

MCG News

A man wearing an orange helmet with a headlamp and a black jacket is looking up at a large, curved, white mineral deposit in a cave. The deposit has a yellowish-brown border. The background is dark and rocky.

October 2022 - Issue 388

Mendip Caving Group Newsletter 388 - October 2022

Trustees

Secretary: Bill Chadwick
secretary@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Treasurer: Tom Harrison
treasurer@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Caving Secretary: Mark Edwards
caving@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Cottage Warden: Jason Kirby
warden@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Recorder/Librarian: David Loss
librarian@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Tackle master: Dan Matthews
tackle@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Social Secretary: Jackie Murch
social@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Editor: Dave Cook
editor@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Investment Administrator:
Ben Cooper
Custodians: Tim Francis,
Jonathan Roberts and Brian Snell

Other Posts

Examiners: Linda Milne and Peat Bennett
Conservation and Access: Hayley Clark
Website Manager: David Loss

Headquarters

Nordrach Cottage
Charterhouse on Mendip
Blagdon
BRISTOL
BS40 7XW
01761 462 797

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the club or any of its officers.

Photographs by article authors unless otherwise stated.

Mendip Caving Group is a registered charity, No. 1197325. The object of the Group is for the benefit of the public and the furtherance of all aspects of the exploration, scientific study and conservation of caves and related features.

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Cottage Bookings

Members need not book beds in advance. The guest booking form and a calendar of guest bookings, can be found on our website www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk. We do from time to time let the whole cottage to bring in much needed income. Because of modern safeguarding rules, which protect both young people and our members, if we let out beds to a Scout group, members will not be able to stay the night.

Membership News for 2022

Farewell to:

Tanya Sparey	Demetri Benfield
Alan McBride	Sidney Copus
Karen Fendley	Victoria Dean
Chris Binding	Lucy George
Dave Ball	Carly Hynam
John Miriam	Gary Laver
Deborah Lambert	Phil Marshall
Emma Lambert	
Aaron Phillips	
Cameron Turley	

Welcome to:

Lee Andrews	Jethro Reading
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New Full Members:

Justin Harris	Dave Cook
Paul Quinton	Dave Vidal

Front Cover photo

Georg Scheuring by the Triple curtain in the approach to Pork Pie Passage, Upper Flood. Photo Michaela Lutz 2022

Back Cover Photo

Becky Vials after a trip in Boss Swallet. Photo Chris Barrington 2022

Welcome and Editorial

First, an apology for the recent infrequency of the publication of MCG News. We elected a new Editor at our April 2022 AGM but his personal circumstances have changed since then, leaving him no time to work on a Newsletter. This edition has been compiled by the MCG Secretary – Bill Chadwick. I would also like to remind readers that 2022 has seen the publication of Tim Francis' excellent '**Blackmoor Valley from the Log book**' as MCG Occasional Publication No. 7. A PDF copy is available from the Upper Flood section of our web site. Printed copies costing £5, are still available on request.

It's great to have the pandemic behind us and have our freedom to associate and travel back again. The MCG did of course lose income from bed night fees etc. during the pandemic, but that was more than made up for by government grants, so that the MCG is currently in a comfortable financial position. I am pleased to report that guest bed night fees are up again, from both Scout and University groups and others too. But now of course we are faced with high inflation and hugely increased fuel costs. Nevertheless, the trustees have decided to hold our membership fee for 2023 at the 2022 rate. We have also kept the member's bed night fee at £5 for now, but have increased the guest bed night fee to £7.50. We were amused recently when a student guest phoned us from their mobile because they were worried about an alarm that was sounding. The 'alarm' turned out to be the land-line telephone ringing!

The MCG is managed by some dedicated volunteers who are trustees of the MCG charity. If you value and enjoy your membership of the MCG, do please consider giving something back by standing for one of our Trustee posts at our next AGM in April 2023. We currently need a new Newsletter Editor. We would also like to see new folk in post as Treasurer and Librarian. You will find a description of the various trustee's roles on our website. The Editor always welcomes contributions of material, words and/or photos, for this Newsletter.

We will hold the now traditional, MCG Christmas Dinner on Saturday 3rd December at the hut. The cost is £20 per head to include a small gift or glass of wine. Please let our Social Secretary Jackie Murch know soon if you want one of the thirty available places, by emailing social@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk. It would be great to see a good mix of old and new members at this event. To keep abreast of Member's weekend and other MCG events and goings on, do please consider joining our Facebook and/or Google group – just ask any of the management trustees about how to join.

The October member's weekend was our annual cottage work weekend – a chance for all our members to help clean and make repairs and improvements to our cottage. The early autumn weather was glorious, making the outdoor jobs most enjoyable. As our log stove is at last working well and we have good modern double glazing throughout the cottage, it is now possible to get toasty warm in the lounge without using much of our expensive LPG. With increased fuel costs in mind, Jason brought us a tipper load of logs, which several members helped saw and split. We also cut down the dead Cherry tree near the new shed to provide yet more firewood. The action shot of Dave Lossl fleeing the falling tree, chain-saw in hand, is by myself, that of the log pile by Jason Kirby. We would like to thank all the folk who helped at the weekend, especially our new member, Matty Dredge and his partner who cleaned all our windows. Special thanks too to Mark Edwards who cooked us a curry in the evening. The cottage and grounds were all made to look spick and span – our yard has not looked tidier for several years.



For our September weekend we had an Oktoberfest – apparently, it's traditional to hold such a gathering in September! A fine Sausage supper was laid on by Kay Mathews. Kay posted this photo of Dave Cook doing a table traverse.



On the August bank holiday, several MCG members were at the 2022 Cave Fest in Crickhowell. Dan Matthews is helping to organise the 2023 Cave Fest and is hoping to hold it at the pop-up campsite just down the road from our cottage. If you would like to get involved with that, please get in touch with Dan. Part of the aim of Cave Fest is to engage younger folk with caving, if they later join MCG that will be great.

