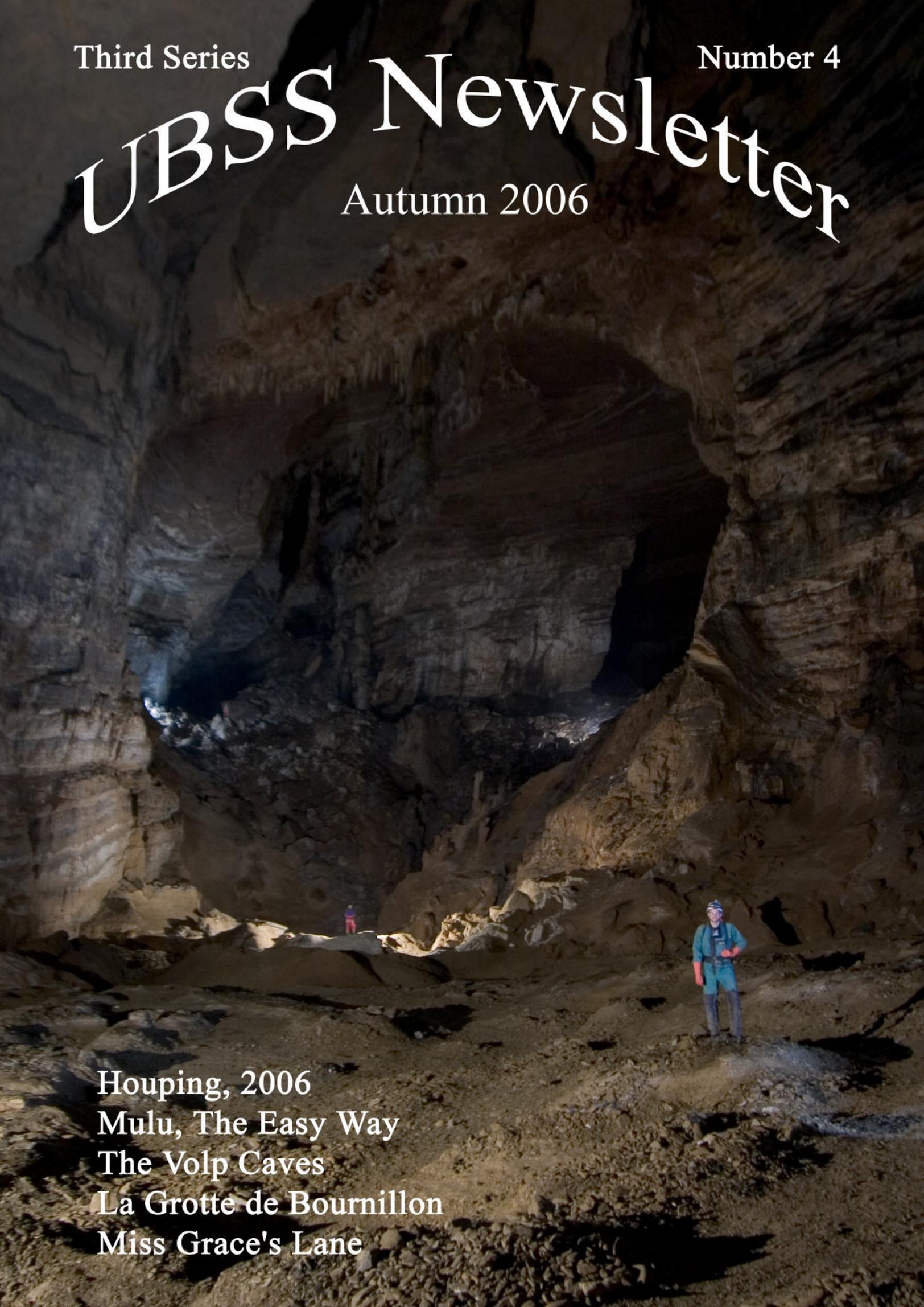


Third Series

Number 4

UBSS Newsletter

Autumn 2006

A photograph of a vast, dark cave interior. The walls are composed of layered rock formations, and the floor is covered in dirt and rocks. A person in a blue jacket and helmet stands in the foreground on the right, providing a sense of scale. Another person is visible in the distance on the left. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the rock.

Houping, 2006
Mulu, The Easy Way
The Volp Caves
La Grotte de Bournillon
Miss Grace's Lane

DO YOU CALL THAT A CAVE? *Charlie Self*

How are caves formed? Many cavers would answer that they are formed in limestone by rainwater penetrating the cracks in the rock, dissolving it and so creating passages large enough for cavers to enter. This is a good enough description for most purposes, though some scientists (including Graham Mullan and myself) would quarrel that mechanical abrasion is a significant additional process in caves that carry a fast-flowing stream. No matter; we all agree that solution is the crucial process in the development of such caves, which are called "karst" caves (named after a region on the Italian/ Slovenian border).

Our local Mendip Hills have limestone karst caves, as do the major caving regions of South Wales, Derbyshire and Yorkshire. Most UBSS members (and most cavers worldwide) will pursue their sport exclusively in limestone karst caves. Such caves can also form in rocks other than limestone: the second longest cave in the world (in Ukraine) has formed in gypsum strata. A combination of solutional and mechanical processes can form caves in arenaceous rocks such as sandstone and quartzite, while caves can form within and beneath glaciers as a result of meltwater streams. There is a debate currently raging as to whether these latter two groups should be included into karst caves.



Caves can also be produced by purely mechanical processes. A good local example is the Cotswold Hills, where landslipping has opened up joints in the rock within the limestone sequence. These fissures (called "gulls") tend to be tall and narrow, well-populated with spiders and with the occasional bat. Tony Boycott and I have spent the last few years happily exploring and surveying these caves (for our scientific journal, UBSS Proceedings), but few UBSS members have joined us more than once. How strange.

A more extreme form of landslipping produces the talus cave. A good example can be found near Arrochar in

Scotland, a short detour from the main road to Glencoe and Ben Nevis (see Newsletter, summer 2005). At Glen Croe Cavern, the river Croe Water has been roofed over by an avalanche of mica schist boulders.



Last June, I went on a mountain walking holiday to Chamonix in the French Alps and found a cave that seemed half way between a gull and a talus cave. In the Eau de Bérard valley (on the north side of the Aiguilles Rouges), a mica schist hillside has foundered. There are many fissures and boulder-roofed voids, by far the largest of which is Grotte à Farinet (see photo). The central chamber is perhaps 10 metres long, 15 metres wide and 7 metres high. Close to this cave, a wooden walkway has been constructed to access a natural balcony behind a substantial waterfall. It feels very strange to stand dry and comfortable in what appears to be a massive boulder ruckle, with the whole volume of the Eau de Bérard flowing only a few metres above your head then cascading down in front of you.

