffreys

Peter ‘Snab’ MacNab enjoying his 70th birthday bash at the Hunters Lodge Inn, Priddy, May 2012.
Photo: Alan Jeffreys
Annie Audsley outside Uamh Thuill, Ardnamurchan, showing the possibly mined seam of limestone creating the three entrances.

Photo: Roger Galloway

Digging the choke in Concretehead, Uamh an Claonaite, before the breakthrough into Treen Scene. Julian Walford below, Andrew Brooks above.

Photo: Alan Jeffreys
Chamber in Krem Khung, Meghalaya
Photo: Fraser Simpson

Richard Hudson in Main Passage, Krem Khung, Meghalaya
Photo: Fraser Simpson
Looking up new passage in Viewpoint Pot, Argyll
Photo: Andy Morgan

Amber MacLeod at the Marble Beehive,
Viewpoint Pot, Argyll
Photo: Tamlin Barton

Toby Hamnet (WSG) and George Antill inspecting Midgefeeder Hole, Argyll
Photo: Tamlin Barton
The team wandered around the area - which is dotted with fern-filled shakeholes - for a while longer with George digging at the base of a small (3.5m) cliff into a cave of a few metres length and another rabbit-sized entrance with about ten metres of passage.

We returned the following day to Allt Buidhe, after lashings of George’s by now infamous ‘death by Chilli’, Tam’s fiery noodle salad and the next morning by Amber’s mega-meaty breakfast to survey our finds (though goodness knows whether confined spaces are where you should be after all that lot), whilst Amber and George A. were joined by Andy Morgan, who arrived late on Saturday night, and took the opportunity to continue prospecting up the valley.

Whilst the survey team were doing their thing with the DistoX, Amber located the Tight’Un resurgence, around 30 metres from the entrance. It was a pool about 1.5 metres long and one metre across and at the time, about one metre deep (⅔ George lengths). She had a really good furtle around and removed some of the downstream rocks damming up the resurgence. This lowered the water level by about 50 cms and allowed her to probe the pool to discover if it might be possible to follow the passage upstream. She also noticed that at one point the water suddenly turned very brown (whilst the survey team were at the end of Tight’Un) and so a return trip is on the cards to photograph the cave and see if the downstream sump can be pushed to make a through trip.

Meanwhile, George A and Andy headed east up the valley with the aim of checking out the visible scars in the cliff face at the top of the valley (marked as Creag na Cathaig on the OS map). On the way up the hill, the boys found a small cave entrance about 50cm diameter in the bank of the burn close to Tight’Un. The water-worn grooves in the rock suggest it might be a small, occasionally active resurgence. George removed a couple of rocks from the entrance, but an overhanging tree growing from and blocking the entrance looked so unstable, it was left for a future visit.

Reaching the top of the valley, Andy checked out rifts at around 600m altitude, which despite their promise, turned out to be just water-cut notches around two metres wide - barely even classed as rock shelters.

A number of other sites were inspected. First was a resurgence due north of Tight’Un, that George dug in George fashion - like a human rotavator, arms spinning! Whilst he was digging, Andy headed up the valley side north of Tight’Un. He located a small resurgence that was dug by George A and Tam a couple of weeks later and named the Bloody Steep Resurgence.

Examination of the geological maps of the area shows that the small amount of limestone there appears to be clustered around Tight’Un and on that side of the valley. Our recce proved this. Shortly past Tight’Un the limestone appeared to end and no further caves were found, although some nice waterfalls were passed.

We do plan to return soon, if the weather ever improves, to push Tight’Un at its downstream end and there is plenty more potential in this gem of a valley. So, watch this space....
One dark windy night last December a significant part of the GSG’s history, the Knockan Field Hut, was blown down. The Knockan Field Hut brought a great deal of pleasure to two generations of cavers and many still retain fond memories of the place, myself included.

The hut was acquired by the club in 1966 thanks to the generosity of Dick McLeod, a local crofter, and had in its previous existence been a weaving shed. In fact in the early days there were still bits of loom kicking about the place until disposed of. Due partly to the Byzantine nature of crofting law we could never obtain a proper title to the place and this somewhat restricted what we could do to improve it, so when the opportunity arose we purchased the old croft that became the new hut.

It was a basic corrugated iron, wood-lined affair about seven metres by four metres, with no electricity, no water and no toilets. It had a great amount of character though. We had acquired a fine engraved window from the ‘Traveller’s Tryst’ pub in Edinburgh, which together with the harmonium provided a fine ambience. Fetching water was a real pain. Early on we were able to obtain it from the spring on the other side of the road close to the entrance of the ‘Chicken Run’, but once the old cottage next to the hut was rebuilt and the septic tank discharged into the same area it was no longer considered appropriate. This then meant going up to the public water supply below Knockan Crags and taking water from the overflow to the spring, or filling plastic containers from an external tap at the Inchnadamph Hotel.

Going to the toilet was often interesting, particularly if going for a ‘dump’, as there was very little cover and one had to go some way up the hill before any shakeholes were encountered - hence the title of this article. The weather was not always clement. Eventually we built a small toilet extension onto the back with a couple of small cubicles which housed a chemical toilet, courtesy of Pegasus Caving Club. It was not often used though as emptying it was almost as bad as the alternatives. It was well built however, and has survived the rest of the building.

The club had very little money in those days, so everything had to be begged, borrowed or ‘acquired’. We gradually collected more gas bottles and improved our cooking facilities. Heating was also a problem for various reasons. For one, the place had very little insulation so although, because of its small size, you could bring the temperature up quite quickly, it also dissipated in about an hour. I remember in the seventies when we had a series of very cold winters the water in the water storage drums freezing solid in spite of the fact that we had left a drip feed paraffin heater on all night. The lack of basic facilities meant that lighting was provided by Tilly lamps. For those not familiar with them they were pressurised paraffin lamps whereby vapourised paraffin burned in an incandescent mantle. To start it the vaporiser had to be heated using a little warmer burning...
methyleated spirit. Some time later a cannibalised gas system from a caravan was installed courtesy of Julian Walford, which was a great improvement, although very prone to mangled mantles.

Being corrugated iron, the structure needed regular maintenance. This included mending holes in the roof with glass fibre and resin. Some were apparently caused when they were blasting the new road in the sixties. The main task however was the regular application of red lead oxide paint, followed by black bitumastic paint. It was generally a messy business, and when on the roof difficult to maintain your footing as we didn’t have proper ladders. Falling off the roof, paint flying everywhere, was not unknown. Given the way we operated I am still greatly surprised that we never managed to burn the place to the ground.

