

MCG NEWS

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group

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Andrea and Hayley in Cueva de Los Naturalistas Photo Ed Waters

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Editorial by Richard Carey

There is still a vacancy for Editor so I thought I would give it a go. Some of you have said that something should be done. No-one appears to have thought that that someone might be them. I am sure it will disappoint some of you **But that's just tough.**

1. Lanzarote 2012 by Richard Carey

The 1st wave of the massed Mendip horde assembled Tuesday 27th November at Bristol Airport for an action packed winter sun tour of the Caves of Lanzarote. Chris Binding, Carmen Smith, Aubrey and Carol Newport, Noel and Rosemary Cleave and Andrea Russe and Richard Carey. Reinforcements arrived over the fortnight, Ed and Hayley Waters, Pete, Sandy and Sarah Hann, Paul Stillman, Alison Williams plus Dave and Judy. At first the weather was a bit doubtful and on the 1st trip we actually got wet from rain. It then settled down to 22C with a light breeze. I did need a pullover for the evenings though.

The 1st cave we visited is part of the Sistema Corona. Effectively a 7k lava tube with several roof collapses called Jameos providing entrances. We went from Jameo Gentes to Jameo Puerta Falsa. This sort of caving isn't very difficult as the passage size was around 50 X 50ft and was a gentle meander to the exit. This said the floor was uneven and much boulder hopping ensued. Shorts and T shirts was the dress code with knee pads of course. Helmets appeared to be optional.

Next day we went to Cueva Las Breñas near the Timanfaya National Park. This was a little smaller in stature and required quite a bit of crawling although not desperate. The cave was much warmer and 2 hours of sweaty progress was made. Next we went to Pico Partido. A small fragment of a lava tube although it must have been much hotter here as the lava often resembled melted chocolate.

Friday was show cave day. Cueva de los Verdes is the downstream end of Sistema Corona and as Show caves go was quite a good trip although the English of the guide certainly left something to be desired.

To continue our exploration of the Sistema Corona we went to Jameo Puerta Falsa and went down stream as far as the science station where a fence prevented continuation into the Show cave Cueva de los Verdes. This fence had been breached but we decided not to risk the authorities by doing a through trip.

On Saturday we drove to the Airport to pick up Ed and Hayley along with Pete Hann and Family. Collecting the hire cars we then set off to go to Cueva de los Naturalistas. Lots of Photography here. Just to show the newcomers that not everything is big we visited a fragment called Punta Prieta. There was a squeeze and those that went through may be scarred for life. A blood sacrifice was required of all but the smaller of the party. This continued down to a sea sump.

As a warning do not get toothache here. Andrea had a flare up the required antibiotics. The consultation required for the prescription cost 50 euros. Having missed the days caving we consoled ourselves with another show cave part of the Sistema Corona but were very disappointed to discover that there was very little cave. It had at one time been a hotel. There was a bar restaurant in the 1st chamber and ascending to next Jameo revealed a swimming pool. I suppose the visitor centre was ok but 8 euros was too much.

We went walking to Montaña Blanca. The plan was to walk around the crater rim but we missed the path and by the time we reached the rim it was very windy and we were all feeling quite tired.



Aubrey Newport and Andrea in Jameo Gentes Photo Ed Waters

To complete our tour of the Sistema Corona we went upstream from Puerta Falsa to Jameo Gentes. A photographer's dream. It is difficult to say but you do need to watch your feet. For the most part the rock is very grippy and boots will not survive many encounters but in some places this was covered with dust and small pebbles so that when trying to step from a shelf down my legs went from under me and I fell to the shelf and momentum rolled me off and I dropped about 1m5 to a boulder strewn floor. Fortunately I landed on my back pack and I was uninjured apart from a scratch to my arm. (Tiger quality material apparently). There is a pitch to abseil down to complete the trough trip but I decided to return back the way we came.

Montaña Blanca once again. This time we found the correct path and soon reached the crater rim. The views are stunning. We walked all the way around. This is a very impressive walk.



Andrea at Montaña Blanca Photo Richard Carey

Carmen, Andrea and I went to the National park for an iffy trip, sort of clandestine, From Cueva Covon to Chifletera. There is a squeeze that I was unable/unwilling to push so we returned the way we came. As part of covert operations we also visited Cueva Paso Esqueleto. A steeper lava tube with some walking passage when suddenly you can hear a noise. Round a corner there is a window to the sea. There were some rusting hangers allowing an abseil down to a rocky beach. What a view.

We also visited Cueva el Convento. More or less a sea cave with no obvious way on.

