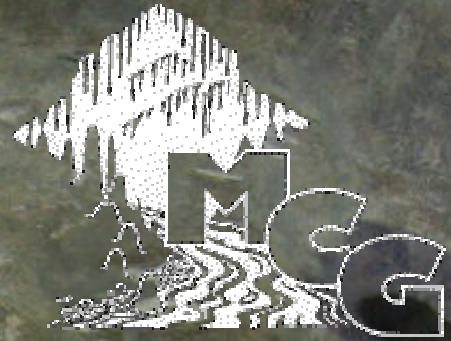


Number 361 March 2010

MCG NEWS



Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group

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Photo: Jeremy Gilson & Angela Clulow in the Room of the Refugees, Metro Cave. New Zealand. Photo: Jeremv Gilson

EDITORIAL

Welcome to a truly international Newsletter #361. In this issue we travel from the Caribbean, Austria, the Antipodes and even the Dales!

I hope you all enjoyed Number 360, and that you like the new format for the Newsletter. I have already received some useful feedback, but I am keen to try and take on board as many comments as possible. So if you have any gripes or suggestions please feel free to let me know.

I apologise for not getting the distribution right last time round, I guess it was too much to ask to work first time! However, I now have an email list to send the newsletter out on rather than via the Yahoo group, and I have a list of those who have said they want the higher resolution electronic copy, and those who want hard copies. The email list has been compiled from Karen's master copy, but I am aware that there are some errors in this. I simply do not have the time to chase these up, so any email addresses that "bounce" I will simply remove from my list. Equally hard copies were sent to all of those people who have indicated that they wish to receive paper copies on the membership list – this was about ten less than I was expecting! In short, if you are not receiving a newsletter, or you know someone who isn't please let me (and Karen) know your contact details.

If I am lucky enough to be voted in as your permanent editor in a couple of weeks, then I will be in constant need for material for future issues. As stated before, everyone has something to add, no matter how loosely related to caving or the Group. In particular I am also on the lookout for high quality photos to adorn the front cover. Perhaps we could start some form of competition for this?

As always I must thank all of the contributors to this issue, and I hope you all have an enjoyable and informative read.

Ed (the Ed) Waters.



Cheers!

CARIBBEAN CAVES AT CHRISTMAS

Over Christmas and New Year 2009/10, I was lucky enough to spend 2 weeks in Jamaica - not somewhere I had planned to go but as some of my in-laws were planning a family celebration there, we joined them for the 2 week holiday trip. As always, no non-caving holiday can be embarked upon without sneaking a couple of lights and thick caving gloves into my luggage. Despite the in-laws keener interest in relaxing on the beach. As Jamaica has around 8,000km² of limestone, there was no way I was going to miss out on an underground adventure! Armed with a complete set of maps covering the whole island, borrowed from Martin Grass, I ensured that the accommodation that was booked was fairly near one of the most accessible caves on the Island. We therefore stayed near Duncans, a small town about 45 minutes from Montego Bay. Just inland from here is Jamaica's famous "Cockpit Country", a 500 square metre area of small but impenetrable limestone hills. From above, the cockpits look like upturned eggboxes - a range of degraded conical hills, covered with lush jungle.

Caving however was the last thing on the minds of my in-laws as the lure of snorkelling and the pristine sand was just too tempting. So, itching to get underground, I asked a few locals where the nearest caves were. It turned out that there was a small cave "Duncans Bay Cave" just 10 minutes walk from our villa. Leroy, a local bar owner was happy to show me the way for a few dollars. I had thought that I'd be a little under-dressed in a sunhat, flip-flops and dress but persuaded by Leroy that it was "airee!" (roughly translated into Jamaican as "chill out man, it's all right!"), we set off. I was concerned that Leroy didn't seem to have a lamp, despite his protestations otherwise. I laughed when we got to the cave and he pressed a button on his cap which revealed 3 LEDs sewn into the peak! It gave him just about enough light to manage.