We had the ideal surroundings - gas cylinders, paraffin, naked flames, wood that had absorbed a huge amount of fat over the years, lots of people regularly under the influence of alcohol and smoking.

Another aspect of the corrugated iron construction was the incredible amount of noise that would result from hail or heavy rain. It was interesting in gales as well when the whole structure would creak and groan and appear to move slightly. On such nights the telling of ghost stories was an occasional event, with the more theatrical persons arranging for someone to slip out un-noticed and then appear at the window after a suitable time had elapsed.

Some Members’ Personal Reminiscences:

**The Tilly Lamps (Julian Walford)**
Before we fitted the gas lamps, lighting depended on two paraffin Tilly lamps. The first task on arrival was always to try and fettle these. Or just go to bed. Fuel was not a problem, but the mantles were delicate, which meant that one or both was usually broken and had to be replaced. And the flow of fuel never seemed to be steady so the light would pulse gently. Usually, one lamp would work quite well, but the other was barely useable due to poor fuel flow. This provided a good excuse not to go caving the following day, trying to clean the fuel path. Anyway, the new gas lighting was brilliant by comparison. Yes, the mantles still got broken, but were much easier to replace and the flow was generally better.

**Deep Mid-winter (Julian Walford)**
I drew the short straw one winter evening after driving down from Thurso in the snow - probably over six inches at Elphin. The rest of the Group went off to the Alt (still a hotel then), and I stayed in the hut with the baby, well wrapped up in his carry-cot. In summer of course he was left in the boot of the car outside the pub, but we thought that it would be too cold there in the snow. Gas heater on full, the hut became pretty comfortable, and I was sure I had a bottle or two of home brew, and something to read. However I got the fright of my life when silence was replaced by a very loud roar as the entire roof-load of snow slipped off the corrugated iron in front of the hut. I had to squeeze out of the door to clear the step to see what had happened.

**The steel ladder (Pete Dowswell)**
At some point we acquired an old steel ladder that was used to get up to the loft sleeping area [from an old railway signal, and donated by me. Ed.]. It was soon discovered that although the ladder was quite narrow,
the spaces between the rungs were just large enough to allow the passage of a caver, so this became a bit of a sport. Some of the more lithe members were even able to be going through the ladder in one direction whilst coming through it again in the other direction at the same time. Occasionally, large people would get stuck in it and risked being left behind whilst everyone else went to the pub.

**New Year (Alan Jeffreys)**

It rapidly became traditional for club members to celebrate New Year at the hut - and other, licenced, premises naturally. On one Hogmanay, after a rousing session at the Inch, we returned to the hut at 11.45pm, myself much the worse for wear. While all others went off to the Alt to see in the new year, I tried to sleep off alcoholic poisoning. Waking suddenly in desperate need of a pee, I half fell onto the spinning hut floor, got out of the door for the necessary, but on returning to the pitch black bunk space, failed to re-enter my sleeping bag. With much cursing of others who must have tied it into knots for a joke, I lay shivering until the party returned with a light and I discovered I had forced one leg down the sleeve of my duvet jacket, which had been lying beside my perfectly accessible sleeping bag! Next morning I asked Eric Glen how things had gone. “Oh, great”, he said. “We held hands and danced around in circles. Then we stopped and the hotel went round in circles. Then I was sick”.

**Visitors (Pete Dowswell)**

We occasionally had people staying from other clubs and I remember particularly a well known Edinburgh climbing club. There were a number of us there as well and the place was a little cramped. Comments were made about the rudimentary facilities, but things were reasonably amicable. Being well organized, they lined up all their boots next to the door very neatly. Sadly, one of our number who had had, as Andy Reid would have put it ‘a touch de trop’, decided that he required a quick chunder before bed. Due to the cramped conditions he wasn’t fast enough to the door and instead sprayed all the collected climbing boots instead. The humorous impact was somewhat lost on our visitors even though we did, of course, apologise profusely.

**The Chicken Run (Pete Dowswell)**

The corner of the road next to the hut had a long drainage gulley running underneath it about 100 feet long, partly made out of cut stone, partly concrete pipe and with a five foot drop in the middle. New members were usually obliged to transit this tunnel on first arriving at the hut, mandatorily in the pitch dark, with other members encouraging them. The exit at the upstream end could be quite interesting as debris would collect there. For some reason drink would also make it appear more attractive as often when coming back from the pub there would be trips through it, also without lights.

**An Introduction to Assynt and the Hut (Martin Hayes)**

I arrived in Edinburgh from Leeds in Autumn 1986, having made contact with one A.L. Jeffreys. I joined the GSG and attended a number of meets in Yorkshire. Early in 1987 at one of the club’s Tuesday night sessions in the Cambridge Bar, Malcolm McConville pointed out that a number of new members, myself included, had never been to the club hut in Assynt. An Assynt trip was duly added to the meets list. And so began for me a fascination with the caves, geology and life of Assynt that remains to this day.

I was picked up from work on the Friday night by Goon and driven to a place called Kirkliston where we transferred to a faster car and faster driver. Ivan whisked us up the night-time A9 to a background of cassette record-
ings of the Hitch-hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy. We stopped for fish and chips at Dingwall, my only ever visit to the town. On arrival at the Elphin hut there was little ceremony. In fact we drove straight past it and went to Inchnadamph where my first visit to the Inch was marked by games of darts in the sadly now abandoned back public bar.

Back in Elphin the door to the hut was persuaded to open to reveal blackness and odd scurrying noises. Light was soon provided as the mantles of the gas central lighting system were one by one coaxed into life. After a cup of tea we settled into sleeping bags on the damp mattresses (yes, I wondered as well) and I was soon lulled to sleep by the circulating fresh air and odd scurrying noises.

I was woken the next morning by the sound of a roaring propane heater which had been redeployed from road tar melting to the much more important job of burning toast. I got up and asked directions to the toilet. “Just through that door. You can’t miss it”. I stepped out of the front door. No toilet, but a vast green plain with towering mountains in the distance. It was as though I had been taken to a different planet.

Some General Recollections (Peter Reynolds)

There were pleasant afternoons lying on the grass while our caving gear steamed in the sun (probably not that often), and strenuous trips to various water sources to fill the water containers. I vividly remember a display of the Northern Lights.

