

# MCG NEWS

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group

Departure Lounge, Upper Flood (by Charlie Allison)

Number 348  
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[m-c-g.org.uk](http://m-c-g.org.uk)

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## Advance Notice of Annual General Meeting 2008

The MCG AGM will be held at Nordrach Cottage on Sat 05/04/08 at 10.30am

Nominations for Office and proposals to change the Constitution and Rules must be submitted in writing by first class post to the Hon. Secretary's home address (Clevelys, Upper Radford, Paulton, Bristol BS39 7PU) with the signatures of full members proposing and seconding at least 25 days before the meeting (10th March). A nomination\* for Office must be accompanied by a signed agreement to stand for election by the nominee. Nominations are sought for all posts.

**Mike Richardson, MCG Hon Secretary**

\*Nomination forms can be downloaded from the MCG website at:

<http://mendipcavinggroup.org.uk/sections/about/forms%20and%20leaflets.html>

**After the AGM** there will be a free buffet lunch with refreshments in our marquee. Please let Mike Richardson or Linda Milne know you will be attending the AGM so that we know how many to cater for. We will also have the MCG Hidden Earth display stand on view.



**The Annual Dinner** will be held at [Coxley Vineyard](#), Glastonbury Road, Wells from 7.30pm - midnight. As usual there will be a coach picking up from Wells, The Hunters and the Cottage. Don't forget to book your seats in advance if possible.

If you wish to book accommodation at the hotel please call 01749 670285

### Annual Dinner - Menu

*Cream of Parsnip and Butternut Squash with a Hint of Chili*

*Chicken Liver and Wild Mushroom Parfait with Redcurrent Jelly and Melba toast*  
*Asparagus and Goats Cheese Frittata Julienne served on a bed of Rocket Salad*

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*Roast Loin of Pork with Apple Sauce*

*Pot Roast Supreme of Chicken in a White Wine, Tarragon and Shallot Sauce*

*Yellow Fin Sole with Smoked Haddock & Spinach,  
served with a White Wine, Prawn and Cream Vellute*

*Roasted Mixed peppers with Asparagus served on a bed of Mixed Leaf Salad*

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*Home made Tiramisu with Marsala and Amaretto*

*Warm Chocolate Fudge served with Vanilla Ice-cream*

*Lemon Lush Torte*

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*Coffee and Mints*

Price £21.50. Cheques and menu choices to Linda Milne by 28/03/08, please.

## From the Editor



Newsletters are like London buses – nothing for ages, then two come together! This newsletter contains news that came while I was completing issue 347... and even now I have stuff left over! This not a complaint – it is very satisfying to see how active the Group is.

It is also pleasing to have so many keen and active new members. I look forward to hearing from them - it's always good to get new members' views on caving trips, social activities, and other Group goings on.

We still have three main projects on the go – Upper Flood Swallet, Stainsby's Shaft, and the search for the elusive Charnel Shaft. There is something that everybody can get involved in, whatever their abilities. May it ever be thus. **Yvonne**

## In this issue

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## MCG doings

Bill Chadwick has been an Upper Flood leader for some time now - apologies for not advertising this earlier.

### Address list

There are too many amendments to mention here. Please refer to the latest address list.

### AGM 05/04/08

The Annual General Meeting is your opportunity to say how the group should be run. You can question the Committee members, query the accounts, elect officers, and discuss formal motions or any other business. You can have your say about the temperature of the showers. Do you want better room heating? Do we need a 4th bedroom, for guest groups? Should some caves have better locks? Do we need an access system for the Cottage? Members do have views about all these things (judging by the comments on the MCG Newsgroup) yet very few attend the AGM?

To encourage members to come along, the AGM will be a little less formal this year. We will be setting up our display boards and an audio-visual presentation in the marquee (based on our "commended" Hidden Earth stand) showing some the Group's achievements this year and (best of all) there will be a free buffet with refreshments after the meeting. Please come along - it's at 10:30 on 05/04/08

## Preliminary geological observations in Upper Flood Swallet

by Mark Tringham, Grampian Speleological Group

**Introduction.** A single trip was made into upper Flood on the 8th December 2007 in support of the surveying and digging efforts by MCG. Due to the length and of the cave and duration of the trip, the emphasis was put onto seeing as much of the cave as possible and scoping out what could usefully be done in the future on a more systematic basis and with greater accuracy. It is anticipated that two more long trips should be sufficient to make a more scientifically robust geological analysis of the cave as known so far, fit for inclusion on future publications on the cave exploration, morphology and its origin. The cave is especially interesting due to its intimate relation to mineral veins and nearby old mine workings. A geological analysis of the cave when considered alongside published surface geology should assist in predicting where future digging efforts might best be concentrated. The geology would be better described using photographs, cross-sections and maps, however the narrative below will have to suffice until further work is done.