Duncan's Bay Cave doesn't get a mention in Alan Fincham's "Jamaica Underground" but turned out to be a couple of hundred metres long in total with at least 3 entrances. The main walk-in entrance led into an open-roofed chamber with a small but abandoned man-made well in it. Straight ahead and slightly uphill through a stooping height passage led to a further chamber open to daylight. In this chamber is a large banyan tree growing up and out of the cave and indeed the whole chamber is dominated by creepers and vines growing into the cave from the jungle outside. On a return visit with the family a few days later, the creepers provided excellent entertainment as 6 year old Eva swung like a monkey across the cave! Back from the entrance chamber, finally our torches had some use as we headed down hill into a larger passage, 15m across at its widest. Leroy told me that the chamber had been used historically as a burial site and indeed there were man-made structures that he

said were old tombs. They were unusually triangular shaped and no-one locally seemed able to tell me about their history. Pushing on into the cave, I left Leroy at the limit of his exploration and headed off towards what appeared to be the end of the cave – around 60m from the entrance. Remains of a fossil meander were filled with mud. I climbed as far up the meander as I could manage in flip flops and feel certain that there may have been more cave beyond at a higher level than I could get to. But I returned back to my guide who clearly thought I was a bit crazy, particularly when I got down on all fours to examine a short diggable crawl downstream from the entrance. So that was Duncan's Bay Cave. Not desperately exciting but at least I'd got underground.



Julie in Duncan's Bay Cave. Photo: Julie Hesketh.

Turning my sights to something a bit bigger, I had asked a number of locals about hiring transport to get me to Windsor Great Cave – described as one of Jamaica's most accessible wild caves. Despite its so-called accessibility, I was warned not to take a hire car there as the terrain was rough. Jamaica, being the playground of rich Americans, felt expensive to me but I was still surprised to find that no-one was really prepared to take me there for less than \$150 US which felt quite steep for a caving trip! Luckily Leroy came to my rescue once more and after some negotiations over a price for his mate to drive us to the cave in his pick-up, we agreed to go to the cave on New Year's Day 2010. That sounded like a good idea until I arrived at Leroy's bar on the 1st with my nephew Stephen, to find him zonked out where he had dozed off after his big new year's party the night before. A large plate of ackee and saltfish later, his mate, the driver, arrived, lit up a huge spliff and duly proceeded to drive us towards the cave.

The journey itself was fascinating – an hour and a half's drive in the open backed truck through Usain Bolt's hometown and into the fantastically lush vegetation of the Cockpit Country – a mixture of jungle and small farmsteads growing yams, coconuts, coffee and spices.

The Rough Guide to Jamaica notes that a local guide will meet you at the cave and indeed, as we drove up to the cave, Dango was walking back down from the cave entrance with three American tourists who were as surprised to see us as we were to see them in this remote part of the country. Dango, it turns out, is approved by the Windsor House Biological Institute close by, to take care of the cave and lead tourists in. My nephew Steven looked on in amazement as Dango prepared his huge bamboo torch to take us into the cave (of course, for a steep, negotiated fee!)



Windsor Great Cave Entrance. Photo: Julie Hesketh.

The cave was a 10 minute walk on a well trodden track up a gently sloping hillside – over some fallen tree trunks and past dense vegetation. The path takes you over a resurgence for the cave in a large indentation in the cliff and boulder strewn scramble. The entrance itself is a little disappointing compared to some tropical caves – 4 feet high and a few feet wide but it opens out immediately inside into a large, deep and high passage – full of spectacular fossil formations. As expected, it was humid inside and we set off slowly, immediately breaking out into a sweat despite our shirt-sleeves. Accompanied by Dango, Leroy and his friend, we made slow progress as the locals acclimatised to their first real proper caving trip (albeit still with Leroy's LED cap and converse trainers – though Rastaman, Dango, led the way in flip flops!)

The well trodden path through the cave ascends over guano-covered boulders and widens as it proceeds. Once past the entrance stal, the cave becomes more phreatic and the ceiling (around 5m high at this point) has some superb scalloping and solution holes. It is these holes that have been exploited by the literally

thousands of bats that flapped around our heads making a racket.

The Jamaica Caves Organisation (JCO) has recorded 11 different species of bat in the cave and guano has been mined historically from Windsor Great Cave. We were told that tourists come especially not to see the cave but to sit at the upper entrance at night to watch the spectacle of the thousands of bats exiting the cave at dusk. Alas we couldn't stay that long but we headed on to a wide chamber – Big Yard – where the roof span was over 60m wide and our lights (even the big bamboo) were insufficient to do it justice. At this point our party of non-cavers had enough and were keen to see daylight again, so I had a quick scamper onwards into the glom before rejoining the group to exit. Dango was in good humour as he recounted tales of various cavers who over the years have explored the cave and camped (much to his bemusement) underground.



Who needs a Scurion? Bamboo is the way forward.

Photo: Julie Hesketh.

