

# UBSS

## Newsletter

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# Why You Really Should Do More Digging



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SANDY SQUEEZING THROUGH THE FINAL BOULDER CHOKE. THIS IS VERY TYPICAL OF THE UPPERMOST 30M

Sinkhole digs are a popular pastime in the more masochistic UK caving circles. The joy of exposure to the disgusting British weather (something usually avoided in caving), intermittent silting up of your hard won gains and unstable shafts that almost always require the use of heaps of scaffolding appeals to a select few. The rewards however can be great. This is the tale of a sinkhole dig that was extremely successful, albeit in Tasmania.

I chose to dig JF 398 (now known as Boulder Jenga) for 2 main reasons; it is a seasonal sink in a part of the Junee Florentine (Tassie's best caving area) where nothing was known therefore there was little risk of simply joining with a known cave after a short distance. Secondly it had an impressive draft. The sinkhole was completely covered with earth and vegetation apart from one point where a rock shelter (probably just a large boulder propped up by others) could be entered. It was out of the back of this rock shelter that the draft issued through a hole between boulders that nobody over the age of 2 would have fitted through. This was to be my point of leverage to crack open the cave.

When digging a boulder choke it is generally inadvisable to attempt to remove or to break up a rock that is very hard to move as it is probably supporting others. In attempting to widen this

squeeze I removed corners and edges that seemed to be simply hanging in space supporting nothing. This was very effective and after a couple of hours I had managed to widen the squeeze to the point that it was possible to get through. This I did with great trepidation and made it through to a very small chamber. There was no way on but the draft still came up through the floor which was made of mud and small rocks. After a few minutes work with the crowbar I was able to kick the floor in and slide down into another chamber. There was no solid wall, this merely being a chamber in the boulder choke. However, following the draft through the mass of boulders I managed to make my way down to a depth of around 10m at which point a too tight way on carrying the draft could be seen between two extremely large boulders. Boulder Jenga was now a cave as well as a sinkhole although no remotely solid passage had been found.

A month later myself and a friend, Andreas Klocker found ourselves with sufficient spare time for 5 full, consecutive days of caving. I managed to convince Andreas that Boulder Jenga would be the best target and so we headed in for another digging session. The second dig was less frightening in that we were digging vertically down rather than horizontally but more frightening in that we were 10m down into the choke, well out of the



IMAGE 1: SANDY CLIMBING THROUGH THE FINAL BOULDER CHOKE BEFORE THE BASE LEVEL STREAMWAY

IMAGE 2: ANDREAS AND I SURVEYING IN THE HADING RIFT BELOW THE BIG PITCH

IMAGE 3: THE CONFLUENCE AFTER THE HADING RIFT, JUST BEFORE THE 2M PITCH

IMAGE 4: ANDREAS FINISHING OFF THE SURVEY JUST BEFORE THE DUCK. THE 20 OR SO METRES OF PASSAGE BEYOND HERE REMAINS UNSURVEYED

daylight zone, completely surrounded by widow-maker boulders. After a couple of hours of excitement we were through. The cave continued down through more boulder chambers. At the bottom of a series of climbs I followed the draft through a couple of low crawls to emerge in a chamber the size of a large car. It appeared that one wall of the chamber might be bedrock, the rest however was all a jumble of boulders like the entire cave up to that point. The draft was not obvious but it felt as if it came out of the solidly choke floor. I was not disappointed with the day, we had gained considerable depth (the survey later showed this chamber to be over 30m below the surface) and may even have found a solid wall at last. However, the way on did not look massively promising.

The following day we were back with only a light dusting of enthusiasm. To my amazement however we soon opened up significant holes in the floor and after rolling the last boulder down the hole we were through into a low crawl with a solid left wall and roof. This emerged in a decent sized chamber with a cascading torrent of humongous boulders making up the right hand wall. There was no way out of the chamber although the draft seemed to come out of the floor. I pulled a sizeable boulder out of a hole in the floor and dropped through into a low dry streamway running through the bottom of the choke. After a final wriggle between boulders that had fallen into the stream the passage opened up into a sizeable meander. WE WERE IN!!! I was totally unable to contain my excitement and proceeded to whoop and scream like a maniac. My headlong rush of passage bagging was cut short when the floor dropped away and the way on became very vertical.

A full 24 hours later we were back with rope and rigging gear. The pitch turned out to be a lot

longer than we had expected and Andreas ended up dangling on the end of a 40m rope with a lot of shaft still to drop. A knot pass later we were on the floor searching for a way on. The pitch was boulder floored although fortunately the mass of boulders that filled the sinkhole had not made it this far thanks to the short section of horizontal passage before the pitch. Slipping through the boulders at the far end of the chamber led us to a steeply descending rift passage carrying a small stream. After a couple of short climbs in a narrow passage the cave opened up as several inlets entered via an aven and a large horizontal meander. Just beyond this junction the growing stream dropped down what looked to be a short climb that due to the ludicrously slippery nature of the rock had to be rigged as a pitch that required only 4 prussiks to ascend.

At the bottom of this the stream trickled down through yet another boulder choke. Heart in mouth I scouted around the chamber searching for a way through, to be kept out of the master system now after so much good luck in passing the main choke would be heartbreaking. Fortune prevailed and after some searching and a little minor digging we got through to the top of a narrow rift carrying the stream. Traversing along the top of the rift I found a spacious pitch of about 7m which we rigged off an enormous thread in the roof. At the bottom we finally found what we had been hoping for; a walking size stream passage typical of active base level in the Junee Florentine. Whooping and screaming we charged along, this is the type of passage that can go for kilometres and will only get bigger as it collects inlets. A short climb after around 50m led to what appeared to be a sump but sliding into the icy water on my belly I realised that it was in fact only a duck and one with quite a comfortable amount of airspace at that. Beyond

the duck we found the largest passage in the cave so far; 3 abreast walking passage. More excited than ever we strolled along dreaming of the master cave that must surely now be within our grasp. Alas it was not to be, the passage ended in a sump after only 20m. At first we thought that this might be a perched sump and possibly even short enough to be free diveable. However on a subsequent trip Andreas probed the sump with a pony bottle and found it to be a classic water table sump, descending in clean washed phreatic tube. That said he believed he had reached the apex of the u bend at only -4m. This would not be surprising, the cave is still a long way up the system, deep phreatic loops tend to be found much closer to the resurgence.

The cave is now around 160m deep. The resurgence is over 8km away but less than 20m lower than the current end of the cave. The caves in the area have fast flow through times and consist mostly of open stream passage with a few short sumps. If the sump is short then, theoretically, passing it could yield kilometres of easy, pleasant passage. Of course the cave gods may be unkind yet again and present us with yet another boulder choke straight after the sump but then that is part of the excitement of cave exploration.

There is I feel an important lesson to be taken from this tale. Many will describe the UK as being 'caved out' with no easy pickings left for the taking. There are certainly very few if any open entrances left to find but that does not mean that there are no relatively easy surface digs left. This is, in my view, wrong, just look at Excalibur pot on the North York Moors. Boulder Jenga was solidly choked, and aside from the draft not a very good prospect and yet it went, big style and in only 3 relatively easy capping trips. So next time you see a promising sink and write it off as a big project dare to hope otherwise (unless it's on the Mendips of course). I can think of a great prospect in the UK that with this experience behind me I may well take on. Where is it? You'll find out when it goes, or at least when you agree to carry scaffolding across the mountain.

Dickon Morris



MYSELF AND ANDREAS IN THE HADING RIFT

# Austria 2014



## SURFACE PROSPECTING

As someone not exactly fond of the dark and with more than a mild sense of trepidation at dangling myself from a single small rope over a gaping abyss, I'm not quite sure what exactly prompted me to take up caving, let alone go on expedition to Austria.

At the very least, I thought, it would be good for my German... It turns out that even with a degree and masters in German, the rural Austrian variety is pretty much unintelligible. The caves are pretty great though!

