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Third Series

Number 8

UBSS Newsletter

Winter 2008

**The GB dig
Novice trips
CHECC 2007
Burrington in WW II**

CHECC 2007

Kayleigh Gilkes

Ok as I haven't had a 3 hour train journey write this this year, it will be a bit shorter than my normal offering.

This year the CHECC (council of higher education caving clubs) seminar was held at SWCC (south Wales caving club). Having spent a while planning our costumes for the fancy dress competition, we all turned up as the weirdest beauty pageant ever seen. (I never thought I would shout 'has anyone seen Hitler and Mussolini, I need a dog collar'). The pageant entry list consisted of:

Miss Leading – Jane
Miss Lead – Ruth
Miss Tress – Fay
Miss Termotivator – Tree
Miss Nomer – Emily
Miss Shapen – Jon
Miss Tectomy – Alex
Miss Ing presumed dead – Sally
Miss Taken Identity – Edd
Miss Carriage – Christian
Miss Understood – Rob
Miss O'lini - Superted
Miss Take – Ryan
Miss Middle East – James
Miss Treated – Kayleigh

Other clubs turned up as:

Lemmings – Manchester
Pimps and hos – Exeter
Nightmare before Christmas/ my worst nightmare – Cardiff
Cavemen – Aberystwyth and Plymouth
My gap year – Oxford
Vikings – Nottingham
Cartoon characters – Reading
The themes of Southampton and Sheffield escape me.

As has become tradition on the Friday, I acquired a few items here and there; unusually we won the fancy dress. There was plenty of socialising and catching up to be done.



Cover photo: Snow Gardens,
Slaughter Stream Cave
Chris Binding, FRGS



Having woken up and tried to organise ourselves on the Saturday morning (breakfast was provided even though we had brought plenty with us), we finally went caving – my socialising the night before and Fay's knowledge of SWCC personal got us an OFD1 leader. Fay went off to improve inter-club relations in Daren – well I say inter-club relations she went with Paul and the 2 people he had got to come from Oxford (Apparently there was a regatta on!)

OFD1 was great as usual, although it did lead to Edd getting rather muddy later (his way of improving inter-club relations with SUSS was mud wrestling). Superted nearly went caving; he even made it to the entrance!!

Saturday night was as usual a night of drunken debauchery (I would like to congratulate Jane on a superb performance!) there was chair squeezing through the back of a bench – most of us left Wales very bruised. Body traversing, the saucepan game are also within my memory, however, I do not remember Beer pong being played – it may have happened I don't know. There was topless dancing in what rapidly became a swamp. Paul lost his clothes in the mud, I'm not sure if my clothes will ever be clean and Fay filled her mum's washing machine with mud. Much drinking, dancing and gossip making occurred into the wee small hours before everyone finally made it to bed.

The next morning some people were up bright and early to go caving (not me I hasten to add) in order to be back in time for the AGM to claim our prize. They were in fact back before we left. Fay and me had the shortest caving trip ever spending approximately 20 minutes bimbaling around underground in Porth yr ogof before getting very cold in the river. During this time, Emily slept in the car and Alex went for a walk. Having had a cup of tea at Fay's mum's house (and probably filled her kitchen with mud) we headed back to meet the others at the tackle store.

So endeth another CHECC – here's to next year, we have a title to defend!

The Burrington area in World War II

Jon Brown

I'm currently doing research for a dissertation on the Burrington area and its World War II defences, including the Home Guard Auxiliary units who operated in the area. The area of study is around the hut and all the caves and points of interest are within a reasonable walking distance. As some have mentioned an interest, I thought it worth while writing a short piece outlining my research.

During WWII there was a need to prepare the country for a possible invasion by the German army which was across the Channel in France. Expectations were that they would land somewhere on the south coast around Brighton and move inland aided by the use of Fallschirmjaeger parachute troops in front of the main landings.

On Mendip between Banwell and Burrington Combe is a hill range which was a defended locality by the Home Guard. There were several rail and road routes which were seen as a strategic point of



350 cc Royal Enfield WD/CO from 1942, used by the Home Guard for motorcycle reconnaissance and dispatch duties,

resistance to slow the possible German advance and there was also the placing within the Home Guard of another unit known as the Auxiliaries, a suitably vague military term for a secret elite unit.