Beyond our turnaround point, the cave forks into two passages which rejoin above an 11m drop into active stream passage. I had been told by the JCO that the recent rainfall would have meant that the stream way would have been impassable and so I could console myself with the fact that I had done almost as much caving there as possible in the conditions. We headed out into the relative cool of the jungle and headed back to our truck which was parked by the Martha Brae River – an excellent spot for a swim.

So that was the extent of my Jamaican caving. I'd like to have done more but as ever, caving alone isn't an option. I will console myself by imagining that one day, the MCG will do a trip to Jamaica (anyone??) and I'll finish off Windsor Great Cave and a whole load more!

Julie Hesketh

CHARTERHOUSE EXTENSIONS

As you are probably now aware the Charterhouse extensions are now open to Mendip Cavers. As one of the MCG Leaders (there is still a vacancy I believe) I can take parties of up to 3 plus myself HOWEVER given the difficulty of the trip (there are several intimidating squeezes, some of the formations are very vulnerable and is over 600 ft deep) I must pursue a cautious approach as a rescue would A: be personally very embarrassing and B: very difficult. So: If you have not been to the old cave: if I don't know you or if I haven't caved with you I will only take you the old cave. The old cave can be visited in 1 1/2 to 2 hours and therefore can be done as an evening trip. This is still a good trip very similar to the pre breakthrough Upper Flood.

Richard M Carey

WELLS MUSEUM EXHIBITION

Two exhibitions, **Treasures from the Earth** and **New History Landscape Archaeology** are at Wells and Mendip Museum, Cathedral Green, Wells from 27th February to May 16th. Treasures from the Earth is a touring exhibition featuring archaeological finds from the stored collections of major museums in the South West, while the History Landscape component is more Mendip based – including items about Charterhouse and Priddy. (More mature members of MCG might recognise a photo of an old cottage in Nether Wood)

If you visit the exhibitions, then also look out for bones from **Bone Hole and Hunters Lodge Inn Sink**, which may still be on display on the ground floor next to the Roman lead ingots.

Joan Goddard

A VERY OLD LAG GOES TO AUSTRIA

Part way though their annual visit to Austria, Cambridge University Caving Club have an expedition dinner at the Gasthof Staud'n'wirt where they have stayed every year but one since the early 1980s; and part way though the dinner, Hilda, who runs the Gasthof, brings out the guest book, and we all write something in the book. This year I wrote (rather in the style of the London Underground logo): "Mike the Animal; 25 years in Austria; 1984 - 2009". And the, the next person - I can't recall exactly who - looked at what I'd written and said "Oh My God! I was minus five years old when you first came!" Ouch! But at least there were four or so other people there in their forties (well, early forties).

Despite holding the sad-git-been-to-more-expos-than-anyone-else record, I'd last been to Austria in 2001. At that time I was caving maybe twice a year, and years of experience in no way compensated for lack of fitness. But since being sucked into MCG, I'd lost weight, developed much bigger shoulder muscles (Mendip may not be SRT territory, but crawling in and

out of Upper Flood Swallet every couple of weeks makes up for it), and was suffering from an excess of enthusiasm. Earlier in the year I'd taken three people from CUCC down Upper Flood, as it turned out including the expedition's leader and treasurer, and Austria had come up in conversation. To cap it all, they were going back to Kaninchenhohle after several years break, the cave I'd spend most of my time in in the late 1980s and through the 1990s. A "chance" comment to Christina that they were returning to Kaninchenhohle secured a pass out, so that was decided.

First, maybe a bit about the caves. CUCC have been visiting Austria since the late 1970s, and are exploring the Totes Gebirge. This is across the valley from the maybe better known Dachstein, but has the advantage of a decidedly up-market base camp, and a road up to the plateau, which avoids all that tedious walking up big hills. Don't get me wrong, I like walking, I'm just not too bothered about combining walking and caving. From the top of the road its somewhere between an hour and two hours walk across the plateau (note, plateau, a word meaning reasonably sensible and flat walk) up to top camp. Top camp is currently a luxurious bivi under a large rock bridge at Steinbruckenhohle, which I'd stayed at in 2001. Its progressed rather well since then; nicely terraced into sleeping platforms, water on tap from the rainwater/meltwater collection system, decent sized gas stoves. and solar power for battery charging. And, seemingly bizarre to me (who considers such things to be Satan's Spawn), excellent mobile phone reception, which meant I could stand on the limestone slabs outside the bivi and phone home.