My first port of call on my epic cross-continental voyage was Cambridge, where I collected a CUCC caver named Sophie, a back-seat-ful of rice and boil-in-the-bag curries, and an emergency SRT rescue kit. We then proceeded to make our ferry by about five minutes, but we also got free chips and cake, so on balance it wasn't too bad a start. We camped overnight in Aachen, then I finally got to try out the famed German Autobahn - I was extremely impressed at my fully-loaded elderly 206 making it to 108mph. It soon had its revenge, however - we got stuck in a traffic jam somewhere near Nuremburg and the engine overheated, so we had to have time out on the hard shoulder of the Autobahn while I panicked and called my brother who knows about cars and Germany. After a while I thought I'd try running the engine again and surprise surprise, it was fine! (I could have saved myself those expensive international

phonecalls!) We cautiously set off again and reached Austria without further incident, somehow crossing the Danube five times in the process.

Upon arrival at Base Camp, I was pleasantly surprised to see hot & cold running water, electricity and even wifi! However, almost all caving is done from Top Camp - a stone bridge/former cave which we camped in, which has rather fewer mod cons. After carting all my gear across the plateau (no mean feat in itself! The plateau-monster (aka sharp sharp limestone) claimed many victims this year), the only thing that remained was to decide where I wanted to go! Because I didn't have vast amounts of SRT experience, and because I had heard that there was a promising lead at the bottom, I decided that 107 aka Gemsehöhle (Chamois Cave) would be my first project. There wasn't too much in the way of "technical stuff", and the biggest freehang was "only" 33m. I did a trip with Sophie, Matt and David, three cavers from Cambridge, but unfortunately Sophie got far too cold and we had to turn around before reaching the bottom. We still managed to be a little productive though - David and I rerigged a traverse which had previously involved stepping out over a huge hole in the floor BEFORE clipping in to the rope. It's much nicer now!

The following day, I recruited Aled from Durham and Rob from ULSA, and along with David, we



EXPO DINNER



MICHAEL AT THE TOP OF TUNNOCKSSCHACHT

bottomed the cave and found the aforementioned promising lead. After much poking about and deciding which way on to go (straight on? down a pitch? upwards??), survey stations going the opposite direction were found! We excitedly made our way back out to Top Camp to relay the news. After some umming and ahing, and checks from some people who knew what they were doing a bit better than us, it was revealed that this was a connection into the big Tunnocks system, pushing that system over the magic 100km mark and making it the second biggest cave system in Austria! Not bad for only my second trip of the expo.

I went on to explore parts of Tunnocks via the extremely “acrobatic” Tunnocksschacht entrance (15 rebelays on a single pitch – I’m now an SRT pro), as well as the newly rediscovered Balconyhöhle. The latter’s entrance had been discovered a few years ago, but then completely ignored until this summer when some of the ULSA lot decided to drop the entrance pitch. This soon became the cave of the summer - well over 4km of new cave was found! Not all by me, I hasten to add, but the feeling of knowing that you are the very first person to step in a particular passageway is pretty great, even if you can’t feel any of your appendages because it’s so bloody cold.

It wasn’t all hard caving, though! On the odd sunny day, I also went surface prospecting, looking for new possible caves. This didn’t always go according to plan - one so-called “amazing lead” turned out to peter out almost immediately, gaining it the name “Aled’s Shithöhle”. I did bag one cave of my very own - not huge, but big enough to be registered on the Austrian system, so there’s a little tag out there with my initials on it. We tried a bit of cross-valley prospecting - send a person to the other side of a small valley then direct them to dark-looking spots that might be caves - and we also discovered that caving can be a spectator sport! Michael from CUCC was learning to bolt,

and his chosen lead had a huge window across from where he was working, so I and several others had front-row seats out in the sun.

For those days when you just couldn’t take another misty night in the bivvy having your bog roll nicked with salad tongs on a stick, base camp with all its attendant leisure activities and chilled beer was just a hike and a drive away. This year it was a bit too rainy for via ferrata (I’m assured that’s not always the case!), but I enjoyed a local culture festival and various scenic walks, and one sunny afternoon swimming across the nearby lake, Grundlsee, some of us found a bicycle in perfect working order. It was towed to shore and dried off and became the Expo bike, perfect for nipping into town for an ice cream or three. The mystery of how it ended up on the lakebed in the first place, however, remains.

The social highlight of the trip was the Expo Dinner - everyone came down from Top Camp and we all went for an incredibly tasty meal at the guest-house across the road. There were speeches and prizes and many glasses of beer, and we threw our Glorious Expo Leader into the river before dancing the night away in the potato hut. I’m already looking forward to the Kasknockerl and Germknodel next year. If nothing else, I still need to beat my Mendip depth record of -228m... I still haven’t lived that down.

Elaine Oliver

# What To Expect From Your First Caving Experience



ANYA, WILL, ELLIOTT AND PIPPA IN SWILDONS UPPER SERIES

**Wellies? Over suit? Helmet? The dress code isn't the only odd thing about caving; many people find the idea of crawling around in dark muddy spaces quite odd.**

But you're dressed now, hovering outside an enlarged badger hole, being told to mind your head and switch on your light. It's not too late to turn back, but the intrigue is too high...

Down on your knees you quickly see why the leader is wearing knee pads but it's not just your knees, every bony bit that sticks out gets bumped as you register a distinct lack of coordination in the new, dark environment. (Imagine walking down a heavily overgrown forest track at night and every bramble and branch that hangs over the path, trips you up from below and comes in from the side, is solid rock.) You are cast in complete darkness with an eerie beam of light limiting your peripheral vision.

Quickly, your body adjusts. The first sense to liven up is smell and the cool soily bouquet is strangely comforting and calms the initial nerves. Then you might register heightened sounds, every foot step echoes and is amplified by the lumpy tunnels. Hopefully your coordination catches up soon and you find your body working with the new "spot lighted" vision; it begins to flexibly react to new obstacles which seem to come from all directions ("step up, duck down, slide to the left, slide to the right").

Before you know it your body and mind is completely exhausted from the totally new

environment. The merciful leader calls for a halt in a small dripping chamber. All sat on boulders the fast breath of excitement and exercise settles. The lights are switched off to gain an appreciation for 'pitch black'. If there is a drip it is loud and there is little perception to the noise, it may be a meter away or it may be 100 meters. The shuffle of over suit on rock breaks the silence, the magic is broken and the tunneled gymnasium is taken up again.

A point which may have seem obvious, now hits you with a certain amount of disappointment. Caves are underground. To get to them you go down. To get out of them you have to go up. So, exhausted and bruised you all make your way back up. A developed coordination, enables you to move forward without hitting too many lumps and bumps and you can snatch glances at openings and passages on either side; curiosity draws you into them, but beginner's caution moves you along and up out into the bright daylight.

The world seems amazingly green, and there is a heightened sense of how blue the sky is. Birds sing and the air is sharp. A relieved smile creeps across your face, "I made it then". It turns into an enlightened laugh as you all walk back to the pub, not only relief but also gratitude for seeing a part of the earth not very many people get to see...under it.

Pippa Churcher

# Ireland Expedition 2014



SURPRISINGLY THIS PHOTO WASN'T POSED FOR!

**As my first 'expedition' experience, this trip will certainly linger in my memory. Amongst the monumental amounts of faff, always followed by a cup of tea (of course), something reminiscent of a caving trip was achieved.**

We set out on a Friday evening in mid-August, myself with two carrier bags of popcorn and a passenger with a borderline case of Tourettes', and Sara with the delectable company of four passengers who preferred sleep to much else. With Sara touring the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park at 12 o'clock at night, the more geographically aware and technologically unencumbered made it to Fishguard. After deftly explaining the reason behind a small van full of caving paraphernalia, we were all on board. Stiff backs and sore necks were plenty by the time we made Rosslare, which (thankfully) we drove straight by. We may lack petrol rations, cars that barely make the tractor classification and the encumbrances held by previous expeditions, but still managed to take 19 hours to get to bloody Lough Mask. Someone can drive next time.