Three memories in particular stand out:
The time the hut warden took a dislike to the variegated crockery stacked on the kitchen shelves and declared a cull. It was not entirely clear what selection criteria were being applied but those present joined in enthusiastically. The air rapidly filled with flying crockery and within minutes the hut floor was deep in drifts of broken china. Presumably we were left with enough to eat off, and I don’t remember how we disposed of the remains.

The time in midwinter when Julian decided that the heater was not doing its job properly. He unfastened said heater from the gas cylinder and applied it to the cylinder until it heated up and the gas seemed to be flowing more readily. I must say that I was not concerned by this as I always assume that Julian knows what he is doing (!) However some members of the Inverness Mountaineering Club who were present became seriously and volubly alarmed.

The time that the hut was experiencing a slight overcrowding situation and Robin and I, as latecomers, were relegated to the toilet extension to sleep. Memory relates that I slept with my head in the cubicle, but I’m not sure if this is anatomically possible. I could go back and check, but I think memory is best left as it is.
On being invited to spend a week in Ardnamurchan in May this year, Roger Galloway and Annie Audsley decided to take the opportunity to investigate the caves on the peninsula. Some prior research revealed quite a number of sites of speleological interest. Firstly the British Geological Survey’s online Geology of Britain Viewer (mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html) shows there to be several areas of limestone (Broadford Beds Formation and Pabay Shale) on Ardnamurchan: one on the north coast between Kilmory and Ockle, one near Sanna and quite a large area on the south coast, to the west of Kilchoan. The OS map (1:25,000, sheet 390) and the archaeological websites West of Scotland Archaeology Service (www.wosas.net) and Canmore (canmore.rcahms.gov.uk) show a number of sea caves, some of them coinciding with areas of limestone. The OS map also shows streams on the limestone near Ockle which seem to rise and then disappear, possibly indicating cave development. All in all it seemed like a promising area for cave hunting.

There had been cavers exploring the area between Kilmory and Ockle in the past, but the information on what they had found was a bit patchy and led to considerable confusion about the identity and whereabouts of Ockle Pot. From the GSG library, Goon provided some articles from Glasgow Spelaeological Society’s newsletter which referred to caves on Ardnamurchan. One (June 1969)(1) recounts some digging done in a small cave system on the Garbh Rubha promontory in 1967 (2) which the author calls ‘Ockle Pothole’. Another GSS newsletter for May 1968 (3) again refers to Ockle Pothole and conjectures that it is in fact the Cave of the Maclains. This cave was famous for being the place where members of the Maclain clan took refuge after fleeing from the Campbells in 1624, but were discovered and massacred by a large fire lit in the cave entrance, asphyxiating those inside. In 1980 Jim Salvona provided a far more detailed catalogue of the caves which again equated ‘Ockle Pot’ with Cave of the Maclains. (4) Tony Oldham’s ‘Caves of Scotland’ (5) puts these together and describes ‘Maclain Cave also known as Ockle Pot’, on Garbh Rubha.

Armed with this bounty of information, we took a walk along the coast to Garbh Rubha. There is some limestone marked in this area as well as some sea caves so we thought we’d see what else was round about before looking at Ockle Pot. We found a couple of rock shelters and a large rift which seemed to have formed at the boundary between the limestone and another (igneous) rock type. Inside it narrowed to a slot after about ten metres through which a chamber was visible. It looked as though some boulder removal would enable a thin-nish person to get in, so we intend to return and investigate further.

At the grid reference for Ockle Pot we found nothing whatsoever but on directly the opposite side of the promontory was a cave matching the survey and description, although not a pot by any stretch of the imagination. It is marked on the OS map as Uamh Thuill. The cave has an impressive entrance: a raised beach sea cave in a sloping bedding plane, supported by three large pillars. [Note: After the visit by Jim Salvona in 1980,
he wrote in the Bulletin (4) that in his opinion, the regular geometry of the three entrances and aspects of the chamber behind strongly suggested a small ‘pillar and stall’ limestone working which either exploited or intercepted natural cave. The present author can neither confirm nor deny this interesting observation.] At the back of the sea cave is a window leading into a cave passage, 25 metres long and mostly crawling with a gravel floor. There is also a flowstone-floored inlet with some small formations. We surveyed and photographed the cave and removed a large number of tealights but left the two garden gnomes that we found in residence as they seemed quite at home there. Their colour had faded so much that we initially mistook them for stal.

At this stage we thought that the cave we’d surveyed was the Cave of the Maclains, aka Ockle Pot, aka Uamh Thuill. However not long after returning from Ardnamurchan, Goon unearthed some further information from the library which clarified the situation. This was a brief article by J-Rat who had visited in 1988 and had faced similar confusion to us.(6) He had done some further research and concluded that Cave of the Maclains was further along the coast. He provided a grid reference which puts Cave of the Maclains on the likely-sounding Rubha na h-Uamha promontory, although he had not visited it himself.

J-Rat also provided some background on Uamh Thuill from Mairi MacDonald’s Exploring Sunart and Ardnamurchan (1985)(7): ‘Below Garbh Ruadh or ‘Rough Promontory’ is Uamha Thoull, the ‘Cave of the Holed Rock’.... where it is said, St Columba converted and baptised a gang of robbers. The natural rock basin inside the cave used by the saint for this purpose is still known as Columba’s Font, and has been visited continually over the centuries for healing purposes’.

We felt that we should fully clear up the confusion by locating the Cave of the Maclains as well, so we returned to Ardnamurchan for a long weekend on 3rd-6th August. We parked at Ockle, where we saw the local shepherd exercising his six collies. Thinking that some local expertise would be useful, Roger asked him if he knew the whereabouts of Cave of the Maclains (or any other caves). He pointed out Cave of the Maclains on the map, in a different place from J-Rat’s grid reference and said that there were also some other sea caves along the coast from it.

We had a description of the entrance to Cave of the Maclains from Seton Gordon’s The Highways and Byeways of the West Highlands (8), quoted in the GSS Newsletter, May 1968: ‘a small cave hidden away amongst the rocks and heather.... its whereabouts is now known to very few....The cave is close to the sea and is on a raised shelf and at the entrance is a great rock which divides the mouth of the cave into two small openings leading into the black depths which the light of a match fails to illuminate’.

