



MCG News

Mendip Caving Group News June 2024 - Issue 389

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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

Memberships from October 2022 to June 2024:

New (and renewed) members:

Michael Ormond
Arthur Scott
Chris Binding
Michael Ambrose
Angie Bual
Jamie Saunderson
Kerry Rutter
Jane Baldwin
Tom Cassidy
Hannah Blunt
Callum Bisley
Greg Hawkins
Edward Ford
Kat Rosier
Owen Rutter
Matty Dredge

Front Cover photo

Bull Pot of the Witches, Yorkshire.
Photo by Jason Kirby, May 2024

Back Cover Photo

Kat Rosier abseiling from Ariel Cave, Portland. Photo by Tom Harrison, February 2024.

Editorial

Welcome to Issue 389 of the MCG News. The last publication of this format was the MCG News Issue 388 in October 2022, compiled by MCG Secretary: Bill Chadwick. This, and other former publications can be found in the Members' area of the MCG Website <https://www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk>

Following the October 2022 Issue; Daniel Matthews, former MCG Editor, produced three MCG Bulletins in July 2023, October 2023 and February 2024. Copies of these can also be located on the MCG Website.

This publication will include MCG news from February 2024 to June 2024. This includes (amongst other articles): digging news, the MCG Portland weekend 23-25 February 2024, the MCG trip to Yorkshire 23-27 May 2024, various historical articles, and an assortment of MCG trip reports and pictures.

This Issue of the News will not include information about the MCG 70th Anniversary celebrations which took place on 27th April 2024 as this will be included in the publication produced by Tom Harrison, which will be sent to members shortly.

I would like to say a massive thank you to members who have supported this publication by providing articles, photographs, information, and technical support. Your contribution is much appreciated.

Should you wish to write an article, or have any content published in the MCG News; please send the information to me at editor@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

Thank you,

Kay Matthews

Advice for new members

There is a Guide for New Members, 2022-2023 Edition, on the MCG website. I would advise new members to read this Guide, as well as perusing the main website. There is an array of helpful information contained on the website, including information about Upper Flood Swallet, and how to arrange a trip.

Alternatively, you can ply older members with beer for information, but the results may not be as reliable.

Caving news and cave access information for local caves can also be found on the website for the Council of Southern Caving Clubs <https://csccl.org.uk/wiki/>

To keep updated about current MCG related events, please consider joining our members Facebook group, and/or the Google email group. Please email secretary@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk for access to the latter.

Useful information

Members' weekends: the first full weekend of the month, including the Friday.

Members' hut fees £5 per night

Guest bed fees £7.50 per night

Upcoming Events

20-22 September 2024 Hidden Earth, Llangollen Pavilion in North Wales

18-20 October 2024 MCG South Wales Weekend (for details see the Facebook page or contact Kat Rosier)

15-17 November 2024 MCG North Wales weekend (as above)

MCG Christmas Dinner will likely be **Saturday 7th December 2024 TBC**

What's occurring?

A bit of a walk.... with Becks Vials

Although not strictly caving related, MCG member Becks Vials is currently 300 miles through her solo hike from John O' Groats in the Scottish Highlands to Lands' End in Cornwall.

On 16th June 2024, Becks wrote:

My solo hike from John O'Groats to Land's End has been an extraordinary adventure so far. Starting with the John O'Groats Trail, I faced incomplete paths and rugged coastal terrain, which tested my endurance right from the start. The Great Glen Way followed, offering breathtaking views of Loch Ness, a true highlight. Hiking the West Highland Way north to south was a more peaceful experience, away from the main crowds for most of the day, and some parts of the terrain reminded me of our caving adventures, adding a nostalgic touch.

The John Muir Way was another unique segment, featuring scenic canals and the impressive Falkirk Wheel. The long tunnel there had calcified flowstone, the closest thing to caving I've encountered on this journey, making me feel right at home. Crossing into England was a proud moment having completed Scotland. The west side of The Cheviots, however (which I hiked over after crossing the border at Carter Bar) presented a very tough hike - testing my strength, resilience and determination, their rugged beauty a challenge and a reward.

Now, after traversing the North Pennines, I'm starting my way down through Yorkshire. Here, I truly feel at home, surrounded by familiar cave entrances. The landscape, rich with caving opportunities, brings back fond memories of our explorations together. This hike has been tough at times so far but incredibly rewarding, and I can't wait to share more stories with you all.

So far, I have hiked approximately 550 miles and am now embarking on the second half of my journey to reach Land's End by July 28th, 2024. Along the way, I'm raising awareness for mental health and funds for the Samaritans. Please support my cause by visiting my JustGiving page: www.justgiving.com/page/beanexploringuk



Charterhouse permits

Charterhouse permits went paperless in September 2023. The paper permits are now invalid. MCG Members who are issuing keys must check permits. The onus is on individuals to renew their permits annually by visiting the Charterhouse Caving Company (CCC Ltd) website <https://permits.charterhouse-caving-company.ltd.uk/>

British Caving Association (BCA) News

The BCA AGM for 2024 was held on Monday 3rd June at 7pm. Information will be on the BCA website <https://british-caving.org.uk/>

The BCA council has approved increases in membership prices for 2025. Further information will follow via email from the MCG Secretary nearer the time.

In memory of Ann Davies

VALE – Ann Davies (née Gibb)

Early members will remember Ann and Geoff Davies from the 1960s and '70s. Geoff died from an early heart attack in 2005 and Ann succumbed to cancer on 14th March this year. Later members will remember Ann because she, her son and grandson used to visit Mendip for annual dinners until shortly before Lockdown.

Filming in Longwood Swallet 1963

Joan Goddard, April 2024

In 1963, Geoff and assorted members attempted to make a film about MCG's survey of Longwood Swallet and discovery of Christmas Crawl. In those days it was a major undertaking. A portable generator and heavy-duty electric cable were used for lighting (there being no fancy headlamps in those days!)

Sun. 4th August: Six people went down Longwood to lay power and telephone cables – telephone was tested and worked perfectly. The farmer at Longwood Farm, Mr Fred Young, brought the generator down valley to the cave entrance with his tractor and trailer and by the end of the day all equipment functioned as expected.

Mon 5th August: Don Searle stayed at the surface to work the telephone and generator, while Jack Green, Arthur Spain and Geoff Davies carried lamps and reflectors into the cave and added an extension lead to reach into Great Chamber. Niggling faults delayed 'lighting-up time' until c.4pm. but when the generator was switched on the entire chamber was lit with 2,000 watts of light. It was terrific. All the colours that had possibly been imagined before, were now displayed.

For a good 10 minutes we just looked around and took it all in. The object of this trip was to take a 'test reel' of 50ft in length taking shots of as many conditions as possible. I.e. shots of stal, close-ups of people, shots in tight rifts, wide expanses and any other that might take our fancy. But during this test, by switching off one lamp to move it, the other two fused, then the third one. So we sat in the dark and moaned! After much deliberation it was decided that the trouble was due to generator 'surge'.

Saturday 30th August: Generator repair.

Sun 1st September: Filming operations were successful with c.1500 feet of film taken.

(from Logbook No 1)

My own recollection of the day is of hanging motionless on a ladder under a steady trickle of water in Great Chamber for what seemed a very long time, wearing normal caving kit of the day – long-johns, a couple of pairs of trousers, two or three woolly jumpers, a cotton boilersuit and carbide lamp.

After three weekends, 10 minutes of film had been taken, but unfortunately a finished film was never produced - I've often wondered what it would be like

Digging news

We're still digging in Stainsby's and have been rewarded with a significant discovery!

Tim Francis and Tom Harrison, June 2024.

Those of you who have been down to the cottage in recent years can't but have helped notice an upsurge in chatter about the prospects for extending Stainsby's and the caves of the Blackmoor valley in general. Or perhaps clusters of cavers, mugs of tea in hand, pointing at the survey in the lounge. Or most likely, you have wondered about the idiocy of mud encrusted cavers who seem to spend more time cleaning their kit than actually doing any caving. Well yes, I'm afraid it's true: we are still digging at the end of Possible Passage in Stainsby's.

Twelve trips were undertaken in 2023 with another five trips so far in 2024 making for a total of over 170 caver days of digging since the start of this dig site. So quite an effort. Although as you'd expect from the Mendip Caving Group there is plenty of scope for drinking marvellous tea whilst we are there.



Tim Francis at the rebuilt wall. Photo: Tom Harrison, 4th November 2023

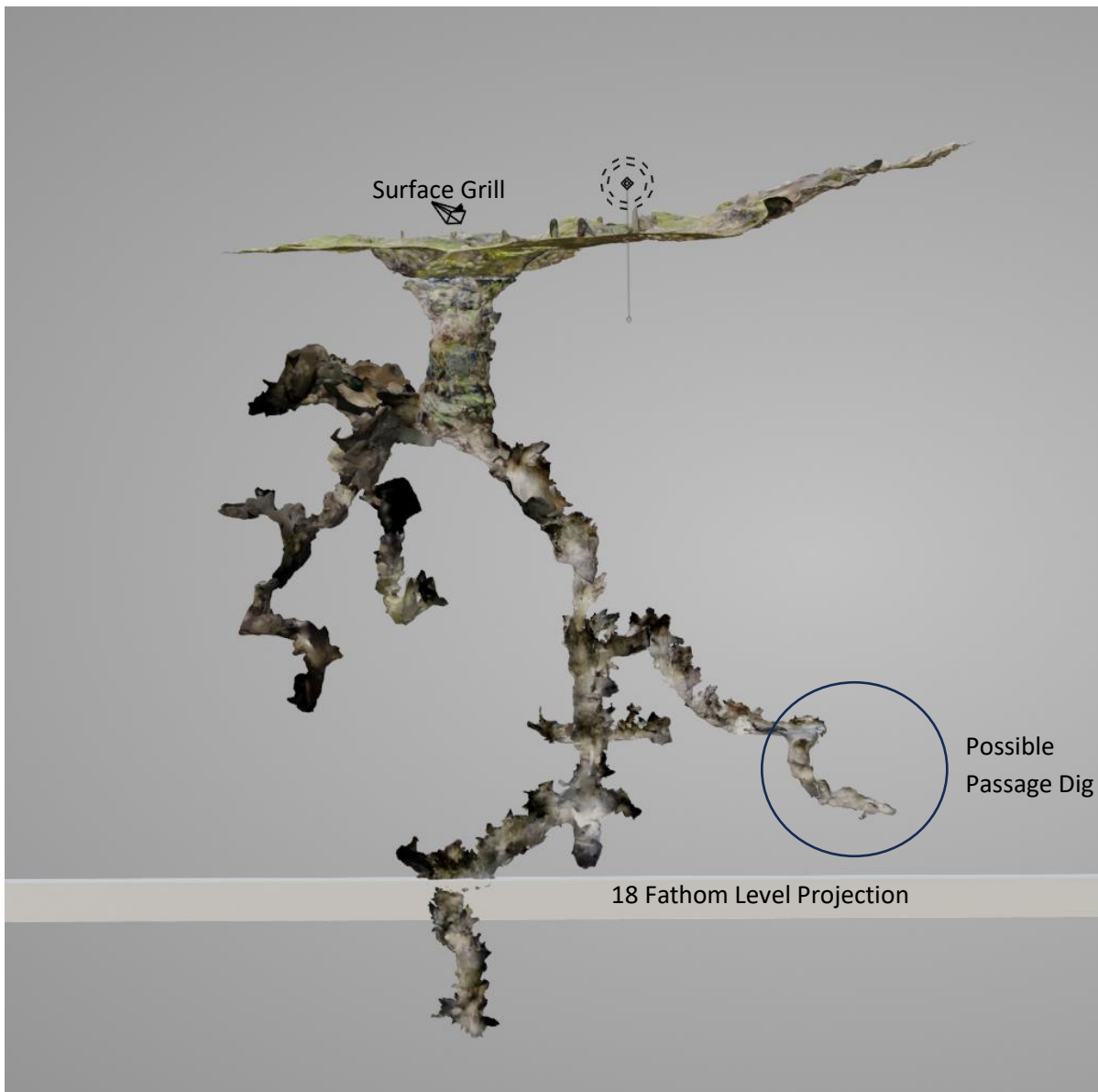
The question of course is what is the fuss all about and what have we found? A few points to make here.