We thus met our host in the nearby village and followed him to the cottage. After explaining the reason as to why we we're all in Ireland and the fact we weren't going to have any 'parties' in the lovely cottage, we were left to catch up on sleep. The next morning, minimal faff left us in Cong for

10 o'clock, with a quick run about Pigeon Hole woods before making it to Ballymaglancy for a through trip. With water so low, we followed the resurgence stream on a bit to its sink, sending Richie through – apparently he "didn't mind spiders". What he did mind however, was the one third full crawling passage. Spiders above you, rocks below you and water sloshing about you. Richie had evidently found the somewhat stupidly named Resurgence cave. After convincing us all it was fine, we all made it through the slightly nasty entrance crawl. This was evidently going to be a decent chunk of surveying, after finding no end of leads in no time.

It was at this point Simon revealed his inner desire to survey at strange times. On making it back to the cottage, Si decided that the water would probably rise in the oncoming drizzle and it would be best to get back in the Resurgence... Questionable reasoning. The survey gear then revealed its reluctance to co-operate. On attempting to calibrate the DistoX, try as we may, we couldn't get to the  $\Delta 0.5$  threshold and gave up after Rosie made a record breaking  $\Delta 7.6$ , after around 4 hours in the drizzle. The cavers pentagram also made its first appearance – namely a fair few suspiciously planted sticks, with plenty of sacrificial ponies and beer about.



PRAYING TO THE GREAT GODS OF MAYO



A HAIRY (AND MULTI-CULTURAL) RENDITION OF THE LOCAL MEDIA HISTORY.

Technical difficulties followed for the next few days, with both PDA's deciding to join to DistoX mutiny. Richie and Si found themselves lying in the entrance crawl to the Resurgence cave for hours on end, with poor calibrations and tricky software. Wetsuits can only keep you so warm it seems. The others started to do some surface work. In the space of a few hours, Cats Hole was located, Wolves, Pigeon and the Ashford Castle caves all revisited, with the lower water presenting no new cave. Still, it was pleasant for all to see the variety of cave Mayo had to offer. At this point, 4 days in and having suffered enough, Richie and Si decided to explore the full reach of the Resurgence cave. An earlier report had put the cave at some appreciable length, but we doubted the accuracy of this work. The end transpired to be a sloshy sump, having crawled through deep clay and water, before a short duck to reach the end. With more leads found in the Resurgence and Kitten's Hole located, the list of surveying just got longer.

The authors birthday passed blissfully, with good caving, followed by (a somewhat dodgy) cake and a liberal dousing of Guinness. What more could one ask for? It was at this point also that Si emerged victorious over his entrance crawl, having gained 26m of passage for the first survey of the trip. Further ventures to Ballinrobe also yielded a rather pleasant encounter for Rosie and co., with an Irishman answering his door, but only opening it after more than the 'usual' number of attempts. Being Ireland of course, he proved to be steeped in knowledge of the area and perfectly capable of driving his car. With water levels still low, technology proving a pain in the arse and still with only a meagre  $\Delta 0.54$  to go by, a mornings kayaking made for a welcome break. What's more, Si's stint with Porrick at reception gave the location of the Castle Lake sink, on Lough Mask. Sara's birthday thus followed and we decided to make somewhat more of an effort. Dinner at Burkes in Clonbur, with the necessary stupid hats,

embarrassing singing and enough deep fried brie to satisfy a Northerner made for a good night. And despite what most might say, blowing bubbles is something you evidently don't grow out of!

This point marked the arrival of Dave Drew and Tony Boycott. After pouring in enough dye into the Resurgence to 'turn Cong green', we ran a quick tour about the caves to hypothesise where the flow may lead to. Perhaps The Resurgence, via Cats, Kittens, Pigeon and Wolves Hole before making the springs at Cong. The literal trickle at Ellechrisaun spring did little to bolster hope of successful results, however. On the last day of the expedition for Rosie, Richie and Cara, a trip to the Aille River cave was planned. Rosie made do with a pair of trainers for a fair share of sliding, swimming and climbing about what seems like a good cave! As many of those reading this will know, dye tracing proves tedious almost immediately. You must collect your samples from the same location, at the same time and as best as you can to not contaminate anything with your (possibly) dye stained hands. 8 days of zipping in and out of 5 caves and 2 springs made for incentive enough to let the Freshers do it next year. After seeing more than enough Quiet Man references about Cong, an obligatory purchase of the film was made. It's surprisingly (awful) good and yielded its fair share of puns to be employed in caves.

With a week left of the expedition, we said farewell to Rosie, Richie and Cara and bid welcome to Jacob. We also managed to get some of the tech working, with the direction of Chris Pepper and a fair bit of botching about with the PDA. With renewed vigour, surveying was started in earnest. With two sets of surveying gear, we could begin to make a dent in our workload. As ever, however, the DistoX decided to have a strop. Calibration simply wouldn't make its threshold and with Si's calibration on its way out, the cavers pentagram came out. Hours upon hours were spent taking our 56 shots around our cube of



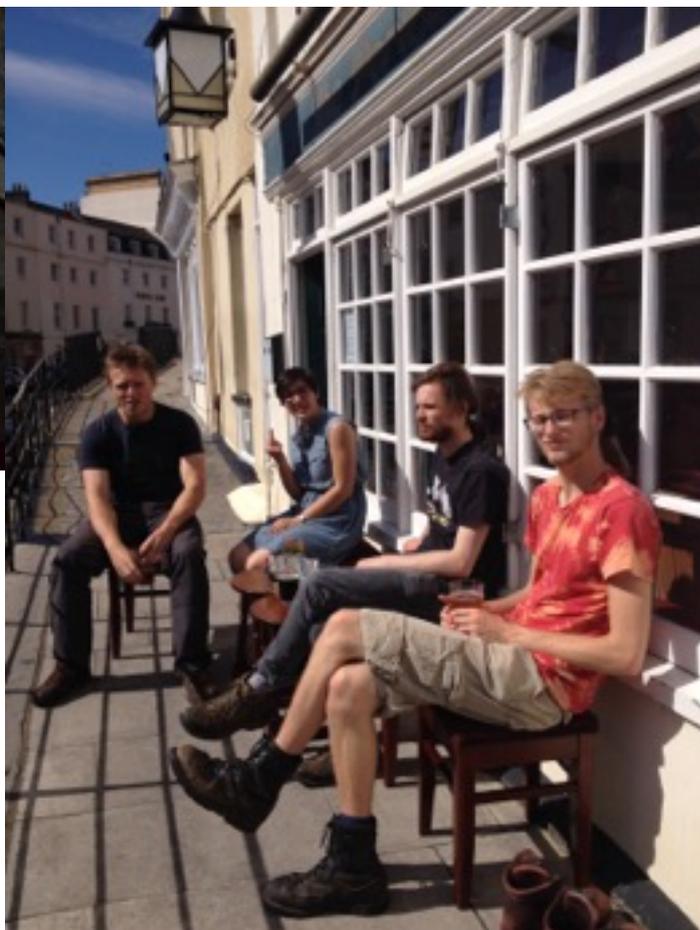
SURVEYING

suffering. The  $\Delta 0.5$  still proved elusive, but with no option but to take what we could get, we set to work. However, if life were that easy, we would all survey whenever we had the chance (I think).

A completely unnecessary quote will suffice here; so as Jürgen Klinsmann once said “We can only win by giving everything and being ready to defeat the adversary with fiery aggression”. Provocative words from a footballer. In our case however, the adversary was nature, which easily puts out fiery aggression. Unless of course, you happened upon the evening Si and I had. On meeting 2 cavers from the Petersburg centre on this rainy evening, we set off in search of the Castle Lake sink. Suffice to say, with an Irishman wielding a machete and hacking through half the Isthmus before trying to single handedly dig out an entire sink hole with his bare hands – we had an interesting evening. The next day, we entered the caves after a good day and nights rain to find little of the cave we once had. Kittens, Wolves and Cats had all begun to back up, leaving little more than the entrance in Kittens Hole above water. With the adversary met, Jacobs work was cut short here, but other caves remained. For the others, the Resurgence was the priority.

On arriving after the rain, with 2 days to left, the entrance crawl was essentially full to the roof. The best part of 20m of duck. With all the gear to get through and common sense prevailing, we left the cave for a while and busied ourselves with other things. On checking in later that evening, the water had appeared to drop a few inches in the entrance. It was decided that we really did need to get to the end of the cave and thus we went through the now thoroughly enjoyable entrance. The cave now was reminiscent of the earlier reports we had read! However, by the time the end was reached, the water had backed up well beyond true end, thus losing some valuable cave.

