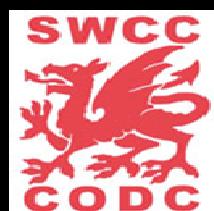


SOUTH WALES CAVING CLUB

CLWB OGOFYDD DEHEUDIR CYMRU



NEWSLETTER 130

March 2014

SWCC is able to claim that it has caved on every continent, this first of two SWCC Journals for 2014, brings together articles that span (almost) all corners of the world, from our doorstep in wet Wales to the warmer climes of Madeira, from a pole to a tropic, from East to West.

This edition has a slightly different format from those I have previously edited. In addition to the more formal and slightly academic journal presentation – with articles that record significant trips, and demonstrate levels of activity amongst our members in the pursuit of exploration, adventure, education and science, it also incorporates supplementary colloquial contributions that centre around the more day to day and entertaining elements of being a member of the club such as recruiting new people into the joys of caving, and some personal reflections.

The combination has made for a bumper edition with lots to read in order to be entertained, educated and amused. I hope you find this to be so as you turn each page and relive our members' trips and exploits.

As always many thanks to all who have contributed.
Krysia Groves, Editor

*Front cover: Detail of the Courtesan
Photo by Duncan Hornby
Article on page 37*

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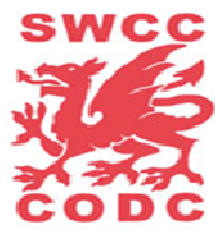
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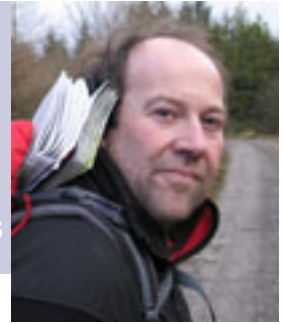
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WHEN CAVING REALLY IS COOL GETTING UNDER THE SURFACE OF ANTARCTICA

By Jonathan Evans



It's been my intention to write this for about 15 years and recently

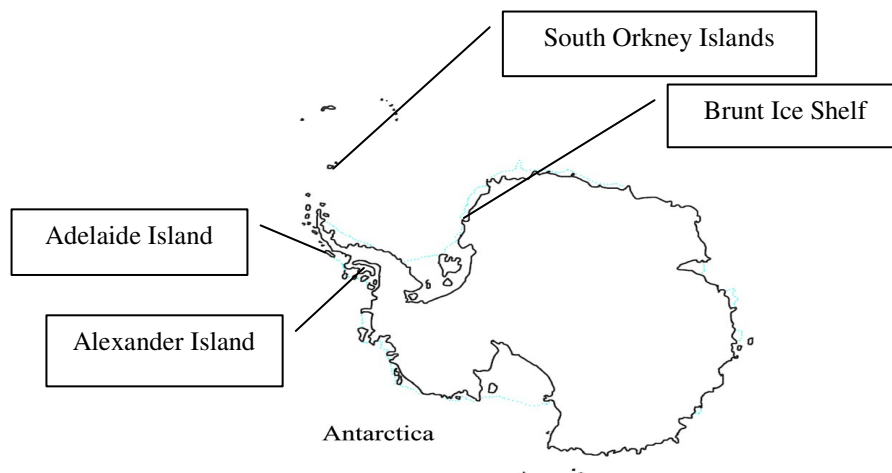
I have started to scan my entire collection of slides taken during the 1990s, when I worked for the British Antarctic Survey (BAS). It occurs to me that this article could be evidence of SWCC activity on every continent.

I don't claim any in depth glaciological knowledge in the descriptions of the caves, so please feel free to comment if you disagree with, or have anything to add to, my thoughts on their formation.

I originally intended to refer to the caves as "Ice Caves" but a quick search of the Internet showed the error of my ways. Ice Caves are defined as caves in bedrock which have significant ice features in them. All of the caves described are in ice and as such are technically "Glacier Caves" although the description goes on to say that glacier caves are formed through the action of melt water or geothermal activity – neither of which is the case with the most southerly caves which I believe are formed through movement of the ice.

The caves shown are situated in 3 areas and each formed through a different process.

1. On a small glacier on the island of Signy in the South Orkney Islands.
2. On an active glacier on Alexander Island to the West of the Antarctic Peninsula
3. Two areas of the Brunt Ice Shelf – near the coast and in the "Hinge Zone" where the ice sheet flows off the Antarctic Continent and onto the Weddell Sea.



Signy Island

Signy is a small island in the South Orkney group of islands (60°43' S 45°36' W). It's about 4 miles long and about ½ mile wide at its narrowest point. Despite its small size it has a bit of everything – mountains, beaches (albeit covered in rock, penguin poo and fur seals) and a small permanent ice cap. The RRS Bransfield (a), the research station (b) and the ice cap (c) can all be seen in *image 1*.

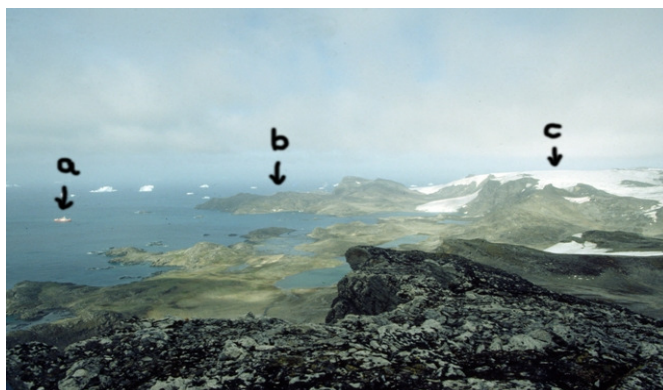


Image 1

Although there were a number of crevasses on the glaciers that flowed from the ice cap, most of these were small and not really descendable, although I came very close to descending one of them, accidentally and with no equipment, whilst crossing a glacier in poor visibility.

The one exception that we found was a hole that was formed in the down-flow side of a protruding rock feature (nunatak) as the glacier flowed around it. It was relatively shallow - 6 or 7 metres deep and landing on an ice floor.



The entrance was surrounded by lots of loose rock of various sizes, which proved hazardous and before descending a bit of tidying up needed to be done.

Once past the rock debris, the cave itself was impressive, the ceiling hanging with icicles that formed as melt water refroze (see right). There were no passages leading off from the shaft.



The Brunt Ice Shelf

At 76° South the temperatures on the Brunt Ice Shelf (75°35'S 26°39'W) rarely rise above freezing so there is no melt water to help cave formation.

Exploring these caves on the Brunt Ice Shelf was generally a winter activity. This was partly due to the fact that the short summer season was busy and jollies few, but also, in the summer months the danger of roof collapse was high and this was seen in the piles of collapsed “snow boulders” that needed to be negotiated in places.

The caves on the Brunt Ice Shelf often contained fine decorations created by a build up of rime and hoar frost.

a) Costal Caves

The ice shelf is grounded at one point near the coast and it is lifted forming the McDonald Ice Rumples (*image 2*). This happens close to the edge of the ice shelf causing bays to



Image 2



Image 3

form in the ice edge. These bays are used to anchor and unload ships by the British Antarctic Survey, as they trap sea ice during the summer. The landward edge of the bay often develops into a ramp which allows access from the ice shelf onto the sea ice; Maggie's Ditch was an example of this (*image 3*)



Author is pictured

Some caves form as an extension of these bays. On some occasions a cave may form on either side of the ramp and can be easily accessed from the sea ice. Maggie's Ditch had 2 such caves. The left hand (looking seaward) was the more extensive of the two and involved several scrambles and even a squeeze to reach the final chamber.

Fossil Bluff - Alexander Island

The glaciers near Fossil Bluff on Alexander Island (71° 20' S 68°17' W) were more substantial than those on Signy, and although much further South, still carried melt water in the summer months. We identified two distinct types of cave formed by the melt water.

The first type comprised a series of small passages which were well decorated with icicles (*right*). They ran often only a few feet below the surface of the glacier. These involved a lot of crawling whilst trying to stay out of the water – getting wet was not an option to consider. Occasionally, small chambers would occur. Here, the floor would be very slippery, as the melt water collected (see photograph below) before re-freezing to form a smooth layer of ice.



Right at the base of the glacier we found passages resembling phreatic tubes that ran a considerable distance along the rock/ice interface and at 90degrees to the flow of the glacier. The floor was of a shale type consistency and

piled up either side of a channel (*right*). The water that formed these probably came as melt from the surrounding mountains rather than from the glacier itself. These had no formations once you moved away from the entrance and looked as if they carried large quantities of water.



The right hand cave comprised of an easy walk down a deep snow slope into a large chamber



In one of the bays, Windy Creek, a large crevasse had formed at its head. By abseiling into this crevasse (it was possible to walk out onto the sea ice and access the Emperor Penguin Colony that existed there.



Both of the above types of cave could extend several hundred metres back into the ice shelf and could make travelling to the coast a hazardous trip. A safe route was usually established early in the season and clearly marked using empty 45 gallon drums.



Another type of cave is formed when an ice cliff “leans” outwards and a split forms a short distance in from the split, running parallel to the ice edge. This can clearly be seen next to the climber in the image on the right. Snow drift forms cornices which eventually form a roof over the split. (Access involves some of the easiest cave digging that you can imagine – just jump up and down on the bridge (suitably attached to an anchor, of course). The main hazard here is that the slot is not bridged but filled in and you end up chin deep in soft snow, thrashing around trying to get out. If you did get in to the crevasse, you were usually rewarded with some fine formations of hoar frost.



b) Hinge Zone Caves

As well as the caves that formed at the seaward edge of the ice shelf there were also some found at the inner edge of the shelf where the ice sheet flows off the continent and becomes a floating ice shelf. The ice shelf is affected by tides and rises and falls twice a day. Where it is joined to the land the ice has to flex and this area is known as the Hinge Zone. In the same way that a plastic ruler cracks if it is flexed the ice shelf turns into a series of crevasses and chasms – some large and containing sizable bergs. Travelling through this area is a hazardous activity. Crevasses are plentiful, wide and often hard to spot and travelers are roped together whether on foot or on snowmobiles .

Most of the caves here are bridged crevasses, either caused by movement of the ice stream or though the cliffs slipping. One interesting cave was found in a large berg in one of the chasms. One entrance was situated about 15 – 20 feet up the side of the berg.



I speculate that this cave formed on the underside of a berg which later flipped over. This could mean that it formed totally underwater. The walls of the cave are scalloped (see right), similar to phreatic passages and this may not be as far-fetched as it seems, one of the bergs in the area, known as

Stoney Berg, has a small gully on the top which is littered with pebbles – evidence that at some time the top was at the bottom and in contact with the underlying rock.





Hinge Zone Valley

Conclusion

There seems to be very little information available on the Internet about the formation of caves in the ice in Antarctica. Most is based around The US station McMurdo and Mount Erebus where glacier caves are formed through another process, thermal activity from a volcano. Unfortunately, these were on the other side of the continent and I did not have the chance to visit them.