Until May, the feature we had been digging had been entirely natural in origin. The breakthrough last July took us into a small open rift. The cross-section of the dig at the moment is extremely spacious. It's perhaps a metre wide, with a solid roof, of unknown depth. We've dug it down to a very comfortable height and we now have a crawling section to the dig face of around three metres. It is totally dry and never gets drippy despite all the rain we've had over this winter and spring. The fill is

particularly interesting. We have orange mud encasing lots of large, sandstone cobbles. As I understand it, this is formed by flash floods back in eons past which have pushed in great quantities of debris into the cave.

During the May members weekend dig, excited shouts from those at the dig face reported further void appearing near the draughting holes on the right-hand side wall, and then shortly after, that they had found some planks of wood. At the end of the digging session, Tom went to the dig face to see what had been discovered and to take some pictures.

Tom believes that this is evidence that we have found the 18 fathom miner's level. "Having scanned and produced a 3D model of the cave last year, I was able to plot where the Stemple at approximately 38m (18 fms) deep, appears in the main shaft and project this out to where we are in the dig. From this projection, it appeared we were possibly only a metre or 2 above the miner's level. And so it turned out that we were closer than that!



3D Scan Showing a North- South Profile of Stainsby's Shaft / Blackmoor in August 2023. The Grey Line represents the 18 fathom level hypothesised location. Blender Render Tom Harrison

In the floor of our dig, we have now uncovered what appear to be 3 planks sitting on a Stemple. It also looked like there was a Pocket for this Stemple on the exposed wall. This suggests to me that we have entered the natural vein or lode feature that the miners were widening and following and occasionally finding lead in. To protect the Level from the fill that we have been digging out, they appear to have used planks over the supporting Stemples.



Enhanced Photo showing Stemple and one of the Planks. Photo: Tom Harrison, 4th May 2024.

Disappointingly, it doesn't look like we will be able to simply climb down into an open passageway to walk to the Cavern the miners reported breaking into about 30m away. Under the planks and Stemple, there were signs of the tailings that were washed into the Swallet from the Buddles on the surface."

We are still very positive about the prospects for the dig.

Firstly, we didn't spend long enough to be certain that the level is blocked and this material could simply be from where the Planks have rotted and allowed the cave earth we have been digging to sink in.

Secondly, the strength of the airflow in the passage provides a clear indication that there must be open passage beyond. The air always flows outwards from the dig face and the air in the dig stays fresh however long the digging session is and however many people are at the very end. One small caveat is that on the odd occasion when the fill in the floor has been heavily compacted or sat on by someone for an extended period of time, it can get stale temporarily. A waggle with a crowbar immediately sorts out the problem. A final observation is that the air currents flow upwards and outwards from the main Stainsby's shaft more strongly than from the dig.

Thirdly, we're not that far away, in the grand scheme of things, from Upper Flood. Personally, I'm hoping for a decent chunk of independent cave for Stainsby's / Blackmoor Swallet but it's worth noting that we are about 50 metres above the roof of Walk the Plank Chamber and a similar distance horizontally from it. Possible Passage itself is reasonably well aligned with Walk the Plank inlet although for now they seem to be different things i.e. Walk the Plank Inlet is a tiny wet gravel in miners' tailings as opposed to the dry, natural fill of the spacious Possible Passage. On the way we could well break into the Cavern reported by the miners.

This of course all sounds very jolly but there are some downsides. There is low wet section that you have to wriggle through to get into the final dig site. This is where we had that small breakthrough in July 2023. The slop here soon churns up and the mud sticks to absolutely everything and finds its way everywhere. It's a bit like being a human sherbet dip.

We've also had to do a lot of maintenance work and rethinking of our approach. In February 2023 the anchor points for the winch were redrilled, deeply, and set with resin and since then everything seems to be working well.

Below left: Dig face, Possible Passage. Still from film, Tom Harrison, 6th March 2024



Above right: Mike Moxon operating the winch (old fixings). Photo: Peat Bennett, 2nd April 2022

Removal of the spoil is really hard work. Initially we manhandle half-filled bags out of the dig and drop them in a heap in a holding area where the original 1967 dig ended. We did try a pulley on the 10ft drop but there was too much mud and friction for it to be of much use. From there the bags are dragged up slope in skips running on strips

of black plastic sheeting to the staging post in the shaft. And then two bags per drum can be winched up to the surface. Finally, it's up to the dumping area just out of daylight below the entrance pitch. Back in November we had a total collapse of our original spoil heap. The wall was completely rebuilt with small steel lintels hidden within for extra support. The spoil area is now full. With about nine people you can do it all in one hit. Less than that and the bags all need staging. But typically, we can do 30 to 50 bags in a session.

As always, all welcome. You never know, we might find some cave. Digging happens on most members' weekends. Just be prepared for a lengthy gear washing session afterwards.

Main recent protagonists: Ben Cooper, Bill Chadwick, Tim Francis, Tom Harrison, Mike Moxon, Keith Knight, Brian Snell.

Decade of Perdition Grebe Swallet June 2014 to 2024

(Perdition: a state of eternal punishment and damnation)

Chris Binding, 27th June 2024

Kay asked me to pen a retrospective because last week (I am writing this during the Glastonbury Festival 2024) was the tenth anniversary of the commencement of the Perdition dig in Grebe Swallet and our last visit there to "celebrate" (the 488th digging trip) the Decade of Joy was a three person event which culminated in something in the order of 50 bags of spoil being stacked up ready for our next visit (most likely this coming Friday) whereby it will be shifted about 75 metres back from the digging area to Sidcot Chamber. Yes, Perdition is now quite a long section of cave, none of which was known obviously, but the theory was that a parallel route existed in the cave heading vaguely towards Stainsby's Shaft, and/or the "fabled Cavern" in the Mendip Hills Mining Corporation logs, or, if you open your minds real wide, perhaps even linking to Upper Flood Swallet itself! - but there is a big bit of blank hillside which needs to be covered to achieve it. But then again. If you don't do the work, it'll never happen.

Rather than go into listing the minutiae of all the various things which have occurred during these ten years of easy toil I shall instead summarise a few main elements and hopefully paint a picture of why on earth we're still digging this for many days each month. First up, we have had some very major problems to solve; the main ones being flooding and poor air; the secondary ones have been the awkwardness of the commute and the problem of having to deal with spoil movement and storage but this is de rigueur for Mendip digs so we're not complaining, instead we're just getting on with it. Flooding in Grebe is a bit of an unnecessarily emotive term because frankly there's no streamway and so our culprit for building up water is percolation in the form of drips and seepage; as the undulating passage leading to the dig face has rising and lowering sections, these latter have ponded from time to time and in order to pass them it's been either an unpleasant wallow (and at times a "nose-in-the-roof" cautious glide, face up, to avoid creating waves and the risk of a semi-shark-attack) or a multi-day syphoning event to reduce the tideline to acceptable levels of luxury. On one occasion we even resorted to filling water containers and physically dragging/lifting the water out but quickly concluded this was a ridiculous method. Finding likely locations where potential drains might exist and then digging down into the floor to successfully discover them and then cementing the edges to create more robustness has been the working solution to overcome the flooding in the last year or so and physically carrying in

SCUBA diving air cylinders of breathing air has been the (still ongoing) solution to coping with increased CO2 levels when working at the dig face, as it is at the end of quite a long gentle downhill passage with a tendency for the atmosphere to increase in stuffiness rapidly when a team is on site.

The commute for removing the spoil and dragging it all the way back to the only spoil stowing space of any size, Sidcot Chamber, has been repeatedly and significantly enlarged since 2018 when it dawned on us that we were likely to be (pardon the pun) “in this for the long haul” and the effort involved in widening the carriageway and removing the resulting material would more than return the investment by making the journey so much easier. There’s not really any way of determining the number of spoil drags since the inception of the Perdicion dig but it must surely run into the thousands.

Although it’s now the 10th year since work started it’s obviously not been ten full years of digging because everyone will immediately grasp that not much happened during 2020-2022, so the results of our labours over what is effectively an eight-year time frame are all the more satisfying. The unanswerable questions are things like: When will you break through? What do you expect to find? Will it link to Stainsby’s? Will it link to Upper Flood Swallet? Etc. The truthful answer is we can’t answer that but we can at least speculate on potential consequences of these events, should any of them occur - IF Grebe Swallet was to link into Stainsby’s Shaft it would most likely do so at the fabled “Cavern” at the end of an adit (see diagram) and thus create a through trip, but one which would increase and enhance the mining pedigree of Grebe and Stainsby’s by being a journey literally in the footsteps and pick-marks of the early miners from both the C18th and C19th; a through trip would also resolve all of the poor air issues in a trice as there would be a good current of equalising air passing between the two ways in/out. The likelihood of this occurring is, though, pretty slim because the adit in Stainsby’s which has relevance to Grebe is the lower one and the current excellent prospects of the Stainsby’s Team are focussed on a higher adit and their air current is almost certainly a proven link into Upper Flood.

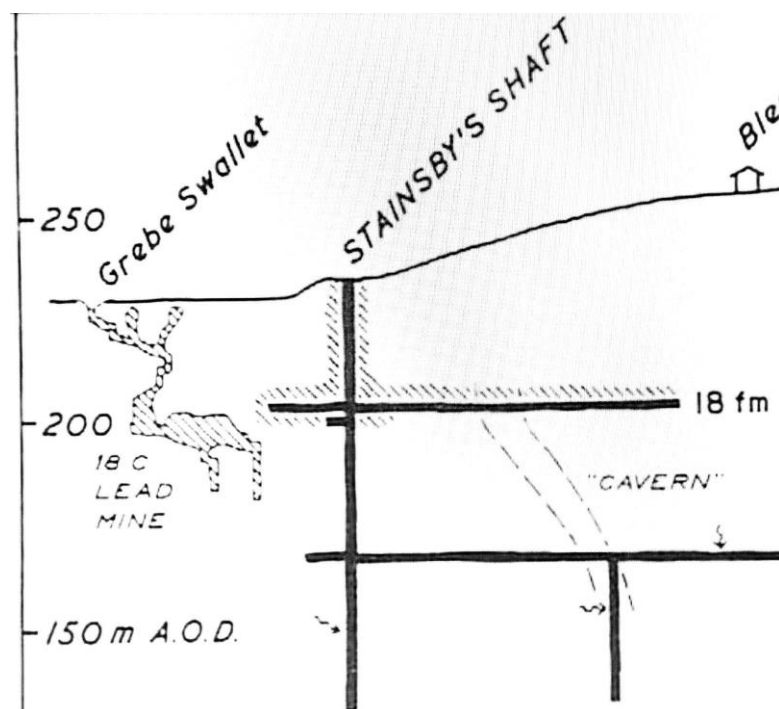


Image from UBSS Proceedings, W.I. Stanton

This section doesn’t include compass bearing detail and a cursory glance means it is easy to misinterpret things accordingly: the horizontal offset is misleading; Grebe is closer to the “cavern” than it is to the shaft/adits.