At our August member's weekend, we were treated to an excellent Mexican themed supper provided by our social team of Kay Mathews and Jackie Murch which was followed by an outdoor talk about bats by our very own Chris Barrington. For this event we experienced what is a rare thing at Nordrach, a fine warm summer's evening! There is more about Chris' bat talk in a short article later in this newsletter.

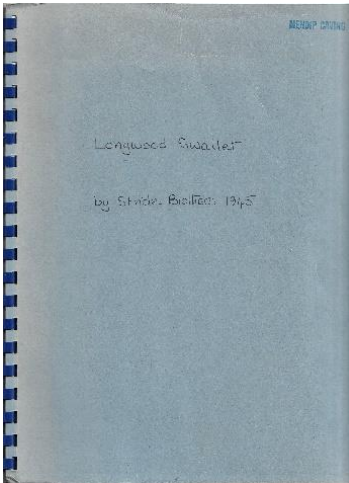
In July, we welcomed two German cavers, Michaela Lutz and Georg Scheuring, for a stay at our cottage. They were on a ten-week camper van trip to visit most of the caving areas in the UK and had accepted an offer of a trip into Upper Flood. On the day of their trip, Richard Carey and I were both slightly alarmed by the size and weight of their two bags of photographic equipment, which they insisted was all essential. The large and heavy bags made for a rather lengthy and arduous 8 and a ½ hour trip. As European cavers, perhaps used to big caves, I am not sure they quite understood why we have left several sections of Upper Flood so awkward and tight! However, some good photos were obtained by Michaela, including those on the front and inside back cover of this newsletter.

On our July member's weekend, several folk took part in the annual Wessex Challenge. Despite a no doubt valiant effort, our team did not win! Chris Barrington (in the wet suit) posted these photos though I doubt they are selfies!

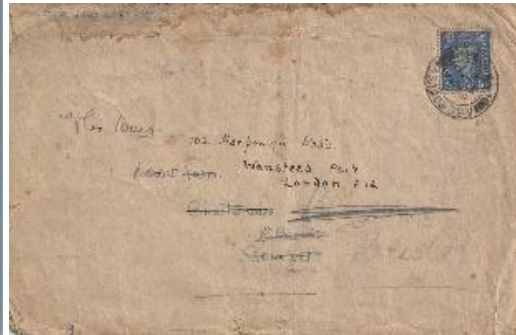


The Strides and the Exploration of Longwood Swallet

By Joan Goddard



This 'spiral-bound 'report' was found recently in the Mendip Caving Group library. It had presumably been given to an early member of MCG by Fred or Kathleen Young who farmed Lower Farm, Charterhouse.

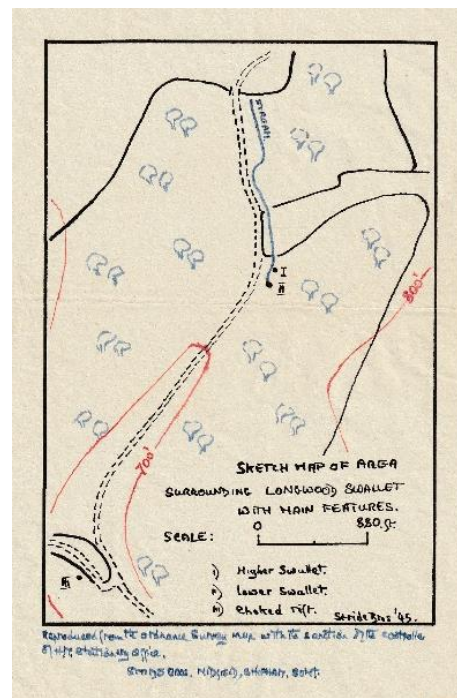
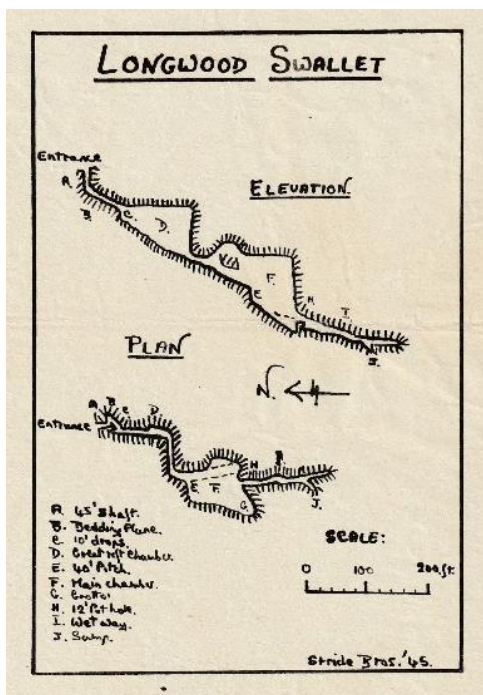


Within it is an envelope addressed to Kathleen Young and a hand-written report by the Stride Brothers (R.D. and A.H. Stride) who discovered and explored the cave. Much of it has been used in the paper 'Longwood Swallet, Charterhouse on Mendip' in UBSS Proceedings, Vol.5 (3) 1946.

As it is an important historical document, the Committee agreed that it should be donated to Wells and Mendip Museum. The Museum was pleased to accept it. The item has been scanned and a copy is in the MCG library. Their original words are reproduced below (using a typewriter style font).

Longwood Swallet Charterhouse on Mendip by STRIDE BROTHERS

This swallet drains the surface waters of a large area of Blackdown immediately north of it - an area of 5/6 of a square mile. This system together with the great G.B. System, should greatly help in the explanation of the hydrology of the area north of Cheddar Gorge.



DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The entrance to the system lies in Longwood Valley 300 yds south of Lower Farm Charterhouse. The wooded valley is to be found on the 6ins O.S. Map (Sheet XVIII SW). Besides the two swallets directly leading into this system, there is another cave (Nº III on the sketch map of the area) at the junction of the two arms of Longwood. It is choked after a few feet. The swallets drain the area immediately north of them on the south slopes of Blackdown. In summer the stream is finally engulfed in its bed 70 yds further up the valley than the higher swallet. But for over eight months of the year, the stream runs down, & is engulfed in the lower swallet.