To complete the lava experience we walked along the coast path of the Timanfaya National Park to El Golfo about 14km in all. We managed to experience pretty much all types of lava.

Finally Andrea and I went to the Timanfaya National Park and did the tour. This was very impressive. There was a coach ride around the park with an excellent commentary. Camera at ready. This is still active. The guides would pour water down tubes to create geysers and set fire to brushwood. There was also a pitch over which chickens were grilling.

To sum up we had a wonderful holiday fully exploring the island of Lanzarote. Our accommodation was very comfortable and not too expensive as was the car hire. The company was excellent. The food was good, the wine was cheap, (6 bottles for 6 Euros) and do watch out for the Caramel Vodka and Honey Rum.

2. Upper Flood Cave Survey Notes by Ben Cooper

With the publication of the new Mendip Underground due later this year, there has been a push on completing the Upper Flood cave survey. The latest, more or less complete version is included with this newsletter.

First, some statistics. The surveyed cave length is now just over 4km, and its depth is 129m with the lowest known point, the South Passage sump, at 108m OD. The survey data is currently made up of 79 separate survey files (th), 97 sketch files (th2), and 64 configuration files (tp) that are used to create standalone survey drawings of different parts of the cave. The data is held in Therion format, which is based on Survex, and provides a human-readable text that preserves the data as originally recorded.

The latest survey additions have all been achieved using a DistoX and PDA combination. This latest technology from

Beat Heeb in Switzerland has transformed the state of the art. The DistoX is a "total station", allowing all three measurements (compass, clino and distance) to be made at once by the single press of a button. As with other electronic compasses, it has the advantage of aiming via the laser beam, avoiding the inaccuracies caused by sighting a traditional compass, especially when close to a wall or constriction. Furthermore, the compass error introduced by steep slopes is also eliminated. But the real benefit of the DistoX is its Bluetooth interface that allows data to be captured immediately onto a PDA. The PocketTopo software runs on the PDA and collects the data, but even better than this, the cave sketch can be drawn against the recorded centreline directly on the PDA while recording the survey in the cave. The sketch is immediately drawn to scale thanks to the centreline data. The icing on the cake is the ability to accurately position cave features on the sketch. Because every reading made with the DistoX is in effect a survey leg, every location recorded can be accurately plotted. Such readings are called "splay shots". Because of the ease and accuracy of recording splay shots, DistoX surveys are characterised by large numbers of them. When viewing the centreline in Survex, the DistoX surveys are very obvious and appear to have lots of "hair" (splay shots) around each station defining the passage dimensions.

A clever convention introduced by PocketTopo distinguishes splay shots from survey legs, so that the software automatically detects the difference. This is achieved by measuring survey legs three times, whereas splay shots are only measured once. This also improves the accuracy of the centreline by reducing the possibility of blunders (caused by the laser beam reflecting off or missing the target to give a false distance measurement) and by averaging the three recorded measurements to reduce instrument error. A further convention I adopt is to rotate the DistoX about its axis for each of the three shots. This is because there is always a small amount of compass and clino error that shows up as a difference in readings as the DistoX is rotated. It is unknown which of the four orientations provides the best measurement, but by rotation the error is reduced. The difference between these rotational readings also provides an indication of the calibration accuracy of the DistoX. The difference can be as little as 0.2 degrees, and increases over time as the magnetic quality of the batteries changes. The DistoX can be re-calibrated in the field, another advantage over previous electronic instruments, such as the Pony. I have been known to re-calibrate the DistoX up to four times in the cave to improve the accuracy to acceptable limits!

Changes to the survey

Changes since the last version of the survey published on the website are as follows.

Some additional detail has been added to the "old" cave from the 1986 paper survey.

L33t Inlet (or Leet Inlet) is a collector's item only for the elite (and petite) caver, namely Tim 'n Peat (Tim Francis and Peat Bennett). This has been the subject of a number of digging trips by the pair, who completed a survey earlier in 2012, using the traditional technique of compass, clino and tape. The surprising find is that the passage continues parallel to Streamway Regained, and does not curve back anywhere towards the old cave as previously assumed and drawn. Numerous observations of the stream suggest that its water does not originate from the Red Room, leading to the renaming of "Streamway Regained" to "A Streamway Regained"! Our latest estimate is that the water from the Red Room re-joins the cave somewhere under the Boulder Choke.

Goldfish Rift has been partially surveyed using the DistoX up to the small decorated Aven, at which point the passage continues as a narrow rift. A wider section at the base has been described by Tim Francis as claustrophobic, and to my knowledge has had no other visitors other than Peat Bennett. It has been sketched onto the survey, but not yet measured.

