

# UBSS

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**Newsletter**

[www.ubss.org.uk](http://www.ubss.org.uk)

## **Picos Expedition**

**Hard caving and helicopter rides in the Pyrenees**

## **Croesor - Rhosydd**

**Adventure in abandoned Welsh mines**

## **CHECC 2009**

**Cross dressing, nudity, and maybe a bit of caving**

**...and more!**

**Autumn/Winter 2009**

**FREE!**  
For all UBSS  
Members



# Editor's Piece

by Frank

It looks like some of us have been busy caving since the last newsletter (well, that was half a year ago). We've got two articles on the summer's Picos expedition with OUCC. Also from Mike's logbook is an exciting trip in an abandoned Welsh mine "filled with a range of inflatables, pumps, pulleys, rope". Whatever floats your boat Mike.

I shouldn't mock, the only new cave I went in over the summer had a plastic cow inside it (Gupteshwar Cave - Nepal's answer to Wookie Hole). Apparently if you rub the cow's udders your wishes will come true. Don't know about you but rubbing some plastic udders IS my wish come true.

Anyway, as always if you get up to anything exciting over the next term, or just have something useful to say, please write it up and send it to [newsletter@ubss.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@ubss.org.uk). It would be good to hear some new cavers' experiences in particular!

# News

- The joint WCC/UBSS digging team receive the 1<sup>st</sup> Tony Jarrett Digging Award for the Charterhouse breakthroughs.



*Top: The Tony Jarrett Digging Award*

*Left: The digging team (less Si Flower)*

- The club would like to thank Ali Moody for her kind donations of caving kit to the club. It's very much appreciated! If anyone else has any unloved kit they'd be happy to donate to the club for the tackle store, some cold students with sore bums would be grateful!

# Picos Expedition



By Kayleigh Gilkes

The OUCC Picos expedition this year was aiming to connect the Texa / Tormenta system to the resurgence at Culiembro (over 1km lower) in the Cares gorge. Tormenta is apparently a much harder entrance to the system, so Texa was the entrance of choice. Andy Wright and I headed out to Spain in the middle of July to join the expedition which had started at the beginning of the month.

A rapid drive to Dover left us with several hours to explore both the town and the castle – most of which appears to be free – before our ferry to Boulogne. Once across the channel, we headed south, taking just over 2 days to reach Asturias. En route we learnt some vital information:

- 13 year old road maps don't help,
- French toll roads are not that pricey,
- if you want a coffee get one made by a person (somehow the French machine stuff is even worse than at home),
- nowhere in France opens on Sunday,
- campsites don't like you turning up at 11pm.

Once in Asturias, we headed to Covadonga, from where we intended to drive up to Los Lagos (the nearest car park to camp). However, cars were not being allowed up for another 30 minutes, so we explored the cave at Covadonga which contains the shrine of the first king of Spain. Andy's comment in last years log book stated that "this cave needs bang!" - it still does.



*The view from the kitchen in Ario.*

Allowed to head up the long winding road at last, we proceeded to the tourist Mecca which is Los Lagos in the Picos de Europa national park. From here, it was only a short (2½ hour) walk up a small (610m) hill to reach our home for the next 4 weeks, Ario. On the ascent, we met Paul and his girlfriend on their way down to collect more food from the trailer and were soon informed of two stories from the early part of the expedition:

- Dickon had been caught short in the cave and had defecated in a small plastic bag, which he had then placed in Paul's (borrowed for the trip) dry bag. He had then tried to return said dry bag to Paul with the line "you may want to disinfect that" whilst standing brandishing the other bag in the doorway to the kitchen. This earned him the nickname *bag in hand*.
- Paul's first caving trip had also been his light's last. On the way down the first pitch on hearing a cry of 'oh f\*£\$' he looked up to

see a falling prussic bag, dropped by Nick (expedition leader) just before it hit his head and broke the light.

The second story prompted Andy to tell us about Nick kicking stones on him last year. The moral seems to be don't cave below Nick.

Anyhoo, on arriving at the campsite in the picturesque Ario bowl, we wandered into the kitchen (an old shepherds' hut with a tarp roof) and met Dave Rose, who was writing an article for the Mail on Sunday Live supplement (published 23rd August 2009). Ario in the sunshine is a truly beautiful place, a grassy bowl in the limestone mountains, with a view straight across to the central massif and the highest peak in the Picos. The mountains are home to many cattle along with some sheep and goats, all of which wear bells. These cows look very cute and I was totally taken in, however they are far from the lovable, docile creatures that they first appear. Roughly one week later, Nick and

I were to return from a nightmare of a shopping trip to find that the cows had gotten in to the kitchen and turned it upside down. There were cookers in piles of dung on the floor, food everywhere and no hope of the cup of tea we had been longing for. Total losses to the cows are not known, however they include; at least 2 of Andy's t-shirts, lots of boxers, 1 of Nick's t-shirts, the cafetiere, all the sugar, lots of flapjacks and a lot of sleep.

Prior to all the cattle related problems though, we had to contend with strong winds. Over our first 3 mornings, we spent considerable amounts of time trying to prevent the roof blowing off the kitchen. When our attempts failed, rocks were blown either into the shelter causing a risk to people and damage to boxes, tins, etc. or out in the direction of those desperately wrestling with flapping wings of tarp. Eventually the roof was lashed down with a combination of rope, metal bars and tent poles which survived to the end of the expedition.

As this was a caving expedition, I guess I should mention the cave. Texa was about an hour's walk from Ario, over the ridge and down steep scree slopes on the other side. The way was marked by cairns and reflective markers, which it turns out, are only useful when they can be seen. My first trip into the cave was the day after I arrived. Paul was heading down to underground camp and I was to accompany him as far as the brew-stop to take some stuff down before 'bouncing' back out. Halfway down the entrance pitch, you land on the top of a large snow plug (left over from last winter's snow), which was to cause many problems for people on the way back out of the cave, but does mean you get a nice cold



*Loveable and docile*

breeze from the entrance when you're on the surface. On reaching the bottom of the 2<sup>nd</sup> pitch, you scramble down a scree slope and climb down into most people's least favourite part of the cave (I however liked it because it was caving) the 'meanders'. This section comprises quite tight rifts, a couple of squeezes and two very annoying small pitches. Beyond the meanders is the top of Sinestra Partiale, a reasonable length pitch, with a deviation which was to prove to me that laziness is definitely not worth it, as not having clipped my cows-tails in, I lost the deviation and couldn't reach it without changing over, prussiking up and climbing round to it.

Once down (a lot of swearing later) we reached the top of No Hay Crystale, from where we could hear the voices of ascending cavers. These were the people I was supposed to meet at brew-stop, so I handed my bag to Paul, quite happy to be turning around and awaited the arrival of Tony and Dickon. Being informed that one of the others behind was having problems and might appreciate my help with his tackle sac; I sat down and waited as the others continued out. Half an hour later, there was no sign of Toby and Mike, I was shivering quite a lot, so decided

they would have to carry their own stuff and headed out. I needn't have worried, Toby had accidentally dropped the troublesome bag down a blind pitch. I arrived back on the surface in daylight and walked back to camp with Dickon, not having enjoyed the prussic back (this did not bode well). Toby and Mike made it back to camp at 2am, so I would have caught hypothermia if I had waited at the pitch head.

My next trip into the cave and Andy's first trip of this year was again meant to be a bounce to brew-stop. Rosa was heading to camp, so Andy, Avelina and I were to go down and meet exiting avers to help with bags. This time, the trip down progressed with only a minor problem when Andy nearly got stuck in the meanders. However, I still didn't reach brew-stop, as we met Nick, 2 cylinders and a tackle sac at the top of Acrobatica. He was returning to underground camp, so having been told not to bash the cylinders, I took the stuff and headed back up to Avelina to share the load, whilst Andy went down to help the divers. We were very careful with the cylinders for a while, but as we got more and more tired, the instruction became more like advice and they were heard to hiss more than once. By the time we reached the surface, it was dark and foggy and we were all knackered. Oh well, we could leave some stuff and it was only an hour back. 2½ hours later after a great deal of searching for reflective markers and also a fair while lost in the Ario bowl itself (Andy thought we had found Cheddar gorge) we arrived back at camp to find a wonderful dinner in the pot.

None of us were overly enthusiastic about the cave the

next day, but we weren't the last to reach the surface. Hilary and Ben had had a problem on the entrance pitch, when she had slipped on the snow plug and broken her croll in the subsequent fall. After arriving at the surface, they had another long walk in the fog to get home. Thankfully as most people were leaving and we needed to go shopping, we could avoid the cave and help carry stuff down the hill. Shopping completed we headed back to camp expecting to find Dickon waiting for us. Arriving back at 22.30, there was no sign of him, we assumed he was asleep.

