

Mendip Caving Group News

January 2025 - Issue 390



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Opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the club or any of its officers.

Photographs by article authors unless otherwise stated.

Mendip Caving Group is a registered charity, No. 1197325. The object of the Group is for the benefit of the public and the furtherance of all aspects of the exploration, scientific study and conservation of caves and related features.

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Cottage bookings

Members need not book beds in advance. The guest booking form and a calendar of guest bookings can be found on our website www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

Members' weekends are the first full weekend of the month, including the Friday.

Members' hut fees: £5 per night
 Guest bed fees: £7.50 per night

Members' information

MCG members can consider joining our Facebook group, and/or the Google email group. Please email secretary@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk for access to the latter.

For local caving news and cave access information:
 Council of Southern Caving Clubs
<https://csc.org.uk/wiki/>

New memberships from July 2024 to January 2025:

Justyn Abrahams
 Kat Bielecka
 Stephen Hawkins
 Helen Ingold
 Matthew Roberts
 Keir Spreckley
 Andrew Thompson
 Dave Wiltshire
 Tyler Wiltshire

Front Cover photo

Ogof Ffynnon Ddu, Wales.
 Picture by Justyn Abrahams,
 October 2024. Featuring:
 Greg Hawkins, Kat Bielecka
 and Callum Bisley.

Back Cover Photo

GB, Mendip. Picture by Justyn
 Abrahams, December 2024.
 Featuring Kat Bielecka.

Editorial

Happy new year and welcome to the January 2025 edition of the MCG News (Issue 390).

This version includes MCG news from July 2024 to January 2025. It's much lighter than the previous edition which incorporated a backlog of news and articles.

Please note that should you wish to write an article or have a report or picture published, please send it to me at editor@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

Former publications can be found in the Members' area of the MCG Website
<https://www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk>

I would like to say a huge thank you to members who have contributed to this publication. Your efforts are much appreciated.

Kay Matthews

News so far...

CLUB NEWS

January 2025

A box of caving helmets, lights et cetera was donated to the club by the family of the late Roger Wallington, ex member and architect who designed the cottage.

Ed Ford (delegate tackle master) advised he is working on a new rope numbering system.

"I'm currently working through what we have and cataloguing it. All ropes will eventually have the following marked both ends: measured length; serial number; date put into service; rope type.

I will be keeping a hard copy inventory in the library which will eventually note all MCG equipment with expiration dates if applicable.

Please let me know if any items are damaged, missing or alternatively you may want purchasing for the club."

December 2024

Bill Chadwick advised: the MCG have a renewed reciprocal rights accommodation agreement with the Northern Pennine Club. Please see the MCG website for details.

September 2024

MCG members Andrea and Richard Carey were part of a four-caver team who cycled from Land's End in Cornwall to John O' Groats in the Scottish Highlands to raise money for Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance. They raised £4,010.00 (including Gift Aid).

July 2024

On 28th July 2024, after 89 days of solo hiking, MCG member Becks Vials completed her trek from John O' Groats to Lands' End. She raised £7,054.38 (including Gift Aid) for the Samaritans.

LOCAL NEWS AND UPDATES

Please remember to renew your Charterhouse permits annually by visiting the Charterhouse Caving Company (CCC Ltd) website <https://permits.charterhouse-caving-company.ltd.uk/>

January 2025

The Council of Southern Caving Clubs reported: 'The goodwill fee for visiting Swildon's Hole, Priddy, is now £2.00 per person. All other arrangements for access remain the same.'

November 2024

The 2024 J'Rat digging award went to the Shepton Mallett Caving Club diggers for establishing another 355 metres in Gibbets Brow.

MEMBERS WEEKENDS

January 2025

MCG members enjoyed a covering of fresh snow, plus a Thai feast and quiz organised and delivered by Kat Rosier and helpers.

December 2024

Christmas Dinner was interrupted by Storm Darragh. There was a power cut which lasted for several days. Dinner was organised by Dan Matthews and prepared by everyone (even Mary next door!) With no electricity, the vegetables were cooked on the gas hobs. The turkeys were roasted in Mary's AGA. Heating was via the fire and members' dancing, lighting and music by candles and battery packs.



Pictures 1,2,3 by Jason Kirby 07/12/2024 and 4 by Kay Matthews

John Crowsley ran his excellent two-day caving course during the December weekend.

Pictures by Dave Wiltshire 08/12/2024



November 2024

15-17th November: North Wales Mines. A group of MCG members stayed at Porthmadog for an exploration of slate and copper mines organised by Kat Rosier and led by Ed Ford. Day 1: Cwmorthin round trip and Wrysgan through trip. Day 2: Mona to Parys Mountain through trip.



Pictures by Jason Kirby featuring Poppy the pup.

Members' weekend included a Halloween disco with food cooked by Justyn Abrahams and Kat Rosier. There was fancy dress, dancing and apple bobbing following the annual work weekend where members deep cleaned and repaired the cottage.



Pictures by Jason Kirby featuring Hannah Blunt, Tim Francis, Mark Edwards, Mike Ormond, Greg Hawkins

October 2024

Members weekend: Oktoberfest celebrations included mash, German sausage, sauerkraut and beer tasting arranged by Dan Matthews and helpers.

18-20 October. MCG weekend to South Wales

Exploration of Ogof Fynnon Ddu (OFD). Members stayed at South Wales Caving Club. Organisation and catering by Kat Rosier and helpers. Trips into OFD were led by Mike Ormond and Michael Perryman. There were two or three trips per day, exploring different parts of the system.

September 2024

Michael Perryman and Nick Thorne's latest film, Bath Swallet to Rod's Pot, was shown at Hidden Earth and received a Merit. Please see the article 'Filming on Mendip' on page 10.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJiFZlAlmVc&ab_channel=MichaelPerryman

Summer 2024

A blur of caving, food, drink and good times!

Digging News

Templeton

January 2025

Michael Perryman writes:

Mendip Underground describes Templeton as "Undoubtedly the most heavily engineered dig in the country, and as a testament to the ingenuity and dedication of the cave digger's art it really takes some beating." If you've not done it, and want to see what's behind the description, see our latest film at:

[\[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHNwL4PSkKo...\]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHNwL4PSkKo...)



January 2025

David Lossi writes:

You may have seen the recent Templeton Video, shot by Michael Perryman and Nick Thorne [link above]. It mainly shows the descent – so I thought a little description of the exit after digging might be interesting.

The terminal rift is a very muddy hole, hence its name, Weston Beach. We time our arrival so that the pump has cleared out most of the water into a side passage that's about 15 feet off the floor. All 15 feet was filled with pure mud, but now we are hitting rock and stal, so we think we are near solid floor – this could be the rocky material that collapsed from the roof of Weston Beach creating a blockage and mud accumulation. We aim to fill 25 woven polypropylene bags per session from Weston Beach. To remove the bags takes 3 people (by now very muddy), one to load the bags into a haul tub at Weston Beach. One to haul at the far end of the low crawl then tie each bag to another haul rope. A 3rd person then hauls each bag up a 15ft pitch. We all then shimmy up, and the bags are then passed up a 6ft drop, the person at the top stacks them in a short narrow passage, while the 3rd person drags the bags at the bottom of the next haul, Staple Climb. We leave them here until the following trip.