The Business Lounge is a high level chamber above the end of the Departure Lounge. The Business Lounge is an attractive decorated chamber, entered by climbing up over boulders just at the start of Malcolm's Way. It has been taped off with no access since the cave was opened in 2006, and it remains closed to leaders and visitors for conservation reasons. High up on the Eastern wall of the Business Lounge is an undercut that could indicate a continuation; but if any it is most likely to be a high level continuation from the Departure Lounge. Because it is unlikely to be a new passage, and because any exploration would destroy the chamber, there are no plans to investigate further. The chamber was surveyed with the help of Bill Chadwick in 2012.

Duck Pond is a high level chamber above Duck Under Boss, with a chest deep gour pool. This is a beautiful chamber, photogenic but fragile. The chamber is currently closed to visitors for conservation reasons. It was surveyed with the help of Bill Chadwick in 2012.

Flyover is a high level chamber accessible from either direction; however the Western entrance should be avoided as it is at risk of collapse and is dangerous. The chamber is beautifully decorated with cracked-mud filled gour pools and "poached eggs". It has been closed for access since the cave was opened in 2006. The chamber requires taping to preserve the delicate floor formations. The chamber was surveyed with the help of Bill Chadwick in 2012.

A sketch of the dig at the end of Wall Street was provided by Tim in 2012 and is included in the latest survey.

The end of Charnel Passage is a recent addition surveyed in 2010 with the help of Mike Richardson. Surprisingly, this clearly showed how the passage veers towards Royal Icing Passage above Brian's Eye. There is a distinctive rift in the side wall here, and the 3d survey shows that these two features directly align. Tim Francis has confirmed that muddy water stirred up at the end of Charnel has resulted in muddy water flowing out of the rift above Brian's Eye, proving the connection.

All three levels of AWOL aven, discovered in December 2011, have been surveyed with the help of Tim Francis and Bill Chadwick. The fascinating discoveries shown by the survey are that AWOL 3 is directly above East Passage, indicating a vertical rift feature extending over 25m of height, while AWOL 2 appears to be connected with the Crystal Pool rift. The apparent connection of these rifts further supports our "squeezed toothpaste" idea about the geological and hydrological development of East Passage, and opens up the possibility that more pockets await to be discovered in this highly complex area.

Muddy Hell was very recently opened by Kevin West, and I managed to bag a survey of the new discovery with the help of Tim Francis, Kevin West and Bill Chadwick, while exploration fever was still running high. Frankly, it was then or never; I anticipate that Muddy Hell will be a seldom used route thanks to the deep thixotropic mud, the claustrophobic duck through the break-through, and the unpleasant lack of oxygen on either side of it! Luckily the exploration team had pushed a drain rod into the Cross Rift sump, and as Tim and I surveyed to the end of the new passage, there it was protruding from the water, proving that the new passage was indeed Cross Rift 2. The sump is estimated as about 60cm long, but has not yet been passed and is not known to be passable. The sump is formed by a significant reduction in ceiling height from 2m to about 45cm, and it would appear that it could be opened by chemical means, making the southern end of Cross Rift 2 a viable (and exciting) dig site.

The connection to Cross Rift has provided a closed survey loop that has significantly improved the accuracy of What the Dobbins (formerly Liquid Mud Tube). This section of cave was first surveyed by Tim Francis and Richard Carey in 2007 using compass and clino, but in constricted and very muddy conditions survey accuracy was known to be suspect. Mike Richardson and I then re-surveyed it using the Shetland Attack Pony (electronic compass and clino) and a laser range finder in 2008. This was potentially an accurate survey, but on processing the data I found anomalies with the compass readings of up to 10 degrees: the Pony had progressively lost its calibration over the course of the day, and this passage was surveyed last. The problem with the surveys and with the Pony in particular, gave Tim the inspiration for the passage name. I managed to combine the two surveys using some maths and artistic licence, the results of which have been on the published survey ever since. Now that I've added in the closed loop, What the Dobbins has moved, pushing the 3m Deep Pool underneath AWOL 2, suggesting these are the same geological feature. Nevertheless, I still need to properly resurvey What the Dobbins, and this is on my list of things to do.