Walking further up the beautiful Eau de Bérard valley, we passed the snowline and saw the river flowing in and out of snow-covered tunnels (see photo). As a caver, my instinct was to go and explore them – but these are not caves according to current conventions. The material may be water ice (the same as a glacier cave), assembled as an unstructured unconsolidated sediment (the same as a talus cave, but on a finer scale) and it is carried away dissolved in the stream (the same as a karst cave). So why are they not caves? Perhaps it is because snow tunnels only last one season, yet transient tunnels formed by drainage outwash from earth and poorly consolidated sands are classed as caves. Or perhaps snow tunnels fail the definition of a cave as a "natural hole in the ground", but in this case why do glacier caves qualify? I don't know and I don't think science has an answer. So let's take an unscientific approach and repeat the old adage: caves are where you find them!

Houping, 2006

Andrew Atkinson

Due to my fixed holidays, I had decided to go on the 2nd of three Hong Meigui expeditions that were to take place in 2006. The slight reluctance came from the fact that it would be the middle of the rainy season and it is meant to rain lots over there. As the accommodation is in someone's house in a very small village. Er Wang dong, the expedition is limited to 6 people at a time. The 6 were Erin Lynch (US) and Duncan Collis (UK) who live in China and do most of the planning, Thomas and Anja Maltham (D), Yvo (CH) and myself (UK).



It didn't start well I lost my luggage at Paris, but did not know that until I got to Beijing, so Erin was a little surprised when I walked into Chongqing airport only carrying a small Pelli case. Much to our surprise the bag arrives 2 days later, in the meantime Erin and I had been doing the shopping for the 15 days in the field.

At that point Yvo Weidmann and Duncan turned up from another expedition, time to start moving all the stuff to the Leiging, which is a 3 hr bus drive away,



being China, it was not unusual for 3 people to load about 20 large sacks and boxes on the bus. Hong Meigui tackle store is in L so a few hours was spent fixing and packing gear.

Lunch with the local officials lead to them getting us a minibus to take us to Er Wang Dong. We were dubious, with what turned out to be good reason, it was very slow over the mud road, and we got a puncture. Luckily, there was a spare, but not spanner or jack. The driver just disappeared without saying anything, while we sat around with the bus now blocking the road. Any trip to China you get use to this sort of thing, things happen when they happen, and there is not much you can do to influence it, so we relaxed. The last few kilometres of the road becomes worse, the bus hit its sump or gear box several times, and started to leak oil. We ended walking the last couple of kilometres, in the dark, moving the stones out the way, but we made it. As soon as we were unloaded the driver set off back, we assume he made it.

The area has two major caves Er Wang Dong and San Wan Dong, which mean 2nd and 3rd Wang cave, we don't know where the first went! As with all expeditions with lots of going leads the plans were vague and adaptable, but top of the list was to try to join the two caves from any lead, followed by checking out a tiankeng (massive sink) to the north as this looked like it could be one of the sources to one or both of the systems. In the rainy season I was dubious about pushing a sink. As it turned out, although we were about 6 weeks into the wet season it still had not rained. So plans changed to go and have a look if we could follow any passages to the sump, which resurged about 2 km from the end of the cave. One question that was puzzling previous expeditions was the resurgence had a huge amount of water coming out of it, but no sign significant water had been found in the cave.

So on day one we split into two groups to go and push two different leads at the bottom of the San Wang Dong, about 300 m from where we were staying.



The Entrance is impressive but nothing to what was inside. The cave is wonderful, full of variety, changing in size from the massive to squeezes that you think must end the cave, but then massive again. The lead the group I was in pushed what has to be one of the best introductory leads to a new cave. A large passage slowly sloping down on mud leads to a pitch overlooking, well, blackness, 'The Cliffs of Insanity' Thomas and I wandered, dubiously, along the mud cliff looking for something that looked like rock and that would hold. Thomas drew the short straw and found something that he thought he would trust, so we sent him first. It was one of the worse rebelays on a pitch I have ever experienced, nothing to do with Thomas' rigging, he had found the only way down. It landed 15 m down at what turned out to be a 3 way junction, we think (the third lead was never pushed, despite been 10 m wide and over 30 m high.) We headed off down stream, surveying 400 m of passage, 'Beyond insanity', not bad for the first trip.

A couple of trips and the survey showed that the lead

had turned away from the resurgence and heading back to the Bisto the lead the others had been down. Duncan and I went down Bisto to link the two together. This was an excellent example of why the caving around Houping is so much fun, it started off as nice walking passage, heading straight for the other passage. But in the end there where traverses, lots of routing around, and complex varied passage before we eventually found the flagging tape from the previous trip.

Below the cliffs of insanity further trips discovered more huge cave and the dry route, gained water that lead to some dubious caving (in the nude.) Water was very limited on the surface so washing was limited to none existent. On one trip Yvo got the wet bit stripped off and produced a bar of soap, therefore naming the whole series 'Bathroom'.

Meanwhile down the dry route Erin and I took a left turn and surveyed in nearly a straight line for about 3 km, 'As you Wish', going well beyond any passage heading to the resurgence. This set the aim for the next expedition of investigating on the surface to see if the resurgence for this passage could be found, all we know is that it is kilometres away. Duncan and I did eventually find the sump about half way along As You Wish, down a very slippery 8 m climb.

Also during the trip we did go and have a look at Niubizi Tiankeng.. This was about 100 m away from the pitch (up) that had stopped the previous party in Kong Fu Fighter, Er Wang Dong. There was also a hole in the wall of Niubizi Tiankeng 'Niubizi Dong' that we wanted to investigate. So on various days

we walked, with rucksacks full of rope, the 2 hours to Niubizi and pushed both as 2 groups. The cave dropped in a series of pitches and the Tiankeng itself lead to an awe inspiring entrance that did drop into Kong Fu Fighter. The Niubizi Dong was left with a 20-30 m pitch which is directly over a side passage of the passage called 'Puke Passage' the name gives a clue why it was not connected, towards the end of the expedition



all of the team became ill, to various degrees, caving became difficult. Niubizi Cave also had horizontal cave development above the first pitch which looks to be heading to San Wang Dong, so the hopes are high to connecting the caves together, that and the fact that the resurgence of the caves seems to be kilometres away should mean that this is going to develop into a very large, exciting system. Three expeditions are planned next year....

Mulu the Easy Way

Dick Willis

After years of listening to Graham telling me that my expeditions are really just glorified holidays, I decided to carry out a scientific study and make a comparison. So, in the company of Roo Walters and his kids, I took my wife and two youngest sons (11 & 6) to Mulu on a holiday. It's an activity I would recommend.

