

MCG NEWS

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group



Departure Lounge, Upper Flood (by Charlie Allison)

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Founded 1954

Upper Flood - the pictures

photos © Mark Shinwell, CUCC

A large part of this issue is devoted to Mark Shinwell's superb photos, beginning with his stunning image of the Departure Lounge. We are extremely grateful to Mark for allowing us to publish his photos here and on the MCG website. The models are Mike Richardson, Duncan Collis, Andrew Brander and Natalie Field. The photos appeared briefly on his website <http://www.three-tuns.net/mark/> and several of the photos have already appeared in Descent (see page 6).



From the editor



I make no apologies for this newsletter consisting largely of Upper Flood photos. They are so amazing and the formations so beautiful and unusual, I feel the whole membership should see them, especially those like me who may never be able to see them for real!

Not before time you have an up-to-date address list – I've been meaning to put it out for ages, but with all the exciting Upper Flood breakthroughs, reports, photos, surveys etc., there has not been space. I think you'll agree it's nice to welcome back some new "old" members alongside the "new" new members!

I hope to see lots of you at the AGM and Dinner when Tim will be giving his acclaimed Upper Flood slide show.

Yvonne

In this issue

- 1-4 Upper Flood photos
- 5-6 Upper Flood update
- 7 Library additions
- 8 Group information

Supplement - Address list







More progress in Upper Flood Swallet

article based on submissions to uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/mendip-caving-group/ and ukcaving.com

Although there have been no major breakthroughs since the last newsletter, steady progress continues to be made.

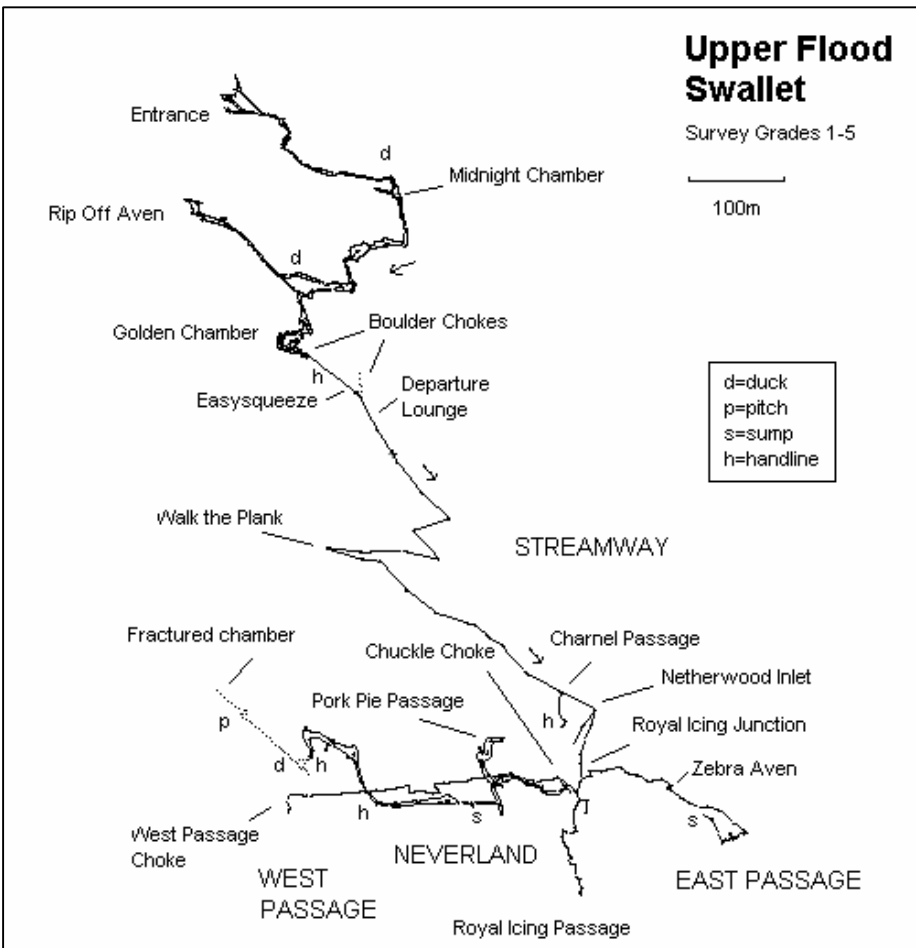
On 06/01/07 Richard Carey, Bill Chadwick and Tim Francis surveyed 200m of East Passage to a clear deep blue sump, and taped off some of the best bits of floor sediment and mud cracks. Above a rubble climb they noted a very high aven (named Zebra Aven because of the markings on the passage wall at the bottom) and beyond the traverses they inspected a 30ft high rift that ends in a couple of tubes and a delightful grotto with a fine crystal floor. The bang in Chuckle Choke had broken up the surface layer of rocks allowing them to make an arm sized hole through which the streamway could clearly be heard. They bailed out Chuckle Sump to a puddle giving an airspace and a continuation on the far side but the silt in the floor needs removing for the puddle to be passed.

