

Third Series

Number 3

UBSS Newsletter

May 2006

Annual Dinner
BCRA 2006
UBSS First Car
The Volp Caves, France

Annual Dinner and Trev's Party

Sat. 4th March, all the preparations were over and I already had a hangover. Thankfully by the time the A.G.M started I was back on form. Dick Willis gave a fascinating talk on 'Holes to swallow Mendip', which could equally well have been called 'A caving world tour'. We headed home to get changed via 'Bottoms Up', as wine was going to be essential for the evening ahead.

The annual dinner once again took place at Manor Hall and was well attended (42 people). The food was (as I hope everyone agrees) delicious. After the meal, believe it or not, came the bit I was dreading - standing up and presenting the awards. Thankfully I'm not exactly a shrinking violet. Tree had made some brilliant awards and also did a wonderful attention grabbing caving inspired dance, meaning I didn't have to shout and I would have a voice for later (some people may have preferred it if I hadn't but hey you can't always get what you want).

The awards were distributed as follows;

Silver compass award (for failing to find Jingling Pot) - *Christian*

SuperTed award (for going all the way to Yorkshire and not caving) - *Edith*

Darwin award (for scaring freshers off) - *Andy*

Santa award (having had his soggy caving gear stolen at Xmas) - *Paul*

Heroine of Wales award (for providing bedding in Wales) - *Fay's mum*

UBSS ambassador to Africa (as a result of his travels) - *Frank*

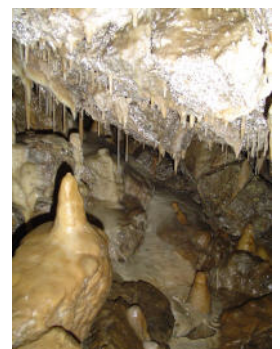
UBSS song book (because we all know he loves it) - *Dick*

A welsh music CD (because he's now studying in Wales) - *Bill*.

Then to my surprise (yes, I genuinely didn't know), I was presented with the silver bucket award (complete with vomit) - for every time I go anywhere near a decent quantity of alcohol (thankfully I didn't repeat the performance on this occasion).



Annual dinner held at Manor Hall
Andrew Atkinson



Cover photo
Uamh an Tartair,
Gina Moseley

Annual Dinner and Trev's Party

The song book was soon put to use, with Paul playing the piano whilst others sang. As far as I am aware there is still somewhat of a mystery surrounding exactly how the piano ended up wearing a reasonable amount of Paul's blood. We then departed, heading either for Clive or Trevor's house for their respective after-parties. I have a feeling that the party at Clive's may have been slightly more civilised than that at Trevor's.



with chair and/or coat hanger squeezing, body and table traversing and the broom trick. I'm not sure if Hannah will ever be able to look at a coat hanger again having been stuck in one for quite some time (again there are some good photos). These games were not practical wearing skirts, so the guys, being gentlemen (or as I suspect, wanting to wear skirts) gallantly handed over their trousers. They did have our skirts, and it did make body traversing much more amusing.

Anyway, all dignity lost forever, (and the loss of that dignity recorded on film), many people seemed to disappear (maybe they went home... but you can never be sure!). Those still standing headed down to the basement to appreciate the wonders of Trev's L.P.s. At this point I fell off a spinning chair (It was actually spinning, although I can't claim to have been sober). Much singing dancing and laughing continued well into the night.

Aftermath at Trevor's house
Tree coat hanger squeezing
Andrew A & Bill Miners body traversing

Having said we were going to Trevor's, we first ended up at his neighbours, - foiling those who had taken a taxi and consequently didn't know where we were. The neighbours in question had had a rather loud party the night before and the aftermath was still very much in evidence. This did not stop us from starting various games or stealing their booze. There is a great picture of Gina looking a bit like a drugs death, squeezing under their coffee table surrounded by various cans, bottles, etc. We did eventually head to Trevor's, many by the over the fence route, having lost those who thought the 1st house was where we were staying (Crap excuse - you know who you are!). Here the games really entered full swing,



Annual Dinner and Trev's Party

At some point, most people left, until there was only Frank, Hannah, Trev (still wearing Hannah's skirt) and Me left, we were still there when we woke up the next morning, so I have come to the conclusion that we didn't leave. In the morning we discovered that Andy Farrant had also failed to leave, although he had disappeared rather early in the evening (apparently he had just laid down for a little while!). We surveyed the damage to Trev's property, apart from several misshapen coat-hangers; the major damage was to the kitchen table (none of the legs were parallel) and a chair (missing a strut). Several cups of tea later, we

were ready to go home and get changed ready to go caving as agreed the night before. However, due to Paul's hangover and very wise suggestion of a York Café breakfast, this got postponed a little. Eventually Chris, Frank, Hannah and I headed to Swildons and had a short pootle around the top section. It is a truly great hangover cure. Having decided that Franks child-bearing hips were simply not going to fit through the pipe below the tree (he still claims it is possible), we headed home for food before returning to the pub. Here's to next year!!!!

Kayleigh

Treasurer's Report, March 2006

A year ago, I stood in front of the AGM and outlined a situation of possible doom and disaster. This year I am showing you a set of accounts that, in the main, show a remarkable surplus. I make no apology for this. I wasn't wrong last year, but, thanks to the generous help from the Tratman Fund of the University in the publication of *Proceedings*, not just because the issue was worthy of support but also because they were aware of our precarious situation with regard to the PI insurance, thanks to Linda's sterling work in negotiations with the BCA over the size of our bill, and thanks to direct assistance from the Trustees of the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund, we came through. However, this surplus will diminish over the next couple of years as inflation eats it away and we need to remain cautious financially. This year, with the size of our printing bill, insurance was only the second

highest item of expenditure. For the foreseeable future it will probably be the highest.

Having said the above, there is no need for serious concern or panic as the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund's Trustees are in a position to offer considerable assistance in support of our various activities, thanks to the generosity of our members and others.