With the remaining group consisting of Si, Jacob, Sara, Rob and myself, we all felt more than pleased with the work we had achieved. Gallons of



DEBRIEF

water samples, plenty of survey data and everything still intact held testament to two weeks well spent. After a quick poke about the possible route of our theoretical cave flow, we left Cong for Rosslare. On making it to Bristol for the early morning, a good rest, followed by a better breakfast and finally a pint made for a suitable end to another successful expedition.

Elliott Smith

# The Game of Exploration



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## THE FISTULA

I noticed in the last issue of this newsletter a serious lack of the tales of exploration that every caver loves to read about.

A very large number of cavers will tell you that the possibility of original exploration is what draws them to the sport. In the UK cavers spend a lot more time dreaming about finding new cave than they do actually exploring it. In Tasmania new passage is a frequent reality. In fact a weekend without a significant breakthrough is either a preparatory trip or a disappointment. In my time there I took part in the exploration of 4 major new caves.

I arrived in the winter of 2013 at the tail end of the exploration of Constitution Hole which ended up as a maze of passages over 2km long and 150m deep. In the summer we explored a cave called Warhol which ended up connecting to a known system and pushing that system beyond 4km but adding no depth. The following autumn Andreas Klocker and I pretty much single handedly cracked open the heavily choked stream sink of Boulder Jenga to reveal an interesting little system well deserving of its name (also described in this newsletter). The most exciting exploration to date however was the exploration of Voltera which occurred in the winter of 2014 just before I left Tasmania.

The caves of the Junee Florentine basin are formed in a large synform with water draining off the limbs of the fold and collecting in the axis. The master cave passage that exists in the axis is very large but intersected by only one cave, Niggly,

which incidentally is the deepest cave in Australia at 375m. This cave contains 2km of master cave (8m wide and 10m high river cave) which terminates at a rockfall with over 5km still to go to the proven resurgence of Junee cave (which also ends in a rockfall albeit at -50m in a sump). This missing master cave is the ultimate prize of the area.

We chose to target Voltera because it is a large stream sink directly above the hypothesised route of the missing master cave. The cave was first explored in the 1970s and consisted, until our explorations, of a large fossil passage which closed down after about 30m and an active sink that reached a very tight rift after 20m. We first attempted to dig the mud fill at the end of the fossil passage but this was pretty hopeless and seemed to have been attempted in the past as we were digging at the bottom of an excavated pit. Turning our attention to the active sink we examined the end of the passage and attempted to enlarge the very narrow rift in the usual manner. This was also hopeless and after exhausting all of our drill batteries we decided to head out. While waiting for my companions Dave Taberner and Andreas Klocker to clear a small climb I poked my head into a small alcove to take a look. Readers that have caved with me will not be surprised by this, my motto is check everything as you never know what others may have missed. A tight squeeze over a dolerite boulder led up to a small chamber with a hole in the corner. Interesting. I immediately climbed through this hole and found a spacious rift



STAIRWAY TO NIGGLY

leading down. It wasn't until I had begun to climb down the rift that I realised I could not see the bottom although I was using a tikka so that didn't really mean much. I pulled a rock from the wall and threw it into the black space. 1...2...3...4...5 BOOM! Holy fuck! I was perched none too securely over what was probably about a 100m pitch!

It turned out to be a very fine pitch 80m with a cool traverse and then a squeeze through a window to bring you out over the spectacular main hang. The bottom however was rather an anticlimax. A small spray lashed boulder choke swallowed all of the water with the only other passage being a steep talus slope that went up steeply for a while before becoming vertical. Just part of the large rift that the pitch comprised. Was this it? A great bit of SRT but highly disappointing given that the depth potential was over 300m and that there was master cave somewhere beneath. I frantically searched everywhere for a way on but there was just nothing. Nothing except a shitty body sized rift which led off a little way up the talus slope. Without much hope I squeezed myself into this, it was awkward but not overly tight. After pushing on for a few metres it closed in and the only way was down. This didn't close down and after about 10m the rift popped out rather alarmingly in the roof of a steeply sloping chamber which seemed to lead to a pitch. After lowering myself very carefully to the floor I shouted back to my companions; "I'm thorough, there's another pitch! Bring rope through. Actually I might need a rope to get out!"

As I had now pushed the majority of this cave I let Andreas and local (ex)hardman Alan Jackson drop the next short pitch and have a look around while I went back through the rift which had already been christened The Fistula (I have no idea why). When I returned the exploration had already been completed. There was a decent

sized chamber at the bottom and a climb down through a boulder choke led to a steeply descending stream passage which unfortunately choked at the bottom of a small pot a mere 20m in. Not again! Surely this bastard was not going to deny us after two failed attempts at concealing the way on. I dropped into the stream passage and followed it to the bottom of the short climb where a small inlet entered and it choked with silt. A few minutes of digging with my hands was enough to convince me this lead was dead. Feeling somewhat dispirited I returned to the chamber and looked around to see if there was anything that I had missed. Nothing looked promising although there was a slightly water worn alcove in the corner of the chamber. It was directly above the passage that I had just looked at and that had had a high roof. Ah well, worth a look, anything to avoid derigging the cave that day as we would have been forced to do if it was dead.

The entrance to the alcove was filled with boulders but looking over the top of these it was possible to see some black space. I pushed the boulders aside and slithered cautiously in, feet first, fully expecting to emerge in the roof of the last passage. Instead I slid down a short slope and dropped into a walking size stream passage with a little trickle in the floor. Clearly this was the source of the inlet just before the choke. Ah well, better make sure of the connection. After 20m the passage had still not dropped, although it was meandering so would probably take a little longer to reach the same point as the straight passage below. After 100m it was clear that this was a separate stream passage running **DIRECTLY OVER THE TOP OF THE OTHER!!**

Rather than bag all the passage I went to get the others and we followed this passage that we named Stairway to Niggly for a very considerable distance. It kept getting lower and more miserable and we were sure that it would crap out, but it didn't. Just kept descending gently until it popped out in a good sized fault chamber and dropped over a 20m pitch (Sent Down). Staggering! The survey would later show that we had gained 150m of depth without any ropework. This is an extremely rare event in the JF, a predominantly vertical caving area. This was meant to be my last trip as I was moving to the mainland the following week and why on earth would you fly all the way to Tasmania for a caving weekend? If you were exploring a cave that was poised to break into the master cave below the mountain it seems.

We had to wait a month for the next trip and of course everybody from the last weekend was back for this one, how could you pass up the chance. On Saturday I studiously surveyed all of the passage that we had shamelessly bagged on the last trip so was not involved in the pushing that



STAIRWAY TO NIGGLY

day. Andreas, Dave and local veteran Rolan Eberhard dropped the last pitch and pushed the narrow meander below to emerge at the top of another sizeable pitch (Date of Release). By the time I reached them they were trying to rig this but it was proving troublesome, a rebelay had been put in just below the lip but the rope hung in the water and there was no good rock to put in any more bolts. I took a turn and found a solution using their rebelay as a deviation and swinging out a good distance to a ledge from which a single 25m drop with an annoying knot pass gained the bottom of the pitch. The cave continued at the bottom but it was time to go home.

The next day Dave was insisting that he wanted a short day so we dispatched him to push a shitty lead at the top of the 3<sup>rd</sup> pitch (Sent Down) with rock of a quality that may have granted his wish with a one way trip. Nat Brennan accompanied him with secret instructions to cut the rope should the rock fail to do its job.

Meanwhile myself, Dennis (forget his surname) and Laure Gautiez set off to push the bottom. Laure decided that she couldn't really face a few hours of my company and attempted to throw herself down the rift between Sent Down and Date

of Release. She was unhurt but, after a melodramatic exhibition, had a great excuse to join the other party.

I re-rigged Date of Release on the way down, swapping the two short ropes used on the first descent the previous day for a 40m thereby eliminating the extremely irritating free hanging knot crossing.