H4x0r Tube (pronounced "Hacker"), formerly Mike's Tube, has finally been named by Mike Richardson. It has south westerly and north easterly extensions, both digs, neither currently active. I had previously thought this to be an ancient phreatic tube intercepted by East Passage, but now I'm not so sure. We now know of other potentially similar phreatic tubes in the area, such as within AWOL Aven, the crawls across Rift Series, Muddy Hell, and the buried passage below the south easterly H4x0r dig, that are indicative of contemporary inter-rift connections rather than ancient intercepted passages. The north westerly extension of H4x0r Tube is unsurveyed but turns sharp right as indicated on the survey. The exact position of the right angle shown is only approximate, and it is feasible (likely?) that this is within a rift feature, above the Waterworks and a projection of the East Passage rift below AWOL Aven. If true, H4x0r Tube is looking more like yet another contemporary inter-rift connection rather than an intercepted ancient phreatic tube, or perhaps at best an earlier development of the East Passage hydrology formed as East Passage cut downwards. A similar observation now also applies to Mud Out, a high level phreatic tube above Crystal Pool. The north easterly extension of Mud Out disappears into the top of the East Passage rift. Is Mud Out just another inter rift connection, or is it a phreatic inlet and an important key to the development of East Passage? Now that we know AWOL 3 is so much higher than Mud Out, does that disprove the latter conjecture?

Down Under is a little known series of passages reached by an awkward climb from East Passage, first explored by Mike Richardson and Ray Deazy (hence the antipodean name). It was surveyed using the Pony in 2008 with the help of Mike Richardson, but along with What the Dobbins suffered from compass calibration issues. The passages are interesting because there are two known entrances from Rift Series, one in the floor towards Zebra Aven, and one buried under the spoil from the south westerly H4x0r Tube dig. However, the surveyed passages of Down Under don't align with either of these features. This suggests that there may be a more extensive set of passages in this area, or simply that the Down Under survey would align to these features if the survey were more accurate. Down Under will be resurveyed in due course to answer this conundrum.

South Passage was fully surveyed in December 2010 with the DistoX with the help of Tim Francis and Brian Snell. This resulted in a significantly different understanding of the dip of this passage and established the sump as the deepest point in the cave at 108m above Ordnance Datum (mean sea level). Subsequently two digs have been started: the end sump and more recently Eliza sump. The latter was named because the bucket used to partially bail it had a hole. Neither is currently looking particularly promising digging options, indeed Eliza has since been shown to

close down (hmm – Eliza sump has no hole?).

Chuckle's Joke was surveyed using the DistoX in 2010 with the help of Mike Waterworth, shortly after the breakthrough at Chuckle Choke.

