



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY



“So who takes sugar in there tea then?”

NEWSLETTER  
VOL. 15 NO. 1

DECEMBER 1998

## **Editor's bit**

**Dear Speluncar,**

**Welcome to the bumper Christmas issue of the UBSS newsletter. Personally I think it's been a fabulous term, lots of new (and 'suppose I'll give it another go') members have not only meant that there's been lots of caving but also new faces to cajole into writing for me, thank you. I'd also like to thank all the other contributors, reading trip reports always makes me wish I'd gone if I hadn't, and in the case of Jeremy leaves me bemused.**

**Till the next round of harassment for articles I wish you all 'Winterval Greetings' in a Brummy accent.**

**Roland**

*Steven Bruce Cottle:  
Clever once, but test*



*Roland Parrott:  
Lard rat on port*

**UBSS Newsletter Vol.15 no.1 November 1998**

**Editor – Roland Parrott**

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**Disclaimer and other legal matters –** The opinions expressed within these pages are those of the individual contributors and are no reflection of the broad minded, liberal and PC attitudes of the committee or myself (except of course for all those bits written by committee members or myself).



Hi all, I trust everyone has thrown themselves into the first term's caving and is waiting to read this exciting instalment of the newsletter with equal fervour, so I'll keep my mindless gibbering to a minimum. The caving so far has seen good turnout (Hurrah, maybe I'll get out of doing this next year) with people even going underground in Yorkshire despite the pissing rain and apparently even forsaking a Fountains breakfast to do so; mad fools. Bonfire showed its normal variety of dumb animal roasting, fireworks, minimal caving, and pub lunches, and more than its normal variety of extreme drunkenness (no names mentioned, or not by me at any rate). A S. Wales trip is planned closely followed by the Xmas Dinner, which, if anyone is interested must be booked by the start of December. Next term has an equally exciting inventory; again including weekend trips and evening trips to Mendip. A final word to anyone who hasn't yet been caving and is worried that its too late. It's not. come along anytime. We're lovely, honest.

