

MCG NEWS

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group

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MUDDY HELL: The Aftermath. Tom, Mike, Kev and Helen

CONTENTS:

- 1 LOTS OF PEOPLE GO CAVING IN WALES
- 2 THE NEVER ENDING STORY: UPPER FLOOD
- 3 RECENT DISCOVERIES IN UPPER FLOOD SWALLET
- 4 IRELAND 2012
- 5 A FOND FAREWELL TO TONY CRAWFORD: A VERY EARLY MEMBER OF MCG
- 6 LIBRARY ADDITIONS
- 7 LETS GO CAVING
- 8 INVESTMENT UPDATE
- 9 NEW MEMBERS
- 10 UAMH A' BREAugADAIR
- 11 THREE GET RATHER WET IN UPPER FLOOD
- 11 GEAR REVIEWS
- 12 UPPER FLOOD SURVEY, JUNE 2012
- 13 NEW MEMBERS

EDITORIAL

Hello and welcome to the MCG Newsletter No 368. Many thanks to Ed Waters for producing the last ones, and I hope I can live up to Ed and his predecessors.

However, should you have any complaints about this newsletter, please do not address them to me! All complaints should be addressed to the Newsletter Editor, and **I am not** – despite any indications to the contrary – the Newsletter Editor. Actually, just at the moment there isn't a Newsletter Editor, so it's all rather neat really. I get the power, and nobody takes any responsibility.

Mike Richardson

LOTS OF PEOPLE GO CAVING IN WALES

On the 2 March the latest invasion of Wales by representatives from the MCG took place. Sixteen people (Jeremy Gilson, Angela Clulow, Linda Milne, Sue Fennell, Russ Porter, Ross Wheeler, Russ Hunt and his girlfriend Mandy, John Crowsey and his daughter Sarah, Debbie Lambert, Tony Smith, Alan McBride, Angus Leat, Paul Davies and myself) met at the SWCC for a weekend of caving and other fun activities. Some of us had a pre-meet at the Ancient Britain for dinner on Friday evening which set the weekend off to a very good start.



Over the course of the evening the motley crew arrived, unpacked and started drinking! (We had to keep up with the representatives from Exeter University who were drinking hot chocolate!!) The SWCC is a veritable maze of rooms and there seemed to be a bit of sorting out of who was where before everyone was settled (according to one source, most of the group were all squashed into one room with the Exeter University lot and above the Lounge until it was discovered there were many more rooms to use).

Saturday morning dawned cold but dry although the weather forecast had predicted very heavy rain. The original trip was changed due to risk of the cave flooding so it was decided that the main group would do OFD1 to

CWM DWR. The other group (consisting of Debbie, Alan, Tony and Paul) did the Pwll Dwrn trip. This being an SRT trip with 5 pitches they all went off suitably tackled and roped!

The OFD1 to Cwm Dwr group set off down the hill amid much chattering and glee that the trip would not include a walk back up the hill at the end. Once at the entrance, an order was arranged and Jeremy started a superb trip underground. The usual route was followed starting with the Streamway and Pluto's Bath (I of course fell in, gamely retrieved by Russ P and Jeremy) then into the OFD1 Boulder choke. This was good fun and started the hearts pumping. Until then it had been big spaces and water (except for when we had to traverse the scaffolding pipes) and easy going. Then it was into the connection and on to the letterbox. What fun!! Jeremy led the way by holding the chain (sling attached to the bolt) and in head first. After much wiggling of feet he was in and able to advise the next through (me!). I went by the same method (except my heart was in my mouth as I was convinced I couldn't do it) and, again after much leg wagging, I was through. Angus being so clever then went through feet first and showed how much easier it was to do it that way. By this point Russ P was regaling the group with what he was going to eat that evening (including but not limited to 16oz T Bone steak, chips, grilled tomatoes, mushrooms and coleslaw!)

Closely following the Letterbox was the Divers Pitch which required the use of a harness and descender. Those of us who didn't have this equipment decided it would be ok to continue with just a belt and the rope. After much grunting and pain under my ribs from the belt cutting up under them I was down and waiting for the rest (at least the rope reached the ground this time!!)



Once all members of the group were down, it was onto the Cwm Dwr section of the cave and Piccadilly, the Smithy, the second of the Boulder chokes (including the rifty bit which caused me to express an expletive and others to fear certain death!)

Finally we had reached the Entrance series with the crawl and Russ repeating at intervals his meal to be eaten later (including but not limited toetc!!!). There was a slight pause as Jeremy had to excavate much of

the end of the crawl as the stones had been pushed into the tube.



The last slight challenge was for Jeremy to face his nemesis (the Pipe) to get out. This due to his legs being so long he couldn't bend them to get into the foot holds!! Angela was a very welcome face to see as each person reached the surface again (even if she was soaking wet from waiting for us there in the rain for so long!)

A long hot shower, many cups of tea and finally back to the Ancient Britain for dinner (and yes, Russ got his steak even if it wasn't a 16oz T Bone!). The meal was a great success (the Pub were amazing to get 16 meals out nearly all together and so well cooked) and everyone retired happy but tired back to the SWCC.

A few drinks later and a rather loud game of spoons was played between some of the MCG and the Exeter group. Im not sure who won (I don't think anyone actually knew!)



Sunday was rather wet (with snow on the hills) but again there was more caving to be done. Debbie (with her merry band of men!) went to do the OFD1 to Cwm Dwr trip while Jeremy, Ross and Paul did Bridge Cave (being on the way home it was a good one to stop off and do). As I wasn't on either of these trips, I can't tell of any mishaps or adventures but I'm sure there were some!

