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Third Series

Number 10

UBSS NEWSLETTER

Surveying in Co. Clare
Knots
CHECC 2008

Autumn 2008

THE EMERALD ISLE

or

Five Go Surveying (in Co. Clare)

Kayleigh Gilkes

Day 1

On arriving in Co. Clare after driving from Dublin in the Quasqai (we got an upgrade – do they know what we are going to do to it??) we found the house unlocked with freshly baked bread and scones on the table, breakfast in the fridge and 2 bottles of wine. All of which made that trip round Tesco where I lost my phone seem worthless (I got it back thanks to a random woman finding and answering it).

Having settled down, we decided to cook a roast dinner and learn to survey before we start tomorrow.

Day 2

Having awoken and had breakfast, we sorted ourselves into survey teams and packed our kit before setting off in search of our cave, Gragan west. This turned out to be easier said than done. It was very much like the story of going on a bear hunt; we came to a plantation, we couldn't go round it, we couldn't go under it, we had to go through

it. Then we came to a bog and much the same applied although falling in it was another popular option. After some 3 hours of wandering around James announced that the GPS had finally found the cave, so we fought our way through the scrub to reach him on a track near the edge of the forest. Having tried to compare the map to the ground, we dispatched Andy to check and he found ... no cave! James then

potential entrances. The last of which, Andy descended to on a rope and whist saying "I don't think there's anything here" practically fell into the entrance. After 4 hours, we had found our cave – YAY!!!

So one at a time we descended the 3 metre entrance shaft, using a nice dead tree to rig off, then set off to survey the cave. We (Andy, Ryan and I) headed upstream in a stooping passageway never



insisted that at least the GPS had brought us out of the woods. After some discussion, I headed down to the road to try to make sense of the map. Having found a farmer I felt slightly more confident, in the mean time Andy and James worked out the map and where the cave roughly should be. The rest of us threw stones at a post to pass time, and then at Kayleigh once she was heading back. We then headed off down the bank towards the promising limestone and after a further hour of searching we found several

managing very long legs as the passage meandered to the first tributary, a tight twisty passage and the distances decreased even further. Once we had pushed this until its size diminished to smaller than Ryan, we returned to the stream and retreated from the cave, clambering out into the vegetation at the bottom of the shake hole. James and Geoff went downstream, through similar wet passage, and interesting large boulders that moved...

Cover Picture:

OFD Streamway

Photo: Ruth Briggs

Back at the surface we scrambled to the road and returned to the cars after a chat with a lady collecting flowers.

On returning, we relaxed and James cooked (without any spectacular mishaps). We then had to try to fit what we had done with previous work on the cave – this also was easier said than done as the description bore little resemblance to what we had recorded and obviously the GPS disagreed with the map and book. Oddly it was a dry night (I know you won't believe me but there wasn't a drop of alcohol in the building).



Day 3

Back to Gragan West, only this time straight to the cave and in ready to continue where we left off yesterday. Again Andy, Ryan and I headed off upstream to survey another inlet en route to our limit of yesterday, this turned out to be a crawly muddy horror of a place which thankfully became too tight to push without causing damage to the stal.

Having finished with the tributary, we continued upstream attempting to fit into many more tributaries to little avail until we came upon a climb into a rift tributary passage, so up we went. After multiple short legs in very tight passageway and much cursing, we reached deep mud through which we had to crawl (this was highly unpleasant to put it politely which is obviously how I put it at the time). Thankfully, after a few more legs, Ryan could fit no further and we had to turn around. By this point, we were determined to get out of the cave. As we emerged from our tributary, we met Geoff and James who had finished the downstream section. The rest of their trip was spent in

tight bedding planes, which turned into wet tight bedding planes with foam marks on the roof... After it got very wet and very tight they turned around suitably worried by the weather outside (it was raining when we went in). We all headed out into the rain and back to the cars looking thoroughly dishevelled. We had to visit the shop on the way home (alcohol was needed) so god knows what the locals thought of 5 mud covered Brits. Once again back at the cottage, we had data to write up, but tonight there was wine to help things along and singing to keep our spirits up. It is now midnight and I have just finished drawing 112 upstream legs (how did the original surveyors do this cave in 30???)

Day 4

Up and back to our cave for one last push to the finish. This time we were all going upstream. It was raining and had been all night, so the stream was slightly higher than it had been and wading through the heather and rushes was more of a chore than it could have been. Today our group took

the main stream passage, which got steadily smaller and prettier until we had to climb up and over a flow stone barrier and we were back in the mud for the last few legs to the surface at the top entrance. It was still raining and very cold. James and Geoff, who had spent the day surveying the final inlet, a tight rift, with small Geoff sized inlets, had not caught up with us so I headed back to the car, shortly followed by Andy and Ryan as we didn't know which entrance the others would emerge from.

Once we were all changed Andy and I drove back towards the top entrance and found the others, as we had Geoff's clothes, it fell to James to collect the rope at main entrance (another hour of walking to get the thing) whilst we came back to write up and make the fire. This done, we assisted Geoff with the crossword and Andy cooked.

Whilst we were faffing around prior to heading to the pub, we had a visit from the owner of the cottage who had brought us a warm plum tart and another bottle of wine (I love this woman just a little bit). So we had pudding



before heading into the bustling metropolis that is Kilfenora. The pub we chose (1st open one we found) was extraordinarily quiet, there were people in there, but they didn't talk even to each other. Although we did discover that the landlady had been caving. Anyhoo after a few Guinness's, we headed back to bed.