Anyway, having driven from Bristol with Frank, a CUCC/Wessex caver, in a very nice (read, fast) car, and heading straight up to top camp with all my caving and camping gear, I arrived at the bivi in the early evening in a puddle of sweat but still feeling pretty good. I can't say for sure, but I suspect I also now hold the oldest-active-caver record for CUCC expeditions, and I had a slight nagging feeling I might make a total idiot of myself, but it was a good start. I was encouraged by how much lighter my caving gear was compared to 2001; Llon/LED lights rather than a NiCd filler Oldhams case plus a carbide lamp; an alloy bar rack rather than my almost wear-free but heavy stainless steel one; and a lightweight oversuit (meaning I was prepared to risk the cost of trashing it against lugging a heavyweight one around). Plus, nice new Petzl chest and hand jammers (to which I shall return), and one of those spiffy Pantin thingies.

Next morning, I decided to take it easy, so - best laid plans and all that - I got onto a trip to the far reaches of Kaninchenhohle, a bit where I'd been, just once, in 1992. Actually, this is significant. Kaninchenhohle is the north-most part of the Schwarzmooskogelhohlensystem, which is now over 50km long and over 1km deep. The north-most part of

Kaninchenhohle lies near enough above the southern reaches of Steinbruckenhohle - around 16km long - so there was a lot of interest in trying to connect the two. The north-most parts of Kaninchenhohle were last visited in the mid-1990s, and there are only a handful of CUCC people still caving who ever went there. Fortunately, life has got easier, since an entrance to Kaninchenhohle which was found in the late 1990s shortened the distance quite a lot (or, while its not a lot really closer, its easier going). The route is mostly quite level, with only two or three pitches of any note, and I made it there and back. The far end was pretty much as I remembered it; we poked around in some holes that had not been looked at before, ran out of gear, and came out. The final pitch is 50m, and its a long time since I did anything that size (I hesitate to say "that big"), it was both less intimidating, because the top is lit by light from the entrance (so its nearly all over), and more intimidating, because the top is lit by light from the entrance (so the height is quite apparent), but that spiffy Pantin thingy really is the dogs.

However, I was rather less than happy with my new Petzl jammers, the ones with the nice ergonomically designed release catches. Now, I'm used to a Croll with a nice large - and hence usable - ring release, which you can get a muddy finger into, and I've always used a Jumar as a hand jammer, which has a nice large - and hence usable - catch. Muttering under my breath about them, I decided that maybe I just needed some more experience. Needless to say, I shall return to these anon.

Over the next three days, I did three more trips into Kaninchenhohle, one something of a tourist through trip, and a freezing poke near the entrance (Austrian caves are cold anyway, and this was a particularly cold bit of a cold cave), and one more back to the far end. This might have found something, but first I took the wrong sort of rock anchors; then we realised we'd not picked up any hangers at the gear dump two pitches back; then we just ran out of time. But I did get to try out a bothy bag, a thoroughly amazing bit of kit; basically a big rip-stop nylon bag you - and depending on size and desperation - other people can sit in. It gets really warm quite quick, I might have to buy one for use down Upper Flood.



Mike underground in Austria. Photo: Mike Richardson.

Four trips in four days, something I have never done in 15-odd expeditions, so at that point it was back down to the fleshpots of base camp. Austria may be a bit expensive but for some reason bottled beer is really cheap, maybe 80p a bottle, and OK, it's not proper British beer, but it's not bad, especially at that price. and, the Gasthof has this really nice wood hut which is used in winter by the curling cum potato-eating cum oompah-music cum during club that we get to hang out in. Plus, a decent evening meal; that's evening meal singular, must be something about Mendip but the caves were calling.....

Back up on the plateau, I decided it was time for a trip town Tunnockschacht, which is the next significant cave to the north of Steinbruckenohhle, so off I set with Steve (apparently an MCG member in the 1990s), Becka (seriously, seriously, hard caver) and Julian (also hard, especially when, how shall I put it, "encouraged" by Becka). This trip was to involve a 100m pitch with a free-hanging knot-pass about 25m down. OK, I've done knot-passes before, no big deal, but I'd not reckoned with the Petzl ergonomic release catch from Hell.