There is a miniature gorge at the approach of the higher swallet. At its terminal point, a rock face through the fissures of which the water seeped, often became choked, causing the stream to run down to, and enter the lower swallet. It was at this rock face that we commenced work. The general direction of the cave is South South West - that is toward Black Rock gate in Cheddar Gorge.

THE EXCAVATION

The decision to excavate was made in April 1944, several experienced speleologists having given a favourable opinion of the situation. Permission having been obtained, we together with a small party of Sidcot speleos started excavating the refuse at the foot of the rock face - then measuring 6 x5 ft. Over a period of weeks, we removed over a hundred cubic feet of leaves and ????, and reached rock bottom. After debating on possibilities, we drove forward into the fissured rock face & moved over 7 tons of rock.

At a distance of 12 feet from the old rock face, we broke into a shaft, cut by water action at the crossing point of two vertical rock faults. This was somewhat choked, but when cleared was descendable to a depth of 35 ft - that is 45ft below the level of the valley bottom. At the bottom a choked continuance of the major fault was entered. It was here that our difficulties really commenced. There having been much rain in the past months, the stream ran down the valley, and made the drop impassable. When we succeeded in diverting the stream with a dam, and once more attempted to make a descent, we did so under very severe conditions. The shaft & rift were composed of loose unstable rocks, & to make matters worse, we were saturated with a sheet of falling water, the drainage of the term bed & sodden valley floor. Under these appalling conditions Stride Bros spent many long hours, removing the most dangerous rocks in attempting to clear a way into the low bedding plane beyond.

It was on one of these occasions, with the stream above running high, & threatening to break the dam at any moment, & descend onto them, that Stride Bros made a great effort & forced their way into the bedding plane. Equipped with tools, they broke their way through, and after some time, reached the head of the first drop. Returning laden with equipment, but through forced circumstances, with only a small supporting party, they descended the drop &, after removing many perilously poised boulders, managed to force their way, within a few feet of the 40ft drop & main chamber. Here they halted.

Later, seeking advice from higher authorities, they were advised lest they might involve the Sidcot lads in the dangers of the new cave.

It was a month later, in April '45 the Bristol Speleo Society informed us of their desire to descend the cave. They meanwhile did so, & with the aid of a strong party & adequate equipment, (?) from the 40ft drop, to the end of the system. About half the cave as we know it today. Later, in conjunction with them & the Wessex Cave Club, we completed thorough exploration of the system, and made a preliminary survey. After the exploration of the system, a short shaft was sunk from the surface, extending into the 35ft shaft lengthening it to 45ft. The present entrance is situated here, the older entrance is out of use through falling rock.

THE CAVE SYSTEM

Descending the 45ft shaft, the vertical fault which we knew in the early days as the "water rift" is entered. Distinctly the wettest part of the cave in the winter months. By crawling and twisting, it is possible to pass through a bedding plane – a source of great difficulty to many cavers. A square-shaped passage is then entered. From the formations, it is evident that this is an older part of the cave. By squeezing, the first 10ft drop is reached – this is very difficult with, and impossible without, a rope. A steep boulder pile leads down into the great rift chamber. As a turn to the right is made at the bottom of the 10ft drop, a very unstable chamber may be entered – it is possible to descend here 30ft until a choke is reached.

Returning to the rift chamber, and descending the boulder pile, the roof gradually rises. Near the end it is over 90ft high, and is very beautifully ornamented with formations. Bosses and curtains abound, and cave pearls are to be found on the lesser slopes. At this point a small tributary enters and is met with down the cave. To the right a rift leads by tortuous squeezes – very difficult when equipment is carried – to the head of the 40ft drop & Main chamber.

This drop is easier than to be expected, as, by means of a squeeze to one side, it's possible to pass round the edge and avoid the drop itself. But this, even, is somewhat difficult, as it is necessary to swing from ledge to ledge – a lifeline is definitely required.

THE MAIN CHAMBER

This is one major, widened, cleavage plane. With care it is possible to descend the steeply sloping sides, where, in places, pothole abound. A terrace to one side rises to a considerable height. No stream runs through the chamber, but there are areas of heavy drip. Toward the bottom of the chamber, there is a dangerous boulder slope. The bottom is choked by boulders, shale beds are well exposed here. By climbing up the west wall, a grotto can be reached. Here is the only mass of formations other than in the Great rift chamber. When descending from the grotto, a pothole will be seen to the right and south side. A further rope is here necessary.

12ft POT-HOLE & WET WAY to the SUMP

This pot is situated at point of secondary infilling of the main chamber. A stream enters high up in the side and is then followed to the end of the system. At one point, calcite crystals, very curiously marked, are grouped together.

Active potholes of little depth form the cave for some distance. From evidence hereabouts, it is known that this part of the cave must be totally filled with water upon occasions although it only has a small stream in the summer months. Several small tributaries enter from sides and roof and a shale bed is very evident.

A short distance from the end, there is a division of ways, a higher dry tunnel leading for over 40 ft, until it becomes too small for further progress. To the right, a lower rift and after a few feet in a tight choked sump. Apparently, no progress will be made here.

THE TRIBUTARIES

In past winters the surface stream entered by the 45ft shaft, and after passing through the "wet rift" and several small narrow fissures, entered the cave proper below the 10ft drop. Hence it was lost among the boulders.

In the chamber to the right at the bottom of the 10ft drop, the stream from the lower choked swallet enters at a good height in the far wall. It falls down among the boulders & finally disappears in a choke.

The tributary entering at the lower end of the Great Rift Chamber passes among the boulders and runs as in a thin film down the 40ft drop into the main chamber.

Another stream enters into the system, in the wall of the 12ft pot-hole. It is of considerable volume, and follows through to the sump. There is evidence of its rising so as to fill the passages of the "Wet Way" after periods of heavy rainfall. In the main chamber, at the height of the terrace, there are indications of a further tributary entering the system.

THE FORMATION OF THE CAVE

The process of the formation of the cave, as we know it today, is very complicated. But we hope to publish it later.