The Auxiliaries were the British resistance, who were formed before a possible invasion had occurred and who were to act behind enemy lines as a resistance organisation should an invasion have happened, this organisation was well planned and had a number of operational and storage bases in the area.

The Auxiliary bases were at Foxes Hole in Burrington Combe, which is a cave location, Dolebury Levvy which is a mine shaft, there was an operational base in a mine in Churchill, which is now in someone's garden, and there was an operational base in a mineshaft in Sandford Hill. The purpose of the resistance was to allow the fighting to pass by before they came out from hiding and carried out pre-determined sabotage, assassination and resistance work as well as the undertaking of efforts to hinder

the Germans as much as possible.

Before the resistance came into action however the locality would be defended by the local Home Guard who had a Spigot Mortar emplaced to cover the road through the Dolebury Bottom area as well as various entanglements, emplacements and portable section weapons and light artillery such as the versatile Smith gun.

The area also had various defences against airborne assault such as the installation of 'Tumps' which are stone piles that form an obstacle to the landing of assault gliders on open ground. The Blackdown area has a large number of these surviving, with the area later used as a bombing decoy an anti-aircraft battery was installed in the area which would act as a further deterrent to airborne assault by glider or piloted Ju52 aircraft.

There are some records which are of interest such as the UBSS hut logbook which records that on a visit to Foxes Hole, the cave was found to be full of forces though this entry was at some point altered to more resemble foxes. There are some accounts of

military forces being involved with the UBSS during the war and being frequent visitors to the hut. With the presence of explosives, detonators and all sorts of things in local caves it is interesting that there were not more instances recorded of cavers in the area running across these stashes, though it is also noted that it would be seen as unsafe to record such things at the time due to the possibility of the Germans learning the locations should an invasion have occurred.

The project I am working on aims to look at the evidence in the area of WWII and assess what remains today. What can the information available tell us of the importance of the area and its defence measures against a possible invasion? What are the reasons for the presence of four operational bases in such a relatively small geographic area? What does the landscape tell us of the defences of the period and the use it was put to as well as the methodology and equipment that would have been used to defend the area from attack?

There are many interesting and varied strands that have been uncovered so far in my research such as the connection between cavers and the resistance. How were cave locations selected? How were they kept secret? and what is

the connection between cavers and the military during the war? These are but some of the questions that have arisen. There are other questions such as the possible demolition of the Dolebury Bottom road by explosives placed in the waterworks tunnel, is there evidence for this surviving?

There are many questions and many points of interest to be explored further, such as is it wise to sit in a pub discussing the methodology of railway demolition with gun cotton charges or is there a connection between archaeology and a relatively recent occurrence such as WWII? The final report should be available in May and I have already received requests from members for updates and also for a look at various sites. Hopefully in the near future I will be able to oblige with a more in depth summary of findings, but for the moment I shall thank people for putting up with my witterings and questions in the pub and will let people know what my findings are when they are available.