Arriving at the knot, I just could not move the Croll to down-prussik. It was not until much later I figured out that, using my old Croll with its nice large release ring, I'd got into the habit of down-prussiking by using the ring to swing the cam clear, rather than thumbing it down. This worked fine, but not with this nasty new plastic illegitimate release catch male genitals thing; no (insert expletive of choice) way. So back up I came, cursing furiously and apparently freaking Julian out, and set off out. Just as well, because a few minutes later my headlight went off and I discovered I'd not got my backup. Fortunately I'd brought my super-bright spotter light, so that got me out.

Back at the bivi, in true Austrian tradition, the sky shifted from clear blue to utter darkness, lightning flashed and the heavens opened, and a group of CUCC walking up proved that chivalry is thoroughly dead, in an everyman-for-himself and the devil take my girlfriend "are you wet" sort of way. At eleven that evening, the callout time for the Tunnockschacht trip came and went, so we all got up and dressed, and variously stayed at the bivi "organising", or walked up to the cave entrance - now in very light drizzle, or walked up to the cave entrance and went down to see what was going on. As it turned out, the other three were sitting it out at the bottom of the 100m pitch which was now a significant waterfall; fortunately they made it up shortly after, and I offered a very small vote of thanks to Petzl. The plastic release catches are still rubbish though.

A return match a day later was rather more successful, bolting down a narrow rift with the aid of a nice little power drill, we made some reasonable progress, but then the giant call out board over the channel called, so that was that, and it was time to stagger back down

the hill with all the gear I'd lugged up 10 days earlier, only damper and less well organised. Oh, and it rained.

So, how did it go? For me, pretty well. There's no point in pretending I can do stuff like I did 25 years ago, and I'm definitely slower now, but experience counts for something, and regular Upper Flood trips seem to be doing a great job of fighting off the inevitable; and even the SRT wasn't too awful. CUCC are a very accommodating bunch, and I reckon that if you avoid any of the "when you get to my age ..." boring middle-aged crap, you can have a great time and everyone gets on just fine. Either that, or they are all very very polite people.

Mike Richardson



The Steinbrucken Bivvi: Mike Richardson.

LIBRARY ADDITIONS

Fernhill Rediscovered DVD by Steve Sharp who also composed the accompanying music. This short film (20mins) documents the reopening of Fernhill Cave in Fairy Cave Quarry; the project resulted from the discovery of an old photograph in Wells Museum archives. Fernhill Cave was first discovered in 1960 but by 1965 the entrance had been buried under topsoil and gravel tipped over the quarry face when an extension was planned. Comparison of rocks identified on the old photo and on the current quarry face suggested where the Atlas diggers should look and four days' work with an excavator and digger saw the entrance rift exposed. Problems with gravel fill running into the passage proved frustrating and required considerable amounts of shoring but in April 2008 the cave was reopened. A large curtain, seen on the early photos, is still there but with the bottom part broken off by blast damage.

Daren Cilau was also filmed by Steve Sharp, and accompanied by his music. This is a longer DVD film (about 35 mins) and I found it enthralling. I was quite exhausted watching the crawling and wriggling required to travel through the cave (and Steve says it was pretty exhausting to film too!!). The film had just a few lines of text on screen and occasional comments by the participants – but no commentary which would have detracted from the images. Relevant sections of the survey were shown at intervals and this helped give the impression of a journey through the cave. I haven't had the pleasure (and pain?) of a trip into Daren but this film was almost like being there. The formations were amazing, and the photography, including some stills by Mark "Gonzo" Lumley, was excellent. A lighter interlude occurred when - "Mad Fi" - Fiona Crozier (ex-MCG) was treated to a "wicked" birthday cake at Hard Rock Café!

Joan Goddard

A WEEKEND IN THE DALES

As some of you will know, I am a relative newcomer to both the MCG and caving, I was bitten hard by the bug in summer last year and have been scrambling to learn as much as possible about the sport ever since.

I don't think an enthusiastic new caver could possibly find him or herself in better company than the people of the MCG. Everyone I have met at the member's weekends, caved with or even just exchanged correspondence with have offered freely of their knowledge, experience and practical assistance, enabling me to progress quite quickly towards being halfway capable!

At the November members weekend, I was fortunate enough to bag a place on the beginners SRT course under the instruction of John Crowsley, which provided an excellent platform on which to build experience.

This experience I would need to gain relatively swiftly, as I'd decided that I really fancied being a part of the MCG Spain expedition involving lots of SRT. My goal was to get to a level where I was confident and independent on the rope; able to sort out any little tangles I might find myself in and not burden others with having to assist me.