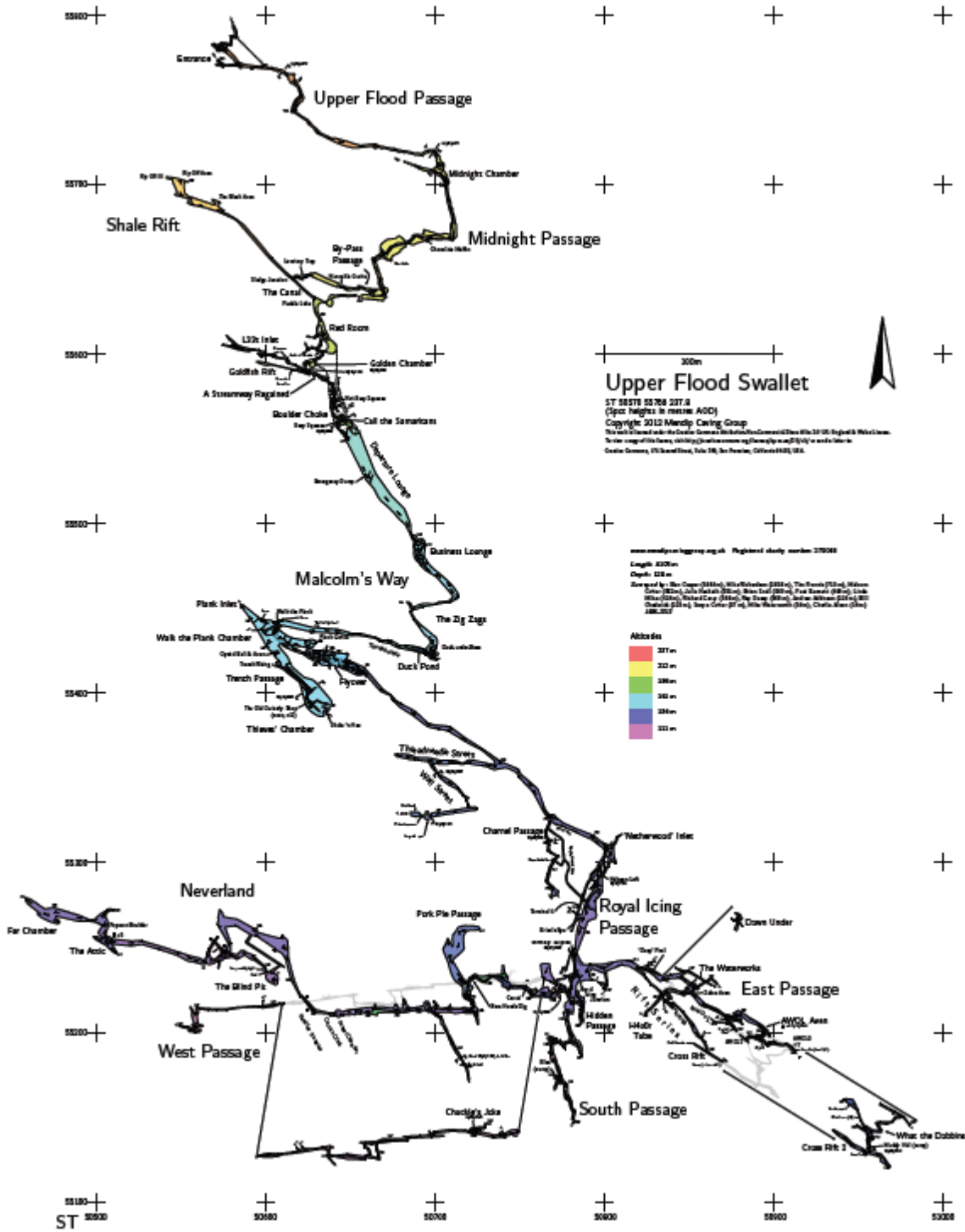
The start of Neverland was resurveyed using the DistoX in 2011 with the help of Andrew Atkinson and included the previously omitted Neverland Sump. An interpretation of the divers report published in the Cave Diving Group newsletter has also been sketched and added on, as well as a sketch of the Blind Pit which is still unsurveyed. The purpose of the resurvey was to confirm the location of the connection dig from West Passage. The resurvey was found to have good agreement with the original compass and clino survey (to about 60cm), and critically provided detail of the rift feature that we are digging into from below from the West Passage rift. The connection appears to require between one and two metres digging; one metre has so far been achieved, suggesting there is less than one metre to go.

The future

This brings the survey more or less to completion, in as much as all known parts of the cave are now included. The survey programme is far from finished, however. A small number of sketches need to be surveyed, a lot more detail could still be added to the passages (showing the presence and location of the stream for example), some very tight passages are yet to be surveyed, there is plenty of active digging steadily extending passages, and a small number of the individual subsurveys are known to be inaccurate. Specifically the inaccurate subsurveys are the Canal, Trench Passage, Thieves Chamber, Down Under and What the Dobbins, the last four due to calibration issues with the Pony.

To facilitate an on-going programme of resurveying, a network of fixed survey stations has been established throughout the cave, so that future surveys can be accurately tied back to existing survey data. A project is on-going to tie all existing surveys to this framework. A related project is the re-survey of the entrance series. A number of surveys of parts of the entrance series exist, notably some very high quality data dating from the 1970s performed by Willie Stanton. However, there are some discrepancies between all these data sets. New data that I have produced has confused, rather than clarified, the problem. My goal is therefore to re-survey some of these sections again in an attempt to reconcile the differences. This is unlikely to significantly change the visual appearance of the cave survey, but could potentially change our understanding of the absolute position of the deeper parts of the cave in relation to the surface coordinates. For example, some of the passages appear to track a number of faults shown on the six-inch geological map, but 20m out of alignment. It would be fascinating to see that alignment increase as we improve the survey accuracy.

For those receiving electronic versions I have attached the full survey. Editor



3. RESERVOIR HOLE - Cheddar Caves Press Release.

The "Tuesday Diggers" have found their way into the BIGGEST UNDERGROUND CHAMBER yet discovered underneath the Mendip Hills. Called "The Frozen Deep" by the discoverers, this chamber contains some of the most stunning calcite formations ever found in Underground Mendip, including two 5m tall pure white columns of calcite surrounded by pure white flowstone covering the walls and floor.

The six triumphant "diggers", who are well known in the world of Mendip Caving, include Martin Grass, Alison Moody, a retired teacher, two retired GPs, Dr. Pete Glanvill and Dr. Tony Boycott, Nigel Cox and Nick Chipchase, who celebrates his 65th birthday tomorrow.