Talking of which.... IF (on the other hand) Grebe Swallet were to eventually link to Upper Flood Swallet it would result in a most remarkable through trip indeed! - some consequences of which might debatably include no longer needing to have a Rescue Dump at the Departure Lounge because an exit could be made via Grebe; cavers do seem to enjoy through trips so one between UFS-to-Grebe would surely be a top tick for many sports cavers; furthermore it would potentially rejuvenate many of the dig faces in UFS because the commute to them could be significantly easier via Grebe than via the current 13 squeezes route, etc.. And how fortuitous is it that both UFS and Grebe Swallet have always independently had the same access control protocol, namely locked caves, conservation warden trips with a leader plus three group size/ratio. There would be no changes needed to the group management but it would probably be a wise move to maintain a policy that anyone unable (or unwilling) to enter via the long-established Midnight Passage route should not have an “easy option” for visiting Neverland by entering and exiting via Grebe: that “luxury” should only be invoked for digging trips whereby the delivery of equipment/cement/personpower etc. was the overriding consideration.

In case you’ve not been to Grebe Swallet I include a photograph which should nicely serve as an instant word-picture, perhaps going some way to explain why over seventy cavers have visited Grebe to assist with the digging project and the vast majority of them only went once.



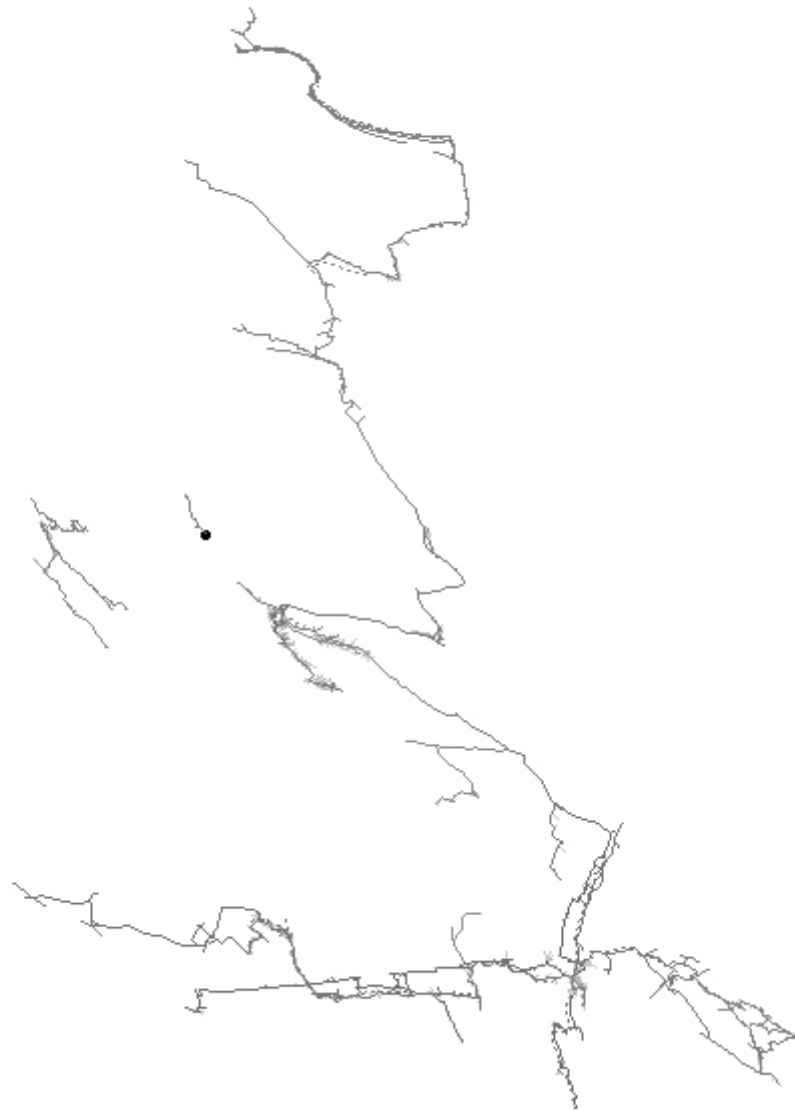
Christopher Binding, yes, he is barking. :-)

Editor’s note: for footage of the Grebe digs (amongst other caving videos), they exist on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/@Chris3141592>

Including Andy Horeckyj's Grebe Diary April 2024
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fhvL4u26rk&ab_channel=ChrispyB and

Cave Digging, 28th June 2024. Shifting spoil! Flippin' hard work!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-VqkM2S9WM&ab_channel=ChrispyB



Grebe Swallet, Stainsby's Shaft in relation to Upper Flood Swallet; the current dig in Stainsby's Shaft is the black blob and neatly shows both the alignment and proximity to UFS whereas the Perdition dig in Grebe Swallet is offset and significantly further away.

The current active team stalwarts are MCGers Michael Perryman, Nick Thorne, Andy Horeckyj and Steven Dowden, plus myself. We're hopeful that the current dig face - mass flow fill between solid rock walls/roof, which is actually easy enough to hoik out and bag up, with occasional wall-widening works to facilitate forward progress, is leading us - as it appears to be doing - in what is near as dammit a straight(ish) line. All of the recent tweaks to "solve" the problems mentioned above, water, air, commute, have largely been finalised and our attention has turned to making progress with the actual dig itself and in that regard things are going very well indeed! - the spoil management/dump in Sidcot Chamber is also a feat of walling and the Guggenheim Enclosure (because of its shape) can take many more cubic metres of material before the ziggurat-style wall needs raising! Fingers crossed we get a void space long before then, though. Onwards and along-wards to victory! - watch this space!

MCG go Potty for Portland including Persil and the Prison

Tom Harrison, June 2024

Day 1 - Persil to Ariel Through Trip

Kay Matthews, Dan Matthews, Greg Hawkins, Kerry Rutter, Kat Rosier, Matty Dredge, Callum Bisley, Bill Chadwick, Mike Moxon, Mark Edwards, Hannah Blunt and Tom Harrison

On the 24th and 25th February, thirteen members of the MCG descended on South Dorset for a weekend of something a little bit different, to explore the uniqueness of the Portland Limestone.

We met up at a very amenable 12pm near St George's church to park and change before setting off towards the entrance to Persil Rift. We picked the right day for this side of the island with light winds and even some sunshine; changing for February trips in wet and windy weather can be miserable, something we were to experience the following day!



St George's Car Park, Portland – Tom Harrison, Greg Hawkins, Callum Bisley, Matty Dredge, Bill Chadwick, Hannah Blunt, Kerry Rutter, Mike Moxon. Photo: Tom Harrison, February 2024.

As we had such a large group, we decided to split into two, with Dan, Kay, Greg and Kerry heading off to the other side of Blacknor Fort to abseil into the Ariel Cave entrance, while everyone else made their way through Persil Rift to meet them. This through trip was only made possible after a connection between Persil Rift and the Grand Canyon was made in August 2021 and as far as I know, we are the first large group to do the trip.

Just inside the entrance to Persil is a 10m pitch, which I rigged with ladder and lifeline. Our group of Matty, Callum, Bill, Mike, Mark, Hannah, Ed, and myself descended, bringing the lifeline with us to use as a handline for a 5m pitch further in. I added the rope to my already stuffed bag which had a 40m rope for a pull through exit from Ariel (in case something went wrong with the other group) and my SRT gear in it as well.

The rift makes a fun sporty trip, especially for the taller and slightly larger members of the group, making their way through Calgon Rift and Lenor Crawl with a little bit of work but not any great difficulty.



Top: Mark Edwards negotiates a squeeze in Persil Rift. Photo: Tom Harrison.
Bottom: Greg, Hannah, Bill & Kat at the climb down in the Washing Machine. Photo: Tom Harrison.

I was still lugging my supersized bag and was pleased to get up a tricky incline with it, before I lost my grip and dropped it back down to the start; therefore, having to repeat the awkward manoeuvre for a second time.

At the part of the cave named the Washing Machine, there is a tricky climb down, so here the rope I'd brought in the awkward bag would finally come in handy. However, the first in our large group to reach this obstacle found a rope in place already.

When all down this obstacle, the party met Kay who had come in via Ariel tunnel. Kay and Dan's party had all safely completed the tricky abseil into Ariel Cave from the coastal path. Anyone who has done this before will know that the first person down needs to perform an awkward swing into the entrance. So, who better to do this, than the least experienced member of the group: Kerry Rutter, who had only had a couple of SRT sessions worth of practice before this trip!



Anyway, the Persil group made our way to the Confluence, where I offered to show those who hadn't already headed off to Ariel, the pretties nearby. Unfortunately, my navigation wasn't perfect and we ended up along Sandy Hole until I'd convinced myself this wasn't the right place. Back we trekked and almost immediately I found the grotto we'd been looking for. Everyone else except Mike and Hannah had lost interest by now, so the three of us went for a look and Mike took a few pictures.

The Ariel exit plan was to undo the rope rigged from the cliff top and retrieve it later, in case it had been tampered with on the cliff top while we were all underground. We would then use the 40m rope I'd dragged all the way along from Persil to ab down to the cliff base 20m below, then to switch the rigging to a pull through to retrieve the rope. However, the guys at the front of the trip at the cliff face, decided that they were happy to use Dan's rope, making my heavy bag totally redundant, nothing I'd carried through ended up being used!

All apart from five of us abseiled out, with Matty derigging the Y hang and being the last one down. This was just as the sun was setting, making it a particularly nice time to do so!

Our non-abseiling party went back through C&A rift, tight in places, taking our time to figure out how to correctly fit through the slots and trying to follow the larger enlarged parts. Hint: Look for the drill holes! Once C&A was negotiated, a short crawl through Hopeless Hole returned us to the climbers' path and the rest of the group.

Everyone seemed to have enjoyed the trip, so it was off to the pub, then back to the Matthews' house on the Island with fish and chips before we returned to our accommodation to rest and nurse bruises ready for the following day.



Dan abseiling out of Ariel Cave. Photo: Tom Harrison.



Right: Hannah negotiates once of the wider sections of the Portland rifts. Photo: Tom Harrison.