The bags from the previous week at the bottom of Staple Climb are hauled out on the descent (this gives time for the pump to empty Weston Beach). This involves a 20ft vertical haul up Staple Climb to the waterfall, then another 12ft haul to the first electric winch. The winch lifts the bags to the 242ft platform. We can stack 100 or more bags on this platform, and we will periodically haul these bags to the 166ft level using 2 electric winches. The bags are emptied into a skip which hauls the spoil out the last 166ft to a waiting dumper truck.

So back to the staple climb on our way out. By now the arms have done a lot of digging and hauling, and we give ourselves about 20 minutes to get to the surface. Staple Climb is a bit tricky right at the bottom and then at the top, but before Graham put the staples in, it was a slippery, mud coated nightmare. Next is a simple 12 ft fixed ladder climb, and a short ascending passage to get to the 242ft platform. The ladder up to the 200ft platform is vertical, and the last few feet are just about shoulder width. You then have to stretch out with one leg, feeling for the 200 platform, across the Bold Step.



The ladder to the 166ft platform is also vertical, but parts of it are tucked in by rock bulges, so it's an awkward lean-out climb in places – more strain on aching arms. Everyone arrives panting at the 166! There is now only 166 ft of ladder climbing left, each one about 40ft and leading to the next platform. These ladders are all slightly angled, so far less strain on the arms.

Changing in the field can be quite exhilarating in the winter, so the warmth at the Queen Vic with a pint is very welcome.

If you would like to join the digging team at this amazing cave you would be very welcome.

Picture: changing at Templeton in the last snowstorm -3 degrees!

Grebe

January 2025

Grebe, Perditiion Dig: into the new digging season 2025

Chris Binding:

More of an update rather than a precis of the Perditiion dig which was what the last article for MCG News kinda amounted to; with the dawn of 2025 we're now into the 11th year with Perditiion but spirits have never been higher because (a) the lake/flooding issues have been resolved very nicely with the excavation of a reliable drain and electric pumping which clears the dig face approach wallow in under 20 minutes (b) we have not needed to take a cylinder of breathing air with us for several months, which ends an almost five-year need for hauling in/out cumbersome, risky and heavy diving cylinders and (c) it looks like the current dig face, which is lower than the floor of approach lake is its own natural drain hole (but we haven't quite found it yet).

Paraphrasing the late, great, Willie Stanton from his essay "Digging for Mendip Caves" (link: <http://thelog.org.uk/more07.html>) he makes an observation about two mindsets which distinguish digging styles, or approaches, namely: "Diggers are either opportunists or planners. The opportunist thinks in terms of a dig lasting a few days. He ferrets ahead, opening a route no larger than is necessary to squeeze through. If he breaks into a cave, the gamble has paid off. If there is no breakthrough, and the dig, though still promising, becomes impossible to work because of its small size, he goes elsewhere.... (whereas) the planner prepares for a long siege. The stronger the enemy, the sweeter the victory. He aims to be unstoppable, so he tries to create an appropriate working environment. Physically, there should be plenty of room, stable roof and walls, a clean dry easy approach, and reserves of tipping space and engineering ingenuity enough to challenge the most formidable obstacle. Psychologically, there should be no risk of major setbacks. An inexorable march forward, even if slow, generates confidence and enthusiasm."

I think it's fair to say that the Grebeistas fall into the latter category and we continue unabated in our efforts. Currently tallying 3-4 digging sessions per week since 1st January.



Nick with yet another load of spoil bags: since the end of December somewhere in the region of 1,000Kgs of spoil and rocks have been extracted from the dig face.

Our most recent interesting (i.e. not just digging and hauling spoil) trip was this week, Tuesday 22nd Jan, which saw two separate groups work in combination to try and ascertain whether the Grebe lake drain water, when pumped, re-emerges in Upper Flood Swallet at a likely candidate site nearby Walk the Plank; although both parties synchronised watches and fulfilled each mission to the letter, very efficiently and slickly, no water was observed at the anticipated location(s) so it was an inconclusive outcome but not one which has detracted one jot from “business as usual” with the Perditiion digging.

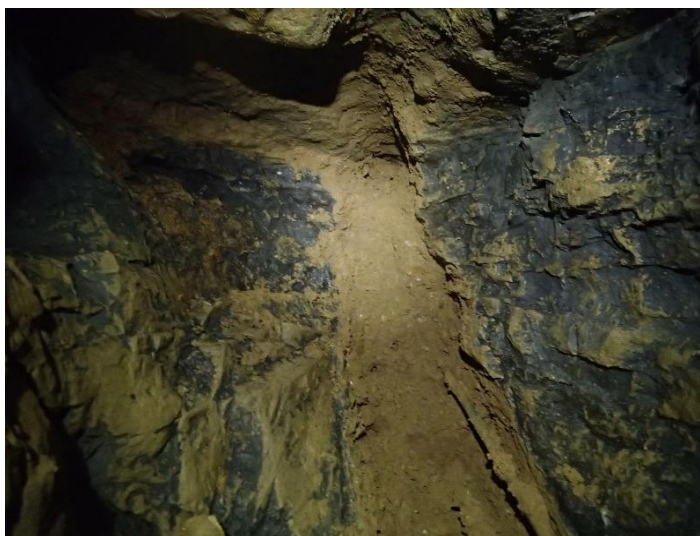


Photo: The “pointy end” - the dig face. Easily-won material.

The current dig face is a pre-existing rift with mass-flow fill in it, a small roof void with a phreatic-looking keyhole-type section, and limestone either side which yields to the digging efforts fairly obediently. Each advance is now far quicker than in 2024 because of the air and water issues (mentioned earlier) now being solved; commuting the spoil to Sidcot Chamber for stowing is actually the hardest part of the equation nowadays. Teams of 3+ do, however, make hauling spoil child’s play and very rapid, and stacking space is still plentiful, it’s just getting further away with each passing advance, obviously!

Onwards and alongwards and downwards!...

January 2025

Persistence and progress; Possible Passage 2024.

Tim Francis:

Since our last update from June, Newsletter 389, the MCG diggers have continued to plod away at the Possible Passage dig in Stainsby's at Blackmoor Valley. The digging remains straightforward but the spoil haul back to the surface is becoming increasingly strenuous, especially with smaller party sizes. So much so that we regularly have to clear out numerous bags of spoil at the start of a trip before starting on a fresh round of digging. Hopes for a breakthrough were high in the summer but we have been thwarted by several roof collapses, a lack of manpower and a spoil removal task that lengthens with every trip. And yet the strong, cold, outwards draft remains as enticing as ever.

After the discovery of the miner's timbers in the floor in May, we carried on excavating the passage straight ahead rather than down into the assumed 18 fathom level. A cursory look indicates that the miner's level is totally full of tailings and as such not an appealing digging prospect. Rapid progress was made in July through a rock and orange mud fill to a body sized void. In the floor we opened up a drafting hole and could see through to a T-Junction ahead. It was an exciting prospect, if a little bit 'sketchy'.