Day 5

Today we decided to have a day off and so after a bit of a lie in, we headed out into the wind and rain to visit the cliffs of Moher. On our arrival, we decided that €8 was a bit excessive so attempted to find somewhere else to park. During this we came across a small herd of cattle in the road which were unattended, we pulled over to let them choose where they were going only for a landrover to go tearing past us and start weaving between the cattle. Just as Geoff and I were thinking he would hit one of the cows he got through, turned around and started driving

wouldn't get health and safety allowing this at home, only to come to a sign facing the other way saying "do not go beyond this point". So over the wall we hoped to find a sign saying "don't climb the wall". Anyways back where we meant to be, we walked up to a little tower where the wind from the Atlantic threatened to lift us from our feet. Photos taken, we went back to the cars to head to Galway (or Galloway if you're James). A long drive ensued due to a very slow driver in front of us. Just after we got past the car, we had to stop and Ryan nearly skidded into the back of the hire car (he blames the ABS – or lack thereof) so we had to stop to check his tyres and the car got passed us again.

We eventually arrived in Galway and went for a wander. It wasn't as nice as I had anticipated. We had lunch and coffee prior to heading back via a different route. As we were home early, and by now the

them back. They had escaped. A second farmer advised us that we could walk up the track near where we had stopped to get to the cliffs. This we did and walked along a dodgy cliff path commenting on how you

weather was nice, I decided to explore our area a bit. There's a lot of nice countryside around some lakes etc. When I arrived back, the boys were all pretty much where I had left them, reading, crosswording and drinking tea.

At some point during dinner Andy brought up the conversation of primary school insults which proceeded to last all night as people randomly threw such classic terms as knob jockey and jizz-monkey into otherwise normal conversations.

Day 6

Another cave, another swamp. Today we were surveying Doonyvardan. Again the GPS was less than reliable. I eventually found it and we set off down through a tight squeeze and into the stream. Andy, Ryan and I went downstream this time. This cave is nicer than the last one or maybe I was in a better mood, especially after kicking James in the head when he was surveying. Either way we were doing well until James and Geoff appeared saying that they had trashed their instruments and claimed to be unable to survey. Having gone past us to rig our ladder they found too much water. Anyway, after giving them a new surveying light, we then convinced them that their kit did work a bit and sent them back to continue upstream. When we reached the pot we turned around to chase the others. On our way back Andy managed to head butt part of the cave and as a result a crescent shaped cut appeared above his left eye, this gave us a good excuse to leave the cave – we had been surveying for 5 hours by this point. So I chased the others upstream, whilst Andy and Ryan

headed for the car. I found them not far from the entrance.

After dinner, we headed to Corofin to find a bar with more life than the one in Kilfenora.

There were 2 blokes who spoke to us at the bar but that was about it.

Day 7

Back to Doonyvardan to attempt to finish surveying as much as we could (Graham's estimates of 1 day needed per cave obviously underestimated the task). Andy, Ryan and I headed upstream to turn around and meet the others. As the passage was very winding and would need many short legs we didn't go all the way to the very far end of the cave before turning around. We surveyed back until we met the others. This was the end of our surveying.



home the next day.

All Photos by Andy Wright.

We headed out and got changed. On leaving the parking space we couldn't understand why Ryan was beeping at us until Andy realised he could see them very well – the boot was open.

We then had to write up and clean and pack, for tomorrow we return to Dublin and James and Geoff fly home.

Day 8

Up early and setting off to Dublin to return the hire car and take Geoff and James to the airport. Once we had dropped them off the remaining 3 of us piled into Ryan's car and headed into Dublin for the night before returning

Definition from the urban dictionary (courtesy of R. Warwick)

A jizz monkey is in fact a job description and refers to the poor unfortunate employed to clean up the inside of peep show/sex show booths, so as said employee wipes spunk from the walls he is a jizz monkey. I suppose it's like the equivalent of being a runner for television or something. Admittedly it is not a particularly desirable line of work, but I hear it pays well...

Bill: 'Has Bob got himself a job yet?'

Ben: 'Why yes Bill, he's working as a jizz monkey down in the red light district'

*Bill: 'What? He gets paid to clean up spunk, that's just f****d up man.'*

Ben: 'It's a dirty job, but some ones got to do it...'

The purposes of the trip were for the group to learn how to survey caves and to gather data on two caves for which, although they have been previously surveyed, the raw data has either been lost or is insufficiently good for modern purposes. Both objectives were achieved. The data has been safely deposited in the Society's Library and has been incorporated in the 3D model of the Burren which can be found on the *Survey Archive* page of the Society's website at http://www.ubss.org.uk/cave_survey_archive.php

The group are extremely grateful to the Tratman Fund of the University of Bristol for its generous assistance with their traveling and living expenses in Co. Clare.

The surveying techniques that the group learnt are already obsolete! A Leica "disto" was purchased for the trip (and has now been bought off them by the Society) as a more speedy alternative to using a tape, especially for measuring passage dimensions. This has now been converted by the addition of a further circuit board and will read not just distance but also both declination and compass bearing,. Not only that but it will immediately download the data via a "bluetooth" connection to a suitable hand held device. If the latter is running survey software then the cave can be plotted on screen while the team are actually surveying. This is obviously far faster and enables errors to be picked up more quickly - though there should be very few as no data needs transcribing - but also enables the surveyor to record far more offset legs meaning that passage detail recording especially in large chambers should be greatly improved. It has arrived just in time to be used in the re-survey of Great Chamber in G.B. Watch this space!