Now for some good news, for a change, in 2003 we spent about £8,000 on publishing the *Caves of County Clare and South Galway*; at this point, less than 2½ years later, we are only a couple of hundred pounds from breaking even. I know that this is a remarkable achievement for any caving club and I think we can be justly proud. Indeed, I can think of other clubs who will be jealous of this feat. This will help us in other ways. At Linda's suggestion and with the backing of the AGM, I have proposed to the Committee that 10% of the

current CoCC fund and 10% of its future earnings be transferred to the *Library Fund*, now renamed as the *Library and Museum Fund* to assist in the upkeep and development of these facilities. The Committee have agreed with this suggestion, noting that this level of transfer will not jeopardise the production of future publications.

If anyone who wasn't at the AGM wishes to ask any questions, contact me at treasurer@ubss.org.uk and I will do my best to answer them.

Finally will all those staff and ex-student members whose subscriptions are not paid by Standing Order please note that they are now due.

Graham Mullan

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDING 31ST JANUARY 2006

RECEIPTS

	£	£
Members Subscriptions		2360.50
Student Members Subscriptions		660.00
Union Grants: Capital	406.80	
Current	<u>300.00</u>	706.80
Interest on Investments: Bank	260.10	
N.S.B.	<u>39.61</u>	299.71
Sales of Publications (not C. of C.C.)		857.40
Donations		65.00
Tax Refund on Covenants		518.55
Sale of Charterhouse Permits		0.50
Tratman Grant		2500.00
Grant from Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund		269.50
Personal contributions to P.I. Insurance		165.00

PAYMENTS

	£	£
Proceedings Vol 23.2 Printing	3000.00	
Postage	501.13	3501.13
Tools & Equipment	460.80	
Capital		460.80
Current	<u>0.00</u>	
Library		58.00
Museum		-
Sessional Meetings		30.00
Postages		149.86
Hon. Secs Petty Cash		-
Stationery & Duplicating		371.40
Property Rates		36.74
Insurances: Third Party	1104.50	
Property	<u>937.84</u>	2042.34
Subscriptions		140.00
Travel Money		234.00
Donation To Mendip Rescue Organisation		25.00
Loss on 2005 Annual Dinner		65.00
Miscellaneous		10.88

Excess of Receipts over Payments 1277.81

8402.96

8402.96

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY

BALANCE SHEET AT 31 JANUARY 2006

	£	£		£	£
HUT FUND			INVESTMENTS		
Balance at 1. 2. 05	3464.89		Capital Reserve Account	15995.00	
Add net income	<u>114.64</u>	3579.53	N.S.B. Investment Account	<u>1278.47</u>	17273.47
PRINTED PUBLICATIONS FUND			CURRENT ACCOUNT		
Balance at 1. 2. 05	2330.00				1094.29
		2330.00	CASH IN HAND		
LIBRARY FUND			Hon Secretaries	16.80	
Balance at 1. 2. 05	265.88		Hon Treasurer	<u>0.82</u>	<u>17.62</u>
Add net income	<u>30.00</u>	295.88			
EQUIPMENT HIRE ACCOUNT					
Balance at 1. 2. 05	180.24				
Add net income	<u>130.00</u>	310.24			
"CAVES OF CO. CLARE" RESERVE FUND					
Balance at 1. 2. 05	8436.22				
Add net income	<u>1088.56</u>	9524.78			
RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT					
Balance at 1. 2. 05	1067.14				
Add net income	<u>1277.81</u>	<u>2344.95</u>			
		<u>18385.38</u>			<u>18385.38</u>

HONORARY AUDITORS REPORT: I have examined the above Receipts and Payment Account for the year ended 31st January 2006, and the attached Balance Sheet as at that date and certify that they are in accordance with the Society's accounting records and explanations provided.

.....D.J. Allen C.I.P.F.A.



The President's Piece

AGM 2006

The President once again expressed our thanks to all those whose work keeps the Society going, especially the Committee, the Secretaries, and our Treasurer and Editor, Graham Mullan. Our thanks too to Clive Owen for the 'new look' Newsletter which is a great improvement. Nice too to see that the hint has been taken and the minutes have been taken 'as read'.

UBSS had obviously had a flourishing year. For the President it was a relief to have a year in which there were no funerals to attend or obituaries of former members to write. Members would however probably have heard of the death on 27th January, of Christopher Lloyd, celebrated creator of gardens and writer on gardens, and younger brother of our own Oliver Lloyd. Christopher was a charming man, in his own way just as brilliant, if at first sight less obviously intransigent, but the family resemblance was there to remind of us of Oliver, who many of us remember 'with affection tinged with exasperation'.

Our thanks are particularly due to the Tratman Fund for the very substantial grant, which in a year of financial difficulty for the Society, made possible publication in Proceedings of the substantial and very important series of articles reassessing the Society's archaeological excavations in Aveline's Hole in the 1920s. This grant was very much an exception since it greatly exceeded the share of Tratman Fund income available to the Society. In no way could the Society expect a similar grant next year. Our thanks go too to Prof. Mike Benton in Earth Sciences who oversees these grants for us on behalf of the University. Applicants for such grants should be aware that he and the President take the assessment of applications very seriously. We are happy to award grants, but applicants have to make the case.

The Society also needs to say, "thank you!" to the Oliver Lloyd Fund - Linda spoke to that. At their meeting earlier the Trustees had resolved to purchase a data projector to make life easier for people to give presentations in the Stables. The Trust will also be giving considerable financial support to the ongoing project to copy and preserve the Society's slide collection.

Our renewed thanks go to the generous donors whose generosity has almost doubled the funds held by the Trust and made these grants possible.

I am very pleased that the idea of renewing our Museum displays, which I raised at last year's AGM, has been taken up. At a preliminary meeting of an ad hoc working party in the museum before this year's AGM, we agreed that a comprehensive renewal of the displays was needed, not merely of the Neolithic and Bronze Age displays as I suggested originally. Our adviser, Lesley-Anne Kerr very kindly undertook to write a Project Brief for us.

Since then, we have had a further meeting on 22nd April, chaired by Linda, with Lesley-Anne, Chris, Hannah, John and myself, at which we accepted the broad lines of Lesley-Anne's Project Brief and began the process of seeing how it might be implemented. We made a thorough review of existing displays and agreed on a general thematic approach. Various people offered to do various things!