**Entrance Passageways as far as Midnight Chamber.** These are mostly aligned along mineral veins with calcite and grey clay infill evident. The veins are commonly obscured by stal deposits. Black and rusty brown markings on some stal was thought by the explorers to be due to rust or oil from a dumped car overlaying the cave, however my view is that these are more likely a natural product from iron and manganese mineralization.

**Bypass Passage as far as Lavatory Trap.** This passage is aligned along a fault. The fault plane surface is visible cutting across the roof of the passage with slickenside markings. The fault plane is more gently inclined than the passage itself and has a dip approximately south at about 40 degrees.



**Red Room and passageway immediately below.** This is formed along a major fault with abundant iron mineralization (photo, left). The limestones on the south side of the fault below Red Room show significant folding with 'reverse drag'. The thin-bedded shaly limestones steepen up from about 10 degree northerly dip to about 75 degrees southerly dip within a few meters.

**Departure Lounge and 550m Way.** This passage generally shows the streamway to be heading down-dip with clean thicker-bedded limestones initially until after a fault is crossed (Threadneedle Street?), where more shaly limestones are encountered again.



**Passage below Netherwood Inlet.** This follows a major fault zone with a high rift passage inclined at about 75 degrees along the main fault plane. East Passage follows a series of fault aligned rifts with much calcite veining, commonly with en-echelon arrays (photo, left).

En-echelon arrays are formed by shear failure of the host rock, the failure angle generally being at about 30 degrees to the maximum principal stress. They commonly form conjugate sets with opposing sense of shear. The veins themselves form due to secondary extension within the shear zone. Other well-known en-echelon vein sets occur in OFD at Marble Showers and also in the Carboniferous Limestones on Clifton Down in Bristol, where the children's slide has polished the bedding surface very well, enabling the veins to be seen clearly.



**Royal Icing Chamber.** What looks superficially like a sedimentary conglomerate is in fact cobble-sized limestone clasts within a mineral vein (photo far left). The wall of the grotto is partly aligned parallel to the vein. The clasts have a rind of weathering alteration and are enclosed in geyish-white calcite or other white carbonate mineral.

**West Passage.** This passage follows a series of veins and joints. The choke at the far end is formed at the intersection of a N-S oriented vein with the others that are approximately E-W. The N-S vein has abundant iron and manganese mineralization (photo above, right).

## Newsgroup digest

### 05/12/07 Upper Flood Swallet - surveying *Ben Cooper, Mike Richardson*

Driving through the torrential rain to the Mendips for a trip in Upper Flood Swallet with Mike Richardson, I did question my sanity, but as we had both made the effort to take the day off work, we decided to have a look at the cave anyway. The entrance crawl was awash, with 6" deep water at one point just before the flat-out crawl into Midnight Chamber. I approached the crawl expecting a sump, but amazingly there were only a couple of inches of water. The Midnight Stream was strong and we approached the Lavatory Trap somewhat apprehensively. Needless to say, the level was very high with only 3" of airspace. Oh well, we hadn't come all this way to be turned back now, and I quickly volunteered Mike for the miserable task. Darn-it, he made it through, so I had to follow. Once through, it only took a few minutes of bailing to reduce the level another couple of inches.

The rest of the trip was fabulous. Water was dripping everywhere and all the inlets were flowing nicely. We surveyed from the end of 550m Way back up to Netherwood Inlet, and then over the top into Halogen Loft, surveying three independent levels here, through Royal Icing Chamber and up to the start of Neverland. We poked about in the floor of Halogen Loft, seeing numerous tubes, cracks and opportunities in the rubble in the floor. It all looks very exciting, though nothing looks likely to give up its secrets easily.

On the return, the Lavatory Trap hadn't risen at all since we had bailed it, so it would have been quite easy if I had remembered to take off my helmet, which of course I hadn't. We surfaced at 9pm, after some 9 hours underground, much later than planned due to us both having forgotten our watches. (In fact, I had forgotten much of my kit, and had to raid the shed. Thanks to whoever for the oversuit and boots. Much appreciated). [BeC]

### 08/12/07 Upper Flood Swallet – exploration passes 3500m

<b>Total estimated length</b>	<b>3523m</b>
Surveyed Length	3104m
Estimated unsurveyed passages	254m
Projected Passages	165m

Last week saw the detailed survey of the three levels of Royal Icing passage. This added over **100m** to the surveyed cave length. On this theme, I wonder if these should be called Cake Series, made up of Lower Sponge, Upper Sponge, and Jam Passage, the latter being the main route through, terminating in Royal Icing Chamber? Halogen Loft is the climb out of the stream into what would be Jam Passage and Lower Sponge. I also thought of The Attic for the highest level, because it is dry and quiet, away from the noise of the water far below.