NOTICES

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL CENTENARY - 2009

Those of you who remain in contact with the University of Bristol, as Alumni, will doubtless already be aware that next year sees the University's centenary. Much is planned in the way of celebration and the main event will be a huge reunion, the Centenary Alumni Weekend, from the 3rd - 5th July, when the hope is that many alumni will return to Bristol for a University-wide programme of events and activities.

We have already agreed that we will be opening the Society's Museum and Library to visitors at times over the weekend - early on Friday evening (3rd July) when we shall be offering light refreshments and also on Saturday afternoon. The main event of the weekend, however is lunch on the Saturday 4th July. The University is organising this for a number of groups. From our point of view, the most important is the lunch at Manor Hall which is for special interest groups. We reckon that the Society should be able to get more members to this than most other groups; indeed Linda reckons that we ought to be able to get forty or fifty members there, given the number that attend reunion weekend in an "average" year. This is a really good opportunity for us to meet up, to bring together all those smaller groups of members who meet up on a regular basis - and to practice for our own centenary in ten years time! Those of you who get information from the University will be getting booking forms for this event in December - just remember to mention *Spelaeological Society* or *Caving Club* when you book. Those of you who don't receive this material will still be able to book online at <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/alumni/events/reunions/booking.html> .

So come along, join us, meet friends and take a good look at the old place.

Graham Mullan

We hope that you have enjoyed this Newsletter. It was slightly late in arriving, as the Editor resigned and a temporary replacement had to be found. However, a volunteer has now come forward to take up the reins for the future: Frank Doherty will be editing the next issue. Hi Frank.

All submissions, articles, gossip, cartoons, photographs etc. should be sent to Frank at the usual address: newsletter@ubss.org.uk

The President's Piece (Snigger, Snigger)

OR

Memory Lane on Brean Down



Anyone who's been to Weston will have seen Brean Down - the limestone promontory, 2 km long and nearly 100 m high, that sticks out into the Bristol Channel on the south side of Weston Bay and is the westernmost extension of Mendip. In June, Profs. Martin Bell (Reading) and Steve Rippon (Exeter), of the Severn Estuary Levels Research Committee (SELRC), led a field day there to look at its archaeology. As Desmond Donovan and the Pres had begun work there in the fifties, we pretty well had to go, along with Pat A and Sheila Watkins, who'd both taken part in the archaeology, and Angus W, who would have done, if only the 1864 harbour and railway had happened. Just as well we went because there were only 11 of us in all.

Martin began by showing us the Sand Cliff, the 30 m high cliff, mostly of sand, formed where the tides have cut into the deposits resting against the limestone cliff which forms the south side of the Down. These deposits range in age from late in the Ice Age, perhaps 60,000 years ago, at the base, to the 16th to 20th centuries at the top, and contain archaeology stretching from Late Neolithic, through Beaker, Early, Middle and Late Bronze Age, to Romano-British, post-Roman and post-medieval. Desmond and AMA and Porthos Taylor sussed out the stratification in the 50's (*Proceedings* vol. 9, 1961); then, after two LBA gold bracelets were found there in 1983, Martin and others, between 1984 and 1997, did extensive rescue excavations and investigations in the Sand Cliff; on the level to the south

where it met ancient saltmarshes; and beneath the beach (*Proceedings* vol. 22, 2000). Finds included stone built Bronze Age houses and an extensive cemetery dated to the 5th to the 8th century AD.

Discussion, taken with lunch in a tearing grit-laden gale, focussed on things we don't know, such as how old is the limestone cliff?, could its origins go back to early in the Ice Age when there was ice a couple of km south of the Down?; could there be an old shore line under the beach?, and why is there so little Iron Age or Roman material from the Sand Cliff?

Afterwards, Steve took us up onto the Down, beginning near the eastern end at the little Iron Age hill-fort (*Proceedings* vol.14, 1976). The problem with this is that the pottery from the pre-rampart layer was thought to be Iron Age because it was like pottery from Unit 4 in the Sand Cliff; this however has since been recognized as Late Bronze Age, while the single rim sherd from the ditch is more probably early Roman. So what is the date of the fort?

From there we went on to the eastern summit where the walls of the Roman temple (*Proceedings* vol. 10, 1965) are still traceable in the turf. A question here was the purpose of the little domestic building on the south side of the temple, internally 12 by 9 Roman feet, and built around AD 390-400, after the temple had been demolished. Despite its resemblance to a similar building close to the Roman temple on Lamyatt Beacon,

Bruton (which also has resemblances to the Brean temple), and to Christian oratories in Scotland and Ireland, AMA doubted any religious significance, suggesting instead that it might have been the dwelling of herders in charge of flocks owned by a Roman villa estate such as that at Lakehouse Farm, East Brent.

On we went, via the higher, western summit, glimpsing barrows and field banks, of uncertain, possibly prehistoric date, as well as a massive stone fish weir, close to the cliff at Black Point, on the south side of the Down, and finally to the western extremity, with its mid-19th century and World War II artillery fort, memorable for the gunner who in 1900 blew up magazine, guns and himself. A very enjoyable and instructive day.

November brought SELRC's Annual Conference, back in Chepstow again. UBSS had 5 members present, the usual gang of Watkinses & ApSimons, plus Ian Standing from the Forest of Dean, with reminiscences of his building a railway for us in King Arthur's Cave in 1996. Ian wonders whether the workmen on the 1871 dig there sold the missing blocks of stalagmite (see *Proceedings* 2003, p.22) to rockery builders.