Love and Hugs,

Taz

~~~~~

## Spring Term Itinerary

|                |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| January 15-17  | Yorkshire, caravans      |
| January 29-31  | South Wales, Croyden Hut |
| February 12-14 | Yorkshire, caravans      |
| February 26-28 | South Wales, Chelsea Hut |
| March 13       | AGM & Annual Dinner      |

This is an itinerary for what is already arranged and is therefore incomplete. To find out about further trips check your e-mail, or turn up to Micawbers on Tuesday evenings at 9.30

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## Top tips from the pros No.1 – Carbide care

*Andy:* I once read a book that advised all kinds of extreme emergency procedures, such as removing and prosocketing on an artery. (Ed that's in next term's training novices). But it said the only no-no was refilling your carbide with urine.

*Graham:* Yes, that's right. The combination of warm and acidic liquid make it react very quickly, and it can bubble out of the valve. Not only is this exceedingly unpleasant, it smells very bad.

*Roland:* I knew a case once where a girl had one of those carbides that *straps on* to your helmet, and not being able to aim, had to get a mate of mine to fill it for her, especially revolting as it bubbled over!

*Millie:* What's a strap on?


*Graham:* Anyway, I prefer to use a quality red wine, the smell is quite exquisite.

*Andy:* What's wrong with cheap red wine?

*Graham:* Again to acidic.

# The Bonfire Weekend

Dicken Banks



We arrived shortly before ten at the tackle store and met Taz; in what she told us was a rare on time appearance. About this time I discovered I had left my wellies behind and she kindly gave me a lift to pick them up. After travelling to the hut in style in the smoking car we arrived to find the preparations under way, both the bonfire and fire pit being constructed by Tim with his trusty chainsaw.

Andy, Rachel, Andy and I headed off to G.B. When we got to the blockhouse we found that the key wouldn't open the padlock. During our attempts to open the door, a group from Portsmouth U.S.S. arrived and had a go with a Cerberus key. Combined attempts failed to resolve the situation and then a third group arrived, when their key failed to open the lock as well, it was felt that perhaps we should find a cave where the hardest pitch wasn't getting through the entrance. The Portsmouth group had a slight problem in that their minibus had gone and wasn't going to be back for four hours. Andy volunteered to walk them over the hill back to the hut. On the way back in the car we met Taz' Taxis ferrying John and his retrieved wellies out to Rhino Rift. After a cup of tea, both groups set out for Goatchurch. It was quite odd to go into a cave by steps carved into the rock but all became clear after a brief history lesson. The cave itself was fun and surprisingly social, if a little crowded at times!

When we arrived back at the hut the sheep was roasting away and, having procured a cup of tea and a bite to eat, settled down to that time honoured practice of watching the fire and occasionally adding wood to it. As time progressed and more trips arrived back, so the fire started to run more on aluminium, and it was reported the pub was not only having it's own fireworks party, but was already full! The situation was saved however, by two heroes making a supermarket run to resupply dangerously dwindling stores. The price of abstinence has ever been a taxi service. It was at this time a bargain was struck; ' Shall we go halves on a bottle of vodka? ' is an innocuous enough statement the full meaning of which was seen later. A short time later the booze arrived back and the fireworks commenced. About this time the vodka in question was shared, Rob downed his half and handed a bemused Jon the bottle. My next sighting of Rob was him being prevented from being over familiar with a recently lit rocket, shortly after, he was leaning against the hut chatting away, when he developed a pronounced list and then gravity took over. There was a horrible noise as he hit his head on a plate, and it was felt that a trip to hospital was called for. The ambulance was remarkably quick and after a brief struggle with the track removed Rob to Weston hospital. The fireworks resumed, the one-legged guy met his fate and much more beer was drunk.

All in all it was a highly enjoyable weekend rounded off, so I am told, by a pub lunch on the Sunday and after all paramedics only attend the best parties.

Millicent Smyth:  
Humm, it's tiny cell



# MISSING FROM THE LIBRARY!

The following have been missing for some time, and the librarian would be very grateful for their return as they are both irreplaceable. Anonymous packages accepted!!

E A Martel    Irlande et Cavernes Anglaises. 1897 . 22 by 15 cms, Blue modern rebinding.  
Bookplate G T Warwick

Shepton Mallet Caving Club: Bound journals Vols 5 & 6. Bright red, A4.

Tony Boycott

# FOR SALE

## Old style “GB” logo T-shirts and Sweat-shirts

**T-Shirts £5.00 each inc. postage**

White	M x 2
Pink	XL
Orange	L x 3
Red	M, L, XL
Yellow	L, XL, XXL
Black	M x 2
Purple	L
Light Blue	M, XL
Turquoise	L
Green	M

**Sweat Shirts £10.00 each inc. postage**

Yellow	L x 2, XL
Light Blue	XL
Black	M

## SECONDHAND BOOKS FOR SALE

Caves of North west Clare	E K Tratman. 2 copies	£80.00 each
Caves of Ireland	J C Coleman	£25.00
Troglodytes No 2 Summer 1920	Legible but looseleaf	£5.00

UBSS Proceedings, old and out of print issues. £10.00 each  
Vol 1 no 2, Vol 1 no 3, Vol 2 no 3 (2), Vol 3 no 1, Vol 3 no 2, Vol 3 no 3,  
Vol 6 no 1 (3), Vol 6 no 2 (2), Vol 6 no 3 (2), Vol 7 no 1, Vol 7 no 2,  
Vol 8 no 1 (2), Vol 8 no 2, Vol 8 no 3, Vol 9 no 1, Vol 9 no 2, Vol 12 no 1 (2)

Also Volume 2, nos 1 - 3 bound, black and gold, good condition but cut down to size of Volume 1, no loss of text. £20.00

Orders to Tony Boycott, 14 Walton Rise, Westbury on Trym, Bristol, BS9 3EW  
0117 950 7336  
Please add £1.00 post, first come first served!

## Mud, mud glorious mud; the joys of the G.B. Dig...

*Andy Farrant*

Those of you lucky and privileged enough to have joined the UBSS caving elite and actually gone caving, or at least spent some time in the Red Lion, may have heard rumours, myths and legends about the infamous GB Dig. Much of what you may have heard may have not been too complimentary – ‘its wet, muddy and horrible...’ ‘why..?’ and ‘digging is for the beardy-wierdy old lags’. So, why have members of the club spent the last 25 odd years toiling away (albeit intermittently) in the muddy gravel at the end of Bat Passage? Good question. There are several reasons.

1. You are a masochistic mud-loving social leper with a perverted interest in small dark shitty holes, and you can't find anything better to do on a Saturday night. (I think Hugo probably fits into this category as I can't think why else he goes digging – it may also explain his penchant for Bos Swallet!).
2. You were told it's really fun and jolly exciting, that fame and fortune await you, or else you were press-ganged/drank when you agreed to help.
3. You want to find lots of nice big caverns measureless to man, and can't afford lots of expensive expeditions to foreign places. And anyway, finding a few hundred metres of passage on Mendip is far more satisfying than a few kilometres of huge passage that anyone can walk into in some far off tropical rainforest.

A combination of all three is probably nearest the truth, but there are good reasons to think there is a good chance of entering some large well-decorated cave beyond the current end of Bat Passage. This dig has probably the best potential on Mendip, as I'll explain. First, you need to understand a little about the cave and how it functioned in the past (sorry – this is one of my geo-rambles again).

Nearly all the caves on the southern edge of Blackdown occur where streams flowing off the sandstone disappear underground upon reaching the limestone. The water descends steeply down through open vadose (above the water table) passages until it hits the water table and then flows to the resurgence through predominantly phreatic (sub-water-table) undulating passages i.e. sumps. The sump level in Longwood is at 40m O.D., only around 20m above resurgence level. Work by Pete Smart and others suggest only c. 9% of the passage between here and Cheddar is open vadose passage.

At present, the water resurges at the foot of Cheddar Gorge. However, the Gorge has had a complex history and has undergone several phases of active incision by a surface river during cold glacial periods. During each subsequent warm interglacial phase, a new cave would develop, graded to the lower valley floor level. Thus, above the current active conduit are several tiers of fossil phreatic passages. Detailed work in the swallow caves by several generations of UBSS and other cavers, including Pete Smart, Tim Atkinson, Dave Drew and Derek Ford, have identified at least 4 of these fossil phreatic levels; at 238, 138, 120 and 90m O.D. In GB, only the upper two have been identified with certainty; at 238m (Devil's Elbow

route) and at 138m, the Ladder Dig – Bat Passage conduit. The lower levels almost certainly exist, but as yet, GB has not been pushed deep enough to find them.

Thus, the Ladder Dig – Bat Passage route is a fossil phreatic passage at the 138m level that probably flowed to a former resurgence in Cheddar. So, there is good evidence for a significant amount of fossil passage beyond the dig face. There is also a fair amount of depth potential before the main streamway reaches sump level. At present, the streamway terminates at the massive choke beneath Great Chamber. However, this choke has already been by-passed at high-level via Bat Passage. Almost certainly the continuation of Bat Passage beyond the dig will intersect vadose inlets draining into the continuation of the GB streamway, in much the same way as the Devils Elbow stream is a recent vadose inlet connecting the old phreatic passage with the much younger Boulder Chamber. Blue Pencil passage in Swildon's Hole is another example.

So, not only is there potential for old high-level phreatic passages, but the prospect of a link back to the main stream continuation. This may also provide a link into the lower fossil phreatic levels and an associated series of vadose inlets (similar to White Passage and Rhumba Alley). One only has to look at the immensity of the Gorge and Great Chamber to get an idea of the potential size of passage still to be found. In addition, it is possible that the downstream continuation of Charterhouse Cave may connect into GB, either at or downstream of the Great Chamber collapse. The diagram below is my prediction of the sort of passage we may find (and not a dowsing rod in sight...).

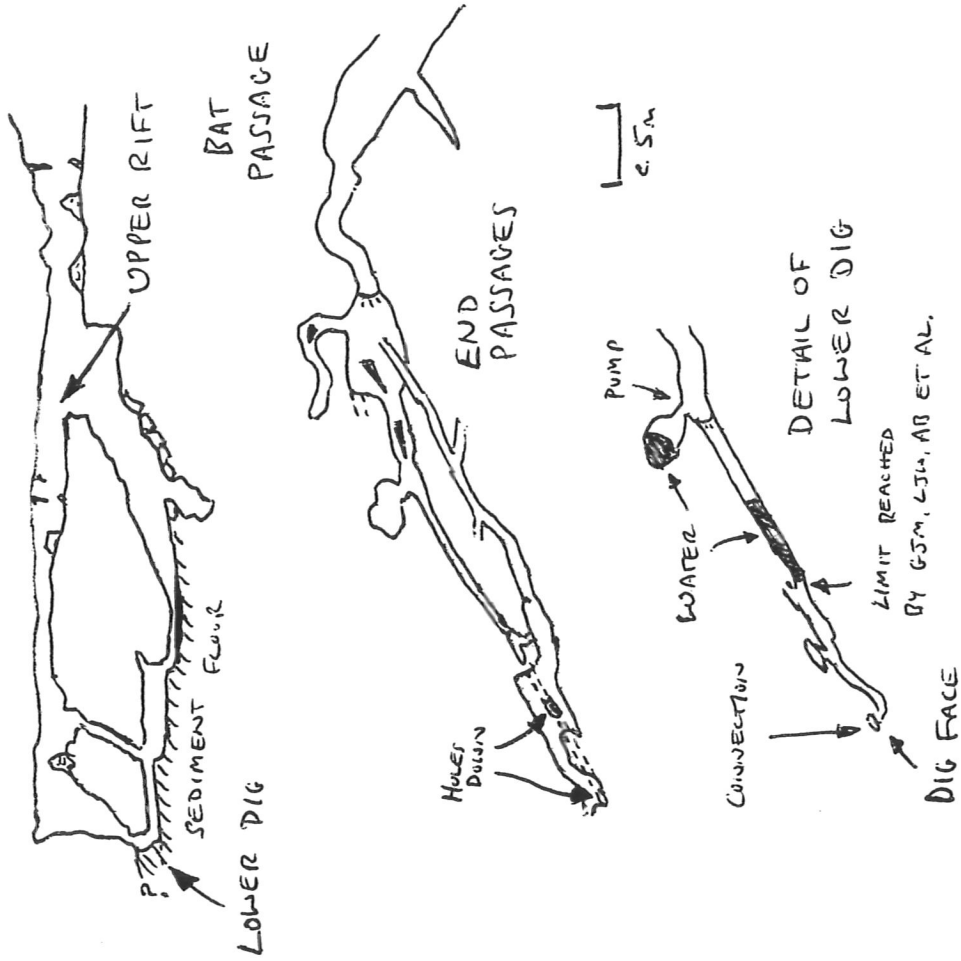
What about the actual dig? Known to some as the GBH dig, (for causing grievous bodily harm to its diggers), it was started back in the 1960's shortly after the discovery of Bat Passage. A cross section and plan is shown below. At the end, the large Bat Passage breaks down into a series of two or three parallel paragenetic rifts. Paragenetic cave development occurs when sediment deposition on the floor causes a passage to erode upwards, rather than incise the floor. As a result, these rifts are almost completely sediment filled. Only the upper rift remained free of sediment. This high level rift leads into a small chamber with two possible leads. However, this was deemed un-diggable due to the abundant pristine formations in the passage immediately before the dig. So, to bypass this, the lower wetter dig was started.

Over the intervening years, many teams have been involved. I began digging in 1989, and eventually broke through into the original end chamber reached in 1966. Although we were hoping to bypass the end chamber, it certainly is not a waste of effort. We can now start digging where the original explorers couldn't without ruining some fantastic formations. At the end, we have two options; either we continue at low level and hope to break up into the open upper level continuation, or we pursue the upper chamber leads, which may require banging. Hopefully, once we get beyond this sediment filled phreatic loop, the passage will open up again to a passage similar in form to Bat Passage

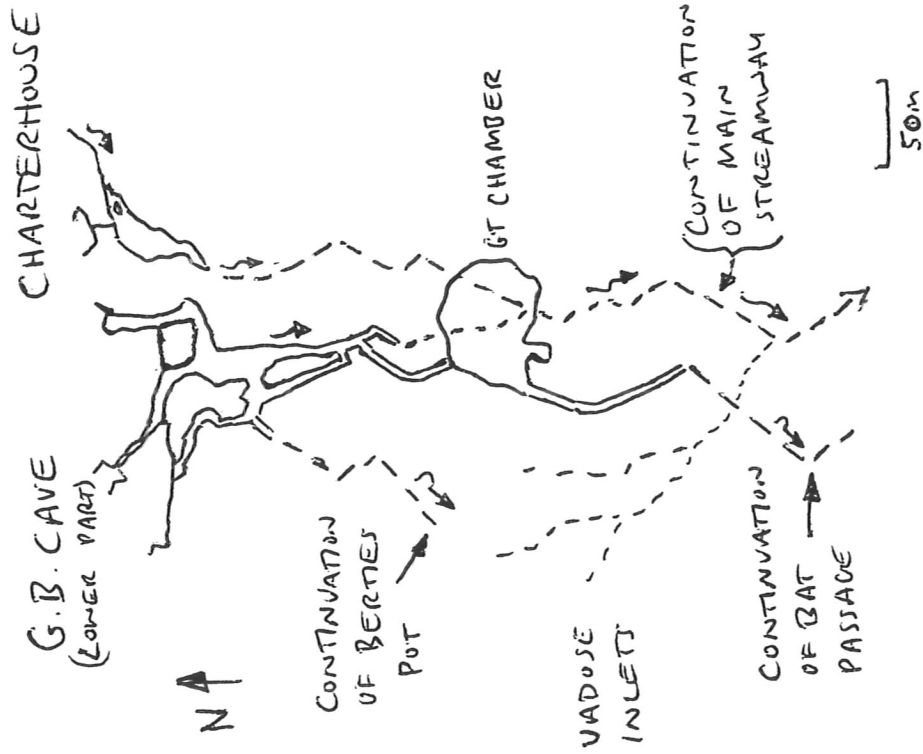
At present, the dig face will need a few trips to clear the accumulated spoil and to make the entry up into the end chamber easier. The pump may need an overhaul as well. Once that is done, we'll have plenty of digging and stacking space, plus no bad air problems. It'll still be a bit squalid getting there, but all the horrible work hopefully has been done.

So, get digging; fame, glory and caverns measureless to man await you...!

# END PASSAGES, CROSS SECTION



SKETCH PLAN (GD.1) OF THE END OF BAT PASSAGE



POSTULATED EXTENSIONS TO G.B. CAVERN

# The Yorkshire Trip

Never going to the bloody Red Lion again, that's what I reckon after being knobbled by Roland (oo-er) to write up the Yorkshire caving trip { "You know that torch you lost...what's it worth to get it back?"}. Enough wining. Here you have it, loaded with sexual innuendo and smut. I know what you like.

I first went caving 3 years back on the infamous naked caving freshers' weekend but didn't go again for another 3 years. Sharon told me I'd no longer be a novice after my fifth trip. This is my 6th caving 'experience.' B\*\*\*\*\*S!

Eight went up to Yorkshire: Andy, Arg, John, Jeremy, Juliet, Morven, Steve and Simon. We met Sharon and Bill up there, as well as lots of other people I don't know yet.

Got to Andy and Tim's house in Bristol and discovered that there was quite a lot to pack. Fortunately Steve had the good sense to buy a van with the extra special feature that allows you to fit more on the inside than the space it takes outside. Unfortunately we were a car down due to an unforeseen management mishap. Credit where credit is due goes to Clive at this point for loan of his Golf GTI for the weekend. Andy should get a job as an ambulance or fire engine driver. You can see the glint in his eye as he attempts to break the sound barrier. There were 3 medics in the back of Clive's GTI. Was Andy trying to do the profession a favour? Sadly this was not to last and we ended up sitting in a traffic jam for over an hour on the M6.

Eventually we made it to the caravans. Simon: "What's that deafening roaring noise?" Andy, That's the river...it's quite high at the moment." Simon: "We're going caving tomorrow...Oh shit..."

Sleeping was interesting. Simon shows off his flash super-warm, ultra expensive sleeping bag (no wonder he gets all the ladies) whilst I crawl into my 20 quid, "It'll be OK as long as it doesn't get below 5 degrees," job and froze my nuts off for the rest of the night until breakfast time. Stepping outside for a breath of fart-free air I finally got a view of how beautiful our location was with a huge viaduct sweeping over the valley the caravan park lies in surrounded by hills. Then we went shopping. Steve spent obscenely vast amounts of money purchasing a veritable plethora of kit in the caving shop. He came out grinning like a Cheshire cat. The rest of us had considerably more self control. (Simon, can I borrow those wet-socks some time?).

So finally some bright spark suggests we do some caving and we drive out to Ivy Fell and kit up in the pouring rain. The walk to the cave was pretty grim. The wind drove the rain so hard it was like someone stabbing your face with pins. This cave is entered via an old sewage pipe (hopefully never used). The entrance is normally wet but so especially wet that day I managed to fill my boots in minutes. Two somewhat moist pitches and we were pretty wet. Andy described the next pitch as, "like being inside a washing machine," but sent us down anyway for the, "experience." Reluctantly, we decided to abandon this cave. Juliet did a cracking job belaying people and strangely when we got out she claimed to be pretty dry. Must be those Marigolds she was

wearing. We stomped off to see another cave entrance (more like a sump) and then crawled back to the cars to get changed. Naked in the rain; Cold but strangely enjoyable... (Ed. Perhaps Sharon was right, such masochistic comments are rarely broadcast publicly by novices!)

Following our premature ejection from Ivy fell it was decided to visit the greasy spoon above the cave shop. Hot chocolate and flapjack...hit the spot. Dinner was also a delectable treat, stew washed down with copious quantities of tea.

Saturday night and Simon decides to work his way along the 16? real ales at the bar. He gets to number 8 then decided he couldn't be arsed because he's a lager man. Despite this he seemed to enjoying the delights of Dishy Debbie a lot (I had her first though). I spent the rest of the night getting Arg to teach me Dutch swear words (cancer-dick, etc, - ask Arg; you'll learn every phrase you'll ever need to insult people in Holland).

Mercifully I got some sleep that night until at some ungodly time of the morning when Steve romps in grinning away as usual and proceeds to fry up bacon, eggs, soss, beans and black pudding (I think this is what people call 'the works.' Great cure for a hangover anyway). The clocks changed and we gained an hour somewhere but I think I must have lost it again somewhere because I couldn't quite match Steves' endless enthusiasm.

Sunday was Bar pot. Unfortunately there's no bar in it and no pot either. This is the first caving trip this term where I haven't been subjected to Steve's oversuit with customised ventilation flap au derriere. Most pleasingly, I was able to pass it on to Simon. Unlike me however Simon, is a cunning chap and improvised with his spare pants which he wore on the outside (!!!) to hold the suit together. This seemed to work quite well and Simon was a happy chappy for the rest of the trip. I would like to know however, how he explained to his girlfriend the fact that his pants are now stained at the front and the rear. A 3 mile walk to the entrance but luckily no rain. Bill was rebuked a number of times for chasing sheep but apparently he's Welsh so I'm told it's OK. The sheep definitely looked worried. I hope they've forgotten us by this time next year.

This is a nice dry cave. First pitch was easy and I learned to absail. The second pitch was .....ft down (get one of the others to fill in that statistic - it was a long way). A muddy crawl for what seemed like forever followed but in great cliché style 'it was worth it.' Opening up into a huge cavern, Bar Pot boasts the tallest waterfall in the UK. Totally awesome. It took my breath away. (please feel free to add any other clichés as appropriate).

Getting out proved more fun. In the short space of this term Morven, has become well renowned for her ladder acrobatics. Steve being well aware of her lemming like tendencies decided that it would be best if her ascent was assisted for this pitch. Pity poor John who climbed up the ladder alone and then ended hauling me up. I promise I'll eat less pies next time. Finally we crawled out to have a look at the top end of the waterfall. Impressive...most impressive...

*Timothy Eliot Haynes:  
He is toothy, tiny male  
Imitate the shy loony*



Cleaning and packing up happened at lightning speed even though Simon spent all of an hour trying to get egg off a pan. Did anyone else notice a funny eggy smell in the car on the way back home?

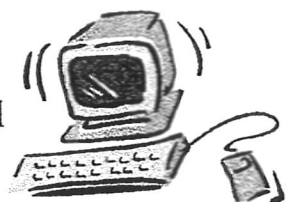
OK so there you have it. A fun time had by all I think. Yes, I know all the facts are wrong and I've libeled everyone seriously but please don't sue me. I might buy you a pint.

Love Jez (Ed. That's Jeremy Newman for all those who feel libeled)

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### The all singing, all new UBSS Web site

UBSS now has a web site courtesy of Andy, which we will endeavour to **keep** as up to date as possible. It includes all kinds of **useful information** such as who are we, where are we and **what's** going on. It will (so I've been promised after the union communications officer has had a few more lessons in computing!) eventually **be linked** to the main Union web site, but in the mean time please **pay a visit at:**



<http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/Union/UBSS/Home/Home.htm>

If you **have any more** information, comments, suggestions, pictures etc please **feel free to email** me.

Roland

*Andy Atkinson:  
A nanny to kids  
Skid to a nanny*

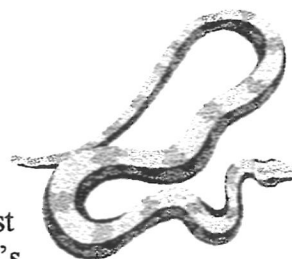


**Pub change** – Due to brewery politics and closures we have had to change pubs and now meet at **Micawbers**, but still at 9:30 on a Tuesday night. However, for those in student halls the union bus goes from the main library, a mere minutes walk from our new venue. Also, if this is news to you, then it is an indication that you are not checking your email sufficiently to be bombarded with information about trips, meets, bargains and occasional pop concerts. And yes on a gravel front, Jon was one of the three out of many hundreds who wore wellies to the Worzals gig!

## The Importance of Ladder Technique

*Morven Beranek*

On Wednesday the 14<sup>th</sup> of October I discovered how not to climb a ladder. I joined the U.B.S.S. at Freshers Fair, and the first cave I went to was Swildon's Hole. The second one was Hunter's Hole and as a result of my little adventure on the fifty-foot ladder, I was asked to write the trip up.



The leaders were Clive, Andy, Roland and Tim, and there were three other novices besides me. After a fairly long wait outside the entrance to the cave while Andy and Clive were rigging the ladders, we all descended to the bottom of Hunters. I had some misgivings going down the ladder; leaping onto ladders above pitch black holes is not my strong point, but was assured that climbing up was easier. Trusting fool that I am, I swallowed that one hook, line and sinker.

We had some fun exploring the tunnels and digs, I can't remember crawling around in so much mud before. We didn't stay down very long as I think the pub was calling. After watching other people going up the ladder I decided that I would be fine.

My turn came and I started up. By the time I was halfway up I was whimpering and it got worse from there on up. I suppose I was using my arms too much because my legs weren't doing anything and my arms felt like they were being tugged out of their sockets. I continued to make slow progress, inventing new and descriptive words at every rung. However a few rungs from the top my arms decided to let go and Andy and Clive hauled me the last bit, Sorry guys!



Well I got to the top and I felt like the biggest wimp imaginable. However they were both really nice and assured me that they had done the same for other people in the past. I was extremely glad to leave the cave and even more grateful to get into the pub.

I now realise the real value of S.R.T. training evenings. It's a lot less painful to make a fool of yourself in the Union!

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### **New year's eve dinner**

The above event will take place at the usual time in the usual place. Places are limited so would those wishing to attend please contact:

Linda Wilson 0117 9502556 or Wanda Owen 0117 9732433

(Ed. Please don't feel that cliques exist within our ranks)

*Morven Beranek-Stanley:  
Envy remarkable sonnet  
Any benevolent remarks*

## TREASURER'S BIT

Graham Mullan

As usual, I need to moan that a number of 1998 subscriptions remain unpaid. If your name is on this list, please cough up the appropriate amount as soon as possible. If you are in contact with somebody whose name is on this list, please give them a gentle (!) reminder.

NAME	AMOUNT OWED
Andy Currant	£2.00
Marcel Dijkstra	£12.00
Heather Jackson	£12.00
Marco Paganuzzi	£12.00
Nick Patrick	£8.00
Mike Simms	£12.00
Pete Simpson	£12.00
Ian Standing	£12.00
Mike Thompson	£12.00
Steve Warr	£12.00

Graham Mullan:  
Hum, All nag Mr. A

Clive Owen:  
One vile WC

## Gravely bits

Tim in his quest for a dodgy motor has taken a lesson from Bristol's best ('Dick Lovett' - Ooh-er - this garrage really exists!) and has been seen wearing signet rings and heard saying "she's a lovely runner, I'll give 'er a service for yer". I hear that after declaring to one lovely runner "I can't live without your hair", she said "on yer bike".

## Phone poll

In this new section it is hoped to get the opinion of the club on important matters. To register your vote please phone our hotline, at much above national rates! In my post bag, bursting at the seams, were such important questions as 'up to what age does the hut need a legal warden?' (Thanks for that Steve). But this issues question was sent in by Millie, and is "should Andy and Tim run over the bonfire at the hut naked?"

Arj Boonman:  
On major ban



As you may have noticed I have included some anagrams of club members names. Well here are a few more without their owners names, can you work out who they are?

I am the shitty looney

Tart or lad porn

Am venereal entry, knobs

Do a skinny ant

On an arm job

Remarkable event sonny

I'm a zits wall

Hey! I am the tiny tools

My tits chill men

Old arrant port

Do a ninny task

Lord! Ran to trap

Let converts be cute

Hey! I am the oily snott

**Disclaimer** – the anagrams are intended merely as humorous reworkings of prominent club members names, and NOT as reflections of their characters. Suffice to say it reflects the dangers of my juvenile humour and free time mixed with the internet!

## COUNTY CLARE, MAY 1998

*Graham Mullan*

As will be well-known, a dinner was held at Ballynalackan Castle, near Doolin on May 23rd last to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Society's first trip to Co. Clare. Others will, I hope, write their own accounts of what was a most enjoyable occasion. These few words from me are intended purely to introduce the following narratives. These are drawn from the speech given after the dinner by Johnny Pitts, who very kindly wrote them out after the event so that they could be included here.

On the Sunday morning, after the Dinner, we went caving. The two photographs here show the party assembled outside Cullaun 2, before the trip, and underground. Only a couple of people failed to "bottom" the cave, Charlie Self had the excuse that he needed to bring his 4 year old daughter out after only a short distance. Tony Boycott's only justification was that he had been "last man standing" at the bar the previous night. And after lunch, those that could still move were taken on an Archaeological Tour of the Burren by the President.

In all a thoroughly enjoyable weekend - and some people are already asking about the next one!

### UBSS IN Co. CLARE

Extracts from the speech in Clare last May by Johnny Pitts

#### How it all began

In 1946 Bob Bendall and I were in the navy. We were not together but we corresponded. We had read Coleman and Dunnington's paper on Pollnagollum and were familiar with the accounts of the pre-war visits to Co. Clare by Baker and by the Yorkshire Ramblers Club. We agreed that when we were demobbed we should go there ourselves.

I came out of the navy early in 1947 but Bob, who was in the Pacific, did not come home until later. The UBSS was in a state of change. Opportunities for exploration were few and far between. GB had been explored, surveyed and studied. The only recent discovery by the Society was Rod's Pot, a small and unexciting cave. Rhino Rift was being excavated yet again, every cubic inch of the cave so far excavated by hand. To make matters even worse, the discoveries at Long Wood made by the Stride brothers while they were at Sidcot school were being treated as their private preserve even after one of them had become the secretary of the Society. This led to factions and quarrels.

Charles Barker, who with Francis Goddard had discovered GB Cave, had returned to an academic post at Bristol from his wartime work on explosives. He also was frustrated by the lack of exploration opportunities and found the atmosphere in the Society of squabbles and back-biting uncongenial for grown-ups. We decided that we would have a holiday in Ireland. We would go to Mitchelstown and Dunmore to see some caves, then on to the south west for some sightseeing and gluttony and finally up to Lisdoonvarna for more caves. The plan was for the two of us to travel on Charles's motor-bike together with all our kit. We had to make the latter as compact and light as possible. We made a ladder of wire and duralumin tube tailored for the pitch in the Old Cave at Mitchelstown. We spaced the rungs as far apart as we dared in order to reduce the weight and took the minimum amount of rope that we hoped would be enough for tethers. Rope in those days of course was hemp.

All went well until we got to Rosslare. The first problem was that the vital petrol ration coupons, ordered well in advance had not arrived. My recollection is that after the best part of a day spent telephoning Dublin, or more correctly waiting for telephone connections to come available, we only got as far as Wexford on the first day. The more serious problem was that whilst the bike, with its heavy load, had withstood Welsh roads it was no match for Irish roads. After the third tyre failure we decided that Co. Clare was not for us that year. After visiting Mitchelstown we returned to England.



By the following year, 1948, Bob Bendall had returned from the navy and the three of us decided to renew our attempts to get to Co. Clare. Charles had more time (and money) than us to devote to this trip. He got in touch with Jack Coleman and Norman Dunnington, who were planning to continue their work in Pollnagollum that summer, and arranged to join them at the Irish Arms in Lisdoonvarna, which was their preferred base in Co. Clare. The rest of us joined up with them two weeks later. Charles had given up motor bikes, following a serious accident, and my attempt to acquire some wheels had failed when I discovered why the ancient motor bike I had bought cheaply, was so cheap. Public transport was the order of the day. I stayed at the Irish Arms with Charles, and Bob camped at Pollnagollum with Mike Gummer who had joined us. We spent a lot of time in Pollnagollum and thereabouts and did some minor exploration. Bob and Mike had the interesting experience of having a party from the Wiltshire Caving Club led by Adrian Hopkins camping not far away. It was a mixed party. After they had been there a week a sermon was preached in the church in Lisdoonvarna condemning the sinful behaviour of the people camping at Lismorahoun. Charles and I lost no opportunity of accusing Bob and Mike of damaging the public reputation of cavers by behaving sinfully in their tent.

Probably the most exciting event was descending Poll Elva. We had taken the light ladder from the previous trip and had made a second one like it. Together we hoped they would bottom the pitch. They did - just. But we sadly underestimated the amount of rope needed to tether the ladder. As a result we had no lifeline. We went into Lisdoonvarna but failed to find any where that sold rope. Finally, we bought a couple of clothes lines. Tied together they provided a bit of psychological support, particularly when negotiating the join between the two ladders half way down the pot. We had forgotten about that when we made them. There was a gap of over three feet with no rungs.

Next year, 1949, Bob and I decided that the cave with the most potential was the Coolagh River Cave. It looked as though it was an important part of a complex underground drainage system with a large catchment area. Charles had told us that he had seen a sign advertising food and drinks near Ballinalaken Castle so I wrote to the 'Tea Rooms' at the castle and asked if we could camp anywhere in the vicinity. I had a charming letter back from Maisie O'Callaghan saying she would be delighted if we camped on the lawn. The letter head showed clearly that this was no tea room but a hotel, possibly a grand one. In our indigent state this was a matter of some concern. However we need not have worried. Six of us, Bob and I together with Joan Light (later my wife), Noel Blackwell, John Nash and Hubert Wright, camped on the lawn up by the castle and the O'Callaghans treated us with the greatest kindness and generosity. They sold us food, provided us with water and gave us turf to light huge fires in the castle to dry out our caving clothes. On our last day, when we were packing up to leave, one of the maids came up to the lawn to tell us that Maisie wanted to see us down at the hotel. We wondered what heinous offence we had committed, but when we got there we were ushered into the dining room and given a meal. Maisie would accept not a penny piece for it.

It is not surprising that on all future visits we stayed inside the hotel, not outside in a tent. Ballinalaken Castle Hotel was much the best discovery we made in Co. Clare. Nothing, today, would persuade me to go down any of the caves again but I will go back to the hotel whenever I can find an excuse. With Maisie's granddaughter, Marian, looking after the guests upstairs and Marian's husband producing superb food down in the kitchen, this hotel, with its magnificent unspoiled views in every direction, is hard to beat for any cave or karst enthusiast with a taste for the good things in life.

That first year we decided right away that we had to tackle the exploration, survey and study of the cave as Coleman and Dunnington had tackled Pollnagollum, and as Glennie and others were currently tackling Ffynon Ddu. We had to do it systematically and thoroughly. This we did, and it took us three years. Of course we took time off occasionally and looked into various other holes, known and unknown. But we did not let them distract us from the job in hand.

During our last season in the Coolagh River when we were completing the, by then, rather boring task of following the individual beds through the cave, two members of the team, Kay Dixon and I think Noel Blackwell, went off to look at a new area with attractive geology and topography but no known caves. This was the west side of Poulacapple and they discovered the Cullaun series of caves. The cave they entered and partly explored was Cullaun 1, the cave which subsequently earned the nickname 'The Teenagers Cave'. The reason for this was that this year, 1951, was the first on which some of the

older members of the Society came to Co. Clare to see what we were up to. Trat, Bertie and Marjorie Crook, Molly Hall and Frank Frost of the Wessex Club came to Ballinalacken while we were there. The discovery of Cullaun 1 greatly excited them and they seized it with enthusiasm, taking it over completely. In no time at all Trat was striding through the cave pontificating and producing theories. I think it was Molly in her gently mocking way who christened her older companions the 'teenagers' because of their rather juvenile behaviour.

That really established Co. Clare as a major caving area for the Society. Not only had members surveyed and studied a major cave in a way that added substantially to the understanding of the hydrology and speleology of the area, but they had also discovered a completely new series of extensive caves that were waiting to be explored and studied. Little did they know that, thanks largely to Trat's newly aroused interest in the area, half a century of underground work lay ahead!

### The UBSS in the late forties

From 1945 to 1950 was a time of transition for the Society. People like Francis Goddard and Rod Pearce, medical students who had been successive secretaries during the war, had moved on to adult life and had less and less time for caving. Professor Dobson, who had been President all through the war, died in 1947 and was succeeded by Trat who had been released from internment in Singapore at the end of the war. He continued working in Singapore until 1950 but visited the UK on many occasions during those years and picked up the threads of his long involvement with the Society. Bertie Crook, who as Treasurer had played the role of elder statesman through the war years, progressively handed over that role to Trat. Bertie had served in the First War but was still actively caving during this period. Desmond Donovan returned from the army, becoming the curator of the museum in 1947. New students appeared, like Arthur ApSimon, who half a century on would become President, and Ralph Stride, who instantly became secretary, and almost as quickly became involved in bitter factional squabbles.

There were some very interesting characters about at this time. Dina Dobson, the widow of the late President was a large lady who swept through the Society like a ship in full sail. She married Martin Hinton, recently retired from the Natural History Museum, and changed her name to Dina Dobson-Hinton. Martin was a dryly humorous man of a sceptical disposition. He jointly edited the proceedings with Dina and appeared at the hut occasionally in her wake. He was a palaeontologist of considerable distinction and is suspected of having been the perpetrator of the Piltdown Man hoax. I can well believe it.

A dynamic Italian physicist, Beppo Ochiellini, with a nose for important research projects came to work at the Royal Fort with Cecil Powell. He was a caving enthusiast and became involved with Max Cosyns and Marcel Loubens in the exploration of the Pierre St Martin cave in the Pyrenees. Loubens, of course, was later killed in the 300 metre entrance shaft when he fell off the end of the winch cable. Beppo brought the other two to Bristol and we had a few caving trips with them. I remember going down Swildons Hole with them and Trat. It was interesting that Trat, Cosyns and Beppo had one thing in common - they had all been in prison. Cosyns had been in a concentration camp, Beppo had been a political prisoner, and Trat, of course, had been interned in Singapore. My clearest memory of that visit was a film show in the geography lecture theatre. Loubens's film of the Pyrenees was shown and we retaliated with the Lamb Leer film. Trat operated the projector but could not get the take-up spool to work. We watched with horror as miles of 16mm film festooned itself all over the theatre.

My dear old friend Charles Barker, still reasonably hale and hearty in his eighties I am delighted to say, brought a great advantage to the Society. When he returned from his wartime work on explosives some of these useful chemicals came with him. At that time it was virtually impossible to obtain commercial blasting explosives for amateur use. Charles's souvenirs seemed like manna from heaven. There was a problem however. Military explosives were not ideal for blasting. They were rigid solids that could not be moulded to the surface of the rock to be demolished. Much of the explosive force was dissipated in the inevitable air gap. They had a much higher detonation velocity than gelignite and were very stable. This made them difficult to set off. A primer explosive had to be used in conjunction with a powerful detonator. This was extremely inconvenient. Charles used to cast the explosives into



appropriate shapes after melting them in a saucepan on his mother's gas stove. He then made up appropriate primers and we had to attempt to find bits of rock of the right shape and size to blow up. After numerous disappointing bangs Charles applied his fertile mind to the wartime developments of 'hollow' or 'focused' charges. He cast lumps of TNT RDX with a conical recess on the face that was to come in contact with the rock. They were no more successful than the earlier bangs.

His last hurrah was an experiment to cut down one of Trai's large trees with a cunning device based on this principle. He reasoned that a flexible tube filled with explosive and wrapped twice around the trunk of a tree would create an annular space of roughly triangular cross section surrounded on two sides by explosive and on the third side by the tree. This, he assured us, would act as a circumferential hollow charge and cut the tree trunk in two. It did not. It succeeded in turning three feet of the lower trunk into a curious flexible structure about which the fifty feet of tree above gyrated in a drunken way without falling over.

By this time commercial blasting explosives had become available. To get a licence however we had to have our explosives store inspected by the police. It was therefore a matter of some urgency that we should dispose of Charles's private munitions. We blew them up in the bottom of a blind swallet not far from the hut, with the secondary objective of digging a new bog. To our surprise, a couple with their clothing in some disarray emerged from the bracken close by. The expressions on their faces combined astonishment, lust and pride in about equal proportions.

*Johnny.K.Pitts*

8.6.98



*Linda Wilson:  
On wild snail*



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### UBSS T-shirt Order

For anyone interested, there will be a new design of UBSS T-shirts being made shortly. Purchase is strictly on an order to demand basis, i.e. anyone who wants on has to tell me (Taz). The design will be found on the web, and sent out via e-mail shortly.