

**Mendip
Caving
Group**

NEWS

No. 382



Pearl Mine Discovery

**Summer Trip
Reports**

Cottage Construction

MCG News is the Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group.

It is emailed free to all members of the group who have provided a working email address on their membership form. If you are not receiving the Newsletter then please contact the editor.

It is also sent to all those other caving clubs, groups and societies who the MCG have an active Newsletter exchange with. If you wish to join our exchange, then please get in touch.

The Newsletter is also made available online, approximately 1 year after publication. See www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

The newsletter is usually produced 3 or 4 times a year, but this is dependant on the amount of content the editor gets. All contributions are gratefully received.

The MCG Update is a separate publication to keep members up-to-date with news and events in between newsletters.

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New Members Welcome
For Joining Enquiries Please Contact
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Front Desk

Welcome to the issue.

A busy summer season is winding-down, though the cottage still seems to have plenty going-on.

The Sandford Hill Open (*frisbee*) Golf championship, cider and sausages, a wonderful weekend in Wales and all the fun of Hidden Earth- where the MCG won the prize for best club stand. The club has the main construction of a new drying room and kit store complete- with the interior to be finished-off.

There was some caving done too...as well as digging, with a major discovery of new mined-passage in Pearl Mine (*article enclosed*), as well as revisiting passages that were closed-off in the relatively recent past.

This issue also sees reflections on the lifetime of Tony Knibbs, as an MCG member and Mendip Caver.

And remember, as the frosts of winter set-in - it's always warmer as you head underground.

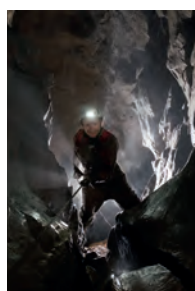
Andrew.

(November 22nd 2017)



Welcome Aboard

The club welcomes Miranda Lichfield to the role of librarian, after Lisa Gibson had to relinquish the role due to the commitments of a new job.



Front cover

Lisa Gibson in Ogof
Craig A Ffynnon.

Photo: Andrew Horeckj



Outdoor Pursuits course on both open grassland and through the woodland.

Brian Snell- seen below tapping-in a short putt, would eventually lift the *claret jug* after a tightly-fought competition.



Photos: Jackie Bishop

A Busy Summer

The Sandford Hill Open *frisbee* Golf Championship- which is becoming a regular feature, was once again blessed with glorious sunshine. After a fish and chip dinner from the Churchill chippy, the club was tested by the Churchill

Sausages and Cider

The September members' weekend saw a superb selection of local sausages and ciders for members to enjoy, after their underground excursions.



The gourmet sausage selection (left).

A couple of connoisseurs of the sausage and cider-makers craft (above)..and a few more (below).

Photos: Jackie Bishop





MCG take Best Club Stand at Hidden Earth 2017

The last week in September saw the UK National Caving Conference descend on The MCG's doorstep again, at the Churchill Academy. The club decided to put-up a stand to show what it has been up to - and ended-up as "*best of breed*" in show!

The images show, clockwise from the top:

The information boards- details of the club and its facilities, dig successes in Bone Hole Sandford Levy and Pearl Mine, and video presentation screen.

The team that manned the stall.

The table-top display- with Joan's bat biscuits and tasty cave pearls.

Ed giving his presentation of the discoveries in Pearl Mine and its neighbours.

The Club's winnings from the event.

The main trade hall.

Photos: the editor.





A Tale of Two Sheds

Over the weekend of 13th - 15th October, a crack team of artisans gathered at the cottage, to construct the new drying-room and kit store.

Brian takes-up the history to the project...

It all started when I was told that a grant from the Somerset Community Foundation may be available to the MCG for a worthwhile project. I knew we needed to do something with the drying room as the floor was rotting out so I thought why not. The maximum that could be applied for was £2000. I put forward an application in November 2016 and was rewarded with a grant of £750 - a useful sum. So Keith and I started working on a suitable timber design based on a substantial shed I had seen built for my brother-in-law. This project had been looked at before when Biff and I had started looking at possible layouts. It was planned then that the Tackle Store could be accommodated into this shed plus Biff had the idea of creating a hatch in the roof of the shed to store the club's ladder. He was also going to create a metal cage to make the Tackle Store secure from unwanted access. Alas Biff it wasn't to be, your skills are already much missed.

The project couldn't be started immediately as the kitchen was already in the planning process and had to take place first. With that out of the way and a suitable rest period, brains were engaged on the Drying Room project. Sadly Biff left us and then Keith had a heart attack. Hmm rather a large weight on my shoulders was very evident now as the project need to be well on the way to completion by No-

Afternoon tea on the Sunday - the roof felt is secure but needs tidying-up...and we need to get the cladding boards on the walls before the day is out.

Words and pictures by Brian Snell and Andrew Horeckyj.



Dave Lossl trying to believe it will become a shed- the main floor members get positioned.

vember as one of the clauses of the grant. With lots of offers of help some of that weight lightened a little. The project needed to be started and the first job was to halve the size of the wash down area. Keith and I tackled that one with a new wall built earlier in the year. This was followed by dismantling the old wood stores and clearing the area. Bill and I then set some block pads ready for the old drying room to be moved there. Then with plenty of volunteers to help we managed to dismantle the old shed, shorten it, then rebuild it on a new base I had constructed the day before.



Mid- morning and the editor joins the team. The uprights are going-in fast... thanks to Doug's nail-gun.

Then about 5 weeks ago I went down midweek to get the foundations of engineering bricks set down ready for the main build. Unfortunately, after completing this, I received a phone call on the way home which meant that I the lives of my wife Eileen and I would going to be turned well and truly upside down. We had to become foster parents to two of our Grand children (10 and 12) under a police protection order. This change means that my freedom to come and go as I please is significantly reduced. I organised for materials and all the key players to be available on the weekend of the 13-15th October.

The prospect of ex-hurricane Ophelia blasting-through on Monday afternoon, gave a certain urgency to the matter of getting the structure sound and relatively weatherproof.

Brian had concreted-in the carefully levelled foundation bricks previously. On Friday, the floor-supporting timbers were put in place, ready for the main building on Saturday.



From the lofty heights of the temporary mezzanine-deck, Russ - in serious builder mode (pencil behind both ears), and Brian measure the gable-ends so the roofing can begin. The ridge is on temporary supports.



With more table-saws and power-tools than the average DIY superstore, construction was maintained at a blistering pace. Keith and Brian's architectural blueprints were followed to an accuracy of a few millimetres.



Being familiar with large, grey, more-or-less watertight structures - Ed takes command of the application of roofing felt.

Once the main structure was completed and the heavy roof panels secure, the group split into teams- Mike, Russ and Ed concerned themselves with the roof felting, whilst Doug and I set to the task of the outer wall cladding strips.

While all the nail-gunning was going-on, Brian occupied himself with the precision task of constructing the door frames and hanging the doors, which we decided to trim slightly, for a better fit.



Starting to lose the light- calling time for this weekend. Packing away all the toys.



Ed providing suitable physical encouragement to the shed-moving team. (above)

Earlier in the summer, the old drying room was moved on to a newly constructed timber base at the gate, to become the new wood-shed.