The six of them have had exclusive access for the last 4 years from Longleat Estate to dig the "gated" Reservoir Hole, which Dr. Willy Stanton, as Lord Bath's Consultant Geologist, had previously looked after for Longleat Estate for many years. It lies 150m east of The Pinnacles in Cheddar Gorge and has a large main rift, which was discovered and named "Golgotha" by Dr. Stanton in 1969. Further major "finds" were made in 1970 and 1973, but progress thereafter was more limited.

Dr. Stanton, before his death, had suggested that the "diggers" concentrate on exploring a side passage, and eventually they broke through into a 20m long parallel rift, which they named "Great Expectations". Removing a large slab enabled them to crawl a further 15m into another chamber, 25m high and 20m long, which they named "Resurrection". Yesterday this led them to a loose boulder slope, which ended in a 12m vertical pitch.

Returning today, Tuesday 04 September, with rope and tackle, they descended the pitch into the largest chamber yet discovered under the Mendip Hills, being 50m to 60m in diameter and up to 30m in height and containing the most stunning calcite formations to be found in recent times in any Mendip cave.



Manganese stained formations in Jill's Slither & the Topless Dig in progress

I was lucky enough to have my first trip into Reservoir Hole with the Tuesday Diggers back in March 2012 when they were still trundling rocks through the boulder choke (very similar to our current dig in Bone Hole, although they had an undercut wall to follow all the way). Nick and Pete were kind enough to show me around the old cave (except "Potter's Heaven") before digging at the opposite end of the cave to "Topless Aven" in the "Silo" (where they had now decided to dig downwards having discovered that it extends under the covered reservoir and road!). I joined them again for single dates in April, May and July (when Léonie Woodward came with me and Pete to clear out the "Silo" after the shuttering had collapsed - funnily enough there hasn't been much interest in this dig recently).

Anyway it turns out that when we inspected the end of the "Topless Aven" dig in July we were only a couple of metres from the breakthrough into open passage at "Great Expectations" before missing out on the "Hard Times" ahead as the passage became low and boulder choked again. This brought them into "Resurrection" where the pitch stopped them due to a lack of ladders and Pete (who was in Iceland), but

they knew they had something big! The pitch has been named “WISh you were here” (after William Iredale Stanton).

The next week they descended into the large rift (over a big dodgy loose block - hence the platform was later added to take the ladder away from this) to discover that it continued to the right (past a big pillar, a triangular curtain which extends into a very fine narrow pillar and a large stalactite) into the huge chamber that is now “The Frozen Deep”. The chamber is filled with large boulders, making moving around it difficult, and some spectacular formations.



Nigel Cox exiting Topless Aven dig and the 5 metre pillars in The Frozen Deep

They returned again on Friday 7th September (I guess they couldn't wait for the following Tuesday) and were met by ITV's weatherman on their exit to announce the discovery to the world. At this time they were concentrating on surveying, taping and making a safe route around the chamber, which is where Chris Binding and I joined them two weeks later (on the Tuesday - a team of artists were painting by the entrance - I don't think they wanted to capture the moment of us changing...). Chris took a short ladder in to use on a big step in “The Frozen Deep” and I got the chance to be first down the far right corner, in the direction of the sump that was discovered later (I didn't push on, just checked that there were options to continue exploration - the sump is down an awkward ladder pitch in a dismal muddy hole, but has been dived by Pete, Chris and Rob Harper into a clear, flowing streamway).

The following week I helped Andrew Atkinson survey “South Passage” (a small muddy rift from near the entrance that would connect with “Golgotha” if it were dug through - still need to finish surveying this as the end was flooded) and “Golgotha” itself (a huge soaring rift with steeply sloping boulder floor that extends up to “Herbert's Attic” - where Willie Stanton had a dig that was heading down towards “The Frozen Deep”, but a long way above it). The “Topless Aven” dig extends along the edge of the “Golgotha” rift at a lower level, but isn't directly under the huge boulder pile.



Stalactites & Willie Stanton's pathway in Herbert's Attic at top of Golgotha

Surprisingly "The Frozen Deep" is covered in bat droppings, the skeletons of at least 3 bats (one was flying around whilst we were in there), but it seemed unlikely that they were coming in through the route we took - so how were they getting in? I haven't had a chance to go back since, but "digging" has mostly consisted of bolt laddering up the rifts that make up both ends of the chamber and the discovery of "The High Country" in October (which Nick describes as being more like OFD than Mendip) that extended the new passage to 580m (easily winning this year's JRat Digging Award) and took them back over "The Grand Gallery" (the dig is at the end of this passage) towards the surface (here they found a slug that was rescued and became the first to complete the through trip, but not a human sized exit).