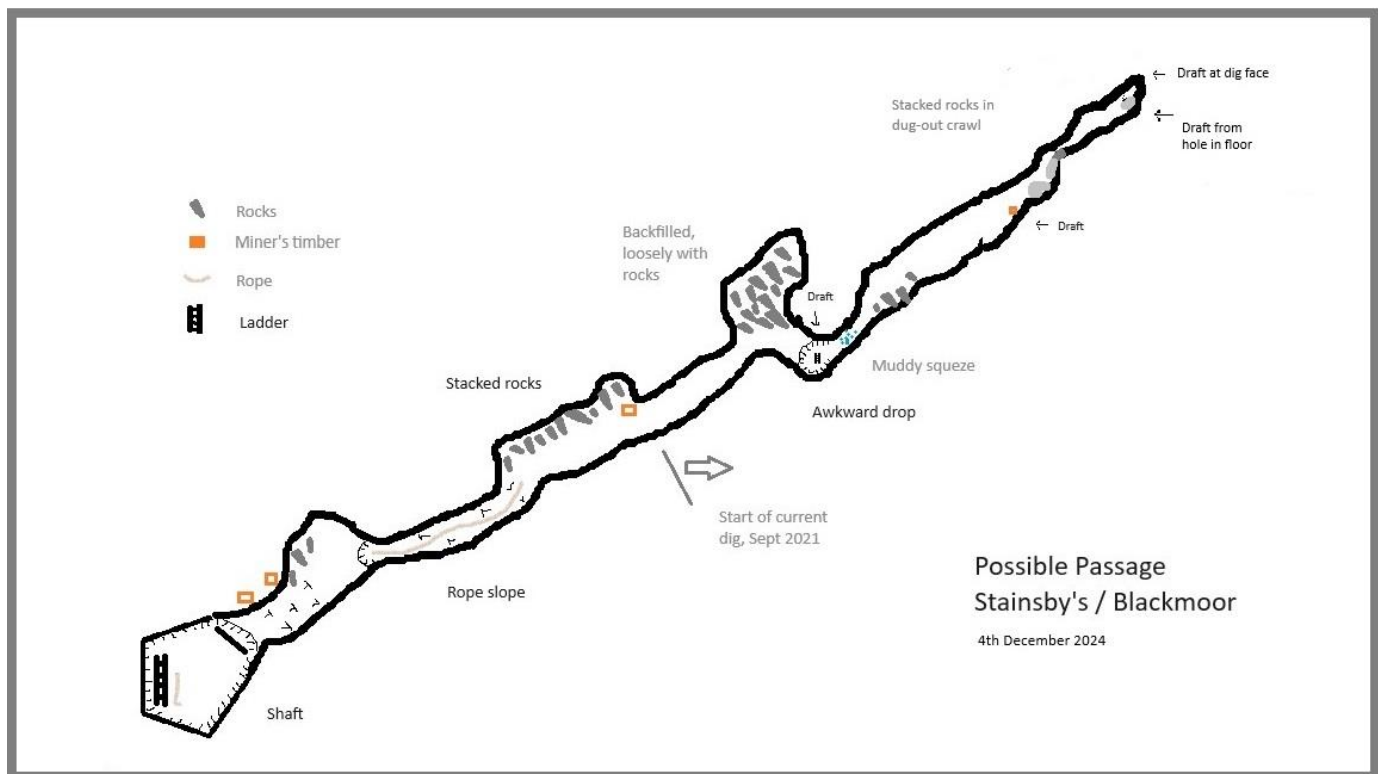
The GoPro view ahead, 3rd August 2024

A strong party reconvened in August but alas we'd had a major collapse from the roof. Large slabs of rock and a huge pile of fill were blocking the crawl a few metres back from the dig face. Thus, the next few trips were a rather frustrating mix of collapse removal and slow haul of everything back to the surface. We were spurred on by a little bit of video that Tom had managed to take by poking a GoPro down the hole in the floor and gently rotating the camera around the T-Junction circumference. Immediately in the floor we could see another piece of miner's plank but the left of the passage can clearly be seen to rise up and disappear out of sight. The cross section of the void seen by the GoPro will of course be tiny but the possibility for proper cave beyond is significant.



Miner's timber, GoPro, 3rd August 2024

After the discovery of the hole in the floor and excitement of the GoPro, I thought it would be useful to create a sketch of the dig so others can get a sense of the place. This has been circulated on the Group's forum but below is a slightly updated version.



And a brief description of the dig that might find its way into Mendip Underground:

“A short flat-out crawl along a bedding plane leads to 3m pot (temporary ladder in place) followed by an awkward, muddy squeeze in the floor. A roomier crawl leads to a dry mud and rock blockage after 8m and an active dig (2024). In several places mining timbers have been found in the floor, an indication that Possible Passage lies, in parts, immediately above the roof of the 19th Century miners’ 18 Fathom Level.”

Our digging continued at every members’ weekend for the rest of the year, including at the Christmas dinner. We’ve chosen to dig straight ahead rather than down into the hole in the floor. The theory is that we should intercept the void filmed by the GoPro rather than necessitating an awkward dig underneath a rather large-looking boulder in the floor. So far, we have dug over the boulder for a couple of metres. A strong draft is blowing out of the dig face so I don’t think it will be too long into 2025 before we discover whether our ‘cunning plan’ has worked.

One unusual aspect at the current dig face is the nature of the fill. For many metres we’ve been excavating natural fill: a mix of orange sediments, sand and large, fractured rocks. Smooth sandstone cobbles were noted as well. But now we have natural fill in the roof but dry black miner’s tailings in the middle of the face. It seems like they have been forced into the passage from ahead; perhaps as a result of pressure from the 1968 flood. Time will tell of course but I suspect there are more surprises to come.

Diggers in the second half of 2024: Peat Bennett, Hannah Blunt, Bill Chadwick, Ben Cooper, Martin Cross, Tim Francis, Ed Ford, Tom Harrison, Keith Knight, Mike Moxon, Mike Ormond, Brian Snell.

Filming on Mendip

Michael Perryman, October 2024

Nick Thorne and I did our first caving trip together 48 years ago, when Nick bottomed Primrose Pot in Eastwater. We’ve done over 200 trips together since, including over the past few years regular digging at Grebe (with Chris Binding), with Nick also digging every week at Templeton and Higher Pitts.

In early 2022, we decided to do some filming in Grebe, in part to record our progress in advancing towards Upper Flood (incidentally, we're about 70m horizontally and 25m vertically above Walk the Plank area in Upper Flood; progress is slow, but steady). We found the combination of modern consumer cameras and LED lighting has, of course, transformed the ability to film underground with relative ease, and with very good results.

We learned quite a lot from our first filming efforts in Grebe, on issues like lighting, continuity, and the time and effort that's actually required. We followed it up with films of Waterwheel Swallet and GB, all of which are at my YouTube channel (Michael Perryman): https://studio.youtube.com/channel/UCgFLwpsdolf3_FfNBCgCZw/

Our latest film is of the Bath-Rod's through trip, which we completed over the summer. We linked it to the story of the connection of the two caves by Andy & Rachel Sparrow in 2007. We included some drone shots of the surface, a short interview with Andy Sparrow at the entrance, with some voice-overs from Andy and Rachel during the trip.

I use an Olympus TR-6 Tough, mostly tripod mounted. The tripod is a significant overhead to carry and set up, but it allows more careful composition and better stability. We've learned about what sort of lighting works best through experience, but setting up the lighting for each shot can also take a couple of minutes. For Bath-Rods, I used mainly one or two Fenix 18650s head lamps, but with higher powered lights in larger passages.

This particular video took us three trips, and nearly 10 hours underground (our GB video took 7 trips, and a total of 35 hours underground). On multiple filming trips, we've found continuity to be more of a challenge than was expected, with issues ranging from slightly different kit, or kit worn differently; a tackle bag carried in a different way when filmed from above or below a climb; different water conditions; or even different vegetation when entering and leaving the cave!