To that end, I decided to cross Andy Sparrow's palm with silver, in exchange for a shiny new SRT kit and began looking out for opportunities to get it dirty! Luckily, we have a resident MCG SRT guru in the form of Miguel Tome, who, being the personable chap he is, agreed to take me on a trip down Hunter's Hole for a spot of practice, with Russes Hunt and Porter also in attendance. The trip was a great confidence builder and consolidated the knowledge I'd gained from John.

Next up was a post Christmas, Pre-New Year trip to Biff Frith's back garden, which contains a mightily

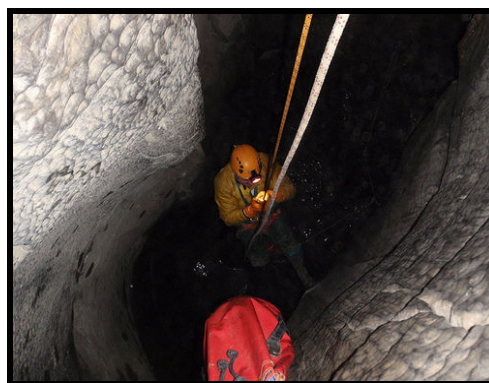
impressive scaffold rig designed to provide a superb above ground SRT training facility. All the club members who attended learned something and I gained yet more valuable experience. I felt ready to tackle something more technical.

At the MCG's New Year celebrations, I mentioned my frustration at being unable to attend the club's planned April 2010 trip to Yorkshire to Ed (The Ed!), whereupon his better half suggested that the pair of us should just clear off and do a trip ourselves to give her some peace and quiet! Sportingly, Ed agreed (Obeyed?) and we set a date for late January.

We chose the NPC as our base for the weekend and arrived late on Friday night to find we had the place to ourselves. Our plan for the weekend was to do Bull Pot on the Saturday and possibly Yordas cave afterwards if time permitted. I'd mentioned to Ed that I fancied trying out my head for heights, so he'd also pencilled in the North-West route in Alum Pot, which we'd do on the Sunday.

After an Inglesport breakfast to cut through the fog of the previous night's excellent beers, we headed up to Kingsdale, Ed pointing out numerous caves and other areas of interest along the way. We parked alongside another party who we discovered were also descending Bull Pot and changed in a leisurely fashion to allow them to get a good head start.

Seeing as Ed had done all the driving, as well as providing all the rope, I could hardly kick up a fuss at his insistence that I do the Lion's share of the portering, but at least the extra effort got me nice and warm as we walked up the hill to the entrance. Although most of the recent snow had melted, there was still a fair bit lying around, with an impressive cornice overhanging the entrance pitch. Ed over-rigged the other party, showing me how he was taking pains to cause them minimal fuss when they came to de-rig. Ed's instruction continued throughout the trip, including pointing out interesting geological features here and there. I even had a go at doing some rigging on the 'slot' pitch, as well as de-rigging on our way out. All in all, it was a cracking learning experience. Just what I'd hoped for.



Ed in Bull Pot. Photo: Kev Speight.

On making our exit, we decided it was probably too late to have a stab at Yordas cave, although we did poke our heads in the entrance after we got changed, then headed back for pasta and yet more choice beers in the hut.

Buoyed with confidence after Bull Pot, on the Sunday I rather cockily suggested to Ed that he allow me to have a go at rigging Alum Pot. Humoring me, he agreed, but added the caveat that the sense of exposure at Alum would be significantly greater! Sure enough, at the pitch head I found that I'd lost the ability to tie any sort of knot and we both quickly concluded that it might be better if I just concentrated on doing what I needed to do to not die! I'm pretty sure Ed had known this would happen, but bless him, he'd not wanted to burst my bubble!

The sense of exposure truly was quite staggering. I don't have any particular fear of heights, but this was quite something else! I guess the fact the the shaft is day-lit for pretty much it's entire depth doesn't help matters. Luckily, I was able to focus through the adrenaline and was soon whooping and hollering my way down the truly awesome abseil. I deliberately stopped and locked off a couple of times, just to take in the majesty of the location. My initial fear had faded somewhat, though a healthy respect for my situation remained!

Bottoming the shaft, I found Ed quite keen to start back up again. Whilst the water conditions weren't too bad, spray from the waterfall lashed around us, making things a tad chilly. He started on up, while I took the time to have a poke around and snap a few pics, before doing my best to shelter from the spray. When Ed's call of 'rope free' echoed down to me, I was more than a little glad to get back on the rope and exert myself again. As I prussiked out, I experimented with slight variations in technique and discovered that on such a big pitch, little details can make a big difference. The top was gained without incident and we were soon back at the car in dry gear. The weekend was a huge success and I'd ticked all the boxes I wanted to.