Day 2- Grove Cliff Caves

Some of our group were staying at a former Portland Bill lighthouse, now a bird observatory providing fantastic views out over the sea for a very reasonable price!



Observatory. Photo: Tom Harrison.



Mike, Greg, Callum, Hannah, Matty & Kerry outside HMP Portland. Photo: Tom Harrison.

We had been blessed on Saturday with fantastic February weather, so it should not have been a surprise that the Sunday would be quite the opposite. By the time we were meeting outside the Prison on Grove Cliff, it was already raining, and conditions worsened while we were underground!

Again, we were two parties with Mike, Greg, Callum, Hannah, Matty and Kerry heading off into the Allotment Dig Entrance and Dan, Kay, Ed, Kat, and Paul Rogers and Sam Reiter, (friends of Dan and Kay) meeting our party after entering from the Flagpole entrance.

The Grove Cliff caves are a series of intercepting rifts, tight in places, that provide several options for through trips. We decided on trying to complete the Grand Tour and brought rope to assist us with any of the tricky exits.

Grove Cliff Survey - Tim Rose

GROVE CLIFF CAVES

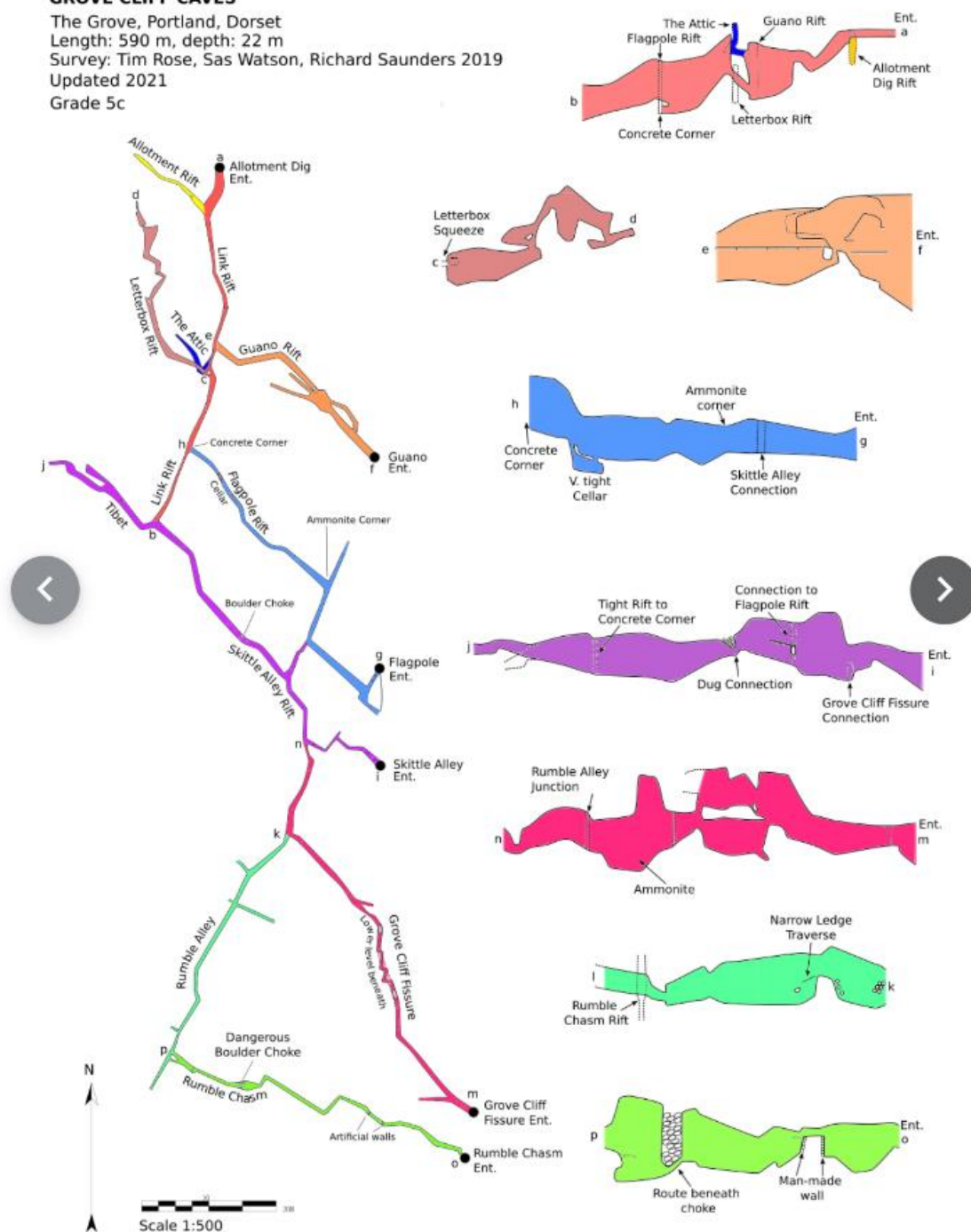
The Grove, Portland, Dorset

Length: 590 m, depth: 22 m

Survey: Tim Rose, Sas Watson, Richard Saunders 2019

Updated 2021

Grade 5c



After heading off along Link Rift, briefly, and thanks to my poor navigation, we were going the wrong way, taking a detour into what I now believe was Letterbox Rift (or it might have been Tibet) and clearly not the way on! When Mike found the obvious 'concrete corner' that I'd been looking for, we headed on into Flagpole Rift to take a look at Flagpole Entrance/Exit and then on into Skittle Alley.

Kerry in Link Rift.



Hannah at Ammonite Corner.



As we headed further south, the rifts became tighter and the caving harder, navigating our way carefully through some tighter sections and up through the boulder choke. Climbing up towards the end of Rumble Chasm, Greg had a real fight to get through the awkward squeeze but forced himself through.



Greg in Flagpole Entrance. Photo: Tom Harrison.

After all that strenuous exercise, no one fancied retracing our steps back through the tight parts or the boulder choke, so we decided to leave via Rumble Chasm Entrance.

Unfortunately, the bag with the rope for the pull through had been left back in Flagpole. The weather had deteriorated further, and the lashing rain and gusty wind made this exit quite exciting. By the time the first two members of the party had climbed down, the very steep path had become a mud slide, and the drop goes along way down to the beach below! As I came down, I tried to use the grass as a handhold, which I pulled out in clumps, and then to grab the rock, which also alarmingly came away from the cliff in handfuls as well. Those following me had even less to hold onto but did make it safely down!

All safely out, we headed along the barely-there path and found a way back into the system via Skittle Alley. We eventually figured out our way back through the rifts, to make a final exit via Guano.



Mike exiting Guano Rift Entrance.



Kit washing- Portland style.

By the time we'd returned to the cars, quite a puddle had formed, this became a very handy kit wash area, just underneath the security camera for the prison!

The two days were certainly a real taste of Portland caving and weather and I hope some of the party might even come back to do some more!

Editor's note: please see the very excellent website by Tim Rose for a guide to Portland's caves:

<https://sites.google.com/view/the-caves-of-portland/home>

MCG May Bank Holiday - Yorkshire Visit

Tom Harrison, June 2024

Kerry Rutter, Mark Edwards, Jason Kirby, Kat Rosier, Ed Ford, Hannah Blunt, Greg Hawkins, James Major, Mike Moxon and Tom Harrison

A club trip was arranged to go up to Yorkshire for the May Bank Holiday Weekend to coincide with the Gaping Gill Winch meet. Ten of us made the long trip up and despite the midges, a busy hut, some low cloud and some tricky deviations, the group had plenty of fun!

The base for the weekend was to be the Northern Pennine Club (NPC) Hut, just outside Clapham. A fantastic hut, with a newly built extension which includes space for a library and very handily, an SRT practice beam.

Several of us arrived on Wednesday and spent the evening practicing rigging and going through some techniques for those with less SRT experience. Some kit was adjusted, and we all had a good chance to refresh ourselves in the warm and dry. I think we ended up packing up around 11pm.

Thursday was a chance to enjoy the beautiful Yorkshire scenery and await the arrival of the rest of the party, so off we went.....for a walk! For most of the walking, the epic vistas stretched to around 100m, as the low cloud-base obscured the best of the views. It was still a good opportunity to see the Karst landscape, and the highlights included a Limestone pavement, Hull Pot and Braithwaite Wife Hole.



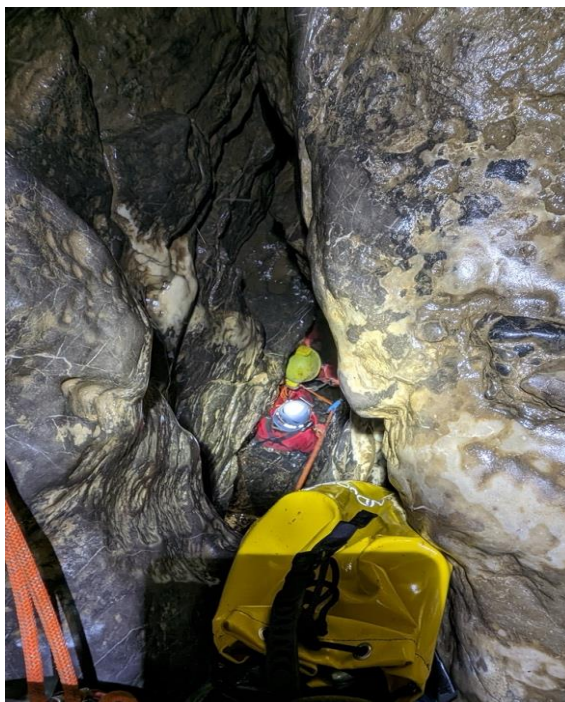
Top left: Jason setting up on the NPC's SRT Beam.
 Top Middle: Greg & Hannah at Hull Pot.
 Top right: Greg and Mark in the mist!
 Middle: Tom, Jason, Greg, Mark, Hannah and Kerry at Pen-Y-Ghent.

Thursday evening was spent with more rigging practice and a few beers!

Friday, the decision was taken to head to Bull Pot Farm and Bull Pot of the Witches to get some underground SRT refresher practice in. Unfortunately, the midges had also decided to head there for the weekend! Any exposed flesh was a target for the little biting b#####s and some speedy changing took place to limit the flesh munching opportunities for them.

I went ahead and ran a handline around to the first pitch, as the path down was very slippery after all the recent rain. This allowed everyone to get underground and shelter from the biting blighters, while I rigged a line down Chimney Climb pitch. Mark, following me, found that I hadn't left enough slack in the rigging, so had to make an adjustment. This got everyone down to the waterfall and to the next pitch below. Here, a pitch with a deviation and a re-belay gave everyone a chance to

practice passing these obstacles before a second pitch took us down to the connection to the Long Gallery.



Left: Jason celebrates that midges haven't followed us underground!

Right: Mark and Kerry down the first short Chimney Climb Pitch. Photos by Jason Kirby.

Below the vertical part of the cave, we headed off to find the streamway. The heavy rains from a couple of days before had left their mark with signs that flooding had reached a good 10m above the normal stream level. However, after the Long Gallery we reached the streamway, and this seemed to be flowing quite calmly. A quick look around and some photos taken, we made our way back up the pitches to the waiting clouds of midges.



