

# MCG News

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## The good 'new days' in Upper Flood Swallet

by Tim Francis

We'd all agree that 2006 is turning to be an exceptionally tumultuous year for the MCG but I think I would concur with what Malcolm Cotter so presciently said in the 50th anniversary year: these really are the "Good new days". The following is a quick résumé of where we are at with the extensions in Upper Flood, written whilst I have a spare weekend above ground and out of the office. In summary, based upon our rough survey notes, it seems we are already looking at a cave length in the region of two kilometres. And I can guarantee that there is plenty more to find yet, even before we get into long term digging projects.

### The best trip ever

As 2006 has progressed we had been making steady progress in the choked filled passage beyond Golden Chamber. A strong digging team, the core being Doug Harris, Mike Richardson, Mark Ward, Peat Bennett and I, kept at it week after week. Despite the uncertain stability of the terminal choke we were convinced that we would eventually pass the boulders into proper passage beyond. On Sunday 6th August Mike, Peat and I had turned round after our latest mini breakthrough at a nasty looking boulder collapse. We had left the safety of the solid fault wall on the right and cautiously peered ahead into a jumble of rocks. Some of the collapse looked quite recent so despite the huge draft pouring out of the gaps between the rocks we weren't too confident of the next steps.

The breakthrough trip came on the next trip on Sunday 10th September, a snatched visit the day after Jonathan Robert's wedding. Mike, Julie Hesketh and I thought we'd do a quick Sunday tour of the new bits to assess what was to be done. MCG Newsletter 336 has the breathless accounts of the breakthrough itself so a paragraph from my log book should suffice:

"Mike busied himself chipping away at some of the squeezes whilst Julie and I carried on to the choke at the end. Scooped some mud to get into the loose choke. But the hole Peat and I had spotted was too dodgy. Down on the right I spotted a slot between boulders. We spent an hour or so clearing out rocks from the floor. I then dropped through. A route could be followed between the choke and the solid wall. Passed some flowstone and the stream could be heard. A bit more sideways wriggling and I'd emerged at the edge of a huge passage. I ran back to get Julie. After some more calcite chipping she squeezed through. We then stomped off downstream and were aghast at the size of the place...".

No doubt everyone will make the trip for themselves but unbelievably even at a reasonable pace it is 25 minutes of caving to the end of the breakthrough passage. And that's not your usual Mendip 25 minutes of crawling and squeezing. Most of it is walking-sized with the roof sometimes soaring to 30ft high or more. On a subsequent trip by Mike and I the following week we ran off 550m of survey which lay at the top end of our 300-500m estimate.

### A quick description

The passage starts off as a steeply descending canyon with flowstone all on the left hand wall. The floor is made up of a jumble of boulders and you don't actually drop back to stream level for several minutes. It then gets a bit Waterwheely before breaking out into walking sized streamway. The passage gradient is very shallow at this point and it feels more like a Welsh cave. In the crawly bit a small inlet enters on the right but it soon closes down. The main streamway zigzags a bit with a few strike orientated passages but it turns back onto the SSE trend at a

### From the Editor



Wow! What a lot is going on Upper Flood-wise. So much, in fact, that this newsletter is almost taken over by it. As a result, I am having to leave some articles and other bits and pieces until the next newsletter. My apologies to all those concerned.

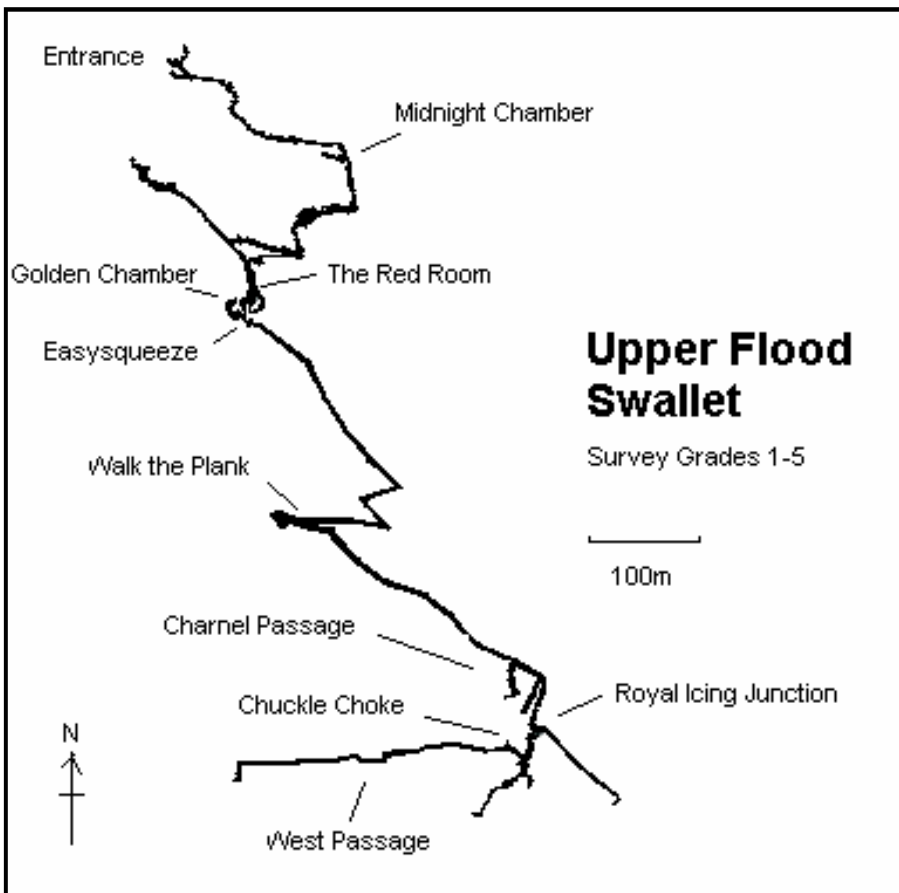
Just as I finish this newsletter comes news of a roof fall in Upper Flood. No harm done, but a close shave apparently. As it happens, I spent yesterday at Inglesport buying darren drums and filling them with kit for an Upper Flood rescue dump in the new extensions. They could have waited for me to deliver it to Mendip!