Next morning we awoke to find still no Dickon. Unsure as to what could have happened to him, Andy went to the refugio, whilst Avelina and I asked walkers and walked up the hill to get phone signal. At the refugio, Andy had to admit that we hadn't seen him for 24 hours, which resulted in a helicopter being scrambled to look for him. Just as Avelina and I returned, having discovered that he had gone drinking in Cangas with the divers for the night, the helicopter arrived on the scene. The bomberos didn't seem bothered about the wasted trip, saying it was a nice day and they wanted to fly. Moral of the story – tell people where you are going or at least leave a note!

Once Dickon and his hangover returned, things went back to normal, we had finished our kitchen and tackle store clean-up (people really should put their underwear away not leave it strewn around sopping wet in the store) and spent a very pleasant afternoon in the sun. The next morning was less pleasant as we were awoken by Dickon shouting that Nick & Rosa had missed their 8am callout. With so few people on the surface and the long

distance to the cave, Andy and I walked to the cave entrance whilst Dickon and Avelina called the Guarda Civil. On our arrival at the cave, we could hear Nick shouting something about a rope. It turned out that the rope had been towed up the 2nd pitch and was hanging over one of the rebelay's well out of the reach of Nick & Rosa. This was easily solved by Andy by the time I heard the buzzing of the approaching helicopter. A spectacular piece of flying allowed the helicopter to hover with its nose into the hill so the guys could jump out. Leon was ready to go and was very keen to enter the cave and do his job, but he never got the chance as Nick appeared at the top of the pitch. By the time Andy exited, the helicopter had returned, bringing more would-be rescuers armed with massive sandwiches and chilled drinks. Unfortunately for Rosa and Avelina the Spanish don't expect veggies.

It was another gloriously sunny day and the pilot seemed keen to fly, so we all went soaring over the mountains back to Ario (this is a much nicer way to get back from the cave!). By this time, Avelina had all of Leon's contact details and we had arranged for him to come caving with us later in the trip. Laura and Ignacio at the refugio had helped us so much and it was only right that we spent the night drinking their very fine wine.

The rescue had delayed Avelina, Andy and Dickon's entry to the cave to start the de-rig so they headed down the next day, whilst Nick and I went shopping and took Rosa to Cangas to start her journey home. It turns out that you can't go shopping in Cangas on a Monday – the supermarkets are all closed. Also you can't buy stop bobbins in the gear store and a new stop is €81. This was a slight problem as the cave was eating stops and Nick had

already killed both his and Fleur's. My kit was rapidly becoming a spares supply due to my lack of caving, so my stop would be the next victim. My helmet was already being used by Andy and Avelina had both my back-up light and foot loops.

The next day there was a lot to do. I sorted out the kitchen and disinfected everything whilst Nick called England to sort out the newspaper problem. Doing all this, getting snow and packing a bag for camp meant that by the time we got to the cave, collected the bags left at the bottom of the 2nd pitch and Nick rebolted the 1st pitch, it was 6pm before he headed down to camp and I took the bags back over the hill ready to spend a few days on my own carrying stuff down the hill and awaiting the arrival of Tom.

I found Tom on my way back up the hill the next day, struggling under a veritable mountain of bags. As plans had changed Andy and Avelina were due to come out that evening, so we made them a big (veggie) meal and went to bed.

8am came and there was no sign of Andy and Avelina and the clag was thicker than ever. I quickly packed a bag and we were setting off to the cave when we heard a noise in the fog. Yelling back got a reply from Andy. With a sigh of relief, I dropped the bag and we ran up the hill to meet them. It transpired that they had reached the surface to find a pea souper of a night. Exhausted and unable to find the route, they had bivouacked on the mountain.

A few days passed without incident, thankfully. Nick and Dickon came out of the cave earlier than expected, Chris arrived and the cows continued their onslaught. Nobody went underground until the Saturday. It

was a damp morning with intermittent foggy spells. Andy, Avelina and Tom were to bounce to brew stop in order to collect the bags that had been carried up from camp, whilst Nick would bounce a bag from midway between camp and brew stop up to brew stop before being joined by Chris and Dickon to camp. I would carry more stuff back from the cave.

Just after Chris & Dickon went underground, it started raining. The rain abated briefly for half an hour and then came back with a vengeance. I could barely look up to see where I was going. I was absolutely drenched by the time I squelched into the kitchen. I started cooking dinner, not expecting anyone to be back for several hours. About 7pm a dripping wet Chris and Dickon appeared in the doorway saying that the cave was flooding and they had been unable to descend one of the pitches. The others were below them and they were understandably worried. Chris attempted to contact people who would know more about the cave's hydrology, to no avail. With no other option, we called the 2<sup>nd</sup> rescue in a week. The bad weather meant that Leon, Justo and Jonay had to walk up to Ario rather than fly. There was no way we could do anything until the next morning as the water would still be high.

At 7am I was woken by the Guarda and at 8am, they and Dickon set off for the cave. Chris and I continued to try to contact people and packed a bag with food, a stove and a storm shelter, which I then took to the cave. Meanwhile, Justo and Leon had been unable to find their way through the meanders. Radioing up to Dickon for instruction, they had set off again when they bumped into the others making

their way out now the water had subsided. They had spent the night above brew stop where they were out of reach of the water. Everyone was out safe and sound, but with Dickon leaving the next day and nothing above camp de-rigged it was starting to look like it may not be completed.

A couple of days later, Nick was planning on heading in for an epic 1 man de-rigging trip. We made our way down with no problems to meet our bags, all 3 were quite heavy and I was not looking forward to the return journey. I was trying out a pantin and had great hopes for it (Avelina claimed it had revolutionised her SRT), however it didn't seem compatible with my technique and just caused my croll to slip. I took 1 bag and Chris took 2 up until the meanders where we used teamwork to pass and haul the bags through. Come the end and the tightest of the squeezes, I'd taken the bags through and was ferrying them up the climb when Chris started shouting and swearing, he'd got his head stuck. I always consider tackle sacks to be male, but Chris had decided that we had 2 girls and a fat boy (he was the lightest though). Given that Chris was by now very tired, I took the fat boy from him and sent him up the last 2 pitches with 1 bag whilst I followed at a painfully slow speed with the other 2. On reaching the top of the snow plug, Chris decided to welcome me with a shout of 'bad news... the clag hasn't lifted and there's no sign of Nick'. We were quite confused as to Nick's whereabouts by this point having been expecting to pass him on our way out. Finding our way back through the clag we discovered that it appeared to be his turn to get ill and he was still in his tent.

The fog stayed for another night. Nick made it in to the cave for his triple bounce de-rigging trip to de-

rig everything below brew-stop. Tom and Andy went in a day later to carry bags out. I continued to ferry stuff down the hill and came back to cook dinner.

Most of the caving was over and we had to move stuff down the hill in earnest. In 6 days, I did 7 trips down to Lagos in addition to collecting kit from the cave. Thankfully some of the kit is stored in caves at Ario. In our trip down 'cheese cave', Nick and I had great difficulty getting all the barrels etc. to the bottom of the pitch safely. We resorted to me balancing on a scree slope and lowering stuff down in a bag. The cave destroyed my trousers once and for all (all my kit had already gone down the hill).

Our last night was 'the night of the falling stars' (as a Spanish man I met on the hill told me), so we spent the evening watching shooting stars and drinking wine. On Thursday, we headed down the hill for the last time and packed stuff into the cars. We were heading for Cangas, where we had arranged to meet Leon & Justo for drinks, when on pulling into a petrol station, Nick realised that the Frontera's radiator had sprung a leak and we called the breakdown service. After great difficulty, we found places to stay, had showers and went to meet Leon, Justo and their friends in the pub. As we hadn't eaten and the pub was Asturian beef burgers, we decided to get our own back and eat the damn cows!

Even though the caving hadn't been exactly what I had been intending, lack of fitness for prussiking showed, I had really enjoyed Ario and we had met some great people. What I need is a horizontal expedition, "none of this vertical shite".

# PICOS In Search of the Ultimate Through Trip



By **Dickon Morris**

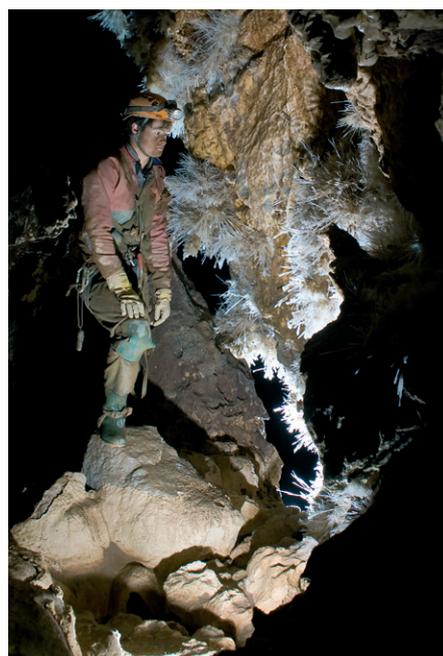
The alarm brought me slowly and reluctantly awake, I had slept long and well but leaving the warm comfort of a sleeping bag to face the reality of a chilly cave is never easy even with an exciting pushing trip ahead. This was my fourth consecutive day underground and my first day of pushing and I was pretty excited, the day before last Phil Rowsell and Max Minckler had done the first of the pushing and found a couple of hundred of metres of passage including 3 pitches, a fourth pitch dropped into a deep and murky sump but there were other leads, two unpushed crawls and a cavity above the sump that it was possible might lead somewhere.

After the usual breakfast of pasta and hot chocolate and hour of so of aimless activity that only very slowly achieved a state of readiness we were ready to go. The pushing team comprised myself, Phil, Mike Hopley and Toby Fox. It took under an hour to reach the bottom of knife pitch where the routes to the downstream sump and the high level phreas diverged. The route from here lay up a soaring aven that Phil had bolt climbed the previous year. A rope hung down and stretched far beyond the beam of my duo. It was a mildly unnerving experience getting onto a rope with no anchors in sight but a number of people had gone before without problems so I clamped my jammers to the rope and began my ascent with steady and deliberate

frogging motions. I was soon cocooned in the strange sense of safety that comes with being on a rope in a huge shaft and after passing several rebelayes and struggling up a very steep muddy slope I was at the top.

A large passage led off, the wall was covered with huge scallops suggesting a slow flow-rate, it couldn't really be more textbook. We had just climbed an aven and were now staring down the most perfect phreatic tube that I had ever seen, some years ago this would have been the top of a phreatic loop meaning that the water table had dropped at least 50m since this passage was formed. However the greatest visual treat was yet to come for at the top of the next climb the passage was festooned with stunning aragonite crystals growing out of the wall at all angles, some grew about 50cm from the wall while maintaining a diameter of only a few millimetres. Everything was brilliantly white except the narrow path that we had trodden causing irreparable damage. Touching the wall was like putting your hand on a thistle head, as dozens of tiny needles pierced your skin. At one point the passage lowered to the point that you were forced to duck beneath hundreds of irreplaceable aragonite crystals. A particularly fine stalactite festooned with crystals lay just to the left under a rock shelter. Phil stopped, turned around and announced that he would personally kill anybody that smashed it, however accidental.

**“Phil announced that he would personally kill anybody that smashed it, however accidental.”**



Beyond lay several more short pitches and more pretties, insignificant compared to what we had just seen. After a short section of grotty but interestingly sculpted passage we reached a short muddy climb which had thwarted the previous year's expedition due to a lack of tackle. It could probably have been free-climbed with relative ease, if it had been a sunny grit-stone cliff then I would not have thought twice about lead climbing it. However at this depth the sense of remoteness is very keen, and the dire consequences of an accident are never forgotten. The passage at the top was dreary and muddy, a miserable continuation of a cave that had – albeit briefly – been very attractive. We dropped another two pitches (discovered only two days earlier) and we were at the front of exploration. A sense of excitement that I had never before felt in caving gripped me, we could make a major discovery within the next hour!

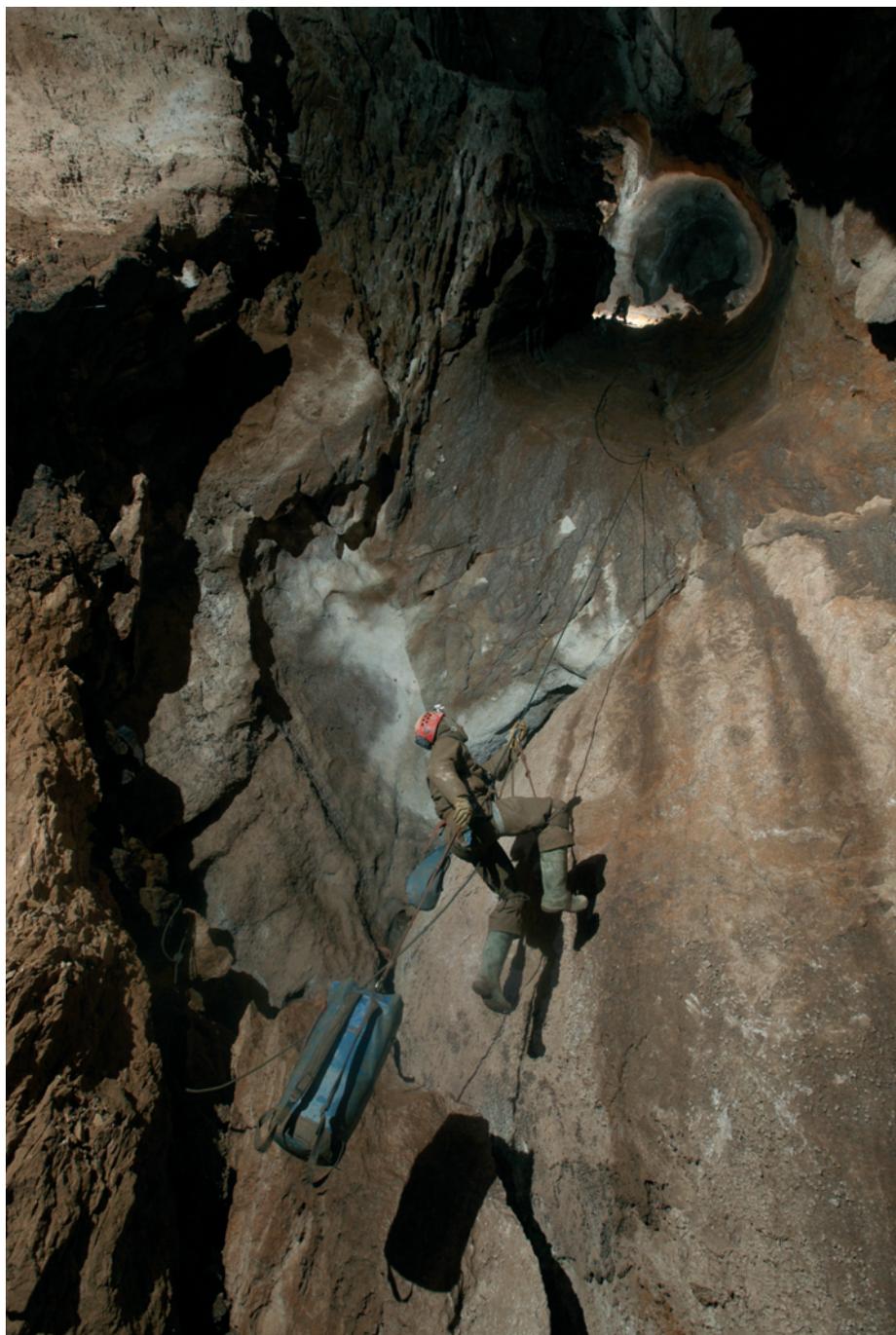
While Mike and Toby redirected the rope of the final pitch to examine a crawl, Phil and I continued down towards the sump. After a difficult, loose freeclimb we were in a large mud-floored tunnel-like passage with interesting oxbows which rejoined after only a few metres. The passage down here was about as phreatic as a passage can be, with almost no vadose development. Huge scallops covered every inch of the passage that was not buried under mud. A feature of the this type of passage is the dreaded alcove, a small passage that in a vadose cave would be a decent lead but in this type of passage almost always pinches out after a couple of metres, annoyingly often turning a bend before it does so. This is no problem if the passage is easy to access but if it requires a bolt climb to reach it is extremely annoying.

Phil pointed out the second unpushed crawl and I bounded off to explore it, my excitement had reached a fever pitch as I dropped to the ground and hauled myself forward to be greeted by rock meeting mud with not even a hope of a way on. I was slightly disappointed and followed Phil down to the sump feeling the expectant daring-to-hope excitement that comes with a long-shot lead.

The sump was a very forbidding place indeed, nowhere else in the cave did one feel so keenly the 800m of rock above one's head. The muddy phreatic tube simply took a sudden right hand turn and dropped vertically 30m into a very uninviting sump pool. On the previous trip Phil had rigged a rope down to the surface of the water but had not surveyed this drop due to lack of time. He now

thrust a tape measure into my hand and explained the very simple task of measuring the drop while also commenting that rope failure on this pitch would not result in a quick death as it would from pitches with a rock floor but would dump one in the sump pool to a very slow but almost certain death. With this pleasant thought in mind I'll admit that I felt more than a little nervous as I lowered my weight onto my stop before abseiling down to the surface of the water trailing one end of the tape measure while Phil held the other.

As a final touch I dropped the weighted end of the tape measure into the sump pool. It did not touch the bottom, the sump dropped vertically for at least 20m, a very final end. The pitch and sump were duly christened 'What we gonna tell the boys'. Toby and Mike had since returned with the report that the second crawl ended in a similar manner to the one that I had already explored. There was now only one lead left and it was a definite long-shot but the cavity above the pitch into the sump deserved investigation.



To reach the mouth of this cavity required a bolted traverse so we watched as Phil put in a thru-bolt and then transferred his weight onto it using a daisy chain. He then reached out as far as he could from this new bolt and put in another which he then transferred his weight onto. From this position he could see that the cavity was indeed an alcove. So that was it, all the major leads had been tidied up, the cave was practically dead.



However I refused to give up this easily and on the way back to camp I spotted a small opening just before the final pitch. It looked to be a fairly easy free climb of around 8m to this opening, and just my style of climbing as well, slabby and technical rather than steep and pumpy. However I soon realised that it was not as easy as it looked and was forced to smear on a shallow scallop mark while gripping a thin flake with the tips of my fingers. I looked down and with no small amount of unease realised that I could only go up. I was only about 5m from the ground but this is one place where you do not want to break a

leg. After a couple more sketchy moves I finally found good holds on a huge thread. The cavity went nowhere but I didn't care – the adrenaline was pumping and I felt privileged to have experienced the isolation and remoteness of this place, half a day's worth of prussiking from sunlight and grass. As I called for a rope and abseiled off the thread I thought not only of the food waiting back at camp but of the living world that awaited my pleasure the following evening.

joy I experienced when I saw sunlight pouring down the entrance shaft after over 100 hours without it was an overwhelming sensation, a sensation that no one who has not been underground for a prolonged period can imagine. We may have found very little but the carrot that was dangled in front of me before being denied was intoxicating and I will be returning to claim that carrot of discovery.

Caves are wondrous places and I expect I will continue to explore them for the rest of my life but the

*Photos courtesy of Robbie Shone ([www.shonephotography.com](http://www.shonephotography.com))*

## Meanwhile in Goatchurch...

**Cat is demonstrating why you should always wear a helmet while caving**

By **Ruth Briggs**



*At first she enjoyed this new-found freedom until...*



*she hit here head on the cave wall...*



*...and died.*

No Cats or cavers were injured in the making of this cartoon. The events shown here are fictional and are not based on a true story. UBSS will accept no liability for any injuries endured in recreating this cartoon strip.

# Croesor - Rhosydd



By Mike Salter

So I decided a fun weekend away over Easter was on the cards. I'd heard of a mine trip that including zip-wires and boat crossings which sounded like the funnest thing since sliced bread – so after a few emails (47 to be precise) eight of us headed up to Snowdonia for Easter weekend.

On closer inspection the super-fun trip we'd all envisaged wasn't quite right; filled with loose slate,

dodgy abseils and freezing underground lakes this was apparently no walk in the park. None of us had been before so all we had to go on was a few internet reports that didn't exactly fill us with confidence. So we went equipped with three tackle bags filled with a range of inflatables, pumps, pulleys, rope, string, maps, compasses, food, water and a whole host more stuff that we might need, plus personal SRT kits and buoyancy aids on top of the usual caving attire.

It was an hour walk from the cottage to the entrance and so five of us made it, rather hot and sweaty, to the entrance of Croesor having found out why most hikers choose not to wear a wetsuit.

Somewhat apprehensively we headed in. Once inside we were all a bit aware of how different this was to a cave, we even found a gate that was closed behind us according to the Country Code. We quickly came across huge chamber flooded with deep eerily blue water, pushing on we soon found the top of the first pitch. The pitches weren't so nice (but actually better than I expected!), the rigging relied heavily on rope-protectors and whilst most was in pretty good condition it certainly wasn't the nice free-hanging P-bolted pitches we were used to.

At the bottom of the pitch we made our way across the huge chamber, we'd heard that even speaking loudly would cause slate to fall from the roof – we had no clue if this was true but weren't in the mood for any scientific experiments. We found the second pitch and I reached the conclusion that my feeling of being mildly warm had progressed through hot and become somewhat of a problem. After a second pitch we came across the first zip-wire across a lake, we used two pulleys to make the crossing easier and I was intrigued to find myself covered in flakes of metal by the time I got to the other side. This is perhaps not too great for the pulleys.

Next obstacle was to cross a lake using inflatable boats. Frank had lent us his boat which included an "ingenious pump" where you



waved a large bag around your head, sealed it, and then used the trapped air to inflate the boat. This, I imagine, is fantastic on a breezy beach but is frankly stupid when you're in a ruddy slate mine. So instead we got out the finest vessel the tackle store had to offer; "Surfbreaker" had clearly seen better days and the number of "repaired" punctures was in double figures. With Edd and I safely across James embarked on his voyage, sailing isn't perhaps a strength of James', he promptly fell out of the boat and made a very brisk swim across. At this point a cold and wet James discovered why many of us had opted to overheat in wetsuits. Ben and Ross made successful crossing in a rapidly deflating boat, we packed it up and pushed on.

So we headed on consulting our survey for the route, things were complicated somewhat by the fact that whoever had drawn our survey had clearly forgotten his tape measure for this bit. I'd promised James a good warmth-generating stomp to the next obstacle; instead we crossed a quarter of the survey in around two minutes.

And so we reached the first of the bridges, a couple of rotten beams across a flooded chamber with some in-situ safety lines. I was excited to finally find a use for being taught how to balance on a beam during PE at primary school.



The second bridge isn't there at all so out came the pulleys again for another pulley-wrecking tyrolean line. Edd came close to nearly destroying what was left of the bridge, the one beam that's left hanging from the ceiling ominously swung after receiving an accidental kick from him.

Things were progressing well as we neared the end of the Croesor section, we'd reached the "Bridge of Death" which is half-bridge-

half-tyrolean. The first half sagged under each person's weight and it was a relief to clip into the chain at the midpoint. I was excited to discover during the weekend that "disco-leg" is actually a recognised phrase and was equally impressed when James suffered from what can be only be described as "drug-fuelled-rave-leg". All across the "Bridge of Death" and we'd reached the final obstacle "The Chamber of Horrors". Unfortunately for James this was another boat crossing, this time we decided to persevere with Frank's boat rather than use the newly re-named "James-breaker". Abseiling down a pitch and landing in a rubber-dinghy is a surprisingly delicate operation. All across

and a short prussic up brought us out of Croesor and into the Rhosydd section of the mine. Route-finding gets a bit trickier here so out came the survey and compass, but before long we found daylight streaming in through the Twll. It's possible to climb out of this, but being cavers, we decided to make our way underground and find the horizontal adit and walk out.

After a typical Easter Sunday Lunch of Snickers and Nutrigrain, which was rudely interrupted by Edd and Ross dislodging slate above us in the Twll, we headed down and away from the daylight. We quickly picked up a railway and then spotted a speck of light nearly 1km down the adit, a brisk walk out and we were done after 6 hours underground.

In conclusion, a great fun trip, well worth doing but it is a bit serious in places and needs a fair bit of equipment. Any trip where you feel the need to high-five each other at the end can't be bad.



# CHECC 2009



By **Cat Hulse**

For those of you who don't know, CHECC is an annual gathering of university cavers for a weekend of general fun, fancy dress, drinking, nakedness, more drinking and some people even go caving! This year's was no different. The UBSS contingent this year numbered 13: Ruth Briggs, Geoff Daniels, Rob Desbois, Sally White, Alice Whale, Kaleigh Gilkes, Alex Crowe, James Skelly, Charlie Horseman, Abi Winn, Stuart Alldred, Ross Helmsley and of course me!

We arrived on Friday night to be greeted by some already scrumpy-drunk and very chilly looking guys from Exeter (Hawaiian Hula Girls) and proceeded to confuse everyone greatly by dressing in seemingly completely unrelated outfits, which people eventually realised with the help of us pinning logos on were representing beers. Other fancy dress themes included Alice In Wonderland (Cardiff - they won in the end), superheroes, the nativity and computer game characters.

On Saturday, after record amounts of faff due to the owner of the car with all the kit in it going missing,



*Old Speckled Hen & Mendip Twister (Abi) + random hat*

we did actually manage caving trips down OFD1 and Locker (or whatever that place is called), as well as a lovely long walk in the rain for those who attempted to get to Pen-Y-Ghent. Rob, after informing me that he had no intention of going caving at all if he could help it, was the only one who didn't at least make an attempt to cave.

On Saturday night after having our mouths blown to pieces by the chilli came the games! Ruth and Skelly made a valiant attempt at beer pong, only to be knocked out and then puke (Skelly) or nearly puke (Ruth). Charlie and I went for the saucepan and sling game and didn't quite finish last (though managed to insult a girl from Manchester by proclaiming that



*Trashy Blonde (Alex)*

“real women shouldn't be able to do that!”), and Alice competed against some stupidly skinny people in the squeeze machine. After that came the traditional topless disco, as usual enthusiastically enforced by Kayleigh. Little more drama than usual as Abi got knocked out in the moshpit and an ambulance was called!

Ladder climbing and SRT races also took place- Despite fierce competition UBSS dominated the speed ladder climbing with Geoff winning for the lads and me for the girls, getting him a light and me a mini tackle bag. We also competed in the SRT race but only came second in both ☹️ (with Ross leading the lads this time) and Alice learning SRT as she went along!

Unsurprisingly, not many of us actually caved on Sunday, choosing instead to go for Ogof Pub Lunch, and getting very smug when we got the last roast dinners at the Ancient Briton and made the rest of the cavers that turned up very jealous 😊. Overall, an amazing weekend had by all!



*Hobgoblin (Ruth)*



*Topless YMCA*







**Which Mendip  
cave is this?**