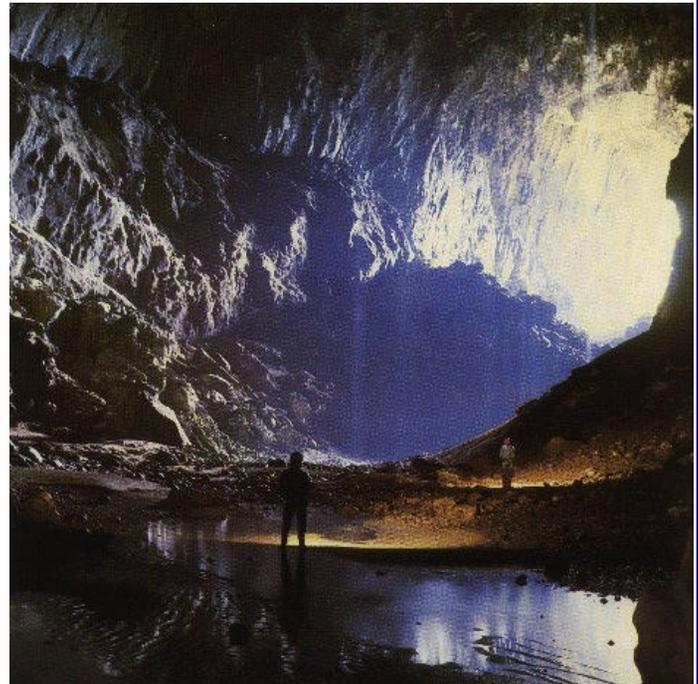
We started off with a few days in Sabah, organised by N.Borneo Safari (info@sukaulodge.com). Arriving in Sandakan, we bedded down for a couple of nights in a 5 star hotel (it was hell) and paid a visit to the local Orang-utan rehabilitation centre. Standing amongst a load of tourists watching orangs swinging through the trees towards us, squabbling over food and occasionally baring their teeth, I was strongly reminded of SRT displays in freshers' week; nuff said.

Moving to Sabah advance camp involved a 70 km journey of which 40 km was over a dirt track. Fortunately we were in environmentally unfriendly 4x4s, rather than the tourist buses that were scattered all around us or providing road hazards as they slid sideways in the mud. A brief detour took us to Guomantong Caves, made famous by the Planet Earth sequence with the very large pile of bat poo. Yes, it's very large but you need to be an international speleologist of no little repute to persuade the guides to take you too it; it's off the tourist plankwalk. Either that or be able to bullshit - most UBSS members shouldn't have a problem.

A couple of days on the Kinabatangan River at Sukau provided a wildlife-rich interlude. We saw more in 2 days than I have seen in 26 years of visiting Sarawak - wild orang-utan, wild elephant, 4 m crocodiles (performing a service by eating the dogs), various monkeys, lots of birds. Fantastic. Then back to Kota Kinabalu and onto a plane for Mulu. We flew by Air Asian Express - the new budget operator for Malaysia. There were lots of reassuring similarities with our home grown budget operators, crappy terminal, total chaos, computer systems down, no one knowing anything, etc etc. All very nail-biting but we got there OK and on time. Flying over Brunei is an experience, looking down on real forest, whilst the border with Sarawak and the area beyond is marked out in logging roads...

Mulu is easy now - there's a real airport with an immigration desk, then a short mini-bus ride takes you to the Park HQ. Accommodation options range from the £30/night 5 star Royal Mulu Resort, with swimming pool, to the HQ own chalets at around £20/night for 4 beds - with bedding, en-suite and air-con. There's also a bunkhouse type option but, hey, we're not students any more! Food is available from 0730-2100 at the Park's canteen - a good selection of local dishes but mind the wasps and bees that queue up waiting for breakfast. Alternatively, across the river is a bar which serves food and booze.

Park HQ offers a range of activities. A 3.4 km plank-walk takes you through the forest to Deer Cave. Despite exposure to lots of photos and Willis bullshit over the years,



Deer Cave

this still rendered Roo speechless; Deer Cave really is awesomely BIG and the bat flight is spectacular. Going north along another plank walk for about 3.5 km takes you via Moon Milk Cave to the other significant show caves - Wind Cave and Clearwater, at least the entrance and a few hundred metres of Clearwater's fabulous river passage.

But despite my protestations that I was there on holiday, Roo insisted on real caving. So we did a trip to Sarawak Chamber - 3.5 hours walk through the forest up the valley of the Melinau Paku to the entrance, then the wonderful 500 m entrance canal (water was low and only involved wading), another 500 m of great traverses and then the loooooonnnngggg flog up the boulder pile to the lip of the Chamber. Personally, as far as I'm concerned Sarawak Chamber is just a big, black space filled with large, unstable boulders. But, once again, it is BIG and Roo was suitably speechless. After 4 hours of caving there was then the small matter of the 3.5 hour walk back...

Adventure caving trips in Mulu have to be guided - even if you were one of the explorers who originally did the cave back in '84. But this isn't a bad thing, just finding the entrance would have taken me a week without a local... We were also accompanied by a Japanese guy on his second caving trip (he'd been into Racer Cave the day before) dressed nattily in baggy denim trousers, singlet and a levi jacket... just right for a potential 500 m swim. Later in our visit, Roo and I did the connection between Wind and Clearwater. I'd done this back in '89, shortly after the connection was found and, once again, I was glad of the guide. The route is tortuous and the squeezes are almost to Mendip standard (well, almost) but the trip is fantastic and finishes off down the length of the Clearwater 1 streamway, arguably the best streamway in the world.

In between all this, we went up to Camp 5, an hour in a boat (and 15 occasions when we had to get out and pull, cos the water was low) followed by a 9 km walk through the forest. Normally, you have to be guided here but the Park Manager recognised that I knew my way around and I greatly confused the Warden on duty at Camp 5 by telling him that I was my group's guide. The walk is fabulous, through lovely forest on a good track, and Camp 5 is without doubt one of the world's great places. Roo went up to the Pinnacles the following day, a 2000 ft (610 m) ascent over rough, sharp limestone to view these awesome blades of rock rising up out of the forest. I'd done it before so I spent the day swimming in the river with the kids. Camp 5 has got the best swimming spot on the globe - clear warm water cascading off a rapid with the cliffs of the Melinau Gorge as a backdrop and the Southern Cliffs of Benarat to the side, with the yawning entrances of Upper and Lower Tiger Caves staring out across the forest.

Then of course we had to go back and as we set foot in the forest it pissed down; a full-scale tropical storm. I spent 3 hours towing Miles (6) through the forest as he sobbed quietly until he lost his voice. On the way he pointed out the leech on his throat but he didn't spot the one on his leg...However, back at the river, the sobbing disappeared immediately and he settled into the boat for the journey back to HQ. Roo wasn't quite so fortunate, he got leeches on the eyeball and, 2 weeks later, it's still bleeding.

Anyway - after the experiment I can definitely say that you are wrong, Graham. There is a difference between holidays and expeditions - you eat better on holidays and the company is less smelly (even my boys!)

So, what's stopping you? Mulu's dead easy to get to, the accommodation is great and cheap, the food's good and the caving is wonderful. If anyone is interested in contact details, just get in touch with me.