I have described four other possible processes through which glacier caves possibly form:

- Movement of a glacier around a solid rock feature
- Movement of ice causing fracturing
- Melt water running off the glacier itself or the surrounding landscape.
- Through melting in part of the berg that is submerged

Most of the vertical systems were descended and exited using a simplified version of SRT, made more interesting by adding crampons into the kit list giving an additional reason not to tread on the rope.

Please, feel free to debate any of the assertions that I have made on the method of formation of these caves or, if you have more information please correct me. As I have stated, I am no glaciologist and it is all assumption and conjecture – but, if it sets a snow-ball rolling...

A FINNISH TAKE ON CUETO-COVENTOSA

By Miri Pihlaja



I first heard about the Cueto-Coventosa through trip in 2011 from Martin Hoff and Tony Baker. We were returning from la Grotte de Bournillon in Vercors and they were telling tales about their 1997 trip to Spain. Soon they began to persuade me that it would be a perfectly sane idea to do a trip where you first spend hours on ropes descending nearly 600 metres and then 10 plus hours walking and partly swimming out. At that point I had done four trips underground that had included *some* SRT. The Cueto-Coventosa through trip sounded completely insane and utterly compelling. Next I learned that SWCC was planning a summer trip to Spain in 2013, and so I decided needed to be there. The idea of the Cueto-Coventosa through trip was my motivation for many things in life over the next two years. I was enchanted.

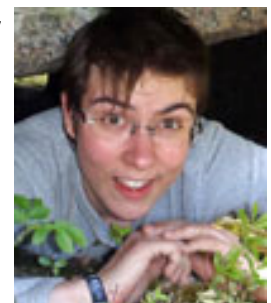
None of the above crossed my mind in 2013 when I stood above the Juhue Shaft and watched two lights disappearing into the darkness below. There wasn't anything crossing my mind at that point really, the view was just too mesmerising. Only after hearing the "rope free" shout from below and attaching my descender to

the rope I found myself thinking, "Shit, am I really doing this?"

After checking and rechecking my descender and the rest of my gear I slowly started my descent. I began to go through pitch lengths in my head – at this point I knew them by heart all the way to the Galeria Juhue, which was waiting for me 581 metres below my starting point. It was after the second rebelay that I ditched the idea of turning back and just started to enjoy myself. Pitch after pitch I got lower and before I knew it I had reached the bottom of the Juhue Shaft at -305 metres. At that point the big straight down shaft was behind me and the rest of the way to the Galeria Juhue felt like just a short little drop, even though the vertical distance was almost the same as the Juhue Shaft. A bit over two hours from entry I reached the end of the ropes and arrived at the Galeria Juhue.



I was caving with a completely Finnish team consisting of Velma Aho (above) Dare Talvitie (left)



and myself and the Cueto - Coventosa trip was our first big through trip ever. Finland's longest cave being the 82 metres long Torhola, this was going to be somewhat different. To take away some stress, an arrangement was made that two hours after us, Andy and Dave Dobson and Tony Baker were going to start their own through trip. That way if we had any problems we could have some help from them after a short wait. To prevent the slightest possibility of our backup team going past us and storming out of the cave abandoning us there without even noticing, we had a roll of red tape with us. Every time we encountered a rope I took a piece of tape and put it on either end of the rope. Sometimes even both ends, just to make sure that the backup party would know that we hadn't got lost in the middle. After a short pause at Galeria Juhue for water and some food we started our journey out of the cave. Until that point it had felt like going in but now, all of a sudden, it started to feel more like going out, even though when measured by time or distance we had barely started our trip at that point. The journey out began with boulders, and there were many of those in Sala de las Once Horas and in Galeria del Chicarron. We spent the next two hours mostly climbing over different size boulders looking for the next cairn or reflective marker pointing the way on. When we reached El Oasis, we all thought that we couldn't possibly be there yet and so we just

moved on. And when we came to Pozo de la Navidad I still couldn't comprehend that we could have somehow made that part of the journey already. The way from the Galeria Juhue to Pozo de la Navidad was supposed to take about two hours and it did, I had just thought that we would be slower.

Pozo de la Navidad was the first place where I placed a tape marker on the rope. At this point the cave changed its nature; there were no more huge tunnels and boulder floors with no end in sight, but passages with dimensions that were easier to comprehend, with some pretties here and there. Caving got generally a bit more interesting. Walking among the boulders really hadn't been so fascinating after a while, so this was a good thing. Sugar coated white tunnels led us on and even though I'm not usually the one longing for formations I was forced to stop and look more closely at some of those we encountered. I even felt momentary remorse for not taking any kind of a camera with me, but being no photographer that wasn't really a great loss. At Pozo de la Union we stopped to fill our water bottles from the waterfall. As I was doing so I realised that I was carrying way too much water with me. Apparently after years of unsuccessful attempts I had finally learned to hydrate myself properly beforehand so that I wasn't desperately thirsty when entering the

cave, which was really nice for a change and also meant that I wasn't drinking as much as I had earlier when caving. This, combined with the fact that I'm a bit impatient by nature and stopping to collect water from a waterfall with a split plastic bottle seemed to take an eternity, got me to do some rationalisation, leaving my other water bottle practically empty. There was no point dragging extra water through the cave just for fun.

We all wanted to finish the through trip in reasonable time and having the backup party after us made me feel as if we were being chased through the cave. Somewhere in the middle of the Galeria de las Pequeñas Inglesas I started to think I could hear the following party behind us. After that every time we had to stop for one reason or another, or even just slow down a little, I was constantly glancing at my watch. It was kind of a mutual understanding that the backup party would catch us at some point, but later the better.

The passages were getting smaller and the swearing in front of me was getting louder, not everyone of our party was thrilled to reach the cramped parts of the cave. Soon the draught started to get stronger and it became obvious that we were approaching Sala de la Turbina. Before reaching that there was much stooping and crawling to do and tape markers to be placed to pieces of ropes lying coiled in the middle of a

smallish horizontal passage. There were also places where I found that my slightly heavier structure with short bones was near the optimal. A slimmer mate with longer bones struggled with narrow vertical cracks where I was able to jam either my whole upper body easily sideways or bend my legs efficiently to get onward.

Eventually, after learning many new ways to swear, we reached the short but rather narrow pitch leading down to Sala de la Turbina. Most of the air going through the cave goes through that six metre pitch and the draught there was unbelievable, it was howling so loudly that hearing your mates talking right beside you was challenging. The problem with the pitch wasn't really the tightness of it, but the thickness of the in situ rope. Even with a Petzl Stop locked to Simple mode and without a braking krab it took some effort to get the rope through the device. The widest parts of the crack were quite easy to spot and then it was just a bit of jumping on the rope to get it to slide through the descender.

Then we were basically on familiar ground. After a short walk from Sala de la Turbina we reached Lago del Pasamanos, which was the point where we had turned around on our trip to the lakes from the Coventosa end a few days before. I had mixed feelings about getting there: I was happy to know exactly what lay between us and the Coventosa entrance, but at the same time I

felt a little disappointed that the trip was nearly over. One more pitch and we had reached the lakes, eleven hours after starting our descent of the Juhue Shaft.

Changing into something more suitable for crossing the lakes took a while, and while we were doing so, I finally unmistakably heard Tony's voice behind us. In no time our backup party joined us. About time they did! We were already starting to worry that by forgetting to put tape on ropes here and there we might have lost them. It would have been most unfortunate if they had been desperately going through side passages trying to figure out where we had gone wrong.

I'm quite fond of swimming and seldom feel cold so my choice for crossing the lakes was basically just swimming across. I packed most of my kit in my tackle sack or dry bag, put on a wetsuit vest and stuffed a piece of karrimat under my overalls. I had tested everything beforehand so I knew that my buoyancy aids would work just fine for me. Those not so keen to swim used other options like car inner tubes to get across, even though some may have ended up getting soaked anyway after slipping off their inner tube. I have to admit the water in the lakes was quite cold and it started to get a bit chilly rather fast after swimming across all the three lakes, despite the dry and warm furry suit I took from my dry bag and put back on. It was time to get moving again.

The Coventosa end of the cave was over

before it began. It was its familiarity that made me feel that way, I think. Of course it still took us around two hours, but I was in some kind of a caving flow, as I had been for most of the way since Pozo de la Navidad.

Soon I could smell outside air, I saw stars above my head and heard some crickets singing nearby. I sat down grinning stupidly, turned off my head torch and waited for the others in darkness. It had taken us 14 hours to complete the trip.

It wasn't a properly epic trip because everything went well and the only story to tell is that we were able to do it without any trouble! For me caving has always been a way to forget everything else and just concentrate on the moment. Doing that for 14 hours was stupendous. I wasn't all that knackered in the end, I could have kept on going had I needed to. I definitely know that I need to do more, and longer, trips because, bloody hell, that was fun!



Miri Pihlaja swimming in one of the Coventosa lakes. Picture by Martin Hoff

BELIZE 2013

By Phil Walker



Introduction

The sixth SWCC expedition to Belize, Central America took place for 2 weeks at Easter 2013, dragging 9 people once more across the Atlantic to brave the joys of sunstroke, horrible food, monkeys, creepy crawlies and hopefully cave.



Bladen (Chris Jones)

After the 2010 expedition there had been no concrete plans to return to Belize. Although the trip found some great new caves, the longwinded process of dealing with permissions and working with an increasingly dollar greedy county was slowly taking its toll on our enthusiasm. However, Toby (on one of his many 'working holidays'....) had a chance encounter with members of the Ya'axche Conservation Trust, based in Belize, who were keen to build caving skills and conservation, specifically in regards the Bladen Nature Reserve, which they are responsible for managing.

Bladen is an area we have known about for years but never able to visit due to heavy restrictions on access to the nature reserve. Working with the trust provided the chance to conduct some cave recce work in Bladen and seemed too good an opportunity to miss. Planning began in earnest and a team quickly recruited to attack the expedition based on

two fronts. Firstly to undertake initial reconnaissance and exploration work in the Bladen Nature Reserve and secondly to continue the previous expedition work around the Rio Grande area within the Columbia Forest Reserve.

Rumble in the Jungle

Due to 'unforeseen' events at the end of the last expedition our previous accommodation option was off the table, so the decision was made to stay once more with the Choco family in the village of San Pedro Colombia. Previous members of the expeditions will be well aware of the conditions on offer with this accommodation, and needless to say it did not disappoint once more. Nine people crammed into a room smaller than the SWCC long common room, hammocks strung across doors, ants all over the equipment, screaming kids, filthy chickens and dogs of death (one look and you know your time is up). On top of that the culinary delights of a partly scrambled egg on a tortilla as a main meal! This time round there was no appetite for 'who can eat the most tortillas in a sitting', and the record from 2006 still stands (7?). In fact, a couple of the old hands struggled with half a tortilla most times.