The passage at the bottom of the pitch (Parole Passage) is very interesting. It consists of a reasonably high fault controlled passage with the water flowing through a miserable bedding plane that undercuts the right hand wall. The floor of this bedding is impermeable shale. We naturally elected to follow the upright, dry part of the passage. Being fault controlled it is very straight which allowed us to get some fantastic 10m+ survey legs, an unusual pleasure in most JF caves.

After a reasonable distance we reached a fairly large and interesting chamber. The high fault section of the passage terminates in a blank wall while the bedding plane portion continues down in the right hand corner. This continuation is low and extremely muddy. The water does not follow this

path as it has now cut a pit through the shale in the floor and falls 4m to flow at a lower level.

We elected to follow the water down the pit. This is a very interesting feature. Halfway down the pit fossil passages lead off in both directions. The upstream passage is dry while the downstream carries the water that drops through the pit, however this stream has clearly invaded the fossil passage long after its formation, creating a trench in the floor that is not present in the upstream section of the passage. The logical conclusion is that the lower passage is related to a previous phase of development. This dry passage always existed less than 1m beneath the floor of Parole Passage as it formed. Then at some point the water in Parole Passage broke through the impure shale into this older passage (Hardened Criminal) cutting a vadose canyon in the floor of the downstream section and leaving the bedding plane lead that I described high and dry. The upstream portion of Hardened Criminal was of course unaffected. A truly fascinating sequence of speleogenesis.

This was getting very exciting we had 3 leads to choose from and elected to follow the downstream end of Hardened Criminal as it was the largest passage and was carrying the water. This continued in a very pleasant manner, crawling in the bedding plane at first before dropping down into the canyon. The bedding seems to peter out after around 20m with the passage becoming a pure canyon. A canyon beyond which I could see black space. A lot of black space. Even better I could also hear the sound of a base level river! A stream with no cascades that just babbles merrily over rounded dolerite cobbles. Was it actually going to happen? The thing that we had all fantasised about? The interception of the main drain? At that moment I really believed I was about to break out into river cave. As those that have been with me on breakthroughs may recall I can become rather excited. My reaction on this occasion made all previous reactions look like disinterest.

I reached the end of the rift and climbed down into a passage that is about 8m wide and 6m high with a rectangular cross section. Large mudbanks left by ancient floods lie against the walls like snowdrifts yet there was no more water visible, just that which we had been following from the entrance. I had to climb a pile of boulders in the middle of the passage and peer down the other side to find the water. The main stream entered from a strolling sized passage on the left.

From the termination of the rift to the top of the small boulder pile yielded a staggeringly long leg of 18m. Does racking up passage get any easier? The inlet on the left was duly marked on the survey and we set off downstream. Alas after 30m this

came to an end at a choke. The flat shale roof comes down to meet the cobble floor, it obviously all backs up a great deal in flood conditions. This shale band completely dominates the form of the cave from the bottom of Date of Release to this choke. It makes up the floor of Parole Passage creating a flat floor that slopes at around 20 degrees. The passage essentially goes along the strike of this bedding plane. Then at the pit the water breaks through the shale band and into Hardened Criminal with Parole Passage heading down dip, now dry but still floored by the shale band.

Hardened Criminal is the mirror image of Parole Passage in that the shale band that makes up the floor in the latter is the roof in the former. This is still the case when the passage becomes very large and the larger stream enters. In it's dying moments Hardened Criminal does what Parole Passage does at the pit and turns to go down dip and unfortunately (and probably because of this) chokes.

With this sudden and unexpected end reached Dennis and I turned our attention to the upstream inlet. This was some of the most pleasant surveying I have ever done, standing in large passage shooting 10m legs. The passage was simple to sketch to boot. Our agreed turn around time was 3:30 and when we reached this time we almost called it but I decided I was having too much fun and elected to do a few more legs. This was fortuitous as the passage ended 2 legs later in an impressive 25m aven with the entirety of the water falling from the roof in two large streams.

With all the easy passage bagged and surveyed it was time to head out. Thankfully the cave was still going and we therefore felt no obligation to de-rig. Dave's team had already headed out and we did not encounter them until the Fistula where we could hear them on the pitch beyond.

On the surface we exchanged notes on the day's exploration. Dave's lead was still going and seemed to be dropping down into something. I was then asked how our trip had gone to which I replied. "Oh, bit disappointing really. 30% of our survey legs were less than 10m!"

On a couple of later trips which I was not present for the cave yielded another 500m of passage to take it over 2km but it did not exceed the depth of 320m that myself and Dennis had pushed it to on my last trip. Voltera is the first cave that I have fully explored from surface to bottom and that I would happily and without irony, recommend as a sporting trip.

Dickon Morris

# First Caving Trip



ELEANOR, ASHLEY AND ALEX IN OFD1

**After my first caving weekend, I was left muddy, bruised and very poorly. Yay caving.**

I was pretty besieged with Freshers' Flu at the time and the flu progressively worsened after two days underground, despite assurances that caves cure such ailments. After my voiced reached Goblin-Grade 2, an ultimatum was given from my flatmates and I was prohibited from caving. I had to ignore this as we were going to Wales the next weekend, which I didn't think I could miss seeing as it's a whole other land with sheep etc. A lot of things happened on my first trip to Swildon's Hole on Mendip, but most notably I found (and saved) a frog when we were on our way out, past that bit that looks like a bath.

As a result, I officially set up Cave Frog Rescue: a non-profit, voluntary organisation run by dedicated frog enthusiasts. This is a lot like Cave Rescue but unfortunately lacks the support/respect that Cave Rescue generates. Certain members from UBSS have unfortunately been banned from CFR due to inappropriate comments and/or motives. Banned members include Stu Alldred and ex-member Geoff, who both made comments that I was a witch after a subsequent caving trip to OFD1 in Wales. Here a frog was rescued but did admittedly seem dead, so its rescue looked like resurrection. Our secretary Jacob Podesta has also been banned due comments regarding

dissection of the frogs saved – this defeats the point and goes against basic Cave Frog Rescue morals and etiquette.

Back to Swildon's itself: I'm not very coordinated and managed to bash my head about eight times within the first five minutes, but I thought it was cool how natural and at ease people seemed at jumping into a slippery, dark hole in the ground on a Saturday afternoon. On the walk to the cave we were given the Freshers' Talk about the need to speak up if you were Sad, Lonely or Bored. This didn't seem to happen, potentially because we stopped for chocolate halfway, although Ben Allen had seeds (I still don't know why). We were told that the water level was lower than usual (and trips since have definitely confirmed this consensus) but it seemed like a lot at the time. Overall the trip was mainly crouching and sliding and a lot more physicality than I think people expected.

My cave-geography is still pretty shocking – it should have improved really, having been down Swildon's a fair few times since that first trip – but we went the 'Short Dry Way' first, I think, down Jacob's Ladder and off to the Water Chamber. This involved a decent amount of stumbling and ambling round corners and alarming behaviour from Stu was noted ("Do as we say not do" – slides backwards down a rock; "this is



TOP: FIRST TRIP IN SWILDON'S  
 ABOVE: JACOB TRYING TO GET RID OF ELEANOR IN GB

CWM DWR

Jacob's Ladder, there's loads of handy footholds" – proceeds to just hurtle down it). Aside from that, the experienced cavers were very competent and very helpful and very patient of my 'that's what she said' jokes. Adam was nice as he persistently pointed out that I'd forgotten to turn my light back on each time after we decided to experience Total Darkness. There were only a few tight crawls (the 'zig-zags' come to mind) but nothing too taxing or unnerving; on trips since we've been past the ladder and Sump 1, but this trip mainly involved exploring the upper series.

Alex Cheadle was my Fresher Caving Partner in Crime for the majority of the trip and can remember all the head bashes (or perhaps can't because he had a few more than me because he's quite tall. NB. Does not mean I am small myself). The evening ended in certain people criticising how I was chopping veg for the chilli (again, uncalled for; only a few carrots ended up on the floor of the hut) and I eventually got made to chop garlic ("no, don't give her peppers! Give her the garlic – she won't eat that one!").