### 08/12/07 Upper Flood Swallet - discovery of Thief's Chamber *Ben Cooper, Julie Hesketh et al*

On Saturday 08/12/07, Julie and I surveyed Trench Passage - the middle of three upper-level passages off Plank Chamber (the other two being Plank Inlet and an as-yet-un-named blind grotto), adding another **100m** to the surveyed cave length. Prior to our survey, Tim Francis had been the only person to have entered Trench Passage, and had described an attractive passage, terminating after 20-30m where a low ceiling came down to a mud floor. We subsequently kept out of it due to the stunning mud formations blocking the entrance. Carefully traversing over the RH mud-encrusted boulders, Julie and I made our way in about 10m. From here one can walk comfortably without trashing it. A 2m diameter crystal encrusted dome sits in the middle of the passage just before this point, and above it is a 4m dripping aven. This whole section still needs to be taped. At the 10m point, a significant stream bubbled up from the right hand wall, and was obviously responsible for carving a 1m deep trench through soft mud banks. On top of the banks are one or two beautiful mud formations formed by small stones protecting pinnacles of mud from washing away in the drip. We surveyed along the



Mud banks in Trench Passage (photo B Cooper)



Crystal Dome in Trench Passage (photo B Cooper)



Stream rises in Trench Passage (photo B Cooper)



Mud Citadel in Trench Passage (photo B Cooper)

stream to where it disappeared under a low roof, with a 2" airspace. This stream was only present due to the massive rainfall, and had opened a small route beyond what Tim had previously seen.

As I was wearing a wetsuit, Julie volunteered me to lie in the stream and investigate. To my right, I could see about 1m through the 2" space and could hear a cascade beyond. Guessing that the hard floor was actually compacted mud, I dug my fingers down under the water, and within minutes had formed a 6" trench. Encouraged, I reversed back a little, and started to excavate a larger trench in the stream bed, giving myself enough head and elbow room to be able to dig in towards the low ceiling. For over an hour I kicked and scraped the soft mud, which quickly washed away in the fast flowing water. Pushing the mud through under the low ceiling with my feet, I could feel that the ceiling rose, but at the same time my helmet jammed in the mud and the choppy water rose around my neck and face. Retreating, I realised I was not going to get through like that! Head-first was also not yet possible, with only 2" of airspace into who-knew-what unknown space beyond. To my left, the ceiling rose, but here the mud bank filled the space. Working away at the bank with my feet, I managed to widen the stream trench and form a more sizeable 5" airspace. It all looked very encouraging. Julie retreated to find some tools (to speed up the work), and on my own I was suddenly gripped by violent cold shivers. I had to get out of the stream and find some food. At this point the mass hordes arrived, and having heard from us that there had been a breakthrough, Brian Snell, Mike Richardson, Peat Bennett and then Julie went to investigate while I warmed up. Refreshed, I went back in to find that they had all effortlessly pushed through the dig into a new chamber, some 30m long, with a 6m+ climb at the end. The stream disappeared at the back wall, and Julie and I furtled for a few minutes to realise that this would probably also give up its secrets with very little effort. However, Christmas Dinner beckoned, so we left it for another day.

Meanwhile, Bill Chadwick had noticed on the way into the lower part of the cave that a stream was flowing out of Threadneedle Street. On his return, he noticed it was very muddy. He explored to find it emanating from under some flowstone on the left hand side just before Wall Street. We therefore speculate that this is the same stream flowing through Trench Passage, and given that Wall Street is blocked by sediment (as is Trench Passage), that these are one and the same passages. The gap is **65m** as the crow flies.

With my new light, I also saw a high level passage in the roof about 20m upstream from Plank Chamber. I speculate that there is a high level passage from the Duck-Under Boss gour pools that Tim investigated, running about **100m** to the point I could see. What makes this section particularly interesting is that half-way along (at stream level) is an inlet. This inlet might also exist at the high level as a relic passage.

Meanwhile, the others had some very positive digging making a bypass into Neverland. I'll leave them to describe what they did. [BeC]

**08-09/12/07 Stainsby's Shaft – preparation for winch** *Biff, Keith Knight, Keith Thomas, Robert Thompson, Bill Chadwick, Rob ??*

Over the weekend, and in miserable conditions, the incoming water was diverted away from the inner shaft. More spoil was removed from the top of the inner shaft, and with a compressor and air chisel an outcrop of calcite clay mineral and rock was removed to make room for the winch and pulley. [Biff]

**08/12/07 Upper Flood Swallet – digging in West Passage** *Brian Snell, Bill Chadwick, Mark Tringham (Grampian Speleological Group), and Peat Bennett*

Trip to look at a possible dig at the first corner of the oxbow in West Passage. Based on the survey this is the about the closest approach of West Passage to Neverland.