However, the good times were not to last. The Choco family have gradually got bigger and bigger, kids, grandkids, random kids, long lost brothers and multiple uncles all now vying to 'help' us in the jungle, getting so bad that they wanted to charge a day fee for just coming along to the easily accessible Tiger Cave, were we drive them to the entrance

and they follow us round the cave. On the one hand you have no option but to use guides for the deeper jungle excursions, but when a small army insists on coming with you the costs soon mount up. We used the Choco family for around a week for some initial work in the Rio Grande, concentrating on Ramon's Cave (named



after one of the many uncles) and Su Sil Ha, a new cave discovered by one of the brothers.

Ya Ta' Ha (Phil Walker)

The jungle camps in the Rio Grande were quite luxurious, with a lot of space, relatively good water and easy access to the main caves. On the downside, it was now possible to get mobile reception, the rather depressing face of progress, even when deep in the jungle! However, the danger of succumbing to the temptations of the 21st century was not enough to put off a family of howler monkeys who decided to set up camp above my hammock on one of the jungle camps. Quite possibly one of the worse night's sleep I have ever had. The first 10 minutes are fun and exciting.. 'what a strange, unique noise they make'... 5 hours later you want to borrow the local's gun and fire it randomly into the trees on the off chance of getting one of the b*stards. Speaking of guns, another highlight of jungle trips is always the firing of a shotgun right by your ear, at 4am, and then seeing some form of miniature rodent being dragged back to the fire and chopped up for breakfast.



Jungle wildlife (Phil Walker)

Rio Grande Area

The Rio Grande Project began in the 1980's as a US led project cataloguing caves along the dry Rio Grande riverbed. This was largely concentrated around the easily accessible caves close to the village of San Miquel. However, from 2001, the SWCC expeditions have slowly been pushing along the river exploring numerous caves trying to tie together the larger picture about the major cave system that must exist along the route of the river.

Tiger Cave (Tich Hulz) – The Growler

Tiger Cave, discovered and extensively explored in the 1980's, has continued to provide new discoveries for the team since 2008, with this year being no exception. At the end of the 2008 expedition an unclimbed waterfall, in the Roaring River section of the cave, had been left as a tantalising lead to return back to in future. This year, toward the end of the trip, Chris and Dave quickly scaled the climb and discovered another extensive wet section of cave. This was a rather daunting area of the cave, with water streaming into the passage from all directions and deep pools with strong undercurrents. Further work on the surface suggested that this area of cave lies directly under some obvious 'leak's' in the hydro canal, which would account for the bizarre direction of waterflow.

Approximately 200m of new cave was discovered with the team turning round with going passage. The new section of cave lies in an interesting location, heading toward the nearby Bat Cave, but likely beyond the upstream sump in the cave. A known sink is also located approximately 1km away from this area, so the potentially for more passage (albeit wet) is a distinct possibility.

Bat Cave (Mucbe)

While Chris and Dave were busy exploring the new exciting parts of Tiger Cave, Phil, Alan and Andy were busy being equally excited about the prospect of resurveying Bat Cave. Although only a minor cave (approx. 200m long) it lies only a few hundred metres from Tiger Cave and is assumed to serve as a flood overflow from the main cave. It transpired that the US team never surveyed the cave (their dinghy popped) so a worthwhile day was spent, resurveying and drawing up the cave on the master survex overlay. It's importance (or lack of) in the Tiger Cave jigsaw is still not fully understood but the new discovery and future exploration in Tiger Cave should reveal a lot more about what lies beyond Bat Cave.

Ramon's Cave

This potentially exciting new cave was entered at the end of the 2010 expedition.. Although some evidence of modern cave exploration presence was found near the entrance, a large lower level underground streamway was encountered that disappeared off into the distance. Research back in the UK turned up minimal evidence of such a large system, although a much smaller cave, known as Yax Ta' Ha (explored in the 1980's) , was quite close.



Downstream Yax Ta' Ha (Ramon's Cave) – Phil Walker

Exploration of the cave over a number of days revealed over 3km of cave, mainly in the stream but with a lot of high level leads. The caves was slowly drawn up and with the various expedition members describing parts of the cave in detail, it was slowly beginning to look like we were in the Yax Ta' Ha system and unfortunately not a new cave. Eventually, the original explorer contacted us with a more comprehensive survey matching exactly what we had drawn up in the field. A final trip into the cave did find some new passage, pushing past the previous upstream limit of the cave (thanks in part to a dried out sump) to a second upstream sump. A high level bypass route was also discovered, but eventually dropped into another sump.

Su Sil' Ha

About 1.5km NE of Yax Ta Ha, a new cave was discovered where a large seasonal

stream disappears down a large 50m shaft.

Explored over a number of trips by the entire team, the foot of the entrance pitch develops into some large impressive chambers, with evidence of severe flooding. Eventually the cave degenerates into large log filled sink holes or small flood debris filled passage. Around 0.5km of cave was found with a few leads left to explore for any future trips in the area.



Su Sil Ha (Phil Walker)

Bladen Branch

The first attempt to explore Bladen was undertaken by Phil, Andy, Alan and Tom. The plan, using the provided Ya'axche guides, was to start from the ranger station near Golden Stream village and head into the jungle, along known trails, towards a cave known as AC Cave and base ourselves in the location and conduct recce work from there. Conflicting reports of 2 days walk, just to get to AC Cave, meant we approached the trip with some trepidation. As time was short, just 2 weeks for the whole expedition, a full 4 days of walking was largely lost time and such a long time in the jungle required more food to be carried.

We had nothing to fear! It soon became apparent that the two appointed guides had no

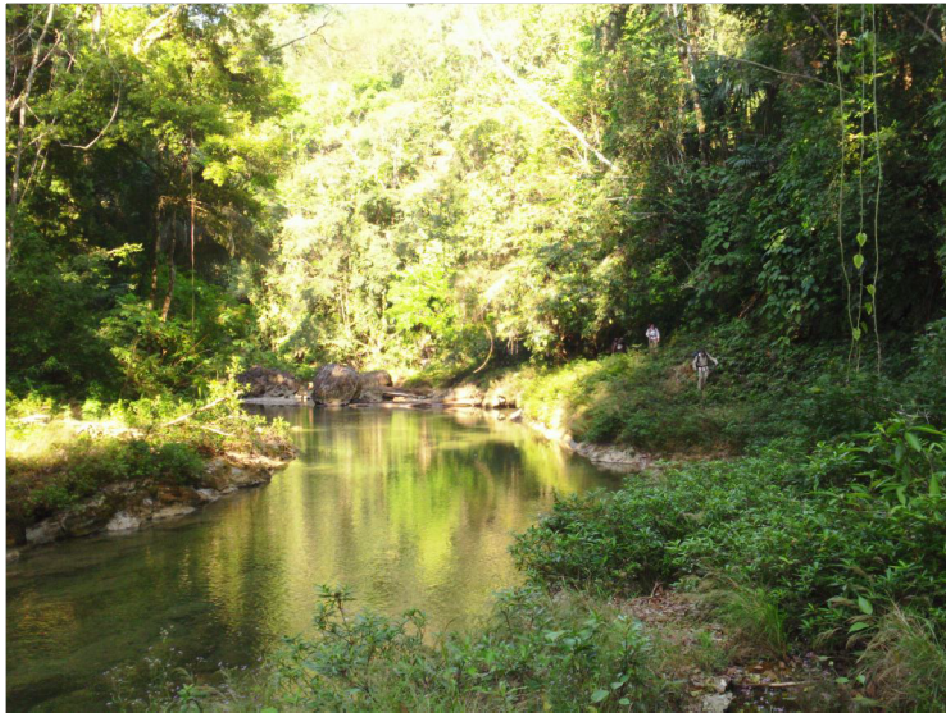
intention of being in the jungle that long and no desire to get anywhere near the site. The usual excuses from the hunters of us being too slow appeared, despite us getting half way in less than half a day. Probing questions soon revealed that the two guides were fairly new and had no idea how to get to the main site. The second day was spent slowly edging further into the jungle, again we think a concerted effort by the guides not to go too far away from known territory. A token attempt to show us some 'caves' on route were disappointing, with just small alcoves close to the track discovered, although they all provided interesting data for Tom, our resident archaeologist. Dejected we made our way back to base and the others.

In good British fashion we complained to the main conservation team, who were very apologetic and promised to provide better guides for another attempt.



Bladen No.1 Main Chamber (Andy Lewington)

The second attempt was a much grander affair. Chris, Amy and Andy supported by the experienced main park ranger took a direct route straight up the Bladen River (why didn't we think of that?). Encountering not only all manner of flora and fauna but most of the scientific world undertaking various projects in the reserve, including ex-cavers from the 1980's expedition in the area. Lots of advice on offer from them, but tracking down the published evidence all led to already pursued avenues.



Bladen River (Chris Jones)

Although not quite reaching AC Cave, the group made it to a place called Teakettle Camp and conducted the recce from there. By all accounts a paradise of jungle, animals, good food and crystal clear rivers to swim in, a far cry from the usual jungle camps. All in all 30 sites were logged, some new but some obviously well known.

Again?

The major objective of the expedition was initial reconnaissance work in the Bladen Nature Reserve. This was undertaken and a number of sites visited and logged.

Although there is still a lot of potential for further work and discovery in the Bladen area, it must be noted that a lot of exploration has been undertaken in the area previously. Frustratingly the information is difficult to obtain, being either unpublished or out of print. Future work in the area would benefit from a concerted effort to centralise all available information and make it available to authorised groups working in the area.

Belize, despite more money coming into the country from oil discoveries and US investment, is becoming increasingly 'wilder'. Guatemalan excursions into the area around the Rio Grande (and into Bladen) are becoming deeper and more frequent, with multiple warnings given to us that they will shoot first, with no questions asked, on the basis of us being authority / government people. Over the 15 years we have been going to Belize we have never yet once encountered any such excursions, but not something I want to experience. However, despite this, there is still huge potential in the Rio Grande and Bladen areas, with large cave systems lurking somewhere in the jungle for the brave (or stupid).

A full report on the Belize 2013 expedition is available from the SWCC library and the expedition website: <http://www.swccbelizecaving.co.uk/>



Team Photo, 2013. (Phil Walker)

From L to R: Andy Lewington, Tom Elliot, Lucy Greenwood, Phil Walker, Chris Jones, Amy Nixon, David Powlesland, Toby Dryden, Alan Braybrooke

UKRAINE 2013

By Allan Richardson



It all started when I saw an article on the Gypsum caves of the Ukraine in the 1986 edition of *The Underground Atlas* by John Middleton & Tony Waltham. They went on the list of caves to visit, but at the time visiting the Ukraine was almost impossible. Fast forward a few years to the 1990's and the opening up of the former Soviet Union. There was a trip to the Gypsum caves of the Ukraine as part of one of the Russian expeditions organised by Jim Birchall et al. I was on the first part of the 1990 trip to Uzbekistan, but was unable to go on to the second part which included a trip to the Ukraine, see *BCRA Caves & Caving No 48*.