It was an excellent weekend and great to be with such a group. I hear there may be another adventure to foreign lands (ie north of the M25) this year but the date has yet to be confirmed. Many thanks to Jeremy and Angela for organising the trip and making sure everyone did all the caving they wanted to do.

Karen Fendley

Photos: Paul Davies

THE NEVER ENDING STORY: UPPER FLOOD

Hope springs eternal, new cave passage rather less so, and no truer word could be said of Upper Flood in the last well, in the last quite a long time.

Ben Cooper and Mike Richardson have been chip-chip-chipping away at the putative Neverland bypass which will connect West Passage to a point between Neverland and Curtain Climb. Based on a resurvey by Ben and Andrew Atkinson, there is less than two meters between a small chamber above West Passage and the passage beyond Neverland. Originally a you-can-just-stand-sideways rift, this has been enlarged to a you-can-just-stand-face-on rift, so that one can now contemplate the solid calcite blockage with something approaching Zen-like calm. Further progress has now been made with something a little less Zen-like and rather more explosive, many thanks to Andrew Atkinson. More will be needed.

Meanwhile, Kev Speight and Les Brown bolted a climb up the rift in East Passage to reach a short passage to a rather nice pool. Subsequently, this was passed by Kev and Chris Binding to around 50m of rift and phreatic passage at various levels, with some quite nice decorations, but no way on This is actually the biggest discovery since Rift Series in 2009. Inevitably some damage was done, but kept to a minimum. Since the area is unlikely to be visited again, and there is a reasonable water flow, it should clean itself with time. Late addition see the next article!

Two separate banging trips to the far end of West Passage with Tony Boycott and Graham Price, and an entertaining session playing boulder kerplunk (Buddy: "That was at least six inches" ... Ed: "That was never six inches. It may be what you are telling Emily is six inches.") has opened up some space overhead, roofed by lots of scary looking boulders, but nobody has been stupid enough to look more closely. Shame, it draughts.

At the bitter (bitter, as in v. cold) end of Wall Street, attention from Tim Francis and Bill Chadwick, plus chemical persuasion courtesy of Adrian Van der Plank has opened up access to a small and formerly well-decorated chamber with black space beyond apparently affording delightful prospects, if only some more calcite could be removed. Further work revealed such prospects, though no passage approaching the size of a french window. However, following the heavy rain at the end of April, the whole area as flooded back to the squeeze from Wall Street, and the diggers have no idea

how long it will take to drain. The digging tools are visible under 5ft of water!

Kev, Russ Porter, Mike and others have made intermittent forays into Mud Out, an ascending phreatic tube above East Passage, where a lot of mud has been moved, well, out. This is at quite a high level and must go somewhere. It must go somewhere. It must go somewhere. It must go somewhere. Sorry, just trying to keep my spirits up, it won't happen again. A recent digging visit found bad air and thought it was closing down, but apparently not, so maybe it does go somewhere.

Kev got quite enthusiastic about South Passage, best described as a mud filled *censored* hole. This is a truly squalid area of the cave. It looks like it should go, as its a fair sized passage that must once have taken a stream, but the far end sumps, and its a long way to move spoil back. Its the sort of place that needs a dozen or so people in a chain gang, at the chance of getting a down or so people down there is vanishingly close to zero.

Chemical persuasion at the end of East Passage has been started by John Lumley (*Gonzo*). This isn't going to be a quick job, and he's left a drill and other equipment down there. This is his personal stuff, so could people leave it alone. Also, there is a bang wire running back to Zebra Aven, please take care of it.

Tim and Peat Bennett have been pushing upstream in streamway regained, a section of passageways described by Tim as claustrophobic, which tells the rest of us all we need to know. Even Julie Hesketh described it as intimidating. The water arrives here not from the canal and the Red Room, but from one of the leets, the area has been christened Leet Inlet (only the author thinks that should be L33t Inlet).

Finally, access to Upper Flood is being rejigged with CSCC and the land owner, SCC. The aim is to get a new access agreement (with some permanent documentation this time) which will include guest leaders (to be called guest wardens to avoid the inferences that go with being a leader). This should reduce the pressure on the MCG leaders somewhat, and remove some of the opprobrium that gets directed at MCG members from time to time. Needless to say, the conservation aspects of Upper Flood are foremost on the new arrangements. A big thanks to Kev for pulling out the proverbial MCG finger on this one, and to Tim for taking over on it.

Mike Richardson

RECENT DISCOVERIES IN UPPER FLOOD SWALLET

AWOL Aven

Way back in October 2011, James Hall and I took a fairly comprehensive trip around the cave, although as always, we kept our eyes peeled for any potential leads. I'd always thought that there must be something going on at the bitter end of East Passage, so James and I spent a few minutes craning our necks and shining our lights through the tiny continuation hole, convincing ourselves that it looked like a go-er! The trouble was, finding out would clearly take some serious chemical persuasion, unless of course there was a way over the top...

A few metres back from the very end of the passage, above a thrutchy climb, an aven looked like it might possibly provide a way of continuing East. I managed to bridge my way up for about 8 feet or so, but to continue the climb, I'd be forced into a reasonably extreme traverse back over the drop below. Dropping off would have pretty dire consequences, so I backed off before I was really able to determine anything for certain. Time to learn to bolt climb!