Armed with a full-size spade (which was actually useful at places in the boulder choke - with ends suitably placed you get a mid-air hand-hold), Brian Snell and I set to work. The spade was definitely the business and we shifted a lot of mud (which rapidly transformed itself to gloop) extending the passage to a point where the roof came down a bit.

Peat Bennett arrived at this point and piled in, extending down below the lowered roof passage to a low continuation which is certainly digable.

Meanwhile the others had a look at a hole on the left hand side of west passage just short of the oxbow. I'd looked in this ages ago (last year) and it seemed to end in a small blind chamber. However, because it has been raining a lot on Mendip, there was water in places we've never seen water before, including coming out of the roof of this chamber.

It took only a few minutes to poke out some rocks, opening a climb into another small chamber. This is very interesting because it has some calcite formations and what looks like a calcite roof. The roof must be about 5m above the survey line from West Passage, which if the survey is correct is about floor level in Neverland at that point. We really need to get back there to survey it properly and to have a go at the ceiling to see how solid it is.

On the way out the Lavatory Trap was full to the point that it was flowing over the bank into Sludge Junction, so some heavy duty bailing followed. Being the person bailing when it got to about 2" airspace I thought: "OK, that'll do, helmet off, on my back, feet first, here we go". I can now reliably state that one body worth of water displacement is equal to 1" change in level, so the 2" airspace suddenly got smaller ... glub (and wobble on account of water in ears). [MiR]

**14/12/07 Upper Flood Swallet – digging and surveying** *Mike Richardson, Ben Cooper*

Another 8-ish hour trip, which means that in the 10 days up to and including this trip, we have spent 10% of our time down Upper Flood Swallet. Do we get a prize?

First we took a look at the Trench Steam and Thief's Chamber.

The stream has basically stopped. There is a small amount of water rising, but it soon all sinks. The rising appears (based on waving a crowbar around at arm's length) to be body sized, but the outlet is over solid rock so not trivial to lower.

The mud into Thief's Chamber was even muddier. We spent a couple of hours or so excavating where the no-longer-present stream sinks, and made about 3m progress, to where the "passage" looks to go downwards in a rift. The roof to that point is mostly compacted mud and small rocks, so I think it would need attention (no West End Chamber repeats, please).

Then we had a look at Threadneedle/Wall Street. The water flow had disappeared - which fits with Trench Stream. We went all the way to the end of Wall Street; there was no sign of any water flow, so it didn't come from there.

We went on to West Passage and the climb up. We had a bit of a hammer at the top. The rift (which likely heads the right way) is workable, but tight. I had a bang around the highest calcite roof with a hammer and chisel. It sounded sort-of hollow (wacking the walls gave a solid ker-chunk, wacking the roof gave a much more dead sound). I guess that's interesting, but doing it by hand would be really hard work, chiselling upside down with not a lot of room. I'd suggest a power drill and a long drill bit, and see how far it goes. Then we surveyed back from there to the fixed survey point at the start of Neverland. Got back to the hut about 8:30 and John Crowsley made us a cuppa. Nice one. [MiR]

**29/12/07 Blackmoor valley - flooding** *Mick Norton, Biff*

Parking on the horseshoe bend, we walked over to Stainsby's Shaft. As there had been such torrential rain through the night, I thought I would see if the elusive Blackmoor Swallet was swallowing. Shock horror, it was resurging. Yes, in three, just separate pools, water was strongly rising. I walked over to Upper Flood Swallet. The UFS2 depression was flooded but on looking down the entrance of Upper Flood Swallet, it was not and I could not hear a stream flowing. There was a huge lake more than a hundred feet long and about six feet deep quite nearby. On going down Stainsby's Shaft, no water was squirting into the cave and in no place in the cave could running water be heard.

There were three ponds, at the place where Blackmoor Swallet is supposed to be, each just separate. The largest, lowest one, was closest to Stainsby's Shaft; the middle one slightly higher; then the farthest one, slightly higher still. The farthest one flowed continually over the surface to top up the middle one. All three ponds were resurging. The water was strongly bubbling and bringing up sand/grit. There were no whirlpools, so it did not seem that water was being swallowed but the three pond's surfaces stayed at the same height all day. I would say all three together would have been resurging about ten gallons a second. Almost certainly these ponds were being forced by the very large, higher pond, adjacent to Upper Flood Swallet. [MN]

Joan Goddard adds: The three ponds were almost certainly buddles. They are quite difficult to make out nowadays especially when they are dry and the vegetation is high. There were some leats which took/take water under the spoil heaps in that area. It may still be possible to find the leats as they have a capstone. When I last saw them they were about 12" wide and 4-6" high. The buddles will have been fed, via the leats, from further up the valley - ultimately from the reservoir near the flues. As Mick noted, each buddle would have been fed by overflow from the next highest one. Water from the lowest one would have been channelled into a suitable hole/swallet (Blackmoor Swallet?) or it would have been sent further down the valley via leats or launders to the next washing area (buddles) in the bottom of the valley just above the horseshoe bend in the road.