For the editing, Nick and I make a trimmed selection of clips (using Mac iMovie), and we identify anything that would benefit from re-filming. My son Richard, a film director/producer, does the final edits, using Final CutPro. He makes a more ruthless selection of material (which may have been hard won, but which add little to the story), along with some cropping, adjusting sound levels, and even adding some "foleys" (sound effects from extensive web-based libraries). His is a major contribution to the finished product.

We submitted our Bath-Rods film to the "Video Salon" at this year's Hidden Earth at Llangollen and were pleased to receive the judge's consideration of a "Merit", particularly because the overall standard of films has risen strongly in recent years. The salon judges also give some feedback, which will be useful for our next efforts. A video of our next Mendip cave is well advanced, and we're targeting completion by the end of this year.

Do give our videos a "Like", or better still, please leave a comment. This pushes them higher up the web search algorithms, gives them a wider exposure, and gives us some additional encouragement to spend even more time filming underground!

Calcited Critter

Bill Chadwick, December 2024.

In the low roofed section of the Midnight Streamway in Upper Flood there is this rather amazing calcified creature. The consensus is that it is a Dragon Fly Exuvia (discarded nymph case). The creature is likely to have been washed in from the surface and then crawled out of the stream to emerge as a Dragon Fly of some sort. This normally takes place on a reed near a pond, with the newly emerged insect able to dry its wings in the sunshine. Our poor fellow picked an unlucky location!



This seems to have first been noticed by Andrew Atkinson, one of the guest club Upper Flood wardens. It was first reported to the MCG, after a trip lead by Andrew, by Seán Nicholas Tidey in a post on the 'Cavers of Facebook' group in October 2022 (the close-up photo is his and is reproduced here with his permission). At that time, its location was reported as being near the Red Room. Myself and others have looked for it there several times, to no avail.

On 16th November 2024 I took a guest group from Derbyshire Caving Club into Upper Flood and asked them to look out for it. On the way out, one of the guests spotted it. It's nowhere near the Red Room! Rather it is in the low roofed section of the Midnight Streamway, in the Chocolate Muffin area. The second photo taken by Yvonne King, one of the guests from DCC and given to me for use by MCG, shows the context of the stalagmite column on which the beast can be found.

It's remarkable that none of the older Upper Flood diggers reported seeing this in years gone by. It's hard to imagine that it has been there less than the fifty years or so since cavers started passing it by. It's more likely to have been there hundreds, if not thousands of years.

After some debate, it has been decided not to mark its location with tape. Rather, the wardens should learn its location and point it out to guests as they see fit.

MCG Trip reports

GB

16th January 2025

Trip report by Mark Edwards with Sam Philips, Russ Hunt, and Dave Wiltshire.

In about 7:15pm, over the bridge, gallery, rigged ladder, the crawl was only slightly damp and the duck okay, kept my ear dry. I pointed out the dodgy climb into Great Chamber we used to use and then we went for the narrow slot entrance. Had a mosey around Great Chamber then went up dip looking for the other route exit I had found on the last visit.

Descending the boulder ruckle I found one of my reflective chevrons placed last time so we were more or less on track. I spotted quite a polished route against the left-hand wall and followed it, was quite bemused when we popped out in Bat Passage, another new to me route. Last time we came out further back near the large, polished slab with the pink ribbon tied around a split stal.

We then exited via waterfall climb and normal route. 3 hours.

Sludge Pit Hole

14th January 2025

Trip report by Mark Edwards with Robin Harris and Callum Bisley

So, this would be my fourth attempt to complete Andy Sparrow's SRT trip in Sludge, maybe the last chance as the ropes were to be removed on the morrow.

We went straight to 7: a three-metre-long jagged mini rift squeeze, you wouldn't want SRT kit on. Robin first, then crawl straight out to a pitch head with an airy stance where SRT kit could be donned carefully. I just used improvised belay belt harness and stop, one deviation 15/20 metres.

Down the passage a bit was 6 now with kit on, up we went, a muddle of boulders at the top to wriggle through and along to greasy rope at bottom of 5, I took kit off, quite awkward upwards squeeze thrutch, Callum elected to keep SRT kit on, I think he said it was the hardest thing he had ever done.

Robin said previously he had done it the other way around and it was easier.

We continued 8,9,10 non SRT maze area, Robin did the roof traverse back down to Aragonite passage and numbers up to 15 non SRT, must remember to turn around at entrance to chamber with many exits and take ascending passage which is the way on. Back to entrance ladder, out in 3 hours. I wouldn't class it as a Mendip Classic but probably worth doing once, SRT kit was filthy and took some cleaning.

Rod's Pot to Bath Swallet

5th January 2025

Trip report by Dave Cook with Mark Edwards, Justyn Abrahams, Kat Bielecka and Mike Ormond

Nice trip down Rods to Bath or the other way roundwe were going to ab in but there was a fair bit of water strangely enough so we went the normal route...which was damp but not flooded so no ladder which we weren't expecting to use anyway so back out the same waydouble trip then and I'd already done a run that morning with Hannah. So fizz ticked for the day.

All good clean fun 😊

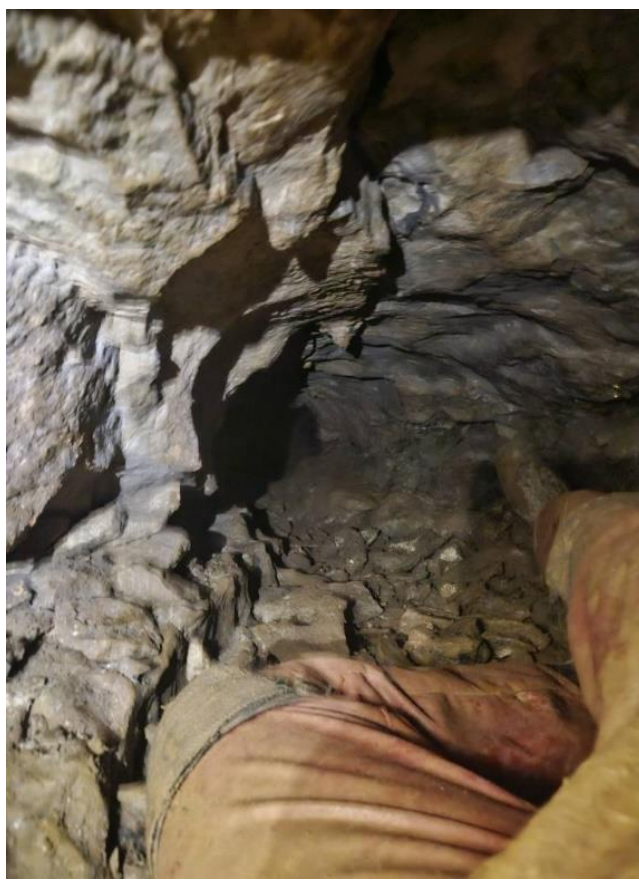
Portland dig

5th January 2025

Report by Daniel Matthews, dig led by Tim Rose

Me and Tim went for a bash at his dig at Northwest passage in Sandy Hole. We abseiled down Sharbutt's Rift, and I managed to get a little stuck at the bottom by not going through the correct squeeze. Tim gave me a hand to get back up and I moved over 6 inches and dropped through the correct hole. We arrived at the Ink Well and