And there it stayed as an idea. Fast forward again to 2013, Christiane and I were booked to go to the International caving Congress at Brno in the Czech republic (Brno famous for Beer and the Bren Gun), we were looking at the various Pre and Post Congress trips, one stood out, the trip to the Gypsum caves of the Ukraine, neither of us had been to the Ukraine so it was booked.

The Congress passed in a haze of Lectures, meeting people, caving trips and of course the local beer and wine just had to be sampled.

The trip to the Ukraine was by train, the journey through the Czech Republic was

fast and efficient, Slovakia was somewhat slower, the section in the Ukraine was slow and rattley, just like the trains in Russia, it was after all a Russian train (we had changed trains in Bratislava), having come from somewhere in Russia. The most interesting part of the journey was crossing the border from Slovakia into Ukraine, where they have to change the wheels on the trains as the track gauge is different, the operation was surprisingly quick and efficient.

Our Ukrainian hosts met us in Ternopil, then it was a bumpy minibus drive out to the Speleo hut, stopping on the way at a garage, where we discovered Ukrainian ice cream, it was delicious. Once at the hut accommodation was sorted out, a snack provided and we were off caving.

It is an area of low rolling hills with river valleys, the caves were in the sides of the valleys, though an aerial photo did show a line of what ap-

peared to be a line of shake holes across one of the fields.

Mylnky cave (above) is a controlled cave in that it has a locked steel door, the first sec-



tion had been quarried and was quite large, then a short crawl led into the cave proper. As with most Ukrainian caves it was not always controlled and has suffered from damage, and the removal of many of the gypsum formations.

The cave passage are mostly vadose, the walls being made up of layers of thin, slightly curved Gypsum crystals, varying in length from Millimetres to Metres. The floors of the passages are muddy and this has spread up the walls to a certain extent especially where the passages are narrow.

Day two was a trip to Optymistychna, which is the longest Gypsum cave in the world. A long drive to a small village with a large caving hut, in fact there were two huts, the smaller held a very well laid out and interest-



ing, museum of Ukrainian caving. Behind the huts was a large covered area with tables and seating. A twenty minute walk got us to the woods where the blockhouse entrance



was located, it was very muddy in the first section and there were logs on end as stepping stones. Once past this area, the passages generally became larger, but were of a similar form to Mylnky cave. Some unusual formations were a considerable number of very detailed mud sculptures. I com-



mented on this and was informed that as it was a national monument, any digging had to be tidied up, removing the tons of mud outside was simply not feasible. Somebody had the brainwave of inviting some art students from the local college to see what they could do, the result was some excellent clay sculptures covering a wide range of topics. The formations were similar to those we saw in Mylnky, though they did have an collection of glass cases which had some fine examples of the different Gypsum formations to be found in the cave.

As usual in the Gypsum caves the passages were tall and narrow, in one narrow section I was suddenly joined by an Alsation which was travelling without lights, it appeared to be friendly, pushed past me and headed off to join another group, apparently it was used to caving, when it had had enough, it would just leave and go out-



side, often from a long way underground. Day three was a trip to the show cave Kryshtaleva, whilst we were standing at the entrance looking at the Gypsum pavement and listening to the guide, there was a sudden loud screech as I stood on the show cave cat in my walking boots. The cave was different, starting with a long section which was Phreatic in origin, this then broke out into some reasonable sized chambers and high Vadose passages. Lunch was in the town of Borshchiv, followed by a visit to the museum. A quick wander round the town gave us a chance to photograph the brightly coloured cathedral and churches near the town centre. We then went to visit the Verteba cave, this was an archaeological cave, which was still being excavated. Once inside the securely locked steel door, the passages were mainly Phreatic and were of a reasonable size, in the first section of the cave was a full size Dolmen (Megalithic tomb), complete with the remains of bones around it, it had not been brought into the cave but was

a boulder out of the roof. I have never heard of another one in a cave. The passages beyond contained many fragments



of pottery, bone and other materials. In one chamber was a reconstruction of some of the pottery found in the cave, I recognized it as similar to pottery I had seen when I lived in Cyprus. The guide confirmed that the Neolithic people who used the cave had come from the Mediterranean area.

Day four was a trip to Atlantyda cave, the



Joe Duxbury at entrance to Atlantyda cave

entrance was partway up a cliff, with the now obligatory steel door, the door was a

recent addition, prior to this many of the formations had been removed and sold, though what was left was still very good. The cave passages were Vadose in the upper levels and Phreatic in the lower levels. There is a major current threat to this cave and others in the area from quarrying the Gypsum to make plaster products, this seems to be being carried out by large foreign firms.

Day five was a trip to Khotyn fortress in the morning and Kamyanets-Podilsk fortress in the afternoon. The fortresses were interesting, but our guides found that trying to guide a group of cavers in an organized fashion on a tour was akin to herding cats, after a while they gave up.

Day six was another trip to Mylnky or another local cave, by this time we had seen enough Gypsum caves for a while, so opted for a local walk, the valley leading up from the Speleo hut was a mixture of woods and semi derelict farmland, There were a number of houses, some occupied others falling down., one which appeared at first to be derelict was in fact occupied, The insect life in particular was very abundant, I counted 20 species of butterfly in one small area in a relatively short time.



That evening it was back on the overnight train to Kiev, we managed to buy some beer from the carriage attendant, but the swaying train meant I got a beer shower at one point.

Day seven, Flight from Kiev to UK.



If you get the chance to visit the Gypsum caves, they are well worth seeing. The Ukrainian cavers are very friendly and helpful, the Speleo house where we stayed is also a very good base, they will organize the trips for you. Whether or not you can stay in the various caving club huts I don't know, making contact would probably be the most difficult part.

MADEIRA 2013

LAVA CAVES AND LIMESTONE

By Allan Richardson

How to avoid Christmas, what to do, where to go, not too far as we only had a week, various places were discussed, in the end it came down to Madeira.

I had heard of the interesting walking to be found on Madeira, along the sides of the Levadas, these are water channels which supply most of the



Christiane Michel on the Levada das Rabacas

fresh water on Madeira, from the rain which falls on the mountains, and there are a lot of mountains on Madeira, in fact it is mostly mountains.

Flat land is at a premium and even quite steep slopes are used

for building and farming.

Accommodation was sorted. By “chance” it was almost next to the only show cave on Madeira, which was a lava cave, now I had never been in a proper lava cave so it had to be done. An internet search and efforts by Lizzie das Neves Wire, our Portuguese member failed to discover any more information on caves.

A pleasant flight from a damp, cold and grey

UK to a warm and sunny Madeira, was just the ticket for staving off the mid winter blues.

Christiane and I jumped in our hire car and off we went, it rapidly became apparent that a lot of the main highways were underground, on high bridges or clinging to the sides of cliffs. The views were spectacular but brief as you were round the next bend or into the next tunnel. Once off the main highways, driving is interesting to say the least, roads are very narrow, they mostly seem to hug the edges of cliffs and are used by buses and trucks as well as cars. It must make driving very difficult once the main tourist season starts.

The walking was interesting, the Levadas are not all flat and easy going, they can be very steep, even vertical and not all the

paths are in the best of condition, you are sometimes walking on a narrow parapet with a long vertical drop to one side and a vertical cliff on



the other, most of the very exposed places have safety barriers of sorts, there are also long tunnels, up to several miles long.

The hill walking in the East is spectacular, with very craggy hills, steep slopes and well maintained paths, the Western end of the island has a large fairly flat plateau, which resembles a typical moorland in the UK.

There had been extensive forest fires on Madeira a few years before, and there were still large burnt areas to be seen. The effect has been to weaken the surface on already very steep slopes, so that rock falls and landslides are fairly common.

The show cave once it had reopened after Christmas was very good, there was a pretour explanation, film and models about how Madeira and the Lava cave were formed.



*Sao Vicente lava drops from ceiling
Photo by Christiane Michel*

The underground tour lasted about 30 minutes, we were able to see a variety of lava formations, there was an active stream in the cave which came from a spring further in. The cave also contained a large number of small calcite stalactites and straws, these are unusual in lava caves. The guide explained that they came from the cement which had been used to repair the roof of the cave many years ago. The tour covered a few hundred metres of the 3 km cave. In discussion with the guide I found that there were a few

other lava caves on the island, but they were small and difficult to get to.

In the foyer of the show cave was an exhibition on Limestone on Madeira, it turned out there was an outcrop of Miocene Limestone not far away. It had been quarried for many years for lime burning. A visit to the site did reveal small Limestone quarries, but the Limekiln had not reopened yet. There were supposed to be fossil shells in the Limestone, but I failed to find any. The Limestone was formed from a coral reef which had formed around part of the island in Miocene times, and had been exposed by uplift of the island.

I can thoroughly recommend Madeira for a holiday, the walking is excellent, the locals friendly (though they and their firecrackers are very noisy over Christmas) and the wine very drinkable. The Geology and Geomorphology is also very interesting. Finally the weather, it was mostly warm, dry and sunny except for one day.



TRIP REPORT: SURVEYING CUEVA DE LA MARNIOSA, PICOS DE EUROPA, SPAIN.

By Duncan Hornby
7th August 2012

Marniosa is an easily accessible cave in the Sobra valley.

Mark Sefton (SLUGS) and I were asked to survey from the entrance of Marniosa to a blob of tipex on an "obvious flake" in the streamway, talk about a needle in a haystack... amazingly we found it! Laurence Brown and David Smith of the NUCC had previously surveyed from the sump towards the entrance and stopped at the flake. Neither Mark nor I had been into Marniosa but the cave had been pre-rigged by Phil Rowsell so all we needed to do was get to the streamway. It involved a series of pitches, the largest a 20m pitch.

The entrance starts as an abandoned cheese cave with a cool draught. With each survey leg we continued our descent into the system following the draught. Eventually we entered the large and impressive Morning Chamber, well decorated with stals and columns. We stopped for lunch and then continued down a crawling passageway with a strong draught. After the 20m pitch we stopped surveying and decided we had had enough and retreated. A couple of days later we returned to our last survey station accompanied by Phil

Stringfellow and Chloe Francis (NUCC). With their help we completed the survey. Phil and Chloe did the surveying whilst I scouted ahead and became official photographer.

Continuing our descent to the streamway Marniosa just got better and better. After a tricky moon milk covered climb the system entered a fantastic chamber stuffed full of stals. If Hollywood was going to make another caving monster movie it would create a chamber just like this! After this we entered large passageways with huge stal columns and an unusual shield formation. After another pitch, a crawl through a boulder choke, there was the final climb down to the streamway. The narrow streamway was scalloped and clean washed. After much walking up and down we came across the deep pool that David had described and there prominently displayed was the tipex point. I had rated our chances of finding the tipex point as nil but I must bow down to Davids superior tipexing skills!