More recent media interest involved the slight widening of "Hard Times" to get a LIDAR laser scanner into the chamber, the results of which were announced on BBC1's "The One Show", when Gavin Newman and Tom Chapman went in to film with the presenter Miranda Krestovnikoff and the team, and showed that the chamber had a floor area of 2900 square metres, whilst Gaping Gill is only 2700 (it does have more head room however!).



Bat bones & formations in The Frozen Deep

The cave is currently closed to tourist trips during bat hibernation and will reopen in April to groups of 3 along with a leader - but it's not been a bad effort from a team with an average age of 60!

News report <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSng3oIXOjc>

The “as it happened” write up <http://ukcaving.com/board/index.php?topic=14031.0>

Survey & fly-through video from LIDAR <http://cave-registry.org.uk/cheddarcatchment>

Descent 229 (Dec 2012/Jan 2013) has an 8 page write up by Pete Glanvill



Nick Chipchase in the rift above Dingley Dell & stalagmite in the High Country

STOP PRESS

I just had another free Tuesday and the team appreciated another set of hands to help carry scaffold bar and dive tank into the cave and as none of the others were keen to revisit I got to have a look at the sump in Dingley Dell. It proved to be quite an awkward muddy route, but the sump had completely filled the floor of the small, steeply sloping chamber (it had also probably been quite a bit higher when Cheddar Gorge was flooding - the Gorge was officially still closed and we could see where the infill along the edges of the tarmac had been scoured out and squash ball sized lumps of limestone covered most of the Show Caves parking - the resurgence was still pumping out masses of brown water). I guess there won't be any more diving for a while, until the water drops and the visibility improves.



Interesting stal covered in bat droppings and splash deposits in The Frozen Deep

I also looked up in the “High Country” where several ladders lead up to the rift which continues high and wide enough to walk back towards the reservoir, with plenty of botryoidal stalactite and moon milk - there must be an entrance somewhere up in the roof that the bats are getting in. They have a couple of smaller passages still to dig, otherwise it’s going to be more scaling the walls to find out what is at the top of the various rifts as they are too high to see clearly - they already have 120m of new passage for the next JRat Award!



Phreatic passage at the start of the High Country, above The Frozen Deep

Report & Photos by Mike Moxon

4. Members’ Weekend and Christmas Party 2012 by Leonie Woodward

The morning of Saturday 8th December saw a group of enthusiasts raring to get stuck in to the rope work training that John had kindly (bravely? foolishly?) offered to run. The venue, Black Cat Chamber in Gough’s, proved to be excellent. A day underground; in the warm, a short walk to the café/conveniences and no over suit to wash afterwards. Perfect!

Paul, Sarah, Ed, Tom and I are all at various stages of rigging/SRT experience, and John kept us all busy working on developing our skills; up and down the rope, changeovers, passing knots, improvising prussics as we ‘lost’ different jammers and rigging our own ropes.

Kev was keen to refresh his knowledge of mid-rope rescues and the rest of us became the obliging victims. I’m now feeling happy in the knowledge that he will be able to save me from any rookie errors I should make in Yorkshire at the end of January.

Having been evicted from the show cave at 4:30, we hopped in the cars in our lovely clean furrries and headed for the Cottage, passing substantially muddier Bone Holers on the way.

Back at the Cottage, Linda and the team seemed remarkably relaxed considering they had undertaken to provide around 30 of us with Christmas dinner. In spite of them smilingly sipping drinks and chatting in the kitchen, the

delicious aromas emanating from the two ovens and double barbecues reassured us. The timetable on the whiteboard explained their calm demeanours; all had been meticulously planned, to the minute, starting from early that morning.

While the rest of us got down to the serious business of drinking and discussing the day's events, the chefs dealt with mountains of veg and trays of tatties. All hands were on deck to clear the room and assemble the tables, courtesy of Biff. Candles and crackers were placed, and the food arrived. Here words fail me (almost). We were treated to a full Christmas dinner, with all the trimmings, and all cooked to perfection. A huge THANK YOU to everyone involved with this masterpiece of a feast.

Those of us who had not been part of the cooking team formed a willing washing-up squad, and the tables were soon cleared for the fun to begin. Table traversing, whatever the ladder lunacy is called and the mince-pie carton game provided much entertainment (for the spectators). The MCG supergun proved too much of a temptation for Kev, Russ and Tom to resist and various items were fired both inside and outside the cottage. I'm only glad that the aim of those operating said gun was shockingly poor. Had it been better, serious injury would undoubtedly have resulted.