Tim Francis adds: The ponds next to Upper Flood Swallet can rise quite dramatically after sustained rainfall (and have been known to almost be lapping the shakehole) but even under very high pond conditions you don't see much higher water in Upper Flood Swallet than the usual wet weather flow. The water is backing up because it can't escape easily down the leat that is under the Charterhouse Centre track!

What you don't usually see is any of the bulk of the valley water entering the caves under these conditions (although someone did once see water spilling over into the Upper Flood Swallet shakehole). The obvious points of entry would be Upper Flood Passage, Black Shale Rift and Waterwheel Swallet. Both Upper Flood Passage and Black Shale Rift respond to rainfall rather than valley flows. Waterwheel consistently has more water in it than Upper Flood Passage / Black Shale Rift but again it doesn't respond dramatically when pond levels are up. So the leat probably takes all the water towards the Blackmoor Swallet area without any major leakage. Blackmoor Swallet also struggles to take large volumes of water hence the bubbling up of water that Mick saw. Black Shale Rift is fed mostly by run-off from the road and Upper Flood Passage from the grassy area and the track by the gate. Remarkably, the crawls at the end of Black Shale Rift lie virtually under the flooded pond. The Upper Flood Swallet II dig (original shaft) revealed some vadose tubes but these were totally blocked by clays so water was unable to enter here. The known Blackmoor Cave off Stainsby's Shaft has always been dry. Perhaps it is still a bit higher than the leat water?

Does the pond water sinking at Blackmoor Swallet enter the known Upper Flood Passages in the Walk the Plank area? In low flow there isn't enough water coming in at the Walk the Plank Inlet to suggest a connection. In high flow a lot of water is seen in Trench Passage so perhaps yes. I suspect the Blackmoor Swallet water goes elsewhere. Ultimately, dye testing could prove this.

**03/01/08 Upper Flood Swallet – Royal Icing Chamber** *Mike Richardson, Tim Brown*

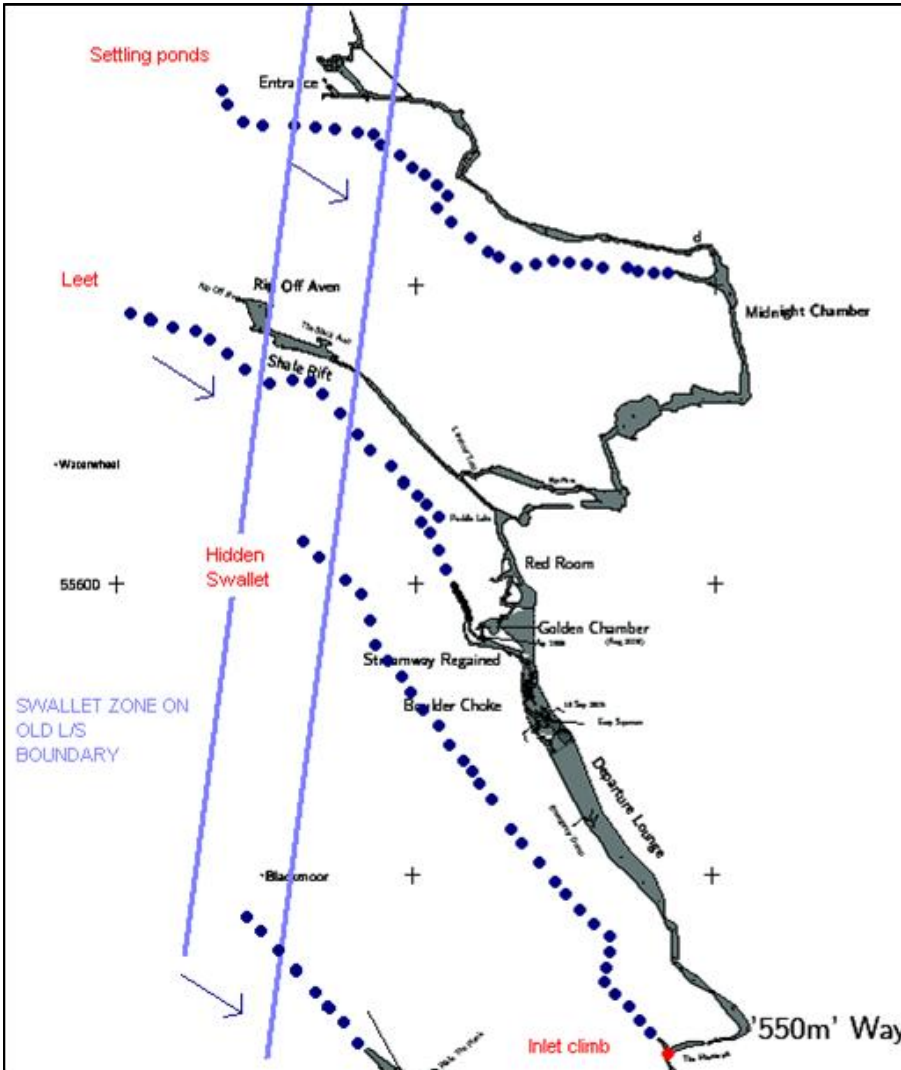
The surface ponds were lower than the wet trip on 08/12/07. We nipped into Thief's Chamber (and pointed out to Tim that he was now the 6th person to get there). There was no water flowing in the Trench; the inlet under the wall was completely clear and static, so far as I could make out (tricky, because the water reflected the roof above so well). It closes down about a metre in.