One more bit of news - I hear a rumour BCA insurance rates for 2007 remain unchanged.

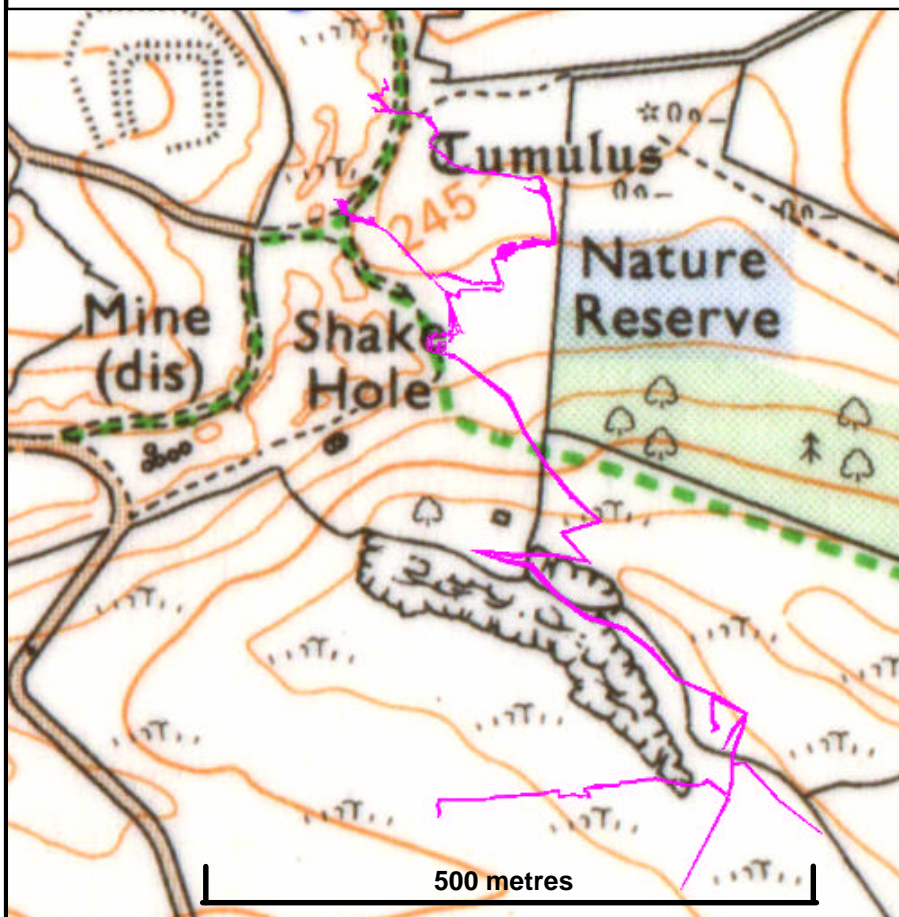
**Yvonne Rowe**

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Above—grade 1-5 survey showing named passages  
 Below—Upper Flood in relation to surface features



large chamber “Walk the Plank”, so named because of a sticking slab of rock in the floor. This is the largest chamber in the cave so far. A huge bank of black and white flowstone sweeps in from the right and ahead is a fine hidden gallery. A real treat for the photographers.

Below “Walk the Plank” you need to scramble through boulders before you get back down to stream level. It continues low at first but soon pops out again. At several points there are flyover passages above, which can be entered from time to time. In fact much of the ceiling is a false floor. We have taped off the high level route as it’s merely a duplication of the stream level route. After several hundred metres the passage narrows briefly before popping out in a high narrow canyon. Up on the right is the only side passage of note we have found. This is a muddy up and down tube called “Charnel Passage”. A 15ft rope climb assists the ascent into a higher level. This is a descending bedding plane which can be seen to continue. It’s an obvious dig that we will return to once the downstream leads have been completed. Our hope is that it will connect with something under Charterhouse Rakes and perhaps the Charnel Shaft discovery of 1963

Another 50m from Charnel Passage and a wet cascade clatters in from the left. You need to crawl underneath at floor level and I reckon we’ll get quite a soaking here in the winter months. Another 50m or so and the passage appears to pinch out. A short climb drops into what feels like the old Upper Flood. A black squeezy tube can be followed to an ‘up-and-over’ rift before it gets too tight. The stream can be seen to continue, and we reckon that some hammer work and hilti-ing should yield dividends.

**Potential leads in the first 550m section**

On the 30th September, whilst the others were looking at Charnel

Passage, Mike and I did a thorough recce of all the new passage. We were reasonably clean so we were able to keep grubby prints to a minimum. Nothing goes apart from those listed below. All the 'holes' above the flowstone cascades are actually nothing. The water just seems to dribble in. We took a detailed set of notes and taped off as much as we could until we ran out tape. For reference these are the points of interest.

[1] Upslope just after the entry point into the big stuff. Someone needs to climb up the boulders to the roof level. Funny that we've avoided it so far.