A good start, but there is still an enormous amount to do to make the idea a reality.

As for Dick Willis' talk after the AGM, the only thing to say was 'Top that!' And, if I made any jokes, I've forgotten them, so you're spared.

UBSS Archives

The Society's Museum and Library in The Stables contains over 4000 35mm slides some of which date right back to the early use of film. In addition there are a large number of glass slides of various sizes dating back to 1920, possibly before. These slides are suffering with the passage of time and present serious issues of conservation and collection management but at the same time technology in these areas is improving. Therefore the time has come to start work on converting these fascinating and in many cases, important, snap shots of history into a digital format.

The OCL fund has agreed to commit funding to a project which will enable us to archive the 35mm slides. How we deal with the others will require some more thought.

Hopefully low resolution copies of many of the photos can be made available on the web. As well as the physical scanning process there is a lot of work that needs doing. All the 35mm slides will need to be cleaned and remounted, and at the same time, essential work needs to be done on the cataloguing as part of the



project. So, I am looking for volunteers! Only a little skill required. The quicker we begin, the more we will save, and we will have more interesting photos available like the one above that show UBSS's first car.

Clive has offered to host slide mounting parties in a dust free environment i.e. his house! And no doubt alcohol can be indulged in after work has been done

SO VOLUNTEER NOW!

Andrew Atkinson

Extract from John Pitts' diary.....

John Pitts, one of our Vice Presidents recently made some comments in an email about the value to his career many years ago of some of the lessons he learned as part of his membership of UBSS. This definitely comes complete with the warning **DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME, CHILDREN!**

"I remembered that I had once told Bob Savage about the value to me in my career of some of the things I had learned from my UBSS experience. I think I particularly mentioned leadership, equating risk with the objectives of activities and dabbling in other scientific disciplines. I did not mention a quite specific experience that I had in the UBSS that later helped me greatly at an important stage in my career.

I bored you all at Ballynalaken (the anniversary of 50 years of the Society's involvement with Count Clare, and John's talk was anything but boring, Ed.) about the fun and games Charles (Barker) and I had in the 1940s with explosives. A decade or so later I was in charge of one of the largest electric smelting furnaces in the world. The crucible was over 10 m in diameter and 4m deep. It had three graphite electrodes each 1.5m diameter and each carrying 100000amps. A monster. Occasionally one of these electrodes would break and drop into the material in the furnace. It would take us about two weeks to cool the furnace and remove the great lump of carbon and then restart it. This was very costly in terms of lost production. Harking back to the UBSS, the thought of blowing the broken electrode up while still red hot was very appealing.

We would have to drill a shot hole two or three feet long into the red hot lump and then insert the charge complete with detonator into the shot

hole, run to safety and fire the charge before the heat set off the detonator. A few experiments with wet newspaper and a thin wooden lath convinced me that we could do it safely. Needless to say, I was unanimously elected as the man to put the charge, wrapped in wet newspaper, down the hole on the end of the long stick. It was hugely successful bang. We had the furnace working again in a few days. It did my career a power of good!

This example also embodies the issues of leadership and risk, though not of dabbling in other sciences. I was educated as a physicist."

Reproduced with permission of the author! The use of the word safely in the third paragraph is one that doesn't currently accord with the definition in the OED.

Linda Wilson

The need to clean up after a muddy trip has lead to some innovative designs in more recent caving cars...



Why caving?

When you tell people you are going caving they look back incredulously. They ask 'why?' with a brow so furrowed and a look so quizzical it makes you wonder whether you uttered a foreign expression. They speak with such urgency and concern in their voice that it betrays the content of their thoughts to be over your immediate safety, mental or otherwise.

Well this tract is for them, an attempt to put into words an answer to that question. It is also for me, when on moments of reflection the same question arises and the same lack of comprehension occurs.

It would be clichéd to say it is all a challenge and that you are testing yourself not only against nature but also against your own self. However this is just lazy, for the challenges are many and varied in their manifestation. There are tight squeezes and precarious climbs during which you are absorbed so intently in the immediacy of the struggle that everything else becomes insignificant. With this comes a certain satisfaction in applying oneself so fully and so single-mindedly to one purpose. The triumph that follows is then untainted by other concerns too.

When not struggling you are afforded the opportunity to be immersed in nature. The all encompassing low rumble of a waterfall that crescendos as you approach is the auditory equivalent of looking up at the stars. Ornate rock formations give you a sense of wonder, history and perspective. And then a moment's reflection as people turn off their lamps and appreciate the quality of true darkness.

This very same closeness to nature gives rise to discomfort. Rocks glitter and glint but are hard, water is clear but cold, and your clothes...are simply old, inflexible and rough. But it is all only initially felt and is quickly adjusted to (albeit grudgingly). However it lingers long in the mind when recovering and only serves to heighten the pleasantness of the current surrounds.

Through all this adversity your group traverses experiencing the same hardships and sharing the same struggle. In moments of difficulty; the wave of claustrophobia in a tight squeeze, the hesitancy during a climb - you give others the opportunity to show strength, tenderness and leadership for which you are grateful for and they happy to provide. And in turn you are glad to offer the same, not least because you know the same anxiety but because you too gain the same reward. These shared experiences are a force for cohesion and make the celebrating afterwards more enjoyable, and of course are the basis for stories and tales waiting to be exaggerated. (About the caving or celebrating I'll leave you to decide. :P)

On returning, simple pleasures like soaking in hot bath feel like an extravagant indulgence when contrasted to the environment below, and moreover are not tinged with guilt for they are wholly deserved.

So it is for all of this we do it, so that we may emerge stronger than when we went in and see a better world when we come out.

Chris Pawley

PS. Caving doesn't however, improve your driving. :P

Spelaeology

Totty Pot

Back in 1960/1, Chris Hawkes, now our Vice President and Museum Curator but back then a Wessex! Member, dug open a small cave near the head of Cheddar Gorge. This was called Totty Pot. If you want to know why, ask Chris, but it has something to do with their digging tools.

