

MCG News

Newsletter of the
Mendip Caving Group

Golden Chamber, Upper Flood Swallet

Number 336
September 2006

www.m-c-g.org.uk

Founded 1954

Major breakthrough made in Upper Flood

At last. 38 years after Upper Flood was first discovered, a major breakthrough has been made. And I mean major. The story begins with Tim's report of a digging trip in Upper Flood on 08/08/2006

Upper Flood: the trip before the breakthrough

by Tim Francis

08/08/2006: Ok, just to keep people updated on what's going on down under the Blackmoor Valley. We (Mike Richardson, Peat Bennett, Tim Francis) had another successful digging session on Sunday 06/08/2006. The draught at the entrance was really strong and blowing grass about. Anyhow we didn't have the drill with us but we still managed to chisel the last breakthrough squeeze wide enough for Mike to fit through. He's taken a few photos although mainly of Peat's legs digging the next squeeze.

At the top of the choke we had seen what looked like a large void. Peat dug through a gap between the solid wall on the right and a house sized boulder to squeeze through. Voids continue up but we chose to follow the draft. Down and to the right was a narrow body sized crack on the fault. I dropped down into this and excavated a way forward into a pile of jammed boulders and fault breccia. A hole was soon opened up with a storming draft coming out of it. A session of boulder juggling and kerplunk and we were through. Dropping feet first you pop out into a solid piece in the choke. Its actually a huge jammed boulder over a 15ft drop. This is just free climbable. Winding our way down we squeezed through a Swildons'esque flowstone gap between boulders and a sporting tight squeeze to

From the Editor

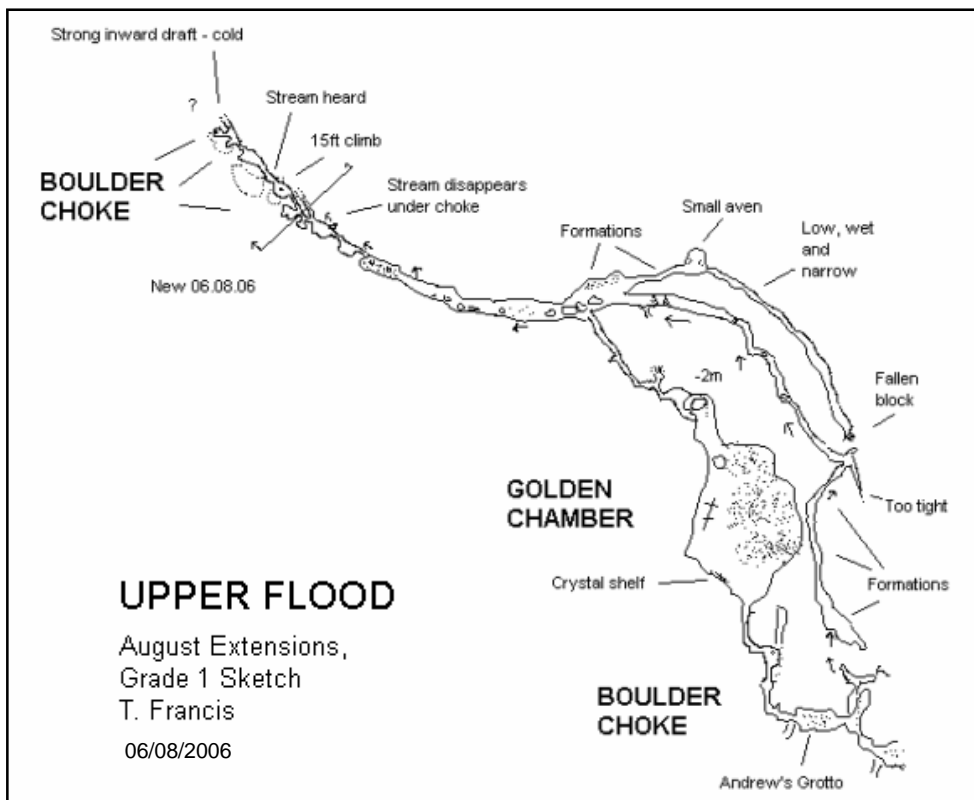


What an eventful few months, both for me and the Group. I reached 60 years old and retired in July, became a grandma in August, then this exciting breakthrough in Upper Flood in September. Can it get any better?