[2] Stream inlet at the first sharp left bend. This constantly runs but the water wells out of a muddy floor. The water could come from Blackmoor Swallet but I'm now thinking that the Blackmoor Swallet stream comes in further on.

[3] Second right turn. Above the flowstone boss is a hole. To climb this we will need to remove wellies and oversuits so it should be left to when things have quietened down.

[4] "Walk the Plank" chamber. Where the big black and white flowstone cascade is; it's the sharp left on the survey (dodgy surveying here though). There is a stream inlet high on the right that ends in a muddy tube. This is diggable. Again the Blackmoor Swallet / Waterwheel area looks a possible source. Also here is an alcove high up in the roof, some 40ft up, which is maybe worth a maypole. Brian Snell took a look and says that its just an alcove.

[5] Charnel Passage. High level inlet on the right approx 39m upstream from running inlet (the constantly running stream that comes in near the end [6 below]). It is very, very muddy so best left as an option for a group who are not looking at the pretties. It drafts slightly and the end is a gently sloping bedding plane with plenty of airspace. Odd really as you need to climb up a 15ft handline to get to the top.

[6] Bottom Inlet. On the left just before the end where the stream cascades in. This is diggable, muddy and will probably need a few straws to be knocked off I'm afraid. I have a suspicion that the water comes from the Ubley Warren / Nettle Pot area. There's a gloopy area just where the farm track drops into the valley.

[7] The stream sink at the end. This must be worth a dig in the near future as you can see the passage widening slightly. It will need a drill, hammer and chisel and probably dry weather. I suspect it will get rather grim in the winter.

### **Surely not more passage?**

Well you'd think that was enough to be going on with, and that's where we left it on the breakthrough day. On the next couple of trips we started a rough survey for the BCRA Hidden Earth Mendip Round Up and also a spot of digging in Charnel Passage. On the 30th September Bill Chadwick and I thought we'd better tie in the Charnel Passage entrance to a known survey station whilst the others were digging. Near the bottom where the passage appeared to close down I spotted a choke in the roof that looked pushable, just by the survey station. A quick wriggle and I was up into walking sized stuff. I wandered off for a couple of minutes and then ran back to Bill. We had another monster lead that appeared to fly right over the streamway. This was getting ridiculous. We quickly knocked off the survey legs back and into Charnel Passage. The others were easily persuaded that walking passage was preferable to a muddy bedding plane.

So off we went again. The first 50m is a narrow rift type affair where you need to traverse in places. It looks like it is going to close down but an ascending rubble slope between two walls suddenly pops you out into huge stuff again. The passage here is completely different to the rest of Upper Flood. We're now in the Black Rock Limestone proper and it feels like the section below Shatter Pot in Swildons. We just could not believe it. There's a major junction here for the first time, and clearly marked by a great pile of white flowstone: Royal Icing Junction. We went left.

This section has a phreatic sumpy type feel. The floor is wet mud which has already become bit of a wallow. Off to the sides are one or two oxbows but nothing too substantial. The main route heads up over a fractured boulder pile before becoming a fine high canyon. We needed to traverse quite high off the floor where it's a bit wider. A few more corners and all we had left was a small claustrophobic tube. We pushed this downslope for 20m or so before deciding that the air was too grim to continue. The air was really dead and I don't hold out much prospects for much more passage. On a subsequent trip party members felt really sick so I think this is one to avoid for now.

We then went upslope from Royal Icing Junction and carefully climbed a delightful flowstone covered boulder pile. This was taped off on the next trip. Up and to the left behind the boulder is a massive calcited choke in a narrow rift. We've had a good rummage around in the choke including climbing right to the top but it all closes down. It now needs taping and cleaning. Back below the boulder on the other side of the 'shoulder' is a view down into a fantastic Christmas like grotto. The formations here are exquisite and it makes for a tranquil spot to sit and admire what Upper Flood has to offer. In the floor Doug spotted a small hole and carefully dropped down into a continuation. This starts to get small and tube like. Up on the left was another extremely well decorated but small rift which should be left well alone. The main passage continues down into the floor and at first glance seemed to close down at a muddy dig. However I spotted a roof tube and a technical climb beyond, which

bypassed the low dig. There is a light connection and the two could easily be connected. Beyond was about another 50m of crawling in a muddy streamlet a bit like the approach to Blue Pencil. There were a couple of pools before the end but it doesn't look that promising. The air was a tad stale and the passage has a flood prone feel.

By this time we were all rather tired so to be honest were hoping to head home. However once back at the large boulder and flowstone slope area, a window down into yet another passage was spotted. A quick scramble down a flowstone slope and we were off again. (On the left is an extremely well decorated low wet crawl that we have taped off immediately; I suggest that this should not be pushed without a completely clean change of clothing.)

### **West Passage**

A low arch in the floor seemed to draft and we were soon enthusiastically wriggling over mud banks. Was that water we could hear up ahead? 30m further on and we came across the sound of a streamway rumbling below us. It comes out of a narrow rift blocked by calcited boulders but I'm sure a spot of hilti capping will do the job. We had a crack at this, Chuckle Choke, on the next trip but it looks like a longer term job than we first thought. Just next to Chuckle Choke is a perched sump – Chuckle Sump. I think we need some wet weather to work out why that's there: does it feed from below as water rises up Chuckle Choke or from behind?