Walking along the coast to the area indicated by the shepherd we started looking for the cave. We did not anticipate it being very easy to find. Expecting a very small entrance, we almost didn’t bother to look at an obvious, but apparently shallow, rock shelter set back a little from the sea at the head of a grassy gully, NM 57006 71355. However, closer inspection revealed two small entrances in the roof, one on each side, leading further into the cave. It definitely fitted the description and you could also see why it would be a tempting place for the fleeing Maclains to hide. On the inside was a two metre climb down into a roomy chamber in which you are completely concealed from the outside. There were sea-rounded cobbles on the floor and the cave appeared to have once been a sea cave, at a time when the sea level was higher than today, but a later roof collapse had blocked the main entrance, leaving only the two small roof-level openings. There were also a surprising number
of formations, since the rock type was not limestone. The BGS website shows the rock to be granofelsic psammite ‘Originally sedimentary rocks formed in shallow seas. These rocks were first deposited as siliciclastic sediments in a shallow sea, and then later metamorphosed’ (mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain.html).

So the story of Ockle Pot can be concluded thus: it’s not a pot and it’s not particularly close to Ockle! It also definitely isn’t the Cave of the Maclains. Its original name, Uamh Thuill or Cave of the Holed Rock, seems far more appropriate.

We intend to spend more time at Ardnamurchan looking at the sea caves in the limestone areas as well as exploring further inland. Others are welcome to join us: we don’t anticipate very extensive caves or bucketfuls of glory (although you never know...) but it’s a beautiful place to spend some time. There are also mines at Strontian, which we have scarcely begun to explore and plan to return to.

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References:
(3) Platt, A. The Ockle Pothole (Cave of the Maclains) GSS Newsletter May, 1968 pp.2-3
(7) MacDonald, M. (1985) Exploring Sunart and Ardnamurchan. West Highland Series No.10
UAMH THUILL
Ardnamurchan Argyll
NM 53802 71032

ELEVATION

PLAN

Scales

SECTIONS

Gravel, diggable

Blocked by flowstone

Survey BCRA Grade 4-5
May 2012. Roger Galloway & Annie Audsley

Annie Audsley surveying in Cave of the Maclains.
June 2012
Photo: Roger Galloway

Survey BCRA Grade 4-5
May 2012. Roger Galloway & Annie Audsley

Annie Audsley surveying in Cave of the Maclains.
June 2012
Photo: Roger Galloway
Over the first weekend of February cavers, mainly from Europe with a couple from the States, assembled in Shillong to start preparations for this year’s Meghalaya caving expedition. Unlike previous years, as this expedition was going to be a two-pronged affair, without just one large camp, the kit residing in Shillong had to be split between two teams. Simon Brooks led a breakaway team into the East Khasi Hills while Thomas Arbenz headed up the slightly larger group bound for the Jaintia Hills - the Pala Range to be more precise.

Pala Range Expedition Team:
Thomas Arbenz, Brian Kharpran Daly, Nicola Bayley, David Cooke, Oana Chachula, Vijay Chhikara, Ross Davidson, Richard Hudson, Peter Ludwig, Graham Marshall, Khluur Mukhim, Fraser Simpson, Mark Tringham, Rudi Weissmair.

After team expedition kit had been divided, both teams loaded up their vehicles and spent the rest of the day - and the next - purchasing essentials and visiting friends in Shillong.

Early on the morning of Tuesday 7th February both teams left Shillong to start the long, arduous journey to their respective destinations. Several hours later the Jaintia Hills team found themselves travelling in a familiar landscape; that of the heavily industrialised town of Ladrymbai, which every year we pass through, looks grimmer and larger. Then, hanging a left towards Sutgna we passed the many coal loading depots along virtually non-existent roads. Thousands of coal laden trucks constantly chew the diminishing road surface with the monsoon washing more of it away every year.

As the direct road to Pala was in a sorry state we were driven to our destination via our old stomping ground, the Shnongrim Ridge. As we approached it we were gob-smacked to survey the toll of destruction as quarrying and mining has enveloped what used to be a rural subsistence-farmed karst area. It was with great sadness we had to witness what ‘progress’ brings to the poorer inhabitants of this area.

Arriving late that evening in the camp set up for us earlier by the Meghalaya Adventurers, the team settled in for our first night close to the village of Khahnar a few kilometres from the Kopili River and the Assam border. Waking up the next day allowed us to see the layout of the camp which was situated near the top of a hill with very little flat ground for sleeping. Our tents were dispersed all over the place, making the camp seem larger than it actually was. After our first camp breakfast several teams were dispatched to two ongoing cave systems that were first explored two years ago. Ross’s team made for Krem Man Krem but, en route, well lost, they found another cave which they named Delusion Cave, surveying for 302 metres to where it closed down. Krem Man Krem was eventually located too late for any work, so
some equipment was left. The rest of the team eventually found Krem Shalong. It’s amazing what can grow in the space of one year, rendering known tracks unrecognisable. Due to limited time the team split into two, one group taking photographs and the rest collecting biological samples under the guidance of Oana and Khlur our resident cave biologists. Meanwhile Brian Kharpran Daly tried for a meeting with the headman of Pala Village, but was unsuccessful. As in previous years this headman proved very elusive.

The following day a large team went into Krem Labit Kseh to tidy up some loose ends and photograph the main river passage, while the biological team spent time setting up bug traps close to the entrance. Meanwhile the majority of the rest of the group found themselves back in Krem Man Krem, splitting into two teams, while Brian again went searching for the Pala headman. Once again he was not to be found. Eventually, Brian went to Khahnar whereupon the headman there told him of some new cave entrances. After settling in to the rhythm of camp life teams continued with work within known cave systems due to the lack of new leads, however that was very shortly about to change. Also, Rudi Weissmair, a geo-physicist from Austria started to conduct experiments concerning the rate of measurement at which limestone dissolves.

As Thomas was keen to get lots of pictures for his forthcoming new book on the caves of that region, photo teams were dispatched to the ongoing known systems and the biologists continued with their field work. On Friday 10th February a team of four descended from camp straight down into the valley to look at two new potential finds. The first one we checked was Krem Synkrang which eventually descended down to wet passage where it was left ongoing, then Thomas and Brian took the other two to a rift which dropped down to a low section, followed by a draughting meandering passage after which a wade through water eventually led the team into a massive chamber with what looked like several ongoing leads. Bloody fantastic, we had hit the jackpot! This cave was named locally as Krem Khung - the Khung being an almost legendary, elusive beast which is supposed to inhabit this region. The following day saw the entire team enter Krem Khung and after a team photograph we split up into smaller groups to head off surveying, photographing and collecting biological samples. One team surveyed the complex first large chamber, named Paradise Hall, while the rest started down the main passage. 190 metres was surveyed in this most stunning of caves on the first day.