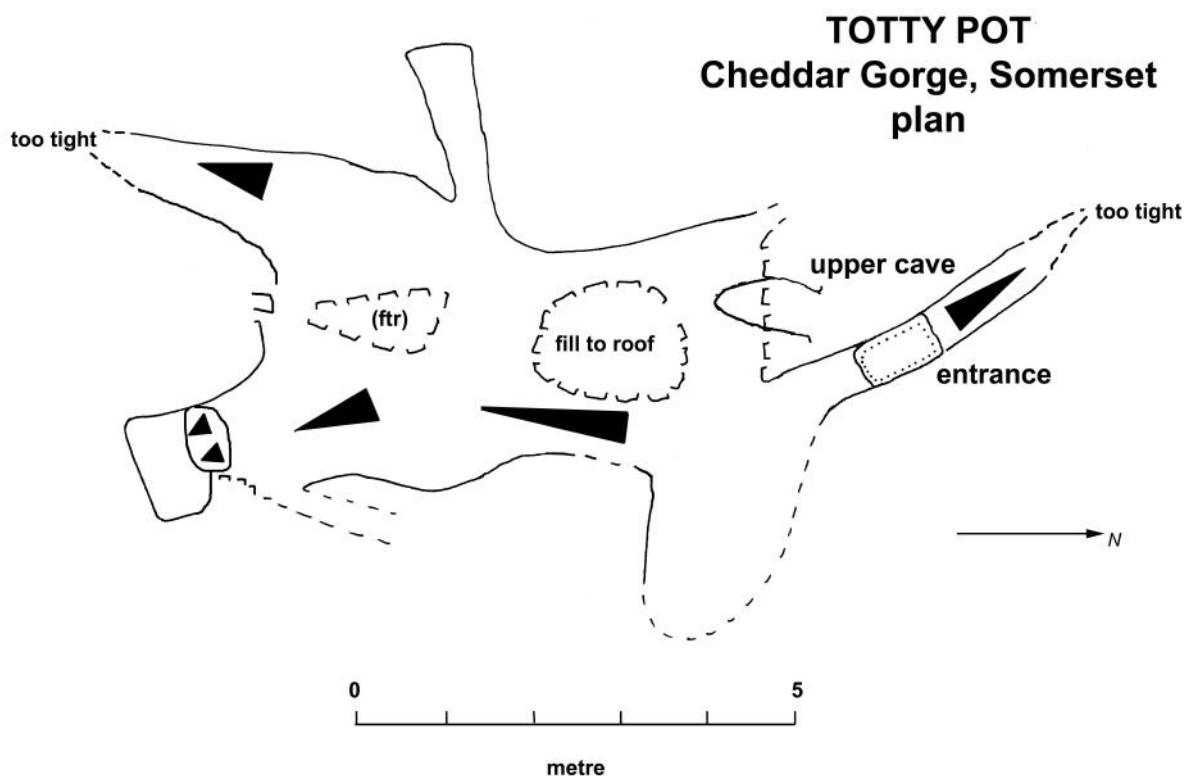
Despite much encouragement from clever people who understood karst development, little was actually discovered in the way of cave, but a large amount of bone was found, including human remains, along with a few pot sherds and some microliths. The later history of the finds is somewhat unfortunate, many having been lost, but sufficient work was done to imply that the site was used from late Mesolithic times; there is a radiocarbon date of 6540 bp (OxA-9863), on animal bone. None of this work has ever been properly published. My own opinion is that the cave was used as a burial site in the Mesolithic and that the later finds are chance falls into a pitfall trap, but only proper excavation will prove this.



In recent years there has been renewed interest in the site from the archaeological community and it is hoped both to get some further dating done on the material that has been recovered and to, possibly, get permission for further excavation to be carried out. In preparation for this work, we were asked to carry out a survey of the cave, as there does not seem to be an accurate modern one available. This was carried out by Andrew Atkinson, Tony Boycott and myself on two trips, in October and March, and the plan survey is as shown here.

Hopefully, permission will eventually be granted for excavation work here. If so be prepared for a request for underground diggers to help out.

Graham Mullan



BCRA

16th Annual Cave Science Symposium, March 2006

The British Cave Research Association holds a cave science Symposium every year in early March, hosted by the Geography (or Earth Sciences) department of a University. This year it was held in Bristol; next year, it will be Huddersfield. One of the big problems in cave science is that most researchers are pursuing a scientific career and (for professional reasons) are obliged to publish in specialist journals, rather than in speleological journals such as our own *Proceedings*. As a result, the average caver is largely ignorant of current trends in cave science research.

The BCRA Symposium is an opportunity for those sport cavers who are interested in cave science to meet and exchange ideas with professional and academic scientists. The delegates range from university professors, to PhD students to independent amateurs like myself. The presentations are quite short, about 20 minutes each, and for the most part couched in non-specialist language, so as to be accessible to researchers in other branches of cave science. This year's programme was excellent, covering a very wide range of topics.

Pete Smart opened the programme with an overview of many years work by members of his department in the underwater caves of the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico. In these caves, fresh water from rainfall floats above salt water that comes in from the sea, which leads to mixing dissolution and a very unusual development. Pete's lectures are always so well presented that it is worth attending a symposium for this alone. Andy Farrant then gave a talk of more local interest – a centenary reappraisal of the geomorphology of Swildons Hole. Swildons has been intensively studied since its

discovery 100 years ago, and is often used as a model to explain the various stages of evolution of a cave.

Pete Smithers (from Plymouth) then gave a talk on the diet of the cave spider, *Meta menardi*. Pete always starts with an apology for being only a biologist, not a caver, then presents a careful and detailed set of speleobiological observations. Brilliant stuff!! Alison Blyth (Newcastle) demonstrated how traces of organic molecules from vegetation or bacteria can be found in stalagmites. Since different molecules indicate different vegetation groups, this method can be used to identify climate variations (such as major drought cycles) or changes in farming land use.

At lunchtime, I had to collect my daughter from her orchestra practice and so missed the poster presentations (sorry, Gina). Stephanie Leach (Winchester) had a forensic archaeology poster which suggested that an Early Bronze Age young woman, who was buried in a Yorkshire cave, had been killed by a flint arrowhead. Gina Moseley had a poster describing Bristol Geography department's ongoing study of Quaternary sea level variations from analysis of speleothems from submerged caves in Mexico and the West Indies.