West Passage continues in more or less a straight line for another 150 metres. The passage is a mixture of walking and crawling but always quite narrow. The floor descends very gently but with some fine potholes in places. It feels a bit like a flood overflow passage. Again there are some excellent straws and flowstones, and some of these are rather vulnerable. On the most recent trip we have realised that the draft here is really strong and very cold so there must be big stuff ahead. It blows outwards. On the breakthrough trip the passage just seemed to go on and on and we were quite relieved that it eventually choked out. A subsequent digging trip on the 14th October, although frustrating in that we didn't break through, has shown us that there is huge potential here. My theory is that West Passage is a fortuitous link between the parallel SSE trending streamways of Upper Flood and the Grebe / Blackmoor Swallet / Waterwheel System. So beyond the choke I am expecting to pick up the Grebe streamway running left / right. Failing that we're going to be stomping off along the anticline to who knows where. Manor Farm? Watch this space.

### **Potential leads in the Royal Icing Junction Area**

These are just initial notes as most passages have been visited only once or maybe twice.

[A] The end of the left passage at Royal Icing. Needs pushing to a conclusion but the air is really bad.

[B] Left passage. Just after the canyon traverse is a boulder choke on the right hand wall. There could be black space above and behind it. Needs a crowbar and a careful digger.

[C] Massive flowstone choke straight ahead at Royal Icing Junction behind the large boulder. This looks a longer term possibility. I have climbed inside the choke right to the top. It closes down, is very tight and very well decorated. But at floor level there looks a possibility. Its all very pretty so maybe one for the future.

[D] The end of the muddy pools passage below the grotto. It looks like it all gets too tight but it would be worth another look. I didn't think there was an air movement and it seemed flood prone.

[E] The unbelievably well decorated passage at the start of West Passage on the left. This has not been entered for good reason. We will need a complete change of kit to even attempt a look around the corner. It's been taped off so please leave well alone.

[F] Chuckle Choke and Chuckle Sump. The stream can be heard rumbling away below so this has to be a goer. It is probably the downstream continuation of where the stream is last seen. Hilti caps will be needed. The sump might be 'bail-able' – a siphon or small bucket should do it.

[G] West Passage Choke. This is the best prospect in the cave as it chucks out a massive cold draft. This is the current focus of operations and I am certain we will be through here soon. It is hypothesised that beyond is the bottom end of the Grebe Swallet water.

### **Conservation**

The important bit. Upper Flood is a leader administered cave for good reason and it is contingent upon the Mendip Caving Group to preserve anything we find as best as we can. There are excellent formations throughout the new extensions with liberal dashes of straws, flowstones, and false floors in most sections. So please respect the tapes at all times. We have done our best to keep the taping up to date with each extension. Do not climb up the flowstone cascades into inviting holes in the roof. These have all been climbed bar [3] above and I can categorically assure you they do NOT go! The water that has formed the flowstones just seems to have been squeezed out of small cracks. There are some leads and digs that will be followed up in due course but some of this will require de-kitting and careful route selection.

Inevitably there may be a small amount of damage but almost all the formations and sediment banks are off

route. The first 550m section can almost entirely be done at stream level so there is no need to clamber about. The first boulder choke descent "The Departure Lounge" has a clearly defined path and most other non streamway sections have been taped. There is still a little more to do so if in doubt check with your party leader first.

### Access

Trips are still of a working party nature, and exploration, surveying, photography and taping are still very much the priorities. The boulder choke also needs a bit of work to make it suitable for caver traffic. But if you don't mind lending a hand then there should no problem for MCG members getting a trip into the new stuff. Please bear with us though as most of the Upper Flood leaders have yet to visit the extensions. I think we've got seven leaders through now but it would be preferable for all leaders to go on a trip with one of the diggers so as to familiarise themselves with the way and the safest route through the boulder choke.

People have been asking how difficult is it? I would say that you need to be a reasonably fit and experienced caver and anyone of an average build should be ok. The boulder choke section between the Red Room and the breakthrough point, "EasySqueeze", will prove challenging for some, particularly on the way out. You need to like squeezes and boulders. And of course remember that you still have the entrance series – the old cave – and the dreaded canal to navigate. Expect a return trip time of seven hours plus if you're planning to go right to the bottom and look around a bit.

For the moment MCG members take priority so realistically trips for other clubs won't really be happening until next year. And probably in the spring as you won't find many volunteers for the canal in mid January. See you there!



Photos by Bill Chadwick and Pete Bennett

## Route finding in Upper Flood: Red Room to the Far End

text by Mike Richardson, photos by Bill Chadwick

### Red Room to Passage beyond Golden Chamber

Leave the Red Room via the low crawl. After a few metres this starts descending steeply to Split Rock Dig, a short climb down to a very short section of streamway; climb up to the left into Andrew's Grotto.

At the back of the grotto, a route can be followed up and left which eventually returns to the Red Room. The way on to Golden Chamber is through the boulder choke ahead; this is the Aug 2004 breakthrough. Two constrictions lead to a climb up into a low crawl and thence Golden Chamber. Immediately to the left on entering the chamber is a shelf covered in crystals; the chamber also has plenty of straws overhead.

At the back-right, descend between boulders to a 3m climb down. This leads to a narrow 4m long rift which was passed in May 2006. The rift opens into a roomy passage with a stream entering from a rift to the right. This has been followed upstream to a point very close to the stream last seen in Split Rock Dig. There are several extremely tight constrictions en route and the whole passage is extremely well decorated. As such it should not be entered. Opposite is a narrow rift. This starts off as being well decorated but soon degenerates into a low wet and claustrophobic tube. After 3 metres of desperate wriggling the tube pops out into a well decorated grotto. The end closes down at a boulder fall with a sound connection to the upstream passage.