**07/01/08 Blackmoor Valley - water tracing** *Tim Francis, Keith ??*

Our own bit of exciting dye tracing was conducted at the weekend. We wanted to put some dye into Blackmoor Swallet to see if it came out at Walk the Plank Inlet. But as usual Blackmoor Swallet was dry. So we - Keith - put it in where the water sinks into the leat underneath the Charterhouse Centre track.

We had a real surprise when the purple dye quickly (20mins or less) re-appeared in 'Streamway Regained' just after Golden Chamber. No dye was seen in Black Shale Rift or Midnight Streamway or Walk The Plank. I didn't crawl up the stream to see exactly where it came in. It's a rather fine piece of well decorated passage that will be trashed if more visits are made.

So when we assumed that this streamway was exactly the same as the one in the Red Room we were wrong.



That means there is virtually a parallel water flow to Black Shale Rift! We'd often thought that there was more water in the Departure Lounge than in Midnight Streamway but this was completely unexpected.

The next plan is to dye trace the Red Room to see where the old cave water enters the new extensions. And of course we need a high flow situation to check where Blackmoor Swallet water goes (Trench Passage perhaps?). I'm suspicious about Trench Passage because it has very large black mud banks. [TF]

**26/01/08 Upper Flood Swallet – Brian's Nose (or Eye), Trench Passage and Threadneedle Street**

*Tim Francis, Richard Carey*

Still rather wet underground and you could see from the amounts of black silt everywhere that the old cave must have taken a serious amount of water last weekend.

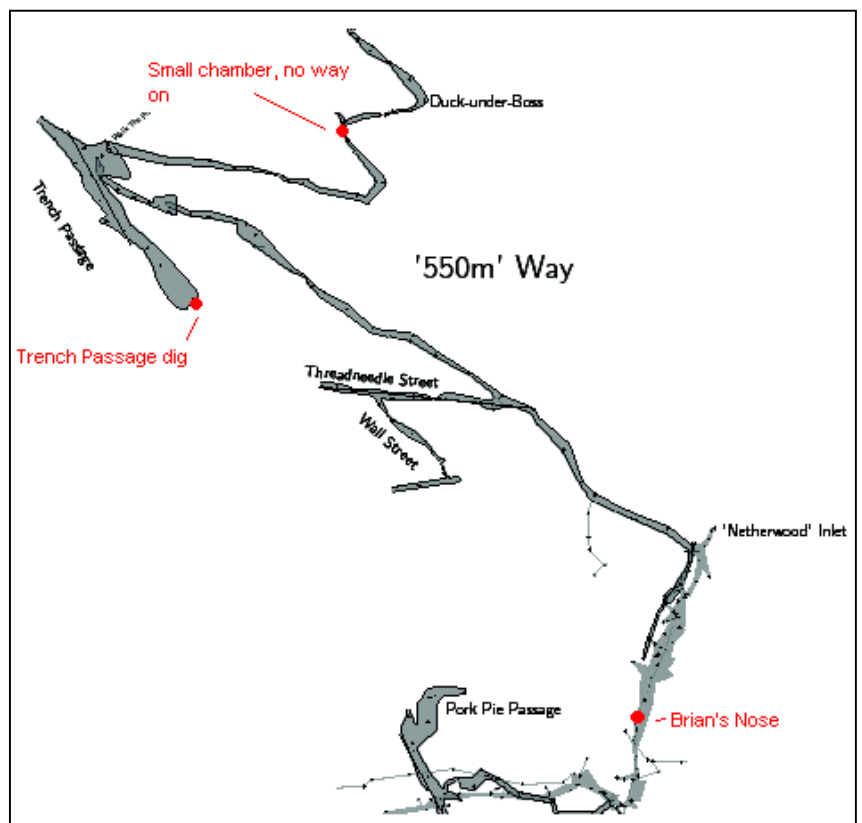
I climbed up into the roof into the alcove above the first streamway inlet (visible if you turn around and look upstream just after the

sump-like inlet). Nothing doing I'm afraid, just a small 'chamberlet'. A small crack heads left but it pinches out to nothing. So I can't see there is any passage heading off where the water comes in.