The day began with Ed Wilson, once a student of AMA's at Southampton, and one of 3 archaeologists from the Environment Agency's *Natural Environment Assessment Services*, whose job is to assess and 'manage' flood risks in the Severn Estuary and

protect archaeological sites. As usual, each year seem to bring new technologies, this year it was CAST - multi-spectral aerial photo imaging, which, for example, can reveal details of ancient field systems hidden in the modern landscape; and ground-based laser scanning, which can be used to build up 3D models of standing structures. Bye-bye draughtsmen!

Then there was Gloucester CC's *Severn Estuary Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment* team (SERCZA to you) finding massive collections of fish weirs and traps, dating from the 10th century on, along the Somerset-Gloucester shore from Porlock eastwards, also the remains of grids of posts and barbed wire, put up in 1940-41 to stop German gliders and troop carriers landing.

Highlights of the day were two talks: first, Toby Jones' update on the preservation and recording of the 15th century Newport Ship, found buried in a medieval 'pill' where it was being dismantled, and second, Garry Momber (Hampshire & Wight Archaeological Trust) on the submerged Mesolithic archaeology of the western Solent. This featured lobsters helpfully digging prehistoric flints out of their burrows in a submerged cliff, 11 m below water,

and part of the world's oldest log boat, dating to about 6070-6050 cal-BC, before sea-level rise flooded the Solent.

The work on the Newport Ship is amazing. Conserving the timbers using poly-ethylene-glycol has taken 6 years; digital recording of the 3000 ship's timbers has taken three people 3 years, using articulated arms and *Rhino-3* software, which gives 'wire frame' files for 3D printing. A paper record would have filled the lecture hall! Artifacts, including merchant's marks on barrel staves and markings on timbers, are recorded using laser scanners attached to digitisers. Reassembly of the ship will take another 7-8 years.

The ship was 'clinker-built', with overlapping planks laid first, the frames added afterwards. The bow section, cut off by the coffer dam round the site, was only recovered last March, its timbers have been matched to the hull by their tree-rings.

Allowing 2 m for the missing stern, it will have been 30-35 m long, with an 8 m beam; big for its day. A coin minted in SW France in 1446-1455, found hidden in a scarf joint in the keel, dates its building to the mid-15th century. The world's best recorded ship find, probably!

Lastly, one more talk to mention; Prof. John Allen (Reading) on "Romano-British iron-making on the Severn Estuary Levels". This rang a Breaan Down Temple bell for AMA; what the report cautiously calls an "iron-working pit", found in the north annexe of the temple, was, - with the benefit of hindsight, obviously a bowl furnace for smelting iron; it had all the right things, black charcoal-rich filling, pieces of iron slag, burnt stones and lumps of clay from the furnace lining. It was probably in use between about AD 367 and AD 390, after the temple had gone out of religious use, but while it was still standing more or less intact, very near the end of Roman Britain. At a guess, the iron ore used was obtained locally, from Triassic fissures in the limestone, like those that Desmond & I observed in the 50's, - iron ore is so heavy that it was usually smelted as close as possible to the ore source.

[For the Breaan Down excavations, see:

M. Bell, *Breaan Down excavations 1983-1987*. English Heritage Archaeological report no. 15.

H.M.R.C.England, 1990] A.M.A.

Get Knotted !

With the intake of new cavers into the caving club (and a very warm welcome to you all) it is time to learn some commonly-used knots which you will undoubtedly need to use in the coming weeks, months and (hopefully) years.

With Britain's rich nautical heritage, it comes as no surprise that knots have their origins in sailing and maritime usage - as indeed have many common phrases in the English language (see footnotes). So, "batten down the hatches" and read these pages which are "chock-a-block" with tips and drawings so that next time you are faced with a 100 metre pitch underground you have a "copper bottomed" approach, it will be "plain sailing", and you are not left "all at sea".

Forget all your parcel-tying skills with reef knots and grannies. These are never used in caving or climbing.

But first, some definitions:

Free end (also working end or running end): the end of the rope you are going to tie onto

Fixed end (also standing end): the end of the rope which is tied on elsewhere or which ascends to the lifeline above

Bight: a U-shaped portion of slack rope

Loop: as it suggests, a loop which crosses over itself

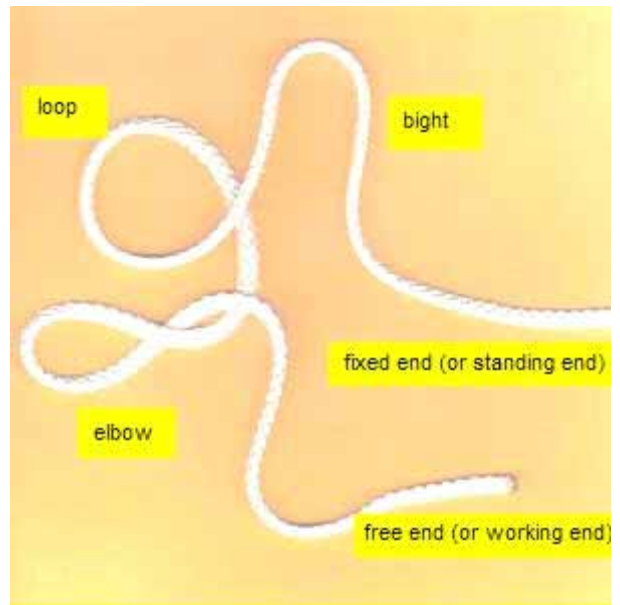
Elbow: a loop with a further twist

SRT: single rope technique. Uses a single rope to descend and climb pitches with no ladder

Karabiner: (Krab for short). Snap link with or without screw-gate

Maillon: (French for a chain link, and looks like one). Miniature krab, sort of

Indian rope trick: how to climb a pitch after you have accidentally pulled the rope down. Only joking !



Now to get down to business:



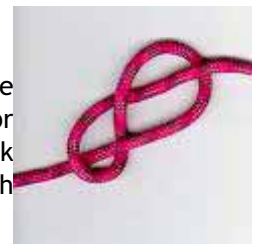
1. Tying a lifeline if you are wearing a harness and have a karabiner.

This involves tying a figure-of-eight knot on a bight. Make a bight approximately 80 cm long (more if you are using 13 mm rope), curl it back over itself to form a loop, make a further twist into an elbow, and pass the bight back up through the elbow. Pull tight and attach the loop to the karabiner and hence to the harness.

With practice it can be tied with one hand. A figure-of-eight knot is much easier to undo after being under strain than any other knot (especially a bowline) and, once tightened, does not require the free end to be tied off - although some people advocate doing this.

2. Tying a lifeline if you are wearing a harness and don't have a karabiner.

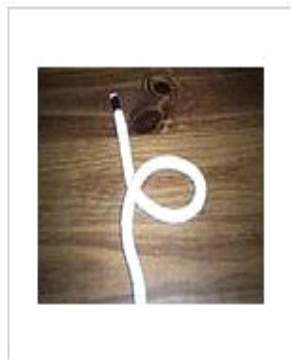
First tie a single figure-of-eight not using a single rope, not a bight. Ensure you have about 50 cm at the free end after tying the knot. Now pass the free end round your harness or belt and then use it to exactly retrace its route back through the knot. The result should look exactly like the picture in 1., except that your harness will have been ensnared by the loop. Much harder to do one-handed.



3. Tying a lifeline if you don't have a harness

For this you will need to master the bowline. Boy scouts will recall the adage: "wrap the rope round you waist leaving a free end of 45 cm; make a rabbit hole (loop) next to a tree (fixed end); the rabbit (free end) comes up the hole, round the tree, and back down the hole again. It is essential to leave a much longer free end than depicted (say 30 cm or 1 foot) because a bowline can easily work loose and fall apart. To prevent this it is "tied off", either with a pair of overhand knots around the waist loop, or by tying a single figure-of-eight in the free end to prevent it pulling through. Bowlines which are pulled very tight (for example in hauling a patient) are hard to undo, especially if the rope is wet. If the rabbit runs round the tree in the wrong direction you get a Dutch bowline or cowboy bowline which some sources believe to be inferior.

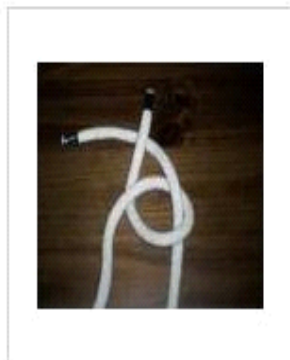
A variant on the bowline is to tie it on a bight. This way you end up with two loops instead of one, and these can be used as a sit harness (one loop for each leg) or “bosun’s chair”, or for hauling multiple tackle bags on one rope.



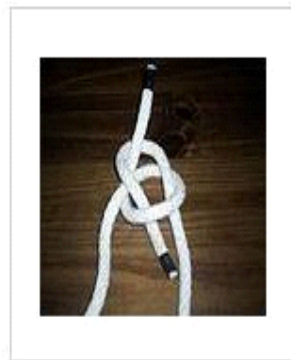
The rabbit hole.



Out comes the rabbit,



runs around the tree,



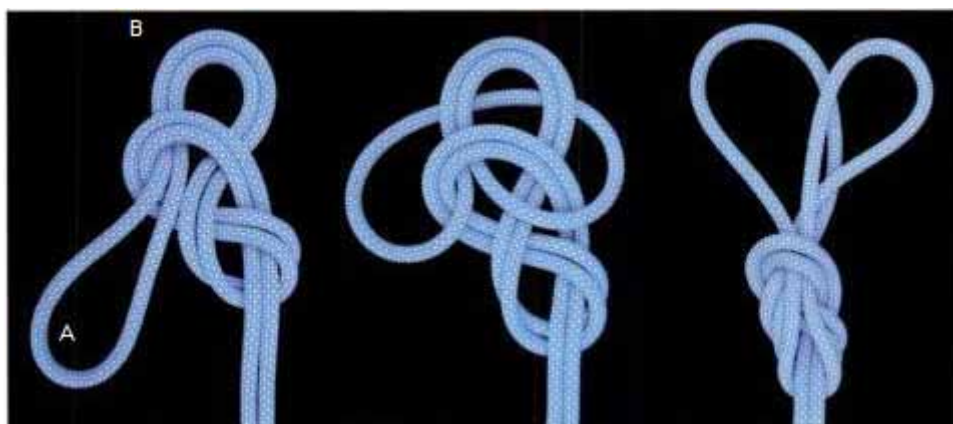
and hops back into its hole.

4. Rigging an SRT pitch on a single anchor point

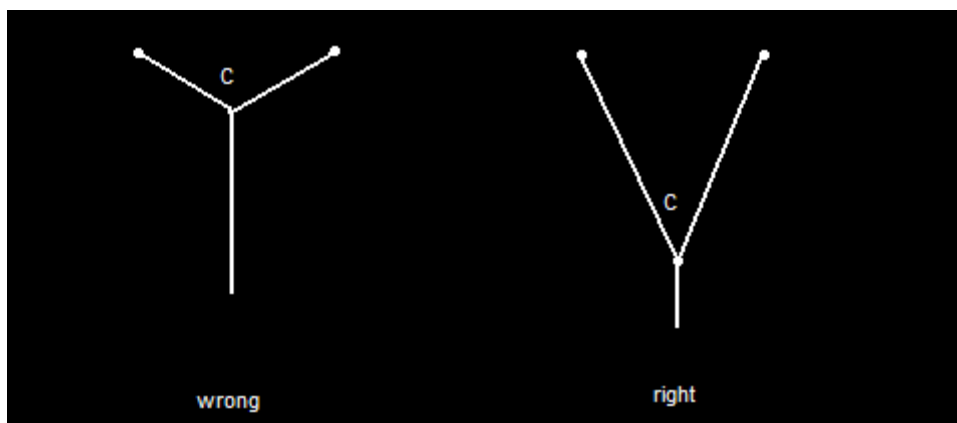
Make a double figure-of-eight knot as in 1. above and secure to the anchor bolt with a screw-gate karabiner or maillon. If the anchor breaks when abseiling or climbing, shout “Geronimo” and try not to land on a caver underneath. Far better to use a double anchor.

5. Rigging an SRT pitch from a double anchor point

Start a double figure-of-eight knot as in 1. above, but with a much longer bight (1.7 metres or 5 feet). At the final stage, instead of passing the entire bight through the loop, make a further bight B and pass this partially through the loop. Finally wrap the original bight A over the entire structure leaving two loops of equal length to attach to the hangers.



Note that it is important that these two loops are sufficiently long so as not to subtend a wide angle C which both increases the strain on the rope and causes undue sideways force on the anchors themselves:

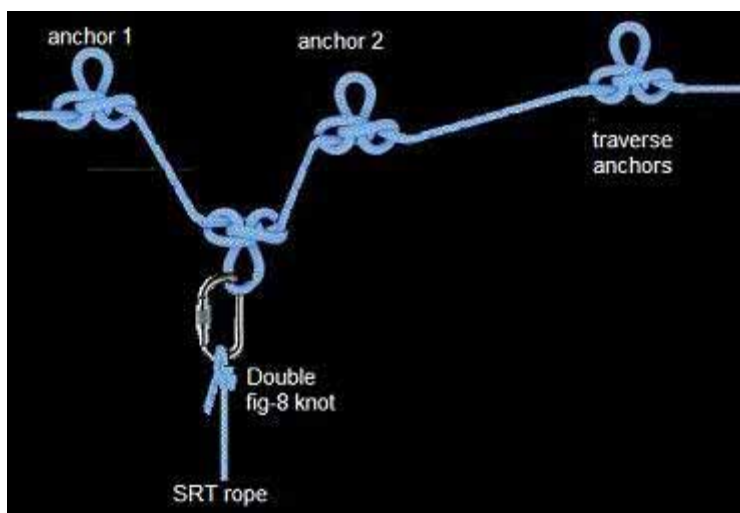
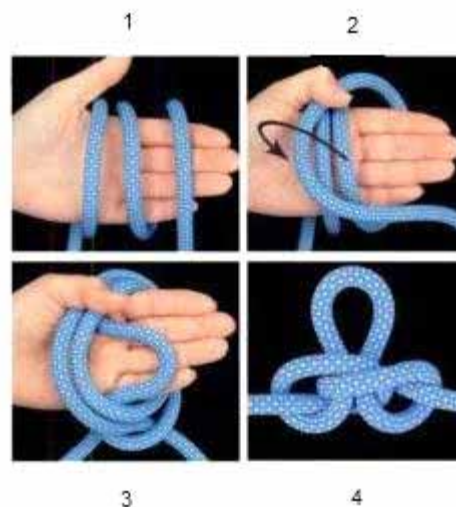


6. The Alpine Butterfly knot.

So called because it is used by Alpine (and I guess other) mountaineers to attach themselves in the middle of a rope (i.e. without a free end). The “butterfly” presumably comes from the fact that the knot is (more or less) symmetrical when tightened. It is also called the Linesman's knot. This is the only knot capable of being put under tension in all three directions. Note: a figure-of-eight should never be subjected to forces involving the two ends of the rope pulling away from each other. This knot requires considerable practice to tie, especially one-handed and in the dark.

The Alpine Butterfly knot has other uses:

First and foremost it can be used to isolate a section of damaged (partially cut through) rope in an emergency situation, provided it is kept in tension; if not then a karabiner may be used to prevent the loop pulling through. Secondly, if you have enough rope, a series of butterfly knots can be used to improvise a ladder. Clearly the loops would have to be larger than the one illustrated above, but for short pitches, say up to 10 metres, this may prove to be one way of allowing a tired or inexperienced caver to climb under his own steam up an otherwise unclimbable pitch. Lastly, a series of butterfly knots can be used as intermediate anchorage points for protection on a traverse, and even for multiple anchors over a pitch:



Some nautical terms as applied to caving:

“Swinging the lead”. Used to portray someone faking illness, or UBSS after drinking too much the night before caving. Originally a decrepit sailor not fit for rope hauling or anchor weighing would be given the job of depth-finding, this being done by dropping a lead-weighted line over the side of the ship, often swinging it and launching it forwards to determine what depth lay ahead.

Hasn't got a clue ! A clew (now misspelled) is the aft mounting point of a jib or genoa sail, without which the sail would flap around aimlessly, just like UBSS members who have arrived at the cave to discover they have left the tackle back at the Hut.

“Hanging on to the bitter end”. A bitt was a dockside block for tying up ships. The bitter end is therefore the fixed end of a rope. You will be hanging onto the bitter end if your abseil rope is too short.

More another time, me hearties !

Adrian Wilkins

My Unintentional Adventure Underground.

Ross Hemsley.

My joining of the University of Bristol Speleological Society, UBSS (The more obvious acronym of "BUSS" apparently not used because buses didn't exist when the society was started) was entirely unintentional. It all started going down hill when I was coerced through the infamous "Squeeze Machine" - literally an adjustable gap constructed from hefty bits of wood, and which almost certainly guarantees loss of all dignity (something I have to come to learn goes hand in hand with caving). "Go on, go through it". It was at 22 cm, which was described as a "Gaping hole". Well, I did it, for reasons that I still cannot summon. It really was quite easy, and I was somehow persuaded to try again once it had been lowered to 20 cm. Now my competitive instinct had been rallied, I removed wallet, keys, iPod and belt, and achieved a comfortable 19.4 cm. This was getting close to the all-time record, and there was a new set of wellies to the person who could achieve the tightest squeeze over the two day freshers fair. Well, it seemed that I stood a good chance of winning! Unfortunately, this prize would only go to a bona-fide new caver. Well, I wasn't going to have scabbled around on the floor whilst hundreds of first years clambered over me, to not even get my number on the board! So of course, I paid the entrance (an admirably low £12) and became a club member.

The next morning I was informed that someone had smashed my record and pushed themselves through an impressive 19 cm! This was not to be tolerated, so of course I returned, quite set on improving my score. I got through 18.9 cm, all the way through to the button on my jeans, which resolutely decided to jam up against the top of the bar. Unfortunately my sense of competition didn't go as far as public exposure, and I never did get my set of wellies.

I should mention here that caving is not something I had really considered as something that you could 'do', and I had the vague assumption that the society might go on small trips and look at stalagmites and exchange vague feelings of being impressed at some particularly nice calcite formations. Well, this impression was slightly altered when I arrived at the "Fresher's Weekend", and I was shown how to ascend ladders. This was mildly impressive – if this thing involves belaying up and down ladders, it must have at least a couple of interesting points to it. A few hours later, walking across a muddy field with a group of new cavers, dressed in shredded pieces of nylon and fleece that could be generously described as oversuits and

furries, it occurred to me that I still had very little idea of what to expect. It also occurred to me that the "Squeeze Machine" was obviously an excellent ploy to get people to join a society.

The cave that I was heading to was "Swildon's Hole" - quite famous in the caving world it seems. It was here that I first got to make impressions of this caving lark. The word cave in my mind meant something big and impressive, so I was fairly surprised to find myself peering into a small gap in the hillside that appeared to proceed to become even smaller, darker, and wetter. I don't suffer from any particular fear of small dark spaces, and I'm fine with water. But I admit that I was at least a little nervous to be lowering myself into something that seemed about as inviting as an impending essay deadline. So how did I find it once I was in? - It had everything! - climbing, sliding, crawling, ladders, pretty bits of rock, steep drops to peer over, waterfalls and many things in between. From someone who was almost expecting to be disappointed by a short walk under ground, I was mightily impressed. Coming

from a place where a speed bump could be referred to as a hill, and the most impressive rock formation is the neighbors shingled drive, I was amazed to find that this small hole between layers of rock could actually be *busy*. There was groups everywhere, smiling with their head-torches shining in odd directions and advancing down between bits of rock that seemed far too small for that number of people. I was quite hooked from the start, and within a few hours of my first adventure underground,

This piece won the author a nice shiny Speleotechnics lamp at this year's CHECC weekend; see Kayleigh's article for details.

I was re-suiting to do the Rods-Bath exchange. This was even more crazy than my first trip, and I started to understand that caving meant much more than a leisurely walk underground. Since then, each trip seems to present new and unique challenges, from the bold step in East Water to wading up to my waist in Ogof Draenen I have yet to be disappointed by a trip below the ground.

So, what started as a dubious and illogical quest for a set of wellies, became several weekend trips down a spectacular verity of small holes and huge caverns, a whole new group of friends, a heap of uniquely indecipherable caving expressions and a shed load of lost dignity. Two months later I found myself descending the Student Union whilst training to use ropes, and proudly proclaiming to the vexed students below that I was a member of the University of Bristol Speleological Society.

What do you get if you mix 300 uni cavers, over £2000 worth of booze and one or two caves?

CHECC 2008

This year we ventured into the uncharted (by most of us) territory of the Peak district caving area. CHECC was based at the rotary centre in Castleton – I have no idea if they realised just what they were letting themselves in for.

Having decided to set off nice and early, my car at least managed to see some of the peak district in daylight, even though it was shrouded by cloud. We stopped for food en route in a pub with possibly the best sound track for suicide I've ever heard. We thought it couldn't get worse until 'three times a lady' topped them all. The food was however very good especially the chips and I hear so was the gammon even though it wasn't the calf that Dickon was expecting (No Dickon you don't have gammon rare!!)