In November, our friends from across the water, Les Brown and Aileen Connor, came across to sample a little Mendip hospitality. Obviously, they'd simply have to visit Upper Flood, and to experience it's true charms, they'd surely want to lug in a drill and associated bolting gear! In actual fact, that weekend saw the cave unusually busy, so by the time we arrived at East Passage (after a little tourism for Les and Aileen), I had quite an audience for my first ever bolt climb! Learning on the job, with instruction and encouragement from below, I made my way up, with my sights firmly fixed on a ledge that looked to continue East. Unfortunately, as I climbed, it became clear that the ledge was blind, but given that there was a decent amount of flowstone on the walls, I continued on up to completely exhaust any potential. Lucky that I did really, as off to the south, a low, phreatic tube headed off into a pretty looking crystal pool...

I rigged a ladder so everyone could come up for a look, then wriggled forwards to see what was what. Immediately before the crystal pool, I found myself wallowing in a deep, sloppy mud bank. Not wanting to prematurely muddy the crystal pool, I backed up to allow Mike Richardson a look. We both agreed that it didn't look hugely promising, but Les Brown disagreed. Seeing as he's a karst hydro-geologist by trade, I felt that I'd probably have to revisit before too long to have a proper inspection!

On the day in question, I was technically supposed to be working (my lords and masters in the RAF having tried to sting me with a lastminute.com shift). Obviously, the caving took priority, so I had decided to pretend I hadn't received the email instructing me to work, making me AWOL! Naming our find 'AWOL Aven' seemed an obvious choice!

A few weeks later, Chris Binding and I went in to start the job of re-taping the cave. As an aside, we decided to check for any kind of vocal connection of AWOL Aven with the lower passages down the Liquid Mud Tube at the end of East Passage. Chris stayed up in AWOL, while I slithered off for a shouting session. With no connection evident, we suddenly felt a burning desire to push AWOL to see what we had. I went first, doing my level best to minimise the muddying of the crystal pool. Initially, it looked completely blind, but a breeze on the back of my neck made me look up, to find a nicely decorated aven heading up and back on myself. I shouted to Chris that we had a go-er, stripped off my boots and oversuit and began to climb, with Chris close behind. After a few metres, a low, west trending passage headed off, with the aven continuing more or less vertically.

being compressed by a rising mud floor. The passage looked to continue and enlarge a body length further in, so we earmarked it for a return visit, armed with a trowel! I think I said something along the lines of, "It'll just need 5 minutes digging the floor out and we'll be through!"

We returned, with Mike Richardson in tow, a few days later, to try and dig our way past the mud constriction. The mud actually turned out to be a mixture of mud, stal and rocks and proved an absolute pig to remove! If I'm being honest, I'd have to say that Chris did the lion's share of the hard graft, but it was me who finally managed to force the squeeze into a small, pretty chamber with yet another aven! Sadly, this time the aven was clearly too tight, although it did carry a decent draught. AWOL aven had yielded perhaps 40m of nicely decorated passage before calling time.

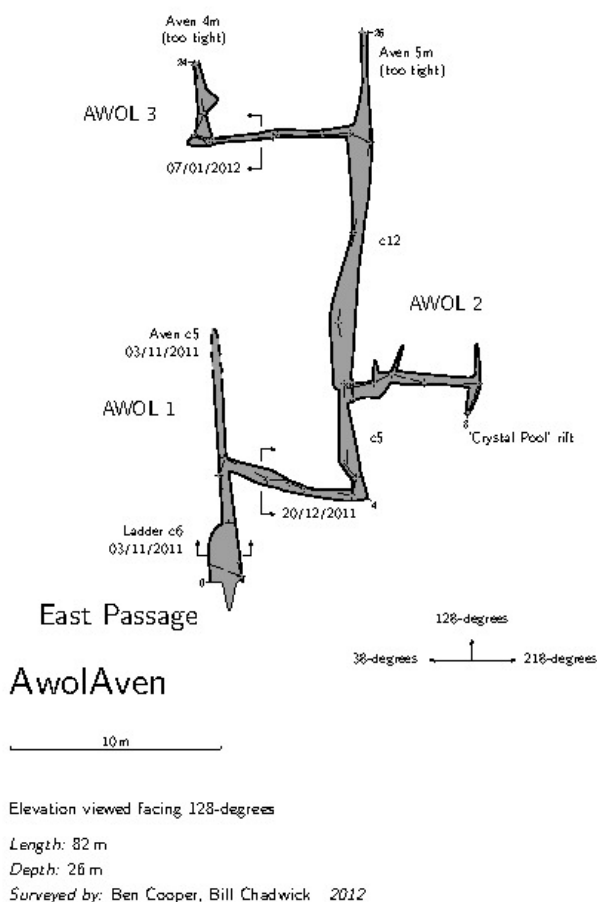
Muddy Hell

My check for vocal connections to AWOL Aven had been my first real look beyond the end of East Passage Liquid Mud Tube. The phreatic, mud floored arch at the southernmost end had caught my eye as having potential and I mentally bookmarked it for a future furtle. It ended up being May 2012 before Mike Richardson and I wandered in for a look.

Following a lengthy period of heavy weather, the cave was very wet indeed, with every tiny inlet being active. When we arrived at the bottom of the Mud Tube, we were surprised to find a good sized pool of water at the spot I'd intended to dig. On closer inspection, it became obvious that this was being fed by a reasonably strong stream, suggesting that it was well worth more attention. We dug for an hour or so, removing mud from the arch and piling it up on the sides of the pool. Progress was slow and squalid, but we did gain a tiny air gap through the slop!