I'd caved before joining UBSS, but that was back when I was slight and lithe and full of youth etc. Times have changed and I am now old. (I spent my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday in a cave! And I got made such a cool caving-cake with jelly cavers complete with strawberry lace SRT gear by Chris! Woوو Wales!). Nonetheless, caving with UBSS has

definitely surpassed my expectations and as anyone who has caved with me can probably testify, I'm quite ~~annoying~~ / enthusiastic / easily impressed:

"Woahhhhh, that's so cool!"

Eleanor Conole (neither small nor a witch)

# Fishmonger's Swallet: An Archaeological Trip

**On the 12<sup>th</sup> November, a few UBSS cavers ventured down “one of the muddiest caves” in the name of archaeological research.**

The cave was first discovered by a fishmonger – from whence it got its name – but when it was being dug further nearly 20 years ago it revealed a darker story. On digging a cave the most noticeable feature was the amount of bones which wasn't just the usual washed up odd bits and bobs



PIPPA HOLDING A ROCK

from whatever had fallen in over the centuries, there were layers and layers of bones. The most interesting of all the remains was a near intact human skull, and pieces of many more humans. After a brief, fruitless investigation by the forensics the case was handed over to the archaeologists who recovered over 400 pieces of bone, mainly dog and human.

The archaeological excavation was aimed at finding any evidence of ritual deposition or cause of death. No solid conclusions were drawn and potentially never will be however the finds were left un-published. The land owners, having a link to Bristol University, wanted the remains to be left with UBSS so we now have the task of writing up the finds officially and publishing them.

It was for this reason we ventured down the mulch blocked entrance to Fishmongers Cave. After scraping back a large pile of leaves we were able to unlock the gate and slip down a short but pleasant shaft to a low chamber. It was the kind of mud that sticks and balls to the bottom of your boots and once we had investigated the areas where the remains were originally found we explored deeper into the low, but not squeezey cave. The best part perhaps was a long mud slide that one could do the “muddy penguin” down, sliding on your tummy to the bottom before scabbling and slipping your way back up.

Once up out of the cave, the mud which had been quite fun (in a childish sort of way) now had to be battled against in order to get back into a decent enough state to go to the pub. Needless to say once I got home I snuck up to my room to avoid my housemates seeing the state of my over suit. None the less it was a productive trip, we got to see the context of the remains and we now have the challenge of writing up the report – watch this space!

Pippa Churcher

# 6 Days in Bulmer



ONE OF THE MORE MUNDANE SECTIONS OF THE SOUPMIX 500

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## Day 1

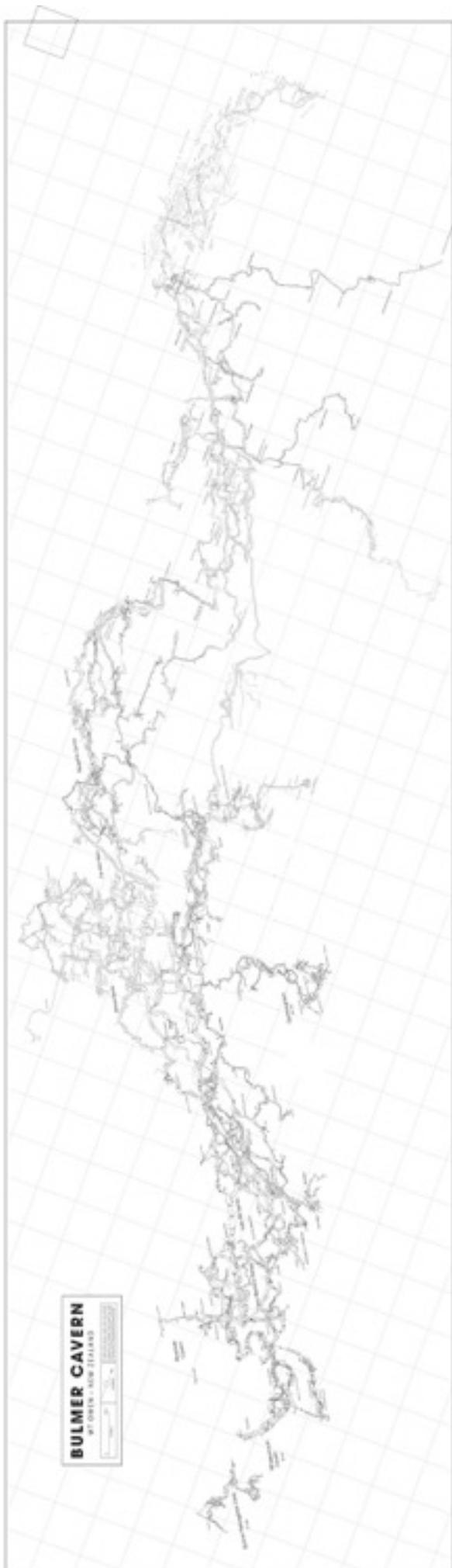
Many who have watched the Lord of the Rings will recall the scene in which the fellowship emerge from Moria into what is clearly a karst landscape. This is Mt Owen in the South Island of New Zealand beneath which exists something far more real than the Dwarven mines of Tolkien's imagination; Bulmer Cavern, New Zealand's longest cave at 70km.

One muggy evening in early December 2014 myself, Neil Silverwood (a Kiwi who has pushed much of the back end of Bulmer) and Neil Warrington (a Canadian who doesn't really like caving all that much but loves bolt climbing) arrived at the bottom of the mountain and pitched our tents in a maelstrom of sandflies (NZ's answer to the Scottish midge). The next morning saw torrential rain from the off, a potential problem as there are 16 river crossings on the way up to the cave, totally impassable if the river floods. Ironically there is no flood risk on the main route to camp 2. This can mean that on the way out from a long camp (with no idea of the forecast) it can be possible to make it to the entrance but find it impossible to get off the mountain. Fortunately the river had not yet begun to rise and a stiff 3 hour hike saw us at the highly impressive entrance

known as Eye in the Sky (10m wide and 5m high), enjoying the shelter from the rain rather more than the 4 degree draft blasting out of the system.

It immediately became clear to me that this is a bloody impressive cave system! The first 500m is a stroll in a passage consistently the size of the largest part of GB main chamber. The following 4 hour trip to camp 2 is as varied as it is impressive with no squeezes and not even a splash of water on the oversuit. The cave is basically a multi level phreatic maze cross cut on occasion by small active streams which follow the massive tubes for short distances before disappearing into small, usually unpushed, passages in the floor. This is the crazy thing about Bulmer, you come across dozens of going rifts or pitches that have not been touched because nobody can be bothered! If this cave was in Yorkshire it would probably be over 300km long by now. A glance at the survey which Stu may or may not have bothered to include will show the tremendous extent of the system. [Editors note: I did - see next page!]

All of the pitches in the cave are permanently rigged in the Kiwi style. This means that ropes are often left on pitches for 10 years or more and therefore the ropes used are often very thick. It then becomes clear why most Kiwis use racks, a Stop will simply not take such thick, stiff rope and I



was forced to C rig mine for the first time. At first I was appalled by the style of rigging but after much discussion with Silverwood accepted that it was simply different to European ethics.

About 8 hours after leaving the bottom of the hill we had made it to the very pleasant camp 2. Camping conditions in Bulmer are excellent. The site is mostly draft free in a dry and spacious passage with some good decoration to create an appropriate atmosphere. Bulmer is a little colder than UK caves at 4 degrees but is certainly much less miserable than camping in Daren Cilau by virtue of the fact that you arrive dry.

After eating one of our delicious (seriously) freeze dried meals and engaging in a little witless inter colonial banter we bedded down for the night. Underground camping is always an odd experience and this was no different. The darkness is of course total and this really confuses your body clock. The first night is usually fairly normal but as the camping trip progresses you tend to want to sleep more and more. There are no natural cues for your body to wake. Of course most cavers use nothing more than a cheap foam mat and the floor is very hard and never perfectly even. This combination of factors means that you will never sleep so well in such an uncomfortable place.

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## Day 2

The goal for this trip was to undertake an aid climb at the end of one of the largest phreatic tubes in the cave known as South Park. In the past the passage simply ended in a huge aven that vanished upwards into blackness, with modern lighting things have changed. On a previous trip the two Neils had spotted a likely continuation of the main passage some 30m off the floor. This was thought to be the upstream continuation of South Park.