If any reader visits Tresviso I would highly recommend the SRT trip into Marniosa and if you enjoy dragging diving cylinders around you'll become best mates with Phil!



HOW OPENSTREETMAP SAVED US FROM FREEZING TO DEATH!

By Duncan Hornby
25th January 2014

Team: Duncan Hornby, Jerome Oswald-Jones, Richard Sore, Claire Vivian, Jo White & Matt Wire.

All good disaster movies start with that initial “mistake” which leads to a sequence of events and the grand finale. In this story the initial mistake was turning up for Matt Wire’s 30th birthday! I knew it wasn’t going to be a quiet one when, upon arriving in deep rural North Wales, I was confronted with disco lights, a pounding beat and a rack of beer kegs...

Needless to say the following day was a slow start but eventually the team headed off to Croesor for the exciting Croesor-Rhosydd slate mine through trip. Stopping off at Dolgellau for supplies, Richard realised he had left his guide back at the bunkhouse. Claire spent the rest of the journey taking guide notes from a webpage off a smart phone.

We had asked someone back at the bunkhouse



Richard and Jo suffering the hail storm

how the weather was going to be, “bad” was the reply. For future reference if someone says it’s going to be bad weather in North Wales what they actually mean is that it is

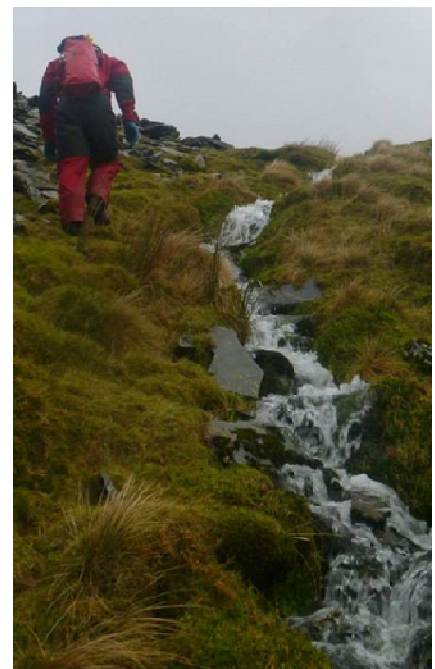
going to be REALLY BAD. This was proven during our change into our caving clothes; we were treated to thunder and lightning and a ferocious hail storm.

Only two of us had visited the mine before and our memories of the entrance were sketchy. Fortunately I had bought my GPS unit so we located the entrance without too much trouble.

The actual trip through the mine went well. Abseils (rope in situ and new) followed by zip wires and shaky bridges made for a diverse trip. A Canadian style canoe has now appeared in the lake which made the crossing a lot safer.

The only observation I can make was

Matt’s unusual lack of zeal. But then he had been downing vodka jellies and setting



The steep climb up to Croesor entrance

himself alight with 80% alcohol the night before, and let's face it, who doesn't do that on their birthday?



Jo on the Bridge of Death



Birthday boy preparing to descend the first pitch

Now for the grand finale!

Upon exiting the Rhosydd entrance we were greeted with a full on storm. It was pitch black and we were being sand blasted in the face with hail stones. You could not look up and see more than a few meters for fear of having the skin stripped off your face. Immediately concern set in. We were unsure of the direction to head in. Richard had a vague memory of climbing up a slate slope which was now a sheet of freezing water buffeted with gusting winds.

My GPS is a Garmin etrex 30 and I had uploaded the entire UK openstreetmap onto it. I can see on the GPS footpaths, contours and streams. Fortunately I had placed a way point for the Croesor entrance and was able to determine a direction to head in.

We climbed the slope out of the relative protection of the mine entrance into what can only be described as a jet stream of hail with wind so strong that it nearly blew you over. Barely seeing a couple of meters ahead, exposed skin freezing and body temperature chilling down due to our wet oversuits we headed in to the darkness. It was about 30 minutes of intense cold and hail before we finally dropped off the top of the mountain down to the Croesor entrance. With spirits lifted, the temperature warmed up and the hail eventually turned into rain. We hit a track and headed back to the car park in Croesor village. Without the GPS we could have easily headed off in the wrong direction or attempted to sit it out with hypothermia setting in...

So the moral of this story? When it's bad, the weather is really bad in North Wales and....bring a waterproof GPS!

AGEN ALLWEDD

TRIP TO THE COURTESAN

SWCC Cavers: Ellen Cooper, Josh Bratchley, Celestine Crabbe,
Duncan Hornby, Philip Hughes, Claire Vivian
8th March 2014 .

This was a joint SWCC/Exeter University trip which also saw two of our provisional members, Celestine Crabbe and Philip Hughes, experience their longest time underground so far – almost 10 hours. In terms of route finding, it was generally straightforward for a lot of the trip as a great deal of time was spent walking down (and back up) the notorious Southern Stream Passage. The minor exception being the first boulder choke which we consistently managed to get lost in both on the way in and the way out. Ah, Southern Stream Passage! This was variously enjoyed and hated depending on which member of the group you talked to. Duncan still has bad knees almost a week later, yet Celestine enjoyed it and Josh sped through it with ease (despite being jetlagged after arriving back from China less than 48hrs before). Following on from Southern Stream, there was another hour of crawling and stooping around the Iles inlet area to finally reach the Courtesan itself. There were some fairly small squeezes and s-bends that provided considerable entertainment along the way and also an interesting scramble up into Corkscrew Chamber itself . The Courtesan is an incredibly delicate formation and is undoubtedly a sight well worth visiting. Fortunately, it is situated a long way from the entrance and guarded by Southern Stream and a lengthy series of crawls and squeezes, making the trip there a special one. Thanks Ellen!



Detail of the Courtesan . Photo by Duncan Hornby.



*Paul Brown (EUSS) in Trafalgar Passage.
Photo by Duncan Hornby*

*Phil Hughes in Trafalgar Passage.
Photo by Duncan Hornby*



*Phil Hughes in Trafalgar Passage.
Photo by Duncan Hornby*



Anemone formations near the Courtesan. Photo by Duncan Hornby



Formations in Corkscrew Chamber. Photo by Duncan Hornby



*Celestine Crabbe at the Courtesan.
Photo by Claire Vivian.*



*Josh Bratchley and Ellen Cooper in Trafalgar Passage.
Photo by Duncan Hornby*



Duncan and the Courtesan.

And an addendum to the trip from Celestine:

The trip to the Corkscrew Chamber in Aggy was long and quite rewarding. It was great to see some sleeping bats along the way and the tight squeezes were kind of fun, but the sandy crawls and constant stooping, that I hardly noticed on the way in, were somewhat tiring on the way out. However, contrary to the reviews I had previously heard about the Southern Streamway, I really didn't think it was that bad... although there was a point where I almost appreciated seeing the Thunderbirds cup more than the Courtesan. Overall it was a good trip, that I would do again, and it was a bonus to come out of the cave and see a clear starry night sky.

FLYIN' BRIAN – A CAUTIONARY TALE

By Martin Hoff

*“Brian! BRIAN! Dave! Oh no. Are you still with us Brian?! DAVE!!
Oh no. Shit. Brian! BRIAN! Oh no. BRIAN!”*

Andy vaulted down the direct route back to the stream while I took the longer way round. Jumping down the last step I found Andy already lifting a considerable dead weight, his hands clasped together in front of Brian's waist and barely supporting the dripping lifeless form. Dragging Brian the couple of metres to the nearest shallow section of the Ffynnon Ddu 3 streamway, we laid him on his side in a position to keep his airway clear and supported his helmetless head. The stream turned red between my fingers but investigating a scalp injury was a lesser concern for as long as he wasn't breathing reliably. This wasn't looking good...

With my regular digging partners elsewhere, I'd joined SWCC's premier surveying outfit on a trip to the higher level passages above the OFD3 streamway, largely for the exercise value of a decent and worthwhile trip. With a new tackle sack to load up, I'd sorted out some kit to ensure I wouldn't be cold or hungry if I ended up hanging around while the others surveyed and wondered whether I should be leaving

a couple of things out. After all the others were already carrying a ladder to get down the drop they'd found but not previously descended but figuring the minimal exercise value of the additional weight would do me no harm, the familiar 12m length of 8mm rope still went into my bag.

The sky was showing brief signs of clearing as we walked up to Top Entrance and a relatively early start was necessary for the distance we were intending to travel and the time that this next bout of surveying might take. Readers familiar with certain people's usual patterns of waking hours might be moderately impressed to hear it wasn't even 1pm as Brian unlocked the gate. We moved on into the darkness, making reasonable time through many familiar passages and making a bit of noise about that climb that bells out at just the wrong level, a short distance before the start of the Traverses.

There was some debate over exactly where we needed to climb up and after a couple of false starts, Andy pulled himself up onto a convex ledge to move back downstream. Once we'd gathered on the same interme-

diate ledge, Dave carefully negotiated the starting move, a foothold just above knee height on the right, the only point from which it was possible to reach for a handhold high on the left in what looked like a fairly loose pile of rocks and sand, then moved on up.

Andy and I were sat a short distance out of range from where anything that might be dislodged from above would inevitably fall as Brian forced his right foot onto the hold before reaching up and to his left. It took a couple of goes before he grasped the hold in his left hand, at which point both the hold and Brian toppled backwards.

Landing first on his left arm on the sloping ledge, Brian's head then connected with the rock and his helmet went flying. Impacts on various limbs each played their own small part in slowing down his descent as he bounced like a lumpy roll of BT-liveried carpet and slowly span out of sight into the trench formed between the two walls of the passage to land in the streamway below.

Andy reached him in seconds, finding him knocked out cold from the impact of head against rock, slumped on his side with his face in the water. After the initial frantic moments of response, there was a short time to assess the situation before we risked doing any further damage. With no obviously broken bones or other major injuries, he was placed in the natural position for some-

one lying on their left hand side, his head being supported with his neck slightly extended meant he was able to take in air through both nose and mouth. It was another brief while before his breathing became appreciable, first as a fluid-laden wheezing which helped clear the mouth of tiny white foamy bubbles.

The short time he'd been unconscious in the water had limited the amount of water he'd taken in and Brian gradually stabilised into a more robust breathing pattern though there was still no response on speaking to him. After some further moments, a muscular tremor in his right arm was the first sign that there was still someone in there and a series of groans followed as he gradually came round and tried to sit up. Dave had rejoined us, taking his time to climb back down safely and he now carried out a fuller check into Brian's condition.

Sitting in the stream until conscious enough to move to a foam pad on a drier ledge, Brian had already begun shivering as the combination of shock and cold set in. He'd reached first for his helmet, found floating in the next streamway pool down, then enquired after his tackle sack, which was sat safe on a nearby ledge. With further checking revealing no other serious damage, he was noticeably still somewhat groggy and appeared a little out of control as he swayed a couple of times and leaned over to his left and right. There was another seri-

ous problem afflicting Brian, one which was now revealed by his apparent attempts at searching for something.