Members have never tired of digging in Upper Flood over the years and it in turn has rewarded the diggers with a breakthrough every now and then. However, this has to be the one that proves all the speculation about there being a master cave was correct.

Well done all the diggers for their persistence and determination

Yvonne Rowe



In this issue

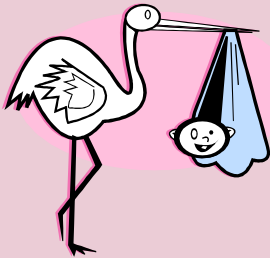
- 1-3 Upper Flood
- 4 Half Yearly
- 4 Cottage work update
- 5 Social event
- 6-7 Kefalonia 2006
- 8 Group News

MCG Doings

Former members

Those who remember **Louise Curley**, who only left MCG last year, will be pleased to hear she is now expecting twins.

Marcus and Zoe Ward are now the proud parents of Jessica Sorrel Ward, born 19/08/2006. Which means Yvonne is now a grannie.



roomier stuff below. To the right you can clearly hear the streamway but it will need some boulder removal to reach. Down slope to the left we followed the fault controlled right hand wall as best we could. The choke on the right looks horrendous! At the end things got a bit too necky for our liking so we called it a day at a muddy area in the choke. There is a gap between boulders ahead that chucks out a good draft so we certainly have finished with the place yet.

I suspect we have added another 70ft to the cave. Up in the roof and in the floor we rummaged around in the choke. Its all a bit nasty but don't think there is a way on. The top of the choke has some monster boulders resting on thinly bedded stuff so take care. The boulders are much larger than the Red Room choke and the whole thing feels much more like Wales than Mendip. Its all quite unusual and actually quite intimidating in places. I'm really hoping that we will get passed this area soon and back into some nice streamway again. Sketch survey attached. In actual fact the whole thing should trend in pretty much a straight line from the T-Junction below Golden Chamber as its all on the same fault line from there.

The best prospects look like at the far end by the draft, but perhaps finding a way back to the stream. The hope for the latter is that it might be in something more solid. On the next trip we will hilti out the breakthrough squeeze, and several other squeezes beyond which only Peat and I will probably pass at the moment. (Mike did his best with a chisel but it needs some persuasion).

The discovery of the Blackmoor Valley Master Cave

by Tim Francis

Yesterday (10/09/2006) Mike Richardson, Julie Hesketh and I did another one of those Sunday afternoon sessions in Upper Flood. Hopes for another breakthrough were high but nothing on the scale of what we have actually found. Mike busied himself widening the most recent batch of squeezes - these are now passable - whilst Julie and I headed to the end. This was a nasty looking bit of choke that Peat Bennett and I left last time. The expected way on looked much too dodgy but I spotted a small crack on the right hand side. This was excavated and hammered for 30 minutes or so before a desperate vertical squeeze was forced. Julie followed after I had confirmed that the breakthrough really was worth seeing.

I will attempt a description of the Blackmoor Valley Master Cave....

We clambered down the gap between the choke and the solid wall. The streamway could be heard below and it is quite pretty. Then a sort of horizontal shuffle pops you out onto a boulder balcony. Ahead is a huge chamber / passage 4 to 5 times the size of Midnight Chamber. That's probably a conservative estimate. Essentially what we'd entered was a monster trunk passage going from left to right. We descended the boulder pile, whooping and exclaiming. The passage then heads off, roughly along the fault-controlled direction of the dig. In places it is 50 feet or more high. Large flowstone cascades come in from the left and right, and there are mini gour pools and ripples aplenty. The roof is also well decorated in places although it is more curtains and chunky stalactites than straws. Then we just stomped on downstream.

After the chamber-like section we entered big straight passage that zigzags a bit. It is still very high but maybe only 5 feet wide. Again it pops out into wider stuff with fossil passage in the roof. We kept at stream level where each time you thought it would close down it opens out again. One section is crawling in the streamway and it looks like it might back up a bit in wet weather. After that you continue down the dip with the odd climb down boulders and one nice flowstone traverse. A small inlet comes in on the right (not explored) and another inlet high up on the left trickles in over a flowstone cascade (Netherwood Inlet?). This one looks muddier but pushable. After 25 minutes (!) we dropped down a small climb and the passage pinches out into a tube-like meander. The rock is black and slippery but the void too tight to pass. The air is fresh and the stream passes through easily so it will be hilti / hammerable.