The ongoing Bat Passage Dig, GB Cavern

End of 2007 report

Ben Morley

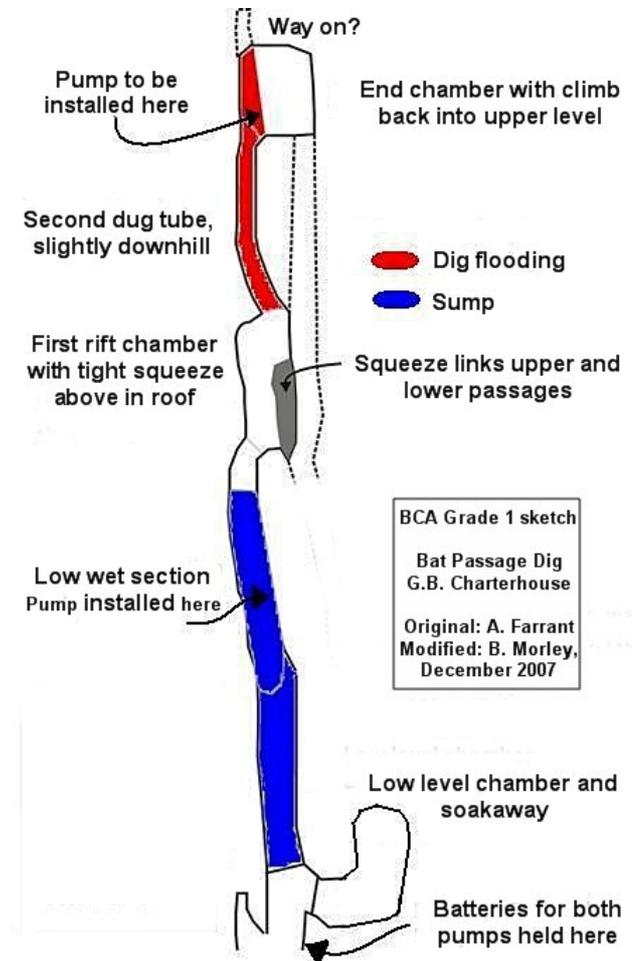
So inspired by the rumours of huge passage to be found (rumours which were further fuelled by the geological reasoning and description provided by Andy Farrant on the UBSS website) – I decided back in March to take up the challenge of the G.B. “Best potential in Mendips” dig.

Little did I know the engineering challenge that I had let myself in for, during what has possibly been the wettest summer the country has seen in a while! If you are unaware of what the Bat Passage dig entails, then let me enlighten you:

The dig face is situated at the far end of Bat Passage. In order to access the dig face, one must pass a 20 m long sump, which when siphoned in order to be passable contains around 40 cm of thick, wet, glutinous mud. At the end of this sump one must haul themselves up a tight, wet 5 m mud slope – under a boulder and then 3 m down the other side of the slope to the dig face (which has a tendency to flood). One must wonder what madness makes people do this for fun!

Thus, with this description in mind – only two things prevent continual all year round digging from occurring. The sump and the flooded dig! Now the sump can be siphoned by hand into a small adjoining chamber. However, this process takes at least 24 hours and occasionally multiple trips simply to open the sump, usually to find the dig flooded. The problem becomes apparent when I look back through my ‘digging diary’ to find that of 20 trips, the dig face has only been seen 4 times. This was starting to get me down.

So, I thought that I would make some use of my engineering degree, and set about designing and sourcing parts for a way to automatically start the siphon if the water in the sump should rise; and a



method of keeping the dig site dry. I knew that the use of a float switch was necessary for both situations, and that power would have to be supplied by batteries for portability – but my first attempt to jury rig an 18v hand drill connected to a small garden hose pump ended in failure as the drill basically packed up 5 minutes after being installed into the sump. The system obviously had to be more robust.

Three months later, and I am happy to report that we are well on the way to a robust, reliable pumping system. The drill has been replaced by 12v bilge pumps that can deliver 6 gallons a minute. Not enough to empty the sump quickly, but more than enough to start a siphon.

The cheap float switch has been replaced by more robust bilge float switch (I knew my sailing experience would come in handy), and batteries and cables have moved on a little as my experience grows on how to mix electricity and water. In addition the small garden hose has been replaced by ¾ inch fire hose.

The hopeful genius of the system, is that as the water drops, the float switch turns off the pump (conserving battery power) – yet the siphon continues to run. Each battery allows the pump to run continuous for 2-3 hours.

So currently the sump pump has been installed and has been working successfully for a number of months now. However – due to the arrival of fresher's and more appalling weather recently; the dig pump is still waiting to be dragged through the sump to the dig. I am optimistic this will be done soon.

Once this is done, digging can commence in earnest. And hopefully, fingers, knees and toes crossed – a break through will be soon in coming.

Through the eyes of a Fresher: GB Cavern

Jon S, November 2007

At around 7.30pm on a cold November evening, Ben, Alex C, Kayleigh and I embarked on a challenging trip down this jewel of cave. It was my first down GB and I would now class it as my favourite Mendip outing. The entrance may not be as epic as that of Swildons, however, after the initial decent, I quickly found some challenging climbs and learnt some new techniques thanks to Ben.