Mike Richardson reported on 15/01/07 that a fairly large amount of mud and rock had slumped into the climb down out of Golden Chamber.

Sonya Cotter and Gary Jones inspected the Neverland and East Passage sumps on 20/01/07. The East passage 'sump' turned out to be a grotty pool with no going holes. The sump in Neverland is a real sump, and progress has not been completely ruled out, but it's certainly not going to be an easy free dive to more passage! Gary found several rifts pinched-off bits, one with a really tight gap in the roof. Further investigation with



Drip formation, East Passage (photo R Carey)



more air is needed to completely rule out any possibilities.

Sonya placed more conservation tape by the Pork Pies so that people don't crawl right into the pool but instead, view them from further back.

Also on 20/01/07, Tim Francis and Richard Carey spent about 10hrs underground during which they cleared out the bang debris and dug down to the slot between boulders in the floor of West Passage Choke. Tim decided not to drop through as it seemed to be another void in the choke rather than a breakthrough. In Chuckle Choke, the previously bailed sump had refilled (presumably from the far side) back up to the lip. Another 125m was surveyed in Royal Icing Passage ending at another sump. Just back from "Up and Over Tube" is a very highly decorated rift up on the left. Tim went in a little way but the view was obscured by formations. This will need a 'furries only' job to pass so was left it for another

day. This rift offers the best prospects for an extension / Neverland bypass in this area.

Tim and Richard climbed up into the roof above the Departure Lounge and into the horrendous boulder choke above. The flowstone on the left was the most stable route up to the top of the gigantic slab that has peeled away from the roof. It continues on up at the back between boulders and the wall.

On 03/02/07 Ben, Richard and Tim spent 11.5hrs down Upper Flood and surveyed nearly 400m of Neverland to the lip of the pitch. Brian and Peat rigged the traverses and the upwards ladder pitch so that access to the further reaches is now more accessible. There is an electron ladder and line in place on the pitch at the moment but a fixed ladder is proposed for the future. At the far chamber a good rummage around failed to find a way on at floor level. The main trunk passage is intercepted by the huge chamber and the whole place is full of shattered boulders and mud. In the chamber above the pitch, Tim attempted a climb up and left, but was stopped by an overhang.

A new lead was followed below the traverse pitch. Instead of going right through the duck, a low passage on the left was followed to a point where falling water could be heard and the passage echoes hugely. It looks like only a couple of body lengths of mud will need to be removed to be through.