The actual physical and chemical actions that led to the shaping of the cave generally, have been well discussed elsewhere, and there is no need to repeat them here. Survey and photography are being carried out, notwithstanding the tremendous difficulties involved in moving equipment in the low bedding planes of the upper series and the pitches of the lower series. We desire to place on record our thanks to the Sidcot Speleological Society, the B.U.S.S. & the Wessex Cave Club, for their help. We acknowledge with gratitude the permission and assistance of Mr Young of Lower Farm Charterhouse, of the Axbridge Rural District Council, & of the Bristol Waterworks Company, without which we could not have carried out this piece of work.

WARNING

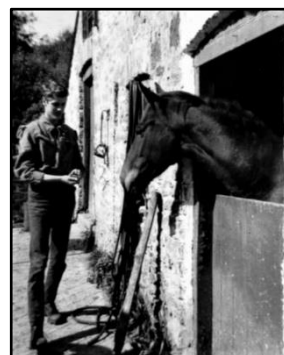
We consider that all intending visitors to this cave, should be warned of its danger. We trust that no parties will attempt it, unless experienced and adequately equipped.

Stride Bros
1945

In the early 1960s we could park at Lower Farm (subsequently renamed Longwood Grange) and were able to access Longwood/August Cave by walking through the farmyard and down the valley.

We used to change in the barn above the stable where Mr Young kept his very large horse. Caving kit consisted of old trousers over long johns and a few layers of old jumpers, all covered by an old cotton boiler suit. We were pleased to don dry clothes as soon as possible after we exited the cave. We organised jumble sales in Ealing Town Hall to raise funds – but also I think – to source our caving kit.

Mr & Mrs Young were good friends to MCG and Newsletter No 39 (Nov 1965) reports that *"Fred Young has given us a 3-piece suite and fine Victoriana armchair for the cottage"*. The cottage at that time was the old army hut which can still be seen from the kitchen window of Nordrach Cottage. Later the armchair was unfortunately taken over by a family of mice so ended up being dumped in the old quarry (now beneath the Stirrup Cup yard). Pete and I rescued it from the quarry, reupholstered it – and it has been with us ever since.



Coincidentally, in the October 2022 Issue of Mendip Times, Phil Hendy had a few words to say about the Longwood discovery.

“...members of UBSS had dug fruitlessly some yards below the Longwood stream sink. Ralph and Arthur Stride (members of the Sidcot School Speleological Society) dug at the sink itself and were rewarded by entering a complex cave system. They realised they were not experienced enough to fully explore the cave, but the UBSS, rather peeved that these upstart kids had stolen their thunder, took over the exploration. Later, the Strides went to Bristol University, joined the UBSS, and were instrumental in discovering August Hole at the lower end of Longwood Swallet.’

“Possible Passage” – Re-appraising the prospects at Stainsby’s Shaft

By Tim Francis

Those members familiar with digging efforts in the Blackmoor Valley will be aware that, despite the occasional visit in recent years, significant work has not been conducted at Stainsby’s Shaft since the huge effort of 2007 - 2009. A massive engineering effort and a large enthusiastic team were deployed, led by Biff Frith, to excavate the main shaft. By 2009 the shaft was dug down as far as the miners’ original 18 fathom level with the discovery of some original timbers from the 19th Century suggesting that this was the case. But, as had been the result with previous efforts, the technical nature of digging at Stainsby’s and the associated need to sustain a very large team over an extended period of time meant that the project eventually came to a halt. A few visits were made in subsequent years but nothing of note revealed.

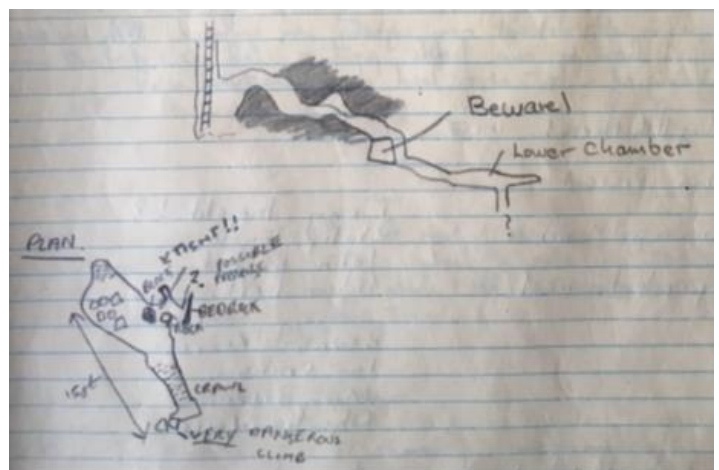


Stainsby’s entrance (Photo: Dan Matthews, 2022)



Original miners’ timber (Photo: Biff Frith, 2008)

More recently Jason Kirby started to look again at the bottom of the shaft but he lacked the manpower to make progress. Thus, he persuaded the Upper Flood diggers to come and have a look with the promise that winter digging in Stainsby’s would be much more pleasant than the cold bowels of West Passage. On 4th September 2021 we went with Jason to have a good look around. But rather than becoming re-enthused by the shaft we were rather more interested in the potential of the blocked natural passage first discovered in 1967. This was marked on the original sketch survey as “?Possible Passage. Tight!!”. To be honest I don’t think the original diggers thought much about this bit of the passage and were focused on digging down through the boulders in the floor.



Blackmoor Shaft extensions (Sketch: Malcolm Cotter, 1967)

So as promised we commenced digging in the winter of 2022, our first trip being on the 8th January. And yes, it was much more comfortable than the rigours of Upper Flood. On our first digging session we excavated several metres of sand out of a low bedding plane. And all the spoil was hauled up to the stacking area below the entrance pitch. In essence we were re-using the digging logistics of the 2007 dig but stepping off half-way down the shaft. To make access to the dig a little easier Jason cut out a section of scaffold and Mike created a staging floor out of sections of mesh so we had something to stand on rather than falling down the shaft.

We also had a bit of 'excitement' when a chockstone was removed which resulted in both aural and visible cracking of some rather large boulders in the wall and ceiling. Trip two was thus essentially a whole day of cementing and walling which seems to have done the job, not least psychologically.