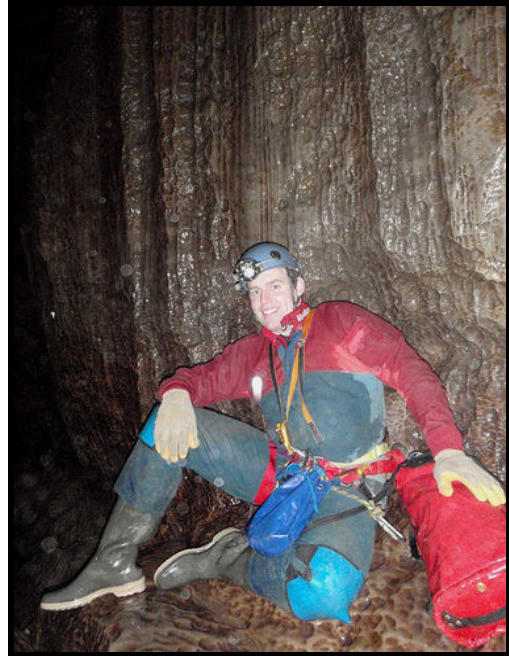


Ed Prussiking out of Alum Pot. Photo: Kev Speight.

Thanks to Ed, Miguel, John, Jeremy and plenty of others at the MCG, my confidence and experience has grown considerably since joining. I hope one day, to be able to give others the same help to develop caving skills as has been afforded me.

Bring on Espana!

Kev Speight



Kev enjoying Bull Pot. Photo: Kev Speight.

THE FAR SIDE OF THE PLANET – JEREMY GILSON

New Zealand is an amazing country with two Islands which are very different from each other but each nice in their own way, Angela and I went over just before Christmas and had an excellent three week holiday.

We had originally planned to do an adventure caving trip at Waitomo in the north island but sadly we had to cancel this as I had pulled a muscle in my back and was not caving fit for the first week of our holiday. Instead we settled for two excellent show caves, one drifting downstream on a boat in the dark looking at the glow-worms and the second an interesting and well decorated cave. These were not the popular tourist caves but ones off the beaten track accessible by dirt track and some walking.



Glow Worm Threads in a New Zealand Cave.

Photo: Jeremy Gilson.

Our opportunity for some 'real' caving came on the South Island at the end of our holiday when we decided to book a commercial trip to Metro Cave, this is located in the North West about half an hour's drive from where we were staying near the spectacular Punakaki Rocks. We arrived to find that we were the only ones on the trip, good news as we were to find that as cavers we were given the chance to enjoy more than the standard tourist trip. We donned our borrowed wetsuits and set off in the minibus with our guide Ray, an experienced member of the local Search & Rescue/Cave Rescue team. The minibus took us to a small railway platform where we continued our journey up the interestingly named Nile River to the caving area. I have never been caving on a train before!!

This area has similar limestone scenery to some of the UK with huge cliffs, an area where the BBC filmed their adaptation of Conan Doyle's 'Lost World'. Interestingly caving is not a popular pastime in this remote area and Ray told us that there were still entrances in the rain forest that nobody had been in yet to explore. I asked about digging, they don't need

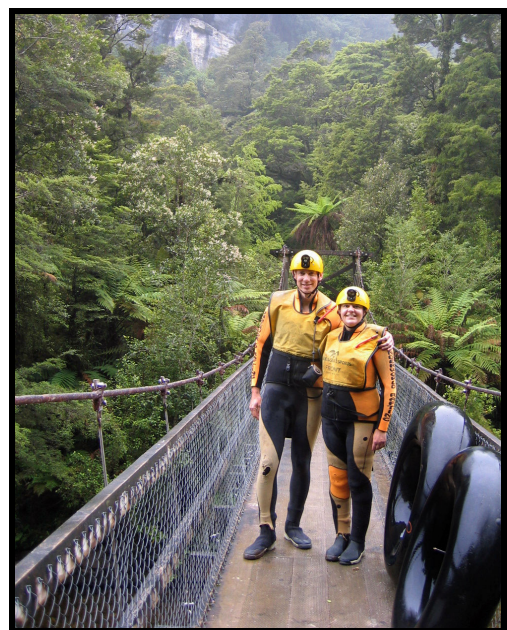
to, if you want to find a new cave just look for an entrance that nobody has been in before!!!