Over the next few days most of the Pala team worked on Krem Khung. While several members pushed on downstream the rest of the group started to survey side passages and inlets. One particular side passage led explorers into a high level chamber aven where claw and paw prints in the mud were found. Could these have been left by that elusive beastie the Khung? That same day in Khung, Richard Hudson took a stumble and managed to slice open his wrist rather nastily to reveal his tendons. Later that evening, accompanied by Nicky, he was driven to Jowai Civil Hospital which by all accounts sounds like the sort of place you do not want to be! A (very) large needle and lots of iodine later he was released, having been patched up. Good value for only 500 rupees and hardly worth claiming on insurance considering the excess would probably be more than

Graham Marshall, Oana Chachula and Thomas Arbenz in the Main River Passage, Krem Labit Kseh. Photo Fraser Simpson
he paid at Jowai. Most of the next few days saw teams surveying in Krem Khung, but there were trips into Krem Labit Kseh and Krem Man Krem to tidy up loose ends and get more photographs, not forgetting samples for the biologists.

Khung’s main drag continued along the aptly named ‘Lost in Space’ passage, eventually stopping at breakdown and a boulder choke that was pushed by Nicky, Richard, Brian and Rudi, who continued surveying through very dodgy sections of breakdown, leaving the cave very much ongoing. Later on that evening it was noticed that Brian was missing. Nobody had seen him since exiting Krem Khung, but then a very distant light was seen on what appeared to be the other side of a ravine separating the camp hillside and the valley. Various search parties were dispatched and eventually the ravine was crossed and Brian located through lots of forwards and backwards shouting, and shown the route back to camp. With Khung now absorbing the efforts of most of the team apart from occasional visits into Krems Kseh and Shalong, it was time to start gathering new leads for next year so a small group accompanied by a local guide were shown a few potential entrances between Moo Knor village and the Kopili River, one of which, called Krem Tin, showed more potential than the others.

After 120 metres a pitch corkscrewed down to what appeared to be deep water. Stones chucked down made splashing noises, so a rigging team will have to return.

The last few days were spent with teams visiting Krem Shalong to survey loose ends and for photography, while the biologists finished collecting bug traps. A few went to Black Diamond Passage in Krem Labit Kseh on a photo trip where Thomas skilfully captured an evil looking tarantula for Oana’s collection. Vijay, Nicky and Richard went jungle bashing, looking for a possible entrance to gain access into Krem Khung’s further reaches but alas were unsuccessful. Meanwhile progress inside Khung was abruptly halted when Cookie, Ross and Nicky surveyed to the top of a 12 metre pitch overlooking a 40 metre long lake. Above there is also potential in the roof with a passage that will require some serious bolting to reach.

As the expedition was now drawing to a close, attention was focussed on trying to resolve question marks in various caves. Rudi dropped Krem Tin’s pitch to reveal a deep canal that would require wetsuit and lifejacket...
to proceed along. It looks like it might go so it is something for next year’s expedition to look at. A team visited Krem Lamliyiang, hoping for a connection into Krem Man Krem and again found good prospects for next year, also a recce was made near Samasi showing more good potential for future exploration. A final trip into Krem Man Krem was made to check future leads and equipment was extracted. This cave awaits next year’s ‘tigers’.

The last day at the Pala Range camp was spent with photo trips into Krem Labit Mynlin. Richard and Nicky went into Kseh to take photos and also gained another 160 metres of passage. Meanwhile as Krem Khung’s big leads were to be left for next year, Oana, Ross and Vijay carried out the sterling task of taking Khung’s total surveyed length to over 5 km by adding another couple of hundred metres pushing various question marks on the survey. Peter and Rudi placed the last limestone tablet experiment for results to be collected next year. The last night in camp saw a ‘few’ beers being drunk as this year’s Jaintia/Pala team celebrated 6.8 kms of new cave with Krem Khung taking centre stage by withholding its dark secrets for another year.

The following day the camp was struck, everything loaded onto vehicles and we started the long, dusty journey back to Shillong where we met up with the East Khasi Hills team to learn they had gained 5.9 kms along with ten new caves. Another fantastic result giving this year’s grand total of 12.7 kms.

Also this year another important milestone had been reached. It was the 20th anniversary of the Meghalaya International Caving Expedition, giving cause for celebration and as a few of the original team members were present from the BEC, doing some cave exploration in the South Jaintia Hills, a party had been organised by the Meghalaya Adventurers. Also, a very enjoyable evening was spent downstairs at the Eee Cee Hotel, when speeches were made by Brian and Simon. All in all a most agreeable end to a very successful expedition. Finally, our thanks must go to the Meghalaya Adventurers and friends, and also to the governments of both Meghalaya and India, for support and encouragement.

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**TREEN SCENE REVISITED**

By Julian Walford

The Rana Hole breakthrough into Claonaite Seven in December 2007 started a flurry of activity there, much of which is documented in previous bulletins: sizeable extensions, palaeontology and consolidating an all-weather route through Rana.

It was clear from the cave survey that The Palatial Abode of Edward Concretehead, largely dry passage upstream of sump 6b, runs above but close to the active stream running from sump 3 to sump 6. Peter Glanvill, Tony Boycott and I had spent a happy day digging up a side passage just downstream of sump 4 in May 1998 before the Rana breakthrough in the hope of finding a dry bypass, but it was not a feasible dig for divers to pursue.

On a visit to Concretehead, in quite wet conditions I recall, Chris Warwick and I were looking for possible extensions there - lots of painful flat-out crawling at the passage edges. In a couple of places, the sound of a stream could be heard through the boulders and I learned later that a clear audible connection was established from the Treen Scene when divers completed the first Rana-Claonaite one-way through trip in May 2009. I was also aware that the hydrology is complicated - sump 5 flows directly to sump 6b in normal weather conditions, visibly disappearing down a ‘plug-hole’ to the right of the sump directly below the Treen Scene, and possibly sometimes into boulders above, so I felt that there was a reasonable chance we could connect Treen Scene with Concretehead if we could put in the effort, and it would be a good winter dig for 2011/12 when surface digging is less attractive.

**The Dig**

It is always difficult to decide exactly where to start to dig, and we began in the wrong place - too near the wall
where loose breakdown soon collapsed into the dig. So we started again away from the wall and quickly extracted all the small rocks, leaving stable large boulders as sides. The GSG portable drill was then put to use to drill larger rocks so as to attach an eye-bolt for hauling. This enabled larger boulders to be extracted, but revealed new batteries were needed. By using sealed Pelicases for both batteries and the drill, the equipment could be left dry in the cave between visits.