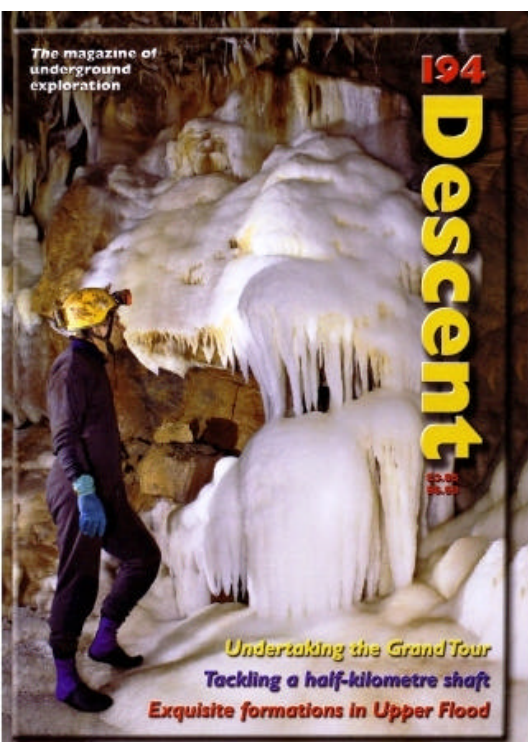
Also on 03/02/07 Brian Prewer and a surface team attempted to locate various points of the cave using the Grunterphone. At the same time, the MRO used the Heyphone to speak to the cavers below. Although the Heyphone worked well and communication was established, the Grunterphone was less successful. The intention was to radio locate Zebra Aven, and West Passage Only West Passage Choke was located, and only to +/- 20m. It is likely that the very disturbed ground (produced by mining) or an undiscovered ore body caused interference and prevented any accurate radio locations to be found.

Biff, at the request of Somerset Wildlife Trust, fitted a lockable lid to Charnel Shaft on 04/02/07. As we do not yet have permission to dig here, the keys are currently in the Upper Flood key cabinet, but should not be used until we have SWT's consent.

Mike Richardson says that on 22/01/07 more soil and rocks had slumped into Golden Chamber from the left, temporarily preventing access. Although removed, it is still rather loose.

Tim Francis attempted a trip into Upper Flood on 24/02/07 but found the cave sumped at the Lavatory Trap. Later in the evening he gave an illustrated talk at the Hunters Lodge. The audience comprised somewhere in the region of 130 people (standing room only, mostly). Lacking a PA system, Tim had to make do with using a loud voice; this wasn't really necessary as the audience were so quiet the proverbial pin could be heard dropping - doubtless there have been few rooms containing so many cavers which have been so quiet! The gasps of amazement at some of the pictures were an apt accompaniment to a superb & historic presentation.

The statistics now stand at 2367m surveyed, plus another 450m or so unsurveyed. Total length is therefore about 2.8km. We are now knocking on Eastwater's door for its 4th place in the list of Mendip's longest caves! Depth below the entrance is estimated at 120m (393 feet).



Upper Flood keeps going

Upper Flood has been a major focus of exploration since the late 1970s. The magazine 'Descent' 194 features a detailed article and photos of the cave system. The article describes the challenges of exploring this deep and complex cave system, including the discovery of new passages and the discovery of a large chamber. The photos show the cave's interior, including flowstone formations and the caver's equipment.

MENDIP NEWS

14 Descent (194) FEBRUARY 2007

Upper Flood in the media

Upper Flood was featured on the front cover of Descent 194. The photo, by Mark Shinwell, shows Mike Richardson in Neverland. The article by Tim Francis updates exploration since Descent 193, describing the exploration of Neverland, and is illustrated with more of Mark's photos, including the Departure Lounge (compare to Charlie Allison's photo used in our masthead).

Library additions

Descent No 193 (Dec 2006/Jan 2007) The centre page spread is devoted to **"The Best Trip Ever"** – Tim's description about **"how it felt to make an almost unheard of breakthrough – not once, but twice!"** The photos were taken by Charlie Allison, Bill Chadwick and Peat Bennett and are superb. The information is presented as a dramatic montage which displays the photographs and text to great effect. But.....amazingly, within a couple of hours of dropping through my letterbox this issue was out of date! **This issue is a collector's item - a must for every MCG member!**

Mendip Times, Vol 2 Issue 7 (Dec 2006). Dave Irwin's caving page deals with digs and recent discoveries on Mendip including Templeton's and Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink,. Upper Flood is mentioned with the comment *"More of this discovery at a later date when I shall be talking to one of the explorers"*. [should be in the January 2007 issue

Three old booklets describing catacombs and archaeological remains in Malta (donated by an ex MCG member).