After lunch, Sam Allshorn (Leeds) described his water tracing work in the East Yorkshire chalk aquifer, then Trevor Faulkner (Huddersfield) gave a curious talk on a relationship he found between cave dimensions and local catchment area in central Scandinavia. By using very simple statistics, Trevor was able to distinguish between the three different types of cave that are found in his PhD study region. But I wonder

how well this method would work elsewhere.

In the last session, John Gunn (Huddersfield) described the hydrogeology of an area of turloughs (seasonal lakes on limestone) in County Fermanagh. Stephanie Leach (Winchester) gave the final talk on some puzzling early Neolithic cave burials from North Yorkshire, where the bodies are incomplete and show evidence of disabilities in the skeletal record. Something ritualistic, but what?

Most sport cavers lose their enthusiasm for caving after about 3 years. Those who do not tend to find some additional activity to maintain their interest, such as digging, surveying, photography etc. As a speleological (ie. cave research) society, the UBSS has a good record of keeping members after they have left university. For those interested in science, there are plenty of areas of study that do not need the facilities of a university laboratory. As an example, Peter Smithers (see above) studied cave spiders in a mine adit and found that they all lived within 8 metres of the entrance. I am sure I have seen them much deeper inside my Cotswold landslip caves, in particular in Sally's Rift near Bathford. This is a very simple research project, requiring nothing more than a tape measure, pencil and paper, and could provide new and useful data for Peter. I will be visiting Sally's Rift sometime this spring for other reasons, so if anyone fancies joining me and combining it with a spider hunt - please get in touch. I would normally go to the cave on a weekend.

Charlie Self
self@globalnet.co.uk
Tel: 0117 954 1728

THE VOLP CAVES (1)

Les Trois Freres

In the last four years, Graham and I have been privileged to visit all three of the Volp Caves in the Pyrenees region of France in the company of Count Robert Bégouën, the son of Louis Bégouën who was one of the three brothers who discovered the cave which is named after them, Les Trois Freres. All three caves are a remarkable testament to the care their discoverers and their family have taken to preserve these most fragile of environments in the 94 years since their original discovery. It is wholly impossible to do justice to the importance and interest of any of these caves in a short article, but I'll try to give a few details here about Les Trois Freres which might be of interest and will follow up in future Newsletters with Le Tuc d'Audubert and Enlène.

Our first trip to the area to visit anything other than the sites open to the public was in January 2002, when we were able to arrange visits to the further reaches of both Niaux and L'Eglise. The same week saw us driving nervously up to the Chateau of Pujol, home to the Bégouën family. We had written to Count Robert some two months before, sending a list of the caves we had already visited (at that stage, many of the sites in the Dordogne) and explaining our particular interest in the conservation of cave art sites, of which the Volp Caves undoubtedly present some of the best examples. Much to our delight, we received an email in reply, just before Christmas, offering us a date during our January holiday. (It was the first time I've ever known Graham totally speechless. The email came through when I was in the bath, and I had to dash into the study dripping water everywhere to find out what had rendered him practically incoherent with delight.)

One thing which rather worried us was what to wear. We knew from our researches into the cave that Les Trois Freres is what cavers would call a proper caving trip, but we were concerned about what our host would think of us changing into full caving kit (which is of course what we feel most comfortable in), after all the

caves are in effect reserved for serious students of prehistory and we didn't want to give the wrong impression. We certainly needn't have worried! Robert, one of the most charming gentleman I have ever met (who bears a very close resemblance in both manner and looks to our late President, Bob Savage) promptly put us both at ease by admiring our gear and joking that it made his overalls and denim flying cap look positively prehistoric by comparison. We drove round and parked near to the entrance in his little white van and then waited while he unlocked the two gates, the older outer gate, and a newer stainless steel inner one. The first thing we noticed underground was a trail of white bird feathers which started near the entrance, and went down the two fixed iron ladders a little way inside. It seemed that a ferret or other small carnivore had killed a bird and taken it to its lair somewhere inside the cave to eat. This was apparently the first time this had ever been noticed.

The first art you encounter in Les Trois Freres is in the Gallery of the Hands and it was at this point of the trip that Robert started to fall in love with modern caving technology. We were using our original LED lights, the Speleo Technics combined 7 LED array with the halogen main beam. As Robert started to explain that some of the prints were now quite faint and difficult to see, which under the yellow beam of his Oldham they certainly were, we looked at them with the white diffuse light of the LEDs and the handprints showed up in a way that even the cave's owner had never seen before. From that point on, my light spent almost as much time off my helmet, being used by Robert, than it spent attached to me, as he used it to examine some of the very faint engravings the cave, even revealing part of one animal which Abbe Breuil had recorded as incomplete. Under side lighting with the LED, the hindquarters of a cervid suddenly came into view, at exactly the moment that Robert was referring to the incompleteness of the figure! It was certainly an amazing moment and it is worth remembering how so much of the work on the Palaeolithic caves done by Breuil and

many others was carried out using lighting techniques that seem incredibly primitive by today's standards, which make their achievement recording the multitude of engravings even more remarkable.

The cave is larger and much more well decorated than I had imagined. Most of the published photographs concentrate solely on the art and give very little impression of the cave as a whole, so it is difficult to gain any overall impression of the surrounding passages. The highlight of any visit here, in my view, has to be the first sight of the Sorcerer, high up in the chamber which bears his name. To reach this part of the cave it is necessary to climb carefully down a large stal flow, avoiding all contact with the walls, then when you stand at the bottom of the flow and look out into the chamber, you are almost at eye level with the Horned God himself, as some have called this strange figure, part animal, part human. The passage then slopes down, until you stand beneath him, in the sanctuary, looking up at the only figure in the cave which is both painted and engraved. Around the chamber on all the walls, wherever you look, are engravings, vast numbers superimposed on each other in such a way that it is only possible to concentrate on a few at any one time, otherwise you would be there for days.