The President's Piece

What do presidents do in the summer? As far as this one can remember, it seems to have mostly involved trying to identify nasty postage stamp-sized pieces of (Irish) Neolithic or Early Bronze Age pottery from a site in Co. Tyrone. And was it worth it, you ask (reader participation is compulsory)?

Well (since you ask), yes it was, particularly when you find a sort of pottery you hadn't identified on the site before, in this case, Late Neolithic "Plain Grooved Ware" (Sorry, I don't invent these terms, I just use them – Late Neolithic is around 2800-2500 real years BC.) We have some of this from Brean Down Sand Cliff in our museum, though ours has proper grooves on it. And there is more. It turns out that the clay texture and firing of this stuff is exactly like a mystery pot from a Wedge Tomb (Cloghnagalla to you), in next-door Co. Derry. Which is embarrassing because Wedge Tombs, - if you've been to the Burren in Co. Clare, you must have seen lots of them, - the place is stuffed with them, are popularly believed by the Plain Archaeologists of Ireland to date from Bell Beaker times = Copper Age, roughly the time when "stone" Stonehenge was built, around 2500-2200 BC. Don't we simple archaeologists have fun?

In July, Linda, Graham and AMA flew the UBSS flag at the revamped Convocation AGM and Reunion Weekend – and our member, Martin Crossley-Evans got a highly deserved Convocation Medal, great pix on the web page.

Last but not... was the special conference held at the British Museum in late September, – "The Palaeolithic & Mesolithic In Context", in honour of John Wymer, the renowned archaeologist, who died in February. For once, Linda and Graham weren't there, - off sunning themselves in France? (don't believe their cover story), but our members, Andy Currant and Roger Jacobi, from the Natural History Museum, were. Roger gave an eloquent talk about Humans in Britain during the Upper Palaeolithic, alias the last 20,000 years or so of the last Ice Age (Devensian), - much of the time conditions were too harsh for human occupation. And Andy, agrees now that Unit 5 at Picken's Hole, when wolves used the cave passage as a den, preying on brown bears, bison, reindeer and perhaps some red deer, dates to at least 60,000 years ago (MIS 5a), before the first long cold phase of the Devensian (see Proc. Vol. 22.1, p.61-2) – which is more-or-less what we thought originally.

Most exciting for me were the two papers by Simon Parfitt and by Jim Rose, showing how in the last couple of years new finds of stone implements from East Anglia have almost doubled the age of the first human presence in Britain, from around 500 Kyr, for sites such as Boxgrove and Westbury-sub-Mendip, for some years the oldest site in Britain with worked implements and first brought to attention by Willy Stanton and Prof. Tratman, to >980 Kyr, for Site 'X', a site (still under wraps) on a buried high terrace of the Bytham River, which flowed roughly west-east from the Cotswolds to Suffolk, before ice sheets of the Anglian Glaciation covered most of England, buried pre-existing river systems and pushed the Thames south to its present course through London. No human remains to go with these new finds, but perhaps they will come.

THE VOLP CAVES (II)

Linda Wilson

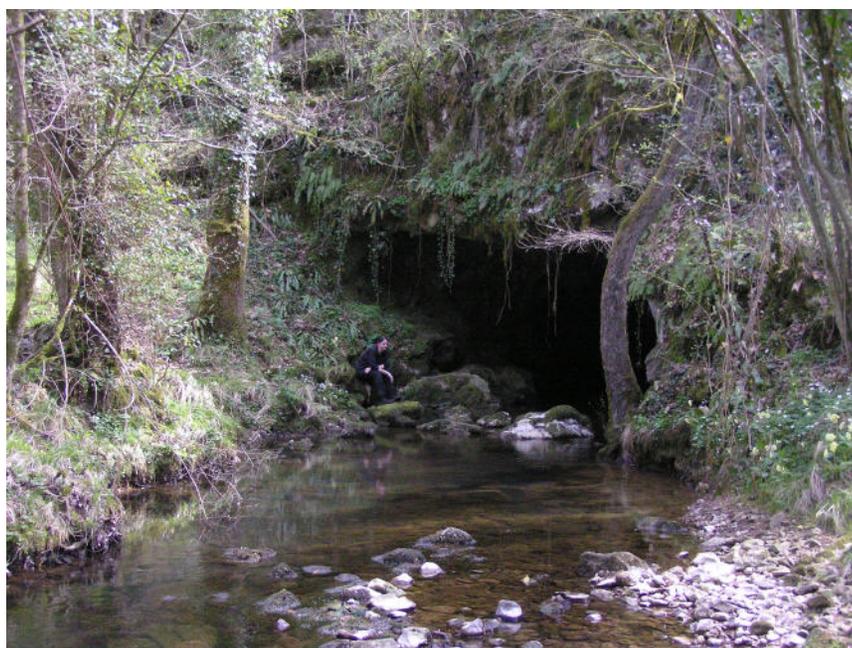
Tuc D'Audoubert

On 30 March 2004, two days after our visit to see the clay sculptures of Montespan (as recorded in the Summer 2005 Newsletter, Third Series No. 1), we returned to the Chateau of Pujol at Montesquieu-Avantes, to meet Count Robert Bégouën again for our long awaited trip to see the clay bison of le Tuc d'Audoubert. Our previous attempt, the year before having been aborted due to a massive snowfall the night before which had then inconveniently melted just before we were due to go underground.

what the river passage was like. One account by Herbert Kuhn, written after a visit in September 1929 when he and his wife Rita became the 13th and 14th people ever to see the cave, said that it was necessary to lie flat in the boat as the water in the river almost filled the passage. *"At first there was a sort of twilight but it was soon completely dark. The rock-vaulting bore right down upon us and in laces scraped the tops of the boats sides. We slithered round turnings and still more corners. None of us said a word. It was sinister and rather terrifying."*

prospect whatsoever of getting a boat upstream against the force of the Volp in spite to that degree, so I expect Kuhn of some exaggeration in his description. It is most likely that the scraping he describes is of the boat against the passage sides, rather than the roof. Poetic licence, aided and abetted by bad lighting, I expect! However, the Volp has been known to rise rapidly at certain times a year and there is more than one description of parties spending a night in the cave waiting for the waters to subside.

Robert piloted the boat upstream expertly, with me kneeling in the back, using the paddle to keep us from banging against the walls. Our lamps pierced the darkness easily in a way that Herbert and Rita Kuhn would no doubt have envied, and the cave was neither sinister nor terrifying. We soon reached a pebble beach, and sent the boat back out, attached to a rope, to allow the next two through. There were three others besides ourselves: Gilles Toscello, a prehistorian who has worked with Robert on the new monograph of the cave, which will hopefully appear shortly, and two colleagues of his, Jean-Pierre Braco and Francois Bon. Robert went ahead to open the first of the gates which protect the cave, situated up an iron ladder on the left hand side of the passage, a few corners on from the beach you arrive at with the boat. This leads up into the Salle Nuptiale, the Galerie des Dessins and then up another ladder into the Galerie Superior. There are numerous fine engravings: bison, reindeer, horses and my special favourite, a fat-lipped creature, with a wide humped neck and an appealing face. Described as an *animal fantastique* and with good reason!