Brian had lost his contact lenses in the fall and these vintage 1970 hard lenses were irreplaceable, and now irretrievably lost, washed away. One had been on borrowed time, surviving being flicked out of his eye by the tail of a rope above a 30-odd metre pitch in the Gouffre Berger a few years previously then subsequently located at the foot of the pitch to be reinserted. Now it really was serious!

A tatty absorbent dressing and a fresh triangular bandage were used to limit the scalp wound's bleeding, then a balaclava and the extra thermal top intended for later use while surveying was taking place was pulled over his head and arms. Dave dug out the painkillers too, though only for Andy who had strained his back in the effort of hauling Brian's dead weight out of the water.

We were only a few corners short of Smith's Armoury, some way from any useful assistance. I climbed back up to the convex ledge, trying to work out the extent of the fall before we left the scene. It seemed Brian's head was the better part of twenty feet above the foot of the ledge when he came off, and the height from ledge to water was probably the same again, if not a little more. Around half an hour after the fall we moved off, trying to provide a little guidance to run alongside Brian's internal auto-pilot as we

headed downstream at a minimal rate of progress, moving more slowly than the water itself but carrying on without stopping until we finally reached the boulders that mark the climb out of the water. We'd managed the first tricky bit in getting out of the water, now we moved on into the drier section where the next obstacles were the slightly more technical crossings of Maypole Bridge and another short but exposed stretch of false floor, both of which our walking wounded passed at the same steady speed as we'd moved along the rest of the cave.

By 18.00 we were able to stop for a rest at the boulder squeeze that separates the end of the Traverses from the further reaches of the cave. Having made it this far without any obvious deterioration and with no signs of Brian running out of steam, things were looking up.

Dropping through the boulder squeeze in front of the others, I climbed up the rift on the other side and pulled out the length of 8mm that I'd nearly left in the car, using it to improvise a means of belaying Brian as he climbed up from the passage below.

This set the pattern for the next phase of progress towards the surface, a short length of rope being just about enough to get him past any individual obstacle without the temptation to run out big distances between the point of attachment and the end of the rope where Brian was secured

on a borrowed belt.

We shifted along the Traverses as carefully as we could, regrouping every time that lifeline was required and settled into a routine where the rope moved a short distance ahead to be set up at the next point where it would be required while the rest of the party negotiated whatever lay between them and the rope.

Once we'd climbed back up the ladder pitch and moved out beyond The Crevasse, it looked like the majority of the harder work was done, with only a couple more requirements for the rope and that awkward crawl behind Timo's Table standing out as points of potential trouble. Once Brian had moved on to favouring complaint about the trouble he was going to have finding new contact lenses he could get on with over remarking on any particular injury, it was clear that not only was he still himself but that he was likely to be fine to get himself out without further difficulty. Six hours after throwing himself off the climb and after five and a half hours of almost continuous, steady progress towards the exit, Brian emerged into the chilly surface air and we all looked out on the lights shimmering down the valley as he complained about having travelled that far and been underground for eight and a half hours without a single survey leg to show for the trouble.

In the period that follows an incident like this, it's natural enough to look at how

things had panned out, what had worked out ok and what might have been done better or differently. So what did we learn?

We learned that a construction site type helmet with a single chin strap doesn't stay on the head of a falling caver once it makes uncontrolled contact with the wall or the floor. We learned that a moderate amount of first aid kit – one absorbent dressing, one triangular bandage, some painkillers to ease a strained back – is enough to patch up a flesh wound and ensure everyone can still move out. We learned that 12m of 8mm rope, one 60cm tape sling and two karabiners (one pear-shaped for the Italian friction hitch on the belay and one for repeatedly attaching and detaching the rope to the casualty's belt) is enough gear to get someone who is mobile all the way back from the far end of the cave.

We were reminded that adapting to the conditions is a crucial skill – the conventional recovery position was never going to work out well in the bed of a flowing stream so we used the nearest alternative available, and some of the places where the rope was attached to make a belay were improvised around the best of a few poor options. We learned that assisted self-rescue with three people in attendance can be the right decision when it's a choice between that and the risks associated with reducing the party size by sending someone to make a solo

exit to fetch help that won't be on scene for a good few hours. And we learned that Cottage Wardens are a tough breed, and on this occasion a lucky one.

SWCC Newsletter 115 includes an article written in 1995 by Paul Meredith called 'A Review of Personal Emergency Kits'; it makes for interesting reading, both for how little has changed and how far a little preparation will stretch when it all hits the fan. Whether sitting out a temporary mis-location or tackling an extended self-rescue because it's the best option available to you at the time, a few basic bits and pieces will at least give you options to improvise around, and that may make all the difference in how comfortable the next few hours might otherwise turn out to be.



Brian Clipstone thoroughly drop-tested (helmet model's own)

YOUNG, KEEN and SMILING

By Piers Hallihan



I know I'm not the only SWCC member who discovered caving through the Scouts. My very first trip was into the old roman mines in Llanymynech near Oswestry followed by trips to other caving areas around the UK. I remember really enjoying trips in Shropshire, Mendip and Derbyshire and being disappointed that my troop's visit to South Wales coincided with a band trip to Austria. I left the Scouts when I moved to Cardiff and found myself working a lot of evenings and weekends and didn't go caving again for several years until I re-discovered caving on a walking trip. I'd parked at Cwm Dwr quarry on a Friday evening and walked up into the hills to spend a night testing out a new bivvy bag and, on my return to the car, noticed that the building next to the car park seemed very busy. A quick check on the OS Map showed the legend "Caving Club" and I suddenly remembered my fellow Scouts coming back from a trip to South Wales where they'd been caving at "an awesome cave near a big cottage in the middle of nowhere." Deciding that it was time to see what I'd missed, I went into the club and asked around a bit until I was pointed towards the Duty Officer (Sue Mabbett if my memory serves correctly). My question was quite simple – "How do I go caving". Being

the middle of a Saturday afternoon, anybody that was going caving that day was already underground but, instead of being just turned away I was given a suggested kit list and told to be back the following morning. I was so keen to get back underground that the 100 mile round trip didn't put me off and I duly arrived back at Penwyllt bright and early on the Sunday morning. Of course, I was far too early and drank several cups of tea before anyone looked like venturing underground. Before too long though, I was off up the hill towards Top Entrance on a trip down to the Trident & Judge. I came back from that trip thoroughly re-hooked.

I met Idris Williams at a few club events over the next few years and discovered that he was the man behind the Shropshire Scouts Caving Team – the team that got me started in Caving as a teenage Scout. Idris never nagged but usually managed to get into the conversation that there was a national shortage of Scout Cave leaders and, if I was around Penwyllt when he visited with Scouts I was often called on to show them around the club and the rescue store. As an ex-Scout, I kind of felt that I should be doing something more to get involved but, with a young family (Meghan

was born in the year I joined SWCC as a provisional) I was struggling to find the time to help. Up until I got back into Scouting in 2013; James joined 1st Cowbridge Cubs at Easter and Meghan joined the Beavers a few months later and I found myself being drawn into the group's leadership team. One of the first questions I asked was about caving and it turned out that there was no provision for Scout Caving in the Area. This surprised me as the whole of the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Area (CATVOG) is less than an hour away from the South Wales Caves and only a little further from Mendip. I set about getting some support and every Leader and young person I spoke to was very keen to get caving back on the agenda. Cowbridge Scouts last organised caving trip was believed to have taken place in the late 1980's! After finding out that the interest was there, I got back in touch with Idris over the summer and arranged to join Shropshire Scouts Caving Team on their next visit to South Wales

In October 2013, I spent a great weekend with a group of Scouts (10-14 years) and Explorers (14-18 years) being observed by Idris and his fellow Scout assessors as I led trips in Bridge Cave and OFD (Porth-Yr-Ogof had been on the original plan but was ruled out due to some very



exciting water levels). I came away from that weekend with a shiny new permit to lead Scouts underground.

The next step, having got the necessary paperwork sorted was to equip the Scouts for caving. Some unashamed begging on the UK Caving forum resulted in a very nice surprise. West Sussex Scout Caving team had just upgraded their lights and moved onto new LED's. That meant that their existing lights were available. They had planned to sell them but decided that the formation of a new Scout Caving Team was a deserving cause. All I had to do was collect them from Crawley. Once again, the SWCC support machine fired up. A few emails later and Graham Christian, who works just around the corner from the Scout hut where the lights were stored, arrived at Penwyllt with 30 FX3's complete with batteries and chargers, all well maintained and including boxes of spare parts to continue their maintenance for some time to come.

While the background work still goes on to build a Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Scout Caving Team – the only Scout Caving Team in Wales, 1st Cowbridge Scouts have already begun working on their Cavers badge. At the end of January, a small group of Scouts had their first taste

of caving in Lesser Garth cave and more trips are planned for February and March. The 6 Scouts involved in this first trip are already hooked and are chomping at the bit for



their next trip.

Anyone who's taken a group of young people underground will know that the personal rewards can be fantastic – standing back and watching the look on the face of an 11 year old when he suddenly realises that he **can** make the traverse on Salubrious, or the response to the formations just inside OFD Top Entrance that we stomp past every weekend without a second glance. Most importantly, these young people are the future of caving. On reaching 18, many of them will move on from Scouting and will look to continue their hobbies. Some will go to university and join caving clubs there but others will be looking for a new caving club. Beginning with the formation of the Shropshire Scouts Caving Team over twenty years ago, members of SWCC have directly and indirectly supported a chain of events which has led, so far, to

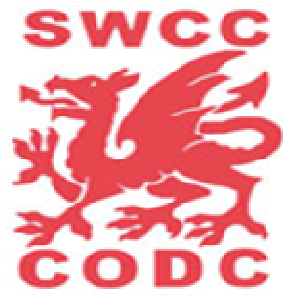
one Scout Troop in Cowbridge getting their first taste of caving and will hopefully result in the formation of a CATVOG Scout Caving Team. In fact, I don't think that it would be an understatement to say that January's trip into Lesser Garth, and subsequent trips still in the planning stages at the time of writing, could not have happened without SWCC.

I'd like to think that we, both individually and as a club, could continue to support Scout Caving wherever possible. If you're based in the South Wales Area and would like to help you can contact me via

caving@catvog.org . For other areas, go to www.scouts.org to find your local Scout group.

If I can't talk you into it – I think the smiles and sense of achievement in the photo's say more than I can!





PART-RIOT GAMES

By Dave Edwards



Whilst enjoying New Year's Eve at the Club, I was encouraged to see a few Members simulating the Long Common Room 'Bench Squeeze' with two planks separated with long bolts and nuts. The original bench squeeze was a fixed space and non-adjustable. If you were stuck, a car jack was used to strain the bench apart!