Robert was kind enough to trust us to wriggle into the very small space, almost directly under the Sorcerer, where le Petit Sorcier, is to be found. This was of particular interest to us as Graham and I had been involved in a debate on the orientation of the figure which had run for a few issues in *Past*, the newsletter of the Prehistoric Society, after some researchers (who had not visited the cave) had endeavoured to argue that the figure should be viewed as if it was crawling, rather than standing upright. To see this strange creature, who some claim is playing a musical instrument with his nose (nice party trick if you can manage it!), you have to slide sideways, flat on your stomach, keeping your feet away from the opposite wall and your back away from the flake of rock above

(leaving your helmet behind in the chamber). A rather interesting three dimensional contortion which not surprisingly restricts the number of people Robert allows to attempt the manoeuvre. As soon as you see the Little Sorcerer, all questions about his intended orientation simply fall away. He is upright and was clearly intended to be upright, of that we were immediately certain and Robert holds the same view.

Back in the Sanctuary itself, Robert then showed us one of the most recently discovered engravings in the cave, which has not been recorded yet in any publication. The item in question was found by his son Eric, who returned to the chateau in great excitement, informing his father that he had found “*un grand phallus*” in the chamber of the Sorcerer. Robert’s response was to suggest his son had drunk too much whisky! It took a trip into the cave to convince him that Eric really had found a huge penis drawn on the rock. A pendent of rock, about three feet long, has had a very fine line engraved round it, with a most anatomically correct tip, which leaves the observer in no doubt at all of what the artist intended to represent. Robert was most amused by the discovery, but was at pains to point out that there was no way his grandfather, old Count Henri, would have agreed to its publication. A gentleman of the old school, Henri had once famously declared that he would not publish some of the engraved plaquettes found in the nearly cave of Enlène because “*the Bégouën family do not publish aids to masturbation.*”

Another notable figure in the cave is the lioness guarding the entrance to the Sanctuary, beautifully engraved on a large stal flow, with her head turned towards the observer. And there, in a fold of the stal, is a small flint point, maybe left behind by the original artist after he or she finished carving the lioness. Like the majority of the artefacts found in the cave, it has been left untouched in its original position by the Bégouën family. Also near to this figure, another object can be seen, poked into a crack in the rock wall. The shell of a Coquille St. Jacques (a scallop shell). This placement of objects in the rock is something that we would see again, four years later in Enlène. Beyond the *Chapelle de la Lionne*, the Aurignacian Gallery is



*The Entrance to Les Trois Freres.
Photo: Graham Mullan*

reached by a narrow crawling traverse, accessed up another iron ladder, which Robert described as “difficult for professors of prehistory, but not for cavers”. He seemed to be enjoying a trip where he did not have to worry about his visitors quite as much as usual. Here we saw the famous snowy owls of Les Trois Freres. Two adult birds standing protectively, one on either side of their chick.

The cave is in a remarkable state of preservation. Every care has been taken since its discovery on 21 July 1914 to preserve both the engravings and the cave itself. There are a few fixed aids, including four iron ladders, a short scaffolding bar to aid the final step around into the Aurignacian Gallery and a few footholds cut into the stal flow on the descent into the Chamber of the Sorcerer but everything has been done to keep human intervention to a minimum

so that it is possible to view the cave in as close a fashion as possible to the way the original artists saw it.

After the visit, we were invited to join Count Robert back at Pujol for a glass or two of white wine, a custom started by his father Louis, which continues to this day. We also signed our names in *le Livre d'Or*, the Golden Book, which has recorded all visits to the caves since their original discovery, and now runs to two volumes. The books are fascinating historical documents themselves, containing detailed accounts of the early visits, some drawings, poems, even songs. There is only one gap in the record, in the early part of the book where an entry for 24 September 1922 is followed by an entry for 31 August 1925, and a page appears to be missing. Robert seemed unaware of



this until we asked him about the discrepancy after a morning spent in the company of the Golden Books in his laboratory before our second visit to the cave a year later, but he thought the damage might have occurred during the War. In one of Robert's papers on the cave, he has published detailed statistics for visits, which make interesting reading. From 1919 to 1975, no more than 1,055 people had visited the cave, giving an annual number of visitors of 15.74, with 3.80 trips per year. From our discussions, it seems this has continued along very similar lines, with approximately 4 trips a year, of no more than 4 or 5 people per trip, now lead by Robert or his son Eric.

One notable visitor was the Queen of Denmark, who Robert described as *une tres grande dame*. The Queen (a most impressive lady, by the sound of it) has a passion for archaeology and came to Pujol, complete with a retinue of armed guards, one of whom even accompanied her underground to see Les Trois Freres. Apparently her husband is far less grand and comes over as an ordinary sort of bloke who just happens to be king. We're told that the Queen contrived to cave in a fur coat and high heels, which really is impressive!

The year after our first visit, we returned to Pujol for a trip to le Tuc d'Audubert, but a large fall of snow the previous night threw our plans into disarray. We arrived at the chateau several hours early and Robert and his wife Jeanne kindly looked after us, parking us in the warm and dry where we happily pored over the Golden Books, recovering from a somewhat precipitous flight from our gite at 4 am to prevent ourselves being stuck up a mountain on the wrong side of a snowdrift! After lunch, we set off, in the company of two others (one of the guides from Niaux, and another who worked at the Prehisto Parc in Tarascon), with the

boat on a trailer hitched to the back of Robert's van. As soon as we got down to the stream, it started to look increasingly unlikely that we would make it into le Tuc. The snow was melting rapidly off the surrounding fields and the Volp was in spate, rushing out of the entrance, far higher than normal.

Our two companions, neither of whom were cavers, eyed the torrent, and the small boat, with a great degree of suspicion. Robert, with the spirit of a true cave, had no mind to admit defeat without giving it a go, even though the conditions could hardly be described as normal. The boat would usually carry two, but that was clearly impossible now, so his plan was to go first, and if he made it upstream, he would send the boat back, attached to a rope and I would go next. The plan being that to see me, a woman, going through next would give our two companions confidence. (They didn't know we were cavers, so Robert hoped his subterfuge would work.) He jumped into the boat and paddled for all he was worth, but although he managed to get just out of sight, the current was too strong and eventually he had to give up and was spat out of the entrance in the boat like a cork from a bottle. But it was a good attempt! (The following year, Eric told us that it had once taken him and a friend two hours to drag themselves upstream in the boat to reach the ladder which leads up into the cave, no more than 120 metres from the entrance.)