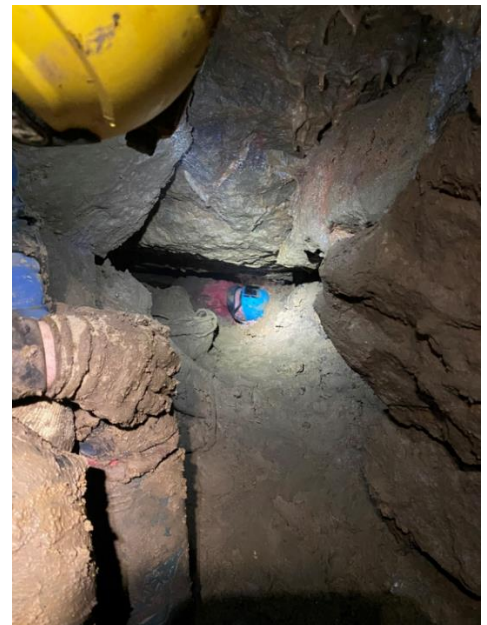
The cross section of the passage is actually quite wide, three or more metres. It's clearly fault controlled with the middle being a jumble of jammed rocks and to the left and right a blocked but drafting bedding plane. We're digging to the right. Initially this started as a sand filled bedding, the sediment being entirely natural apart from a small skim of fine black silt on top. The latter being associated with run off from the mine. After about three metres things seemed to close down. Initially at the end we dug up and left and back into the fault. This started to get a bit sketchy so attention turned to down in the floor on the right.

What we have here is a narrow descending pot. It's totally full of orange mud and small rocks although the air always stays fresh. There is perhaps a hint of moisture on the back wall but generally everything is dry. What is interesting is that part of the wall is made up of old flowstone and very similar in nature to that seen earlier in the approach passage. On occasion we're finding large chunks of stalactite buried in the sediment but its not clear to me whether these have fallen down in situ or have been washed in from above.

The question is: what are the prospects? The first point to mention is that we are digging in entirely natural passage as opposed to mined passage. The fill has been there for a long time. So, perhaps you'd could say that this is Blackmoor Swallet as opposed to Stainsby's Shaft. Secondly, Walk the Plank Chamber in Upper Flood is approximately 55m horizontally and 25m ahead. Not that it necessarily connects or that we want it to do so but its interesting to note the similar alignment of Trench Passage and Thieves Chamber with our dig in Stainsby's. The dig face we are working on now isn't as large as it was but the good news is that the air always stays fresh.



Stainsby's Shaft (Photo: Biff Frith, 2008)



Stainsby's dig (Photo: Tom Harrison, 2022)



Stalactite excavated from Stainsby's dig face, July 31st (Photo: Tim Francis, 2022)

The bad news, which I forgot to mention, is that it's a long haul of the spoil tubs all the way back to the bottom of the entrance pitch. And we're on to our second spoil heap. Six to eight people is ideal for a fun day's digging; three people is really hard work! So far, we have done nine trips and no doubt there is plenty more to keep us amused. All welcome.

Main protagonists: Peat Bennett, Bill Chadwick, Ben Cooper, Tim Francis, Tom Harrison, Jason Kirby and Mike Moxon.

Trip reports from the MCG Facebook Group

Many members these days choose to write up trips and our socials, on the MCG Facebook group, many are accompanied by great photos and videos. For those of you who don't see them, you editor has selected some posts and their photos, from recent months and reproduced them here. Please do keep posting them, they are great to see.

On the 19th September 2022 Becks Vials posts:

19/09/2022 Thrupe Lane Swallet to Hob Nail Hole - Becks Vials, Stephen Hawkins, Mark Edwards.

A first time visit to this cave for Becks and Steve, but when Mark asked us to join him for a rope test and review session of the Cavefest UK sponsors Spunk Ropes sample rope, we happily took part.

Mark rigged the first pitch and we all abseiled down the rather squeezey 'Ferret run' pitch with no issues followed by the 2nd pitch perseverance pot. We went through the wet cowsh crawl and down to the marble streamway passage to look out into Atlas Pot... Lots of seeds planted for future SRT trips!!

We went out via Hob Nail Hole where Mark had pre rigged the ladder to exit. A nice intro to the cave for me and Steve and I am sure we will be back for more.



On the 10th August 2022 Becks Vials posts:

10/08/2022 Bos Swallet - Becks Vials, Chris Barrington.

After consulting the Bible of Mendip Caving we headed to Bos armed with ladders, ropes, krabs, slings and the very vital spits for the pitches. The leaf and branch filling to the cave entrance proved how this was certainly a less well travelled cave of the Burrington area and steep, muddy, squeezey, almost vertical tunnels welcomed us to begin the challenge down. Progressing down the narrow tubes we entered disappointment chamber. A hole in the floor took us down another mud slicked tube to the first pitch, the aforementioned required spits, ladder and rope were already in situ perhaps from a recent digging team so I just rigged our own hand line before we both descended

down to a circular domed chamber with some nice formations. Another tight squeeze lead us to the 2nd pitch where we were grateful to discover another ladder in place. At the bottom we found a shale chamber with many fossils. We explored the few passages and rifts from here before turning back for the steep, tight, pretty vertical and very muddy and slippery ascent back up. This was quite a challenging climb out especially with our pretty unused tackle we took with us and getting up certain bits required great levels of team work to get the bags up and out. You know it's been a great trip when your knackered and are covered in enough mud to look like you've been part of an evening's digging team!!



On the 31st July 2022 Chris Barrington posts:

Fairy Cave Quarry – 31st July 2022 Becks Vials and Chris Barrington. A virgin cave !! First time for both of us. Bumped into Richard and Andrea at the cottage who gave us some handy tips on where to go, they mentioned in passing a few bits where squeezy and that one word I took with me into the cave system..... We got into the cave at the Hilliers entrance and dropped down the slot into the streamway (completely bone dry) and the guide said we should go downstream now to be fair it wasn't completely obvious which way was downstream, jokingly I said this stick pointed the way and we set off. We and soon hit a few crawls which then became flat out crawls..... then squeezy flat out crawls.... Now we should have maybe consulted the guide book at this point but I was quite enjoying the challenging crawls, and they must go somewhere right! We continued on and there were a few bits now that were properly challenging, I was definitely upgrading this trip to challenging fun and I was very glad this was going to be a one-way trip so I wouldn't have to go back the other way. I did think wow Richard was right it really is tight in here....