Photo (right): Bill Chadwick

New Cottage Chairs

In other cottage news- a set of nice wooden chairs has been acquired by Bill Chadwick, from a company restaurant that was relocating and therefore not needing the furniture. The club's orange chairs had given good service but started to deteriorate, so this was a timely move by the firm.



Pearl Mine Revisited

More Than We Expected..

The reopening of Pearl Mine and a major discovery to boot.

by Ed Waters

Back in August, our illustrious Editor hinted that the MCG had discovered something significant in Newsletter No.381 and had further hinted that more would be revealed in the next issue (*Horeckyj 2017*). As many of you will be aware a dedicated group has been toiling to re-open Pearl Mine on Sandford Hill for many months. Newsletter 380 includes a good history of the site, it's blocking in 1971 and the circumstances surrounding the start of the dig by the MCG (*Harrison 2016*).

The nest of Cave Pearls- to which Willie Stanton referred in his survey notes. *Photo: Tom Harrison.*



The Survey of Pearl Mine contained in Mendip Underground (Gray, Taviner & Witcombe 2013)

The majority of the digging took place on the Saturday of members' weekends, and consisted of simply filling buckets of debris at the bottom of the shaft, then hauling them up to the surface. This was accompanied by an open fire, tea and sausages for sustenance which enabled a typical performance of 1.5 tonnes of material to be removed each session and the floor of the shaft to be lowered by about 1m. These sessions would inevitably be followed by a swift visit to the Crown Inn at Churchill for a pint of Bath Ales Gem.

The March 2017 members' weekend saw us finally enter the eastern arm of the upper gallery, which proved a little more extensive and interesting than the survey in Mendip Underground (Gray, Taviner & Witcombe 2013) suggested. The next session saw us into the short upper-west gallery. This proved most interesting indeed. The old surveys (such as Geoffrey & Swarbrick 1951) showed this branch ending at a too-tight hole.



This indeed proved to be the case, the passage ended in a slot about 130mm (five inches in old money) wide, which dropped about 2m into what appeared to be larger passage. There was also a healthy draft, this looked like a proper prospect, and more to the point did not appear to lead towards anything shown on the old surveys.

At the July members weekend we continued to dig downward toward the lower gallery, but at the end of the session Graham Price applied a healthy quantity of magic enlargement cord to the slot before we left.

The following Tuesday a small party consisting of Martin Cross, Andy Horeckj and myself descended Pearl Mine to inspect the damage. Graham had done his work well, and the slot was now passable, albeit with some effort for the larger types (i.e. Martin and I). Quite committing on the descent, it proved quite awkward coming back up due to the lack of footholds. This obstacle is now known as "The Pension Pot" in honour of the rather high average age of the diggers.



The author lifelines Brian Snell out of the mine on the day of persuasion, closely observed by the "gaffer" - Bill Chadwick, already into his cuppa. Photo: Graham Price

The slot- site of great interest- significant draft - and as much speculation- July 8th 2017- prior to the persuasive effort. Photo: Graham Price.



Martin Cross gets his first view of “The Unexpected Level” on the breakthrough day. Frame from video: Andrew Horeckyj

Directly below the Pension Pot, the passage immediately enlarges into a high rift about 1.5m wide and decorated with white stal. Andy, Martin and I walked forward into the unknown, with Andy filming the exploration as it happened, including the most embarrassing effusive statements as we realised we had made a major discovery. We pushed on for about 50m or so, until we reached a deep hole in the floor. The passage could be seen to continue beyond, but we decided to leave exploration at this point to allow the other diggers the chance to make their own discoveries. Getting back up the Pension Pot proved a bit of a bugger, the walls were still very rough and I had to stand on Andy and then pull both Martin and Andy up through the hole. All in all it was a most excellent find.

Saturday unsurprisingly saw most of the digging team assembled. The passage, now named “The Unexpected Level” was pushed via traversing over the deep hole at the previous trip’s limit and about another 50m of mined rift passage explored to a choke. Mike Richardson climbed to a high

level passage, named “Diamond Passage” in honour of his forthcoming 60th birthday, whilst Graham Price announced that the choke below was drafting and set about digging. The choke was named, “The Price is Right”.

Meanwhile Buddy and Martin had climbed to another high level passage which yielded about 20m of passage to a choke, and Mike Moxon climbed down below the traverse and dug through a miner’s wall (taking care not to disturb the Hare skeleton nearby) to another 10m or so of passage. Having pushed his climb, Buddy noticed that there may be a continuation directly below the Pension Pot. A few boulders were removed and black space dutifully appeared, but was left for the next session. Consulting the survey suggested that Buddy’s dig would likely enter the lower level passages of the old Pearl Mine, and so it proved on the next session. Whilst I carried out a surface survey to accurately fix the levels between Pearl Mine and Sandford Levvy, the rest of the party squeezed through into the lower levels and

A few metres along the Unexpected Level this shaft rises almost to the surface, where it corresponds to a depression bearing mature trees. (Igloo shaft). Frame from video: Andrew Horeckyj.



saw the famed pearls for the first time in 40 years. Comparing photos new and old sadly proved that a number of the largest pearls had been removed, though several very large ones remain and it is still very pretty indeed.

Attention now focussed on the Lower-East passage and the potential connection with Sandford Levvy. With the two entrances now accurately tied together, it appeared that the Lower-East passages in Pearl Mine lay about 4m away from the 2015 extensions in Sandford Levvy (Waters 2015). On the August members weekend an attempt was made to establish where the connection might be. Hayley and I entered Sandford Levvy whilst another larger party dug in Lower East. Hammering could clearly be heard between Lower East and TH Chamber in Sandford Levvy,

but no obvious dig site could be seen. At the end of the session, Graham drilled 10 shot-holes around the terminal constriction in lower east and the dig became known as the Broadside.

With Broadside enlarged, the next trip saw us into 15m of natural passage which the miners had never been in, and the reward was superb. Broadside Chamber is a comfortable hands and knees crawl, if a little awkward to enter.

The main attraction is a superb pure white crystal pool which runs along the left hand wall of the chamber. There are two choked continuations from this chamber, but it would be criminal to push this as the pool would inevitably suffer.



Graham Price astride Fingers Traverse, having just secured the anchors for the handline. Photo: Andrew Horeckyj.

Ed Waters, Hayley Clark, Tim Ball, Paul Walford Mark "Buddy" Williams, Graham Price, Mike Moxon, Keith Knight, Brian Snell, "Biff" Frith, Mick Norton, Linda Millie, Tom Harrison, Mike Richardson, Bill Chadwick, Martin Cross and Andy Horecky).

Survey drawn by Ed Waters.