In the Streamway .



Kerry and Jason.

Back at the NPC we nursed our bites and welcomed James, Kat and Ed with food and some drinking games!

The following day was Gaping Gill and the day we'd been particularly looking forward to. The weather arrived for us as well, with beautiful, mostly blue, skies and a warmer day for our walk up Ingleborough. No midges today, just swarms of tourists, and when we reached the winch, we found that the winch had become fully booked from about 10 mins after they'd starting selling places at 8am!



Kat, Ed, Jason, Kerry, James, Mark, Mike, Hannah (in the green field loo), Greg and Tom.

Mark Edwards wrote the trip report:

“It was a lovely sunny day for the walk up, with a number of women complimenting me on my turquoise furry. A bit of a faff saw us at the camp sometime after mid-day. Jason decided not to cave that day, although he did end up in Ingleborough show cave.

Originally, we were going to do Bar Pot but as there was a queue we decided on Stream Passage Pot. Tom went first, then James, down a corrugated tube rigged with ladder and rope. The guidebook said it's hard for tall people to exit this way.

Next Hannah then me, the tight slot at the bottom of the tube was quite awkward. I had a few attempts, then Greg did it, so I followed on.

Kerry had a bit of a problem on the deviation on the second pitch but managed to sort herself out and continue, Ed also. At this point Mike and Kat decided to exit without descending.

The rest of us carried on after letting a number of other cavers go off in front. At this point Tom felt a bit unwell, possible dehydration and exited before Mike and Kat. The third and fourth pitches were very nice and at the bottom we met a balaclava-ed James who was a bit chilly so decided to go back up the ropes.

So now we were five. Ed had a tiny topo, Kat had a tiny description, too small for me to read. We almost immediately bumped into a party of three from the peaks, the two chaps sporting carbide lamps, they had much bigger topos and descriptions so we tagged along, until we had to backtrack out of a wet rift which wasn't the way. Greg found the correct muddy slope leading to a low sandy crawl to sand caverns. After that, route finding was relatively simple to the floodlit main chamber, spray water crashing, bemused tourists, odd cavers.

We didn't stay long, just enough for a snack and drink, then off in search of Bar Pot, I went up first, a fine 32 metre pitch which made me breathe a little. At the top I met Mike who had returned. Every now and again people emerged from a tight crevice on the left wall above a narrow ledge, Tom also turned up and we carried on to first pitch, where Tom pointed us in the direction of small mammal, a shorter quieter pitch while he exited via a non SRT horrible crawly route, called Stile. We emerged into evening sun after six and a half to seven hours, very enjoyable trip."



Mike, Hannah, Greg and Mark at the top of the main pitch in Bar Pot.

Kat in the tight bedding plane linking Bar Pot with Small Mammal.

After this exit, a tired group of cavers made their way back down into Clapham, and to the NPC for a fantastic meal cooked by Kat, washed down with beer, cider and whiskey!

Ed and Hannah outside the entrance to Bar Pot.



Sunday

Unfortunately, (for me) the typical, later than planned start meant I'd missed my chance to get underground. But those staying on and caving until Monday, went off to Sunset Hole for today's caving trip.

Mark Edwards reported the following:

"Mark Edwards, Mike Moxon Greg Hawkins, Hannah Blunt, Kerry Rutter.

We parked just above Hill Inn, half an hours walk in the rain. Sinuous narrow phreatic streamway with four, mostly short, (some free-climbable)

pitches. I rigged, mainly traverses out over waterfalls with single bolt descents. Mike helped me rig a Y-hang on one of the pitches with a knotted instructor's sling over a natural and one in-situ bolt. It was quite loud and atmospheric with the brown peaty water cascading down the pitches. We had mixed up ropes so couldn't do the last pitch, the rope was too short but as it was a bit chilly, we all happily exited, doing his first bit of derigging. We emerged into a lovely clear sunny day."

Monday

The group caving was down to three by Monday, but Kat, Ed and Mike all managed to get underground with a trip into Yordas.

Kat Rosier wrote the trip report for this:

“Kat Rosier, Ed Ford and Mike Moxon.

Yordas Cave.

Ed, Mike and I went for a nice little caving trip to Yordas, before making our way back south. The weather held out relatively well considering there'd been very heavy rain, and after a first failed attempt due to a missing furry, we got there in the end.

Had a nice look around the old show cave and checked out the waterfall, then made our way up to the next entrance. The water levels were high, but the first two pitches were passable, although some simple climbs required handlines due to the amount of water.

Unfortunately, we weren't able to make the last pitch as the water was very high and after deliberation on the high route versus the low route, complexity, available rope etc. we decided to call the trip and head back. Lovely trip all round, Mike took some cracking photos.”

Thanks to all those who came along for a great weekend, and for all your contributions in making it so good. Kat and Ed have already made plans for the next away meet in Wales, in October, so I hope to see you there!

A selection of MCG Trip Reports 2024

Bath Swallet to Rod's Pot. 4th February 2024.

Edward Ford, Kat Rosier, Greg Hawkins and Callum Bisley.

Trip report by Callum Bisely.

I would have to say a very fun through trip today starting at Bath Swallet and finishing out at Rods Pot.

For everyone besides me, this was their second trip to this system.

On entering Baths and climbing down a good five to ten metres to start our descent at Shower Pot, Ed set up the pitch with Double FO8 and Alpine B (I think a double on the Alpine B also) on the Anchor points. We all descended safely to the bottom of the Pot using slings, belt, HMS, and Italian hitch acting as the breaker. Interestingly there were quite a few bats hibernating at the bottom of the pot, but also through both systems. One even decided to take over the dig site bags!

Continuing on through the Bhudda squeeze (my favourite part!), we then arrived at Purple Pot, where someone has rigged up a line (I recall, not 100 percent sure) Ed stating it was used as a safety line or lifeline. Initial climb is quite straight forward up the pot for a beginner climber, but to ascend onto the final ledge is a little tricky and takes a bit of time. Especially as I decided to carry the tackle bag on my back (note to self, next time to clip to the belt).

However, we all made it to the top of the pot, and continued on (through some more squeezes, climbs and crawls), to a large chamber in Rods Pot.

As I've never done it before, we went in search for the Bear Pit. Ed went first where we initially got a little confused but found the pit in the end (literally right at the bottom). Ed and me completed the pit, then headed back to join Kat and Greg to exit the cave.

Some initial bearing issue on finding the cave exit, but as we began to climb higher, the team gained their confidence, Ed went ahead and found the exit to the system (where Kat warned me of the plank which 'should' protect you from the honking mud puddle prior to the exit.)

We all successfully exited the system and with good time to spare before callout.

See some of you for the Portland trip, and March Members weekend!

Eastwater Cavern. 14th February 2024.

Becks Vials and Tim Cockle.

Trip report by Becks Vials.

A simple trip planned, that we'd conquered many times before. We thought we'd walk in and out dry, but Eastwater decided to pour over our plans. Eastwater's entrance gave us a 'wet' welcome, making us question our trip, fearing a 'reign' of water at the entrance shaft getting worse for the later on exit. This unease was echoing my past 'damp' experiences here, which represented a MCG trip where the entrance flood tried to block our exit, contributing to earning it the name of 'Emotional Eastwater' by a certain few of us!! 🧠 Emotional Eastwater, where the only thing deeper than the caves are my feelings for it—truly a rocky relationship built up over time, 'cave'ated with love and loathe.

After a return to the car to check the weather on the phone we decided it was safe to proceed for a quick whizz round the upper series which went by without any issues... despite the weird headspace it put me in, which was enough for me to confuse myself enough to not even realize I'd gone through the hallelujah

hole?!?!?? 🧐 🧐 🧐 🧐

This Valentine's, my date with Emotional Eastwater is the epitome of 'it's complicated'—a true test of my undying love for caving! ❤️ 🧡 🧡 🧡 🧡 🧡 🧡 🧡 🧡 🧡

Hunter's Hole. 17th February 2024.

Matty Dredge and Callum Bisely.

Trip report by Callum Bisely.

Picture: Not Hunter's Hole but Callum doing SRT in Eldon Hole, Peak District 9th May 2024.



Me and Matty decided to do Hunters Hole today based on the fact it's a great SRT cave (in the Mendips), but also a good trip for consolidation as I had just completed 2 days of SRT rigging training.

We initially looked to rig from the tree down to the ladder but decided instead to actually start from the first set of Y hangs in the cave. Which I rigged.

I'll admit my training didn't really prepare me for the rigging required on this cave (IMHO I would say rigging for this cave is above an upper beginner SRT caver- or I could have had an off day).

Matty decided to take over the rigging and we proceeded to descend to the bottom of the cave via the re-belay route quite rapidly.

Ascending back up the system from the bottom, is unfortunately where I encountered some issues with the re-belay.

I would agree my inexperience of this type of re-belay is very likely the cause of the issue. My chest ascender became stuck due to the line being too tight, and I was unable to remove it from the line to re-belay onto the other line.

After about 20 minutes of struggling and not too much panicking, (more frustration as I had done re-belays during my course in the week). I was finally able to free my chest ascender.

However, I took a huge hit in my confidence and also felt that there was potential damage to the chest ascender. I discussed with Matty that I would return back to the cave floor.

Matty agreed to go ahead and exit the cave in order to call for Cave Rescue since we were very very close to callout time expiring.

Long story short, I was able to regain my confidence (with the help of some of the Mendip Cave Rescue team), ascend the pitches speedily and exit the cave safely.

A huge shout out to them for their help, and also a huge shout out to Matty for keeping calm, patient and cool. Lesson learnt that I need to practice re-belays and rigging in more complex caves!

I won't be the first, nor will I be the last 🤔😅

Sharbutts Rift 2, Portland. 18th February 2024.

Dan Matthews and Tim Rose.

Trip report by Dan Matthews.

Tim emailed during the week and asked if anyone would like to go digging and seeing his last email regarding progress in Sharbutts 2 I agreed to join him.

We met at the park and headed over to the cave and Tim said on the way I expect this to be a fairly messy dig (oh how right he was) the cave entrance is an unpleasant climb over boulders with a dressing of pigeon poo (common occurrence on Portland) after the climb we reached a very muddy/wet tunnel (yes there was actual water flowing in a Portland cave!) At the end of the crawl the cave becomes a rift with 3 big boulders blocking the way on so Tim drilled and plugged the boulders to break them up and with slow progress I removed them from the cave. After 2 hours of lying on my side in clay with water dripping in my ear unfortunately the abuse of the cave damaged my head lamp and we could no longer continue. The good news is the boulders are out and the way on is a muddy dig. A short session of moving spoil from the dig face to a slope behind and digging will be able to commence. Tim is confident that if we break into this rift and it's as big as he thinks, Portland could have its first SRT trip.

Tim Rose is the author of Portland caves website.

Lionel's Hole. 2nd March 2024.

Callum Bisley, Becks Vials, Mike Ormond, Dave Cook, Hannah Blunt.

Trip report and pictures by Callum Bisely.

Callum, Becks, Mike, Dave, and Hannah.



First and definitely not the last trip through Lionels, I loved this cave!