A bunch of tired, happy and seriously full cavers headed for their bunks in the early hours of the morning. Roll on Christmas 2013!

5. Log book reports

Battery Swallet report 22/11/12 by Miguel Tome

Today was a trip down Battery Swallet with four of us; James Hall and I arrived early and were by the entrance by 4:30. There was the normal winter stream (1 inch deep, 3 inches wide). We went to the dig face and hand chiseled some mudstone, then we started clearing the chamber just before the digface. We pulled about 20 drums back to the end of Frog's Passage. As we were pulling the last drum the water level started rising and within 10 seconds the whole passage was full of water with more than 4 inches deep, running down fast as hell. We started making a move back out, climbing Mick's Cascades wasn't easy with all that water pouring down the stream, by the time that we got into the turning chamber we could see The Tunnel in flood conditions in almost a third of the air space, the "flat down crawl" was just scary to me, Lol.

James mentioned that for a minute he was almost swimming in the entrance passage. Well, we got the chamber cleared, that's what counts, and we had lot of fun also. Unfortunately Mark Ward couldn't make up to the Mendip's due to road closed because the flooding.

From a complete beginner by Danielle, aged 12

It was Saturday 4th August 2012 I arrived at the cottage welcomed by warm smiles and welcoming gestures. We headed off to the dairy farm and everyone (who wanted to) joined in with a photograph as it was Swildon's Hole 50th anniversary, people with the dedicated t-shirt stood at the front while the rest stood at the back. After that Andrea took me and the rest of the group to Goatchurch Cavern. We put on our gear then headed into the cave, at first I have to admit I was a bit weary as it was my first time caving, though it took me time I eventually got used to it. It was very interesting the shape and size of it all and my age and size came in handy when we came to a place in the cave called the drain-pipe (a small squeeze that looks like a drain-pipe) after a bit more time in the cave we decided to go take a look in another. Sidcot Swallet! The cave dreaded by all spider dislikes'. I didn't realise how much I disliked spiders until I came face-to-face (literally) with one or should I say four and a sack of spider eggs!!!:C When heading into the cave I only noticed one and it was not a pretty sight. It had a yellow back and it was big and fat, which made it all the worse seeing four of them!! It was only on the way out that I really noticed them. First of all I saw two of them with the sack of spider eggs and i got a bit emotional because images of them touching me and climbing up my neck came into my mind. when I got past them there were two more on either side of me and one where I was supposed to put my hand and so I got more emotional but Andrea and my dad helped me through it and I finally managed to get up and out. It was a great experience and I'd like to thank everyone for giving me a great time despite my emotional breakdown. Finally, I would really recommend it! Xxx

6. Library Additions

CNCC Rigging Guide Volumes 1 and 2, 2012 – *produced by the CNCC Technical Group* - is a compilation of the original CSCC rigging guides 1-3 with some new routes included. The first 11 pages are devoted to rope care, conservation, rigging techniques and safety. It covers 34 caves with photographs of entrances, information on location, access, route descriptions, equipment and topo diagrams. The guide is beautifully presented with large print on glossy paper, but one potential problem concerns the topos which do not always show the name of the cave (they always occur at the end of their cave description which means they sometimes occur on the page facing the following cave description).

The cost of the initial and replacement anchor programme, including on-going testing and routine maintenance is financed by the sale of CNCC Rigging Guides and rigging cards; the cost of this rigging guide (£15) will pay for three anchor placements!

Cambridge Underground 2012 – contains a report by our very own Mike Richardson on his trips into Kaninchenhohle during the 2009 CUCC Expedition to Austria. (*donated*).

Descent Index Online – A new online index is now available on the Descent website at www.wildplaces.co.uk. You can search article titles, authors, surveys & area maps, and view the contents of each issue – a very useful facility.

7. Meets List 2013

Date	Cave
January 5	Eastwater Cavern 13 Pots
January 19	3 rd Saturday Lionel's Hole
January 25/26/27	Yorkshire Meet
February 2	Manor Farm Swallet
February 16	3 rd Saturday Swildon's Hole
March 2	Hillier's Cave
March 16	3 rd Saturday Ladder and line training. Probationary Members
Easter	South Wales Meet
April 6	GB Main Chamber
April 20	Beginner's Day

8. Social calendar

March 2	Malaysian Evening
March 22	AGM and Dinner.

Full diary details are available along with contact information are available on the MCG website.
<http://www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk>