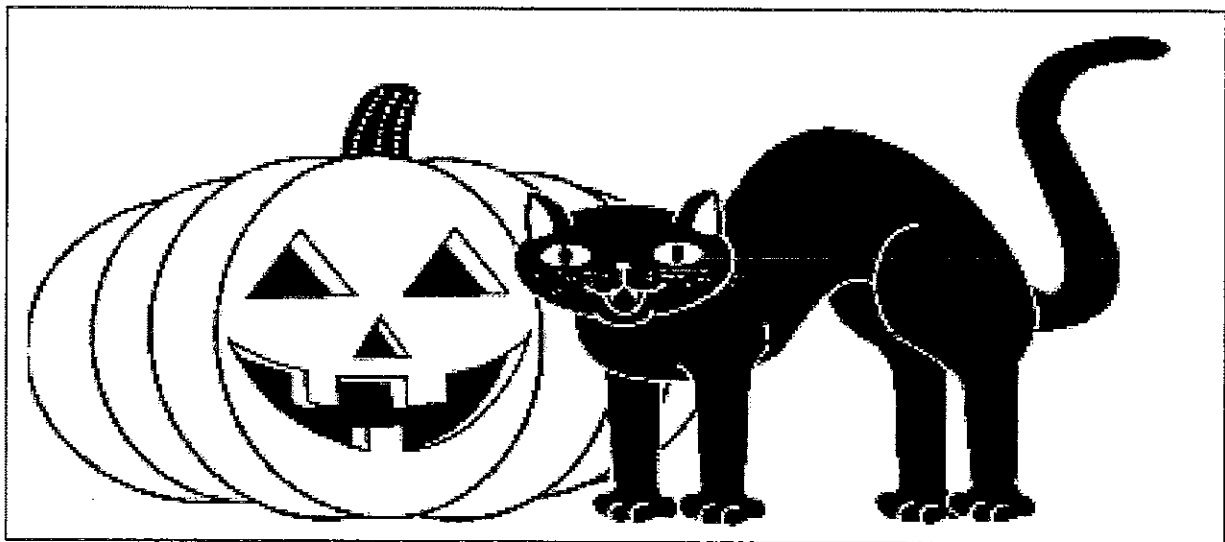


UBSS NEWSLETTER

November 2000

Welcome to this season's newsletter. We would like to extend a special welcome to all our new recruits, and hope that your experiences so far haven't left you too scarred! From your contributions, we can see that your 'First Impressions' have been lasting! A big thankyou also goes out to the existing members of the club who have been so enthusiastic and helpful this term, both in making our Freshers feel at home, and offering material for this edition.



We hope that you all enjoyed yourselves at the bonfire party, and that you are all suitably recovered! Any photos or articles recounting what you can remember of this epic night would be appreciated...

Happy caving!

Your editors.

Mud, mud glorious mud; the joys of the G.B. Dig...Mark II.

Andy Farrant

Those of you lucky and privileged enough to have joined the UBSS caving elite and actually gone caving, or at least spent some time in M^cCawbers, may have heard rumours, myths and legends about the infamous GB Dig.

Well, there is now a sequel!! The incessant rain of the past few summers has forced even the most brain-dead masochistic die-hard Mendip fanatics to seek their perverse pleasures elsewhere. Alas, just as the Bat Passage dig was looking promising, and Andy Atkinson and I had finally broken through to the end chamber, the drought of the late 80's and mid 1990's came to a soggy end.

So attention turned else where. Rather than pick an easy dig in Ogof Draenen (too easy) or make our own cave in true J'Rat style, we instead picked another site in GB: Berties Pot. This a small side passage leading off from the Hall, just before the climb down from Rhumba Alley. The approach to it is a stooping sized vadose streamway following a chert bed down dip. The passages suddenly enlarges and drops down 6 m into a small chamber where it intersects a prominent joint. The floor of this chamber was choked with mud and the only way on was a small rift in the bottom south-western corner. It was this rift that attracted the attention of various ex-Bat Passage diggers wanting a dig with breathable air, room to swing a dead cat and stacking space with the added advantage of being not too far from the entrance and hence the pub. And most importantly a dig which didn't require total immersion in liquid mud and freezing your nads off.

Several trips later and I finally made it down to have a look over Fresher's weekend. A spectacular amount of effort has been made to follow the rift at the southern end of the chamber which can be seen to continue, but is too tight to follow. A hole some 3 m deep has been dug to see if it enlarges at depth. At the current limit, two passages bend off to the right, heading down dip. The first is a too tight rift choked with stalagmite. The second is more promising, but again appears too tight to follow - except by Andy Jacket who must have been a mole in a previous life. This is the current end as of Fresher's weekend. The next step is to enlarge the bottom of the dig and continue downwards in the hope the passage enlarges with depth.

So, what's the potential of the dig? Clearly, the vadose passage leading to Berties Pot continues somewhere. The Pot itself is a fossil waterfall, and the sediment at the base is a coarse poorly sorted mixture of coarse grained sand, limestone flakes and cobbles of Old Red Sandstone originally washed in by a stream. Electron Spin Resonance dating of some stalagmite suggests the passage is pretty ancient, clocking in at around half a million years old. The choked passage beyond probably connects to Ladder Dig at the

Helictite chamber, just before the wet crawl into the Great Chamber choke, some 20m lower and 60m distant. Here a large, stalagmite choked passage enters from the right. However, this passage appears larger than that at Berties Pot so there is a possibility that one or more fossil inlets draining from the north may be encountered en route.

So, until next summer when the dig with the most potential on Mendip: the Bat Passage dig (see UBSS NL, Autumn '98) dries up, we have something else to aim at - keep diggin'.

Beats watching crap telly or writing that Ph.D.!!

The Cast

Andy 'Rock-Doc' Farrant	Chief Advisor and spelaeo-bovine scatologist
Bill 'Ice-man' Miners	Miners by name, Miner by nature
Tim 'Scotty' Parish	Chief Engineer and expert stacker
Andy 'the Mole' Jacket'	Ferret extraordinaire
Ed Hill	Gorilla impersonator
Jez Newman	Donkey Kong & champion rock-putter
Jon Telling,	Hired Muscle
Si 'Bones' Flower	Hard man
Andy Cooke	Beer Advisor and chief beer monster
Trish 'Mouny' Beddows	Canadian correspondant
Andy 'Trousers' Atkinson	Expo-surveyor and Beard advisor
Juliet Morse	Hard woman

Now you've heard the technical bit, here's Bill and Andys' real-life diary of the digging in progress. Could this become the next 'Coronation Street'? We'll be eagerly awaiting the next report! (ed.)

DIGGING DIARY

Bill Miners and Andy Wallis

NOTE FOR THE UNINITIATED

After floods or glaciations caves have the annoying habit of collecting sand and gravel at any constrictions in the passages. If these are dug away it is often possible to get to passage beyond which no one else has ever been into. This is proper exploration "boldly going where no one has gone before" *per angustias ad latiora* not like Mountain climbing which only takes you somewhere anyone can see (RANT RANT!).

20th May 2000

Bill was at a friend's wedding in Keyworth and staying in Andy Farrant's house, and as usual we were bemoaning the amount of water on Mendip, which was making it unfeasible to dig in Bat Passage of GB. Andy Farrant suggested an alternative site would be Berties Pot in GB. Though there is the chance of it just coming back into the end of ladder dig. Bill thought it might be interesting to go have a look at it with a view to some digging in there just while the Bat Passage dig was full of water.

3rd June

Bill, Sharon Pilkington, Andy Cooke and Tim Parish go for a look at Berties Pot. It is accessed via an awkward downwards tube to the head of a 4 metre drop. A ladder is belayed to chock stone in the passage and you descend into a small sandy-floored chamber. To the right the chamber stops pretty abruptly. Ahead the chamber is only about two metres wide and to the left it goes about 3 metres then narrows into a rift a few inches wide in the solid rock which can be seen to go a metre or so before turning off to the left. This rift is far too narrow to be squeezed into. However, below the rift people have been previously digging into the floor of the chamber and gone down about a metre and a half.

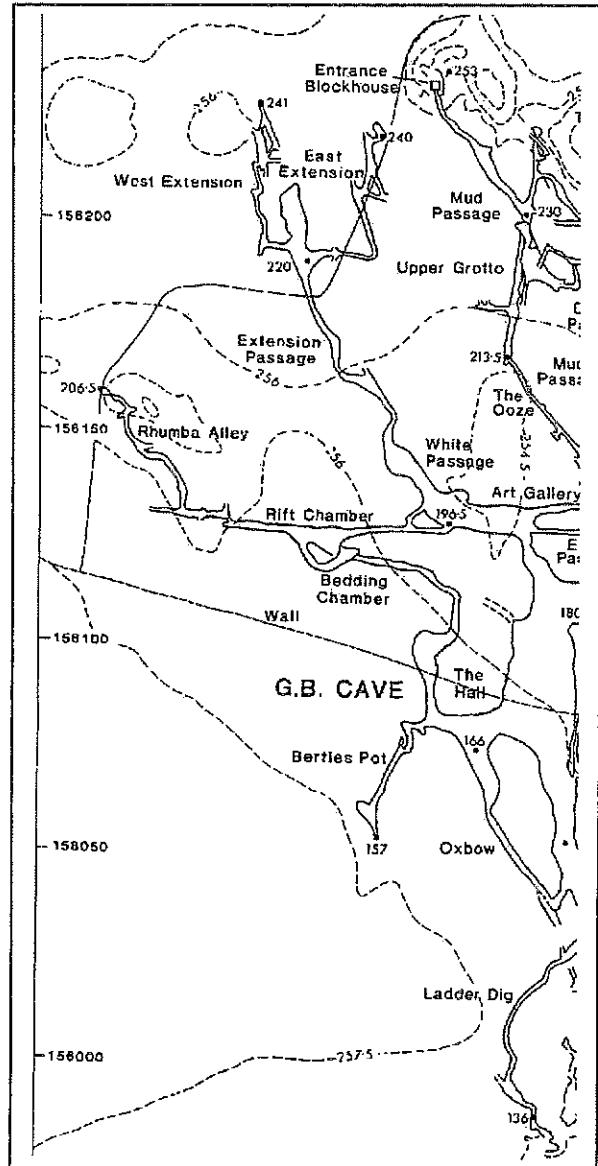
There is a large boulder (1.5m x 0.5m x 0.5m) half balanced over the digging pit on the left (rests on floor of pot) which is in imminent danger of falling into the pit and would damage any one in the pit digging.

First of all we tried a lighted candle in the rift above the alcove, very steady flame so sadly no draft. In the bottom of the dig is a nasty pool of water about two inches deep. This was bailed out, using Bill's helmet, pouring the water into the rift above where it flowed away readily round the corner and was heard to go over some sort of cascade or waterfall. Shame the rift is too tight to try to squeeze along.

Once bailed we had a look at the sandy bottom in the pit. It appears to be easy digging. Not clear if the walls bell away but it would be best probably to follow the Southern wall of the pit at first. There is ample room to wield a spade and because you can get a few people working close together it is much more sociable than the Bat Passage dig.

- No decoration in the base of Berties pot which can be damaged.
- No fragile decoration in the crawl to Berties Pot.
- There is space to stack spoil against the back walls of the pot against bare rock walls.
- No noticeable bad air after an hour spent in the base of the pot.

Left feeling fairly positive about how easy it would be to continue digging down in the pot. Unlike Bat Passage dig, which requires lying on your side in an inch or two of water while scrabbling away with one hand at the sand ahead, with the other people many metres of way on the end of the line to the spoil tray.



6th July

We receive an email giving interim permission to dig in Berties pot from Charterhouse Caving Committee Conservation Officer (Linda Wilson). We need to do a full report of the progress in March 2001 to be presented at their annual meeting.

21st July

Tim Parish and Bill start to price up hiring a portable winch to take down the cave to drag the boulder out of the way.

22nd July

Graham Mullan and Tony Boycott go to assess the dig site. See if it would be possible to put bolts into the boulder. They recommend that instead of bolting and winching we make do with propping the boulder up.

11th August (Friday)

Were due to go digging this evening ... but got a call from Steve Cottle saying that the balloon Festival was on and Bristol was solid with traffic. Decided to cancel.

16th August (Wednesday evening) - *Bill and Si Flower*

Bill left Didcot at 4.30pm driving via Bristol to pick up GB key and Si, then out to Mendip. We took in some sawed up iron poles (produced by cutting up the prop for the washing line at home). This is used to jam around the boulder to hold it in place (braced across the top of the dig ... looks safe now).