Despite somewhat infrequent digging, rapid downward progress was made for some four metres, then the way on seemed to be sideways, which slowed progress a bit. After three metres sideways, a hole down could be seen, initially too tight to enter. Careful removal of rocks there saw Ivan Young, Preston White and myself in the Treen Scene on 25 March 2012. Finally, in April 2012, the edges of the final drop were cemented and it was enlarged to a comfortable size. Looking at the entry into The Treen Scene, it seems we were by pure chance spot-on, as there do not seem to be any other easy routes into the choke.

Observations and Opportunities

The stream noise (at least under dry conditions) emanates from the small waterfall just upstream of sump 6b. When we broke through we were somewhat surprised to find the Treen Scene clean-washed, and indeed this led to a certain amount of disorientation. Clearly in flood, the Treen Scene takes water, presumably because sump 6a backs up, consistent with the fact that there is no passable route through it. The lower part of the boulder choke is also clean-washed. It would be very interesting to observe high water first-hand.

Sump 5 can be easily passed in dry weather conditions with about 100mm minimum airspace, but it is still very wet and cold in just a furry suit. If the stream rises, sump 5 can very quickly return to a real sump, about six metres long, as witnessed once by divers before the Treen Scene was found. The upstream side is quite intimidating in wet conditions as the roof slopes gently into the sump and is often packed with foam created by the noisy cascade flowing from sump 4 into sump 5. Probably not an ideal first sump for a beginner.

The streamway up to sump 3 is worth a visit if only for the way the thrust plane calcite has been eroded into weird shapes and colours, but it is somewhat constricted, as divers carrying a couple of bottles will recall with some discomfort. In several places the roof consists of boulders, possibly signifying a route up into new dry passage at a similar level to Concretehead, Claonaite 3 and even East Block. None of these routes are open, but the new access route would now make a sustained dig feasible. The passage on the thrust plane which goes back over sump 3 peters out as a flat-out crawl and measurements in April using avalanche transceivers suggest it is still some 20 metres from the other side - too far for a dug connection.

In contrast, avalanche transceiver measurements from the divers’ dig at sump 4 give a reading of around ten metres up into the far end of Concretehead, with loose rocks at both sides. This is the sort of reading obtained from the Treen Scene, suggesting a feasible dig there which would bypass sump 5. Furthermore an audible connection was also obtained. Perhaps another winter dig?
A SUMMER OF DISCOVERY. NEW CAVES AT GLENAMUCKRACH, GLENSTOCKDALE, APPIN

By Tamlin Barton

It’s been a while since any large discoveries were made in Appin. The area saw most of its exploration done back in the 1970s and 80s by the GSG whose hard work culminated in the first Appin Guide. Since then however, only one longish new cave has been found (Draught Caledonian), a handful of smaller systems and a few small extensions to existing caves. It seems that the area has become a bit of a caving backwater, a region only really visited for SCRO training exercises or perhaps the odd leisurely SRT trip down Claig-ionn.

My fascination with the area started less than two years ago on May Day when I went caving with Derek Pettiglio along the narrow sporting passage of Draught Caledonian, followed by a trip to the bottom of Claig-ionn. I was utterly exhausted, but absolutely hooked on the area, astounded at not only the views out to sea and the pretty flora on the way to the caves, but underground, the variety of passages and the many forms of the local limestone.

To satisfy this thirst for Appin, I proposed a series of GSG trips starting last October to visit all the 100m+ caves in the region within a few months. I’ve got to admit it started out a bit like a Munro-bagging exercise, but having now completed the task, I would recommend this to every caver as a fabulous and unforgettable experience. The valleys, hills and caves in the region have completely different characters; if you don’t believe me, try the above Appin cave challenge for yourself, though you’ll now have to add an additional cave to the list.

During the visits a group of us began to get an inkling that these remote areas had been seldom visited by cavers since the initial flurry of exploration. The signs were obvious, most of the caves appeared to have never been pushed and there was frequently no evidence of digging. Soon we made a variety of discoveries: first we extended Rock Shelter 3 (Glenstockdale) and neighbouring Claon Uamh by perhaps 40 metres or so. Then we found an Edwardian silver threepence in Uamh Coire Sheileach, re-opened Fly Plague Hole (abandoned in the guide), and then discovered a new loop in the remotest cave of the region, Owl Hole. After this we found a new tunnel at the Old Ladies of Duror and a few months later came the discoveries up the Allt Buidhe (see above, this issue).

Giddy from all these finds, I was sure the summer would bring further discoveries. We just needed a wee bit of perseverance, a tent and several wine boxes to dull the pain of the midges....

Hugo Boss Cave

Glenamuckrach, if you have never been there, is a charming little abandoned settlement about half way along Glenstockdale. Nearby is a small gorge and odd limestone hillocks; to the west a spectacular view down across
the wooded valley and out to sea with islands visible on the horizon. A perfect place, we decided, to use as a base for exploring Glenstockdale. We had no idea back then that we had in fact chosen a settlement surrounded by enough passage to keep us occupied for many months.

Taking a glimpse of the aerial photo map, you can see that there are two bands of limestone, (the ‘smoother’ sections of landscape on the black and white reproduction, right) running from SW to NE across Glenamuckrach, a narrow northern band, and a wider southern one.

According to the blue guide the northern one contained Glenamuckrach Pot and Glenamuckrach Resurgence, so that’s where we initially headed. At the top of the hill we found an obvious large pothole which we assumed must be Glenamuckrach Pot, but which we couldn’t descend due to lack of SRT equipment. Nearby we investigated several rock shelters and found an obvious small entrance at the lower end of a dry gorge. Entering, we passed over several boulder steps, past many sheep bones, through a small chamber with pristine walls and on to a tight squeeze. Earlier on in the day to help with the stench of my oversuit I had applied a large quantity of Hugo Boss eu de toilette. Now, as I attacked the squeeze, wafts of this fragrance filtered up through the cave, causing my colleagues to exclaim “What the hell is that smell?” Eventually after much fidgeting I figured out that you have to climb up and squirm across the constriction at 90 degrees, which drops you down at the start of a narrow S-bend. I could tell that no-one had been here before as all the calcite crystals on the walls were shining white. Round the bend I could hear the echoing of a waterfall. As I pushed on round the S-bend I noticed that the passage was descending at a sharp angle so retreated, worrying that it might lead into a pitch. Establishing that the others wouldn’t be following me, I got them to listen while I took a rock and threw it round the corner....rattle....rattle...boom....boom...BOOM!! To say we were excited is an understatement, we would return, with safety gear.

Two weeks later and I was back in the same place, but this time with a belt and rope for safety. I was on my own though, the others being content with investigating other holes around the ruins. ‘Head first, that’s the spirit’, I thought as I proceeded round the S-bend attached to the rope. To my amazement the passage opened out quite quickly, but took a plunge at 45 degrees downhill across lots of strange water-worn limestone and phylite formations. Just as I thought that the blood rushing to my head was going to make me faint, I noticed a deep bowl-like formation and was able to turn around and, yes...put my feet down and...stand up...Hurrah! Nearby I found a vertical four metre passage which I immediately investigated. Soon I followed the main route down into another larger bowl which was wonderfully stripy. Another small descent took me down to a reasonably large cruciform chamber 5m high and 4m x 4m across (now known as ‘The Boss’), with a waterfall at one side. Exploring downstream I found a very tight passage full of phylite projections which shattered as I passed. I then came face to face with a large sump.
Pushing upstream I passed through a deep watery passage then into another with a duck involving proper swimming. I emerged from the water in an interesting 45 degree rift with one side completely covered in flowstone. Pressing on down a tight dry passage for some distance, I rejoined the stream in a chamber with pretty little gour pools at one side and some stal. In front of me was a structure I had never seen before (I’m fairly new to caving, remember). Located upstream, it looked like a dam with a mirror-like pool of water above which it continued through a small opening like a window. I now know this is a font and indeed I had seen one in Yorkshire before, but that had been enlarged and damaged. This one, though small, was magical; on the other side it looked like another world.

Returning to the surface we made a return trip, this time though we took a tape measure. A new route was excavated below the entrance squeeze to enable relatively easy access to the S-bend; however this route would prove later to act like a Mexican finger trap - easy to get into but very hard to get out of. After touring the cave, we split up, Andy heading home, Amber returning to camp and George and I pushing on beyond the font. Plunging through the hole at the back of the font we entered a narrow waterlogged passage with an inlet to the left with a small waterfall behind. Leaving this unexplored we headed along the main passage which opens up to standing height and ascends a small cascade containing stal., straws and curtains. At the top the passage doubled back on itself round a bend with a pool and entered a tight rift. George stayed behind at this point while I investigated, finding a font-like formation beyond at the entrance to a strange cylinder shaped ‘room’ which reminded me of a boiler in a steam engine. Beyond this the passage turned a corner and started to descend down a mud bank into a gravelly passage. Continuing, I found a dead-end chamber, a choked muddy rift trending downwards. Retreating, I noticed a very small circular passage I’d missed heading uphill with water flowing out. This was just large enough to fit into with my arms outstretched. Slowly I began a maggot-like crawl forwards, enticed by a possible chamber at the end. I only got a few metres in before I thought ‘Perhaps that’s enough for today’ and promptly decided to get the hell out of there!

Cold and hungry, George and I exited as fast as we could, though it still took over an hour to get back to the entrance. Unfortunately, the newly created squeeze bypass wouldn’t let George back out, so I had to run to get help from Amber (who brewed emergency rescue tea) as well as a hammer and chisel to enlarge the passage. After trying to escape for an hour, George eventually realised he’d have to take his oversuit off, not an easy feat in a cave like Hugo Glenamuckrach.
The Trachea Pipe  mud
The Boiler Room  formations
Hugo's Throne  sump 1

The Royal Mile  sump 2  duck/sump
flowstone

Passage of Shattering Knives  waterfall
The Boss
The Bulkeye
Boob Buster
vertical passage 4m above

Easy to Get in, Hard to get out

Survey: BCRA Grade 2 Tamlin Barton,
George Antill, Amber MacLeod,
Andrew Morgan
August 2012
Eventually, after much swearing, he managed to slowly inch his way up the constriction and free himself. It was now dark outside. We had gone in at 16.30, it was now 22.00. Distance measured: 100 metres. One should never underestimate how long it takes to travel through an Appin cave.

Several weeks later, Hugo Boss again became the focus of GSG activity when BBC reporter Kevin Keane, who had heard about the discovery of Tight’Un, contacted us inquiring about the possibility of filming a short programme on caving. Kevin (a non caver), managed to get into the first chamber seven metres in from the entrance, but unfortunately George’s squeeze prevented him from venturing further. We had established by this stage that he wanted to do a piece on ‘new discoveries’ rather than caving in general. So, you can imagine he was a little disappointed on not being able to reach ‘The Boss’. Luckily for him, Mark Lonnen and Fraser Simpson offered to send him some of their footage to flesh out the news report. Over the course of the day Ross Davidson and Fraser were filmed and myself and Julie Hesketh interviewed for Reporting Scotland, with discoveries in Viewpoint Pot providing further interest for Kevin.

While all this was going on Fraser and George heroically hauled a load of diving equipment down to sump 1. Fraser dived first, finding around 20cms of visibility and gained just over a body length of passage approximately 75cms wide by 40cm high, but this gradually lowered to 30cms. Ross followed after Fraser had returned in zero visibility and found a further half body length of upwards trending passage beyond the limit of Fraser’s dive. However, he soon backed out due to the lack of a line and the height which was further deceasing.

**Viewpoint Pot**

On the afternoon of the first major Hugo Boss exploration, Amber MacLeod and Andy Morgan descended with SRT into the large pothole that we had thought was Glenamuckrach Pot and had left alone a fortnight before. They found the pot to be around six metres deep with a gravel bottom and a tight crack to the north through which a small stream could be seen. On the same side of the pot, but higher up, they noticed a beautiful rift lined in pristine flowstone. Enticed by the sound of a waterfall, Andy climbed up and squeezed through the gap.
On the other side was a circular aven, three metres in diameter and five to six metres high with interesting banding in the limestone and a waterfall entering ahead. At the top of this fall was a tantalising passage, much too high to reach. In the same aven but to the east, was another passage, heavily encrusted in flowstone; this has still not been fully investigated.

On the weekend of the BBC filming Viewpoint Pot was radically pushed. The maypole had been brought up in two batches earlier on in the weekend and sent down into the pot for exploration of the passage above the waterfall. After five lengths of pole were erected, Andy Morgan climbed up the ladder (getting soaked) whilst being filmed by Mark Lonen. At the top he crawled up the tiny wet passage, Amber following behind. Together they explored roughly 20 metres of passage (all well decorated) with a few ‘chambers’ and a side branch at the end. At the end, they reached a 45 degree rubble-choked constriction and heard something..... the voice of Toby Hamnet (WSG)? While these folk had been enjoying the pushing of new passage, Toby had headed round to a sink and rock shelter uphill from the pot. After shifting a little silt and a few rocks he had revealed a void. Intrigued, he continued excavating until he revealed a small slimy passage (four metres long) which he entered. At the end, he heard voices and so he shouted, thus voice contact was made! Future expeditions will concentrate on making this an interesting little through trip, though someone will have to drill an anchor in at the top of the waterfall.

**Human Bung Hole**

This well flowing resurgence is located in the lower band of limestone at Glenamuckrach (see map), and was found by George Antill during our first visit. It is essentially a very claustrophobic wet, tubular passage below a large limestone outcrop south west of Glenamuckrach. After some initial enlargement, George set about lowering the water level by removing flakes and silt in the main passage. I remember watching as he crawled up this pipe exclaiming that the water was starting to back fill up to his mouth! Unperturbed he continued, pushing a crowbar ahead of him, until he reached a small chamber where luckily the water level receded a little. As he continued round a tight corner I heard him say “Well, if it’s all going to go wrong, it’s going to go wrong here”. I then heard spluttering and eventually a muffled voice saying that he couldn’t get any further as a large limestone block was preventing further access.

A couple of weeks later and the passage was almost bone dry (though it was much less sporting). George set...
to work removing the offending limestone block with a hammer and continued onwards, but unfortunately the passage got too tight. I later gave it a go after my initial exploration of Hugo Boss, but quickly gave up, more due to tiredness than anything else. I still intend to go back, though it’s a bit of a helmet off job. The total passage length so far is estimated at 8-10 metres, but you can see on for perhaps eight metres more.

Midgefeeder Hole

This cave lies 40 metres north west of Glenamuckrach behind a small knoll. During our initial visit to Glenamuckrach George had removed some rocks from a promising sink below a small crag revealing some slits in the rock, but the midges had prevented him digging further. On the 26th August at 00.00, George and I set to work excavating this hole down under the natural rock shelf. After collapsing an unstable earth ceiling we followed a passage descending at about 25-30 degrees to the east. Eventually enough boulders had been removed for me to descend into a rubble-choked solution tube. At 03.00 we called a halt to operations, the passage having reached perhaps six metres below the surface.

Glenamuckrach in the near future

Since the above discoveries took place we have good reason (more than good in fact) to believe that Viewpoint Pot is connected to Hugo Boss and Hugo Boss to Glenamuckrach Resurgence. The race is now on to connect up the two systems to create a 160m+ long cave network with several through trips. At the time of writing the J-Rat Digging Award (unbelievably) beckoned for a second time for a Scottish discovery, but at the last moment has probably been pipped by the breakthrough in Reservoir Hole on Mendip (although at least two Grampian members were involved there too!) The whole united system, if ever created, would be named Upper Glenamuckrach Pot in memory of the ‘Glenamuckrach Pot’ in the Appin Guide, whose description we never fully fathomed (see below).

In the lower limestone band we have reason to believe that the two sinks next to the settlement lead straight into the Human Bung. This means that there is another longish system (perhaps 200 metres or more taking into account side branches), which it may be possible to access with a little more digging. Whether this system contains chambers like ‘The Boss’, or whether it turns out to be nothing more than a hellish crawl, we don’t yet know. Incidentally, the solution tube from Midgefeeder Hole may well connect into this lower system as well, only time will tell. I propose that this system, if ever united, should be called Lower Glenamuckrach Pot.

Naming Issues
A description matching Viewpoint Pot doesn’t appear in the Appin guides despite it being a massive maw in the hillside. We must therefore conclude, strange as it may seem, that it was missed or left unreported by the GSG in the initial exploration of the valley. Andy Morgan and Amber MacLeod were therefore the first people to descend and document this cave.

However the naming of Hugo Boss is a wee bit controversial since there was a cave called Glenamuckrach Pot in the first Appin cave guide whose description almost matches Hugo’s. This is the original entry:

“This is one of a line of sink holes along the upper edge of the limestone above the ruins of Glenamuckrach. The entrance is at the foot of a three metre deep channel with the stream sinking into a tight tube 10 metres uphill. Once past the decomposing sheep at the entrance the passage drops in a series of steps. Near the bottom the stream reappears and flows into a narrow rift that rapidly becomes too tight.”

At first reading this account appears to describe the entrance to Hugo Boss, but there’s a slight snag. Hugo Boss’s entrance has no stream at all. This is the main reason why I originally ignored the Glenamuckrach Pot entry and gave the cave a new name. However, perhaps it was very wet when the original entry description was written? Being the mature adult I am I suppose I should really give up the on the name Hugo Boss and let the cave have its old one back again, but on second thoughts ....ha...no way. I found it at seven metres and left it at over 100!
This summer, examinations of Deep Depression up on Cuil Dubh plateau revealed that the cave is (almost) open. As illustrated in the photograph below, water has washed out a trench in the peat debris which had thoroughly blocked the way in, to create a free climb down for about two metres, with the grassy edge comprised of packed peat and stones, virtually vertical, indeed almost overhanging at the right end as shown in the photograph.

With some trepidation (I was alone), I tested the security of this wall of muck and managed to chimney down to the floor where a flat layer of gravel makes for a comfortable landing. At the south west end - to the left in the picture - larger boulders capped with the same unstable muck had left a tantalising gap giving a view underneath the cliff face.

I inserted myself gingerly into this squeeze and by turning my head sharply to the right, could see the ends of scaffolding bars which were placed there in 1992; better still, downslope the original passage ‘Stonewain Hall’ appeared to be wide open, given that some small rocks would have to be pushed to one side as one progressed. The problem is that forcing the squeeze might bring down the earth wall, which could be more than embarrassing if one was below it!

It would be a great pity to lose this cave again to winter floods. Some shoring might be the solution to maintaining a viable route down to the squeeze which only requires some determined clearance to gain entry. Jokingly, it has been suggested that we cut the bottom off our surplus wheelie bin and jam it down the drop! Possibly something a little more robust would be better.

During our explorations, dramatic changes occurred, most of it due to infill from the large shakehole immediately downstream. Given that voids like Storm Cave are known to exist on the plateau, who knows what changes have taken place in the intervening decades? In any case, it’s time we stopped losing caves like this one, Heidbanger, Upper ANUS Cave 4 etc., and started preserving access instead.

Any volunteers? Work would be better done before Christmas so that snow melt and other horrid events don’t seal the place up for another twenty years.

.....oOo.....