The following week, I returned with Tom Harrison for another bash. Mark Lumley, Helen Nightingale and Mike Waterworth were also in the cave, preparing to bang the end of East Passage.

Tom and I made good progress, trying to remove as much slop as possible from the pool, but we soon reached a point where we needed extra manpower. Thankfully, Helen and Mike appeared to find the two of us up to our waists and utterly plastered in slop! Gleefully, they joined the fray and we soon had a makeshift mud dam to bail into, using our wellies! It wasn't long before we had a decent airspace into the unknown. I donned my neoprene hood and lay down in the squalor to try and force the horrific duck we'd created. Unfortunately, all I got for my trouble was an eyeful of mud, so we got back to bailing for a few more minutes, before Mike decided to have a go. This time, he slithered through, shouting back, "You're gonna like this!" He was right. I managed to force my way in after him, not caring about the liquid mud doing it's best to scratch my contact lenses out of my eyes, to find we'd entered walking sized passage heading off both left and



We opted to explore the horizontal bit first. Slowly and carefully, we edged forward past some nice stal, some of which had an unusual yellow tinge. About 5 metres in, we encountered a cross rift. To the left was obviously blind, but heading right, the passage opened out a little, with a beautiful white stal floor at the very end. This looked to be blind, and as we didn't wish to tread on the stal floor, we opted to return to the aven.

This time, I climbed much higher (approx 10m) before intercepting more horizontal passage. The lack of holds, combined with only being clad in wetsocks, conspired to make the climb pretty tricky! This time, the passage was much lower; not much bigger than body sized. About 3 or 4 metres in, it got even smaller, and I found my chest

right, looking for all the world like it was heading off for miles!

Heading left first, we found ourselves in a chamber with large mud banks, but no obvious way on. Going back the other way, the passage narrowed and forced us to our knees, before arriving at a low, muddy duck, far too small to force without digging. A little disappointed at having only found around 40 metres of new stuff, we headed back through the duck, but not before bringing Helen and Tom through for a look. (We couldn't let them get away without getting mud in their hair!) Helen in particular, ended up impressively filthy! Mike and I settled on the name 'Muddy Hell', which should pretty much speak for itself! (See cover photo: **Ed.**)

After hearing our description, Tim Francis and Ben Cooper postulated that our low, muddy duck at the north westerly end of the new stuff might connect with a very similar sounding feature in Rift Series, and so it was that I found myself once again in the cave with Tim, Ben, Helen and Bill Chadwick. This time, our mission was to test the connection theory by poking drain rods through from the Rift Series side, and to survey the extensions. After the trip into Rift Series to position the drain rods, Helen, Tim and I joined the others to re-enter Muddy Hell. Much of the work we'd done to open the duck the previous week had been undone by slumping, but this time, we'd armed ourselves with buckets, making progress much faster. Amazingly, Ben's hi-tech surveying gear survived the squalor unscathed, allowing him to add the extensions to the survey. The theory that Muddy Hell connects to Rift Series proved to be correct, with the drain rods being visible through the duck. This connection could be made passable with a little persuasion, which would allow a much more comfortable route into Muddy Hell to properly probe for leads.

And for My Next Trick...

Eliza sump (in South Passage), beckons. Chris Binding and I have already installed some gear and had a crack at pumping the sump dry. It opened with some impressive noises and a strong draught, but not enough airspace to safely push. Watch this space...

Addendum

It didn't go. Kev, Mikes R&W, and ChrisB bailed it, then Kev had an NDE. **Ed.**

Kev Speight

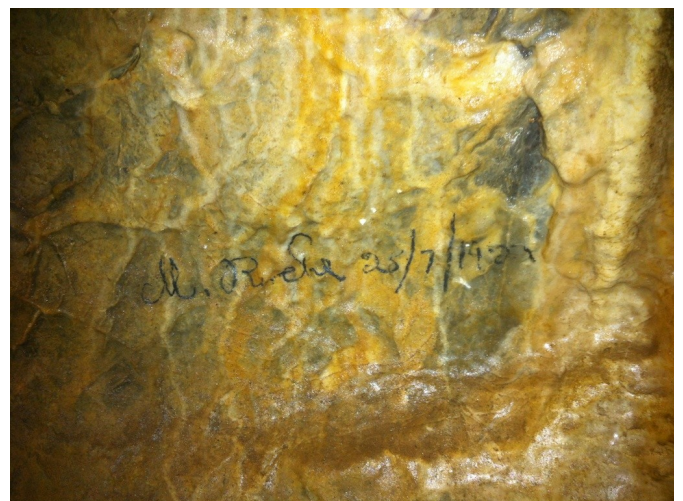
IRELAND 2012

Working in the Scotch Whisky industry has many perks and trips to distilleries are frequent. Trips to Irish distilleries are harder come by but I was invited to Midleton Distillery in Cork for a meeting in March 2012 and so once I'd accepted, naturally the next thing I did was to see if there were any caves nearby. I wasn't disappointed and copies of Tony Oldham's guidebook to 'The Caves of Co. Cork' and the 1969 classic 'The Caves of Ireland' by J.C. Coleman were duly acquired. Both of these were in the MCG library at the time of

writing. Les also managed to get hold of an unpublished update to the area - a work in progress by Colin Bunce and Peter Barry (2009). I shall try to deposit a copy in the MCG library.