the passage is straight across the top. I went first and took digging tools as Tim wanted to survey up to the dig. Flat out belly crawling for around 20m (standard Portland caving) got me to the dig face which had rocks calcited together. I squeezed in the low passage and started chipping away at it. After 20 minutes of slow chiselling, Tim came up behind me and was keen to get stuck in, so we swapped over. Tim decided that every bit of rock had to go so he went at it like someone very keen to make progress and after an hour decided he wanted a drill to plug and feather the boulders. Luckily, we had one stashed at the cross rift, so I slowly made my way back to collect it. Drill in hand, progress speeded up and soon I heard Tim say, "I can see the way on, I think a bit more bashing at it and we may breakthrough," so he carried on and I assisted by moving the rubble to the only place it could go: each side of the passage. Eventually, he moved a big rock and was through. Unfortunately, by this time we were getting cold as there's one hell of a draft coming from the dig and the hole wasn't quite big enough to get through. Needs some work on the ceiling but we swapped over and there was crawling passage heading off as far as I could see with a few boulders that will need removing. Next dig will be the potential to explore new (Portland horrible) passage. Tim has a gut feeling that this may be the way to what's left of Sawmill Cave: some of the biggest passage found on Portland, you could actually stand up in it!



Eastwater Cavern

31st December 2024

Trip report by Dave Cook with Steve Church and Matty Dredge

Nice annual New Years Eve trip down Eastwater (the most depressing cave on Mendip IMHO). Through Halulluya Hole (spellin' 0/10) had a bit of a root around, out via woggle press. 20p shower at the 'other club'obviously , then a quick scoop at the Hunters.
Just under two hours.
Happy New Year, people.

GB to Great Chamber and Bat Passage

7th December 2024

Trip report by Mark Edwards with Callum Bisley, Greg Hawkins, Hannah Blunt, Kay Matthews

Bit of motivational faff to start, we got in about 12. Down normal way over bridge loop ladder. A few groups about, ladder already rigged. Not too aqueous on the way to the duck, which was okay, wet inside helmet but dry ear. Greg was keen to find Great Chamber as they mislaid it on their last trip. I pointed out the dodgy climb route and the tight letterbox way, which we did.

I had done the Disappointment route ages ago but had not found it from the bottom, so I had a poke around in Great Chamber up around Southwest wall and found a route: a steep climb down through a boulder choke. I left reflective chevrons on way just in case. We eventually found Bat Passage (right wall) and we continued to look at the pretties. Greg was pleased to avoid the exit squeeze, not sure about Disappointment Chamber. On our return to the ladder there was another party waiting so we got their first person up to throw down our ladder. We exited via waterfall. Enjoyable trip, about 3 hours.

A Malaysian Caving Adventure: Gua Tempurung sections 1-4.

19th October 2024

Trip report by Becks Vials with Hairie Tahir, Bala and Aisha.

My visit to one of the largest limestone caves in Peninsular Malaysia, spanning nearly 4.5 kilometres, with 3 Malay caving companions.

1. Golden Flowstone (Section 1)

We entered in the 'show cave' section seeing massive flowstone formations, a highlight of Gua Tempurung's geology. These smooth, rippling rock surfaces are golden under the right lighting, giving the area its name. The temperature here is relatively cool for Malaysia around 24-26°C but compared to Mendip Caving I was very hot. Stalactites and stalagmites are plentiful, giving you a taste of the cave's natural beauty.

2. Top of the World (Section 2)

As we ascended into this section, the difficulty increased slightly and the excitement grew. The climb up to the "Top of the World" point required us to scramble over rocks and through narrow spaces. We pass several impressive formations, including flowstones and curtains. Spiders were replaced by crickets and a huge roost of bats flew around the chamber's ceiling. Next chamber on, the ceiling dips, requiring careful navigation through tighter passages with a welcome stream to cool down in.

3. Gergasi (Section 3)

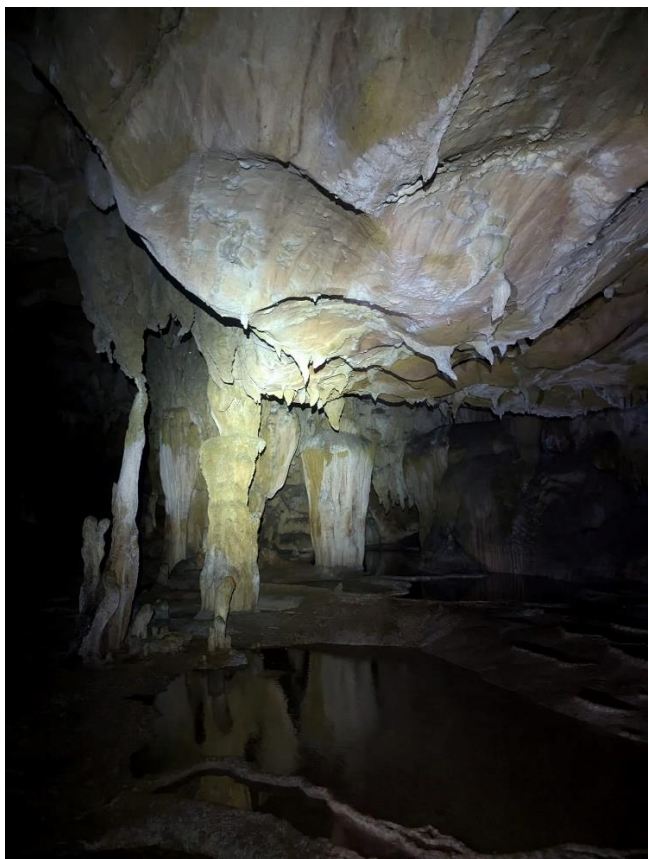
Known as the "Giant Cavern" (Gergasi), this area is filled with enormous rock formations and large columns. Me and Hairie our lead particularly enjoyed the challenge as it involves crawling through small passages and navigating some areas where water flows more freely. We were crawling on all fours through shallow streams, with the cave walls closing in. The temperature dropped in these water-filled sections, sometimes making it feel like 22-24°C, with a few points where you must squeeze through ducks, adding to the thrill here.

4. The River Adventure (Section 4)

The final section took us through the underground river. Here the real adventure began. We waded through waist-deep water and at times fully submerge ourselves, to pass through low-hanging rock formations. The sound of flowing water echoes throughout the chamber. You have to use your hands to guide yourself through some parts as the strong river current picks up. The experience was exhilarating.

5. Respite in the Jungle

After completing the river adventure, we took an exit into the surrounding jungle. The humidity outside is a sharp contrast to the cool cave air. This rest area offered a chance to relax and dry off while surrounded by tropical foliage and the sounds of the rainforest. The jungle trail led us back, offering a chance to reflect on the amazing journey I spent in this beautiful Malaysian cave with new friends.



OFD 1 to Cwm Dwr

18th October 2024

Trip report by Mike Ormond with William Ormond, Callum Bisley, Greg Hawkins, Hannah Blunt, Kay Matthews

It had been raining hard overnight and some hard drinking and staying up late had also been happening. It was a late start for a Saturday trip eventually leaving SWCC HQ at about 11:00. Given the recent dry weather, I was hopeful that the streamway hadn't taken too much water and we would be able to traverse OFD1 via that route. With misplaced confidence I declared that Cows Tails would not be required.

After the traditional fight with the padlock, we made our way underground into the spacious entrance passageway. We were soon at the Streamway and the water was above the step, how far above the step is safe though? I got in the stream – it was strong! At the first corner we had a huddle and a decision conference, the water was strong, but if we stayed together, we felt we would be fine. At the second corner (2 corners too far) we decided it was really dangerous. Just making it back those 20 metres or so to the step was really hard with the water pushing at the back of our legs. Lesson learned, if the water is over the step don't go!

Not wanting this to be the end of our trip I thought we could make our way to Low's chain via the escape route. The only obstacle was the bolt traverse with no Cows Tails! Fortunately, we had enough crabs and slings for the party to improvise with.

Route finding in reverse was a bit tough (how often does anyone go this way?) and I had to call on the most junior member of the team, William, for reassurance from time to time, needless to say he declared he had no idea where he was either.

The roly-poly made some heads and stomachs feel the full benefit of the previous night's drinking and there was a strong feeling that the section was misnamed because a roly-poly goes end over end not on the side.

Roundabout chamber will be familiar to many, for those who know the trick – it doesn't work in reverse!

It was around this time while we were resting in a lofty chamber that Hannah initiated the following exchange:

(H) Is there a mountain above us?

(Us) Of course we walked down the mountain.

(H) No like a mountain...

(Us) What?

(H) Does the cave poke up into a mountain?

(Us) What, like a cone on the surface matching this below?

(H) Yes

(Us) ????

(H) Let's not mention this conversation.

Onwards and down Low's chain (now stainless-steel staples), and we were back on route. Through the choke with only a small amount of bouncing on the big rocking stone, we stopped for a snack on the other side at Hush Sump.

Moving on from here, I soon found myself climbing up a choke propped by degenerating wood and covered in thick bat guano. I had no recollection of this from any previous trip and it was starting to look dangerous as well as unpleasant. I backed down the few metres of ascent now caked liberally in bat mess to find the really obvious way on. With my mojo disturbed we had another route finding fail as we missed a hole on the right under some superb red calcite and instead had a crawl around some lesser visited passages. There are some superb mud formations around here that are a really good marker and look like a Sci-fi city in miniature.

We now made steady progress with some walking, crawling and climbing and we were soon at The Letterbox. With some great acrobatics we were all through. Soon after this a tight crawl over a rippling floor leads upward to the Divers' Pitch. There was a large amount of water cascading down this pitch, so we decided to belay everyone down rather than simply rely on the "rope of dubious heritage". Despite the great shower from this down climb, I was still covered in bat guano.

The cave now changes completely in character to huge walking passages as we made our way to the massive heights of Piccadilly Circus and deeper into the Cwm Dwr system. This being the least familiar part of the trip, route finding now became a bit more erratic...

We missed the first turn out of Piccadilly which for future reference is near an old maypole. That did allow us to see some lesser travelled areas of the cave though. The correct route was confirmed by the presence of an "awkward step" and the following exchange:

(Me): That's the awkward step

(Everyone else): It doesn't look that awkward to us

(Collective): Grunt, slip, swear, slither, heavy breathing.

(Everyone else): Okay it was awkward.

The next big feature was the Smithy (on my last trip here I was sure I was at the Smithy at least four times before I got there, this time it was only the once). Beyond the Smithy was our biggest route-finding problem, some silver tape at a T junction just before the entrance to Big Shacks was really confusing me, (Kay was sure she had been here before but was somehow getting a bit mixed up with the Maypole Inlet meander). We looked up and down this passage three times with a big exploration off a side passage, eventually turning left at the silver tape. The route on was obvious, but time was now against us.

The Cwm Dwr choke was no problem for us, with no wrong turns or dead ends. A good-sized walking passage goes up and down from here. I was wary of not dropping into the wrong hole for the crawl and told everyone not to get tricked into that. Confidently pointing out what I was sure was the wrong hole, we were soon climbing up an unstable pile of rocks that didn't seem too familiar. Greg eventually said, "are you sure it isn't that hole" and of course it was!

The Cwm Dwr Crawl is less unpleasant than it used to be, with much of the gravel having been cleared out at some point in the last decade. With the crawl finished, the route on is fairly straight forward to the concrete pipe exit. Thrutching and swearing (the pipes are not kind to people with long legs) as well as being careful around some rotting timbers, we were soon back on the surface and the short walk back to SWCC HQ. A great trip of about 6 hours.



Pictures by Mike Ormond,
Top: Callum Bisley, Greg Hawkins, William and Mike Ormond, Kay Matthews, Hannah Blunt
Bottom: Hannah, Callum and Greg

Singing River Mine

5th October 2024

Trip report by Kat Rosier with Mark Edwards, Edward Ford, Andrew Thompson, Carl and Neil Adams.

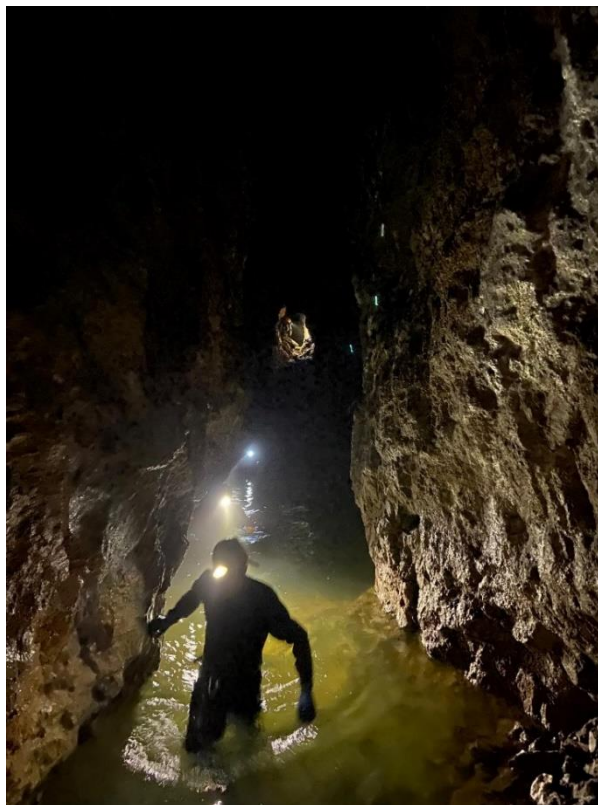
Had to follow instructions to find entrance, luckily a few helpful locals confirmed we were in the right direction.

Had a good explore round. Andy found an interesting squeeze that was tighter than expected, helmet needed to come off and assistance was required on the way back out of it.

Found some great swimming spots, some easier than others to get out of. Luckily, Mark had brought many, many slings so we could make a few handlines.

Found the great pools and dodgy plank in the east series with little problems.

Headed back out, although I struggled with the ladder. Definitely need some more practice on technique. Would've been easier with SRT kit as Mike had suggested. Underground for about 4hrs, good trip and think Neil and Carl will be back. Thanks everyone. Pictures by Neil Adams.



Goatchurch Cavern

24th September 2024

Trip report by Mark Edwards with Kerry Rutter and Dave Wiltshire

A Newbie trip for Dave. We rigged Tradesman's. When down, I retrieved the rope and rigged the Coal Shute. There were kids coming out of every orifice except the Coal Shute so we abbed down, Dave doing his own Italian hitch from watching Kerry. More kids down at the terrace so we headed back up Bloody Tight to mess about in The Maze. I found a reasonable looking crawl but it turned a corner, so I went in feet first backwards to a T junction with graffiti saying no way. Not been here before: left shut down, right seemed tight, so returned.