Downstream, the stream sinks to the right after a few metres, and the passage ends in a chamber (now mostly filled with spoil) 14m from the rift. This marks the start of the main boulder choke.

### The Main Boulder Choke

*Trips through the main boulder choke into the new reaches of the cave are arduous and tight in parts. Leaders wishing to lead guests on trips beyond The Red Room are strongly recommended to recce the new cave passages with one of the digging team or a leader who has knowledge of the new cave before taking guests. It goes without saying that conservation is of the utmost importance in the new cave passages, as in the old cave, and extreme caution is needed around the numerous decorations.*

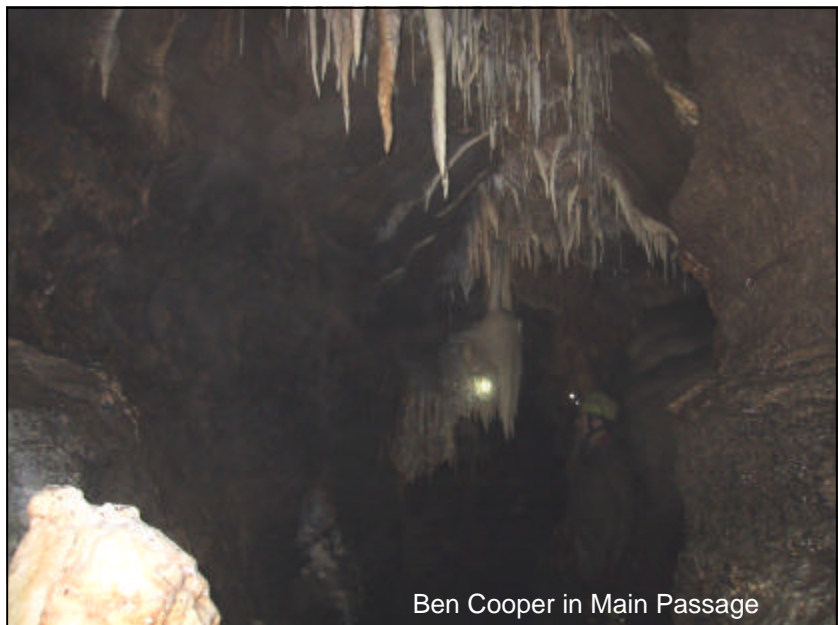
The route through the boulder choke mainly follows the solid wall to the right. Go right through a hole into the "3D Squeeze" U-bend, and then climb up in the choke. Pass through a squeeze after a few metres, and climb up to a slumped boulder which is supported (Oct 2006) with an Acro Prop. Pass under the prop, then drop feet first into a slot against the right-hand wall. At the end of the slot, drop through the hole onto a large perched boulder.

Climb about 5m down from the boulder, most easily by chimneying down the opposite side to the previous hole; a fixed handling is in place (Oct 2006). At the bottom double back and descend until a turn left leads to a squeeze between a flowstone block and the wall. Immediately after, drop through a second squeeze into a rift between the wall and the boulders. This rift can be followed to a small triangular opening and a short descent to a point where a crawl under levitating boulders to the right leads to the "EasySqueeze", the Sept 2006 breakthrough squeeze.

The breakthrough squeeze is down the slot at the back. Below the squeeze, work down between the wall and the boulders for about 5 metres until it is possible to work to the right (with your back to the wall). After a few metres a large black space comes into view; this is the main Blackmoor Master Cave passage. The boulder choke gives way to a boulder slope into the largest section of passage, "Departure Lounge".

### Blackmoor Master Cave

The next 500 metres or so is mostly in large walking passage or high walking rift. The stream is met at the bottom of the boulder choke, and is followed for the entire length of the passage, with occasional stooping or crawling sections in water. The whole passage is well decorated. The initial part of this is some 12 metres square; the left-hand wall is a continuous 5 metre high flowstone for around 30 metres. There is extensive taping which should be strictly



Ben Cooper in Main Passage



Ben Cooper in Main Passage

adhered to, to avoid damaging the formations which include roof pendants, straws, flowstone, curtains and mud castles.

At around 250 metres from the boulder choke the stream passage opens out at a large chamber, "Walk the Plank" where a large flowstone cascade comes in from the right. The way on is down a short climb, doubling back under to avoid an exposed traverse. At around 400 metres, a climb on the right leads to Charnel Inlet, and a rope climb to a mud filled passage which is yet to be pushed. About 50 metres beyond Charnel Inlet, follow the right-hand wall along a narrower section to a climb back down to the stream; beyond this the passage continues until it becomes too narrow to continue. This is the end of the Sept 2006 breakthrough.

Shortly before the climb down, it is possible to climb up some 4 metres on the left side of the passage into "Halogen Loft" and traverse to enter the Oct 2006 discoveries. A short muddy section leads to a steep climb over drier mud to an opening into "Royal Icing Chamber", where several large blocks are capped with pure white calcite. Continuing round to the left leads into "East Passage". This is radically different to the main passage, being in solid rock with no formations and a number of static pools. The route crosses a number of climbs and traverses, and eventually closes down, but a muddy tube in the right-hand wall can be followed into a muddy descending tube. This has not been pushed to a conclusion, and contains bad air.