So, after taking the boat back to Pujol, we found ourselves heading off to Les Trois Freres for a second visit as a consolation prize. And that really was something that I never thought I'd experience again! The following year, we were lucky enough to visit le Tuc and last year, we rounded off our knowledge of the Volp Caves with a trip to Enlene.

Panoramic view of the hillside under which the Volp caves lie: the stream sink is in the valley to the right, in front of the trees and the entrances to Les Trois Freres and Enlene are in the woods at the centre.

Photo: Graham Mullan

Our grateful thanks go to Count Robert Bégouën and his family for their kindness and hospitality over the past four years. The warmth of the welcome that the Chateau of Pujol and its inhabitants extend to its visitors has certainly not diminished over the last century.

Those who have an interest in historical accounts of the cave might like to look up some of the references below, as some of the best and most interesting accounts of the cave come from the travelogues of some early visitors, particularly the Sawtell account from the 1920s, which has a wealth of fascinating detail.

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Linda Wilson

Trip Reports

Shatter Cave

30th November, 2005

Andrew, Kayleigh, Matt, Gina

My interest in Shatter Cave (Fairy Cave Quarry) began when I conducted my undergraduate research on its microclimatology in July, 2004. In finding this out Andy W. expressed an interest in going to see it and so I set about contacting Chris Binding of the Fairy Cave Quarry Committee. We could take a maximum of five people due to conservation efforts within the cave and so on a very wet Wednesday night we set off to Shatter Cave with Kayleigh and Matt in tow.

Getting there was a quite an effort, it took over an hour to get out of Bristol, traffic was manic. Chris being the great guy he is didn't appear to mind too much that we were slightly late, however many apologies go to Chris. We also had John on the trip with us who is Chris's boss and works up at Charterhouse.

I'll set the scene a bit. Shatter Cave, according to Chris, is the second most beautiful cave in the UK (after Otter Hole). Having never been to Otter Hole I think it is fantastic and feel very privileged having been there 7 times now, especially as visitor numbers are very restricted. So far that year there had been only 28 visits to the cave, not a lot really, on a weekend you would get that many just in Goatchurch. English Nature spent £13,000

having various gates installed in the quarry caves. The entrance therefore consists of a large sewage pipe with a gate to prevent bats entering and messing up all the pretty stuff.

It was quite a cold night so going into the cave was lovely and warm. The chambers in the cave are relatively large, in fact there is only three crawls so caving isn't difficult. The first bit of the cave took a lot of shock from the quarry blasts and consequently the first few passages are 'shattered' funnily enough which is where the cave got its name from. There is however a distinct change in the nature of the cave a short way in. The rocky floor disappears and more natural cave starts. Immediately the passages become beautiful. There is a huge canopy almost straight away which I think Matt took a photo of. The walls and floor are lined with pretty stuff. We were really careful not to put muddy footprints or hand prints anywhere. Conservation tape lines the way really well and guides you away from all the special bits.

The flowstone varies quite a lot in colour. Some of it is pristine white and other bits blood red. Going through the cave beyond Canopy Chamber is Erratic Rift. Not too tight at all but it does have the most spectacular array of curtains, some double folded too. We had to be really careful not to knock these out. Straight after the curtains comes Tor Hall. A huge stalagmite the shape of Glastonbury Tor is in this part of the cave. This passageway is

again lined with stalagmite, flowstone and the roof which is quite high up has streaky red curtains. Going through the cave you have Pisa Chamber with a stalagmite that looks like the leaning tower of Pisa followed by the a section with the Angel's Wing, a pristine white curtain. Here Chris explained about fluorescent stalagmites and so we paused for a bit whilst testing out the flash on Matt's camera. Sure enough the stalagmite glowed bright green for about 10 seconds afterwards. We then had to do our first bit of caving and climb up through the Ring Road. All the time Chris was explaining the cave structure and history. We were all really quiet (can you believe that) as we were fascinated by the pretty things and what Chris had to say. We reached the final part of the cave for us, Pillar Chamber. A gorgeous white moonmilk sparkly floor with a huge bright white column at the end. The cave does go on beyond this but general visitors aren't allowed so as to protect the passage.

Finally a small squeeze back out to the ring road and out the way we had come. It really was a fascinating trip, even if I had heard it all before. Everyone was really quiet just cause there is so many formations one after the next throughout the cave. It really is stunning and Matt has got the photos. Oh and of course, the trip was ended with a quick trip to the pub in Oakhill.

Gina

Wales - Darren Cilau

It was my 1st caving trip in 2 ½ months (lame I know) and I was eager to find out which Welsh cave would be graced with our presence. When Christian told me it would be 'Daren Cilau' panic set in. I had never been before but had heard plenty about the delightful crawl to be slightly apprehensive.

The last few days of February dusted the Welsh valleys with snow; it would be fair to say it wasn't the warmest of weekends. After an energetic snowball fight, Christian, Frank, Chris and I ploughed up the hill to the cliff face.

Already in a state of mild hypothermia, Christian led the way into the icy cold water. I was somewhat relieved that it wasn't a continuous belly crawl for 45 minutes and was broken up with some standard

crawling and stooped caveman style walking. Each box was eagerly awaited and a relief to see (although I'd always hope we'd missed a box and had made more progress than we actually had done).

By the time we reached box 8 I think we'd all had our fill of cramped spaces. Christian then informed me that we were only 2/3 of the way there and there were in fact 12 boxes! I've never been so relieved to find out he was joking.

Once inside and able to fully extend our bodies the pace quickened up. Tiered from the crawl we couldn't quite match Christian and Franks brisk pace. Unfortunately we only had time to reach the log book and have a little wander around as we had the hut key, not that anyone particularly cared as the

pub offered a pleasant, warm place to wait for us!

The crawl out was much worse quite possibly because we didn't even see the pretty parts of Daren. I don't want to imagine how painful it would have been without knee pads. I'd like to thank Christian for putting up with so much abuse on the way out. Eventually a call to say the end had been reached gave me the last surge of motivation to escape.