Down Slide to Drainpipe. By now the children had diminished to nothing. As a child, Dave had visited this point and been refused entry so now as an adult his dreams were realised! He puffed a bit but seemed to enjoy it, we then exited via top entrance as time flies, and we were nearing our call out. I wondered why I always wear a furry in Goatchurch, it's far too warm.

2 hours.

Goatchurch and Sidcot Swallet

8th September 2024

Trip report by Callum Bisley with Kat Rosier Kat Bielecka and Justyn Abrahams

After a little discussion about a trip today, Kat decided to lead myself, PKat, and Justyn around Goatchurch and Sidcot.

A great trip overall, started by the main entrance, descending down the Giant steps, into the Boulder Chamber, and down the Coffin Lid (taking a few shots along the way). Finally arriving at the infamous (but extremely enjoyable) Drainpipe tube. I've done it before, but me PKat, and Justyn decided to do the Drainpipe without torches, which was hugely fun! On completion, we exited the cave via the Tradesman entrance, we met Mike Moxon's Mendip Activity Centre team on the exit (a younger chap leading this team of adventurers).

We then headed down to Sidcot, which I'll admit was not a fun entrance and exit 😬 (I really hate spiders 🕷️). We descended down to the Lobster Pot (via that cheeky little squeeze), and after some consideration, decided to leave it for another time.

Completing both caves well within callout and were underground for about 1 and half hours!

Great trip overall!



Eastwater Cavern (13 Pots)

7th September 2024

Trip report by Callum Bisley with Becks Vials

There was initial concern that the entrance would be flooded, due to the recent rain that has been occurring not just here, but all over the country! Thankfully, however, it was a pleasant surprise to find it was completely dry!

So not too much to report (for once 😊), myself and Becks conducted the 13 pots round trip. Which I will say is a fantastic but quite a demanding trip. We both successfully rigged the ladder pitch at Dolphin.

However, I will add (for your benefit Becks 😂😂), that on return and ascending the Dolphin Pot, she kindly left me the tackle bag to ascend the pot.

I'm not going to lie, after doing 13 pots, this was not fun 😂 but with some good determination and positive reinforcement from Becks, I was able to successfully ascend the pot.

It's quite a cheeky climb with a tackle bag!

Trip completed in good time and well within the callout period!

Swildon's Hole

3rd August 2024

Trip report by Callum Bisley with Mark Edwards, Greg Hawkins, Justyn Abrahams and Kat Bielecka.

A fairly quiet weekend at the club over this members' weekend with not many members about (well except the army of diggers 😊)!

I decided to join Mark on a newbie trip down to Sump 1 with Justyn and Kat as our hopeful new joiners to the club! And of course, Greg! Myself accidentally putting call out time at 0900 😂

Starting the trip from the car park and somehow losing my caving mitts in the process (nowhere to be found unfortunately).

We entered the system via the Wet Way, on towards Forty Foot Pot, myself carrying the ladder and the line in the tackle bag.

On arriving at Twenty Foot Pot, there was already a ladder in place so making it easier for rigging. Myself belaying everyone down, except for Mark who came down last. No issues with DF08 this time which is great! But issues with a simple Italian hitch 😂!

A successful descent down the ladder for the team, we continued on down toward Sump 1, with the usual climbing, bouldering, and some squeezes.

On arriving at Sump 1, I decided to wait behind and look after Kat, whilst Mark, Justyn, and Greg debated on who would take the plunge through Sump 1 first.

Mark decided to go through the Sump with the other chaps following whilst me and Kat waited for their return (they decided to just go up to Sump 2 and back).

On their return, we retraced our route back to the top, via Barnes Loop with a nice speedy climb up the ladder pitch and myself this time being the final caver to ascend. Finally exiting via the Dry Way.

A good trip overall, Justyn and Kat seemed to hugely enjoy the trip, and I am hopeful that they will be back again soon!

Thrupe Lane Swallet (Hobnail Hole pull-through)

23rd July 2024

Trip report by Mark Edwards with Kerry Rutter and Mike Ormond

Quite a warm evening, was a small amount of water in the stream which diverted off before the entrance of Thrupe, both entrances have CSCC padlocks.

Mike rigged the Thrupe entrance while I popped down Hobnail to rig the ladder for our return. Mike led on in his brand-new shiny suit and found the rift nature of the cave a little snug, catchy and sharp. Down the ferret run to the head of Perseverance Pot where Mike set up the pull-through rope. The orange Petzl club rope made quite a loud squeaking noise on the descents which I haven't particularly noticed before, I suppose it was the Italian hitches. We pulled the rope through then proceeded past Cowsh Crawl and up into a drippy, bouldery Butts Chamber where we left the bag and descended to Marble Streamway and viewed the awe-inspiring vastness of Atlas Pot. Back up to the bag and out via Hobnail Hole, which is even sharper, being relatively newly dug out. I got a bit wetter above the ladder, probably from the diverting stream on the surface. There is an in situ knotted rope on the short ladder pitch which you could probably use sans ladder in extremis. A nice trip of two and a quarter hours.

Sludge Pit Hole

6th July 2024

Trip report by Callum Bisley with Mark Edwards and Matthew Roberts

After some initial deliberations at the cottage deciding which cave to go to, me, Matt and Mark eventually agreed on SLP which was a new cave for me and Matt to venture to.

Taking advantage of Mark's availability to get me signed off (pending providing documentation) for rigging a ladder on the entrance (the one and only pitch at SLP being the Boulder Chamber.)

With some assistance, I was able to successfully rig a ladder, including the traverse to the pitch head, experiencing no issues with some of the more complex knots. However, having some difficulty with a simple DF08!

Once I finally figured this out, we safely descended the ladder and began our adventures of SLP.

Even reviewing the caving book as I type this report, I am not too sure what part of the system we ventured!

I am confident however, as I do recall Mark mentioning going via Fault Passage down to the Main Rift and returning back via Aragonite Rift as part of our trip.

I do believe we also ventured around Triple Arch and via the Four Pots Rift.

With time closing in to leave the cave, we retraced our steps back to the Boulder Chamber, successfully climbing the ladder (again I had some issues with the DF08).

Speedily de-rigging the ladder and the traverse line, we exited the cave comfortably within the call out time!

Great trip all around, lots of squeezes, climbs, and crawls.

Swildon's Hole Round Trip

2nd July 2024

Trip report by Mark Edwards

With Owen Rutter, Kerry Rutter, Matty Dredge and Robin Harris

Bit of a faff to start as there were possibly going to be seven of us, one of them Jason. I was thinking Swillies round. As it happened Ed informed me Jason wasn't coming and as he didn't fancy a long trip, Ed went to Cutlers digging with Mike Moxon.

We were in the cave at 7:30pm. Robin led on via short dry way and rigged the 20, then to Tratman's Temple via Barnes Loop.

We arrived at the mud sump at 8:20pm, it was almost totally dry, just water in the embedded yellow bucket. Someone has been busy! There was a new drainage system of blue pipes going off somewhere lower with a white tee shaped rigid pipe on the end, with what looked like an impeller in it, I guess powered by a drill, anyway it appears to have worked.