We started through the main entrance, where it opens into the bouldered chamber (passing some sleeping cave denizens on the right) passing the tent, where we met the first squeeze (Mike had some issues but with great determination, successfully got through the squeeze), we then reached the bottom of traverse, where we scrambled along a small rift, which reminded me very much of the rift traverse in Eastwater.

We continued on through to the West Low Level, passing through a lovely little phreatic passage (another tight crawl and squeeze) where a small stream runs below at the start of a climb up to the right, which is also a little tight too.

Some more climbs (descent and ascents) with more crawls and squeezes until we arrived at Horrifice 1, where we then did a big U-Turn heading back a different route via the bypass, we came across the letterbox squeeze (Mike again had some squeeze issues but overcame this by passing underneath the letterbox).

Passing through some slight bends, and crawling. We came to the junction chamber, and finally back into the boulder chamber, exiting the cave system. Completed well before callout (just over 2 hours). A great trip!

Upper Flood Swallet. 3rd March 2024.

Mike Waterworth + 2 BEC members: Josh Henry and Hollie London.

Trip report and pictures by Mike Waterworth.



The weather forecast was for a dry and crisp day, excellent for a cave with flood in the name. Getting up to the entrance, the lake in Blackmoor looked larger than usual, an ominous start. Popping down the entrance we soon started coming across higher water levels than usual. It was flowing over the lip; it normally sinks before Midnight chamber. Hey ho, this cave is passable in any weather really (ask me about diving the lavatory trap sometime).

The water temperature on the other hand, that was really cold. For a normal air temperature of 12c underground, the water was 8c. It might not sound like much difference but in a onesie you can really notice it! Following the passage down, upon entering the bypass to the lavatory trap you can really notice the temperature difference between standing water and flowing water whilst immersed in the puddles. The rest of the entrance continued to be high water levels, with the stream sounding very loud and rumble below Not Easy Squeeze.

Near the bottom of the cave, just before the entrance to West passage, a stream of a similar size to the initial entrance passage can be heard high up in the wall. Interesting for sure. Has anyone tried to explore this before? We got to Neverland and did a bit of a photoshoot, then exited to noticeably lower water levels in the entrance passages. This must react pretty quickly to rainfall.



Attborough Swallet. 28th March 2024.

Steve Church and Dave Cook.

Trip report by Dave Cook.

On Thursday, Steve Church and myself went to Attenborough Swallet....mud ,red and very wet coupled with a hurricane getting changed on the surface still all good fun, haven't done it for years.

Goatchurch Cavern. 30th March 2024.

Dave Cook, Kat Rosier, Edward Ford, Jason Kirby.

Trip report by Dave Cook.

A novice 🎒 trip down 🐎 🏠 for the newbie Jason Cardwell Kirby.

Met up with Kat Rosier and Edward Ford or more correctly Mr and Mrs Ford since they can now cave at will, now they live in Cheddar 🏠 .

Entered in via the tradesmen's entrance, oooer, always looks a bit different in reverse. Down to the boulder chamber where we did a bit of ad-hoc recruitment.....see how that goes.

Down the drainpipelights out and a bit of a ging gang goooly at the end ...mused about the Dexion....which surprising I have done in the past with Neil Jackson then Ed ,Kat and I did some more musing about some other tight slot which would be easier to get in and horrible to get out.

Then back along the drainpipe and out the normal entrance.

All good fun first tick in the box for young Jason 😁😁😁

Bath Swallet to Rod's Pot. 31st March 2024.

Jason Kirby, Edward Ford and Kat Rosier.

Trip report by Kat Rosier.

Good little trip, went down and I rigged the main pitch at Bath entrance with Jason supporting and checking my rigging, Ed and I went down and waved goodbye to Jason, who backtracked out of bath to his van for some R&R whilst Ed and I carried on to exit through Rod's.

Got up purple pot with minimum assistance and had a look at the bear pit but didn't attempt as Jason was waiting. Popped back out of Rod's and derigged, lovely little trip and a nice break from unpacking the house.

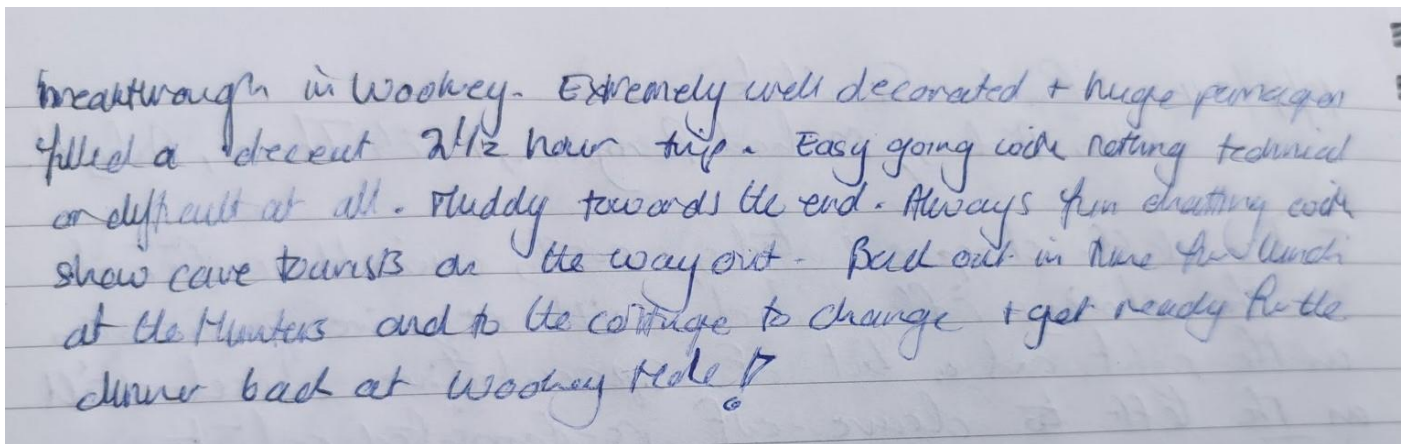
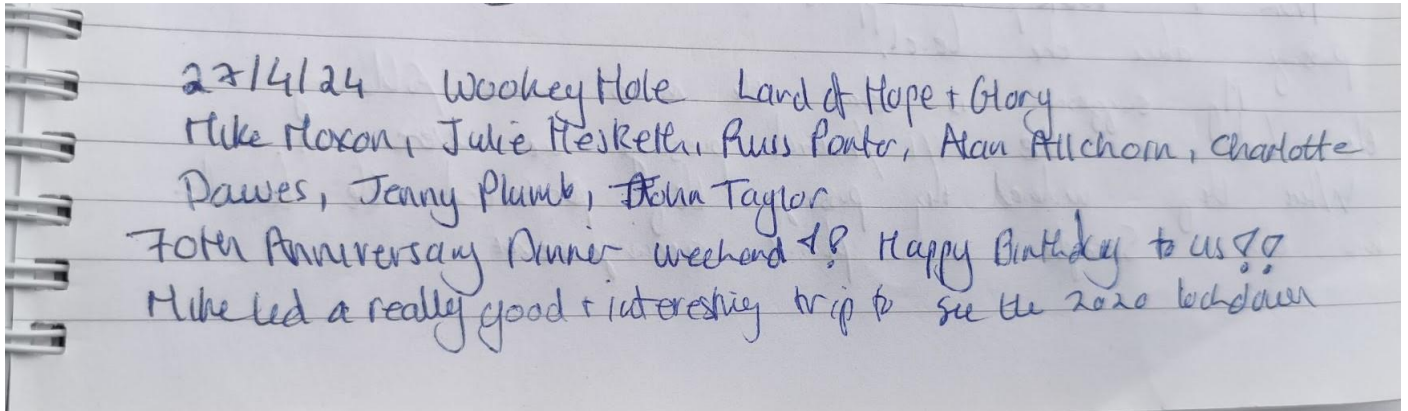
Goatchurch Cavern. 6th April 2024.

Isaac's first caving trip with Hannah Blunt, Greg Hawkins, Jason Kirby.



MCG 70th Trip to Wookey Hole 27th April 2024.

Trip Report by Julie Hesketh.



Eastwater Cavern, Unlucky Strike. 30th April 2024.

Mark Edwards, Ed Ford, Kerry Rutter, James Wilfred Harrison.

Trip report by James Wilfred Harrison.

The rain started as we gathered at Nordrach but it was very light so we decided to go ahead. The stream wasn't flowing so a nice dry entrance and we followed the rope through the boulders to the top of Upper Traverse. A bit of puffing and panting brought us through in decent time. Hallelujah Hole was fine (feet first on our backs worked well), can't remember much about the Lower Traverse so it must have been OK! Then over the trench at the bottom of Lower Traverse into First Rift after a discussion of the merits of Haribo. Crawl into Second Rift then Mark free climbed to set up a line, we followed using Ed's jammer. Probably could have climbed up closer to where you emerge into second rift without needing a rope but it was nice to have the rope, it's quite exposed for the first bit. We learnt some choice new Northern words as the group progressed up the thrutch. The "reversing" manoeuvre at the top of the thrutch had me puzzled for a bit (you need to go a bit past the junction and reverse in once it's wide enough for your legs) then we used the fixed handline to drop down into Unlucky Strike. Nice formations - curtains, stal, flowstone, helictites and nice crystals too. Then back to the top of the thrutch, squeezed down and self-belayed to the floor on Italian hitches. Pretty tired by now! Straightforward exit via the S bend, Canyon, Boulder Chamber, Woggle Press. Great trip, thanks everyone!

Sidcot Swallet. 6th May 2024.

Kat Rosier, Jason Kirby, Ed Ford and three new cavers from Wessex (Jason, John and Danny).

Trip report by Kat Rosier.

Our trip plans changed a few times, from Swildon's to Pieres and then finally deciding to do Sidcot after meeting the three guys in Goatchurch car park and having a long chat about the lobster pot. Surprisingly not that many spiders for Sidcot. Nice little trip down, everyone enjoying the tire press with a few back cracks. Got to the lobster pot, Ed, myself and the three Wessex cavers all gave it a good go with Jason directing at the top re technique. I'd never been down the lobster pot and was really happy to see how much extra cave there was, a lot of interesting holes to stick your head through and of course the great duck pond at the bottom. All got out ok with direction from Jason. Great little trip, and first outing for the new knee pads we won in the raffle 😊

Fairy Cave to Hillier's. 7th May 2024.

Mark Edwards, Kay Matthews, Kerry Rutter, Owen Rutter, Ed Ford and Kat Rosier.

Trip report by Kat Rosier.

Arrived in lovely sunshine, quick walk into the cave, a few navigation issues, but produced some fun exploring. A few nice pics as there were some lovely mud formations. We missed Cambridge grotto, ending up straight at the Hillier's entrance. A really good trip and we came out in day light.

Rhino Rift. 1st June 2024.

Picture of the Grotto by Matty Dredge.

Matty wrote: A pretty serious SRT cave: 140m of rope to do the first three pitches of five and 500ft deep in total.



Goatchurch Cavern. 1st June 2024.

Dave Cook, Kat Rosier, Riley.

Trip report by Dave Cook.

Riley Chapman's first Cave trip to Goatchurch with Kat Rosier and myself. After a slow start and a few tricky climbs for a 7-year-old she gradually got cave fit. She's looking forward to another trip later this month...Mendip cave group's newest newbie. Well done Riley. Thanks Kat.

An Old and Amusing Survey of Swildon's Hole

Bill Chadwick

In January 2023, we were slightly surprised on opening the post at the cottage, to find a quirky old Swildon's Hole survey. The survey had been sent to us by an elderly gentleman name Clifford Irish (who we do not believe was ever a member of MCG). He wrote:

"Dear Members,

I have been sorting out some old photographs and possessions in preparation for a move. I came across this map of Swildon's Hole and some photographs.

I started potholing and caving in 1955 when I was based at RAF Locking during radar training during National Service. I was only there for a few months then posted to an RAF base near Middlesbrough, where along with a few other lads did some potholing and caving in the Pennines and North York Moors.

After NS I returned home to Bracknell but managed to continue potholing and caving with the Sandhurst Military Cadets. The enclosed print may have come from them.

You will notice from the photograph that in those days, our kit consisted of army boots, army denims and oxyacetylene lights. These of course always went out when passing through a sump.

Looking back, I had a great time.

I wish your group all the best.

Clifford Irish."

We assume that MCG were the lucky recipient of the survey following a simple Google search. We emailed our pleasure in receiving the survey to Clifford who replied

"Thank you for your email and I was pleased to hear that survey was of interest. Please do whatever you like with the survey. I do not have any copywrite on it and was pleased to hear that it may appear in one of your newsletters. Would I be able to see your newsletter online?"

With regards, and good caving,

Clifford"

Mike Moxon and Joan Goddard have done some research about the survey, which is dated 1962, and about the RMAS caving group. In the MCRA records Mike found the following snippet entitled



Army manoeuvres underground [Sandhurst, article by M. Hickling, formerly of Downside Abbey School CC; Swildon's Hole]. Anon. (22 Feb) 1952 Wells Journal.

"Local news - An unusual group of visitors are often seen arriving at Wells Station late on Saturday afternoons. They frequently wear fawn rain-coats and sewn-down caps, and sometimes carry kitbags or a bundle of rope-ladders. They are members of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst Mountaineering and Exploration Club who come down for a week-end's potholing under the Mendips. The officer cadets show great keenness for this sport. After duty (12.30 p.m.) on Saturday. they rush off from Sandhurst to catch the earliest train from Reading. The express has been known to wait as much as eight minutes overtime for the party. They then come all the way to Priddy and have to be back at the Academy again by 11 o'clock on Sunday evening. Sandhurst has recently bought Fountain Cottage, on Priddy Green where the potholing parties can eat, change and sleep. This small cottage sometimes holds many as twenty cadets."

And here we are in 2023 when I sometimes feel a two-hour drive from Reading is a chore!

One of MCG's founder members, Malcolm Cotter, wrote in MCG Occasional Publication No. 5 about meeting RMAS cavers in November 1953 for a Swildon's trip, when he himself was doing his National Service
http://mcg.eastus.cloudapp.azure.com/oldws/sections/about/retrospective_05.html

Malcolm includes:

Albert Main told us that a group from Sandhurst Military Academy were going down Swildon's Hole that evening. He then pointed across Priddy Green saying that the party was in the New Inn and would probably let us join them.

On entering the New Inn, we found the Sandhurst party sitting on benches next to a bare kitchen table. The bench to the left of the window was high backed. On the table was a silent mantle lamp, so that the small gathering was contained in a lit area. Behind the table was a range-style hearth. We enquired if we could join their trip down Swildon's Hole. A friendly affirmative was given with the added message that they would leave for the cave once we returned with caving gear on.

Once changed into caving gear, we returned to the New Inn and left at once for the cave. It was by now late, probably about 10pm. John Richardson, the leader and a charming individual, had caved in Devon and Yorkshire so we had something in common. We engaged in easy conversation and before long were within sound of the Swildon's stream. The cave would have been difficult for us to find on such a dark night. In addition, it would probably have been locked. A goodwill fee of a shilling [5p] a head (or was it sixpence [2½p]?), was paid by explorers.

Swildon's Hole made a great impression on me, being a beautiful, clean watercourse decorated by such a profusion of calcite formations. This was particularly so at Barnes' Loop where a grossly exaggerated note of the height of formations (75 feet) is made in my log. After a short wait at the sump, we returned. At the Water Chamber we changed route, returning by the Wet Way. Our time underground was about 4½ hours.

The night outside was very cold with a hard frost freezing our wet clothes as we made our way back across the fields. John Richardson invited us to join his party for a hot drink in Fountain Cottage once we had changed. We were made welcome at Fountain Cottage and given a mug of hot coffee that was very well received.

Now it turns out that the RMAS cottage was auctioned in 1981 and bought by the Mendip cavers Alison and Pete Moody who live there to this day. Alison has kindly provided this photo showing the cottage when they bought it. There was still a nail in the Livingroom wall, with a hook labelled for hanging a Swildon's Ladder on.



[illegible]

Bill Chadwick.

LEGEND

Fms. Attractive Formations.

1900' Distance in feet from Entrance.

616.2 Level above mean Sea Level.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Survey is a copy of one made by W.I. Stranton and Dr O Lloyd in 1953

The Survey of SWILDONS 4 and 5 is copied from one made by D Kemp, D Davey and D Walker to CRG. Grade 4.

NOTE

An Extension beyond DOUBLE TROUBLE of 400' was opened 17th August 1960 by W.I. STRANTON containing two baleable sumps



SUMP 1.



THE BLACK HOLE



'ERBE'

ALL IS LOST ! MY CIGARETTES ARE WET.



Fms.



DOUBLE POTS (ONE)

Roger Wallington's Blackmoor Log 1968

Joan Goddard, May 2024

Roger Wallington's daughters Kay and Anna have kindly donated Roger's Caving Logbook (Oct 1964 - June 1968) to the library. Roger died in 2021 (see MCG News No 387). Below is a transcription of three loose pages describing his visit to Blackmoor just after the Great Flood of July 1968, with Malcolm Cotter, Richard Peat & Greg Smith.

BLACKMOOR

LOWER FLOOD ENTRANCE (*Grebe Swallet*)

Large shakehole 30ft across with entrance to one side under sheer face of mud. Bottom of shakehole approx. 10ft below ground and entrance hole approx 15ft below G.L. Drop of 5ft into large boulders. Through boulders drop into rift 10ft below. left passage 15ft high by 3 ft wide, going straight for approx.. 30ft via one crawl under wedged boulder. At end crawl on left (Z-bend) to small chamber (many large fist sized nuggets of galena around here). Tight rift approx 1ft across at bottom tapering up to approx 3-4ft high. Now fenced off by school. Claim to it by school and BEC (Axbridge).

MIDDLE FLOOD ENTRANCE (*Waterwheel Swallet*)

About 100ft West of ancient sluice gate which has appeared down the valley. A swallet type entrance in clay bank. Approx 5 f t. below general valley floor. Small tunnel starting at base of bank – flat out crawl, sandy floor, approx 3ft wide, 1ft high, leading for approx 30ft to small chamber. Floor of chamber loose boulders with ***es clay infill washed in by flood. Started to dig straight on down.

Tunnel leading to this chamber has air space all along its length on the left side going in. This was cleared partially in one plane as tends to point to the passage being much wider in cross section and possibly much deeper.

LEAT

Approx 60ft from Middle Flood Entrance down the valley. In the line that the floodwater took. Hole in side of leat in entrance passage running up and down valley floor. M.O.C. (*Malcolm Cotter*) entered it and explored up the valley getting right out of earshot. Dry sandy floor. Dry stone walling and stone slab laid across top.

BLACKMOOR SHAFT

No change in rift passage leading off Don's Chamber. Walls of shaft washed very clean. No change in lower dig except a few rocks washed into the rift and terminal chamber floor

BLACKMOOR SWALLET

UPPER FLOOD ENTRANCE 3.8.68

While waiting for M.O.C. to reappear out of leat, a stranger walked across, enquired whether we were cavers, then asked what the shaft up the valley beyond the old sluice led into. Having never heard of it we casually followed him only to discover among some tall grass on the right-hand side of the valley going up the valley, about halfway up the valley side and 20 ft from the track from the old cottage – a shaft. Squarish 20ft long and 10ft wide, with a square passage leading into the valley side 4ft square. After 20ft a drop into a passage going at 45° across line of entrance passage to the left, followed for 10ft drop into low crawl passage with thick mud floor to stal (with) and then dry sandy floor. Removed a couple of obstructing boulders, and after approx. 20 ft crawl altogether dropped into stream passage in a small chamber 10ft across and 12ft high. Stream passage

goes up and down stream (No water). Downstream first (*or firm*) floor of thick mud sticky mud over 18" deep at the chamber. Flat out crawl over this down an obvious stream passage. Stal covering to walls and roof. 50 feet of passage like this terminating in a pool 4ft across. Stalactites on far wall hang below water level obstructing way on. Water approx 1ft deep on top of mud.

On right going out high rift like inlet passage 10ft from pool with mud floor choke. Open area on opposite stream passage wall. Return to chamber.

Upstream passage means clambering over jammed stal'd boulders for about 25ft to first chamber, rift going off on right. Way ahead thro' more boulders in same chamber rising upwards quite steeply for about 25ft.

Rift passage from chamber turns sharp right after 15ft from stream passage. After another 10ft, small tight passage in left wall leads on. In here a natural rock bridge blocking the passage had to be smashed and a way was forced after crawling along passage into a small grotto with a stal bridge (hence called Bridge Chamber). A downstream passage for 5 ft till it is choked and stal filled. Upstream passage for 30 ft leading upwards to vertical face at end. Small trickle down here over beautiful mud gours in steps.