Eventually Becky came to clay filled sump and

couldn't go any further and I took a look and the 6 inches of head space was definitely not going to work... At this point we decided to get the paper guide out rather than follow our inner spiritual caver guide and on reading it was pretty obvious that we might have gone the wrong way. I think looking at the map we must have got either down to



the either sump or mud pit before we got stopped. It's a pity we couldn't get though it would have been hilarious to have popped out the entrance to Hillwithy cave and wonder where the hell we were. On the plus side we have got some great video footage!! On the way back I channelled my inner turtle and dug through the sand a bit first to enlarge the space so I could get through it and after about 40 minutes exploring the wrong way we got back to where we started and then headed off in the right direction (there's a reason we always have a long call out) Going in the opposite direction it was noticeable how considerably larger the cave system was with more pretty bits, many photos below. We did pretty well at not getting lost this time as we occasionally consulted the guide. Found the connection with fairy cave, I was getting a bit tired by this point so we skipped Cambridge grotto and onto the red room as something to do next time. Loved the tree roots at the end of fairy as we came out, they were amazing!! All in all, a good fun trip.



On the 25th June 2022 Nicola Pearce & Dan Mathews posted these photos

Ben Sumpter kindly led a trip for some MCG members into Tretharrup Mine in Cornwall. The photos from their trip show the fantastic colouration in the mine. The mine lies on private land and has no public access.



On the 12th May 2022 Chris Barrington posts:

Cow Hole! Any Cave that has in its description rotting timbers and rusty framework is obviously a must see. I did promise Tim Cockle that I would sort the kit out but I got distracted with Mint Tea and the view so by the time he turned up I hadn't actually started. The Cow Hole tackle list appears require the entire inventory of the tackle shed with a total of 40 metres of ladder and 115metres of rope, which we carried across a couple of fields. We followed Graham Price's description which was spot on and the lovely lady from the house down the road pointed us in the right direction as well. It's definitely going to be a fun find in a month's time in a full hay meadow.

So first important point, there is a mistake in the bible, the entrance pitch requires a single 10m (33ft) ladder and 25 metres of rope. (Not the 20m and 50m lifeline as described) I'll alter the copies in the library when I get chance.

I've taken some photos of the timbers and framework and as you can see you definitely want to take "quite" a lot of care passing through and trying not to touch anything. (Also don't be fat, that's another good tip for this cave).

The fossils on the way down to the main pitch are amazing as is the black calcite, I've taken some pictures and I'll post them below after this report, are they fossil shells or something else? they look amazing.

The bolts for the main pitch could be a bit better positioned, the carabiner for the lifeline rubs against the rock so Tim suggested putting it on a sling which was a good call and freed it up nicely.

The main pitch is pretty cool, you go through a tight squeeze, feet first straight onto the ladder which opens out onto a pitch that reminded me a bit of Hunter's hole. (but on ladders). (I've not got photos of this, because someone kept complaining about the time and the fact that I might have got distracted with tea rather than sorting tackle out. (Such a moaner)).

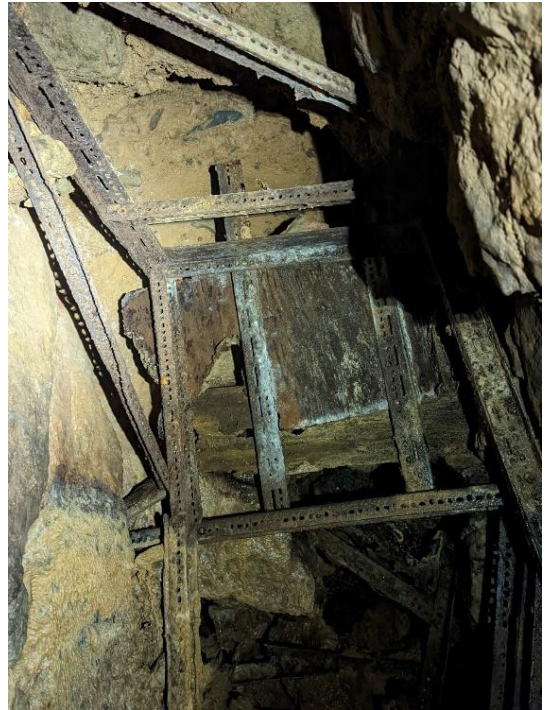
We went further down towards another small pitch, the stones here are very loose and I snagged a small boulder in a rip on my suit and could feel it start to shift.