On our arrival at the centre, we discovered that the organisers had a major beer problem; the brewery had only delivered half the quantity they had ordered. More beer had been sourced; however it was on Mendip, well over 100 miles away. As Edd and Rob were yet to leave Bristol, we made a few calls and Edd stepped up to save our sobriety. This meant that he had to make a journey to Mendip to get 4 firkins of Potholer and therefore arrive later than he had intended.

Friday night at CHECC is always fancy dress night. Each club has a theme and there is a competition for the best club and the best individual costume. Last year we had won the club competition, however this year our theme of caves lost out to Leeds and their caver's breakfast. Ryan did win the best individual costume though with his depiction of Tatham Wife, I hope he can get his mum's shoes clean!

The bar and music had to be stopped in the very early hours, well before a lot of people were ready to end the party and before most of Kent even arrived in their Viking longboat (commonly known as a minibus). So the party moved to the corridor and some of the dorm rooms. At some point I gained a top hat (probably from one of the circus themed Cardiff group)

and a sword from either a Kent Viking or the group dressed as Monty Python's Holy Grail.

Eventually people started drifting away and finding places to sleep. On my return to my tent I found it occupied by Ed Moss and Dickon, so I extracted my sleeping bag and air bed and joined Sally and Christian in the drying room, my space was under the sink.

In the morning Sally, Henry, Cat and I headed off to Carlswork Cavern leaving behind us a minibus stuck in a field with a 2nd minibus trying to pull it out. There was another group of CHECC cavers going down the cave hoping to do the same trip as us. The route finding in the cave was supposed to be fairly simple, however we managed to miss the turning. This

turned out not to be as bad as we explored much of the rest of the cave, also discovering several loops which caused much confusion as we recognised parts of the cave but were unsure why. We had a lovely little cairn which kept cropping up, though we are still unsure as to its significance. On our way back towards the entrance we had come in by, I heard voices and so headed up the one turning we hadn't taken on our way in. Popping

out into a small chamber I was greeted by a shout of 'it's a girl'. I had met a stag party, who had come in via the entrance we were hoping originally to exit by. They informed us that it had taken them about 20 minutes to get to where they were, so we joined them for their return journey. They seemed to quite enjoy the idea that they had rescued a group of what they thought to be 4 young girls (I don't think they saw Henry), although they did seem very confused as to why we weren't at all worried by our situation. Only 2 of them seemed to understand that we could easily exit via the 1st entrance.

When I went back to de-rig the entrance, I met the other CHECC group coming out the way they went in and looking very cold, they had done the same as us but had not been 'rescued' by 20 middle aged men.



Back at the centre, they hadn't had enough people to do their most naked cavers stunt in Peak Cavern as everyone had still been underground, but as the Guinness book of records had told them that it was a too specialist an activity and wouldn't count anyway, it didn't matter. The beer began to flow and the games began, beer pong was 1st. Despite a valiant effort

and I ended up diving over the top of Sally to start a mud fight which rapidly spread to involve our whole group and mainly Ralph in theirs and continued where ever there was mud to be found. It didn't take long before I was a uniform shade of brown and Christian was telling me I would be accused of racism for blacking up. We had to have a good wash and brush of in a pool before we re-entered the show cave and got freezing cold walking back to the TSG hut to change.



Back at CHECC, much of the clearing up had been done and the AGM was about to begin, we had to collect Ryan's prize of a night out with Sue Ryall and a print of a photo by Rob Eavis. We also had to see Ross voted onto the committee and watch him collect his speleotechnics lamp for the best write up of 'your first caving experience' by a fresher. Rob also won a prize in the draw and therefore will not be paying to go to CHECC next year. All that was left to do was load up our cars and head off on the long journey back and return the kegs to cheddar.

our team of Steve and Ross, they didn't make it beyond the second round in a competition eventually won by the Manchester team. Squeezing was also won by Manchester, but they did have the smallest person at CHECC by a very long way. The rest of the competitions didn't seem to happen as by this time most people were in the dance hall and had removed most of their clothing from the waist up. Some of them took more persuasion than others to do it, but in the end we got there.

Much drunken dancing ensued some of us entering into the spirit of the event more than others. I spent much of the night trying to acquire a chicken hat and failing as many people wanted the same hat and the guy was on the ball. By the time we were once again thrown out of the hall many beverages had been consumed, but sleep was far away so I ended up in the kitchen eating more food and chatting to the event organisers until the not so wee small hours of the morning. The next morning, we were sat having a rather hung-over breakfast when we realised the cave we were planning on probably would contain a rather large volume of water, and besides we were all feeling lazy. This led to the decision to go to Peak Cavern with Rob and Andy from SUSS, we had to be in the cave having signed permits etc. by 11 and it was now 10.30 so we left all our stuff and set off.

Peak Cavern is entered via the show cave, where we were not allowed to have our lights on, speak, touch the handrails or touch the tourists; the later point caused much disappointment. The departure from the show cave section is down a slide much to the amazement to the tour group and the excitement of the guide's collie. Peak Cavern is a good fun cave with plenty of water and mud, both of which helped the hangover. Once I had been through the sump I felt much better, which was lucky as we later met up with another CHECC group

Rob and Christian however decided that to drive straight back simply wouldn't give them enough quality time together so decided to head north instead of south on the M6. So CHECC has been and gone for another year. Here's to next year!!!

Text: Kayleigh Gilkes

Photos Henry Zhou