Entrance Le Tuc

The resurgence of the Volp looked much lower and calmer and proved to be no obstacle at all for the small boat (the fourth since the original cockleshell contraption knocked together in a hurry by Robert's father and his brothers). I went first with Count Robert and we paddled serenely up the river. I was unsure what to expect, as none of the various accounts I had read seemed to agree on the details of

In reality, the entrance was wide and inviting, with ivy and other vegetation draped around it and bright yellow primroses decking the banks on either side of the river. The roof of the passage was nearly two metres above the surface of the water and even last year when the river had been in flood, it had only been about half a metre higher. If it had been anywhere approaching the roof, there would have been no

We made a short detour with Gilles and the others to examine a Magdalian habitation site in the middle levels of the cave, not far from one of several exits down to the river, whilst Robert went ahead to open the two gates which protected entrance to the upper levels via the famous *chatiere*, the cat-hole which gave Robert's grandfather, Count Henri, such difficulty on his first visit to the cave. We had read all the descriptions: how the three brothers entered the upper reaches of the cave by smashing a narrow stal grill, which had grown up over the years since the Upper Palaeolithic, how their father had become hopeless stuck on his first attempt to pass the narrow opening, catching his clothes on the broken points and emerging with his shirt in rags and his trousers left behind, to the amusement of his sons. There is nothing particularly tight in this section now, but it is necessary to pass two gates and a smooth climb up a narrow passage, which would have been distinctly tricky without the iron ladder which now assists the visitors passage. At the top, you wriggle sideways through a narrow squeeze which then leads into a much bigger passage, and from here, the cave steadily increases in both size and beauty.

One thing that we noticed almost immediately is the thin white plastic tape which is strung along the passage on both sides, marking the same narrow trail used by the brothers on their first visit and followed by all visitors to the cave since then. Apparently Max Bégouën brought this line back from America in the early 1920s and installed it in the cave less than 10 years after its discovery in 1912. The line is low to the ground, but not so low as to prevent generations of bats from having used it as a perch for roosting. All along the line, for long sections are mounds of bat droppings, several inches

thick, forming a low, black wall. The bats seem to congregate around the tape as most of the droppings are found in association with it.

A long series of large, well decorated galleries contain a variety of evidence of the passage of both humans and bears. Everywhere bear skulls and bones can be seen as well as bear prints, the scratchings from their claws and their hibernation pits. One notable thing about the skulls is the absence of canine teeth in the skulls. In the vast majority of cases, these had been prised out, maybe for use as decoration. There is also much evidence of human visits, including numerous stalactites and stalagmites, all broken in antiquity. Palaeolithic man was certainly hard on caves! One of the strangest sights you see on your way through this area of the cave is a complete skeleton of a snake, to the right of the path. Did it get here by itself, or was it brought in, alive or dead? And for what purpose? Robert believes it was brought in, but its purpose will probably always remain a mystery.

And at last you reach the prime reason for the visit. The two magnificent clay bison, which caused Henri Bégouën to send his excited telegram the day after their discovery, to Emile Cartailhac declaring that the Magdalianians modelled in clay! The bison are almost at the furthest end of the cave, only one small chamber lies beyond them, and moving at normal caving speeds, with modern equipment it would take between 30 – 45 minutes to reach them, providing you didn't stop en route. How long did it take the artists? Remember, they were bare footed and had to climb

the pitch by the *chatiere* without the aid of two fixed ladders, their own lighting coming from small lamps, with a twisted wick of vegetable fibre, dipped in animal fat,

Entrance 1912



which would have given a flickering light, similar to that of a candle. (And we used to complain about caving using FX2s! They were hard in those days!)

The bison, a male and a female, each about half a metre wide, lie propped up on a pile of rocks, in the middle of a wide chamber. The roof lowers around them and is now totally devoid of stal. It is possible to get all the way around the figures and view them from all sides, although it is necessary to crouch as you move round them. The front figure, a female, is the more complete of the two, having two horns and superb detail on her mane and beard. Her tail, which seems to have been unsupported by her body has fallen off and now lies on the ground beneath her. The male's tail, which curves round to meet his body remains intact. Both figures are cracked, but substantially intact, and the cracks are almost certainly the result of the clay drying in antiquity. The basic modelling seems to have been done with the figures flat on the ground and then they were lifted up and placed against the rocks, with smaller rocks and stones holding them partially upright. We learnt later from Robert's son Eric that 2 small stones were placed behind the figures some years before by Louis Bégouën who had feared that they might suffer damage following an earthquake.



Bison

There is also a third bison figure, much smaller and far less detailed, lying to one side, in front of and slightly behind the female. This is actually a copy of the original which was removed many years ago by Count Henri and sold to the museum in Saint Germain-en-Laye, partly to finance the purchase of some of the land over lying the cave, to assist in their preservation.

The figures have huge impact, both visually and emotionally. As sculptures rather than engravings, they demonstrate so well that their makers were people just like us, whose finger marks still show as clearly now as they did on the day the bison were modelled. The long sweep of the potter's fingertips stand out on the shoulders and flanks of the creatures, with even the thin lines of their fingerprints themselves still visible.

We were able to take our time here, moving slowly around the group, viewing them from all angles, listening to Robert tell the familiar tale of their discovery, and explain details that we had not known, such as why the third bison is now only a copy, albeit one

which is indistinguishable from the original.

Beyond the gallery with the bison the passage dips down to a pool, almost certainly where the sculptors took the water to wet the clay while they created their figures. At this point, le Tuc d'Audubert is no more than 2 metres from the end of Les Trois Freres, the Gallery of the Hemoine. But there is no known connection between the two caves, either now or in the Upper Palaeolithic.

Not far from the statues and at a slightly lower level is the Chamber of the Heelprints, with both finger tracings in the clay and numerous heel prints, both of adolescents and children. The clay floor of the chamber is quite hard and it would have taken a degree of force to make the prints so it seems highly unlikely that these were made accidentally. We also saw the famous clay *boudins*, originally identified as phalluses (because anything long and vaguely round was identified as a phallus at that stage), but later correctly re-identified by a professional potter as test pieces to check the hardness and malleability of the clay. From my own pottery

experience (about 20 years as an enthusiastic but un-artistic amateur), it was clear that the clay is indeed quite hard because each of the rough cylinders, still lying where they were casually discarded by the artists, was slightly flattened in shape, oblong in cross-section rather than perfectly round. This is a characteristic of clay that rather too hard to work easily, hence the need for it to be softened with water from the nearby gour pool. The hardness of the clay probably also explains the cracks that we can see today as the clay dried out and changed shape slightly. (If you were making a replica today, you would dry the models slowly under a plastic sheet to avoid this, but the Magdelanians hadn't invented plastic. It would be interesting to do a test today on a similar sized model with similar clay to see how long it takes the cracks to appear. My guess, unsupported by scientific evidence is that it could take several years in the humidity of the cave, but probably no more than one or two.)