I stalled for a minute wondering who'd want to come to Cork with me but old Pal, Les Brown and Friend of the MCG, had, co-incidentally been mulling over whether to make the drive down from the north of Ireland to take a gander at Cork underground and so in one email, the trip was on!

Oldham's guide contains surveys of caves that run right underneath the distillery at Midleton and so I was hopeful to gain permission from the guys at the site in the margins of my meeting there. The look of terror in their eyes when the subject of the caves was raised over lunch hinted at the answer I finally got from them about access..... No-one has been down them for years, though Barry Crockett, the Master Distiller there (born in the distillery cottage) recalled going into the entrance in days gone by. The conversation was moved on by them faster than you can say 'risk assessment'! There were plenty more, much larger caves in the area however, work done, I met with Les on the Saturday morning in a wee town called Mallow in Mid-Cork to find accommodation. There are no caving huts in the area and so we found an Inn with rooms, dumped our stuff and headed straight off in the spring sunshine to find Castlepook (sometimes referred to as Mammoth Cave) near the village of Doneraile.



The scenery around Doneraile is very Mendippy - lovely rolling valleys in a very agricultural area. The limestone, according to Bunce and Barry sits in-between sandstone ridges and few exposed areas of limestone can be seen but there are patches on occasion, which adds to the Mendippy feel of the place.

Access to the cave was via the landowner who lived about a mile down the road. The entrance was easily located as it was a stone's thrown from the road in a low cliff just off a small country lane and sits at the base of one of those exposed patches of limestone in what appears to be an old quarry. The cave is gated but not locked and so we easily gained access to the very dry, fossil cave. We were immediately greeted by evidence

of local kids using the place as a party venue with trails of string, piles of empty beer cans and the remains of a 2 foot high candle in a very heavy glass container. Luckily there were also lots of old plastic bags hanging around and so we were able to do our bit for conservation and remove lots of the rubbish in the cave - totalling one and a half large bin-bags of rubbish plus the candle - it almost filled the boot of Les' car!

The cave is very unusual in that it consists of a series of parallel galleries with connecting passages. In parts of the cave, erosion or crumbling of the walls has led to larger chambers being opened up. The whole place had a very dry, static feel to it, though it was picturesque in parts. Much of the cave is named after archaeological finds (Hyena Hall, Wolf Hall etc.) and in one part the cave is 'decorated' with the signatures of past explorers - many now of historical interest - though I do struggle with the fine line when graffiti becomes of historical interest. Armed with a copy of the survey (that dates back to 1911!!), we set off to tick off the whole cave and almost did so but were beaten back by some pretty foul air at Boulder Ruckle Passage - the lower parts of the cave. After we left the cave, we had a quick wander around the old quarry and it was obvious that agricultural run-off was more than likely the issue here. Fortunately I had my back turned away from the very large rat that scuttled past when we were changing! But a decent introduction nonetheless to the area.



A curry washed down with some of Ireland's good black stuff and a lot of reminiscing was followed by a full Irish breakfast and then on to Old Desmond's Cave (one of the Mitchelstown Caves) which Coleman puts in County Tipperary. There are two Mitchelstown Caves - one a showcave open to the public - more of that later. The other is 'The Old Cave' or 'Old Desmonds's Cave', which according to Coleman was named after the Earl of Desmond taking refuge there after his futile rebellion in 1601 before he was handed over to Queen Elizabeth I of England for execution. A number of other fugitives have apparently also taken shelter there but the only fugitive in the cave for our visit was a lonely and shell-shocked toad sitting at the bottom of the entrance pitch - rescued on the way out. This was with some hilarity as I'd popped him in my glove to carry him out and he

duly tried to hop away - watching a glove hop about 10 feet was brilliant!

Access to the cave was very straightforward and the landowners were very friendly - even offering to drive us up to the entrance! We found our way however after a short search. To find the entrance, walk along the lane leading from the farmyard. As it rises out of the small valley, cut across the field around the edge of the scrub in the depression and after 5 minutes, look out for a small stile. Cross the stile and follow the track through the gorse to the cave entrance. The entrance itself is a cleft in the rock with the very straightforward entrance pitch requiring a 20 foot ladder. At the bottom of the pitch, the rift leads into some larger passages and chambers, the early sections of which are very well decorated. A few muddy passages lead quite suddenly into great East Chamber. And wow, it is very impressive! The chamber is one massive sloping thing at about 40 degrees angle that goes on for 250-300 metres and slopes down to a crystal clear sump that runs along pretty much the whole of the lower part of the chamber. It's a slightly slippery high-level traverse to get to the very far end of the chamber and great care is needed not to go slipping down the huge (20m?) muddy bank that runs above the sump. Retreating back towards the entrance of East Chamber, we potted around some more muddy, sumpy smaller chambers before time ran out and we headed back out and were greeted again by the landowners (who are very amenable to cavers and have been down the cave themselves) for a friendly chat.



We quickly scooted over to Mitchelstown New cave - just a few hundred feet away but on different land with a different landowner. The new cave is a showcave and for around 9 Euros we were led through the first few hundred metres of the well-decorated cave as far as the massive 'Tower of Babel' formation. The showcave was reasonably well done (in our opinion!) as it was lit well enough to see but not overdone and despite the obvious concrete floors, the cave was still fairly 'wild' in nature. A 'highlight' for the other tourists was when our guide switched all the lights off to show us what it was like to be in total darkness - for most tourists this would have been their first such encounter and would have made it a

great experience. For Les and I, the temptation to hide behind a stal whilst the lights were off and leave the tourist trail was almost overwhelming! We resisted however and exited into the spring sunshine about 45 minutes after we went in. And as with too many of my caving trips, I had to dash straight off to catch a flight!

This part of Ireland around Cork/Tipperary is a great place for a long weekend. It will never match the scale of the caves of Fermanagh or Claire but there is more than enough to do over a long weekend and the countryside is pleasant and green and the Guinness fine! I for one will try to do more there one day if only I can plan some more work trips to the Emerald Isle!



References:

J.C. Coleman, The Caves of Ireland, May 1965.
T.Oldham, The caves of County Cork, Part 1 in the Series Caves of Ireland (1981, reprinted in 2001 and 2003).

Caves of County Cork, Edition 1 - Compiled by Colin Bunce and Peter Barry – 2009, compiled for the Speleological Union of Ireland.

www.mitchelstowncave.com

Julie Hesketh

Photos: Les Brown and Julie Hesketh

A FOND FAREWELL TO TONY CRAWFORD: A VERY EARLY MEMBER OF MCG

Tony Crawford was a very early stalwart of the Mendip Caving Group who was aged 82 when he passed away peacefully in a hospital in Auckland New Zealand at 11h45 on 24th January 2012; family and friends were at his side. He died from the complications of mesothelioma. A disease he probably acquired by breathing in asbestos fibres. He would have been exposed to them whilst wearing an asbestos suit, during his time serving with the Royal Navy as a fire-fighter on aircraft carriers.

I first met him at Malcolm Cotter's parents' house whilst we were trying to make a club rubber stamp from some cut up date stamping devices. These gadgets were nothing more than a rubber band that had the months of the year on them. We were stuck; there were no letter "g's". It was Tony who suggested rotating the "b's" through 180 degrees.

He had a fine sense of humour and always referred to the MCG as Malcolm Cotter's Group. In those days, not very wide of the mark.

I knew Tony during the mid 1950's. Most of our adventures involved a mixture of snow and ice, his ex-Army Royal Enfield single-cylinder 500cc side-valve motorbike, and its near-lethal sidecar.

In those days MCG were digging at Timber Hole in Velvet Bottom, and I was the explosives man. We used to carry the explosives in a pannier on the side of the bike and I carried the detonators in a small rucksack on my back for "safe" keeping. Near the Golden Arrow transport café on the A4 main road one snowy day we were driving behind a car that skidded off the road. Tony took avoiding action, and from sitting frozen in the sidecar I found myself sliding on my back, rucksack, detonators and all, along the road. I was wearing so many clothes that there was no danger of 'road rash'.

I rushed back to the bike, to find that Tony, with the first Aid Kit, had hurried back to the car, where, between us, we sorted out the occupants. Later when I demanded to know why he had chosen to aid the car not me! He replied; "Well, when I saw that you were skidding straight down the road, and I did not hear a bang I assumed you were OK".

Our most strenuous effort at killing ourselves involved homemade SCUBA gear. An extraordinarily gifted and proficient engineer, Tony had seen the plans of Jacques Cousteau's demand valve and had made a copy. The hoses were from an old gas mask, and the air bottles were ex-RAF oxygen bottles that should have exploded the moment they were filled with high-pressure air. The "test" dive was in a partially frozen lake near London. We stuffed the lead diving weights into our bathing costumes. Fortunately, the lake was too shallow for us to go very deep, so we survived.

My enduring caving memory of Tony is going into Swildon's Hole carrying the ladder for the first 40ft pitch, only to find when we got there that the pitch had been washed away. Tony was delighted to climb down the remnants with just a rope to belay him from above.

In addition to his already numerous interests and skills, Tony was keen on martial arts and was a 'black belt' at judo.

He was above all someone whose infectious enthusiasm and dedicated teaching of cave craft made him a delightful companion.

Through his engineering skills, Tony made a considerable contribution to the Group while he was

tacklemaster. In collaboration with C. Lewis Railton (SWCC and CRG) Tony acquired the specification for the French *electron* ladders with aluminium rungs. He then proceeded to construct appropriate lengths on his kitchen table; his wife was not amused.

Noel Dilly (with minor amendments by Tony Knibbs).

Dr P. Noel Dilly was, himself, one of the very earliest members of the Group, having joined in October 1954.

Tony Crawford – Longwood Valley.



LIBRARY ADDITIONS

Wookey Hole, the Cave & its Story, written by Alan Bell, illustrated by John Hassall, 1928. A nice copy of this 46 page booklet, pleasantly old fashioned!

Bath Stone Quarries by Derek Hawkins, 2011, Folly Books. This beautifully produced large-format book contains over 450 superb colour photos, maps and plans. A well-researched introduction to the stone industry is followed by chapters on Combe Down, The Avon Valley and Box & Corsham quarries. The author has worked down some of the quarries and the book contains archive photographs as well as recent images. It is a comprehensive photographic record of a threatened subterranean world. If you've been into any of the quarries (mines) you will find this book fascinating and if you haven't this book should encourage you to do so.

Cold War Bunkers by Nick Catford, 2011, Folly Books, is another book in the same series, again with over 400 excellent photographs and informative text. Not really a caving subject but we do have members who are keen on other underground locations.

River Scenery at the Head of the Vale of Neath by F.J.North, 1938. A classic book with simple descriptions of the formation of river features including Porth-yr-Ogof cave (donated)

The Origin and Story of Kents Cavern with a descriptive tour of the caves by Clive Pemberton, 1950. An earlier edition than one we already hold. (donated)

Subterranean Britain: Aspects of Underground Archaeology by Harriet Crawford, 1979 – chapters on Grimes Graves (flint) mines, early metal mining, Roman mining, Irish souterrains, 19thC mining and curiosities such as grottos, labyrinths and ice houses. (donated)

The Cave of Nerja by Eduardo Ortega Rodriguez, 1970 – a substantial guide book to this show cave near Malaga published by the Patronato de la Cueva de Nerja, 181pp. It describes the cave, its history, excavations, cave paintings and the music and dance festivals held in the 'Ballet Hall'. (donated)

Caverns Measureless to Man by Sheck Exley. (donated)

Underground England by Stephen Smith, 2010. A bit odd! (donated)

The Mendip Hills: 8 Wild Walks, Mendip Hills AONB, 2009 (donated)

Wookey Hole, the Caves and Mill, 1986/7 (donated)

INVESTMENT UPDATE

This year we reviewed our investment strategy to move most of our investments from accumulation to income units. The difference between these two types of fund is that accumulation funds pay no income (any dividends received are retained within the fund to buy additional stock and increase capital value); whereas income funds pay dividends to the holder (that is, the MCG). A further nuance of income funds is that we can sometimes elect to automatically buy additional units instead of receiving the income (income reinvested), effectively turning the fund into an accumulation fund. There are other differences too, in that the investment strategy of an accumulation fund is to invest in stocks that are more likely to appreciate in value, whereas the strategy of an income fund is to invest in stocks and bonds that are more likely to pay high dividends. In practice, however, that doesn't always work out according to plan. For example, we've had no income at all from our Schroders Income fund, but it has nearly doubled in value! Indeed, from the evidence of the past few years, the performance of our accumulation funds has been more or less the same as the performance of our income funds with income reinvested.

Our new investment strategy will focus our investments in Income funds, with income paid into the MCG bank account. The benefit of the new approach is that more investment income will be available to contribute to the Group's running costs. It meets one of the key objectives of our investments, to provide financial stability. The combined effect of the changes will be to increase the interest received into the current account from about £300 pa to about £1200 pa (based on last year's investment performance figures). Whether we

choose to keep, spend, or re-invest that cash can be decided year by year by the committee as needed.

The strategy has been implemented by selling our entire Schroders holding (valued at about £3,800), to reinvest in Premier monthly income units; and converting our M&G Charifund Accumulation units (valued at about £10,000) into Income units.

The value of our investments are still protected against inflation – our chosen income units do also appreciate in value, as does the income received, broadly in line with inflation; and in years where we do not need the income this can be reinvested by the committee to bolster both the capital and income potential.

Ben Cooper

LETS GO CAVING

I've noticed lately that although there has been a lot of digging going on lately (all power to The Battery Boys, Bone Holers and the on going Saga of Upper Flood) there hasn't been so much caving. As Caving Secretary it falls to me to attempt to rectify this. In light of this please see the Meets List. It is on the board at the Cottage and on the website. I've tried to select the Mendip Classic trips and for now have not included any trips off the Hill. The clue is in the name of the Group I suppose. Members' weekend trips will be on the Mendips. The 3rd Saturday trips are primarily intended for Beginners and the less confident and will follow a 6 month cycle. If anyone wants to join a trip just let the contact know. Some trips are restricted by numbers for conservation reasons but do not be alarmed if you don't get on the 1st trip. The caves aren't going anywhere and there are a lot of caves not on the list that need exploring. All you have to do is check the access procedure and off you go. Probationary members who need equipment only have ask a full member who will advise you as to what you may need.

If anyone wants to organise trips away please let me know and I will put it on the website. If you need permits let me know and I will try and arrange them for you. There is a 3rd outing to Andalucía in September and I am working on the possibility of a visit to Italy for some deep caves and also to Indiana. So get yourself to the cottage and remember to bring your friends. See you soon on the Hill.

Richard Carey, Caving Secretary

GEAR REVIEWS

Assorted comments on assorted gear

Following up on the topic (on the group mailing list) about caving lamp demise I've done a few tests on batteries to see how long they last. Turned the torch on full power and waited until it went out, which was fairly abrupt - just a few minutes on a noticeably dimmer light. Torch was a LED Nextorch K2 that uses a single AA

battery. Manufacturer's blurb says 1.5hrs on full power with an alkaline battery (4.5 on half & 15 on low). My results (rounded)as follows:

- Supplied Nextorch battery: 1h45m
- Kodak Alkaline: 1h45m; 17p each; cost 10p per hour
- Kodak Zinc Chloride: 30m; 9p each; cost 18p per hour
- Energiser High Tech: 2h 15m; 94p each; cost 41p per hour
- Maplin Lithium: 6h00; £1.25 each; cost 21p per hour

Surprised that the supposedly 'super-doooper' Energiser alkalines seem very expensive for what they are. Much better off with Lithium as better and cheaper per hour. For value the Kodak alkalines from Poundland seem best. Any thoughts?

Charlie Allison

I've recently invested in a new Rude Nora caving light, produced by John Biffin. I've only used it once, so can't say to much on battery performance etc... I can say that I am very happy with the light operation, light output and the overall construction quality is top notch.

Pretty shure I paid around £350 for light, main battery, spare small battery, holder for 4 x AA's and the charger. Biff also included a red mounting bracket for free. Out of 10 I would rate it 10, haven't found any fault as yet. I plan to use it for night diving in June, when I'm on holiday in Cornwall.

I've also used the Meander oversuits as well. The tri-colour breathable version was perfect for Spain, but too cold for damp/wet Mendip caves. It is very comfortable with Velcro instead of a zip and doesn't go hard like a heavy weight Warmbac. The water proof red Meander is perfect for Mendip caving, I've also used it in Wales.

Russ Porter

NEW MEMBERS

Charlie Allison (welcome back Charlie!)

Dave Ball

Lisa Ball

Thomas Batten

Stephen Church

Bill Edge

Alan McBride

Mike Peer

Matthew Ryan-East

Les Sheppard

Sue Fennell

UAMH A' BREAGADAIR (CAVE OF THE LIAR) APPLECROSS, SCOTLAND

Andrea and I had decided to go to Scotland for the Jubilee week and it was suggested that we do some caving while we were there. Tim Francis lent me a guide book and we decided to do the longest cave near Applecross Uamh a' Breagadair (Cave of the Liar). It was actually very difficult to go caving as the whole Applecross Peninsular is breathtakingly beautiful and the weather was fantastic. Every corner turned or summit passed presented even more spectacular views.

5/6/12 Cave of the Liar



The cave is only a 20 minute walk from the campsite and the lower entrance is found in a small cliff in a normally dry streambed. The original entrance is not recommended as it is unstable. The entrance leads to Jawbone Passage and is onion shaped. This is a flat out crawl for a about 60m.the passage gets a little bigger where it joins Little Shale Street before lowering again to reach Boulder Chamber. From there we descended a hole in the floor and with a bit of thrutching reached Balcony Chamber.

Another flat out crawl reached some fine formations and columns. Believing this to be the beginning of the "forbidden" Formation Pot we turned back. Just before this crawl we spotted a very small crawl which we thought would lead to Straw Chamber but decided not to force it and returned to Boulder Chamber to explore what we later discovered to be Frustration Passage. Clearly return visit would be required to visit Straw Chamber and Great Shale Street.

7/6/12 Cave of the Liar. Part Deux



The entrance crawl certainly wasn't getting any easier although this time I remembered to bring both kneepads. Boulder Chamber was quickly reached and we soon found ourselves at the beginning of Great Shale Street. This starts of low and wide but soon develops into a walking size passage. We stopped where the passage became smaller and partially blocked by boulders. The advice is to turn back at this point as although there is another exit it is not safe.

We returned to Boulder Chamber and continued to Balcony Chamber. From here we pushed past the formations with a flat out crawl through a low pool. The passage opens out at this point and at a sharp left turn the spectacular Flowstone Pot is encountered. We took some pictures and decided to return fro the crawl to Straw Chamber. The crawl we had spotted earlier proved to be too small. Obviously this was not the route to the chamber.

8/6/12 Cave of the Liar. And finally



We rechecked the survey and description and realised that the low crawl to Straw Chamber was in fact beyond the formations after Balcony Chamber but just before Formation Pot. This was quickly found and although not easy the crawl reached a small chamber. To the left was Metal Puzzle Squeeze. I might have got through 20 years ago but there was no way I was going to fit. Andrea tried but didn't like it either. However, there is an easy squeeze not in the description that passed straight underneath a boulder in the main passage. A short passage later found us in Straw Chamber which not only has some impressive straws but a very fine curtain as well.



Despite its short length about 500m it proved to be a very energetic trip although also very rewarding.

Richard Carey (words and photos)

THREE GET RATHER WET IN UPPER FLOOD

Mike Waterworth, Aiden Moyce and Lucy Foster entered at 11am on Saturday 23rd June, 2012. Progress was slow through the cave due to three belligerent drag bags, and we finally reached the Rift Series at 6.37pm. Our plans to camp overnight were begrudgingly abandoned due to wet sleeping bags. We ate and rested, and began our journey out about 2 hours later.

Discharge rates along the main streamway were beginning to increase at this point, first becoming noticeable at 'Netherwood' Inlet. We stopped for rest at Departure Lounge, Golden Chamber and Red Room. Two streams were flowing in the Departure Lounge (on both sides of the path at the emergency dump), an inlet was observed to be producing a small stream on entering Golden Chamber, and a torrent of water was flowing through the streamway at Red Room.

The Canal became a fast flowing duck, and the Lavatory Trap sumped, with water flowing from here at approximately 0.5Litres p/s. Also of note was water pouring out of holes in the rock adjacent to the dam upstream of the Lavatory Trap. We exited the cave at about 5.30am, having been in the cave for over 18 hours.

On exit, we learnt that a constant, heavy rain had been falling from 4pm on Saturday until 4am Sunday, and surface water flooding was evident along the access road to UFS. It is likely that between 10-15mm of rain fell within the 12 hour window.

Mike Waterworth



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Submissions are
preferred in electronic
format, but any
material, in any format,
is always welcomed.



AFTERWARD

At this point in the newsletter, there is all the stuff like contact details and cottage bookings and all that stuff. Well, sorry, but its just **too hard!** Its got funny layout blocks, its got colours. Its not plain text. It was hard enough getting the pink bit into place. And the black blob is an image, so its stretched and the font has gone funny!! Well, if you really want to know, have a look at the previous newsletter, or have a look at the group web site. Maybe I'll figure it out for the next newsletter, maybe I won't, or maybe I'll get my marching orders

Mike Richardson

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- Social Secretary – Jenny Plumb
- Rescue Warden – Vacant

The above can be contacted via the email addresses to the right, or via the contact details included in the membership list circulated to group members with this Newsletter.