We collected our inner tubes and set off up the cliff up a huge flight of steps, at the top was the impressive entrance, our guide unlocked the gate and in we went. This cave is natural and unlit, we had helmets and lights provided and as cavers were allowed to wander on ahead, more like caving with a mate than a trip for tourists. The passages were large and the formations amazing, the most impressive was the Hall of the Refugees as shown in the cover picture. After exploring the dry series we collected our tubes and set off to the wet lower series. The highlight of the trip was floating in our tubes in total blackness down the river until we came into the main river chamber which had thousands upon thousands of glow-worms, despite being underground and with our lights turned off we could easily see each other and the cave around us, whilst above were the tiny lights, like stars on the brightest of nights. We floated along in silence looking open mouthed at the roof above our heads, it was one of those moments in your life that you will never forget.

Sadly it had to come to an end, we floated out into daylight and after crossing a couple of gravel bars were out of the cave and joining the main river outside. The final leg of our journey was to float down the river, over rapids, down slower deeper stretches and finally back to our starting point by the rope bridge and our waiting train.

It was an easy trip, but one that Angela and I will never forget. If you get the chance go to New Zealand, a world of glaciers, beaches, snow capped mountains and amazing caves.

Jeremy Gilson.



Jeremy & Angela on the Swing Bridge.
Photo: Jeremy Gilson.

REMINDER!

As stated in Newsletter #360, the AGM will be held at the Cottage at 10am on Saturday 27th March. This is your opportunity to provide your two penneth to the running of the Group. Please make every effort to attend, to ensure that your views are taken on board.

OGOF DRAENEN ACCESS

Access to this cave will be altered from 21st March. Until now access has been via a combination padlock, the code for which could be obtained via the Pwll Du Cave Management Group, but the landowner has now requested that access be via a key (see http://www.pdcmg.org.uk/PDCMG_Minutes_091212.pdf for details).

A further, more serious issue, is that due to the bitter disputes over further entrance to this cave, the landowner has stated that if cavers cannot come to an agreement, all access will cease from 31st March. Efforts to maintain access are apparently being made, and the outcome of these will be included in the next Newsletter.

To find out more of the whole sad story see the many postings at,

<http://ukcaving.com/board/index.php/topic,9335.0.html> and related threads on the same site.

CHEDDAR CAVING CLUB QUIZ NIGHT

The MCG was represented by two teams at this year's Cheddar CC quiz. The two almost completely independent teams consisting of Mike and Christina Richardson plus Doug and Alison Harris, with team two of Joan and Simon Goddard plus Ed Waters and Mike Moxon.

The questions were set and asked by Robin Gray, and they varied from the cryptic to the obscure! The difficulty of the questions can be gauged by the winning score of 27 out of a possible 14, victory being taken by a group of show cave guides from Cheddar (including Chris Castle and Phil Hendy).

The event was great fun, and I will certainly try very hard to return for next years event. For the record MCG No.1 team managed 14 points, whilst MCG No.2 got a very creditable 20 points, putting us in joint 3rd place.

Ed Waters

A CRIPPLES OUTING TO SWAN MINE

Saturday 12th March saw a group comprising Buddy [Mark Williams], his children Ollie and Jenny, Jeremy Gilson and his son Ryan, Angela Clulow, Hayley Clark, Ed Waters and Corinne Atkins (from the Shepton) visit Swan Mine (aka Kingsdown Quarry) at Kingsdown.

The venue had been chosen as Buddy's and Hayley's reintroduction to caving after their operations (Hayley back and Buddy knee) as it would not provide too much in the way of physical strain. With Angela still getting over her knee operation as well, it was definitely going to be a sedate trip!

The mine is located conveniently opposite a fine pub, the Swan Inn (hence the mine's name). A swift drink was followed by arranging permission to leave our cars in the pub car park before venturing underground.

Once through the short shored crawl at the main entrance, we spent a happy couple of hours exploring most of the easily accessible bits, and taking plenty of photos. Points of interest include a very well preserved crane and lots of old miner's graffiti. The mine is also notable in that the stone was extracted by horse and cart. The cart ruts are preserved very well throughout the mine, and there are even a few horse shoe prints preserved in the further reaches of the mine.

All in all it was a fun trip, without any mishaps (at least until Ryan fell over in the car park afterwards).

Ed Waters



Main Haulway in Swan Mine. Photo Ed Waters