We then paid our respects again to Mr and Mrs Bison and slowly re-traced our route through the cave, to emerge after about four and a half hours underground into bright sunshine in what must surely be one of the most beautiful and undisturbed valleys in France. I promptly bestowed a delighted hug and a kiss on Robert, much to his amusement and then the pair of us almost fell in the river laughing when we heard a loud splash from within the cave as Francois tried to enter the boat standing up and proceed to dump himself and Graham into the river. They were still in the shallows by the beach, fortunately. We described the incident later at dinner as *un petit problem, comme le Lusitania*. We returned to Pujol to change and sign our names again in *le Livre d'Or*, and then joined the family and some friends for dinner.

It truly is an amazing privilege to visit le Tuc and see sights viewed by probably no more than about 700 people since the Magdalenians themselves left their sculptures behind in the quiet darkness of a very beautiful cave. Again, our grateful thanks go to Count Robert Bégouën and his family for their kindness and hospitality.

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Miss Grace's Lane

Andy Farrant

Back in August, I and members of the Chelsea Speleological Society spent a weekend caving in the Forest of Dean. On the Saturday, we had arranged a trip down Miss Grace's Lane, a cave recently discovered a few km south of St Briavels, perched high on the eastern side of the Wye Valley, north of Chepstow. The cave is located where all good caves occur, about 20 m from a road, making access really

easy. The entrance is located in a shallow closed depression within woodland. A small wet weather stream sinks nearby and the neighbouring area is pockmarked with closed depressions. The cave has a typical 'Mendip' style entrance consisting of a piped shaft, looking for all the world like a wishing well. However, this is where the similarity with Mendip ends. Beneath the lid is a 30 m deep piped shaft with a fixed ladder. The entrance shaft is actually an impressive feat of engineering, with vast amounts of concrete used to construct the piped shaft.

Donning SRT kit [you read it right...yes a) I do actually own an SRT kit, and b) I used it!], we dropped the pitch. There is a fixed series of rungs which can be used to climb the shaft, but beware, you need to step to the right a few metres down. The base of the shaft pops out into a low breakdown chamber where a further ladder climb down a rather dubious curved fixed ladder leads to a low crawl and the breakthrough point. Thus far route finding was relatively straightforward, but from here on in the cave became very complex. Passages led off left, right and centre, but we carried on straight into an impressive collapse chamber. Here, the roof rose up into a spectacular multi-coloured dome where the collapse had stopped up into a very brecciated and colourful rock unit above the limestone bed in which most of the cave had formed.

Several other collapse chambers followed, all very colourful, but from here the way on led down a narrow rift. Here the nature of the cave changed abruptly. Much of the lower series of passages are a complex maze network of narrow rifts formed where the water has etched out the joints in the rock. The most similar bit of passage I know of is Squirrel Rifts in Ogof Draenen. Many of these rifts are anything up to 15 m high, and usually have be traversed at various levels, which can make progress a little awkward.

Several routes can be taken through these rifts and in places an ascent can be made up into the overlying



*The entrance shaft. Photo Jan Karvik.
Taken from <http://www.rfdcc.org.uk/>*



*Nicky Bayley on a traverse. Photo taken by Andy Harp.
Taken from <http://www.rfdcc.org.uk/>*

collapse chambers above. From one of these chambers, a side passage can be followed, aptly named the Phreatic Causeway. This is a fantastic, but alas quite short, section of stunning phreatic passage with an incredibly flat roof, very similar Indiana Highway in Ogof Draenen. It ends in a choke which I'm sure could be dug further.

Some of the party continued to the end of the cave across the Satanic Traverses, which are quite well named. The route back to the entrance involved more traversing before a rather exposed climb back up to the upper levels. We did a short loop round some rather pleasant chambers near the entrance before heading back to the breakthrough crawl at the entrance. Not being a great fan of big pitches, I can't remember much of the entrance shaft except that I did it at great speed and was mightily relieved on reaching the surface! The whole trip took about 3-4 hours, but you could spend a lot longer poking in all the corners. Although the cave is around 4 km long, the end of the cave is actually not that far from the entrance, much of the length is taken up by the complex network of rifts. The normal tourist trip involves a round trip, but there are many other various combinations and permutations you could do, especially if you like tight rifts and small tubes.

Now for the geology bit. The entrance is developed where water draining off the Cromhall Sandstone (a local sandstone unit within the Carboniferous Limestone that extends across the Forest of Dean and the Bristol area) sinks into the underlying Carboniferous limestone. However, this may be fortuitous, because much of the cave appears to have been initially formed at a depth of around 40 m along the contact between the Black Rock Dolomite and the overlying Gully Oolite. Here a series of phreatic passages have been formed, which trend north-west – south-east in zone about 100 m wide and 400 m long. Some of these phreatic passages have collapsed, stopping up through the thin Gully Oolite into the overlying Llanelly Formation, a series of mudstones and thin limestones and fossil soil horizons marked by the colourful brecciated palaeosols. The lower part of the cave system has been dissolved out along numerous joints in the underlying Black Rock Dolomite.

No where is there any evidence of any rapid water flow, and the whole system appears to have been formed by very slow groundwater flow. The flow appears to trend towards the northwest, up-dip towards the River Wye, but the evidence from scalloping is pretty equivocal. There is some evidence of periods of sediment fill with 'notches' developed in some of the upper phreatic passages, but little remains in situ.

Much of the cave extends under the cap of the Cromhall Sandstone. Consequently much of the cave is dry, like many of the caves in Llangattock which extend under the Millstone Grit cover. Only at the end of Miss Grace's Lane does the cave extend out from this protective sandstone cap and it is here you get the only stal formations that occur in the cave.

However, the exciting bit is that the potential for more discoveries is pretty good. There are several stream sinks in the area and a large resurgence at Ban-y-Gor, down-dip to the south. As yet no streamway has been found in Miss Grace's Lane; the whole system is relict, and unrelated to the modern hydrology. There is plenty of potential for more maze cave networks and relict high level phreatic passages to be found preserved beneath the cap of Cromhall Sandstone, related to a former drainage system draining to the Wye. Inkwel Hole, a minor stream sink and former dig site a short distance to the east has a very strong draught and digging at Kelly's Lane and Woolaston Wood nearby is looking promising. There could easily be another major Forest of Dean cave system here.

On the Sunday we spent the day canoeing down the Wye to Monmouth, a very pleasant way to spend a caving weekend! Many thanks to Paul Taylor for taking us round the cave, and Lee and Jackie Hawkswell for organising the weekend.

Details of the cave including a full description of the cave, the survey and data are available on the Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club website <http://www.rfdcc.org.uk/>.

Hut Re-Roofing, Summer 2006

How does the story go again?...

