

**Mendip
Caving
Group**

NEWS

No. 383

Welsh Metal Mines

**Club Veterans'
Meet-up**

Farewell to Biff



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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The current MCG Committee is composed of the following members:

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Conservation & Access Officer - Dan Matthews.
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New Members Welcome
For Joining Enquiries Please Contact
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Front Desk

Welcome to the issue.

It has been quite a while since the last edition and though plenty of stuff has been going-on, the members don't seem to have been screaming about it - in the form of printed words and pictures.

But now we're into the back-end of a superb summer of dry, sunny weather- too dry if you're a farmer perhaps, the members seem to have had time to catch-up with the paperwork...likewise the editor.

Ed Waters' article from the club's visit to Snowdonia last summer, introduces a few of the *metal* mines hidden-away and waiting to be explored in the region and Mike Moxon shares a worthwhile diversion from the long slog up or down the A74, as well as his recent exploration of a more local site. And of course- Brian's triumph of *herding cats*, by way of a very successful club veterans' get-together at the cottage.

The *NEWS* welcomes Bill Chadwick to the role of club secretary and thanks Brian Snell for his years of steady helmsmanship. In this issue Bill shares his memories and reflections on the passing of Biff Frith- which is already a year ago now.

The club welcomes: Beverley Allen, Chris Barrington, Kriss Cawson, Alan Chivers, Mark Edwards, Frances Hodgson, Sam Hume, Jason Kirby, Julian Ohara, Keri Smallwood and Joe Wilkins, who have all joined since the last *NEWS* went to press.

And - lest we forget- *winter is coming*, there are only a couple of members' weekends to go before the Christmas party...so a glimpse into last year's festivities is bolted-on at the rear, for those whose memories may be *fogged*.

As always, the editor welcomes your articles, notes, observations and pictures of cave trips, or loosely club-related events, to grace these pages.

Andrew.

(September 23rd 2018)



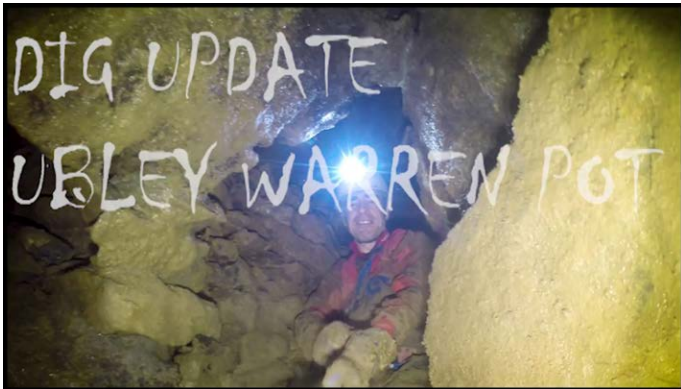
Front cover

The editor in Swildon's streamway- part of the cave that folk just go barreling-through on the way to somewhere else...

Photo: Ed Waters- with Hayley Clark 'light-painting' behind.

Around the Cottage

The September members' weekend saw plenty of activity in the cottage- with a number of cave visits and active digs...



...including a video diary update from Ubley Warren Pot by Tim And Peat - which is available on general release via the MCG Facebook page.

Ed Waters kindly stepped-in to be our culinary host for the evening, in Jackie's absence, with a revisit of the popular sausage and cider appreciation opportunity. For desserts, a blackberry and apple crumble was offered, with blackberries from the hedge outside.

The centrepiece of the evening's entertainment was an auction of Ed's (seemingly) vast collection of caving equipment, that had been deemed *surplus to requirements*, with the sales earning some £65 for club funds.



Ed-serving the crumble. (photo: editor)



The auction in full-flow, Ed demonstrates one of a number of 'compact' tackle-sacks that were on offer...

Having been well-fed and suitably lubricated, the bidders at the auction were intrigued by some of the lighting collection on offer - with varieties of Oldham lamp and FX2s bringing-on cries of nostalgia and howls of disbelief. Sadly for some- the catwalk display of the suits on offer didn't actually take-place- but the sales didn't seem to be affected with suits in various states of disrepair *flying off the hangers*.

Quite what our international guests made of all this isn't entirely known - but Rosita, Dirk and Petit from Belgium, who were here for a week's caving on Mendip at least didn't bolt for the door. This may - *in large part* - be due to the fact that they'd just been to Neverland in Upper Flood for the day, so simply lacked the energy to run-off...
(see pictures overleaf)



Admiring the flowstone cascades on the walls of Neverland. (photo: editor)

Bill Chadwick took our Belgian guests on a *standard* Neverland tourist trip into Upper Flood Swallet, with the editor tagging-along with camera.

Later in the week they were going to visit Swildon's Hole, GB Cave and Reservoir Hole - so were getting a good taster of some of Mendip's more impressive destinations.



The group at Royal Icing Junction. (photo: editor)



A fine turnout of the senior echelon of the club, enjoying a summer's evening. Photo: Ian McKechnie.

An MCG Veterans Get-Together

By - Brian Snell.

After standing down as Secretary I had a more time to think about how the MCG can go forward. Apart from a possible change to the clubs charitable status, my mind strayed to when I first joined in the mid 80s and the members who were in the club at the time. It occurred to me that most of these now don't cave due to advancing age, or if they do, rarely come to the cottage. All of these people are real characters and I thought it was a shame that current members had no connection with these people, all of whom have their story to tell about the MCG's past. So I came up with a plan to organise a weekend to have a get together with what I would term as MCG veterans.

I mean this not in any derogatory way, purely older members who still have a part to play in the club and I would like to see have more of a connection rather than just paying their annual fees to maintain contact and acknowledging their desire to support the club.

With the idea hatched I start putting out mails to some 25-30 of these past members, asking if they would be interested in what I termed as a Veterans' get together. My idea was immediately received with great favour with many answering with words like 'great idea, it would be great to meet up with the old crowd again'.

So, after suggesting a number of dates a majority were happy with 20-22nd July and I booked the cottage for about 22 beds. I wanted to keep it laid back and uncomplicated. Caving for those who wanted to, a walk for those who now don't cave, or just stay at the cottage and use the time to relax and have a good old chin wag catch up on each other's lives.

Friday night saw Keith and I at the hut around 6.00 ish to find a number of cars and a camper van already there. We walk into the lounge to find lots of smiling faces and much conversation. After lots of hugs and shaking of hands the evening continued. More member/ex-members appeared. People I haven't seen in over 15 years, all looking in excellent health and not much different from when I last saw them.

I was particularly pleased to see Wayne Hiscox walk through the door. Wayne is an instantly likeable guy who always wears a smile and I know current members would enjoy meeting. Wayne had a lot to do with the building of the cottage and later the Library extension and hence was Cottage Warden for some time.

Unfortunately Wayne and John Puddock were only able to stay over Friday night having to leave in the morning for other commitments. A shame because with John's squeeze box and Wayne's repertoire of songs, Saturday evening would have been even better.

Saturday dawned and some with sore heads from the previous night. Mike and Sue Haselden turned up and I correctly guessed that Mike wanted to bottom Rhino Rift. So I agreed to partner him and we got going late morning. It was sweltering hot as we walked over the hill and down into the welcome shade from the trees in Longwood Valley. The first hiccup occurred when I realised I hadn't picked up the cave key from my van, so I had to return back into the heat to retrieve it and wasting 25 min in the process and even hotter and sweatier than before.

It took no decision making to follow Mike's example in not wearing an oversuit, preferring instead to just wear a furry. It was good to get into the cool of the cave from the humid heat of the valley. Mike rigged the route down and we bottomed it in about 1hr. 40min. We could see that the collapse which had occurred a few years ago had been stabilised and there was new dig going on in the floor. We returned to the surface with Mike going ahead and me de-rigging.

Back at the entrance we were again greeted with the humid muggy heat of the day and the hum of lots of hover flies in amongst the trees, sounding for all the world like a drone hovering above. Having had a couple of small bits of toast and not bringing any water along meant that I was now pretty hungry and some what dehydrated with my head feeling a little light and airy.

We trudged back up the valley and on arrival at the stile to cross the field Mike, who was already carrying two kit bags grabbed another off me and marched on up the slope. I need to say at this point Mike is 79. Amazing!

In the mean time Roy, Fiona, Sue, John and Helen Miriam went for a walk. They parked at the Stockhill plantation by the Mineries, then walked up to the Priddy Nine Barrows.

They continued over North hill to near where the Miners used to be, then south down Eastwater Drove to past the Wessex CC and cave. They then continued along the Priddy road past the BEC and St, Cuthbert's with a view of the Shepton hut then back to the car park, a little over 4 miles. It was a hot walk but everyone enjoyed it.

Back at the cottage loads more people had turned up and there was a real cosy atmosphere with lots of reminiscing and everyone wearing a smile, in the warm balmy evening air of this exceptional summer weather.

As I had promised I got going with cooking baked potatoes with fillings various. JP had arrived and was busy warming up a chilli he had made and Mary anxious to have a task, I got preparing tuna mayo and some of the salad stuff. Joan was being helped to prepare a mixed fruit salad and I got Mike and Keith to get the BBQ going. An hour later the spuds were done and everyone tucked in,

The Priddy Nine Barrows- looking somewhat parched this year. Photo: Roy Kempston.



much enjoying the simplicity of the food, the warmth of the company, and of course plenty of beverage. All in all a fabulous evening topped off with 125 bats counted leaving the cottage's eaves.

I received no end of thanks for organising it and for me it was a small amount of relief and with much pleasure that everyone enjoyed the weekend so much. The Sunday dawned again sunny as the heat wave continued and the cottage came back to life as people drifted down from their slumbers.

The morning was relaxed with most planning to have a breakfast and leave by about lunch time to have final get together in the Hunter's. Lots of people helped to clean up

the cottage and take empty cans and bottles for recycling on the way home.

It was unanimously agreed to plan a similar event next year but this time on a member's weekend so that past and present members had the opportunity to meet up. Currently that weekend will be the July weekend in 2019.

My thanks to all who came and made the weekend so memorable and pleasurable.

Brian Snell

CO₂ - Awareness

This naturally-occurring gas is part of the caving environment and often shows seasonal variations in its presence- with late summer regularly seeing an increase in reported experiences of build-ups.

Chris Binding- a member of the Association of Caving Instructors, shares this article with the *NEWS*, so that members new and old can (re)-acquaint themselves with the effects of this gas.

Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) in caves: Recognising the effects and how to respond to them.

Based on an original article by Tony Boycott, 2002, former Doctor and Cave Rescue Member, and presently a member of University of Bristol Speleological Society Edited and amended by members of the Association of Caving Instructors, 2016.

Cavers routinely encounter poor air conditions underground and this short article aims to inform you how to gauge levels and react to them.

Carbon Dioxide is an odourless gas which is heavier than air and therefore often forms invisible ponds of higher concentration in predictable parts of a cave such as pits, depressions, or dead-ends. Experienced cavers claim to be able to detect raised levels by a metallic taste whereas most cavers only recognise the symptoms by reduced physical performance combined with increased or laboured breathing. Inexperienced cavers are often completely unaware of bad air and just dismiss feeling less physically fit or finding conversation compromised by a shortness of breath by putting it down to having an off day.



The Health and Safety Executive have a maximum recommended exposure to CO₂ of 5,000 parts per million (0.5%) for periods of up to 8 hours, or 15,000 parts per million (1.5%) for up to a maximum of 15 minutes. However, cavers can frequently be exposed to levels exceeding these.

The normal concentration of CO₂ in surface air is 0.03% whereas it is more commonly 1% in caves and is often higher because of rotting vegetation, poor ventilation, small passages with heavy traffic or from farm run-off; caves in areas with volcanic activity also commonly exhibit higher levels. Naturally occurring CO₂ levels of 4.5% have been measured in some popular caves in the UK, and up to 7% in some antipodean and tropical caves.

Sporting caves, even those with large walking-sized passages, routinely register increased levels of CO₂ because of the number of people visiting on any given day.

A strong draught cannot be relied upon to indicate good quality air, or be presumed to assist with flushing out poor quality air, since there is anecdotal evidence of significant air movements emanating from a boulder choke in a UK cave with a CO₂ concentration of 4+%.

Tolerance to the effects of CO₂ can increase with experience and exposure, and some cavers have regularly coped with up to 6% for several hours; please note, however, that you should not set out to do this deliberately and certainly not without a gradual acclimatisation.

The concentration of CO₂ in expired air is around 4%. An increase in CO₂ in inspired air, when caving, stimulates your respiratory centre until CO₂ equals 5.6%

which matches the normal concentration of alveolar air, where gas exchange is taking place in the lungs. Beyond this increase in level the situation becomes increasingly intolerable and narcotic.

The Table of Responses below assumes an atmosphere with a normal oxygen level (21%) in combination with a caver who is at rest. The symptoms will be increased by strenuous exertion or if the ambient oxygen level is decreased, but levels of oxygen down to as low as 13% can be tolerated, but not sustained. Individual responses will vary, and acclimatisation can occur but it is best to react on the presumption that the circumstances will worsen or at best remain constant.

Carbon Dioxide level and common corresponding symptoms at that percentage

1%	Usually comfortable but with a slight increase in rate & depth of respiration
2%	Respiration increased, with a headache developing after several hours exposure
3%	Respiration twice normal rate, uncontrolled panting after exertion, slight headache noticeable while caving
4%	Respiration three times normal rate, combined with a throbbing headache, face flushed, nausea, sweating
5%	Respiration more than x 3. Persisting effects after exiting cave can be headache, nausea, vomiting
6%	Respiration x 6, cannot be sustained
7%	Mental deterioration. Intolerable for more than a few minutes, progressive dyspnoea (breathing discomfort), violent respiratory distress
8%	
9%	
10%	Intolerable panting & exhaustion, unconsciousness within minutes, spasmodic neuromuscular twitching & convulsions
11%	
12%	
13%	
14%	
15%	
25% -30%	Unconscious after 8 - 12 breaths, convulsions

How to respond.

On recognition of the symptoms of elevated carbon dioxide your caving trip should be immediately altered and your party should evacuate the area slowly and calmly. You may consider the wisdom of commenting on the real reason for moving from Plan A to Plan B so that you minimise any sense of panic in your group. A plausible and non-alarming excuse is a good ruse.

Overcome the natural tendency to wish to rush as the increased exertion involved will worsen your breathing. Slower, shallower breathing is the aim; deep or fast breathing will exacerbate the problem.

Leave non-essential equipment behind. It may be necessary to lifeline even simple climbs for some party members as judgment can be affected and even minor exertion can worsen symptoms.

Symptoms improve rapidly on exiting, but headaches and nausea can persist for some hours, and an acid base imbalance can be detected in the blood for up to two days after exposure to high levels to carbon dioxide.

Report your experience to others so that the cave can be put on a watch list and other cavers are alerted to the problem – this can be done via your Regional Caving Council and online resources.



A large work team with lots of toys. Photo: Doug Harris



Keith - in detailed discussions. Photo: Doug Harris

Cottage Work Weekend

The weekend of August 4th-5th, saw the annual cottage maintenance and building gathering - cottage warden Keith Knight writes this account, with pictures by Doug Harris.

The main plan was to progress the drying room to a point where the waterproof wall and flooring could be fitted, and fit in other tasks on the cottage as and when they could be done.

On Friday a trip out in Brian's van to Wickes to buy the materials for the weekend was made. Loads of money.

But there was another overriding task for Brian -two weeks before at the veteran's weekend, the group's computer was found to have died. The solid state "C" drive had packed-in. Brian took the unit away and got the "C" drive replaced and of course it was out of warranty! But it was the task of recovering the door access system from the back up files that was most important. The computer was fired up Friday evening and connected to the internet.

Saturday morning - Brian and Bill worked on the task of recovering and setting up the access system. Let me say here that it all went over my head but they did a great job and the system is now up and running. Bill has a few odd things to sort but apart from that all is well. Andrew Horeckyj has donated a computer which will be used as a standby / back up.

On Saturday the usual crew arrived, Bill Chadwick, Doug Harris, Keith Knight, Russ Porter, Brian Snell and a new volunteer Martin Cross. A great number of power tools were assembled - wicked looking saw benches, battery powered drills and impact drivers. Tape measures, hammers, chisels boxes of screw and nails all appeared. The work went well with the roof timbers being reinforced, it is planned to tile the shed roof at some time in the future so the roof has to be able to take the weight of the tiles not just the roofing

The dividing wall stud work was built. Bigger timbers for the ceiling were put in which was to facilitate storage of the ladder and other stuff in the loft area.

Insulation was fitted in the space between the breathable outer membrane and the inner wall. An air gap was left to enable the outer wall to vent off any condensation. Some of the inner wall cladding was then fitted. By 5 o'clock everybody was knackered so we closed the site for the day. Great progress was made that day drinking loads of tea that just kept coming, in fact so much tea was consumed that Ed and Haley went and got more milk and Joan volunteered to fetch us pasties for lunch.

Just a side note

Brian had taken his telescope and other kit down to do a bit of star gazing which he did Saturday night, being out until 2.30 am but he was up and ready ish to start work Sunday morning.

On Sunday morning a slightly depleted crew started about 9:30 which included Brian, Bill, Russ, and me.

Russ cut a big hole in the floor and fitted a level dec floor panel (sort of shower tray thing) and all the plumbing to go with it to get any water out of the room and into the gully outside the shed. This will form part of the waterproof flooring arrangement. That completed, we finished off the insulation and inner wall cladding.

The off-cuts of the OSB boarding from the roof were used as flooring in the loft.

Russ fitted this and screwed it down. It was exceedingly hot up there and he came down sweating buckets. More recycled insulation supplied by Russ was fitted to the drying room ceiling between the joists. A ceiling still has to be fitted but by lunch time - out of materials and energy we called a halt. The site was tidied up spare materials stored in the tackle store end.



The interior partition wall between drying room and tackle store, with insulation panels. Photo: Doug Harris

And then we went home, apart from Russ the human dynamo who went off to the Cerberus to look at their plumbing. Progress made has been phenomenal, doing far more than I had envisaged for the weekend.

A big thank you to everybody for all the enthusiasm and hard work which made completing the drying room a step closer.

The next step is to have the drying room walls and floor made water proof.

The electrics can be installed to the shed and the internals wired as and when the water proofing has been done.

Sadly in the cottage not a lot got done, Joan tidied up the 6 room and most of the junk from there has gone. Bill burned off a load of branches and rotten wood from the pile in the car park by the wall on Saturday evening so it looks a lot tidier now. The windows downstairs got cleaned and that's about it.

Keith Knight.

From the Logbook...

Trip write-ups of *distinction*

Pinetree Pot 8th April 2018

Best laid plans.....

Team: Richard Carey, Andrea Carey, Tim Case, Joe & Miranda and Dom Wood

This was a full member trip for Tim. Plan A was to go to Sludge Pit but we decided that Pinetree would be better as for one thing it is just down the road. Tim selected the kit and equipped with slings and karabiners we set off to the cave. The padlock was unlocked without issue although it will need some lubrication pretty soon. The entrance pitch is now longer since the last time I was there (2013) but presented no problems. I descended 1st followed by Tim. Pine Pitch is a bit awkward as there is not much room to manoeuvre but we got everyone down without incident. We then went for a rummage and went looking for Moonlight Chamber. After the 1st descent we climbed up and through a small chamber ended back at the bottom of the pitch. We had been through the Wallows. Returning down again and continuing down the entrance to the nicely decorated Moonlight Chamber was found. On the return myself, Andrea & Miranda went for quick recce down Easy Street. I stopped just before Sonya's Bend, but Andrea went through but decided as she was the only person who might fit returned promptly. We all then returned to the base of the pitch and this is where everything went a little bit awry.

With Tim life lining from below I climbed the ladder but found it very difficult to get off at the top. With me life lining from the top Tim also found it quite hard so I decided to move the ladder to the other side of the pitch so that the ladder was free hanging. I forgot to secure the ladder and managed to drop it down the pitch. The life line was sent down and ladder hauled up and re- attached. Andrea was next but found it impossible to get to the top of the ladder and getting off on a ledge 6ft below climbed the side though a narrow cleft at the pitch head. Well, this wouldn't work for the larger of the party, so we moved the ladder and Miranda came up next. Unfortunately, the ladder still defied us, and Miranda was unable to get to the top, so we swung her across to Andrea's ledge and out she came. 3rd time lucky. The ladder was moved again back to the original position but slightly to the right. No more problems and Joe and Dom ascended without issue. All in all, quite an adventure for such a small cave.

On a positive note Tim was completely unphased by all of these shenanigans and dealt with each problem as it arose.

Richard M Carey



The preserved beam engine.

Wanlockhead- Leadhills

An interesting diversion off the main road through the Southern Uplands of Scotland.

Words and pictures: Mike Moxon.

Every time I drive up to Glasgow on the M74 I've been intrigued by the signs to the Lead Mining Museum, but never had time to stop and check it out. So, when we were coming back south in the camper van, late at night, it seemed like a good option for a stopover.



Leaving the motorway you're suddenly into the Lowther Hills, which are reminiscent of approaching Nenthead. The signs were warning about the closure of the road in Leadhills (famous for its Miners' Library & narrow gauge railway), but fortunately it was still passable – otherwise it'd be a long diversion to get to the nearby museum (repairs have now been completed).

<https://www.leadhillslibrary.co.uk/>

Wanlockhead is Scotland's highest village (despite being in the "lowlands") with extensive ancient & modern surface remains, including the only in situ beam engine, miners' cottages and a short section of Lochnell Adit that can be visited, you can also have a go at panning for gold...

<http://www.leadminingmuseum.co.uk/tours/>

https://www.aditnow.co.uk/Mines/Straitsteps-Lead-Mine_9200/

https://www.aditnow.co.uk/Mines/New-Glencrieff-Lead-Mine_8288/

The Scottish cave registry shows the location of many of the entrances, but unfortunately most of them seem to have been sealed:

<http://registry.gsg.org.uk/sr/registrysearch.php>

http://www.rrcpc.org.uk/newsletters/NL_V41_N1_A4.htm

However, the remains are well worth a visit if you're passing.





AGM & Dinner

The annual general meeting was held at The Hunter's Lodge which was followed by an evening of fine-dining at the Camberley Lodge.

A presentation was made to Brian Snell, thanking him for his years of service as club secretary.

A slightly unusual- but interesting and informative presentation on the subject of owls, was given by a guest speaker from the Hawk and Owl Trust. The club's stand from the previous Hidden Earth conference was also on display for members that had not had the chance to see it.

Pictures: Jeremy Gilson.





Mike, Brian & Léonie in Cae Coch Mine. - Ed Waters.

Bogies, Acid & Peril A visit to some metal mines of the Gwydyr Forest, Snowdonia.

Words and pictures- Ed Waters.

Snowdonia has become well known amongst cavers for the sheer entertainment value of its slate mines, such as Cwmorthin and the Croeser/Rhosydd through trip. These venues are provided with a wide variety of fixed aids such as traverse lines, bridges and tyrolean traverses that provide both an adrenaline rush and the ability to appreciate the sheer scale of these immense underground quarrying operations.

Less well known perhaps, is that the area is also riddled with abandoned metal mines, and in particular the Gwydyr Forest close to Betws-y-Coed has more than its fair share. The mines were used to extract a variety of metals, and often contain features of extreme interest, but became largely forgotten by any but the most avid of mine explorers due to the lack of any official access.

This situation changed in 2015 with the Cambrian Caving Council (CCC) negotiating a new access procedure with Natural Resources Wales (NRW). To do this the CCC created a new company, Cave Access Ltd, to indemnify NRW and in return a number of mine sites across Wales, including sites in the Gwydyr Forest.

The access procedure is now simplicity itself, simply email the permit secretary at Cave Access Ltd, see

<http://rakelane.anduin.org.uk/cal/index.html> (accessed November 2017) for the full procedure.

16-17th August 2017 saw a multitude of MCG members heading up to Snowdonia, primarily to visit the slate mines of Cwmorthin and Croeser/Rhosydd but also to do a little climbing, walking, zip-lining and to partake in the odd tippie or two. However, I have always been one to be attracted by “something different” and having previously visited Cwmorthin I contacted Cave Access Ltd and obtained permission for Cae Coch, Parc and Hafna mines in the Gwydyr Forest.

Cae Coch Sulphur Mine

The sulphur extracted from this mine is found in the form of Iron Pyrites (aka Fool's Gold). The sulphur was used primarily in the manufacturing of explosives, and the mine was a very important source of sulphur during the two world wars. The mine is worked on the "Pillar and Stall" principal, and follows a steeply dipping bed of Iron Pyrites, there is almost no vertical development in the mine.

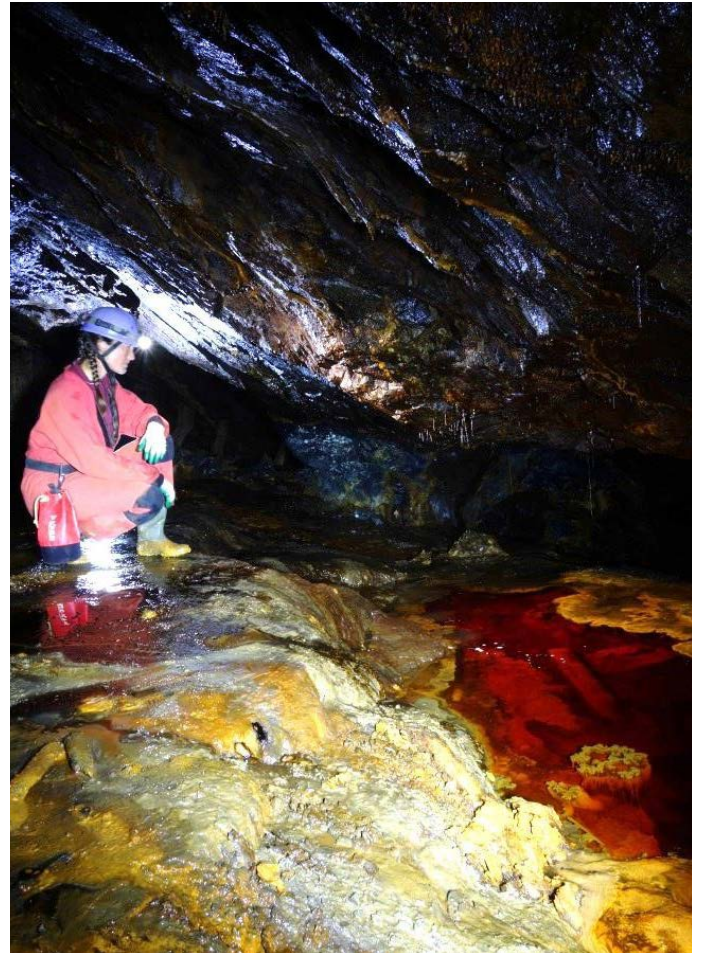
There are a number of mining remains in situ, including an ore chute and many stemples and pit props, but the main attractions for the caver are the many formations that have grown since the mine was abandoned. These are largely due to the action of the highly acidic water found in the mine, reportedly pHs as low as 1.8 have been recorded.

This means that pools and streams found in the mine are akin to battery acid in nature, and great caution needs to be displayed if burns are to be avoided. The upside is that this acidic water dripping through the rock has produced a profusion of rust stalactites, and also allowed the formation of "snotites", formations made of mats of sulphur reducing bacteria. Indeed at one point in the mine is a highly attractive (if you like bogies!) waterfall of snotite many metres long.

Our group consisted of Brian Snell, Léonie Woodward, Mike Moxon, Hayley Clark and myself, and we spent a several enjoyable hours exploring the mine, after a somewhat perilous time finding the entrance.



Hayley with Iron Stalactites- Ed Waters.



Léonie with a blood red pool of acidic water- Ed Waters.



Delicate gypsum crystals - Ed Waters.



Brian with the snotite waterfall - Ed Waters.

Parc Lead Mine

This was one of the largest lead mines in the UK and parts of it operated up until the 1950s. Access is via the No.2 Level which is protected by a substantial metal grille, entrance is achieved with some gymnastics via a small hole at the top. This is difficult for the portly caver, and I had to be “posted” through by the others!

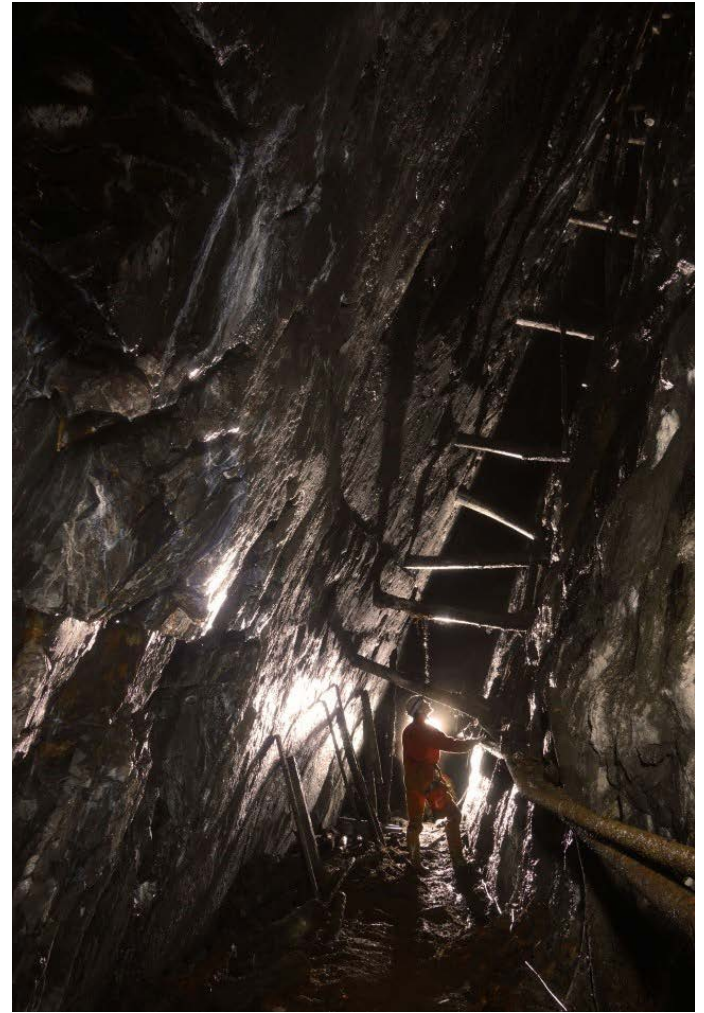
No.2 level starts as a straightforward, if rather wet, drainage adit. This changes abruptly where it intersects the Main Lode at 90° in a T junction. The lode, or vein if you prefer, is almost vertical and the ore material has almost all been removed to produce huge stopes of staggering height. No.2 Level extends along the footwall of the lode to the north and south. The “floor” along the hanging wall, on the opposite side of the lode, is made up of rubble laid on rotting timbers, or in many places completely absent. Beneath these holes and false floors is nothing but interstellar void all the way down to the No.3 Level, some 100m or more below. Great care needs to be exercised to ensure that you stick to the footwall and the railway lines at all times.

To the left at the junction with the No.2 adit leads quickly to the “Bidston Tidal Experiment”. This was an attempt in the 1960s to measure the distortion of the bed rock due to tidal forces, but today the sights are limited to some walls and piles of shredded polystyrene insulation and rotting wires. No.2 level continues beyond the experiment, but we were warned that the “floor” beyond was scarily dangerous and that it was not worth the risk to continue. We heeded the advice!

Close to the tidal experiment is a ladder way descending to No.3 Level. This needs full vertical gear as the bottom ladders are missing, and apparently allows a good through trip to emerge at Kneebones Cutting (a huge hole on the surface not unlike a mini-Alum Pot). We left this for another time.

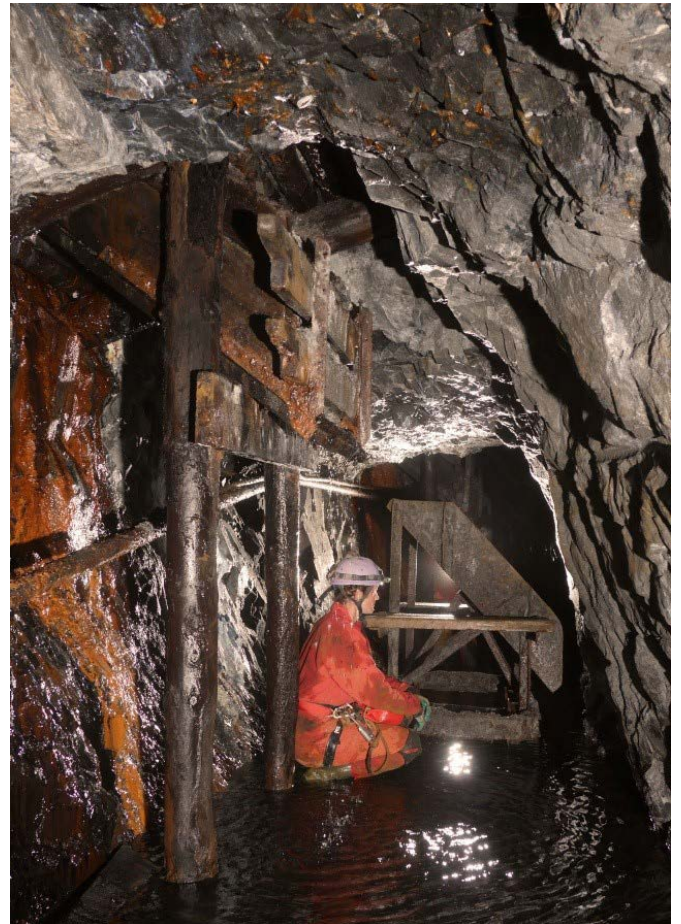
We returned back along No.2 level, and headed past the junction with the entrance passage. From here the stopes are incredibly impressive. They soar up out of sight above, and down into the stygian darkness against the hanging wall. The passage continues in grand style for a huge distance, littered with many ore-chutes that were used to direct material dropped from workings above the level into trucks on the No.2 Level. I have simply never seen so many ore chutes in one mine before.

As one progresses into the mine, the passage gets scarier and scarier. The holes in the floor get more numerous, and take up more of the passage. The floor becomes more covered in deads, and at one point the floor is suspended on giant chains. The “highlight” has to be the traverse over a 100m deep hole on nothing but the railway lines hanging over the void.



Léonie with an Ore Chute in No.2 Level- (above) and Mike looking cool on the scary rails (below) - Ed Waters.

Spectacular Stope in No.2 Level- (above) and Léonie with the deflector truck (below) - Ed Waters.



Towards the end of No.2 Level is a unique “deflector truck”. This is a steel plate at 45° placed on a the body of a railway truck. This device was placed beneath an ore chute, and used to deflect the material on down from the No.2 Level down to the No.3 Level below. At this point is another shaft heading down to the No.3 Level, neck deep water and the connection with Cyffty Mine. We turned back at this point. We headed back slowly taking many photos, and were just congratulating ourselves on what a great time we had, when a deep, ominous rumble emanated from the depths.

This was clearly a huge rockfall, probably the result of the failure of rotting timbers holding up many tons of deads. It was also clearly a long way away, but suffice to say it was enough to make us head rapidly for the entrance!

All in all I cannot recommend Parc Lead Mine highly enough for the experienced mine explorer. The scale of the place and the superb remains make it a must do. It cannot be stressed enough however that this is not the place for those unfamiliar with mines, the hazards are extreme and there are many traps waiting for the unwary. The party consisted of Mike Moxon, Léonie Woodward, Hayley Clark and myself.



Hayley and Léonie in No.2 Level- Ed Waters.



Hayley with snotites growing on an ore chute- Ed Waters.

Hafna Lead Mine

The final of our trio of Gwydyr mines was Hafna Mine. The gated entrance to Level 3 lies next to the impressive surface remains and their dedicated car park in the forest. The low entrance is initially a little moist (to put it mildly) but the water is soon left behind. A shaft is soon met on the left hand side of the passage. This provides a short pitch, past a wooden platform to land in an intermediate level. The intermediate level contains a rather nice ore truck and an intact wooden wheelbarrow as well as a substantial stream.

Downstream leads to a pitch, which is actually the top of an ore chute in Level 4. Due to the amount of water we decided not to descend this. Upstream leads past another shaft down to Level 4 (which we did not descend) to an impressive collapse through which the main stream descends.

Hayley with the ore truck (opposite top) and the wheelbarrow (opposite bottom) - Ed Waters.



Returning to Level 3, the passage continues past the pitch to a major hole in the floor created by collapse into the intermediate level below. This lies above the wet choke seen from below earlier. A traverse line is provided and leads to a large stope, with a superb ore chute. Beyond the ore chute the way on is to crawl beneath deads stacked on timbers, apparently this continues for c.100m.

We turned back at this point. Whilst taking photos of the ore chute, we became aware of a strong smell of rotten eggs. Hydrogen Sulphide was suspected and a hasty retreat made. The party consisted of Hayley Clark and myself, and Hafna Mine is considered well worth a visit.



Hayley with the Ore Chute- Ed Waters.



Hayley in the Intermediate Level- Ed Waters.

In summary the metal mines of the Gwydyr Forest provide not only great scope for exploration, but also provide a marked contrast to the slate mines that seem to be more often frequented by the caving community. So if you are making the effort to travel up to Snowdonia, why not sample the delights of more than one sort of mineral mine!

Ed Waters, November 2017.

Remembering Biff - A Year On

by Bill Chadwick

Its just a year since Biff passed away from cancer at the early age of 63.

There have been two obituary pieces about him published in Descent

but it seems fitting to include something in the MCG News too.

This is a sort of photo essay recording just some of his caving and associated exploits and hopefully revealing something interesting and memorable for those who knew him well or had not had the privilege of so doing.



Let's start with caving, the traditional tourist kind. With the Bracknell Caving Club or MCG, Biff had visited a large proportion of UK caves and numerous caves overseas too. He was a master route finder. Here he is contemplating the rigging for a descent in Yorkshire, in GB, at the terminal sump (siphon) in Torca Del Carlita Spain and in Malataire in the Jura.





As with many cavers, Biff turned to cave digging, bringing to it his fantastic engineering abilities. This first photo set shows him at Carcass Cave on Shute Shelve Hill. He repurposed ship yard rivet guns as air chisels and built a self-propelled compressor to power them. This was before good battery drills and Hiltis were available.

To go with this was an overhead mono-rail for spoil hauling and a manual winch built using a Ford Transit wheel bearing.



After Carcass and the breakthrough in Upper Flood, Biff worked on Stainsby's shaft and then Bone Hole where he installed a prodigious amount of scaffolding—mostly sourced by himself.

Here he is installing a fixed steel ladder in Stainsby's (he was a very keen collector of such equipment), installing a lid he fabricated for Coral Cave and at work in one of his comprehensive workshops.

He was a very accomplished welder. In the right of the welding picture is the tempering oven he used for making Hilti firing rods.





Biff was a skilled digger driver. Here he is excavating at Hutton with a large hired digger, installing the MCG gates (which he made himself) and digging a hole for the LPG tank. For those jobs he used his own digger, towed down from Bracknell on the back of his van. Whilst doing those jobs he installed the tube in the Hole in the Lawn dig – the tube being another item from his large collection.

If you go caving you need transport. For years, Biff ran a minibus so that we could go on expeditions together – Ireland, France, Spain and Belgium as well as Wales, Yorkshire and Mendip. Here we are on the way to the Jura where we tried our hand at Via Ferrata using caving gear.

He was a good cook too – well known for a hot chicken curry with hand ground spices.





Biff liked to party. In his earlier years he was very active with the Bracknell Chopper club and turned his dad's old chicken shed into their party shed complete with large fireplace, beer cooler, spirit optics and adjacent toilets.

This doubled up as the Bracknell Caving Club party shed too but in later years got taken over as yet another workshop. Here is a view of the fire place, a set of big speakers – Biff did not do small, and the rafters where many a youngish man swung about to impress a lady. Fancy dress was often deployed.

No party was complete without a bonfire – zero to inferno every time. The fire photo includes large blue paddling pool which was warmed by water pumped around a long coiled black hosepipe laid out in the sun, plus a bit more of his large-scale salvaged junk. When it was time to stoke the fire, a large dumper load of logs was the norm.

Biff's funeral last August has widely been referred to as his *last party*. Many MCG folk were there. It was a moving affair with the crematorium chapel bursting with people, a most impressive motorcycle cavalcade and even some fireworks.

Here are just some of the forty or so bikes assembling outside his bungalow and a floral tribute in the form of a mug of tea. If you visited Biff it normally involved a cup of tea, despite him moaning about how busy he was.

As the last year has gone by our memories of Biff have not faded or dulled. I like to think that the more I recall them the more lustrous they become. We miss his skills for instance when we let the Pearl Mine entrance run in though I hope he would have been impressed with our moving of the log shed roof.

The last laugh has to be Biff's: here he is caving in Spain with the MCG. *'Bugger that cancer'*



Bighorn Rift

Mike Moxon gives a summary of his diary entries for a curious hole he had noticed in Sandford quarry.

Sun 19 Mar 2017 - after running an abseil at Sandford Quarry I decided to have a look at a small hole near the top of the main cliff face that I had noticed shortly before – there was nothing to belay off so we used the tow hitch of an Isuzu Bighorn. Turned out to be bigger inside & more impressive than we were expecting!

Grade 1 survey done Mon 20 March with Tom Conolly. Also hacked our way in rain to Badger Caves on other side of quarry – these were investigated by ACG in 1991 (ACG Logbook 7 p.65) & may be remnants of Sandford Quarry Cave (No.1).

Thu 23 March I abseiled in to Sandford Quarry Cave No.2, but too tight to enter without a bit of clearance (I had also tried to reach it on 19 Mar whilst abseiling from Bighorn Rift, but it was too much of a swing across with too much vegetation inbetween). SQC2 original description CCG Newsletter (4)18 (Oct. 1968 - Mar. 1969)

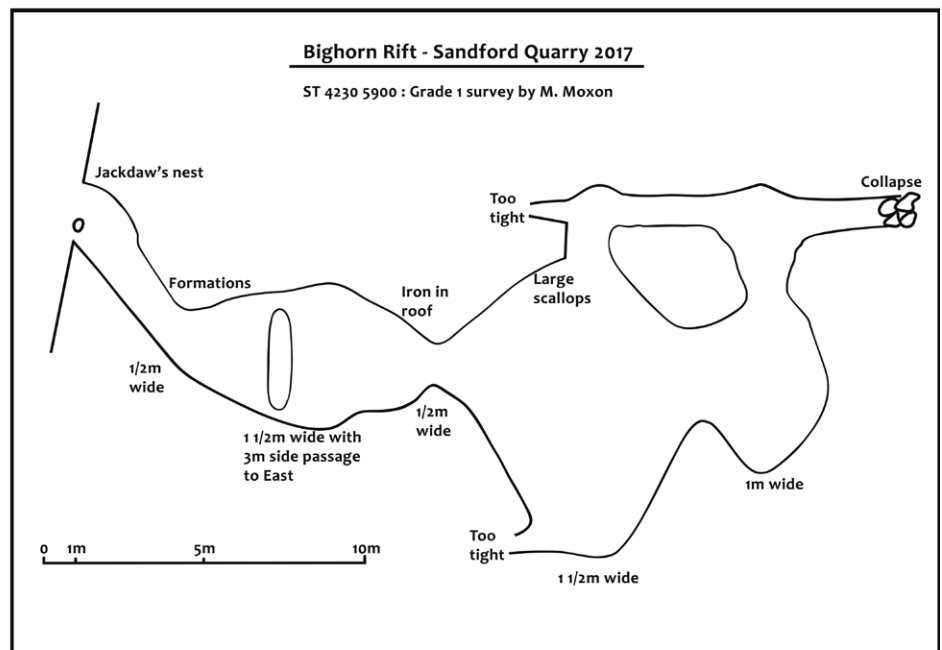
Thu 30 March, took Kay Eyeington to SQC2 (much easier to use an extendable ladder than abseiling) & she got through, persuading Tom C. & I that it was worth opening up (but only just).

Grade (?) survey Thu 30 Nov 2017 by Graham Price with Tom C.

After entering the hole I did some research & a climber, Tim Meehan, had been in Bighorn Rift two and a half years before, the only mention of it being on a UKClimbing

route description – The Moderate Path to the Entrance to Hell 50m. Climb the broken ramp on the far right of the broken buttress to the right of the Cardiganos. This leads up to the gully formed with Pink Wall. At the top of this is a cave some 30 metres long. This needs to be completed before the final scramble to the top.

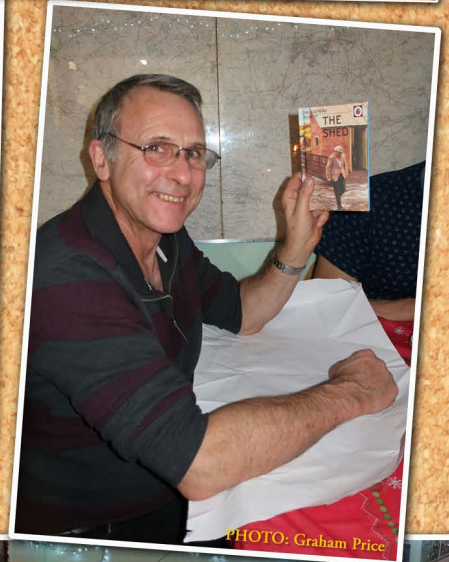
Sandford Ochre Cave (Willie Stanton's first trip) is supposed to be in the cutting close to the end of Bighorn Rift, but they do not line up, so a connection is unlikely & the entrance was blocked up many years ago.



At the top of the quarry is Sandford Quarry Mine, which appears to have opened up around May 2004 & was descended for about 35ft by the ACG (Logbook 9, p.30-33), amongst others. It is now covered with large blocks.

Spar Shaft, Test Mine, High Mine and a couple of other mines reported by Sidcot School SS in 1940/50s around the trig point have been quarried away.

Mike Moxon



CHRISTMAS PARTY