**West Passage to the Far End**

Back at "Royal Icing Junction", continue ahead and ascend the taped route over the flowstone. At the top of the ascent, pass a large cubic boulder to a well decorated descent; at the bottom, climbing down leads to a too tight constriction over a mud floor. A bypass is offered by a small roof tube and tricky climb, just back and above the constriction. Beyond is another 50m+ of descending crawl passage over mud and pools. Back on the flowstone ascent, just before the cubic boulder, the main way on is through a taped gap between the right-hand wall and a boulder, to a descent through one of the best decorated parts of the cave, with a fine grotto to the left. At the bottom of the slope, duck into the low arch on the left and follow the crawl over firm drier mud.



Ben Cooper, Descent to West Passage



Grotto, Descent to West Passage

The crawl arrives at hole, at the bottom of which is what appears to be a perched sump. A stream can be heard through the rocks just above the sump; this is "Chuckle Choke". Traversing past the hole leads into "West Passage", which continues in an almost straight line (with the exception of a single left-right joggle) for around 150 metres. The passage contains some nice gour dams, and some extremely liquid mud. At the end, the passage turns sharp left and terminates a few metres on, but a low arch to the right gives access to "West End Chamber".

The probable exit from "West End Chamber" is behind the boulder at the right-hand end, the muddy and flat-out "95 Percent" crawl. This terminates with rocks which will need to be removed, and thence to ..... *to be continued.*

## The end of one thing and the start of another?

by Roy Kempston

For quite a while Fiona and I had been talking about a 'last caving trip'. Although we have stayed reasonably active in the MCG (particularly at AGMs!), the last time we had gone underground was 25th March 2004 (the MCG 50th anniversary trip into Swildons), and before that once in 2003 and once in 2001. There are various reasons why we had come to the decision to stop - we have not been getting the same 'urge' to go underground, our gear should have been refreshed a long time ago, and at least one of us is getting older! We also, nowadays, get our exploratory pleasures by going walking on the surface of the world.

Thus we had arranged to bring our tattered gear with us to the 2006 Half Yearly weekend, and before the meeting maybe do a trip to Swildons sump 1 or possibly a trip into GB (perhaps even a round trip, with an exit via the Devil's Elbow!). However, since we had started out on this plan, Tim (Francis) and his fellow diggers had made two very significant breakthroughs in Upper Flood, and after consuming a number of beers on Friday evening, we had been swept along on a tide of Upper Flood euphoria, agreeing almost enthusiastically to a trip into the new parts of the cave.

So Saturday dawned, and by 0700 people were on the move, and by the time that I came downstairs I noticed Tim and Peat leaving the cottage before 0800! (however, only to go and get their provisions). While we prepared our cooked breakfast, Fiona and I between us agreed in advance that if the dreaded squeezes were too difficult for us then we would simply exit the cave, thus giving us the reassurance of a get-out clause, for when the going got too tough.

Eleven of us set off for the cave, splitting into three groups, with the young tigers at the front and Fiona and I between Mark (Ward) and Doug (Harris) at the rear. The old part of the cave to the 1985 breakthrough into Midnight Chamber was exactly as I remembered it - very painful even with knee covers. The duck was thankfully a lot lower (see the picture of Tony Knibbs in the 1987 version of Mendip Underground), and the beautifully decorated stream-way was as it was when first discovered, although again with less water. On through Hanna's Grotto to the Lavatory Pan, again with a lot less water, as was the Canal, where on my first and only visit it required cotton wool in the ears as Malcolm was convinced that the water here caused infections - I suppose that as I didn't get any diseases he was correct! I presume that the passage of numerous diggers has cleared out a lot of the sludge, as previously it required a lot of dexterity to keep your mouth and nose above the water level whilst trying hard not to make waves.

Leaving the canal was welcome and I had now reached my previous furthest point, the Red Room, which was largely as I remembered it, but bits were either different or that part of my brain no longer works. There was no time to have a nostalgic dwell, and on we went to Golden Chamber, named after the MCG's 50th anniversary, and then there were boulder chokes (with mud and squeezes), and I quote from Tim on 18th September: *"The boulder choke section between Golden Chamber and the breakthrough is complex and rather precarious in places. Please take care. For the moment I would recommend that any leader intending to do the trip who has not been through to the final squeeze teams up with one of the diggers who is already familiar with the route. Please take care. Overall it's ok but we need to do a spot of scaffolding to make things safer for caver traffic."* Part way into the first tight squeeze I identified one part of my gear that is no longer in common usage - my Oldham battery case (filled with 2 NiCads), which snagged, and following Doug's advice, had to be removed together with my belt. So for the next 7 (or was it 8 or 9?) squeezes, climbs and crawls I had both my battery and ammo box (another old bit of gear) to either push ahead or pull behind, just to make this 'interesting' part of the cave even more so.

I'm not barrel-chested, but at two of the squeezes I had to do some very large breathing out exercises to be able to fit the Tim sized gaps, and I think some parts of me were touching virgin mud as well, (in one I nearly lost both my helmet and glasses). There's one interesting climb down through the boulders and also there was one loose-ish bit that we had to treat with care. For all of this part of the new bits, Mark was providing guidance to Fiona from the front and Doug to me from behind, and largely consisted of which body bit to enter the gaps with and what to do with the rest as you manoeuvred - this is essential at the moment, and will remain so until the route is established. During one crawling bit here Fiona had her first Petzl Zoom/battery combination failure, requiring a battery change from the ammo box, but this was not the last for another piece of old gear.