We carried on to Shatter Pitch area past a dead bat, there were two hanging dead ones going a bit mouldy when we were here last year, probably different ones.

The first Trouble was quite civilised, lots of air space, no need for bailing. In fact, that was the case for the whole trip onwards through various dunkings; the last one seemed the wettest. Greasy Chimney and Birthday Squeeze all negotiated by everyone with relative ease. Kerry seemed to enjoy her first sump one, after which we promptly continued up the streamway to the 20 and exited the same way out at 10:30. Three hours, a fine trip.

Additions to the library

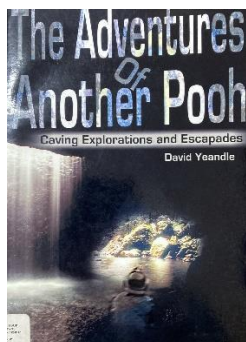
ONLY FULL MEMBERS HAVE ACCESS TO THE LIBRARY.

The Group has a substantial library which full members can access. Books and journals on the shelves can be borrowed - they should be signed out in the LIBRARY LOANS BOOK which is kept on the central unit. Please return them as soon as possible and sign them back in again.

Please don't keep them for longer than you need to - I will chase them up after a couple of months. There are some historical club items which should not be borrowed. They should be obvious but if you are unsure, please ask me, Mike Moxon or a committee member.

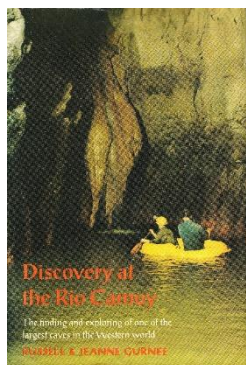
Joan Goddard, library assistant.

Books



The Adventures of Another Pooh: Caving Explorations and Escapades by David Yeandle, 2002

This title has always intrigued me, and we are fortunate to have had a copy donated to us. David ('Pooh') was quite a character. He started caving in the late 1960s with Axbridge Caving Group, followed by BEC, but he soon set his sights on exploration in the Yorkshire Dales which led to ULSA, cave diving and expeditions. The book is very descriptive and quite scary in parts!



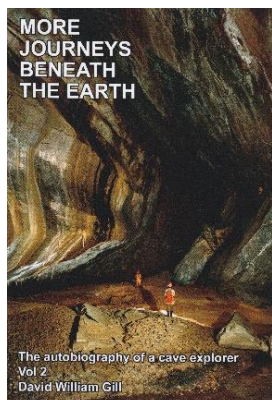
Discovery at the Rio Camuy by Russell & Jeanne Gurnee, 1974

While browsing the BCRA stand at Hidden Earth at Llangollen I was attracted by the cover photo and title of this book. The first half of the book was all about their explorations of the cave in northwest Puerto Rico, and its ecology. It eventually totalled six miles of main river passage. Lots of photos but of course not up to the standard of today's photographers.

There is now a Rio Camuy Cave Park with limited tours of the cave.

Journeys Beneath the Earth by David William Gill, 2020

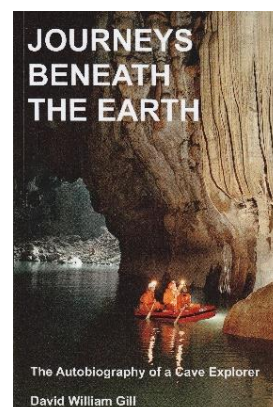
More Journeys Beneath the Earth by David William Gill, 2021

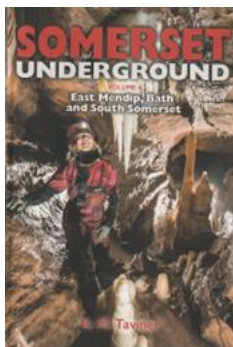


Subtitled 'The Autobiography of a Cave Explorer' Volumes 1 & 2, these two volumes are just that – a very readable account of David's caving adventures, expeditions and career.

These weren't purchased for the library when first published but having had the opportunity to look through them I think they'll make interesting reading. Each chapter begins with a quotation and covers a specific subject, often one of his many expeditions, which makes the book easy to pick up – but it's not so easy to put down!

Dave Gill died in January 2024 and his '*In Memorium*' is in Descent 298 (June/July).



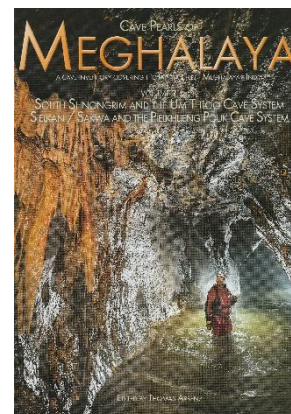


Somerset Underground, Vol 4 by Rob Taviner.

Launched in September, it describes underground sites in East Mendip, Bath and South Somerset including the Bath hot springs, Glastonbury and the major catchment area of St Andrew's Well. It includes substantial caves such as Stoke Lane Slocker, Browne's Hole and Fairy Cave Quarry Caves, but also useful location maps of sinks, risings and many more sites of speleological interest. Bath Stone quarries and the Somerset Coalfield areas also feature.

Treatment of Disused Lead Mine Shafts: a Guide to Good Practice produced for Peak District National Park etc. 2007

Cave Pearls of Meghalaya: Vol 3 edited by Thomas Arbenz A glossy hardback dealing with expeditions from 2000-2004



Other publications

BCRA Annual Review for 2023 – Officers' reports, overview of the Special Interest Groups, 2023 Conference, Cave Science Symposium, field meetings, a short summary of BCRA's formation 50 years ago and its officers.

Cave and Karst Science Vol 51, No 2 - Caves of Inhaminga (Mozambique)

Craven Pothole Club Record No 155 (July 2024) – Much of this publication is taken up with 'Mulu Diary 2023' – 14 pages of very readable day-by-day descriptions and photos of the Mulu Caves Project expedition. Definitely one for the active members of MCG to enjoy. And a couple of pages of advice for anyone embarking on an expedition in tropical climates.

Craven Pothole Club Record No 156 (Oct 2024) – a summer trip to Pierre St Martin (PSM) in the French Pyrenees, again with some advice for future visitors to this system. Also, a canyoning trip and notes on this year's Gaping Gill winch meet.

Derbyshire Caver No 159 (Autumn 2024)

Descent Nos. 299, 300, 301

Grampian Speleological Group Bulletin October 2024

Northern Caving: Newsletter for the Council for the Northern Caving Community (previously known as Council of Northern Caving Clubs).

Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club Newsletter (Summer/Autumn 2024) – lots of trip reports.

Shepton Mallet Caving Club Journal, Series 14 No. 3 (July 2024) – Home Close Hole, the 2023 Vercors trip which included the Gouffre Berger, and the 2024 visit to Northern Thailand.

UBSS Proceedings for 2024, Vol. 29 No 2

Wessex Journal 364 - 90th Anniversary Edition (Nov 2024) contains a history of Sludge Pit by Andy Sparrow. (*If I remember correctly, when first found it was called Contour Cavern - a much nicer name*). In 2022 a detailed look at the 2016 resurvey of the cave led to further digging which in August 2024 resulted in a new round trip.

Subterranea, Issue 67 (Dec 2024) has an interesting article about visits to Cambrian Slate Mine and Snailbeach Lead Mine.

Gallery: Pictures in OFD

Ogof Fynnon Ddu, South Wales. Pictures by Justyn Abrahams, October 2024