Our beloved hut started life as a ladies sports pavilion (said to be cricket) at Bower Ashton. It was purchased for the Society by our first President, Prof. Edward Fawcett, for £5 and delivered to Burrington on the back of a lorry at the cost of 30/-. It was erected on its present site on 31st December 1919 but daylight was fading and it was snowing when the roof was put on. This led to it being done in a hurry and the roof went on a bit crooked. It still is, but as there are no straight lines or right angles anywhere in the building it doesn't actually show! It was last re-roofed in the early 1970s and so I hear, talk about the need to do so again has been going on for at least 10 years.

Hoping this time round it would be sunny, a number of us (Graham, Linda, Chris, Clive, Bill, Tony, Stan, myself and an unsuspecting victim who thought he was going mountain biking called Tim), got round to a spot of DIY over the summer.

The morning of 29th July started well, not too warm but not too chilly either. We were soon on the job and stripped the tin off to find a nice layer of rotting felt. The roof was considerably more unsteady without its tin support and each footstep became a careful task which involved finding the beam underneath. Having stripped the felt off it became clear how rotten the wood was as well, with plenty holes visible through to the hut below. An executive decision was made to add another layer and so after some careful measuring, off went Tony, Chris and Graham to fetch some plywood. Stan, Clive and I finished cleaning up the roof in

preparation for the later stages and yes, in the couple of hours that we were waiting for the supplies, it rained!!! Out came the large green plastic sheet to try and protect the roof.

As is customary at the hut, a large fire kept us entertained for the afternoon, especially the point at which the pile of old felt accidentally caught fire and all went up in one big black cloud of smoke. Lunch and plenty cups of tea were supplied by Linda who had been busy all morning working on the fire place and filling in all the cracks. We now have a drying room that has been swept out and does not fill with smoke when the fire is burning. After lunch Clive, Stan, Bill and Tim set about fixing the water supply. The nice job of clearing out the gutter was carried out and then lots of clanging on various pipes ensued. Linda and Clive paid a visit to the first house down the track to beg some water, I later found out this wasn't so cheeky as the occupiers are veteran UBSS members. The outcome of the water supply was that it is collecting but leaking somewhere between the tank and the hut and for now, we still do not have a water supply.

With the arrival of the supplies, we all soon began nailing the wood onto the roof. This became an interesting test of team work as we tried to get the nails into the mosaic of beams below. Lots of banging and shouts of 'No! Missed it, go left about 3 inches' could be heard all afternoon. The irregular shape of the roof also resulted in a lot of measuring and sawing by Clive and Tony. Laying the new felt on the roof carried on in a similar vein to the wood, being careful every time to get the nail in the correct

place. The Saturday finished with the last piece of felt going down and after an enjoyable day a number of the group headed off for a pint or two and a well deserved meal.

Sunday morning we all arrived at the hut again to finish off the job. Linda painted the fireplace a nice new cream colour and the men began sorting out the tin and replacing it on the roof. Tony had the bright idea of using a staple gun to secure the felt underneath the lip of the roof and set about doing that. With plenty of people working on the roof, Stan and I decided to make ourselves useful and began painting the outside of the building. Lucky for us the rain kept off on the Sunday and we finished the job with relatively few disruptions. By Sunday afternoon the tin had been replaced on the roof and the outside of the hut completely repainted.

I didn't attend the following few weekends up the hut, but I have been reliably informed that there has been lots of activity, including work on the marriage quarters. Thanks to Chris Pepper we now have lighting in the hut. Thanks to Barbara Lawrence (Clive's sister in law) and Ian Cassely the benches around the fireplace have been re-upholstered and thanks to Linda all of the pots and pans have had a very thorough cleaning.

The work over the summer really has been worth it and the hut looks really good. All we need now is for people to use it. I've included a collage of photos from the weekend so you can all see how the event progressed. For anybody who is interested there is also a copy of the photos on a CD in the library.

La Grotte de Bournillon, Vercors, France



Andrew on a via ferrata

This summer for two weeks from Aug 19th to Sept 2nd, myself (Bill Miners), Andrew Atkinson, Juliet Morse and Steve Cottle were in the Vercors. In all that time we only did one cave (shame I hear you cry!). But when faced with some of the nicest canyons in France and a plethora of via ferrata's to play on in the sun it was hard to get the motivation to plunge into the depths in what would have been mainly long sequences of dangling on string.

But we did manage to go down one ... and here is a brief synopsis :::::

Bouillion entrance from outside



Grotte de Bournillon is in the same gorge as Grotte de Choranche (which is a show cave) -- excuse to put some pretty picture swiped off the net!!

We (Bill, Andrew, Juliet) though were on the other side of the valley to Choranche drove along single track road ... till stopped by a gate with a strictly no admittance etc etc sign ... got changed and walked around the side of the gate. Along the road then up a valley into an impressive amphitheatre of karst with cliffs of 100 m + extending around on three sides.



*Grottes de Choranche :
A cave unique in Europe,*

The Bournillon entrance is quoted as 80 m high, and is said to be one of the largest entrances in France. One walks in through an area which has been moulded by the local water board for its purposes, also possibly an ancient tourist cave? and also the sight of some very extreme aid climbing with a bolt route going all the way up the back wall along the roof then continuing up the cliff outside.

Andrew and Juliet had been here previously in much higher water conditions and followed the main passage till driven back by the flow / depth of water. This time there was little if no water inside the cave.



Bouillion entrance from inside

The initial part is a large 20 / 30 m chamber with room sized boulders to jump over / around leading to a 6 m + wide and 2 - 4 m high passage tunneling into the hillside. Which we followed for 20 - 30 mins in mainly walking passage. There were some nice formations - bosses, stal in places, but on the whole fairly grey. We passed just beyond the limit reached previously by Andy and Ju to a pool of cold water with a small possibly head sized duck, or was it sump, but the throwing of stones and the trepidatious wading in the general direction soon persuaded us not to try to push through. :-)

Obituaries

Mick Seavers 1958 - 1989

It is not often that someone would have two obituaries in this Newsletter, but then Mick was never particularly conventional. He was lost in a storm on Mont Blanc in February 1989 and although the bodies of two of his companions were recovered within a few months, Mick and his third companion Dirk Ziolkowske were not found until early August this year, when the glacier ice in which they had been entombed, melted.