After not the most successful trip to Daren I came out with some incredible bruises and the comforting knowledge that I'll have to repeat the trip to see the amazing parts of the cave. Only next time I'll make sure its not the 1st cave I do after a few months off!

Fay

County Clare, March 2006

This was NOT a caving expedition, rather a saunter through the old haunts by an old lag of 1967-73 vintage. Having spent a day in the Twelve Pins in Connemarra, Co. Galway, I found myself wandering around the Burren on my way back to Dublin. It has been nearly thirty years since I was last in Clare, and there have been some changes alright: regrettably many of them for the worse. No karstification here. "Touristification" has seemingly prevailed everywhere and in my view spoiled the place. Clusters of newly-built "holiday cottages" which, in the words of Tom Lehrer, "all look just the same" are to be found in every village, and Fisherstreet at Doolin now sports a horrendous "visitor centre". The old harbour at Doolin now serves as a port for not one, not even two, but three ferry companies vying to take your money off you in return for a trip to the Aran Islands. This is nothing to the enormous cauldron of a hole in the ground at the Cliffs of Moher which is soon to become another visitor centre - in size rivalling the Albert Hall - to replace the current 10 acres nearby of car parking and portacabins selling leprachauns and tea towels.

Many of the small plantations have now become dense forests, and attempts to find some of the caves failed dismally. The old classics are still evident (St Catherines to Doolin, for example) but a GPS might be warranted for serious expeditions to the Callauns or the "B-series" caves in future. It might be my imagination, but the Burren looks greener than it did decades ago, the immediate coastal fringe excepted. Maybe grass and scrub is taking over again from bare pavement in many places.

And, yes, it was raining.

Adrian Wilkins

Eisriesenwelt

Whilst inter-railing around Europe last summer I found myself frequently begging and pleading with my travel buddies, Russell and Amy, to let us have a day visiting a show cave. In Slovenia I was really keen to visit Postojna or Skocjan caves which I had been told were both absolutely magnificent. However, having taken Russell down the world famous Goatchurch Cavern a couple of months earlier he decided he never wanted to go underground again and unfortunately I had to settle for a visit to Lake Bled instead.

By the time we reached Salzburg they were weakening and finally my wish was granted and we headed for Eisriesenwelt, the world's largest ice caves (so the tour guide claims) near Werfen, 40km south of Salzburg.



The views on the way up to the cave are amazing and well worth the small trek to get to the entrance at 1641m a.s.l. From Werfen you can take a shuttle bus up to the car park at 1000m a.s.l or alternatively walk the 5km up the mountain road. A 20 minute walk from here brings you to the cable car which ascends the 500m climb. Another 20 minute walk to the entrance sees many shivering people returning from the cave and claiming 'I hope you've got more clothes than that if you're going in there!'

We joined a tour group of about 50 people. The guide spoke in English, German and French which meant you

had to wait at each stage for all the translations before we could move on. We were given a small oil burning lamp between about 6 people and then filed into the cave through the metal doorway. The draft coming from the cave was unbelievably strong and we all really had to struggle to get in there without being blown over. Once inside the dry cold air really became noticeable as the temperature is on average 0°C.



The cavern was absolutely huge and very impressive in itself even without the spectacular large mass of ice that filled it. The tour lasted about 1 hour in which we walked up slippery wooden steps on one side of the cavern to the top and then came back down the ice on the other side. The guide stopped at particular points and gave us the history of the cave, the discovery and how the formations were formed. It was all very interesting and even Amy enjoyed it much to my surprise (Russell stayed outside eating apfel strudel and admired the views). All together the cave system extends ~42 km though only the initial ~1 km is covered with ice and this is as far as the tour extends. The cave is well worth a visit though I would advise people to wrap up warm, regardless of what the weather is like outside. After an hour and a lot of standing still listening to the tour guide it definitely gets a bit chilly.

Gina

Book Review

Caves Beyond Time

(Cristian Lascu 1991, ISBN 9738537215)

I'll admit that the text portion of this book - several mini articles along with some philosophical waffle ("If a tree falls in the forest and there is no one to hear it, does it make a sound? ... If a cave remains undiscovered and in darkness, can it be beautiful?") - was rather lost on me, and I was more drawn to the excellent full page pictures which dominate this book (though I would describe my reading level as "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" so others may feel differently). Particularly nice was the article "Water and time droplets" focusing on the interesting star shaped formations of Romanian caves.

A fair portion of the book is dedicated to photos of aboveground Romania and its people. These were still interesting but I'd have preferred more cave pictures myself, especially given the title of the book.

Caves Beyond Time is available for \$35 from gess@dial.kappa.ro.

Frank

Notes from the Editors

We hope you have enjoyed reading this latest edition of the UBSS newsletter.

Is there anything that you would like to see in future issues? If so please forward your requests to either of us at
cliveowen@tesco.net
gina.moseley@bristol.ac.uk

Many thanks and

Happy caving!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Archaeology of Mendip and its Environs

11-12th November 2006

This two-day conference, held at the medieval Bishop's Palace in the beautiful cathedral city of Wells, has as its focus the archaeology of the Mendip Hills and its environs. Around twenty speakers will present the results of new research and new ideas about the rich archaeological sequence of the region, a sequence that stretches back half a million years. Speakers, including Roger Jacobin, Malcolm Todd and Michael Costen, will consider the evidence for Prehistoric, Roman, Medieval and Post-Medieval activity in this upland limestone landscape and the surrounding lowlands. The cost is £35 for the two days (including refreshments): concessions £25. For more information contact Dr Jodie Lewis, Department of Applied Sciences, Geography and Archaeology, University of Worcester, Henwick Grove, Worcester WR2 6AJ. Telephone 01905 855182.

Email jodie.lewis@worc.ac.uk <<mailto:jodie.lewis@worc.ac.uk>>



75th Wedding Anniversary

Clive and Wanda, Graham and Linda, Phil and Diana, each having completed 25 years of married life, are delighted to announce a celebration party to be held at the UBSS hut on Saturday 8th July 2006.

Drinks will be available from midday and food from 4pm.

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