There was no water in the bottom of the dig .. nice to see. We spent about two hours down there. Moved 20+ buckets of spoil out (one metal bucket, one metal waste paper bin ... both the result of ferreting around in the skips at work). Used a recently purchased ex-German Army Surplus entrenching tool to dig with (folding spade and pick on the end with a stout wooden handle/shaft) ... were very impressed with its performance. Don't want to leave it in the dig as it has moving bits and will rust solid.

Managed to lower the level by about a foot and a half over a circle of diameter a bit more than a metre. A noticeable difference so that was pleasing. Hopefully one or two more trips will give an indication of whether the walls are going to slope out or whether the spoil will become rocks which are too large to move.

Also took down some wooden panels (a pallet cut then painted with wood preserver) to provide some bits of wood to use as the treads for steps. However the flimsy bits of sharpened wood taken down to use as spikes to hold the panels in place are not long enough or strong enough.

Then back to Bristol. Spend the night at Andy Atkinson's and then up early to drive back to Didcot and work.

1st September (Friday)

Was due to go digging this Friday evening. However Steve Cottle called to tell about a multiple pile up on the Avonmouth Bridge again all of Bristol solid with traffic. Decided to cancel.

2nd September (Saturday)

Bill, Tim Parish and Si Flower get in an early morning dig. Tim does his bit of expertly sorting out the stone wall behind which the spoil is being placed. (Then down Bath Stone Mines in the afternoon.)

3rd September (Sunday) - *Andy and Jez Newman.*

Spoke to Si Flower on Saturday night whilst getting a few rounds in the pub. Si mentioned that the walls were starting to show signs of moonmilk. Thought it sounded interesting so I arranged to go there on Sunday with Jez and Si.

Si couldn't make it on the Sunday so Jez and I headed out there anyway via 'Do-It-All' to buy a crowbar and trowel. Always wanted to own a crowbar so the day was looking good already.

Got to the dig shortly after lunch. Jez decided the wall needed building up as there were only a few small blocks around. He set out gathering a couple of tons of boulders from the approach passage and in true Donkey Kong style started throwing them down the pot towards where I was digging. Fortunately he's not a good shot!

Dug for a couple of hours during which we shifted around 30 buckets and noticed that the walls were starting to bell out ahead of us quite noticeably. Also tried digging out a rift immediately to the right of the dig face but hit solid wall too quickly and decided it wasn't the way on.

Couldn't get hold of Bill to let him know we'd been digging.

13th September (Wednesday evening)

Bill, Andrew Atkinson, Juliet Morse, for another productive (destructive?) digging session. Bill was very surprised to find that somebody had been down there (thought it was Graham Mullan and Tony Boycott), but it is really great to turn up and find even more spoil moved. Anyway we wanted to secure the steps we are making (as the small wooden stakes just aren't doing the biz) so took four metal road pins (each 4 foot 6 inch long) and hammered them into the sand in front of the wood step fronts. We were going to cut them off at about half length but they went all the way in so two steps are now in and rock solid. Superb thanks to Tim Parish for that suggestion.

The wall for piling the spoil behind, which was getting overrun, has been destroyed and a new wall started now even closer to the dig. We are rapidly filling up the space behind it

Now about 2 metres below the original floor level of the pot!

Bill loses his wallet at some point during this evening (was sure I had it in the Pub in Shipham!)

17th Sept (Sunday) - Andy and Si Flower

Spoke to Bill before we went digging this time. He mentioned that on his previous trip he had started to pull out a couple of larger boulders from inside the rift straight ahead. He thought this was a good sign as it was likely that the larger blocks would have blocked the passage before the fine silt built up.

Headed down to the dig on Sunday with Si. Spent around three hours at the dig face shifting around 45 buckets of mud between us. Bill's theory about the boulders appeared to be bearing fruit as towards the back of the rift the mud was full of boulders.

Hollowed out the rift for a while until we hit a wall – Bugger!

Digging down we found that the shape of the wall changed at the bottom and looked like it might be a boulder. Also noticed that there seemed to be more fine silt to the right of the wall straight ahead. Looked like the passage could be swinging right.

Left feeling confident that the next trip would be quite revealing in terms of where the passage was going.

24th September (Sunday) - Andy and Jon Telling

Persuaded Jon that hacking away at a pile of mud with a trowel and a crowbar would be much more fun than writing up a PhD.

Did a marathon session this time staying at the dig face for around 5 hours moving around 70 buckets of mud.

The boulder/wall straight ahead proved to be solid wall as we discovered digging vertically down another three feet.

The space to the right became roomier and turned out to be a low tube heading in the general direction of Helictite Chamber in the ladder dig. Further comfort that this passage had been formed by flowing water was found in the shape of the passage. The wall at the end of the rift was cut under as the passage swung to the right. The start of the tube was smooth and circular where an eddy would have formed as the water direction changed. This was seriously encouraging.

The only downside was that the passage was bloody small and extremely tight at the top. We would have to remove more mud from the floor to have any chance of pushing forward.

Left the dig having hollowed out the new tube for about two and a half feet forward and a foot and a half deep. More large boulders were removed including one massive slab that is now propping up the spoil wall. The rift into the tube is now big enough to uncomfortably sit in!

Towards the end of the trip I noticed that the air was not good (but that might have been the after effect of 5 hours of digging).

1st October (Sunday) - Andy and Trish Beddows

Hot on the trail of the last mammoth session, Trish asked if she could come digging. The more the merrier as far as I'm concerned.

Was disappointed to find a big puddle of water at the dig face when we got there. Until now the digging had been muddy but relatively pleasant. This gloop was decidedly unpleasant.

Spent a little while removing the sloppy stuff before digging downwards to enlarge the passage before pushing forward. The floor was full of pebbly materials and quite hard to dig. After a short while we hit a large rock. Keen to bash it with my crowbar we continued digging down around it but the damn thing just kept getting bigger. By the time we left it was assuming Titanic sinking iceberg proportions (ok well not quite that big) and I was starting to think that maybe it was actually attached to the floor. This was quite disheartening as a proximity to the bedrock level of the passage would make digging forward extremely difficult.

Trish started to push forward, hollowing out the tube a bit more. She agreed with me that the air was not good in the tube (most likely due to our disturbing the sediment that had been blocking it). The spoil heap at the top of the pot was also starting to smell.

Things were starting to look difficult. On the positive side I was convinced that whenever I bashed the far end of the tube I could feel a very small draught.

8th Oct (Sunday) - Fresher's's Weekend - Bill, Andy Farrant, Tim Parish, Jez Newman

Afternoon spent in the dig. Main reason is to take Andy F. down to the dig to get his expert opinion on whether he thinks it is a goer.

(This next bit supplied by him)....

Turns out most of the upper part of the rift we have dug down was formed paragenetically, i.e. a large influx of sand and gravel washed in by a large-ish stream blocked the lower part of the passage, so hence the water could not erode the passage downwards. Instead dissolution eroded the passage roof upwards. This created the tight rift where the water was initially bailed into. The original vadose trench is still choked with sediment. There are two tubes on the right hand wall as you go down into the dig, this may mean that the flow down each will only be half as strong hence the diameters will be less. Also noted how the bed dips away to the south so as we proceed along the bottom tube we will need to keep digging down as well as the roof will keep lowering.

During the time down there we dig out the slope in the bottom and put in the third step (make a right mess of hammering in the road pin as it strikes a rock and bends over).

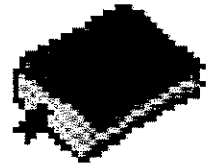
18th October (Wednesday evening)

Bill and Andy Atkinson, start to widen the bottom tube. At the end a person can get into the passage and start to really rathole at the end. Both of us believe there is a slight draft / fresh air flow in the roof of this passage.

So, after that personal and revealing account of the lives of several of our diggers, if any of you fancy joining them underground, please let them know - they are always keen for more manpower!



Andy Wallis



This term the UBSS newsletter has been given the sad task of announcing the departure of our much-loved Mr Andrew Wallis. Known to his many friends as "Andy Jacket", Mr. Wallis joined UBSS whilst studying History at Bristol University. As a member of the club he had a large repertoire of trips as well as a reputation for being a firm and safe leader - a true aficionado.

Since rumours of his imminent departure to a new job in the Cayman Islands began circulating, the newsletter has been bombarded with calls and e-mails from members wanting to pay their respects to someone they considered "their friend".

Here are just a few of the thousands we have received:

"The only caver I know stupid enough to leave his car outside GB and have it broken into...twice" LW and GM

"The man with the nicest wine but the dodgiest green booze I've ever tasted" JN

"A genuine caver... he cultivated a five o'clock shadow by eight am" JN

"I'll remember him as the character who could teach us all the true meaning of raptures of the depth gauge" CO

"He gave my piano multiple orgasms" CH

We will treasure his memory and our thoughts go with him as he leaves for pastures new, eternally walking the heavenly white sands of the Cayman Isles, and bathing in turquoise waters - seldom thinking of us mere mortals left here to amuse ourselves in dark, muddy holes.



We will remember you

Freshers' First Impressions

I am really enjoying the caving club so far, it is fun. It is exciting and interesting in its own right. But I have been especially encouraged by the enthusiasm of the other members of the club. Those with geology backgrounds sharing their knowledge and pointing out things of interest, and others telling you how sporty or wet or tight something is. After the taster I've had I am looking forward to more; caving, SRT in the union (and sooner or later down a cave), trips around the country, seeing everyone in the pub.

*Thankyou,
Pete Hubbard*

The first thing I remember of that day was the short walk to the entrance of the cave. I remember Morven saying how "it's not what most people expect", to that end I had these visions of walking in to a large cavern covered in moss and lichen. How wrong was I.....

When we finally reached the entrance, a small hole in the ground with a torrent of gushing water awaited us. Morven led and clambered down with ease, as I, not wanting to look too much like a wimp, followed hastily. After ducking and diving over rocks, squeezing through numerous narrow entrances and whacking my helmet on numerous unseen overhead rocks, we finally reached a clearing. I remember the sights of the stalactites, stalagmites and water-worn boulders surrounded us; a truly unusual yet fascinating sight which made the trip down worth the while.

Medic Andy (Swildon's Hole)

I don't know what I'd imagined caving to be like. I suppose I'd never really thought about it until I ended up face to face with the entrance to Swildons, my first cave. I really wasn't expecting a dark hole in the ground that dropped vertically for a metre or two 'till it opened onto the top of a waterfall.

Those initial few minutes, when you first hit cold water then discover that you are completely surrounded by rock and darkness are really quite surreal. After that for most of the rest of the trip, it's a simple matter of reminding yourself that thousands of people have been down here before you and that it's not impossible to fit through that tiny gap in the rock.

A couple of hours later, we (Simon, Martin, Sam, Peter and me) re-emerged from the depths after what was probably among the most unusual but most amazing few hours I'd ever had. It was like going back into a different world.

That afternoon I threw myself into another cave and then the next morning I ended up climbing down my first pitch, back in Swildons (rather scary but great fun). Caving, together with a roaring, well perhaps steaming is probably more appropriate, bonfire, a country pub trip, plenty of nice grub and lots of crazy people, made for a really excellent weekend. Okay so then you've got the aching muscles, the bruise outbreak that covers most of your four limbs, and the rather large mound of wet, dirty clothes to deal with, but who cares, it's worth it!

Charlotte Hamilton

Dirty Uncle Dickon's Problem Page - this month featuring expert knowledge from Dr Frisky Farrant

Dear Dr Dickon

I have a problem with my tackle. During caving it gets knocked about and mistreated. When I get home I find that it is caked with mud and useless. I am worried that it will seize up and become worn out. Is this common and do you have any advice on how to look after my tackle?

Mr SF, Redland, Bristol

Frisky Farrant says:

This is a common problem amongst many cavers. Firstly, be careful when caving. Most cavers keep their tackle dangling at the front, or in some cases, across the chest. In long crawls or tight spots this obviously is not the best place for it and it can be easily damaged. Sling it to one side or stick it in a tackle sack - these come in all shapes and sizes nowadays. On returning home, tackle needs maintenance. Careful inspection of each piece should be carried out, if necessary by a qualified person. The tackle should then be washed in warm soapy water and well lubricated prior to any further use. To make sure, it may be worth trying out your tackle at home before using it underground. Divers, please note, prolonged immersion in cold water may seriously damage your tackle and render it useless.

Dear Dr Dickon

I am worried that I am getting too fat to go caving. I've tried many diets but without success. What can I do?

Miss A Flossie, Llangattock, South Wales.

Frisky Farrant says:

Don't worry. Make sure your not pregnant, as this can make caving difficult. Many cavers develop large beer guts or flabby thighs with age. This is normal. Fat is fairly flexible so beer guts, large breasts and flabby arses can be manipulated through most squeezes, perhaps with a little helping hand from your caving buddies. Barrel chests and child bearing hips are more problematical. Anyway, when most people get to this stage, they just sit in the pub, drink beer and talk about caving, so perhaps think about that instead. Armchair caving can be great fun. If all else fails, take up show-caving. It's easy, quite cheap, you don't need any gear and even the fattest people can participate.

Dear Dr Dickon

Whilst caving, I suffer from an overwhelming urge to insert myself into the tightest orifice I can find. When in large caves I get palpitations and need to find a nice tight dark damp passage and feel the comforting roughness of two solid walls. Am I alone in suffering this debilitating problem? I am worried some non-cavers may think it is some perverse Freudian manifestation of sexual dysfunction. Are there any self-help groups I can contact?

Dr MS, Belfast

Frisky Farrant says:

This sounds like an acute case of Mendipitis to me and is quite common in certain parts of the country, especially in the south-west. It usually afflicts individuals, but whole groups can succumb as witnessed on a trip down Alderly Edge Copper Mines a few years ago. Classic symptoms include ignoring huge open passage in favour of small muddy and tight passages. In extreme cases, victims can literally spend years digging themselves a tight orifice such as Bowery Corner Swallet. Acute Mendipitis can lead other ailments such as Balliny Depression, Butcombe Belly and Anorexia Spelaeosa. Although not normally associated with sexual dysfunction, there has been no major study into the causes of Mendipitis, or indeed into caver's sexual habits (interesting Ph.D. topic there; any takers?). It may have more to do with an inability to cope with the pressures of 'normal' life, or mental instability causing delusions of 'vast caverns measureless to man', and 'sunless seas' bought on by too much Butcombe beer. Other theories suggest it may be the spelaeological equivalent of Anorexia where the caver believes (s)he is in a gurt big ginormous passage when in reality they are in a tight constricted tube.

There are a large number of self help groups such as Bristol Exploration Club, Wessex Cave Club or the Mendip Caving Group to name but a few. Alternatively, many sufferers gather in the Hunter's Lodge Inn, Priddy on Wednesday evenings.

Dear Dr Dickon

My fiancée keep pressuring me to have sex underground, but I feel it would be very cold, gritty and unpleasant. I am worried that we may be caught in the act or be too knackered to get out afterwards. What should I do, refuse and risk the relationship or end up being shagged out?

Mr SC, Bridgend, South Wales

Frisky Farrant says:

Take suitable precautions and risk being shagged out - you might enjoy it. The cave rescue organisation can always pull you out if you unable to exit under your own steam. I recommend Agen Allwedd, OFD or Gough's Cave, all of which have large comfortable chambers suitable for the purpose.

Dear Dr Dickon

I have been caving many years now, and feel I should be growing a beard, going bald and developing a beer gut to be a 'proper' caver. However, when I try, the beard comes out ginger, I still have a full head of hair and drink lots of beer with no sign of a beer gut. What can I do?

Dr AF, Basingstoke, Berkshire

Frisky Farrant says:

Take heart, not all cavers show the signs of a classic 20th century spelaeologist. Fashions change, even underground. If you feel you must develop these attributes, drink more beer and stick a cushion up your jumper, use hair dye or a stick on beard and get some testosterone implants. Either that or wait another 10 years.

Dear Dr Dickon

My boyfriend is an avid caver and seems to prefer spending time with his mates digging down small damp, dark holes rather than with me. I am in danger of becoming a spelaeo-widow and feel I am doing something wrong. Is there anything I can do to stop him caving so much?

Miss SP, Didcot, Oxfordshire

Frisky Farrant says:

Nope, just get diggin'...

Dear Dr Dickon

My boyfriend thinks I am weird as I like to get dressed up in a purple romper suit and a yellow one-piece body condom, strap lots of shiny dangly bits of tackle next to my groin and shin up and down ropes and squirm about in the mud. I daren't tell him about the sheep, wellies and knee pads. He thinks I may be involved with another man. Is there anything I can do for him?

Miss ET, Bristol

Frisky Farrant says:

Alas, normality is an all too common affliction. I suggest you try to get him to take up caving too. Introduce him slowly, perhaps try a few show-caves at first. Then suggest wearing a furry suit at home, and then gradually entice him underground. Before you know it, he'll think nothing of knee-pads, dangly tackle, wellies and writhing about in the mud.



Membership News

Two of last year's graduates have applied to stay on as ex-student members of the Society, Rachel Martin and Jeremy Newman. As they have both applied within the requisite timescale, their election is automatic.

We have also had a proposal for election of a less-recent graduate: Richard Rossington, late of the Law Faculty, has been proposed for membership by Linda Wilson, seconded by Tony Boycott. Richard is a late convert to caving and will be joining his wife Helen (nee Wills) as a member.

This note is being posted here as a substitute for the Society's noticeboard, which no-one ever looks at and in the absence of a formal sessional meet, none of which have been arranged for this term. Anyone wishing to comment should contact the Secretaries.

In this issue, Graham presents a summary of his caving holiday to France. The second part will feature in the next newsletter.

A HOLIDAY IN THE VERCORS, SEPTEMBER 2000

Part 1

Graham Mullan

Towards the end of last summer, a mixed party of UBSS and Grampian SG members spent two weeks caving on the Vercors plateau in SW France. Despite some transport difficulties brought about by the fuel blockades, the weather was generally superb and a lot of good caving was done. What follows are edited highlights from the trip log.

3-9-00 - Grotte de Bournillon.

All except Davie Robinson went through the eyehole and on to the sump. The uphill walk to the cave entrance was hot and sweaty. The huge cool, entrance was a pleasant change. We were accompanied up the hill by two keen, belled hounds. Davie Robinson guarded the entrance whilst the others descended the cave. He gave up trying to converse with the coming and going tourists and resorted to hiding behind rocks.

We entered the cave by crossing a bridge and traversing round a large pool to gain the cave passage. This descended gradually to a sump. The passage was wide and high. There were some fine formations. At the sump level was the beginnings of a 'sand bank,' and to the right the passage descended steeply underwater. To the left Peter I made about 10m progress by wading. With everyone else overheating he became the coolest caver.

The return was made by a slightly different route, with a traverse to a high level passage that exited on the opposite side of the huge entrance "porch". The two Petes exited via the original route to retrieve the hand line placed on the entrance.

Grotte de Brudour

Linda, Graham and Tony looked into entrance and soon came across a gate blocking further access. The cave is a water supply and a chlorination plant is situated nearby.

4-9-00 - Gouffre Berger

UTM co-ords from GPS:- 31T 0704512 5010609

All walked to the entrance and some descended part way down the initial passage. A minor cave was explored on the way to the Berger. Puits aux Icritures was ventured down a 3m climb and then a further 10m to a further climb which prevented progress given lack of gear. Next a trip to the resurgence at Sassenage. The show cave itself is closed on Mondays. Food and fuel shopping on the way home as "them bloody frogs" have decided to barricade the refineries now!

5-9-00

The caving party went to the bottom of Trou de L'Aygue with a view to following the cave back to the bottom of the pitches. This was accomplished by two of the party with the rest "dropping off" at various points along the way. Julian then went to find the top sink with a view to doing a pull through later in the holiday.

Cave description: Bedding plane 90m long, 12" high. F***ing grim. After that is a great streamway with many holes in the floor to keep you on your toes. One in particular is very nice. It is a flooded pothole, with no visible bottom in the deep green water, and what looks like a passage going off. The traverse round has a fixed rope, but no footholds (well, it does, but you can't really see them until the way out). More nice streamway and then some holes in the floor that had to be traversed. The first was described as "easy", the second as "dubious", the third as "Errr ?" and then word came back of an "airy climb". We left.

The 'airy climb' turned out to be a wide descending traverse above deep water, but was simply avoided by a simple slide down from a phreatic high level bypass to a deep canal on the right to a slide down to the water. This and was in fact easier than it looked and was reversed easily (?) by Julian to prove it could be done. He and Ivan then continued over more of the same streamway with the occasional collapse chamber and diversion from the stream. One more canal with a rope soon arrived at the 'Lac.' Here the route from E2 enters the ceiling of a low chamber with a deep pool and some rope dangling looped across from the ceiling to aid those on the descent, though not too useful to anyone ascending unless they come supplied with an etrier.

From 'Lac' they continued upstream just to see where it went and after a couple of hundred metres of walking passage between bouldery breakdown and silt banks decided the way ahead was closing down and started out. The return journey was faster than the incoming and they soon arrived for the struggle through the entrance crawls - not so much tight as long.

Julian then donated his rucksack to Peter and set off to find the top entrance to E2 while everyone else returned to the cars. After about 45 mins Julian also turned up after successfully finding the entrance.

6-9-00 - Scialet de Graille

A lazy start to the day as we awaited the return of the advance party of shoppers. Pete D and Julian did their best to break the conveyor at the supermarket with copious amounts of alcohol, a huge leg of pork and a ton of spuds. Following a fine breakfast of black pudding we decided to start the days activities.

All bar chef Dowsell wandered up the nearby mountain and descended the above mentioned. Some laddered to the bottom whilst others abseiled. Rosemary's exclamations of "joy" lead us to believe she wanted lots more ladder pitches.

The cave started with a muddy slope down to a huge chamber. There was strong olfactory evidence of something dead. There are plenty of fine formations. A short climb at the back of the chamber leads to another well decorated chamber with huge stal. Many multi-flash photos taken. A short climb down is followed by a corkscrew ascent in to a final equally well-decorated chamber. In one corner is a slope down into a widening bedding plane. This draughts fiercely but given the 40m width as the floor meets the ceiling, where to dig is not immediately obvious. The cave has obviously suffered from a major earthquake at some point, as there is a proliferation of broken formations throughout.

On the way out Julian decided to refresh his memory of SRT after a 25-year break. All others ascended the ladder ably assisted by Ivan. Some more than others! Rosemary was also heard to give her usual encouragement.



Tony Boycott and earthquake damaged stal in the Sciallet de Graille

7-9-00 - Grotte de Cheminee

100 m long and 80m deep. A huge doline littered with rocks on the floor, descended at 45°. A fine array of stal dangled from the roof. The cave descended to a pool at the bottom, reputed to reflect the roof formations. Unfortunately the low summer water levels had reduced the lake to not much more than a large pool.

Pot du Loup

Back down the road for about 4km and a short walk to a second cave (before midday - is this the G.S.G?). The initial pitch was descended by all (bar Tony) to practice their descending techniques. Much wittering occurred at the pitch head but no squealing was heard during descents. Some continued up a short climb to view the second pitch (37m). One idiot decided to ascend the rope only to abseil down again. All others exited via the passage that emerged part way down the hill. A final obstacle of a very tatty piece of rope and a tree branch provided an interesting exit.

8-9-00

Linda, Graham, Tony, Pete I and Davie set off for Grotte de Berger. Graham and Davie managed to wimp out half way along the incredibly scary and non-existent path to the cave. This path had been described by Walfords as "an easy walk around the base of the cliff". This consisted of a very up and down narrow track, across a scree slope, and up a short scramble where the path had been washed away completely. It was awful; honest! Graham's vertigo got the better of him and Davie just suffered from an attack of common sense.

Tony, Linda and Pete I entered the cave and as soon as the ridiculously easy squeeze was reached, the party was down to 2 as Pete I wimped out having gone through the squeeze but had problems getting his leg up!! (just ask Celia). Tony and Linda continued down the passage to their planned end of the cave. The route on was through a series of high rift chambers connected by short squeezes, up and down boulder slopes. The passages were well decorated with some stal like the stuff in La Draye

Blanche. We negotiated the Reseaux (Non) Actif and ended at the point that the cave went up into a series of high level muddy crawling passages. The squeeze on the way back was not a problem.

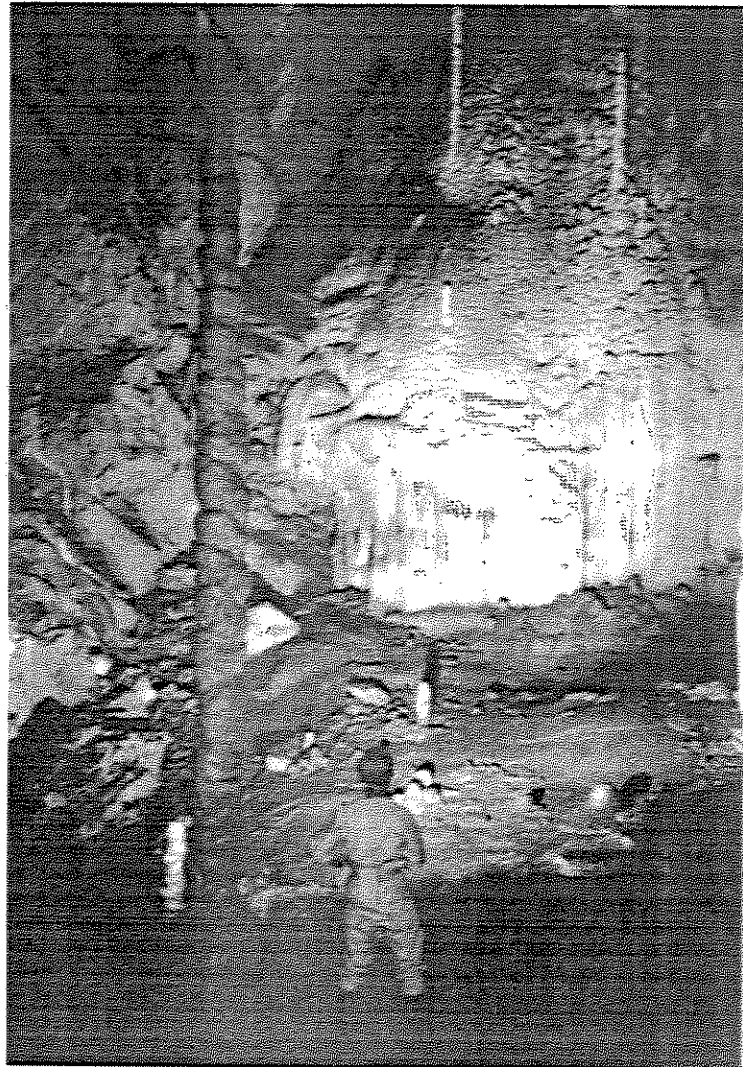
The caving "A" team (Walfords plus Dan and Fiona) sweated up to the E2 top entrance of Trou de l'Aygue - a long hot climb, carrying over 150m of rope. Once at the entrance (ten feet of sub-metre diameter rusty iron oil-drum drainpipe with a tree branch for a belay) things went well. We dropped smoothly down the first three pitches (including the 58m "big one") but had a minor problem at the fourth when Carol tried to abseil down the wrong end of the rope. Fortunately the error was spotted before disaster struck. A pleasant romp down the streamway led to "payback time" - the exit bedding planes. Just as well Julian had sussed them out in advance, as route finding would otherwise have been problematic. The through trip took about 5 hours and was much enjoyed by all. Back for a late lunch - at 5.00 pm - swiftly followed by the realisation that since the sun was now over the yardarm, it was time to start drinking. So we did.

Note 1: the first three pitches follow one after another; loose stones at the top of the second fall down it, but shelter is possible at the bottom. However they can fall down the third as well - bad news!

Note 2: A large number of new 'P-hangers' had been implanted in June 2000, but had not been rigged - it looks as though the fixed pull-through gear is being renewed. The existing stuff is getting worn - on the fourth pitch one of the bolts for the chain is out of the wall!

Note 3: Taking the rope tackle sacks through the cave is easy - simply carry them though on your back, then roll them through the 'laminoir' - it is slightly down-hill.

Note 4: Access: The track is unmetalled and quite rough for cars but the recommended parking place for normal cars is large and obvious. It then continues, and looks passable for 4 by 4s, though the sign suggests it is not permitted. The warnings regarding turning are true, but the turning and parking point at the top are fine. The cairn marking the turn-off to E2 is small and well-hidden by vegetation. The path is indistinct in parts as it is in woodland but well-cairned.



Formations in the Main Chamber, Sciallet de Graille

9-9-00

Pete D, Ewan and Davie stayed behind whilst the caving team of Julian, Dan, Fiona, Linda, Graham, Tony and Pete I set off for Grotte des Ramats. A short drive and a Walford style "easy walk" up the

side of the hill through forest. A forestry track (unmarked on the 1997 map) at about half way was found to lead back to the main road about 400m downhill from the parking area. A low opening beneath a tree provides the entrance into a small chamber, the floor of which was covered in a pleasant sand. The cave

consisted of a basic passageway with many holes and side passages off at various levels. There were plenty of short climbs up and down along with quite a few low crawly bits, (some slightly aqueous). The floor of the cave was by and large muddy until the farthest reaches of the cave. The walls rock was sharp, scalloped and occasionally covered in calcite. The "B" team turned back about half way down the cave after a few more "entertaining" climbs and a slip by Tony B resulted in bruised ribs. Linda, Graham and Pete I formed the escort out party whilst Julian, Dan and fearless Fiona continued on into the furthest reaches of the cave.

A squeeze and a fairly serious climb up lead to a length of well decorated passage (Bourgin Gallery). Unfortunately this part of the cave was littered with piles of spent carbide. No attempt appeared to have been made to confine the dumping to specific areas - maybe we could teach the French a thing or two about cave conservation??

Note 1: the climb was rigged with in-situ rope. We put a 8m ladder on the first bit and a 5m ladder through the squeeze, and used a rope for protection. Fairly straightforward, but best protected.

Note 2: Access - a steep 150m walk. The bridge marked on the map has plenty of parking space before it - it is actually more of a culvert and the stream is dry, except in flood. The stream resurges from the cave, so just climb the bed (hard) or the steep bank beside the bed (not quite so hard) until it ends at the cave entrance - you can't miss it!

And now for something even more cosmopolitan – here's a little note received by your editors this week:

We are members of Perovo Speleo Club in Moscow. More then 5 years our team works in the "Gorlo Barloga" cave. Currently it's the deepest cave in Russia: 840 m. Last summer we have found promising directions and we are going to continue the exploration next August. We invite you to take part in our expeditions. In reply we'd like to visit some British caves, if it is possible to arrange.

We don't publish our own magazine, but we can send you an information about speleo researches in Russia. Our club web site is <http://euro.ru/~horshoe/zagedan/gb/index.htm>. There are some materials about the "Gorlo Barloga" cave there.

We are leaving Moscow for an expedition. We shall be back on November 13.

If you are interested in our expeditions, or any information about caving in Russia, please contact Konstantin Zverev: <mailto:zverev@elmech.mpei.ac.ru>

Best regards,

Pavel Demidov and Konstantin Zverev

Contact Charlie and Galina Self for more info...

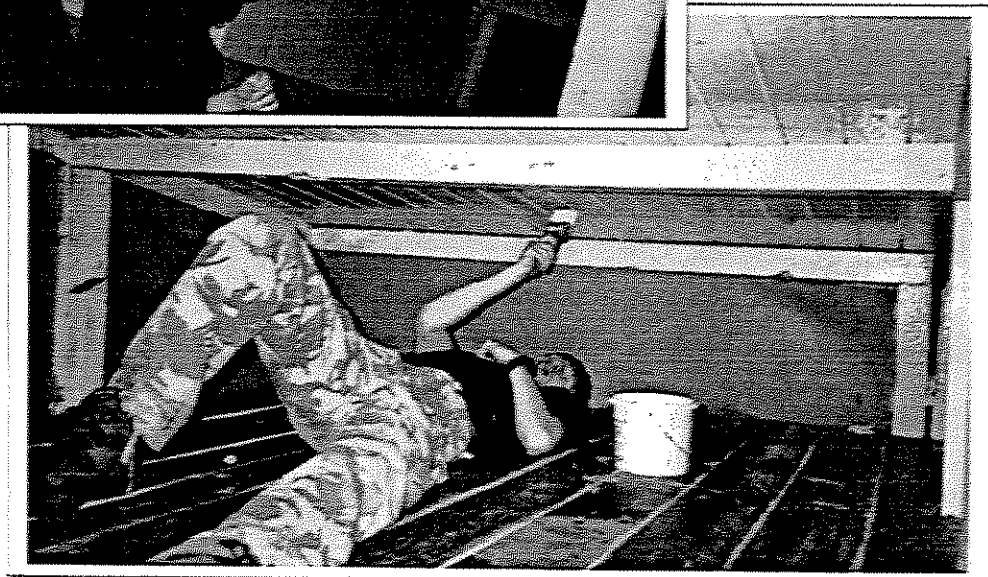
A Tale of Hut Renovation ... Continued

In the last newsletter we reported on how extensive hut modernisation has got well under way, starting with a thorough paint job. Further plans were outlined at the last committee meeting which involve putting in a new floor and improving the kitchen.

We are hoping to round up as many people as possible to help lay lino, fit the new burners and sort out the stainless steel worktops. Charlie Self has also kindly volunteered to replace the broken window.

We are aiming to meet all these targets in a single 'Challenge Anneka' style event, which will be held just before the Christmas Dinner hut weekend.

So it looks as though it'll be all hands on deck once again...we'll be rounding up volunteers in the pub next month.



Forthcoming Events

Christmas Dinner *Saturday 9th December 2000*

The UBSS Christmas Dinner will be held at the 'Stag and Hounds' pub in Churchill, Mendip on Saturday 9th December, 7.45pm. We are reliably informed that it is within walking distance of the hut, so we will be combining it with a weekend of Burrington caving. The cost will be £12.95 for three courses, including coffee and mints:

Menu

Starters

- *Soup - Leek and potato soup with crusty bread*
- *Stuffed mushrooms - Button mushrooms stuffed with cream cheese, garlic and herbs*
- *Christmas pate - Pork pate with walnuts, cranberry and orange. Served with caramelised onion marmalade and hot toast.*
- *Salmon and broccoli tart - Pastry tart filled with flaked salmon and mini broccoli florets*
- *Melon steeped in port*

Main Course

- *Traditional turkey and all the trimmings*
- *Sirloin steak and mulled wine sauce*
- *Vegetarian option*
- *Salmon filet with dill and pernod sauce*
- *Pork loin dijonnaise*

Desserts

- *Christmas pudding*
- *Apple and calvados parcel with cinnamon ice cream*
- *Chocolate shock - biscuit base covered with rich chocolate mousse, studded with chocolate pieces, topped with flake and honeycomb pieces.*
- *Caramel orange in cointreau sauce*
- *Fruits of the forest cheesecake*

Coffee, mints and mince pies

Contact Morven or Lesley to make your reservations:

mb8163@bristol.ac.uk
lb7110@bristol.ac.uk

UBSS Expedition to Northern Thailand

The following UBSS members are off to locate, explore and survey "dark, moist passages" (Ed Hill) in the province of Chiang Mai, Thailand:

Andy Farrant	Andy Smith
Si Flower	Sam Smith
Ed Hill	Jon Telling
Nick Ireland	Si Lee

The group, sponsored by BCRA's 'Ghar Parau Foundation' and the Tratman Fund, are leaving on 15th December for a one month expedition. They will of course be willing to exchange beer for stories of what "actually" happened when they return!

New Year Dinner

Following the success of last year's Millennium extravaganza at the Hut, the usual suspects will be gathering in the usual place to do the usual things again this New Year.

Again, places will be limited to save wear and tear on the catering staff, so would all those wanting to come please contact Wanda (0117 9732433) or Linda (0117 9502556) to book your place and agree your comestible contribution.

A final note from your editors...

We hope that this newsletter has met the high standards set up by the last edition, and once again we would like to thank everyone for their contributions – keep them avalanching in! If all has gone to plan, Dr Farrant has managed to remedy all your queries and problems in his guest appearance as our cave psychologist, but if you feel that you still have questions left unanswered, you can send them to us in complete confidentiality (!) and we will pass them on.

In the next thrilling installment of your newsletter, we will be featuring the much loved "GRAVEL" gossip column, back by popular demand. All tid bits, slightly elaborated truths and blatant slander welcome!

Our roving reporters will also be bringing us the scoop on the Thailand Expedition, and we will be continuing our ongoing coverage of the hut renovation....

Until next year, enjoy the festivities and keep on caving!!!

Christina Hoskins ch8914@bristol.ac.uk
Emma Todd E.Todd@bristol.ac.uk