Mick was born and brought up in Essex and came up to Bristol in 1976 to study geology. He joined the Society on arrival and soon proved his worth as a hard and competent caver. At the end of his second year he went on a two-man caving and climbing trip to Switzerland with Charlie Self and I have fond memories of a late night caving trip with him which he wrote up in the Newsletter:

OH! IS IT CLOSED? Or P*N*A*K*O*E REVISITED

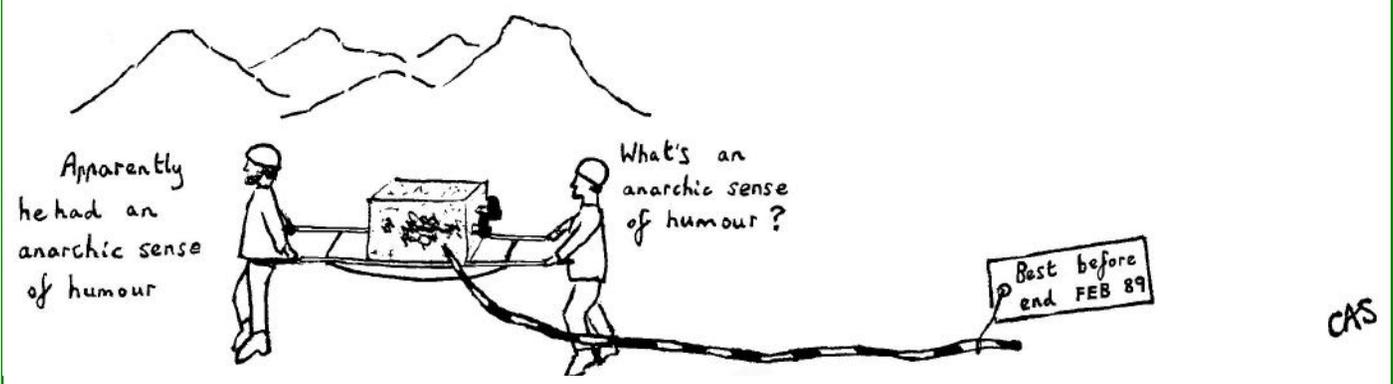
Deep in the heart of Bristol, in the very centre of gin and Jaguar land, there lies a secret cave known only to a small and intrepid group of speleos.

There is a sudden glare of headlamps and squeal of brakes followed by "Gude Evenin' Lads, and wot may you be doing at 3 o'clock covered in mud?" Oh! We're cavers, Officer, we've just been down P*n*a*k*o*e." "Isn't that closed?" He said challengingly. "Oh, is it?" We retorted innocently. The outcome was that we swapped names and addresses for a "Muve along there, please", and stopping only to drag C*S out of the hedge where he had been hiding, the intrepid t*i*s headed home. (UBSS N/L New Series No. 8, 1978).

Such a trip was typical of Mick. The caving was competently executed but the surrounding circumstances were somewhat on the farcical side.

After graduating, Mick's interest gradually shifted from caving more to climbing and he took part in two Himalayan expeditions, leading the second one. The trip to the Alps was in preparation for a further trip later that year. He was also hoping to start his own outdoor pursuits business.

Mick's parents were, obviously, shocked and upset by the news of his discovery, but relieved that at last there would be an end to his story. His remains were returned to the UK on September 3rd; an inquest was opened and adjourned on September 12th and he was cremated at a private family funeral on Friday 15th September. It may be, however, that at some time in the future they will arrange a wider celebration of his life. His parents both told me that they had been enormously helped and gratified by the many messages of support that they had received from around the world once the news broke and they were grateful to be able to pass this on to his many old friends in Bristol.



Katherine Anne (Kate) Thomas

30 Oct 1955 - 13 Aug 2006

Kate, a member of the Society in the late 1970s - 1980s, died in August after a losing an unequal battle with cancer. In her memory one can do no better than to quote the appreciation of her given by Clive Owen at her funeral:

On 8 Jan 1977 Kate Thomas was having a drink with a friend in the Plume of Feathers in Rickford. Some cavers from the University of Bristol Speleological Society came in and in her usual outgoing way she struck up a conversation with them. The upshot of this was that she spent the night in a borrowed sleeping bag at the UBSS hut and the next day descended Aveline's Hole. The start of Kate's caving career epitomises the spontaneity and zest with which she lived the whole of her life.

As the cavers got to know her and as her many other friends have found since, Kate was great fun to be with. She was cheerful, vivacious and witty with a sharp sense of humour, always looking for a chance to puncture pomposity or expose hypocrisy. She had an inborn mistrust of authority and could be very irreverent and outspoken at times. Given that several of her close friends served in the military or other branches of government, there was often a creative tension in those relationships.

What drew everyone to Kate was her infectious enthusiasm for new experiences and the energy that she put into everything she did. As an illustration, one of her friends sent me this reminiscence:

When we organised a charity Burn's Night Ball, Kate was flying back from her year in Australia and landed at Heathrow on the morning of the Ball. Did a 20-hour long-haul flight deter her??? Not at all - she turned up in Bristol in the afternoon, snoozed for a few hours then danced all night - before crashing



for about 12 hours! There were also many times when Kate would drive miles (car permitting!) to come on a Coast Path w/e for a day or two....only to hare off at the crack of dawn on the Sunday or Monday to go orienteering - she always wanted to pack in experiences and happenings.

You will notice that the order of service has the grid reference of the crematorium printed on the cover. This is in recognition, as Kate would appreciate, that she has made it to the final check point with a high placing in the order of friendship.

Kate also achieved considerable success and satisfaction from study and work. She obtained a degree at the University of Sussex, learned Spanish and French and worked for a time in France. In recent years she became an expert in geographical information systems and took a job in Australia where she pursued her interest in the terroir on which wines are grown.

Though Kate spread happiness about her, she herself suffered a great personal misfortune when her beloved husband Byron was killed in a mountaineering accident in Jan 1991. They had been married less than a year. She bore this tragedy bravely, as she did her final illness.

Here are some of Kate's own words, sent in an email in February this year to a friend she met while walking the South West Coast Path:

'First day back at work today for me (groan) but at least I feel I've settled in now and hopefully will have a bit more energy to enjoy life in the evenings and at weekends. Hopefully Major Hopkins, having now sorted the wedding, will round us all up on a walk shortly. I'm currently investigating going to Scottish dancing classes to learn how to do that bloody 'Reel of the 51st' properly in time for the big bash. Incidentally, can you please thank Matt ever so for sending the CD of photos, which he did with astonishing efficiency ages ago. I haven't even got around to going through mine and labelling them - so much to do and not enough time!'

Kate was thoughtful of others too, and in that email was referring to the forthcoming wedding of her friend Kirsten Hopkins. Her very last words before she had the stroke that deprived her of speech were about her plans to put together all the reminiscences from the South West Coast Path into cartoon form and create a montage on a map of Devon and Cornwall as a wedding present for Kirsten.

When we remember Kate, let it be with joy.



Weddings

Congratulations to

Tim and Sally

Kirsten and Brian

Simon and Charlotte

From all at UBSS



Births

Congratulations to

Andy and Donna Farrant

on the birth of their son,

Matthew

From all at UBSS

A Note from the Editors

It has been a summer of fun with plenty of exciting trips going on both at home and abroad. As a new semester starts we would like to welcome all the Freshers to UBSS and we hope to see you on plenty of trips very soon. We hope that you have all enjoyed reading this newsletter and would like to thank everyone that sent in an article.

Clive and Gina

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