Since I had bemoaned the lack of Saturday Night games at the AGM in favour of smart phones, i-pads and laptops, it was nice to see at least a small revival.

My recollection of Saturday nights at the Club was of a large selection of games, played either drunk or sober.

One of the most painful was 'going round the table'. This consisted of a trestle table in the dining room, held steady by a person at each end. The contestant started by laying face-down on the table. The objective was to move from the top of the table, going underneath and then back to face down on the table again....as many times as possible.

On my best attempt I managed three cir-

cuits, for which I was rewarded with a body covered in black and yellow bruises for several days. This was quite a competitive game and visitors especially were invited to do as many circuits as possible before we wheeled out our secret weapons. As I recall, these were Bob Radcliffe and Mick Day. We would wait until the visitors had completed their best efforts, rarely a very high number, and then either Mick or Bob would proceed to complete 100 revolutions! A degree of competence and fitness that, to my knowledge, has never been beaten. All that is needed is a trestle table, the existing dining tables are too posh and the sides too deep. If you know of one...



Another game involved glass beer bottles. Two contestants each stood on a bottle and, with a broom, tried to topple their opponent by pushing their bottle from under their feet.

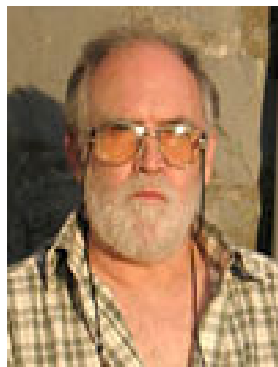


At one time there was a large, rubber, nautical buoy at the Club. This was used as the ball in a violent game of 'Buoy Rugby' played in the Long Common Room. Injury was almost mandatory.

A ladder was used to illustrate agility. Those who could would climb in and out between each rung. This game seemed to come to an end when Alison Maddocks's daughter's leg broke with a loud crack and she was promptly extricated and shipped off to hospital!



Bob Radcliffe



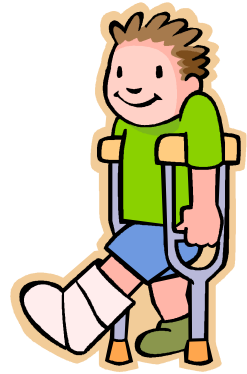
Mick Day



In the kitchen, bolted to a wooden beam, was a finger board used for demonstrating the strength of arms and fingers in doing pull-ups.

There was also a conical saucepan rack, used for delicate climbing until someone broke their neck.

A pastime, demonstrated almost exclusively by Bruce Foster, was to pull a wire coat hanger into a diamond shape. Then, starting with pulling this over his head, he managed to pass it down his body and, almost unbelievably, lifting one leg through the diamond before setting the coat hanger on the floor!



Traversing the cottage was a regular exercise. This involved climbing from the kitchen, along the corridor, around the Small Common Room, around the Long Common Room and back to the kitchen, all without touching the floor. Use of benches was not permitted. This would be discouraged today as we paint the walls every year and footprints would not be appreciated.



One other game involved the use of Marmite jars, but modesty forbids me from explaining further. If you are interested, I suggest you check with an older Member.

All these games were played in a spirit of fun and laughter and were a perfect complement to a hard day's caving and a convivial evening in the pub. The atmosphere was always electric and I have no idea when or why this disappeared. I have a sneaking suspicion that tougher drink-driving laws stopped drinking in the pub and encouraged drinking in house. But where the singing and fun and games went, I have no idea. I would suggest that it is up to our younger, newer Members to try and resurrect this atmosphere and spirit before it is too late.

I live in hope.



NEW CAVING ACCESSORIES

By Jenny Burrows



When children make an appearance in your world they have a huge impact, but it doesn't mean that the life you led pre-offspring has to stop altogether—you just need to adapt...

We have been carrying out our caving trips with our new caving accessories this year - twin toddlers. An ideal way to make every caving trip MUCH slower - if you have a tiny cave you want to cave in for hours, take toddlers! Having the whole of OFD at our disposal we have made it as far as the drip at the end of the entrance series in OFD II. On our first trip in April we stuck to taking just 3 one year olds with us for Thomas and Matthew's first and Freya's second OFD experience, which was very successful with happy toddlers and no underground tantrums.

We returned in October with our now highly experienced twin terrible twos, after conquering Upper Long Churn in Yorkshire. We decided bigger is better and caved OFD II with an international troupe including 6 little ones, 1 one year old, 4 two year olds and a 4 year old, who had flown in from all over Europe to be with us. They all had fun especially when we found the dripping water and ate the traditional caving mars bars.

Many thanks to all those who have helped us with toddler caving logistics!



Ask shows how to cave with twins



International toddler caving. L to R, Mike Lamb, Matthew Burrows, Ash Burrows, Thomas Burrows, Freya Stuart, Tom Stuart, Gordon Cole, Amy Cole, Felix Cole, Rachel Stuart, Paul Craddy, Charlotte Craddy, Jenny Burrows.



Enjoying the dripping water at the furthest reaches of the entrance series.

Jenny's Tiny Shoots Photography for bumps, babies and beyond
Visit me at www.tinyshoots.co.uk or www.facebook.com/TinyShoots



PROVISIONALS TESTIMONIALS: How much fun is caving?? A caving taster review

Collated and cared for by Claire Vivian

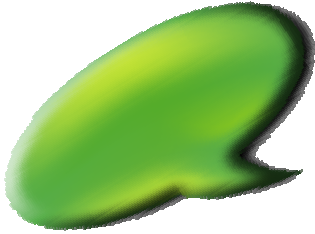
I really enjoyed the Provisional members weekend at Penwyllt. I've been meaning to get to the club for a long time, but I'm an outdoor instructor, which means that on most weekends during the summer and autumn I've been busy working. I want to get to know OFD, and other caves around because I would like to advance my cave leader certification to level 2 and perhaps Cave Instructor Certificate someday.

It was a bit of a mad weekend for me, Fire Service interview aptitude tests on Friday, Citizenship test on Saturday and then I made my way up the Swansea Valley to the jam packed caving club cottages on the mountainside. I was really intimidated at first having missed the start of the weekend's activities and introductions and everyone seemed to know everyone else. That was quickly put right as one of the members spotted me and directed me to Clair and the group of provisional cavers chatting about their day's exploits down the caves. I then happened to strike up a good conversation with Fred, the former president of the club. We talked for a long time about the club and how I was really keen to get involved.

It turned out that it was also the club fireworks night and with other guest clubs in residence at the cottages the place was heaving. It was a night of good conversation, amazing fireworks in the lovely Welsh weather with a lot of good beer/ cake on tap. After an enthralling video presentation Fred found me and introduced me to a member named Tony who was planning a harrowing caving trip on the Sunday. I headed off to my van at about 2 am and was impressed that the party was still in full swing!

The next morning I met up with Tony, and two other provisional members, named Gareth and Phil. We planned a through trip into the OFD top entrance and out of Cwm Dwr. It was indeed harrowing, and I got to practice my navigation skills. We moved at a good pace through the cave doing the trip in about 4 hours. My long legs and reach proved very useful when doing some pretty high and slippery traverses. I really loved it!

It was a sporting route with all the best aspects of a good cave trip for me. The route boasted fossil labyrinthine passages with big chambers and "exciting" traverses, climbing up and down rifts all surrounded by lovely prettys. We climbed up through some impressive vadose and phreatic tubes then down we went into the Streamway in Marble Showers. I love active systems, and the Streamway did not disappoint! Then we came to the Cwr Dwr system which apparently, and obviously, is a popular place to get lost! We didn't, but we did find some more "interesting" scrambles and high traverses and then we came to the boulder choke leading to a long crawl located near enough under the club. This is where my lankyness always proves to be a disadvantage! However I don't mind, it's a good mental and physical challenge. It took a little while to get through the pipe but I eventually found the technique and returned to the club for a well earned cup of coffee with my new caving friends.



We survived our first caving trip!!!

The sense of achievement was palpable in the car during our Sunday evening drive back to Swansea. Laura and I, both total cave novices, couldn't believe that we'd spent the day deep underground, traversing rocks, squeezing into narrow passages and wading through gushing streams. How to describe our sense of wonderment at such a surreal overwhelming experience?

At the recommendation of a friend and long-term caving club member we'd arrived with our wellies, some old clothes, a tad of apprehension and a spirit of adventure! Whilst both of us had experienced the show caves at Dan-yr-Ogof as children, we were relatively clueless about what to expect from 'proper caving'. Upon arrival we were met with friendly faces and warm mugs of tea: the clubhouse was cosy and welcoming, providing the perfect atmosphere for us to get to know everyone else.

Introductions over, it was time to change into our caving gear and meet our friendly guides: Antonia would be our trip leader and we'd be joined by Adrian and Stuart, two experienced cavers. At this point we were warned that our clothes were likely to get trashed in mud, so we opted to borrow some caving suits. I'd highly recommend hiring a decent overall as it helps not to be worrying about your t-shirt riding up as you do your best caterpillar-shimmy through small, rocky passages.

A brisk walk up the hillside in the sunshine led us to the top entrance of OFD1. We descended into the darkness and were pleasantly surprised when our head-torches lit up a vast chamber ahead: we'd expected the cave to be confined. Whilst this is true of some passages the majority of the space we encountered was high and airy. Our trip was to take in Gnome passage, the Trident and the Judge, three awe-inspiring formations of stalactites and stalagmites. Dropping at around five meters the Trident is one of the longest stalactites in Britain. The Judge is a similarly magnificent stalagmite which, you've guessed it, resembles a beleaguered magistrate, resplendent in wig and gown. A gloriously textured blanket of protuberant formations, knobbly Gnome passage didn't disappoint either.

Our trip lasted just under four hours and was genuinely one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life. We emerged wet, tired, muddy and exhausted, but relieved to have overcome such a challenge. Our guides were immensely supportive, and their extensive knowledge kept the trip interesting. If you've never tried caving before, or have considered it but been put off by misapprehensions my advice is give it a go, it definitely won't disappoint!

Jess Hughes

A Day in the Life of a Provisional Caver Sian Mundy

It's 6.45am on Saturday the 9th November. My alarm sounds, piercing my sleep and waking me from warm dreams - but I don't mind - today is caving day and I cannot wait...

I'm due at SWCC at 9.00am. Google says it should take 1 hour but I'll allow myself an hour and a half, just in case. Good job I do. I plug in my not so faithful or reliable sat nav. As expected, on one occasion it asks me to take a left where there is no left and on another occasion it leads to me sign which reads 'road ahead closed'. (It is difficult to imagine the joy one feels being alone, lost, and stranded in the Swansea Valley on a Saturday morning when the rest of the world seems to be in bed - oh and there's no phone signal to call for help).