Ground survey to fix position of shaft) 4.8.68

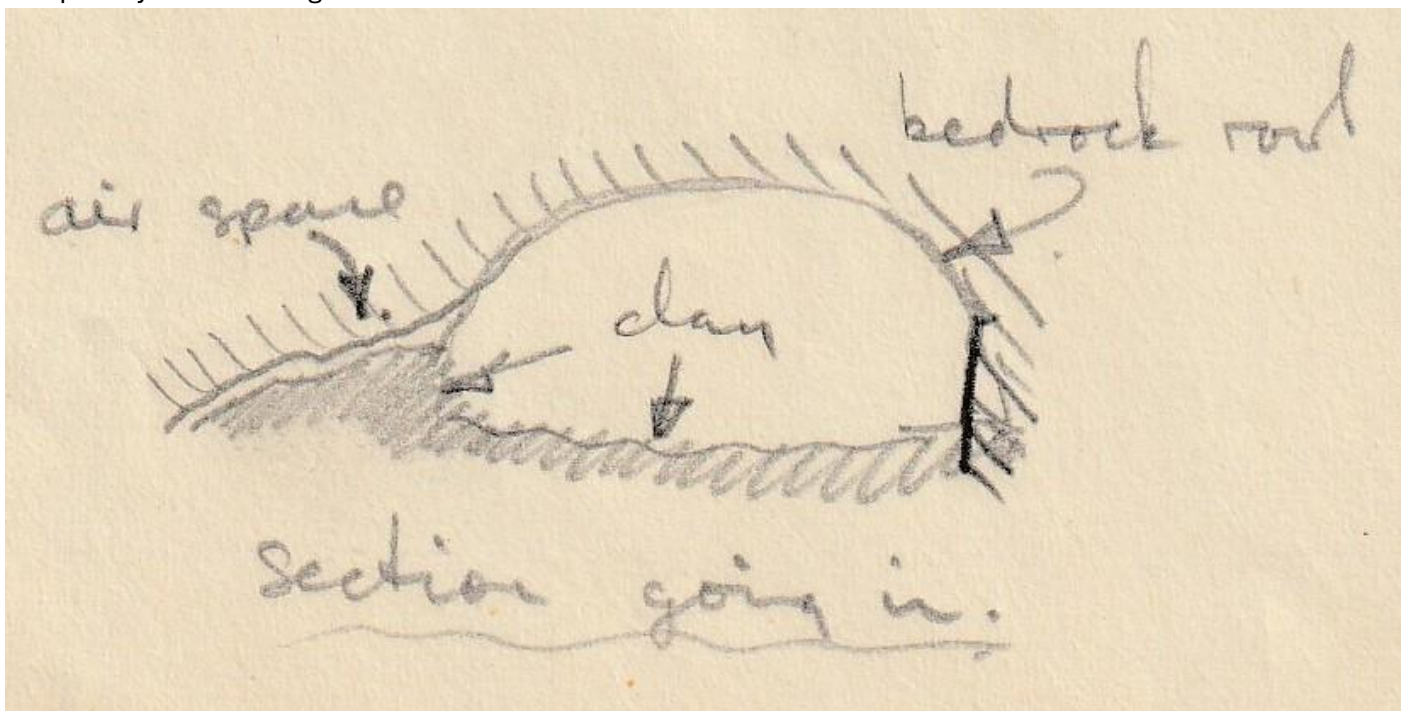
Underground survey 4.8.68

Looking in valley bed for possible inlet for water to enter new cave. 2 miners' wash pools found in approx expected position for inlet. Perhaps miners used cave as a drain for their pool?

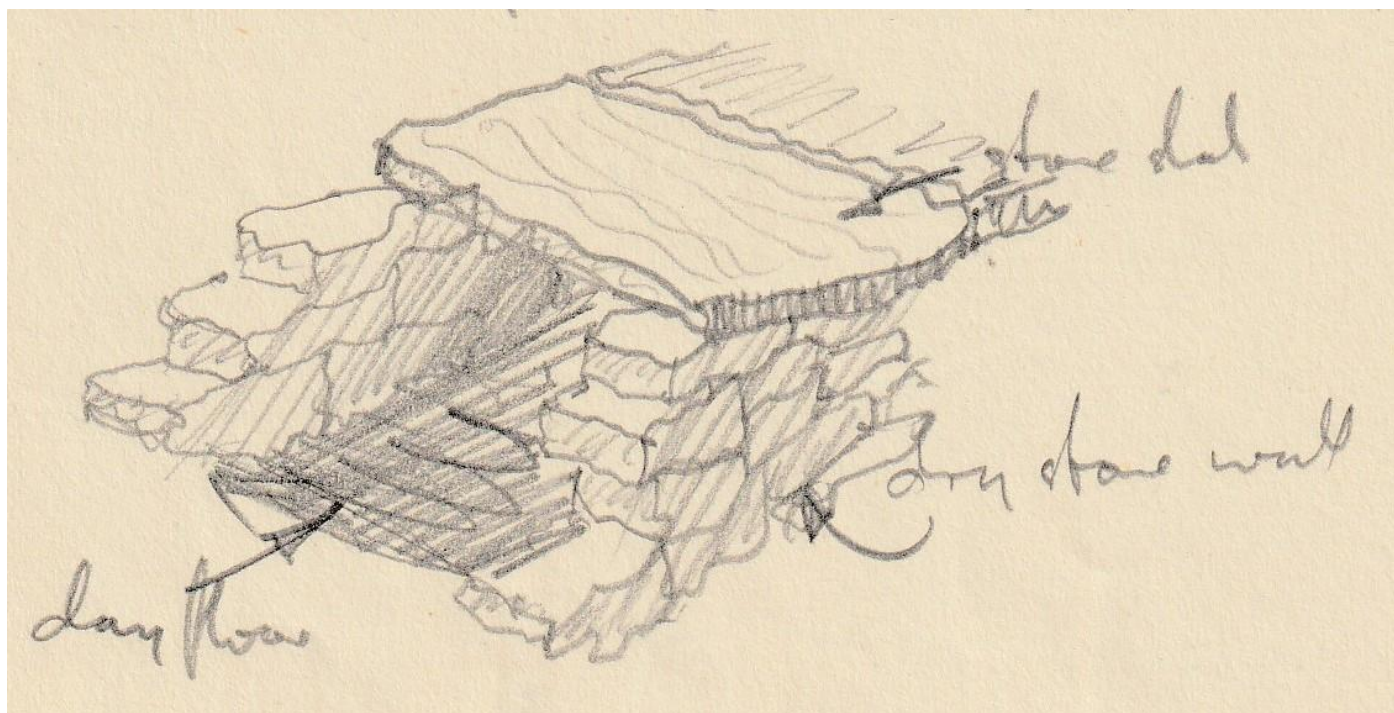
FLOOD

Water pouring off Blackdown and from a row of springs in field above road from Burrington Coombe Road to Charterhouse. Crossed road then poured thro' Minnery pools and built up behind track crossing Blackmoor. Built up till it forced an overflow channel and finally swept away the track completely and bank revealing an ancient sluice gate previously unknown. It then backed up behind road crossing Blackmoor 'til that in turn was swept away. Soon after Lower Flood entrance (*Grebe*) collapsed and from then on all flood water disappeared via this hole.

Old story that main road built on ancient embankment which was site of Roman villa seems to be substantiated thro' finds of pottery and coins after preliminary dig by private individuals. Many Roman coins and pottery found among washed down silt.



Middle Flood Passage Sketch



Leat Sketch

Additions to the library

Joan Goddard, May 2024

Roger Wallington's Caving Logbook: Oct 1964-June 1968 (and loose pages up to April 1970). Roger and Trish Wallington's daughters (Kay and Anna) have kindly given Roger's logbook to the Group. It starts before he joined MCG and consists of short trip reports with participants. Beautifully presented.

Cave and Karst Science (51) April 2024 – Chronology of cave development in Nidderdale, caving in Greece.

Wessex Journals for March (361) and May (362) – short piece about Phil Hendy, (author of the caving page in Mendip Times) with full obituary in next issue.

Cantabria, Thailand, restoration work on Main's Barn in Priddy, 3D Cave Photography, Logbook extracts including an interesting selection of Longwood Valley Sink digging sessions.

Grampian Speleological Group Ser 5 Vol 5(1) March 2024.

Craven Pothole Club (153, 154) Jan, Apr 2024

Subterranea April 2024 – Usual mixture of subjects, UK and abroad; bunkers, mines and tunnels, archaeology.

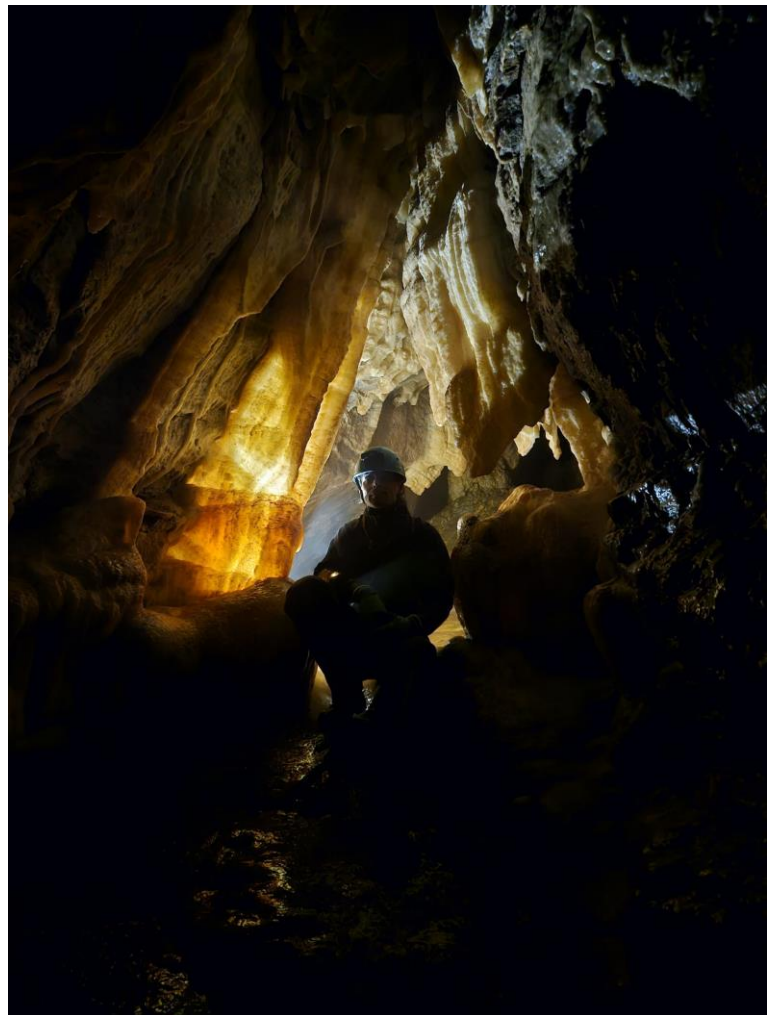
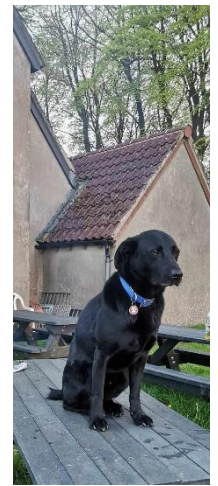
Gallery

Ariel Cave, Portland. Pictures by Kerry Rutter February 2024 featuring: Kay Matthews, Mike Moxon, Greg Hawkins, Tom Harrison Hannah Blunt, Bill Chadwick.



Page below: Ed Ford and Kat Rosier in Yordas, Yorkshire. Photo by Mike Moxon, April 2024. Kat looking at fine formations, Bar Pot, Yorkshire, April 2024. Photo by Tom Harrison. Sam Ford. Photo by Kay Matthews, May 2024. Hannah in Bar Pot, Yorkshire. Photo by Jason Kirby, April 2024. Matty Dredge in Swildon's Hole. Photo by Ed Ford, April 2024. Ffynnon Matthews, May 2024.





Page below: Kat and Ed in St Cuthberts. Photo by
Matty Dredge.

Matty in St Cuthberts. Photo by Kat, June 2024.

Group photo by Jason Kirby: Dan Matthews, Paul
Rogers, Clare Eyeington (guest), Bill Chadwick, Kay Matthews, Mike Ormond, and Mat Roberts July 2024.