GB also presented me with my first ladder away from the beloved student union staircase. It was probably only 4 metres, but nevertheless, near to the top I was thankful of

the rope attached to my waste! I found it pretty tricky to get my hands behind the ladder as it was lying straight against the rock. Ben told me to stop being a puff I made it to the top without too much difficulty. This cave was also the debut for my knee pads. I reckon I annoyed everyone in the team because they just wouldn't stay straight and kept catching on rocks, but it's all sorted now because I do them up so tight I can't feel my ankles!

Further into the cave and we entered the spectacular, stalactite and helictite covered 'Bat Passage'. This was proper caving. The sort of scenery you imagine all caves should look

like. We went on to look at Ben's 'project'. His dig was a mess, to get near Alex and I had to crawl for around 20 m along what can only be described as mud flats. I have never seen so much mud. As we crawled, the ceiling became lower and lower until at one point it was a duck. Alex potted off to find the dig but realised it was too flooded to carry on – relief, I was shattered!

Overall, this cave literally had allsorts. It was tricky in places, tight, vertical. Then in others, i.e. Great Chamber, were massive. Cheers to Ben and Kayleigh for leading, and to Alex as well.

Lionel's Round Trip: a novice's guide

Liz Green, December 2007

One Thursday evening I sallied forth in the dark, in more ways than one, to meet the others at the Rock of Ages. Our leader was Alison Moody and the group comprised Kayleigh and Ryan, another man and me.

The cave is higher up the coombe than I'd expected (yes, I now realise that Lionel's is clearly marked on the OS map). When we reached the entrance, there was a small group of little people with pristine white hats and a grownup leader just about to come out of the cave so after the first half minute getting in we had a short pause while we navigated round them. They didn't like the bats.

From then on it was fast and furious. Alison obviously knows her way round very well and I found it difficult to follow her at speed, not helped by a faulty lead to the battery on my helmet which occasionally plunged me into darkness. (Alison did offer to swap but a tap on the battery seemed to solve the problem.)

The route involves a lot of caterpillar-like activity (knee pads help here!) with only two or three opportunities for standing or even sitting (including the welcome Mars bar stop).

It was much harder than I had anticipated and I did get weary and needed a bunk up on big reaches when I couldn't get a grip. I even idly wondered about the cave rescue service. Alison and one of the lads went down to the first sump (only a few yards) but I decided I could do without the slippery climb back up so stayed above it. I think we went back a different way and again I sometimes needed a bunk up. Then right at the end my hand slipped on the big boulder and I dropped down about 4 ft, which possibly explains the bruises and broken nail. Leaves in the passage followed by the sight of little tree trunks were very welcome!

I walked home (after 10.30!), wriggled out of my clothes and left everything on the front doorstep in a big muddy heap. I had to scrub the lot, including the step. Outside hosepipes really come into their own here.

It was quite an adventure and as I wriggled through the tiny passages I thought about what was above us. The cave is right under one of my favourite routes and when I run over Burrington Ham I like to stop on the cliff top to look over the coombe to twin brooks and the trig. Cavers should try this some time. I am glad I went but I'll probably be cautious of what I let myself into as I am not a very good caver and hope I didn't slow things down too much, (though I can probably run further than some of the others).

Recommendations – a proper caving suit or you'll lose your clothes in the tunnels; a leader who won't get lost, and a friendly, strong person behind you to give you a bunk up. I had all three, so thank you Ali and co. I might be a caver yet!

AGM and Annual Dinner

The AGM will be at 2.30 pm
Saturday 1st March, 2008 in the Stables

Followed with a talk by Ben Morley on
'The SUSS 2006 Caving Expedition to Crete'

In 2006 SUSS (Sheffield) went on their first expedition to the White Mountains in Crete. This meant camping and living for 30 days at 5000 feet in uncharted territory. There are no accurate maps, no fresh water sources and the nearest bar was a 6 hour walk away! How would they survive? What would they find?

This is the story of 18 people,(most of whom had never been on expedition before) and the amazing places and caves they found. Oh, and this year they are going back...