It's nearing 8.20am and Sat Nav informs me that I'm very close to my final destination. I've been driving for about an hour so it seems Google was right too. I'm told to "turn right" and follow the road to my destination. The road winds to the left and then continues up hill on a road mostly fit for a single vehicle. I continue, despite the fact that I feel I'm on the road to nowhere - or at the very least - a dead end. At the top of the hill I'm confronted with yet another ominous and foreboding sign "danger, working quarry ahead" and Sat Nav beams that I've arrived at my destination - very unlikely I think.

Surprisingly, I have enough phone signal to send a text "Hi Stu, Sat Nav has led me to a dead end". This text won't get read until I'm in Stu's company later and I'll never receive a helpful reply. I plough on anyway.

I turn the car around and drive off in search of anywhere that looks like SWCC. I see a sign for a country park, an interesting castle and the entrance to Dan Yr Ogaf Showcaves, but no SWCC. I know I'm near. I had no idea of how close I was.

I drive around in circles a few times and finally, encouraged by my full bladder and utter desperation go caving, I decide to stop and ask for help. I pull in at the country park, use the facilities and track down the only person who is around at this time on a Saturday morning - the cleaner.

"Excuse me, do you know where South Wales Caving Club is please?"

"The only Caving Club I know is the one around the corner, where the quarry sign is"

Two feelings hit me: relief, and something resembling hysteria. I thank the kind, helpful lady and return to the dangerous quarry that happens to be the home of the SWCC - if you just ignore the sign and carry on regardless.

9.10 am, a little late, but finally I meet up with Stu and the first-time cavers. We don our kit and are ready to go...

I'm sat, fully kitted out, in the SWCC common room. Harvey, who's been coming to the club for longer than I've been on the earth, tells me 'I'm likely to be too warm caving with all my

layers on'. I'm soon to discover that he's right. It's a 15minute walk to the 'top' entrance of the cave - whatever that means. It's a 15 minute walk up hill; walking up hill, something I've never really been a fan of and pretty soon I'm pretty warm, in my four layers of clothing. We make it to the entrance and there's just time for me to strip off to a more sensible layer of clothing before we to descend into the abyss...

It's a fairly gentle entry, much gentler than my last entry into a cave, but I seem to have forgotten quite how dark they are. Either that or my head torch isn't great - both turn out to be true and a change of batteries helps slightly. Apparently a good second hand head torch will set you back about £100. I'm good with the darkness for the time being.

Just as well...as we're asked to switch out our lights and try to allow our eyes to adjust. At this point, I have an unhealthy desire to scare one of our group who is already feeling slightly nervous. I hold back. I must fight the will to be wholly inappropriate and possibly dangerous.

Soon some light is resumed with the switching on of Pete's torch, and with it all desire to be immature leaves me. I am suddenly struck instead with the marvel of the cave. An enormous cavity beneath the ground hollowed out by running water. I cannot quite believe that it is natural and not man-made. It seems too angular, too neat. Peter explains the make-up of limestone and how it erodes. It all starts to make sense with some memories of secondary school geography fumbling their way back into my working brain.

I begin to fumble through the cave. I love it. I love the dim, mood lighting. I love the gentle sound of clear running water. I love the "pretties" that mark our path. I love the small squeezes, immense enclosures. I love the challenge of climbing and falling through stone. I love it all. I love my biscuits that have been crumbed and my chocolate bar that has smashed and melted. I love the feel of the ice cold water invading my wellies and soaking into my socks. I scream with delight. I laugh with delight. I'm having a great, great time.

A few hours later and it's time to leave the cave. Daylight is a welcome embrace. We thunder back down the hill to the caving club. Walking down hill always much more enjoyable than walking up hill and it get's better still... tea and cake and a roaring fire. What more could you want??? (Well maybe a hot shower, a massage and Wales to beat South Africa - but you can't have everything, not all at once, not on the same day.)

Had a wonderful time trying out caving at SWCC. I had just returned from living in the USA, bit disoriented at being home, and this was just what I needed - a proper adventure! Also a reminder and first hand experience of how exciting, and beautiful, the Welsh countryside is.

This adventure involved climbing up rocks, climbing down rocks, crawling through tunnels, traversing streams, entering large caverns and squeezing through some pretty tight spaces. I was amazed at how vast the network of caves beneath the hills of the Brecon Beacons was. We were exploring underground for several hours and I know we only saw a tiny fraction of what is down there. We saw some amazing rock formations, drank straight out of underwater streams, and generally challenged ourselves - must admit I felt quite sore the next day!

Huge thanks to Claire and Boyd, our guides, who made us feel so welcome. I felt in very safe hands with them, and was very impressed with their ability to navigate the underground labyrinth.

My top tips for trying caving would be:

- 1) Zip-up pockets. I did take a bar of chocolate underground with me as a snack, but somewhere in all the activity it must have worked its way out of my pocket (which was underneath my caving overalls!) - will be a happy surprise for the next cavers on that route I hope!
- 2) If possible get an all-in-one caving overall (instead of separate trousers and top). My trousers had braces on but I think they must have become loose as I was forever pulling them up, and had particular trouble with them falling down while crawling - bit embarrassing!
- 3) Wellies - it's quite wet and muddy down there. I was very proud to have avoided getting my feet wet through the experience, but then at the very end I plunged my foot into muddy stream that was much deeper than expected... A change of socks is also a good idea.
- 4) Eating well beforehand. You are underground for a while and will need the energy.



Prior to the provisional's' weekend I had only been caving once, in Cheddar, for about an hour in total. I thoroughly enjoyed myself and knew that I wanted to go again... and again... and again. Hence I went along to SWCC for the provisionals' weekend. I had previously been in touch with a few members of SWCC, via email, beforehand and had been made to feel very welcome, so when I did eventually arrive I was relaxed and not at all anxious.

On the Saturday morning we were put into groups determined by our previous experience (I was not alone in my lack thereof) and once organised and kitted up we set off. Our group, led by Claire and Boyd, went to the top entrance of Ogof Ffynnon Ddu (OFD II). I wasn't really sure what to expect before going into the cave although I imagined it would be different from the one in Cheddar, so I kept an open mind. Once in, we had a go at getting in and out of the Prisoner Pit, traversing and were shown potential natural markers in order to help find our way around. Interestingly, some bacteria was pointed out to us and some fungi (although as pretty as this was, it was there as a result of people dropping crumbs of food). We also walked along passages where we could see some beautiful stalagmites, stalactites, straws and other calcite formations such as the Wedding Cake - thankfully these along with certain mud formations are protected, as conservation efforts are in place. Our trip lasted for about four hours and once back at the club we had very welcomed tea and hot showers, followed by soup and fireworks. The evening was a great time to chat with other members of the club and for them to share their experiences and knowledge.

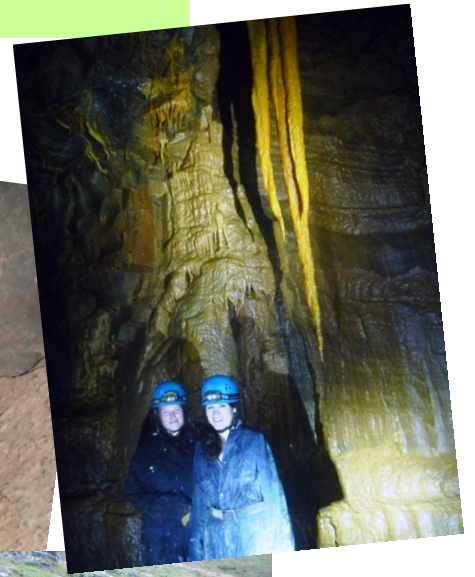
On the Sunday morning we (Claire, PCW and I) set off again, this time to the bottom entrance of Ogof Ffynnon Ddu (OFD I). This was by far my favourite of the two trips, although the Bolt Traverse did scare me a little (well maybe a lot), but the equipment used was secure and I was in safe hands... Claire and PCW are trained in cave rescue. This cave was quite different from OFD II, particularly because, from what I remember, there was such a contrast in the way we moved throughout the cave and its passages. In one part of the cave we were clambering up and over boulders, in another we were crawling in small, wet, gritty passageways, then sloshing our way through shallow pools of water and in another we were rolling under a sandy bedding plane. Unfortunately I didn't get the chance to wade upstream because the river was too high, however, I did have the opportunity to climb up (or rather be pulled up) Lowe's Chain and to do a little more traversing. We also had to make our way up and down the Elephant's Posterior (I'll let you figure out what this is and was like for yourself). What was particularly memorable for me though was a beautifully serene chamber that we entered, the walls of which were covered with crystals, here I could have happily spent a day or two... and I almost forgot about how we got there via the dreaded Bolt Traverse... but would I travel this path again to get into that chamber? Absolutely! Other parts of the cave consisted of black limestone, flowstone and beautiful gour pools. It was wonderful to have the opportunity to be in such an environment, not to mention that caving is an excellent form of fitness.

I left the club after the provisional's' weekend proudly covered in bruises (knee pads are advisable... thanks Claire) and somewhat exhilarated. Being in a cave certainly gave me a new and enhanced perspective of the Earth, especially while I was travelling over its surface in the following few days, knowing that a few days previously I had been travelling through it, a few hundred feet underground.

Many thanks to all who made the weekend possible :-)

Celestine Crabbe

PROVISIONALS GALLERY



MERCHANDISE AND A BIT OF CLUB BUSINESS

SWCC T-Shirts

Sale!!

Old Stock T-Shirts at Bargain Prices...



£5 Each

Old Stock T-Shirts at Bargain Prices...

**OFD 1 T-Shirts
Just £2 Each !!**

Sizes:
Age 9-11
Ladies Small, Medium or XL
Men's Small, Large or XL



Now available:

New mug design by our very own Andy Freem. He has arranged for

a mini version of the new OFD1 survey to be printed under glaze.

We have some of these available at the Club, first come first served, at the following prices:

£14 medium, £16 large, £17 extra large.

The order form is available on the website.

SWCC Annual Dinner

Date for your diary:

**Saturday 18th October 2014
Ty Newydd Country Hotel**

Further details and menu options, including kids menu, will be sent out closer to time.

Any ideas for pre/during/post dinner activities are welcomed. Send your suggestions to Lizzy das Neves

liz@dasneves.co.uk



WORM-HOLE

It's a watery day
at the side of Afon Tawe;
the moss on the branches
drunk enough.
At my feet, where
the rivulet trickles
into an opening,
it seems to twist:
a corkscrew of space.
The water rattles
on limestone
and makes it tinkle.
I might travel in time,
or shoot
to another universe
through the passage
lying open here.
I'll take my courage
and slide inside,
I'll be the first; the man
that came from a world
where it rains every day.

By Bernard John



Scan this QR code and connect to
<http://www.swcc.org.uk/>

Courtesy of Ian (*Toddy*) Todd



*“View from Fossil Bluff”
From article ‘When caving really is cool: Getting under the surface of Antarctica’
Jonathon Evans*