Bulmer cave is extremely complex with many levels of development. It consists of 4 main levels with only the lowest one being active. Obviously all of the modern active routes eventually burrow their way down to base level, very often while wandering along a large tube you will meet an immature vadose canyon cutting across. These are ignored, pushing Bulmer is all about following the tubes without (as Silverwood put it) getting into a battle with a Bulmer streamway. It makes sense, why would you push shitty rifts and drop wet pitches when you can walk along pleasant tubes. Unfortunately we are now in the position where there are no more open walking leads in Bulmer. Most of what has been found in the last 10 years has been inlet passage. The two main downstream ways on at the end of the cave involve a sump at



1: NEIL WARRINGTON APPROACHING THE ENTRANCE  
2: THE WILD WEST

3: A RATHER SPACIOUS BULMER STREAMWAY  
4: TYPICAL WINDBLOWN STALS IN BULMER

the active level or a sandy dig in a large tube. But this raises another interesting point. These two aforementioned leads are heading in the direction of Blue Creek some 5km to the North a resurgence that is the destination for most of Bulmers water BUT NOT ALL OF IT! Thats right, some of the water flows to a resurgence in Bulmer creek that we walked past on our way to the cave. There is in fact a passage within the cave that ordinarily flows to Blue Creek but in flood conditions the direction of flow in the passage reverses and the water goes to Bulmer creek!!

After a couple of hours Warrington had made good progress but had drained the first battery and had to return to the deck for another. This was an appropriate time for a break and Silverwood took his place. After only 5 bolts the Kiwi returned to the ground, 'too bloody scary' he said. 'Your turn Dickon.' I've done a little bolt climbing but mostly just a couple of bolts to protect scary, dangerous moves in muddy, chossy avens, never actually aiding off a long sequence of bolts. Still the principle is simple enough; place a bolt, clip the etrier to it, climb to the top step and put in the next bolt, repeat. There are as few minor complications like making sure that the dynamic rope is running through all of the bolts to protect you but nothing that isn't obvious to somebody with extensive climbing and vertical caving experience.

So I prussiked up to the last bolt and tried to put in another. It was the hardest bolt I had ever drilled, strenuous as all hell holding the drill at arms length but also really slow. After a minute or two I decided I was being too greedy and putting the bolt a little higher than was viable so I abandoned that hole and tried one a little lower only for a sizeable piece of marble to flake off as I was drilling. I was getting annoyed now but with a few more minutes of effort I had managed to drill a hole but the f\*\*\*ing bolt wouldn't go in. I was wasting drill power with my incompetence so I rapped back to the ground and handed the reins

back to Warrington. As he kitted up it was noticed that the drill had been set to reverse, very embarrassing!

The bolting saga resumed and eventually after about 6 hours of bolting a ledge was reached. Silverwood went up to have a look but I was not psyched by the prospect of more bolt climbing (give me a tight shitty rift any day) so had another wander around the area. About 20m into the passage that led back under the bolt climb I spotted a small, unpromising looking alcove. With nothing better to do I clambered up to it and was surprised to see a stooping height passage leading on. The windblown stals on the roof suggested that there had at one time been a draft even if there was none at the moment. Disappointingly there were footprints on the floor but I didn't recall this being on the survey so pushed on anyway. Very shortly it lowered to a narrow crawl, again no draft but drifts of moonmilk were banked against the walls, always a sign that there used to be a draft. The signs of disturbance also ended here, nobody had been further than this. Crawling through I was rewarded with a considerable enlargement which emerged into the top of a very well decorated vadose canyon. The canyon was (by UK standards at least) ridiculously well decorated, crystal encrusted stalagmites hung from the roof, crystal decoration plastered literally every surface and there were stunning drifts of moon milk scattered around. The climb down into the canyon looked necky to say the least and my fellow cavers had no idea where I was and would probably never find the passage I had pushed. With this in mind I decided, in the true spirit of bold exploration to push on. The climb wasn't too bad, at least not for somebody who had spent the last 3 months doing nothing but rock climbing and, buzzing with excitement, I dropped to the floor of the canyon. It was clearly very old and long abandoned. To the left it choked immediately (the survey would later suggest that this was the other side of the choke in



A TRAVERSE ON THE ROUTE TO SOUTH PARK



SURVEYING; INTERESTINGLY THE WHOLE OF BULMER CAVERN IS SURVEYED ONLY TO GRADE 4

the passage below the bolt climb and that I had passed it by way of an oxbow. To the right it was wide open.

Back at the bolt climb the news was not good. The two Neils had done another bolt climb up a further 20m above the first ledge that they had reached. It seemed likely that the continuation of South Park was on the other side of the aven and would require an epic free hanging bolt traverse of more than 50m to reach. In other words we had climbed in the wrong place. My discovery was some commiseration and we joked about the possibility that my easy find would bypass the technically and physically demanding climb that had been done. By now it was almost midnight and we had been away from camp for almost 12 hours, it was time to head back and crash gratefully into our uncomfortable sleeping pits.

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## Day 3

We still had a fair bit of drill power left but probably not enough to reach the passage that was still only just about visible with Silverwood's Scurion 1500. Besides the traverse would be extremely cold for the belayer and absolutely terrifying for the leader. Therefore we elected for the easy option of pushing the pretty passage that I had found the previous day, a cop out for sure but a worthwhile one at that. We gave the lead to Warrington as Silverwood and I had already pushed plenty of new passage and were both already hooked on caving.

Beyond the last chamber was a short climb which was actually deceptively tricky and loose. Warrington put the skills learnt on a month long stint at Mount Arapiles to make short work of the obstacle rigging a handline for those that followed. The continuation was not pleasing. We entered what appeared to be the side of a large aven, the floor dropped away down a steep muddy slope although the roof remained at the same level. Undeterred I wrapped a rope around a boulder.

Our SRT kits were back at the bolt climb so it would have to be a handline, probably more suitable as a pitch although with the amount of rub points in the exploration rigging prussiking would have been a terrible idea.

After 3 consecutive scary rope assisted down climbs I was out of rope but looking down a short drop into a stream passage. The upstream appeared reasonably wide while the downstream was a classic suit shredding, alpine rift. The old vadose canyon that we had been following could be seen continuing in the roof only reachable by a lengthy bolt traverse or maybe not. The modern meander looked very narrow and easily free climbable it seemed as if it might connect with the floor of our passage that had now, continuing the South Park theme, become known as Cartman's Corridor.

Once I had reported my findings it was decided that we should head back to camp so that this would be a short day and allow us to recover a little from our exertions of the previous day.

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## Day 4

By the next morning enthusiasm had well and truly plateaued. Silverwood's enthusiasm had plateaued to the extent that he felt unable to get out of bed and devour his sumptuous feast of Mi Goreng noodles, that staple of every student's diet. Getting out of bed is certainly hard a few days into a camp and today was harder than ever. Today marked the equalling of my personal underground endurance record. Until this point I had never spend more than 100 consecutive hours underground and today that record would be surpassed. There are those that say they love underground camping and those (like me) that see it as a means to an end to be resorted to only when the commute to the pushing front becomes too lengthy to make for viable day trips. If Bulmer was (like just about all British caves) an hour or less from the road it would be possible for a fit

team to push the end from the surface. As it is, it is a long stiff hike making this completely non-viable. In any case I think few will try to argue that underground camping is good for one's mental health.

Anyway so it was that we arrived at the end of Cartman's Corridor one colonist down with enthusiasm still at a reasonable level but certainly not what it had been 2 days ago. The first order of the day was to rig down to the stream I had looked out on the previous day and then push downstream paying particular attention to the roof to see if it would provide a bolt free route into the continuation of Cartman's Corridor. It was just as grotty and snaggy as we had expected somewhat reminiscent of a nasty Picos meander. We pushed it anyway and got to a point where a 30m drop led into what appeared to be a really bloody big chamber. As all you experienced vertical caver out there will know a tall but narrow rift often leads to a very large chamber when it goes vertical but the degenerates to shitty rift. This was most likely just a Bulmer streamway and I recalled Silverwood's warning about not getting into a duel with a Bulmer streamway.