The annual dinner will be the
same evening at Mazati Lebanese
Restaurant on Small Street
Sit down 7.00 pm



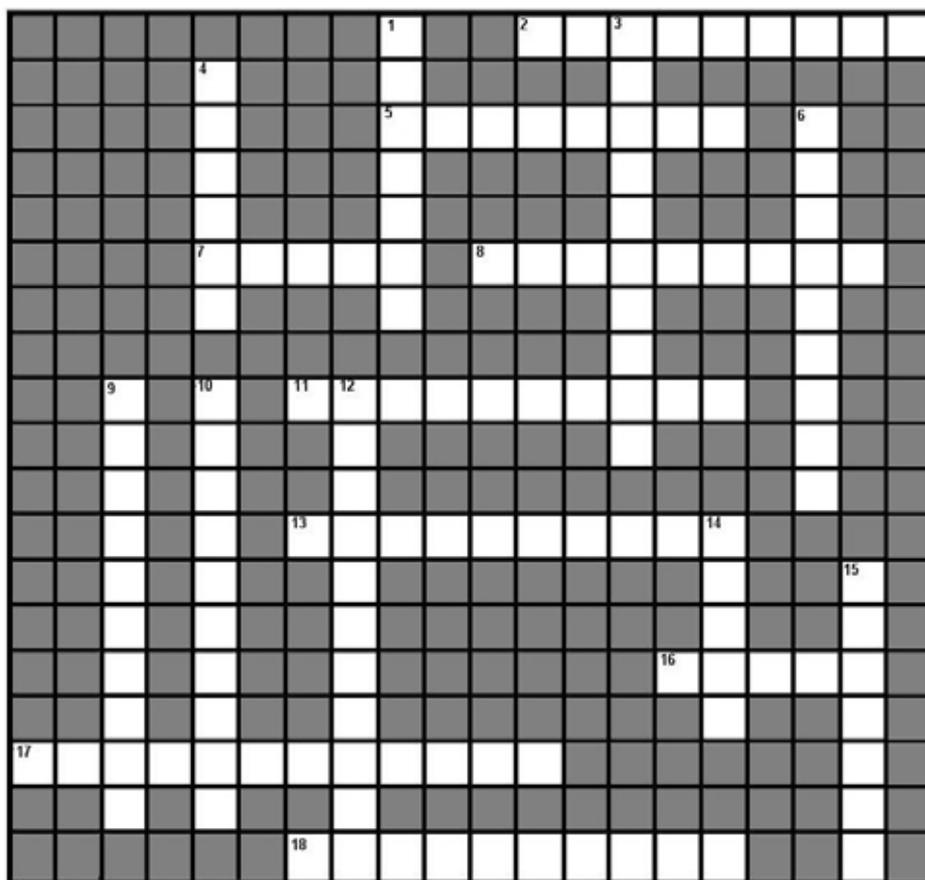
Puzzle Time

ACROSS

2. Caving region in the abode of the clouds (9)
5. Animal part used in SRT (8)
7. An endangered rift (5)
8. Caving region in Austria (9)
11. Stationary found in Swildons (4,6)
13. Film 2005 (3, 7)
16. Goddard and found it (5)
17. Centre of the caving universe (7,5)
18. A long crawl (5,5)

DOWN

1. Lucky P8(7)
3. Billy's place of worship (10)
4. Home of the BEC (6)
6. Australian Journal (9)
9. Another name for caving (10)
10. Caverns measureless to man (5,5)
12. Cave in New Mexico (11)
14. Deepest in Britain (5)
15. Caving clothing brand (7)



A note from the editors

We hope you have enjoyed reading the first newsletter of 2008.

Sorry for a shorter than normal newsletter but it seems that despite a whole semester going by either a. we haven't been doing much caving or b. we are caving but not writing articles.

We had to fill the space somehow so I hope you have fun with the puzzle. There is no prize I'm afraid, just personal satisfaction.

This shall be my last newsletter (Gina) as I have to get on with the job of writing up. I look forward to seeing the fourth series.

Best of luck to the new editor(s).

Any articles for the next issue please send to newsletter@ubss.org.uk

Gina and Clive

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