West Wycombe Caves (c. 1960) (donated)

Aillwee Cave. booklet with description and brief history to 2005 (donated)

China - Beneath the Wall, filmed by Gavin Newman, commentary by Chris Searle. Beautiful photography of expeditions to the 11km 'Great Crack', in central China, which develops into a river cave as it penetrates the mountain. It was in flood and only partly accessible at the time of filming, resulting in some excellent shots of cavers battling against white water. 12km downstream through the mountain is a huge 700m deep 'tienkien' (doline) at the bottom of which is the cave which the expedition had hoped to connect with the 'Great Crack'. I found this a very relaxing DVD to watch; as well as the caving and expedition footage Gavin has also included scenes of the country and local people. (42mins)

Hard Decisions at Sleets Gill. Sid Perou has re-edited the material from a Tyne Tees TV documentary about the rescue of two cavers in 1992 from Sleets Gill Cave in the Yorkshire Dales. He has included contemporaneous news footage and interviews with many of the people involved – wives, rescue coordinators, divers. The re-edit was suggested by Harry Long (Upper Wharfedale Fell Rescue Association Controller) and Sid Perou is donating 50% (£7) from each sale of the DVD to the UWFRA. If the China film was relaxing, this one had me gripping the edge of my seat. It was enthralling, not least because of the re-enactment of the drama by Roy Deane and Les Hewitt, the two cavers trapped by rising water in Sleets Gill. I would highly recommend you purchase this DVD, partly as a reminder of the wonderful service our cave rescue organisations provide (all volunteers and cavers like yourself) and also because of the donation to UWFRA (38mins). Obtainable from caving shops and sidperou@btinternet.com (£14 + £1 p&p)

The Aggregate Landscape of Mendip: Predicting the Archaeological resource by Hannah Firth, English Heritage, 2006. The title is a bit of a handful but inside is a concise resumé of the archaeology of Mendip, a list of excavated cave sites and maps showing locations of archaeological sites by age. It's a good starting point if you want to find out about the history of Mendip.

Sumatra 87, report of the Sumatra 1987 expedition, compiled by Des Marshall. I don't know if anyone is contemplating a trip to Sumatra, but this was cheap on eBay so I bought it.

Chelsea Speleological Society 50th Anniversary Journal '50 Years under Mynydd Llangattwg'. 2006 (Chelsea Speleological Records Vol 33). This is a series of personal reminiscences and reports which capture the spirit of exploration and comradeship 33 contributors - so lots of variety.

East Surrey Underground by Peter Burgess. This small book should be of interest to members living in the south east. It contains much historical information, is well illustrated and nicely laid out.

Copy of the BBC Points West report on the **Upper Flood** breakthrough.

Annual Dinner

For those people who usually stay at the hotel for the night – unfortunately it is fully booked. There is another hotel around the corner (15mins walk, 2mins drive) which they have recommended to us as an alternative. Tel. Winston Manor Hotel 01934 852348. www.winstonmanorhotel.co.uk

Hidden Earth

This year's caving conference will be at Tewkesbury School, Gloucestershire on 21-23 September. Tewkesbury is very close to junction 9 of the M5. Location map is at Further information will appear at <http://hidden-earth.org.uk>

MRO meetings

Warden's meetings (open to all); at 8:00 pm in the Hunters Lodge:

Sun 13th May

Fri 10th August

Sun 11th November

Sat 10th March - AGM

MRO Talks

Sat 10th March. The History of the MRO. An illustrated talk by Jim Hanwell.

Sat 24th March. First aid and improvisation for cavers. A talk by Pete Glanville

MRO training

Takes place on the second Thursday evening and the third Saturday morning of every month. If you are interested in participating let me know. *Keith Knight*