Eventually we came out into the new open bits, with the stream running through most of the time, and as I know that I won't get things in the right order, I'll concentrate on the overall impressions that the visit left me with. The decorations are spectacular, with many being pure white, and ranging from straws to stalactites (some quite long) and on the ground stalagmite bosses and stal floors. It's all around and it takes a long time to take it all in - and then you move on and there's a whole lot more. The stream-way and passageway at times remind you of Swildons 2 and 4, GB, and near to its current end, Manor Farm. Underfoot sometimes it's muddy (both out of and in the stream, which itself has a maximum depth of about 3 feet), and at others a more sandy mud. In addition, a long time is spent beneath an old stal false floor very similar to GB, with one boss being about 15 to 20 feet in diameter. In some places the wall is very friable and in others it has rocks attached (loosely) to it. The rifts



in places are very high and a bit like the sporting traverse in Longwood/August, with lots of stal flowstone high up, some of which have some colouration.

There is also a very nice length of phreatic stream-way, with eventually increasing vadose development below it. Eventually we arrived at the place where the next extension leaves the streamway, just short of its end, and this is very reminiscent of the way into NHASA Gallery in Manor Farm. At this point Fiona decided to save herself for the return trip, and I foolishly went on for a bit more, up the loose climb and on to Royal Icing Junction. From here is a very good view along the chamber, which I took a while to take in, before deciding that I had probably come far enough into the cave – as I stood here, I could almost imagine Malcolm saying "I told you there was a large cave here". Brian (Snell) and Kerry (Howard) appeared and after a discussion as to whether Brian should go further out to recover a rope for some high level investigation, we went back to Fiona, and then made our way for about 20 minutes to our ammo boxes and a very welcome chocolate bar. It was about here that the magnitude of our outward trip began to sink in, so when Mark and Doug arrived we set off out.

It was tiring, but as in all caves, looked entirely different when going in the opposite direction, and whilst waiting at the squeezes I noticed some curtains that were developed horizontally, but we decided that it was part of the boulder collapses and must have developed vertically, before a gentle fall. As we worked our way through the squeezes, Fiona had another light fault, which we repaired, and then a total failure requiring the use of Brian's emergency lamp. Fiona went off-piste a bit at the 10 foot climb, causing Doug and I to shelter from falling rocks beneath what looked to us to be the largest and most secure boulder. The all over mud coating dragged very much here (including again on my removed battery and belt), and during the rest of the way out, but I did manage to get through the two tightest squeezes for me without having to exhale, although by this time I was breathing heavily, and feeling very dehydrated.

Tim and Mike (Richardson) caught us up and when it was possible we allowed them to pass, as by now I was noticeably slowing down. From the canal onward I felt like I was running on empty, and can only compare it to the wall when running a marathon. This meant that I had to take frequent breathers to try and get enough energy to drag myself a bit more, before another period of recovery. Doug took over my ammo box, thankfully, as I was slowing the others down, but at times in the old cave I wondered how I would ever get out under my own steam, (of which I seemed to be producing loads). The old stream-way was very painful on my knees, elbows and palms, and even worse when there was insufficient height for me to crawl on all fours, and there was even cramp in my left calf on the home straight, but with coaxing I eventually made it to the exit shaft. As always, this was a pain for someone with long femurs and no strength left, but I made it out and collapsed onto the grass in front of Doug, Mark and Fiona after 7 hours underground. Reunion with my ammo box allowed us all to finish off some French chocolate and a small bottle of whisky, with a sip of Doug's water, and thank them very much for getting us in and out again.

What a privilege though for Fiona and me to be only the 3rd woman and 8th man (and so far the oldest and only pensioner) to view the far reaches of Upper Flood - more men have stood on the moon!. After this, the walk back to the cottage was slow and laboured, and we were provided with some very welcome tea (thanks to all those who did this) whilst waiting to clean our gear. By the time we had finished this, and waited for the water to warm up for a shower we didn't make it to the Half Yearly meeting, but just sat back and let the day's experience (and more cups of tea) sink in. I learned that most of the meeting had been about all aspects of Upper Flood, which of course need dealing with soonest.



Roy and Fiona after their Upper Flood trip. (Photo J Goddard)

So that's Upper Flood seen through an old fart's eyes (and felt through an even older body), and I can only thank again those who have dug for so long and those who got us in and out. If I had to give any advice I would say take a drink and some food, and a good set of guides, and be very cave fit. I can't see any way that I'll be returning, so that's probably it, the end of a long and undistinguished caving career, and so I now hand the baton on to those with a younger and fitter future – may you find and experience all that you're looking for.

## Eric Dowley

We are sad to report that Eric Dowley passed away in September.

Eric joined MCG in October 1972 and was made a full member in July 1977. He served on the committee from 1979 to 1981 as Treasurer. Not only did he have to deal with the complicated finances involved in building a cottage, but had to contend with us destroying it in a gas explosion. Eric steered us through the process of making a claim on the insurance and then rebuilding our headquarters - not an easy time to be Treasurer.

My abiding memory of Eric is his laughter - no matter what the situation he was always happy. When I volunteered for the committee in 1979, Eric asked me if I was a full member, which I was not. "We'd better do something about that then", he said with a broad smile. Next day we had an hilarious trip down Manor Farm with Eric laughing his way through the entire trip. He could be serious though, and ensured I could lifeline by stepping off the ladder to test me. Smiling, of course! **MR**



Eric at the 50th Dinner

## So Long Smiler

"You're a rotten bugger", he stormed when he eventually reached the top of the 40ft, "You nearly drowned me on that pitch!" But the twinkling eyes and broad grin belied the severity of the reprimand, doubtless well deserved. Swildon's was always his favourite cave, though we seldom went back after the 'drowning' episode - GB took over.

He was the only man I ever saw enter a taxi by the nearside door, walk through, fall out of the offside flat on the road and get up smiling.