On the way out we briefly looked at a couple of high level bits but nothing has been looked at in detail due to lack of time. Also water levels were extremely low so it is hard to determine if there are other inlets coming in. Anyhow I think we've more than doubled the length of the cave with the old cave now just the entrance series. It is hard to say but we must be looking at 300-400 yards of new passage, maybe more. It doesn't descend that steeply (50 yards?) so it shouldn't sump off left. I would now describe Upper Flood as a sporting cave akin to Longwood / Swildons / GB rather than a crawl to a dig.

Gobsmacked.

The caving trip of my life

by Julie Hesketh

To say I am flabbergasted is an understatement. Who would have believed that we would make such a find in Upper Flood! Yesterday (10/09/2006) was the caving trip of my life! I would have been happy with 10 additional feet of boulder choke - what I had expected to find. The dig into the boulder choke was impressive enough and there is a fair old amount of (pretty unpleasant) passage between Golden Chamber and the latest breakthrough point. So to find what we did was just unbelievable!!!! Hundreds of metres of yomping passage in Upper Flood! The new section of Flood partly reminded me of GB in parts (in scale and prettiness) and in parts is reminiscent of Longwood (the stream) and the rift-like nature of the final part of the cave is very typically "Upper Flood like" as the stream heads off into a dark rift ahead (though definitely a "going" rift).

On reflection what strikes me is how few inlets we found. During the trip we discussed whether we had caved beyond the reaches of Waterwheel etc - it felt like it in distance but there were no obvious streamways coming in other than the two small ones Tim mentioned. This didn't seem to be enough to explain the very large passage size in parts of the new cave. Low flow might explain it in part - water levels were very low indeed - just a trickle into Midnight Chamber (on our way in through the now "entrance series!!!) Perhaps inlets will be more obvious in wetter weather. Otherwise, perhaps there is yet still more big stuff to be found????!!

The entrance into the new stuff is quite intimidating - a very tight (even for me and Tim) squeeze down a slot which we hammered to make it passable. I was pushing bone when passing the squeeze. I am sure that this can me hiltid or hammered out. There is another smallish squeeze past the breakthrough point too and so a bit of engineering will be needed there as well.

Some of the pretties are outstanding and will need taping off. Some of the calcite flow is pretty too, so we will need to sort taping out soonish.

Nice timing for the BCRA conference in 2 weekends time!!!

Upper Flood / Blackmoor Master Cave - next steps

The priorities are to widen the tightest squeezes, then tape off the best of the formations to prevent damage. There is lots of photography to complete as well.

Tim will be on Mendip this weekend (16 and 17/09/2006) to commence this work. The final squeeze is horrendously tight but a drill and chisel will sort it. There is one squeeze over a boulder just after the 10ft drop that needs sorting but that will be a five minute job.

Mike Richardson, Linda Milne and others had (prior to the major breakthrough) already started the task of linking Tim's survey of recent discoveries to Malcolm Cotter's survey. If anyone wants to help with surveying, please contact Mike or Tim.

Training Weekend 4t/5th October 2006

This is a very special opportunity to receive professional training free of charge. John Crowsley will be coming all the way to Nordrach Cottage from Scotland to take a weekend of training geared specifically to MCG.



Last year's session was extremely valuable and I would recommend that anyone interested gets their name on the list. It may be possible to come along to the classroom session even if you are unable to make the practical sessions. Details are as follows:

Date: November members' weekend, 4th and 5th November 2006

Saturday am: Session in the library on cave awareness and environmental factors. (covering subjects such as pre-trip checks, underground emergency gear, underground hazards, conservation and access, cave environment, technical skills, accident procedure).

Saturday pm: cave trip covering basic rope work.

Sunday: cave trip covering a subject chosen by the trainees.

Contact Linda Gates

MRO Cave Rescue Workshop

GB Cavern
Saturday November 4th

Sign in at Charterhouse Centre Car park from 9.30am Please do not park by GB - transport from Charterhouse to the cave will be available.

Exercise will take place in parties of 6 at intervals throughout the morning (and afternoon as numbers dictate) and will involve many aspects relating to cave rescue, including surface procedures, first aid, casualty care, hot air kits/entox/oxygen, stretchers, communications, vertical hauling and more.

There will be a debrief in the Hunters Lodge at 8pm. In the meantime, if there are any matters relating to cave rescue training within your club please let me know and MRO will be happy to arrange a practice, kit workshop or whatever suits your needs.

Gonzo
(Mark Lumley)
MRO Training Officer

Mendip Caving Group Half-Yearly Meeting, 7th October 2006

The half-yearly meeting will take place at Nordrach Cottage on Saturday, 7th October 2006 at 2.30 pm.

Unlike the formal AGM, the mid-year meeting is informal. There is no fixed agenda, no Officers Reports, no Minutes to agree. Although I suspect Upper Flood and the Blackmoor Master Cave might be discussed.

The purpose of the meeting is to give members an opportunity to raise any subject they wish to discuss.

Please try to come along. We need to hear members ideas and opinions. If not, you may well get what the committee think you want—you have been warned!

There will be a social event in the evening —see poster on opposite page for full details. We are trying a new venue out this year. It's being held at the White Hart Inn, Axbridge, not far from the A38. Food is available at the bar. Start time is 7.30pm or alternatively meet at the cottage at 7pm.

Cottage work update

by Doug Harris

An update on the work carried out so far, especially to the Library Roof!

Well it was a bigger job than we expected! (anything to do with the cottage normally is). Friday night (18/08/2006) the scaffold was put up. Then Saturday morning the fun started! (not).

We had to remove half of the porch roof to clear out all the debris. The ridge was carefully dismantled. The tiles were not nailed down! Then the tiles were put back on and cut where appropriate to overhang the gully.

Sunday was spent cementing those tiles on.

The floodlight over the lawn was disconnected and removed. One side of the bracket holding the light was broken! (It would have fallen sooner or later). I plan to fit a new one just below the window in the Foreman's Lounge.

After the weekend, Mark Ward and myself spent another day at the Cottage:

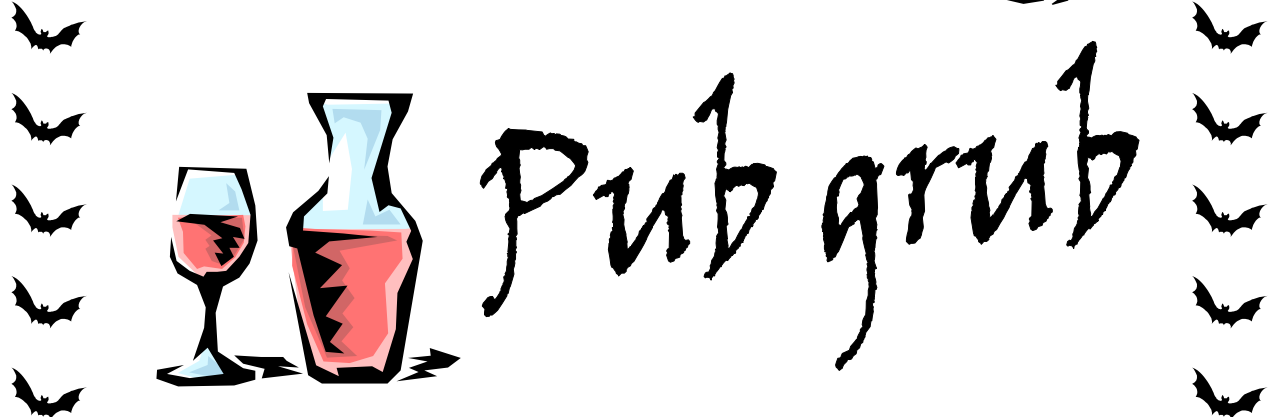
- The gully on the roof nearest the front door is now complete.
- The gate post has been straightened and a latch fitted, concreted into the ground.
- Vegetation around the front gate and wall has been removed/trimmed back.
- Reflectors have been fitted to the gate and the posts.
- The BT junction box outside the lounge window has had all timber removed from around it.
- A replacement 5' tube has been fitted to the light above the computer desk.

Thanks team for your help and support and to Joan for making the tea and supplying us with chocolate biscuits and providing encouragement when needed.



Mendip Caving Group
Half Yearly
Beer & Skittles
evening

Sat 7th October
7.30pm



The White Hart Inn
Old Coach Road, Axbridge, BS26 2EE

For further information from Linda on 01420 562315 or
linda.milne@btinternet.com



Kefalonia 7th to 20th July 2006

By Roy Kempston

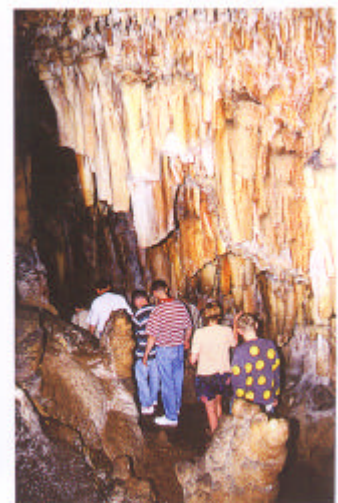
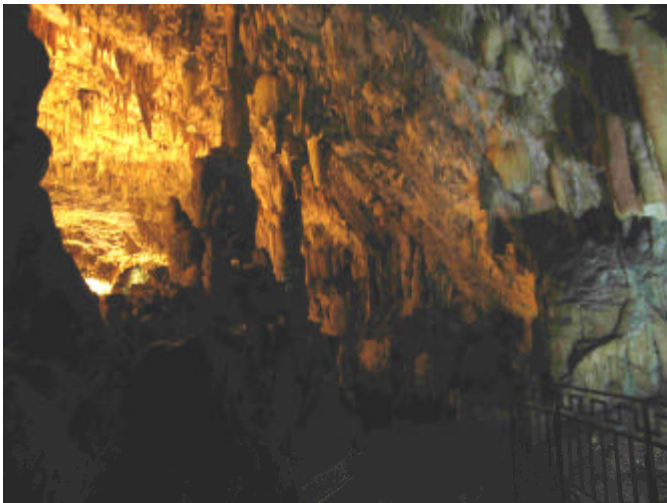
If there any readers out there who can remember reading of my caving exploits whilst on holiday in Ireland in 2002 and in Tuscany in 2004, they may want to stop reading now ! However for all those readers with a less than good memory (ie one that has not survived the repeated overdoses of tea and beer over the years) may find my new missive for the MCG newsletter of some interest, as it details a visit to two showcaves made during our family holiday, in the Greek Ionian Islands !

For this year's family holiday we (Roy, Fiona, Ellen, Neil and Nicholas) travelled to Kefalonia, for our first holiday together out of school summer holiday, which was great because it was not too crowded (and it was cheap enough to have some money left for wine and beer !). I have to plead forgiveness now that this article does not contain any mention of any real caving, but we did visit two showcaves. Note for all those who get bored easily, the cave information starts at the asterix (*) below.

Once we had decided to go to Greece, a long time was then spent researching for the island that we wanted to visit – there are lots of them, and separately we had been to a few, so we settled on one that we could fly to direct (that is if the co-pilot turns up for the flight !). Kefalonia is the largest of the Ionians with an area of nearly 900 square km, and is rugged and mountainous, allowing us to make plans to cover most parts of it in two weeks. We then had to decide where to stay on the island, so off we Googled – but at this point started to discover that Kefalonia is not the only spelling for the island (let alone any towns, villages or places to visit there). There are also Kefallonia, Kefallinia, Cephalaria, Cephallonia, etc, which requires numerous searches. We finally settled on the west of the island between the mountains and the sea, beneath the highest point, Mount Enos at 1628m. The villa that we finally selected was about 15km south of Argostoli airport (just below halfway between mid north/south), and was about 150m high up in the hills, which provided cool afternoons and night breezes.

The patio was at the rear of the villa, and on our first evening we were relaxing on the patio, following a meal, as dusk started. As we sat admiring the views we became aware of bats – these were feeding on insects above the pool. We were entertained nightly by the bats feeding as close as arms length away, a wonderful display of acrobatics as the insects ducked and weaved, just for our enjoyment !

* After a few days to relax following the journey we prepared to visit the Drogarati Cave (or Drongarati, or Dhrogarati), which was about 20km from the villa. The drive was very interesting on the narrow winding roads that we shared with car-driving Greeks – they seem to be very Jekyll and Hyde characters, who out of the car are courteous and helpful but once behind a wheel explain why Greece is 2nd in the EU motoring fatalities league ! Drogarati is estimated to have developed over 150 million years, but was discovered about 300 years ago, when one of the region's many earthquakes opened up the present entrance. The way in is down a steep series of about 120 steps into a cool fissure, which then leads to a viewing platform overlooking the huge chamber from high above. The cathedral-like chamber covers about 900 m² and is full of large formations and straws, with the largest collections separately lit, bringing out the textures and colours. More steps lead down to the floor of the cave, which due to the excellent acoustics has been levelled to allow occasional concerts to be held, including one by Maria Callas. The visit is self-guided and costs about €4 to enter, which is worth the money just to cool down.





Once back to the oven (sorry, the car) it is only about 4km to Melissani cave, (entrance fee about €5). This cave is estimated to be at least 30,000 years old, with stalactites estimated to be 20,000 years old, and has been open to the public since the 1960s. Stairs lead down to a long sloping tunnel, (which looks very blasted), that arrives at a platform overlooking the large underground lake. The roof of the chamber is open to the sky courtesy of the 1953 earthquake, providing shafts of light that turn the water a brilliant turquoise. The water (up to 35m deep) in the cave is brackish, and is made up of seawater that comes over 15km from the west of the island, mixes with percolating water and then enters the sea via the Karavomilos lake, one meter below and a few hundred meters to the east.



The lake is explored by boat, with the aid of a boatman/guide, who provides the curt commentary and offers to take photos for you (there's a convenient place for tips !). It's not a long trip, but it covers rowing across the main chamber into a narrow channel, which is then traversed with haul ropes. Excavations in the 1960s found a number of interesting items including a very risqué Pan, thought to date from a few hundred years BC.

The seawater in the cave enters from near Argostoli at the Katavothres which were mills driven by the water flow, but this came to an end after the 1953 earthquake when the flow was disrupted.

some of them: <http://www.showcaves.com/english/gr/karst/Katavothres.html>. There is a good drawing and explanation of the water densities and their effect upon the flow rates.

Back in 1963 there was an investigation by Austrian geomorphologists using purple dye in the water to find that it travelled through, mixing with rainwater and ending up rushing into the sea, taking two weeks to make the journey across the island. The experiment was verified by using radioisotopes.



For those who want to know more, there are plenty of websites (very useful to any readers who have become armchair cavers), remembering the usage of various names, and there are also a number of other caves scattered over the island including ones at:

Fiskardo - the caves situated on the hill of Spiliovouno are sites of archaeological interest.

Lixouri - Dracospelia cave (the cave of the dragon), located to the South.

Argostoli - Agios Gerasimos cave, situated 3km from the town, where Agios Gerasimos, the island's patron saint, led a frugal life before settling in the Valley of Omalon.

Sami - Zervati cave, Karavomylos area, 18m deep and 75m long, features two small lakes whose banks support aquatic

plants rarely encountered in Greece. Not open to the public.

Sami - Aggalaki cave, found in the area of Poulata, is surrounded by fourteen other caves. It has a 50m deep cauldron-like opening, and comprises a lake with a surface area of 3,000 m² approximately, and a subterranean karst branch that extends over some 8,000 m². The cave is not open to the public.

Skala - Sakkos cave is a site of archaeological interest, found at the location that bears the same name, between Skala and the Temple of Apollo. It consists of two cavities linked by a small tunnel. It has yielded findings attesting to its use by prehistoric peoples.

During the rest of our holiday we did a lot of walking including numerous hill villages and the limestone peak, Mount Enos at 1628m. Kefalonia is superb, with all of the limestone and wide variety of terrain and views of other islands, and at the moment is not too developed. There are loads of lovely beaches, good indigenous wine and lots of history. There is also Captain Corelli and his mandolin, but that's another story.