We backtracked to where we had left the gear at the top of the series of climbs down into the meander and assessed our options. There was nothing for it now. We simply had to bite the bullet and get on with the bolt climb. Warrington climbed up to a ledge some 10m above where we were standing so that we could head down into the passage on the other side and therefore use fewer bolts and less drill power. I was able to traverse a few metres from the ledge bridging against the opposite wall. When it belled out I tried to put in a bolt and was confronted with seriously soft marble. I was able to away scratch a good few millimetres of rock using the claw of the hammer. This was frightening to say the least, particularly because the bolts that we were using were shorter than usual to conserve drill power. I wasn't keen.

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## Day 5

Today it was my turn to remain in bed. I'd had enough, 4 days is enough for me and motivation was at zero. When the two Neils had left around midday I went back to sleep for 6 hours. Essentially I slept for 18 hours with a 2 hour period of wakefulness in the middle. This seems like an insane amount of sleep but this is what happens after a long period underground, the body is happy to sleep almost without end. When I did wake I lay in my sleeping bag and read a book while contemplating various important questions. If you want to put your life in perspective and really think

about what you are doing I thoroughly recommend spending a day at an underground camp by yourself. I don't think you will come across a more distraction free environment. As the hours wore on another question came to mind. What would I do if they had an accident and did not return. They had told me not to come looking for them until the morning but what if I did find them and they were unable to make their way out? There was no way that I was going to be able to find my way out of this enormous phreatic maze after a single trip in one direction.

Of course these fears were necessary and the two Neils returned after a 10 hour trip. Silverwood had been somewhat more bold than I and had scraped away the soft surface of the marble and drilled into the better rock beneath. Apparently the rock had improved further along the traverse and they had gained the continuation of Cartman's corridor. It had choked almost immediately.

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## Day 6

I could not pretend that I had not been looking forward to this day for a couple of days. Bulmer is a truly beautiful cave but the underground environment is not where we belong and this is never more obvious than at the end of a very long trip. The big question on the trip out was whether we would be able to make it back to the cars or if we would be forced to bivvy on the mountain in a storm. As we had been underground for 6 days we had no reliable way of knowing what the weather would be like. Silverwood said that often if the draft was gusting strongly it meant that the weather on the surface would be shit. The draft in the entrance passage was certainly strong but could it be said to be gusting? That was the subject of debate as we strolled the last 500m to the surface. I was sure that it was going to be a good day and by god it was!

At the first sight of blue sky I whooped with joy and ran full tilt up the entrance slope to emerge into a perfect summers day, about 20 degrees and not a cloud in the sky. Never were the rolling mountains of the South Island such a beautiful sight as at the end of almost a week of darkness!!

Note; the pictures in this article are not from my trip but were taken on a trip a few months before mine. All by Neil Silverwood

Dickon Morris

# Photos by Jacob Podesta





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**Detective Constable Nick is not exactly a poster boy for the Metropolitan Police. He's corrupt, lazy and not even slightly abashed by how he nearly ended up losing his job through his antics in the first book in this series, *The Hollow Men*.**

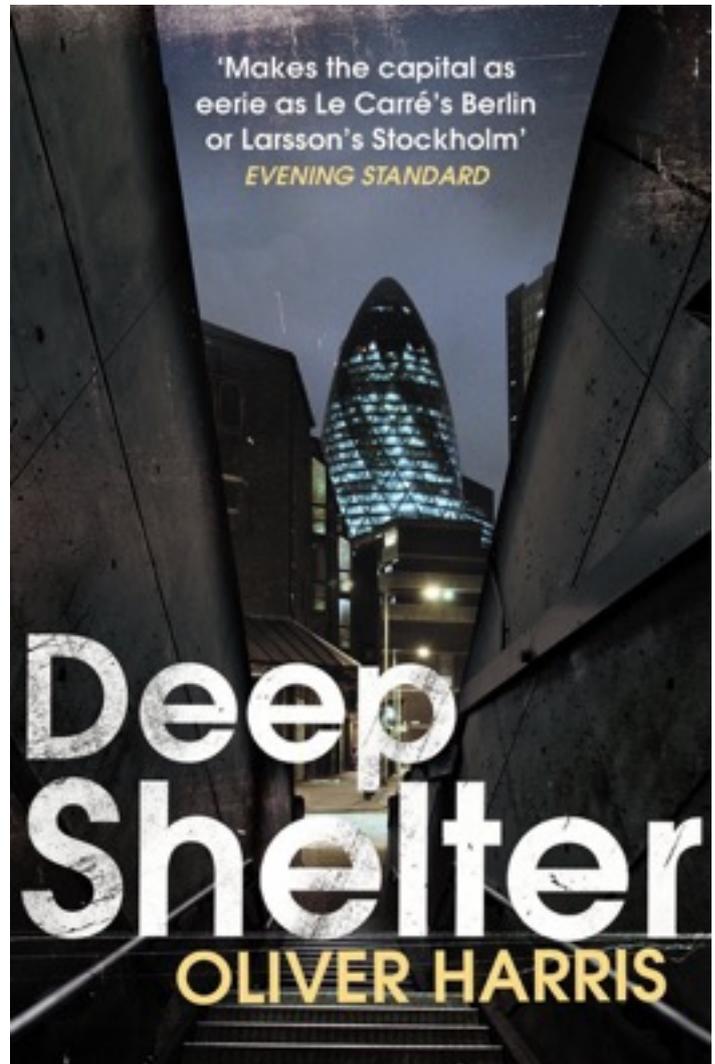
His second outing, in *Deep Shelter*, opens with him intending to take a crafty nap in his car, parked in a London side street, with an iced coffee laced with a double vodka for company. His illicit attempt to cool down on a hot day comes to an abrupt end when he sees a BMW tearing around a corner in front of him. A hectic car chase ends in Belsize Park when the driver bails out and dashes away on foot. Belsey chases the suspect down a dead-end alley, but then loses him when the man seemingly vanishes into thin air.

Belsey's interest is piqued; after all, chasing disappearing men is more fun than investigating a series of break-ins at a library whilst he's on restricted duties. He ends up underground in a series of abandoned tunnels that appear to stretch for miles under the capital.

Having all the style of a pig in muck, Belsey decides that's a good place to take a girl on a date (I'm sure there are plenty of people in UBSS who would think that's a thoroughly goo idea!), but the devil very definitely doesn't look after his own on this occasion. The girl disappears and when Belsey gets a cryptic email, it's clear she hadn't just wandered off of her own accord. Never having heard the phrase 'when in a hole stop digging', Belsey takes a series of dubious decisions and ends up finding himself in some very big holes indeed.

As someone who wanders around in holes in the ground of all descriptions for fun, I felt very much at home in the labyrinthine complexity of Oliver Harris's fast-paced and massively entertaining romp underneath London's concrete tower blocks. Short, punchy sentences effortlessly move the plot along, and Harris's eye for detail is always spot on.

The networks of Cold War tunnels under various parts of the country are as extensive as they are little known – apart from amongst cavers, mine enthusiasts and some history buffs. Harris skilfully evokes the nuclear fears of the 1980s, and vividly brought back to mind the days when, with the likes of Dave Mager, Graham Crisp and Chris



Pepper, to name but three suspects, we spent an awful lot of time in the stone mines under Cox Hill and near Brown's Folly. On one celebrated occasion, we also went looking for a supposed concealed rocket silo in Wiltshire, which a certain person believed was hidden in a haystack. To this day the use of the word 'haystacks' is still enough to make Mr Crisp twitch a bit and look over his shoulder. That was also the same occasion when, thinking we were about to be busted for trespassing, the rest of us scarpers into the undergrowth which Chris P, for reasons best known to himself, decided to hide in plain sight by pretending to be a tree. 'Nuff said.

*Deep Shelter* hooked me right from the start and I ended up writing off an entire day just so I could finish it in one sitting. There's enough detail to intrigue without ever threatening to swamp the narrative, and Nick Belsey is a thoroughly entertaining anti-hero, never more so than when he's getting up to his neck and beyond in a very complex – and wholly rogue – investigation.

And don't dismiss the central premise as unbelievable either. It's all too close to the truth in a lot of places.

Linda Wilson