There must have been something about taxis - one winter's night we were waiting for one to pick us up at Manor Farm to go to the MCG dinner. When it arrived Eric, filled with enthusiasm, dashed outside, missed seeing the staddle stones protecting the grass verge and fell headlong over one sprawling alongside the taxi - he got up still smiling.

That was Eric, full of enthusiasm and save when he had a migraine, ever smiling. How he enjoyed the singsongs after an MCG do - a huge smile and a loud voice, we always knew when he was participating, the only man who coaxed me to join in a duet - a terrible rendering of 'There was an old farmer who had an old sow' - some of you will doubtless remember it. He was always happy when with MCG - we'll always remember his big smile. **Ron Saunders, October 2006**

## Letter from Joan

My heartfelt thanks to all members of MCG for the cards and phone calls I received on the death of my husband, Eric. He died peacefully on the 15th September after a long spell of illness without complaint.

He loved being a member and always referred to MCG as his family.

Kindest regards, **Joan Dowley**

## Cotags

Due to price increases, the cost of a keyfob is now more than the deposit we charge! This means the Group is subsidising the cost of replacement fobs. As from now, members will have to buy their cotag fobs so a deposit will no longer be required. The fobs will then become their own responsibility. When the 2007 subs reminder is issued, current members will be asked if they wish to have their deposits returned; unclaimed deposits will become donations. Ex members were contacted about the return of their cotags when they left the Group, but those that didn't return them will be contacted once more to see if we can get the cotags back. If we get no response after a reasonable time has lapsed, then their deposits, too, will be treated donations.

## New cottage extension?

Well, almost. Charlie Alison's dad has kindly donated a marquee to the Group. It's a lightweight heavy-duty plastic one, rather than the old-type heavy canvas variety. As a result it folds up reasonably small so is to be kept in a suitably-sized mouse-proof box, probably in the loft. It will be very useful for our social functions at the cottage, especially barbecues (whether or not it is raining). So thank you very much to Charlie's dad.



## Earwig in on the committee meeting held 8th October '06

**Cottage extension:** is almost complete - one gully is finished, the other is almost finished. Thanks to the cottage warden... **Water heater:** the thermostat has been replaced and made tamper-proof... **Occasional Publication:** Joan has taken this over and it is coming on well... **MCG fliers:** almost finalised and looking very professional... **Beginners weekend:** the first one will be over the May members' weekend 2007... **Cottage maintenance:** £10 of subs (instead of £5) to be transferred to cottage account... **Tackle:** new SRT rope costing £324 has been purchased to replace old stock which had become out of date; new lifeline needed... **Cottage heating:** Committee to look into costs and practicality of cavity wall insulation to help with heating costs which have become very high... **Car park:** needs sorting; also needs sleeping policeman-type bump across entrance to divert road run-off away from car park... **Utility bills:** Martin arrived at the cottage to find a final demand threatening to cut off the Group's electric if the bill isn't paid. A notice is to be put on the letterbox instructing those finding any bills to please forward them to the Treasurer as soon as possible.

## Your club needs you !

Sadly, we are to lose our current Secretary, Librarian/recorder and Tacklmaster. Tim Francis, Louisa Minahan and Peat Bennett have given notice that they are to retire from their posts at the Annual General Meeting (24th March 2007). The committee is therefore putting out a request for volunteers to fill these posts. The notice is going out early to give members time to talk to the retiring members to find out what the posts involve and, if interested, allow a decent hand-over period.

We have a good, strong and dedicated committee who voluntarily work silently (and sometimes thanklessly) behind the scenes, but the rewards come when you see the Group thriving and growing as it certainly is at present.

As you probably know, committee meetings are usually held once a month on the Saturdays of members' weekends at 5pm, but we are flexible and the time and/or day can be changed if it becomes necessary. If a committee member can't attend a meeting, all that is required is that he/she informs the Secretary as soon as possible so it can be determined if the meeting will still be quorate, or if any matters concerning that committee member can be discussed another way (e.g. via email) before the meeting.

Many thanks must go to Tim, Louisa and Peat for all their sterling work over the months – their hard work will be missed on the committee and ultimately for the Group in general.

## Window locks

Locks have been put on the upstairs windows next to the bunks in the 8 and 16 rooms. This is for the safety of youth groups staying at the cottage.

I know that members like to have these windows open in the summer as the top bunks get very hot and airless at night. Therefore the key to these window locks is on the keyring which is kept on the hook on the outside of the under-stairs cupboard. Please replace the key when you have finished with it.

Normally the locks will be left undone but they will be locked when youth groups are expected.

## Movies beneath the Mendips

A presentation of early films from the Wells Museum and UBSS Cave Cine Archive

Wells Museum

Fri 01/12/06 at 7.30pm

Admission £2.50



## MCG Doings

Welcome to 3 new members:

**Biff Frith**, Proposed:  
Doug Harris, Mick Norton

**Adrian Bell**,  
Proposed: Mick Norton, Linda Milne

And **Kerry Howard** who has rejoined as a pro-bationary member.

## Congratulations

To Jonathan Roberts and Jacqueline Flexney-Briscoe who were married recently.

And to Julia and Mike Pittman on the birth of their baby boy, Reece. He was born on 15th October and weighed 8lb 12oz. So Jenny (& Mike) Lovell and Ann (& Bryan) Pittman have joined the MCGrandmas.

## Cheddar Gorge

Cheddar Gorge will close between Nov 2-30 as loose boulders are dislodged from the cliffs. Parts of the B3135 will be resurfaced at the same time. Diversions will be in place.