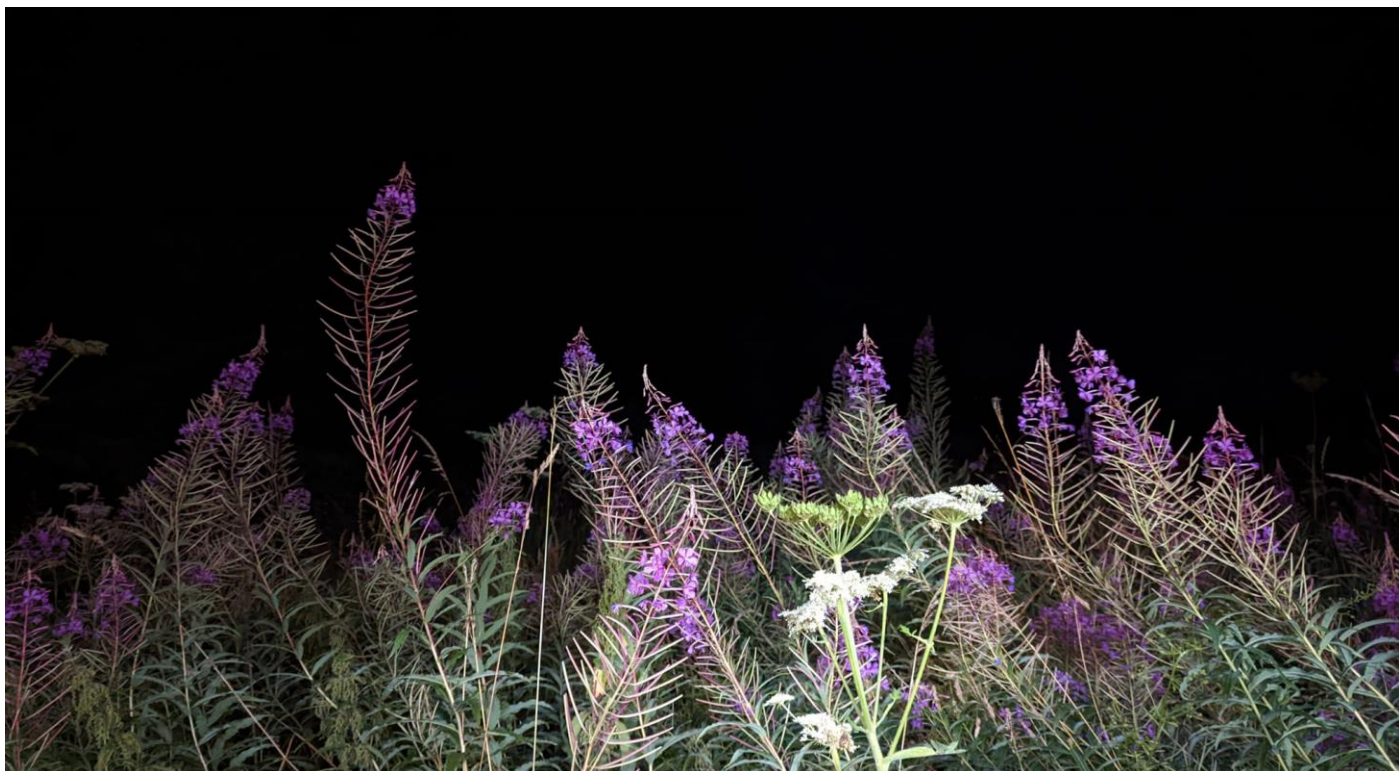
I want to get to the bottom next time so another trip is on the cards with the tight spaces it's definitely a two or three people type trip

All in all, a great trip worth a visit but a lot of care is needed.

Finally, On 6th August 2022, Chris Barrington posted

This great photo of Rosebay willowherb taken on the evening of the August member's weekend, from the MCG kitchen window.





An OFD 2 Trip

By Dave Cook

Pleasantly surprised to get another Invite from Gwent Cave club for yet another trip under South Wales..... this time it was a roundtrip down OFD2. A Friday night drive down to Penwyllt and the Wealden Cave club for an overnight stay at the 'Stump'. All the cave kit packed check, Dhobi bag (wash kit), flip-flops and towel checkaway we go.

It was only when I got across the Prince of Wales/ Owain Glyndŵr bridge (contentious?) that I realised that I had forgotten to bring my green slug (sleeping bag) and pillow.... go back?nah nutz to that, a quick cost benefit analysis said to me find a Tesco (other supermarkets are available) and buy a cheap bag and a pillow ...needed some new pillows anyway it's a no brainer.

To find a Tesco on route at night is harder than you might think even with Googleeventually I found a big one somewhere in the vicinity of Merthyr Tydfil or Merthyr Tudful in Welsh, frankly I think the English spelling is more welshweird that.

No sleeping bags and it was raining cats and dogs. I had no idea what the 'Stump' was like, sounded uninviting to me, what to do.... luckily I had my Spanish Army Blanket that I had 'acquired from the Spanish army.... strangely enough. Therefore, I bought a fleecy blanket with the idea of making a sausage roll of myself and a pillow coz I am civilized ... sometimes!

Eventually after fighting my way through the continuous road works on the Heads of the valleys road (A465 for those who like that sort of thing) I made it to my destination. RESULT! What a lovely place a warm welcome from John Sheehy, his brother in law Tony Chan and some sage called Les, plus a couple of that Wessex lot. Lots of chat and a couple of beers then turned in for the night. Fortunately, it was a comfortable night the makeshift bed wrap worked and so fortunately did the showers and the coffee machine (why haven't we got a coffee machine?). John dished up the bacon rolls then it was all systems go and we were out of the Stump suited and booted for a cave trip before

1000hrsamazing didn't realise caving could be quite so fast moving. Mustn't forget the other core part of the A team turned up Nikki Paterson (she used to be MCG once ...so she says).

A leisurely plod over to the cave entrance Ogof Y Nos Hir; Cave of the long night (apparently) in the blazing September sun which took its toll and some Cambridge lot (staying at SWCC) overtook us and went in first ...meh slow and steady equals a good trip. Having negotiated the cave log jam at the start now the interesting bit begins or it would be if I had any idea of what I'm doing ...goldfish brain!... Where was I ? So down to the brickyard which to me looks nothing like a brickyard but hey until I discover a breakthrough on Stainsbys on the rare occasion I help out digging I cannot judge.

Through Gnome passage and Edwards's shortcut and down to the aptly named Elephant trap ...not sure, if I could have got out or not but luckily the ladder was there (it has been hidden before by purists...clearly tall ones).

Next, a quick photex by John at Shatter pillar that does indeed look like it might collapse at some inopportune point. Selenite tunnel (quite nice) leads on to president's leap, which to be fair could be a big deal if you were new to the art of speleology. Indeed John's Brother in law is fairly new to this pastime but a little coxing from the 'A' team and he made it no issues ...good job really there's been enough rescues down OFG recently, makes Daily Mail readers spit out their cornflakes!

Through the crossroads and another photex at the trident3 quite impressive stalactites just hanging there...even I was impressed; I don't do pretties!! Getting close to the end nowdown the crossroads and along the Salubrious streamway which the dictionary says Salubrious is of benefit to health /pleasant not too run down...yeah I'd go with that ,then through the corkscrew which frankly was a piece of cake to any Mendip caver.