Survey Data

Total Passage Length 593m
Vertical Range 30m

Total Passage Length 705m
Vertical Range 68m

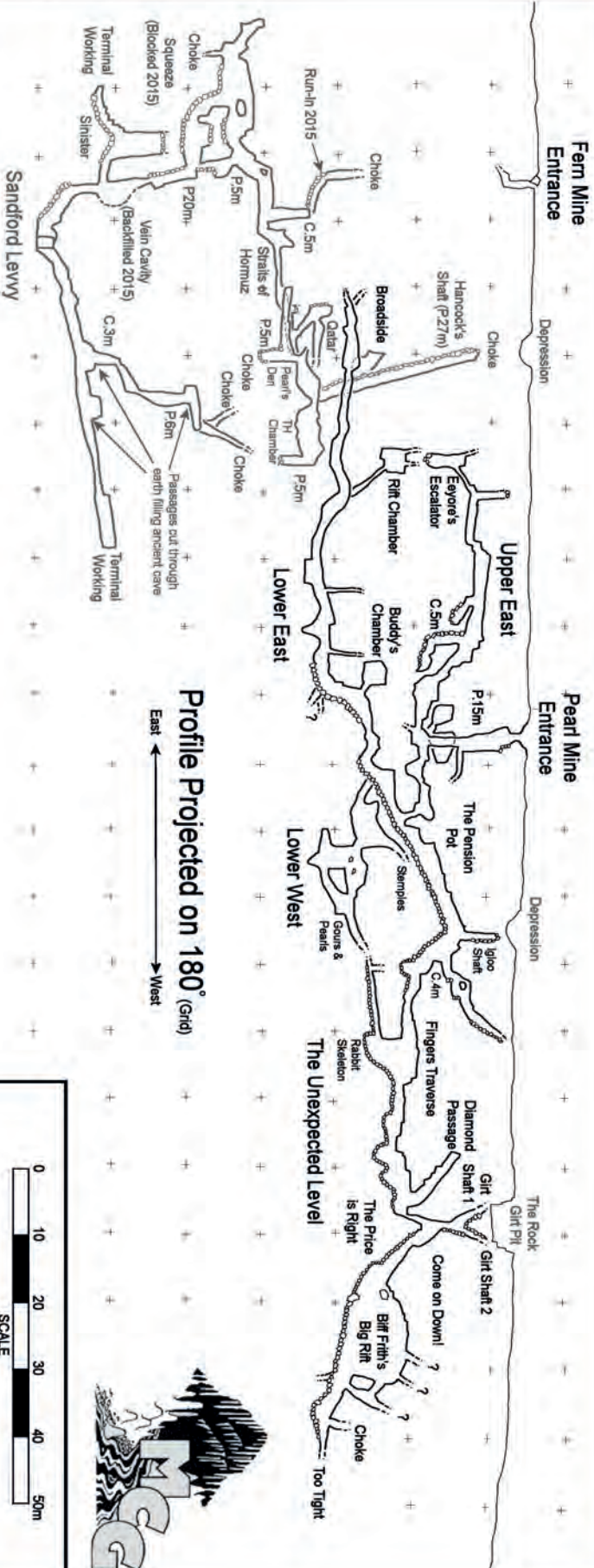
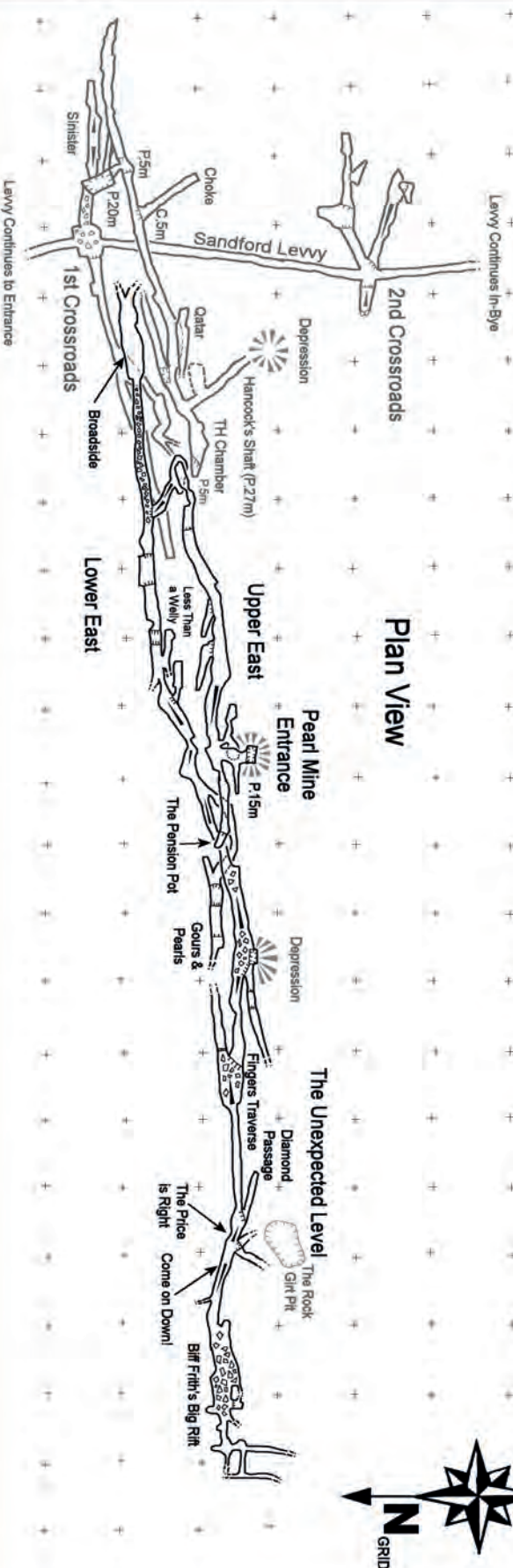
Note: Only selected passages in Sandford Levy are shown on this survey. No passable connection has yet been established between Pearl Mine and Sandford Levy, but a noise connection has been proven between TH Chamber and Lower East.

Diagrammatic Section (looking west)



Survey of the Caves and Mines of the "First Crossroads Vein"

Sandford Hill, Winscombe Parish, The Mendip Hills, Somerset





Part of the cascade of crystal pools in Broadside chamber.

Photo: Andrew Horeckyj

Back in the Unexpected Level, Graham was still persevering with the Price is Right. The digging was dangerous, as the “choke” was in fact debris backfilled by miners from above. Poking gingerly with a wooden pole cut from the woods above, Graham made progress up the slope to break out into a chamber with two shafts and much loose material above. These shafts must come very close to the floor of the surface feature known as “The Rock Girt Pit” and as such have been named Girt ShaftsNos. 1 & 2. At this point the passage sloped steeply down hill with a very mobile boulder floor. This was named “Come on Down” after the catch phrase of the 1980s game show “The Price is Right”. Initially Come on Down was dangerously loose, and Graham cautiously passed a very loose drop to enter a large natural rift chamber. This was found on the day that we had heard the news that Biff had passed away and it was named “Biff Frith’s Big Rift”. The chamber is over 15m (50ft) long, up to 3m (10ft wide) and nearly 10m (30ft) high. It is well decorated, and in particular there is a spectacular crystal pool at the point of entry. To date only two trips have been made beyond this pool as it is currently necessary to step across it and this risks mud dropping from the caver into it. It is planned to build a set of steps to avoid this in the near future.

Digging continues at several places, the latest small find being at the choke at the end of Upper East. A very dangerous dig through material backfilled from a shaft above was made to a steeply sloping narrow passage leading to a natural chamber. This is most awkward on the return and has been named “Eeyore’s Escalator” in honour of Martin Cross who’s nickname has become Eeyore the Donkey after all the hauling he has done at Pearl Mine.

As things stand in the middle of November 2017, it appears that all of the easy leads have now been finished off. It is also frustrating that there does not appear to be any obvious place where a connection can be made to Sandford Levvy. The survey shows the two caves/mines are several metres apart but there is just nothing obvious that suggests a connection. Given that the passages above 1st Crossroads in Sandford Levvy were dug from above (Waters 2015) the mystery of where the Old Man entered these workings has only deepened. The next stage may be to dig at the depression above Hancock’s Shaft (as radio-located, Harrison 2016) or to dig open Fern Mine.

Despite this frustration, the project has reopened what is amongst the most interesting of Mendip mines for the caver, and made over ½ km of cave/mine passage accessible. In addition some 297m of new passage have been discovered, which can only be considered a bonus!

Previous page: Ed Waters’ survey of the Caves and Mines of the “First Crossroads Vein” in Sandford Hill.

Description of Pearl Mine

Note: The whole of Pearl Mine is littered with small but pretty formations and mining remains such as sharpening stones, stemple pockets, animal bones and pick marks. These are all very vulnerable and many are protected by marker tapes. However great care must be taken to ensure that no damage is done. Access details are yet to be agreed with the landowner, and much stabilisation and conservation work is required before it is made accessible to the general caving public.

The entrance pitch requires 20m of ladder and 40m of lifeline, currently belayed to the scaffolding¹. The shaft can be rigged for SRT, but experience shows that ascent is far easier by ladder in the relatively narrow and sloping shaft. The shaft starts off roomy, and descends with the bedding at about 70° to the vertical. About 12m down a short passage can be followed west from a ledge for about 8m to a choke. Below the ledge the shaft narrows noticeably and lands on a muddy floor. Originally the shaft continued down another 10m or so, but this is currently blocked.

At the base of the shaft a low arch to the South leads to an aven chamber, a low crawl to the east leads to a second chamber. To the East a large opening leads to a steep slope up to a sizeable mined passage, with some initials smoked on the walls², which lowers before opening up beneath a scaffolded shaft. At the base of the shaft the passage continues, narrow and downhill. This is Eeyore's Escalator and can be awkward on the return. This leads to a choked natural shaft.

Back at the base of the entrance shaft, a small passage to the West leads to the top of the Pension Pot. This is secured with a scaffold gate, and is a narrow 2m descent which can be awkward on the return. Immediately below the Pension Pot the passage enlarges impressively and is decorated with white calcite flows.

Uphill from the base of the Pension Pot leads to the Unexpected Level. This is walking size rift passage, passing under Igloo Shaft which is 7m high and lined with impressive stacked deads. Beyond Igloo Shaft the passage descends steeply. A 4m climb up reaches a high level passage which leads uphill to a choke passing two miners dry stone walls and an unusual bridge of ochreous material.

At the base of the slope is the choked top of a shaft, which contains the bones of what appears to be a sheep. The passage then continues at stooping height to reach a large hole in the floor. This is "Fingers Traverse", named after the small children's fingerprints (some covered in stal) which can be seen on the right hand wall.

The traverse is relatively straightforward, if a little exposed.

Once across the traverse, the slope below the traverse can be descended to view the almost complete hare's skeleton and several bat skeletons. The passage is partially blocked by a miner's drystone wall, which can be passed to about 10m of low boulder passage terminating in the backfilled shaft beneath the sheep skeleton mentioned earlier. This point must be very close to the choke beyond the pearls in lower West (see later).

Carrying on beyond Fingers Traverse, the passage becomes smaller and with many loose deads on the floor. This leads to the constriction leading to the steep ascent of The Price is Right. Just before The Price is Right, the 10m long Diamond Passage can be reached by a 3m awkward and slippery climb.

Ascending through the Price is Right leads to an enlargement with the two Girt Shafts and tons of loose boulders above. The way on is to descend the steep boulder slope, Come on Down! Which is cement stabilised in places. Passing a too tight decorated passage in the right hand wall leads to a pinnacle like boulder that marks the entry to Biff Frith's Big Rift. To enter the chamber requires the caver to step carefully over a pristine white crystal pool. Efforts are underway to protect this pool by constructing a set of steps around it, until this is complete it is requested that no attempt is made to enter the chamber.

Biff Frith's Big Rift is an impressive chamber over 15m long and nearly 10m high with much decoration. There is at least one unclimbed shaft in the roof. A small passage on the left had side soon becomes too tight but provides a visual connection with a further passage on the left at the end of the chamber, which also includes a choked shaft 2m deep.

From this point the passage narrows dramatically and is very bouldery. There are a couple of shafts above which are choked with dangerous backfilled deads, and the final choke is of large boulders in the rift which have apparently been dropped from above. Crawls at floor level all become too tight or choked within a few metres.

Back at the Pension Pot, a careful descent can be made down the loose boulder slope to the East. At the base of the slope, the lower West passages can be entered by doubling back under the loose slope. This leads to a chamber with stacked deads and a climb leading up to a wooden stemple wedged in the roof. There is a vocal connection from here to the passages in the Unexpected Level above. The way on is at the far side of the chamber where a short drop leads to a traverse over a hole, with stones placed by the miners wedged in the passage above. Beyond the traverse leads to a short drop, with the passage ahead taped off to protect the miniature white gours and superb cave pearls ahead.

¹Note that the shaft is in the process of being capped and the belay methods will change as a result.

²It is unknown whether these initials date from the miners or from cavers in the 1950s-1960s.

These can be viewed without crossing the tape, and the passage chokes just a few metres ahead. Doubling back below at this point leads to the passage below the traverse and ocherous chokes.

Back to the base of the loose boulder slope below the Pension Pot, the way on is a low passage that leads up and over the debris slope from the now blocked entrance shaft. It is possible to squeeze up into voids between the upper and lower level of the shaft. Continuing ahead the passage opens out to a steep boulder slope leading down. Buddy's chamber can be entered by an awkward manoeuvre up to the right followed by a flat out crawl. This is a rift chamber with a mud floor and an almost complete bird skeleton. There are also two short continuations possible by doubling back into the boulders at the base of the slope.

At the base of the slope, a low wide passage on the right hand side is Less Than a Welly, this is some 6m long and very tight on sticky mud. There is also a very narrow decorated aven above. The crawling sized passage has a few delicate formations on the floor and walls, which are then followed by a short traverse over a hole in the floor. Beyond the traverse the passage is again well decorated, with a second narrow aven above.

Beyond the second aven there is a large stack of deads including some interesting minerals, followed by short drop into a muddy area. At this point there is an odd circular depression carved into the left hand wall, about 150mm in diameter and 10mm deep. A short constricted ascent leads to a muddy wallow. And an enlargement into a passage lined with deads. A narrow steep passage on the right leads to a small rift chamber.

Continuing ahead the passage is floored with deads and the walls lined with stacked deads. It is in this area that the noise connection with TH Chamber is Sandford Levvy was made.

The passage gradually lowers, to reach a flat out section leading into Broadside Chamber. This is 15m long and of hands and knees height. A superb crystal pool lies against the left hand wall and increases in width along the passage. Please do not cross the conservation tapes.

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Mark "Buddy" Williams provides *launch assistance* for the author through the Pension Pot aperture. (Graham Price)

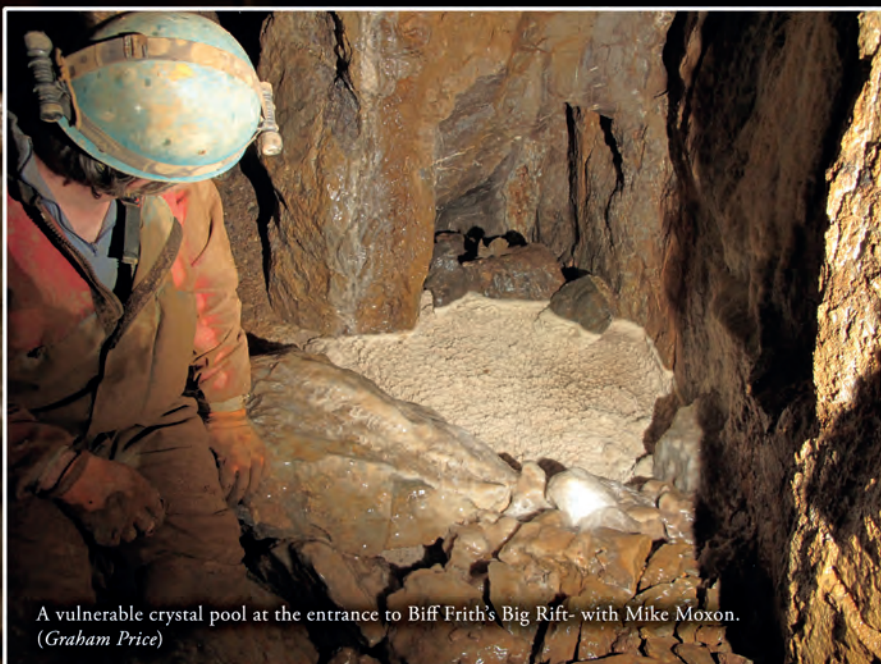


Hare and bat skeletons- below Fingers Traverse. (Graham Price)

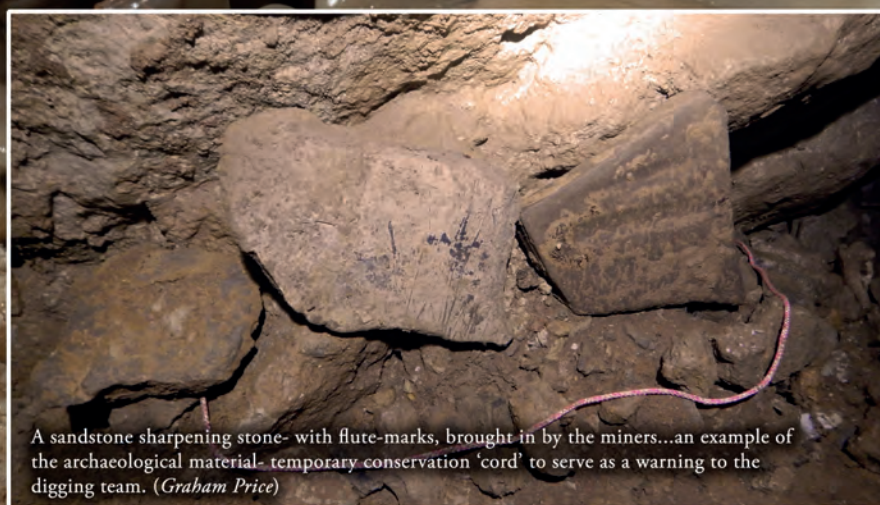


Brian Snell and Mark "Buddy" Williams view Broadside passage. (Graham Price)

Background image- roof formation in Broadside passage (Andrew Horeckyj)



A vulnerable crystal pool at the entrance to Biff Frith's Big Rift- with Mike Moxon.
(Graham Price)



A sandstone sharpening stone- with flute-marks, brought in by the miners...an example of the archaeological material- temporary conservation 'cord' to serve as a warning to the digging team. (Graham Price)



Part of the day-2 exploration team: [top-bottom]-
Martin Cross, Tom Harrison, Graham Price,
Mike Richardson, Mike Moxon. (Andrew Horeckyy)

Background image- part of the crystal pool cascade in Broadside passage.
(Andrew Horeckyy)



MCG August Snowdonia Weekend

The August trip to Snowdonia saw a number of excursions - both underground and above- into the mountains. One of the subterranean ventures was the classic Croesor-Rhosydd through trip.

This is a summarized version of an article written by Dominic Wood and published on the MCG Facebook page. Photos: Dominic Wood and Tom Harrison.

I met up with Tom Harrison, Mike Moxon, Alan McBride, Debbie Lambert and Leonie Woodward at the Siobad Bunkhouse just after 8:00am and around half an hour later went off in two cars to the area of the mine. I was a little apprehensive about this trip as I was told it was an hour and a half walk to the entrance of the mine. We all set off at a gentle pace and in high spirits but unfortunately in slightly the wrong direction. After about 45 minutes some concern set in about our current location. Tom went off for a quick recce and declared us to be in completely the wrong place resulting in a rather severe climb up a very steep hillside. Finally reaching the entrance we had a short break before entering the mine. Sandwiches and drinks emerged in abundance. Happily refreshed, everyone donned their SRT kits and entered the mine.

A short way into the mine and across to the left is a steep 45 degree incline going down to the lower levels of the mine. Walking on a little way we found a hole in the side of the wall which gave us the most incredible view of an enormous chamber with a very deep lake stretching all the way across. The lake appeared to be crystal clear but we could see it was also very deep.

Starting the long walk-in to the mine entrance- a walk that would be just a little longer than predicted...due to an "individual approach" to the navigation.

Below- Tom Harrison- a man on a hill, with a boat under his arm...looking for somewhere to float it.



We walked on a little way to a short climb with the aid of an in-situ hand rope. Following on from there was a very steep vertical climb up. The climb was pretty much vertical but was made easy by a series of metal hoops which had been cemented into the walls. A safety line ran all the way up alongside the metal hoops as well so it was all very safe.



Now do I really want to go in there?

At the top of the vertical climb we turned left and came to the edge of another massive chamber. The way on from here was down the side of this vast chamber via a 30 metre pitch. "A truly enjoyable abseil straight to the bottom I thought." There is a rope fixed permanently in place here, which having been checked, was found to be in good condition.

The way on from here was a precarious scramble across a huge mass of broken slate. The slates were of various size ranging from very small to extremely large but always vertically stacked which made progress very slow. There was no level pathways through this section. Shortly on from this section we came to another 30 metre pitch. This pitch was a little more technical as there was a deviation a couple of metres down from the pitch head. The deviation is easily passable though as there is a large piece of rock to stand against while locked off. Picture (*opposite*) is Mike Moxon in the shades, just below the deviation.

So all at the bottom and a short walk on we come to our next piece of entertainment. The zipline across the lake. Some of us were armed with pulleys for this part of the trip, others were not, so a cord was attached to the pulley to facilitate its return for the next person. Tom launched himself off down the line. Halfway across the lake however he went from a vertical to a horizontal position. Not the best position to be in on a zip line, in a quarry, across a very cold and deep lake. Mike made an excellent suggestion about repositioning the bags to adjust one's centre of gravity.



Tom about to descend the first pitch.



Mike Moxon on the second pitch.



The zipline across the lake.



The ladder bridge.

This is a suspension bridge that looked like it had been put together with bits of old scaffolding and aluminium ladders and hung with pieces of steel cable. It was on this very bridge that I had my first introduction to the rare and unique “subterranean tsunami,” when Tom and Alan gave me a soaking courtesy of a large rock in the lake.

A short trip on leads to the first of three of the partially remaining original miners bridges. This one in particular, (pictured above right), was made up of several lengths of very dubious looking pieces of rotting wood. Some of us were making jokes about the nice soft feeling underfoot as our boots sank into the wooden planks.

We started getting quite concerned about some very loud rumbling sounds in the distance. The noise continued for some time and our conversation turned to thoughts of having to go back as it sounded like the mine was collapsing. The rumbling sounds were caused by the acoustics in the mine. The source of the noise being a dubious looking canoe tied to the side of the wall of another water filled chamber. The canoe was banging on the wall of the chamber and the way down to it was also very interesting. We were at the top of an eight metre pitch. The only way into the canoe, was down another abseil but no solid ground to land on, just a rather unstable boat.

We stopped a couple of times along the way to look at some of the old mining equipment and of course the mandatory photo shoots, past several large entrances with sunlight bursting into the mine, which was quite a nice sight, before heading downwards again. A right turn at the bottom of a complex of passages took us through a long straight tunnel and then out to the other side of the hill at Rhosydd. We emerged into sunshine and a flowing stream coming off of the hillside.

A big, big thank you to Tom Harrison for leading this trip and to every one else for your great company. A truly amazing experience and one that I will never forget.



The remains of a mine bridge.



The canoe across the lake.



Mining machinery left in place.



Emerging back into daylight.

First Trip Report

The *NEWS* is delighted to introduce its youngest ever guest correspondent, 11-year old Joe Densley.

Joe was taken on a tour of Goatchurch - just the one day route - *rather than the more commonly undertaken three-day expedition*, by his friends Russ Porter and Lisa Gibson. Here's what he had to say, exactly as he wrote it...



CAVING TRIP 2017

ON THE 23RD OF JULY I WENT CAVING WITH MY TWO FRIENDS RUSS PORTER AND LISA GIBSON. I HAVE KNOWN LISA FOR A LONG TIME, AS SHE STAYED AT MY GRANDPARENTS FARM AND MET RUSS THERE TO. IT WAS HERE THAT I HAD FOUND OUT ABOUT THEM GOING CAVING. SO I ASKED LISA AND RUSS IF I COULD GO AND THEY RESPONDED MAGNIFICENTLY AND SETUP A DATE OF THE 23RD OF JULY. TWO MONTHS LATER WE HAD GRABBED THE GEAR AND ENTERED BURRINGTON COMBE, WHERE THE START OF THE CAVE WAS. MY DAD HAD TO GO BECAUSE HE DIDN'T LIKE CONFINED SPACES! AS WE ENTERED THE GIGANTIC CAVE A DROP WAS THERE IN FRONT OF US, RUSS WENT FIRST AND LANDED SOFTLY. NEXT IT WAS MY TURN AND I MADE IT DOWN WITHOUT ANY HELP, THOUGH RUSS WAS THERE JUST IN CASE! MEANWHILE LISA WAS BEHIND ME AND JUST ABOUT TO COME DOWN.

AS WE CAME INTO THE NEXT CHAMBER RUSS SAID "BE CAREFUL THERE IS A LARGE DROP, SO STAY UP UNTIL I SAY". I DID WHAT I WAS TOLD AND STAYED UP. HALF WAY DOWN I ASKED HIM WHAT IT WAS AND HE REPLIED THE COFFIN LID. ONCE HE WAS DOWN I BEGAN MY DESCENT AND CAME DOWN SMOOTHLY. THEN WE CAME INTO AN OPENING AND WHAT I SAW WAS UNBELIEVABLE, A MASSIVE ROOM FILLED WITH JAGGED EDGED ROCK AS SHARP AS NEEDLES. ARE VOICES ECHOED LOUDLY ACROSS THE ROOM? I FOUND AN OPENING ONLY BIG ENOUGH TO FIT ME IN, SO I SAID TO RUSS IF I COULD EXPLORE "YES BUT DON'T GO DOWN ANY DROPS" SO I SLOWLY MADE MY WAY THROUGH AND LOOKED DOWN AND I CAME ACROSS A DROP I ASKED ABOUT IT AND RUSS SAID COME BACK SO I DID BUT IT WAS A BIG DROP AND WAS HARD TO COME ACROSS. AS I CAME OUT OF THE GAP RUSS SAID YOU WILL BE HAPPY FOR THE NEXT ONE IT'S CALLED THE DRAIN PIPE. THE DRAIN PIPE IS A LONG PIPE THAT SEPERATES TWO CHAMBERS FROM EACH OTHER.

WE FINALLY GOT TO THERE AND WHAT AWAITED US WAS A THIN TUBE. PEOPLE THAT HAD JUST CAME UP THE DRAIN PIPE SAID IT WASN'T EASY IF YOU'RE SMALL (WHICH I WAS) BUT IT WAS GOOD FOR SLIM PEOPLE SO THAT WAS GOOD NEWS. RUSS WENT FIRST AS HE WAS BIG AND IT WASN'T AS EASY FOR HIM. WE ALL MADE IT THROUGH AND THEN WE CAME INTO ANOTHER CHAMBER WHERE I WENT TO EXPLORE ROUND, WHERE I FOUND A HOLE WHERE I SLID MY BODY THROUGH AND RUSS SHORTLY FOLLOWED. THERE WAS ANOTHER WHICH LEAD TO THE SAME PLACE BUT IT LOOKED HARD TO GET UP. USING MY CAVING SKILLS THAT LISA AND RUSS TAUGHT ME, I MANAGED TO DO IT. THEN AS I GOT UP LISA TOLD ME ABOUT MY GRANDAD GLYN WEBB, WHO HAD GONE UP THE DRAIN PIPE IN 19 AND A HALF SECONDS WHEN HE WAS 18, WHICH GAVE ME AN IDEA. WE USED A STOP WATCH AND I DID MY BEST TO BEAT HIS TIM. I CAME CLOSE, BUT NOT CLOSE ENOUGH. MY TIME WAS TWENTY SECONDS!

WE THEN DECIDED TO GO BACK UP, AS WE HAD BEEN UNDER THE GROUND FOR 2 HOURS. SO QUICKLY WE RETURNED BUT IN ARE WAY WAS THE COFFIN LID AND THE DECENT ROCK.

I SAID I WILL GO UP THE COFFIN LID WITHOUT THE ROPE, SO I BEGAN MY ASCENT AND GOT TO THE TOP AFTER USING EVERY PART OF MY BODY. A TIERING EXPERIENCE AND AHEAD WAS THE DECENT ROCK. I BEGAN BUT WAS HAVING TROUBLE GETTING UP. I DIDN'T GIVE IN AND CLIMBED TO THE TOP AND WHEN WE MADE IT I ALMOST FAINT-ED. WE LEFT BURRINGTON COMBE CAVE AND I SAID IT WAS ONE OF THE BEST EXPERIENCES OF MY LIFE AND HIGHLY RECOMMEND GOING THERE. IT IS A GREAT START OF MY JOURNEY AND AMAZING FUN. MY CAVING TRIP JULY 23RD 2017 BIG THANKS RUSS AND LISA FOR TAKING ME.

WRITER AND CAVER
JOE DENSLEY.



Russ and Lisa with Joe, before their daring descent into Goatchurch.

Peak District Weekend

After the successful Snowdonia trip in the summer, provisional arrangements are being made to visit the Peak District next year, during the Spring Bank Holiday weekend 25th to the 27th May.

A mixture of straightforward and more advanced trips (with some SRT) should be available each day subject to volunteers for leading trips coming forward! The area offers much more besides caving for any accompanying non-cavers. Accommodation will be at a local caving club to keep the costs low.

Further details to follow but expressions of interest needed now! See the Yahoo! Group or Facebook page for more info or email treasurer@mendipcavinggroup.co.uk if you'd like to join us.



Springtime in the Peaks- The editor standing on the snow-plug at the bottom of Eldon Hole main shaft...in May.

Photo: Adam Evans.



MIG Longwood



(06)64 Oldbelf TK



NewIn TK



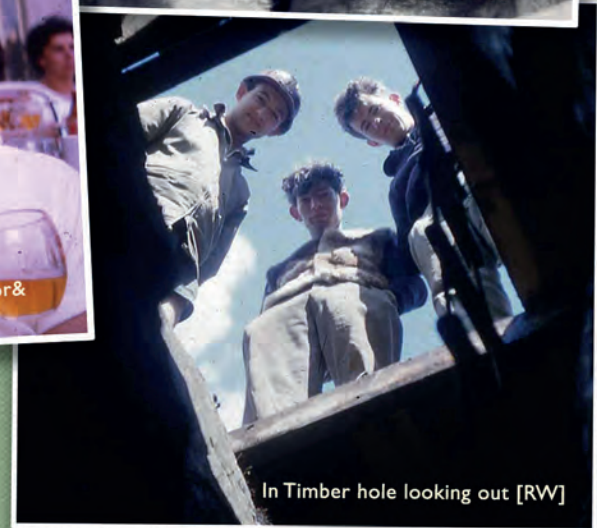
MIGPinetree



Eire TK's LRover) [RW]



1963 Swiss trip(Maureen Taylor& TonyKnibbs)[RW]

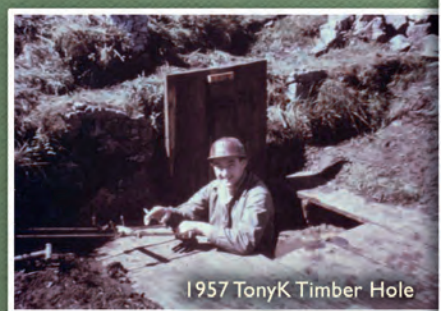


In Timber hole looking out [RW]



60s JG+TK (GB trip)

TONY KNIBBS MENDIP CAVER 1936 - 2017



1957 TonyK Timber Hole



D and T Knibbs, 50th anniversary dinner



1981 Tony Knibbs Priddy



Tony D + Tony K at Timber Hole [RW]



Timber Hole I [RW]

Memories of Tony Knibbs

A prominent member of the MCG since the 1950s, Tony Knibbs died on February 9th 2017 aged 80 years. John Miriam has shared some of his memories of Tony.

I first met Tony in 1966. He worked at British Aircraft Corporation, Weybridge where I was a second year apprentice. The MCG were looking for new blood at the time and so Tony got together a small group of apprentices and arranged a trip to Mendip. They were short of transport and so as one of the few car owning apprentices I was persuaded to join them. Unexpectedly I took to caving and so caved with my BAC colleagues for a year or so until one by one the majority lost interest and I began to do more with other members of the MCG. Around this time I went on the MCG trip to the Dales and with Tony and the others camped at Goat Gap Farm. Notts Pot and Ginging Hole were visited and through Tony I first encountered the Northern Pennine Club with whom I subsequently did over half my caving.

Tony lived in Byfleet at this time and it was not long before he and I teamed up to go to the club meetings in Brentford on a Thursday evening. I lived some 20 miles from Weybridge and so I would stay over at Tony's place to avoid driving home and back. It was at this stage that I became aware of Tony's love of classical music and he inspired me to invest in my own Hi-Fi and start my own small record collection.

I frequently travelled to Mendip with Tony and this would usually involve calling in on the likes of Dave Irwin to discuss progress on their cave guide, Ray Mansfield for an evening snack or, if we were digging, Luke Devenish for the necessary chemical persuader.

It is digging that perhaps has provided some of my most vivid memories as in the case early on in the digging of Upper Flood. It was while working on the long blasted section before Midnight Chamber that Tony and I nearly came to grief. We had placed a charge and returned the following day to find the smell of fumes still quite strong at the dig face. We chose to ignore the smell and proceeded to clear the debris but after a short while I began to feel very peculiar. I told Tony I was going back to the surface for some fresh air and began to make my way out. As I crawled out with my head spinning I had to fight to stop myself falling face down in the small steam. After several stops I made it to the surface and lay on the grass gasping. I knew Tony would be feeling the effect of the fumes by now but I was powerless to do anything. Luckily after a few minutes Tony emerged and collapsed on the grass beside me. Fortunately we suffered no long term effects but we had learnt a hard lesson.

Our other digging focus was in Longwood- August where Sand Passage, the boulder choke next to it and Fountain Passage were frequently worked on. On some weekends we would go down the cave on Friday night, Saturday afternoon and Sunday. We also did more conventional caving and in particular Tony introduced me to the delights of St Cuthberts Swallet.

It is through that first caving trip organised by Tony that I acquired most of my long term friendships and it was for that reason that I asked Tony to be my best man when I married in 1982. I can certainly say that Tony set the course of my early adult years.

John Miriam.

Tony Knibbs MCG Timeline

Joan Goddard has trawled the MCG Newsletter archive to compile this summary of Tony's activities within the group.

At Whitsun 1954 Tony *cycled* from Surrey to Mendip and spent eight days with MCG members at their campsite at the bottom of Velvet Bottom, exploring Longwood, Goatchurch and digging Timber Hole. After arriving back home he decided cycling was not a suitable means of transport.

1954, September he and Malcolm Cotter spent a week in South Wales.

1955-was called up for National Service in Scotland where he managed some caving in Scotland and a trip down Bar Pot into Gaping Gill on rope ladders.

Yorks 1956 bar pot into gg using rope ladders

1957 Tony was back on Mendip early in 1957 by which time he started his first stint as Editor of the newsletter and was exploring the bigger Mendip Caves, enthusing the membership with detailed reports in the newsletter.

1957 October Joined a Westminster Caving Club trip to Yorkshire –they hired a coach!

1961 Aug. Tony bought landrover which was used for expeditions to the Pyrenees, Co. Clare.

1962 June – Sept. Involved in Long/Aug Survey: digging in August Hole

1963 Sept Switzerland when Group found a new cave entrance - Mendiphohle.

1965 Sept Spent week in Yorks with MCG members.
Digging at Blackmoor Swallet & Shaft (Stainsby's)
Sand passage (August Hole)

1966 Eire
He went on lots of Yorks trips

Encouraged newer and younger members. Very interested in lighting (produced technical supplements for journals in 1960s and 1980s), safety underground and equipment. Never missed a chance to visit different caves in the UK or Europe.

As well as being the 1971 Charterhouse Caving Committee Secretary, he spent a total of 15 years on the MCG committee: meet secretary (1961-68), two stints as editor of the *NEWS*, Club Secretary (1981-1986).

He continued to contribute to the *NEWS* after his move to France in 1987

Reflections from the man Himself:

When Tony was interviewed at home in France, by Martin Mills, he was asked about trips that stood-out in his memory- this is what he had to say about a 24-hour *overnight* trip into St. Cuthbert's.

As the decades ease by, some caving trips stand out more than others. In the 1950s there was one such trip – into the not-long-since discovered St Cuthbert's Swallet.

On Friday evening 19 March 1954 I humped my heavy rucksack the one mile to Walton-on-Thames railway station and caught a train to Waterloo from whence I took the tube to Gloucester Road station. Here, I met Dennis Kemp. I squeezed myself and kit into his already crowded vehicle and we headed towards Mendip; I think I was a WSG member at that point in time. The stated plan was to do a long trip to the Black Hole area in Swildon's.

We duly arrived at the (old) Belfry where discussion soon indicated that, due to weather conditions, Black Hole was out of the question. I remember feeling very disappointed. However, it soon transpired that there was a 24hr trip planned for St Cuthbert's – from midday Saturday until midday Sunday. I volunteered to join that trip and was accepted (beginner's luck – I had only been caving for about a year).

A group of BEC members which I recall included Sybil Bowden-Lyle dammed the stream on Saturday morning to allow us to go down at 12.00 pm. The other members of the team were Bob Bagshaw, Roy Bennett, Norman Petty, Don Coase and John Stafford; all much older and more experienced than I was. On the way down we spent what seemed like ages (actually about an hour) putting in



At the entrance to GB cave, (L-R) Richard Woollacott, Martin Rowe, Tony Knibbs, Yvonne Rowe and Denise Knibbs.

Photo: Joan Goddard.

a Raw bolt at the top of Arête Pitch. The descent of the Water Shute introduced me to the use of knobbly dogs. The roomy yet complex aspects of the cave were quite fascinating. Its vertical nature was something I had never previously experienced (Pulpit Pitch was awesome). It was also perhaps the wettest cave I had ever been into!

At last we arrived at the Dining Room. Here we put down all of the food and cooking equipment that we had been carrying.

After a 'meal' of soup, bread, tea and biscuits we set off to explore the Rabbit Warren; I recall the names Plantation Junction (where we made great efforts to pass the stal formations that block progress upstream) and the Tin Mine. Our explorations eventually brought us to Curtain Chamber. We seemed to have been on the move for many hours, but we were back in the Dining Room by 7.00 pm.

After another brew-up and meal we set off up a short climb and entered Cerberus Hall. Since I had probably been selected as 'duty ferret' I wriggled through a flat-out crawl at floor level to find myself looking down a rather steep passage. The passage turned to the right but appeared to continue, so I started off headfirst downwards. On reaching the point where the passage turned, I could see that it led straight into a lake of beautiful green water. I performed the necessary acrobatics to get my feet to where my head had been and went on down to water level. I think everyone went down to have a look into Lake Chamber. Our next exploit was to make the connection via Rat Run to Everest Passage. This involved John Stafford pushing a small boulder with his nose, having committed himself to an upward squeeze in which the boulder was sitting!

Yet another brew-up restored us for the next phase of exploration. This time we visited Upper Traverse Chamber and High Chamber. It was now very early on the Sunday morning and we were getting quite tired. Back in the Dining Room we took our time over a final meal before setting off for the surface to keep the midday rendezvous

with the damming team. The journey was slow and rather arduous, as we had to roll up all the tackle we had taken in. An enduring memory is that every time we set off on a new excursion from the Dining Room, I thought how similar it felt to what I imagined it must have felt like going out into no-man's land on a WW1 night patrol (it must have been a mixture of the wetness, the mud and the obligation to do as everyone else did). I think also that khaki was the dominant colour of our caving clothes.

Above the Water Shute on the way out Roy Bennett and Don Coase climbed up into Drinking Fountain Passage. They had not been gone long when the ominous sounds of nailed boots sliding down a rock wall signified that Roy had not quite managed to make a short climb. Luckily, no harm was done and we carried on out.

I remember hoping that the people on the surface would not be late putting in the dam. They were on time and we duly emerged very wet and very tired at midday.

Dennis Kemp's Landrover was loaded and ready to go, so I wasted no time in sorting myself out. There were no hot showers in those days of course and I recall being very concerned that parts of my body (mainly hands and feet) were very wrinkled by long exposure to cold water. I even wondered if they'd return to normal.

Tony Knibbs.

Biff's Big Send-Off

On Sunday 22nd October, a group of 30-odd gathered to accompany Biff Frith's last caving trip into Swildon's Hole, when some of his ashes were scattered into the streamway. The ceremony was followed by a reception at Nordrach Cottage.

A full tribute to the man will be published in the next edition of the *NEWS*.

Karen Pearson carries some of Biff Frith's ashes into Swildon's Hole, to be scattered in the streamway. Photo: Mark Pearson.



Back Cover image: Ed Waters and Martin Cross on the first journey over Fingers Traverse in The Unexpected Level. Photo: Andrew Horeckyj.



A social evening gathering (editor)



Formations- Waterwheel (Paul Stevenson)



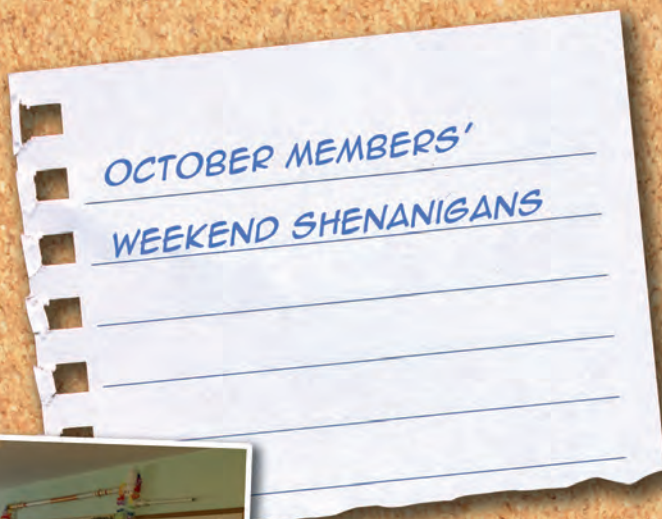
apple strudel+open oven rack+ heat= cleaning!
(editor)



Upper Flood "muddy hell" video still (editor)



Swildon's sump 1- "baptism"
(Paul Stevenson)



OCTOBER MEMBERS'
WEEKEND SHENANIGANS



Dave Loss- strudelmeister! (editor)



An evening of (loosely) cave-related videos (editor)



Mike Waterworth back through the muddy sump
Upper Flood (editor)



Where did they all come from??? (someone said there
was a barrel left-over from Hidden Earth...
that's where. (editor)

A man wearing a blue jacket, brown pants, and a tan helmet with a headlamp is climbing a rocky cave wall. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. A yellow rope is attached to his harness. In the background, another person is visible, also climbing the wall. The cave walls are made of dark, textured rock.

Pearl Diggers' Delight

Major find on Sandford Hill