**Brian's Nose.** This is the heavy drip and 'pot' en-route to Royal Icing Junction. We started the dig at the bottom. More importantly it was an excuse for us to try out Richard's new stove. The tea was nice and hot but we both burnt our mouths.

You can still hear the streamway below here and I'm certain with a bit of effort we could dig down. We excavated some of the rubble cone and there is a solid rift below. Stones rattle down a long way. Next steps would be to clear back the overhanging rocks and hope it's a bit drier on the next few trips.

At the moment there is limited space to avoid the drip running down your back although at least it will keep the dig clean. The hammer and chisel



from West Passage were left here. It might be worth sending someone small down to the end of the main stream-way to see if there is a sound connection. I have a suspicion it pops in just after the constriction that Peat and I were hilti-ing.

**Trench Passage.** We dug a little bit at the far end. You can see more clearly now at the end of the low crawl.

There is definitely a way on here although it is small and twists out of sight. The best approach would be to follow the left hand wall right from the start of crawl so that all that overhanging dodgy stuff is removed. Prospects here are excellent and once we've dug the thing out it may be much bigger than first appearances. The air was fresh. A crowbar from chuckle choke is now sitting here but it will need a few more tools - a trowel and a small skip at a minimum.

**Threadneedle Street.** Richard and I muddied the water in Trench Passage on the way in. We didn't see this coming out of Threadneedle Street. Not very scientific I know.

Trench Stream was flowing quite strongly although of course there was less volume than seen on the flood trip. The water was coming out of a small trench on the right hand side before the low section. I think Bill Chadwick saw the flood water coming out higher up in the flowstone slope just below the Wall Street junction. There may be a high flow / normal flow thing going on so it would be worth lobbing some dye into Trench Stream, when it's flowing, to confirm the link. [TF]

Brain Snell adds: I think Brian's Nose needs to be referred to as Brian's Eye since it was my eye which needed 4 stitches (after falling against the cave wall in December 2006)

### **03/02/08 Upper Flood Swallet - digging in Thief's Chamber and discovery of Shake'n'Vac**

*Bill Chadwick, Peat Bennett, Adrian (BDCC), Mike Richardson*

There were a couple of rock falls in the choke (each one just after Adrian went past ...). The first was just after Not Easy Squeeze, before the drop down to the rope climb. A couple about 6" in size fell into the rift; one got stuck, I went back and poked it down. This bit looks just as safe as it was before. The second was from the loose stuff immediately above EasySqueeze. Peat shoved the debris into the turn-around area. This looks more dodgy. There is a water-melon sized rock jammed directly above the squeeze which looks to be split in two. Not instantly a problem, but I think we need to get some scaffold in there; I propose to take some down (and press-gang tourist trips into portering).

At the back of Thief's Chamber we cleared out the crawl to remove the loose stuff on the wall and ceiling, and to open it out some more. Peat then set to at the end, removing a lot of rocks and general spoil. Subsequently, Bill removed a positively humungous rock, so the end is now a turn-around sized chamber with a body-sized descending rift filled with clean (until dug anyway) washed rocks. It drafts really well whenever a decent rock is removed, and at one point the back slumped several inches, so there must be some open space below.

Bill kept saying how the air is really fresh so it's been named Shake'n'Vac.

Thief's Chamber is getting very gloopy. Most of the rocks were dumped into the floor to give a solid walkway; this is pretty good except that they are all below the surface so you can't actually see where they are! Outside of this strip is a real welly-puller.

There are two small skips, a large pointy bar, a pry bar and a small bar (taken from the Red Room) there now - also a narrow shovel which needs to be recovered since (a) its not much use and (b) I think its the one used to clear the silt traps at the Cottage.

The next trip should take a cold chisel and lump hammer; there is a rock at the top of the rift that could usefully be removed. Also, a larger spoil tray and drag rope - there is one in East Passage at the dead dig below Zebra Aven that could be recovered. Possibly also some slings or tat to pull large rocks up. I think this is currently the best dig in the cave, and doesn't need Hiltis or chemical persuasion.