Quick look at the wedding cake ...some interesting descriptions ...I would be very disappointed if I had that as a wedding cakethen, again it is cake ...yum. Then it was the mini columns...yep they are mini columns again quite pretty and intricate then out via the big chamber.

A very rewarding 5 ½ hours with some little diversions just to be nosey. To finish off we had a slap-up dinner at the Ancient Briton which I thoroughly recommend; no booze as I had to drive back to Sunneyst.

Thanks to the Gwent Cave Club for the invite and I am looking forward to some more Welsh underground adventures very soon.

Upper Flood Swallet Wardens

By Richard Carey

It has been my honour and privilege to have been a Warden for Upper Flood Swallet since 2007. Although I played little part in the digging of the choke, I spent many hours exploring and surveying once the breakthrough had been made. I have since led more than 100 hundred trips for members of the MCG and other guest groups. It is a positive delight to share this cave and never a burden or a chore. We introduced a guest leadership system to allow Mendip clubs to have their own wardens. The rules for becoming a Warden are quite stringent and am sure that the MCG Wardens exceed the qualities required.

Rules and guidelines for Wardens (from mendipcavinggroup.org.uk/uf-warden-info-)

Conservation

Conservation of the cave and its wildlife is the prime responsibility of the Warden. Trips must have a minimum impact on the cave, so this means taking an active role in guiding a party through the cave. If a party does not seem sufficiently competent or are careless, the trip must be abandoned.

All visitors to Pork Pie Passage must remove their over-suits at the lake reached just after passing through the New Link and avoid touching the passage walls whilst doing so. Before proceeding to Pork Pie Passage, feet and hands must be cleaned of all traces of mud. Great care must be used to avoid touching anything other than the tape marked section of passage floor. The small ponds in Pork Pie Passage may be used for further washing. The final approach to the Pork Pie Lake is to be made by flat out crawl. Beware the sharp calcite needles on the passage floor, the use of clean gloves is advised.

Warden expectations

Demonstrate a level of caving and leadership ability commensurate with the difficulty of a trip to the far reaches of the cave.

- Have a sound knowledge of the history of exploration of the cave.
- Have visited (as far as is practicable) all areas within the cave and be competent in route finding, particularly regarding the main boulder choke.
- Be aware of the particular dangers and conservation sensitive areas within the cave.

Warden training

To enable prospective wardens to meet the criteria listed above, they should participate in a minimum of five training trips, encompassing all open-access areas of the cave. These trips should be accomplished in a time frame of not less than 18 months, with at least two different established Wardens, one of whom must be a MCG member.

New mural at Wells & Mendip Museum features Herbert Ernest Balch

By Joan Goddard



A mural featuring Herbert Ernest Balch (see photo below), was installed in the garden at Wells and Mendip Museum at the end of September 2022. Chris Jewell, one of the divers involved in the 2019 rescue of thirteen boys from Tham Luang Cave in Thailand, performed the unveiling, together with The Bishop of Taunton and the Dean of Wells, and gave a short talk - which unfortunately I missed as I arrived late!! The mural was made by volunteers and local schoolchildren, under the watchful eye of a Museum Trustee who is a ceramicist **

Herbert Balch (1869-1958) was born in Wells, gained a scholarship to the Blue School aged 7, left aged fourteen to become telegraph messenger boy at Wells Post Office and worked his way up to become Postmaster. He had wide ranging interests in archaeology, natural history and geology,

He spent much of his free time exploring and studying nearby Wookey Hole caves, and he later excavated some of the Ebbor Gorge rock shelters. He became intensely interested in their archaeology and stratigraphy. Travel to more distant caves was a big problem; bicycling and pony & trap transport was slow and a

journey to Burrington or Lamb Leer would take several hours. He spent many hours walking and cycling to and from caves contemplating catchment areas for springs and swallets.

Herbert Balch founded Wells & Mendip Museum in 1898 and was its honorary curator for 60 years. Many of his archaeological finds are on display in the Balch Room, together with later archaeological finds such as those from Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink and Bone Hole.

- The Museum is open Tuesdays to Saturdays, 10am-4pm. Entry £4
- Wessex Cave Club Occasional Publication Series 1, No 1 "Pioneer under the Mendips", Oct 1969, by Dr William Stanton - in the MCG Library and well worth reading if you have a few hours to spare.

*** The mural also features Bishop Thomas Beckynton who constructed a conduit to supply the City of Wells with fresh water and Dean William Turner who was hailed as the 'Father of English Botany' and whose book 'A New Herball' was the first book on the subject to be written in English.*

Editor's note. The Wells Museum



is well worth a visit.

August Member's Weekend – Barrington on Bats

By Joan Goddard

Batty for Bats! (photo Kay Matthews)



After Saturday evening's excellent Mexican meal around the 'fire-pit', we were treated to a talk on Bats by MCG member Chris Barrington.

There are 18 species in the UK, mostly found in southern counties. On Mendip you are likely to come across Lesser and Greater Horseshoe bats hibernating in caves such as Goatchurch and GB. If you see a bat while caving, pass by as quickly and quietly as you can

without shining your light directly on it, as any disturbance might cause the bat to be aroused from its hibernation. This uses up some of its energy reserves - not good if they have more months to survive until spring arrives. The Bat Conservation trust has produced a conservation guide for cavers and there are a number of books and leaflets in the library.

Towards the end of the talk, we were fortunate to see a number of bats flying around the cottage. They were one of the larger species and probably Serotines (wingspan 320-380mm). These fly early in the evening and feed on flies, moths and beetles including chafers and dung beetles. Echolocation is the means by which they identify their surroundings, the size and shape of an insect and its direction of movement. Some species are particularly specialised for echolocation such as the Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats which have horseshoe-shaped 'noses' to sharpen their echolocation signals. Chris had his bat detector with him so that we could listen to the calls of the bats we saw.



Bill Chadwick & Richard Carey in Pork Pie Passage, Upper Flood. Michaela Lutz 2022



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