### **02-03/02/08 Stainsby's Shaft - installing the winch** *Bill Chadwick et al*

On Saturday the winch was installed and I believe some cementing of the shaft walling was done. Unfortunately the bearings in the winch have rusted and need replacing before it can be used. Biff claims this is a straight forward job and he has the bits. A large pulley has been securely fixed to the roof directly above the shaft (for eventual use with the winch).

On Sunday, some more shaft walling was done below the winch. Lower down, the narrow rift formed by the wall and a large boulder was widened (both sides) with chiselling and Hiltis. Finally the old spoil and some new material were removed from the very bottom of the shaft. Some significant stabilisation / safety work is needed here as the old wooden shoring which holds back a lot of small fill is a bit iffy and lacks a firm foundation. Some of the surrounds fell into the bottom of the shaft when I was sitting on them! A significant quantity of cement (ready-mix) is going to be required for further walling. It was warmer underground than outside. At the bottom an occasional freshness of the air occurred. Interestingly some grey, water borne mud deposits similar in colour to the Trench Passage mud are present here - quite different to the natural fill which has orangey clay. [BiC]

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# Upper Flood Swallet - up close and personal

by Richard Carey

Since the breakthrough in 2006 we have been regaled with reports of "Caverns Measureless to Man" (currently 3km I believe, that's 2 miles to the older folk) pristine formations (and so many of them) and of course forbidden fruits (Neverland does exist). However I don't believe anyone has done a blow-by-blow description of the choke and its squeezes. "What squeezes?" some of you may retort, but I do not believe that I am in any way overlarge and believe myself to be the average-size caver.

The majority of members will know the cave as far as Andrew's Grotto but beyond is another world of pain and destruction. Since I returned from China I have worn out two oversuits.

There are thirteen squeezes between Andrew's Grotto and The Departure Lounge. I prefer to call them The Thirteen B\*\*\*\*\*S as I struggle with each one.

It takes three just to get to Golden Chamber. The first is tight and requires a degree of flexibility in the legs to get around the corner. It is followed immediately by another tight squeeze which requires a lot of thin thinking. Next is the climb up into Golden Chamber, not the easiest of manoeuvres as I feel it is best not to look at what you are forcing yourself through. The first reward for all this effort is Golden Chamber but this is only the beginning.

From Golden Chamber a small climb down is followed by a head-first-downhill as I prefer to approach the next squeeze head first. This is not desperate but it does help to position my zip away from my sternum. A short relaxation reaches Streamway Regained.

A short spell of walking is rewarded by 3D Squeeze. Not particularly tight but awkward as again it is downhill head-first followed immediately by an uphill manoeuvre (not easy for long legs).

Straight after this is the one that I find most difficult. It doesn't seem to present a problem to get my chest through but it does seem to grab my hips. The route goes uphill for a bit past Ben's Boulder and is not difficult.

This is followed by Not Easy Squeeze. It definitely lives up to its name especially on the return. Immediately followed by another squeeze that definitely grabs your hips on the way back up. I have seen it done head-first but is too brave for me. A quick pinch of the chest and you're through to the top of the climb down. There is a handline in place but it is easier to free-climb down.

A little more crawling reaches Stal Squeeze - straight after the squeeze you drop down a slot between the large boulder and the back wall. You then walk / stoop along a bit before an up-and-over slither over some flat boulders to EasySqueeze. An inclined flat-out squeeze that requires exact placement and thinking thin to get me through. Likewise on the return.

It is almost over with a constriction in the middle of a climb down followed by an average squeeze (to make it the number 13) and then a little boulder hopping and it's big, big, big.

It is the choke that makes this the most sporting trip on the Mendip Hills and I am just glad that I still fit, if only just.



Phillipa Glanville and Julie Hesketh in the squeezes, Upper Flood



## 2007 Christmas Dinner

The Christmas Dinner is always very popular and we've had a few years to practice the routine.

This year I think we got the formula just right. With a limit of 27, everyone had some elbow room and something to sit on although we used every seat in the building including plastic garden chairs and wobbly ones from the drying shed.

The cooking facilities were stretched beyond capacity and we had to bring in extra cooking facilities. We used two extra ovens, one of which was located in the cupboard under the stairs - picture Brenda running in and out with tray upon tray of roast tatties... Thanks go to Biff for loaning us his ex-narrow-boat gas cooker.

The festive spirit abounded and we decorated the cottage with our own tasteful decorations complete with my contribution of a rather attractive (if I do say so myself) fibre optic Christmas tree.

It was a most enjoyable evening; there were even some mince pies left over for Sunday. **Linda**



Dining at the Cottage is becoming popular - this was the scene at MCG on New Year's Eve.