

# UBSS

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Winter 2012



# Editor's Piece



## A happy but “slightly” lost editor (with Adam and Simon on the left)

**Whoops! Despite me promising a newsletter very soon after the last one, aiming for a summer issue at the very latest, here we are a whole year later!**

Hopefully you'll all forgive me, as this looks to be a bumper issue, with lots of articles, photos, gossip, book reviews and flowcharts! (yes, you read that right...caving flowcharts!) A lot has happened since the last newsletter: fancy dinners, drinking, training, expeditions, surveying and of course spot of caving!

I've had quite a busy caving year, plenty of trips down Swildons, as well as Otter Hole and Croesor Rhosydd, learning how to survey and organising my first expedition to Ireland (more on that later). I even squeezed in an accidental game of hide-and-seek with Welsh cave rescue for 6 hours after I couldn't find my way out of Cwm Dwr. (See above photo). Not something I'd recommend doing, but it certainly made

Adam's last trip before he left for America memorable!

Unfortunately, a lot of stuff that has happened over the last year won't make an appearance in this newsletter as nobody wrote me an article (hint hint)!

So, whilst I would like to extend a warm welcome to all the new people who've joined this year, this is a written warning that I will be pestering you non-stop for pieces for the next newsletter (which I promise won't be 12 months in the making this time...). That said, a HUGE thank you for those who have wrote me something! This newsletter wouldn't be much of a read without your input.

Hope you enjoy it,  
Stuart



# Underground before 12? It's a myth!



**An UBSS weekend to Derbyshire, 23<sup>rd</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> March 2012 (yes that's 4 days!)**

It all seemed so simple, a weekend away to Derbyshire to do some epic SRT caving (suck on that Yorkshire) to kick off the Easter holidays. The cast included, myself, Stu, Sarah, Simon, Chris, Dave, Tom, Rosie and a guest appearance by Tash. Epic sunshine, the perfect time to go underground.

The Friday night from Bristol led us into a false sense of security, it all went well! Arriving in Castleton at the TSG at almost exactly the same time, Pizza and drinks before bed.



## **Saturday, Underground 12:30**

Even with getting all up at 8, the gas tester arriving at 9am ceased the cooking of the much needed bacon.... And with large amounts of rope packing fuff (6 whole tackle sacs, when only 5 were needed...) we set off to do a Maskhill to Oxlow Exchange. From the Oxlow side of things, we saw Tom fly through his first underground SRT experience, Dave having a good spot of rigging practise, a traverse line that had snapped in two, a two hour wait at the bottom of Maskhill for Stu's Party and some "sporting" rigging on the way up. Perfectly fun, apart from needing to remind stu that gates on crabs can be screwed shut!

Evening entertainment included Stu leaving his wallet in the Bulls Head, finding out magic was invented so physics could exist, bashing a rock-solid fruit cake and general abuse of Tash and her sugary-cherry boobs.



## **Sunday, Underground 1:30 – even the changing clocks were against us!**

The plan: rig the entrance to JH, then drop Titan, and carry on through and up JH. The problem, Adam snapping the key to titan in the lock, bummer! With no way to get past the gate (or so we thought) we changed tack and went for an easy pre-rigged trip down to the bottom of JH, it's amazing how well some people can get lost when your just following a rope.... 7 hours later the last of us was on the surface, just in time to miss sunset. Attempting to make the pub quiz in Sheffield was thwarted by South Yorkshire police pulling over rebel in there unmarked Audi (I wasn't doing anything illegal I promise!) and the juicy hot meal provided by Adam's mum, so just for beer it was.



## **Monday, Underground 12:10 - so close!**

Waking up even earlier than students should, and joined by a cow who looked a lot like a Rosie; we acquired the only other key for titan, a pair of pliers to remove the snapped key stub and had a man with an angle grinder on standby. At 11:20, Adam successfully removed the key stub with the pliers, gaining a great



souvenir! At 11:01 we realised that the locked padlock wasn't actually securing the lid. It had been open the whole time! At 11:03 we noticed we were missing the rope to drop the entrance pitch! The rope washer at the TSG had been far too tempting for some, unpacking the rope we still needed. By the Time the rope arrived at titan, it was just past midday, and down we went! Stu's rigging was safe this time, as titan didn't disappoint! One mistake that proved to be well worth it, was the slight nav error that led us through the lake of a thousand banana skins to the eerie blue depths of the Major Sump at the far end of the peak-speedwell system. Eventually finding our way to JH, the ascent was all that was left, and took all that was left of our energy! All that could be done that evening was to break more stuff (this time the rope washer in the TSG) and go to the Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese for a massive dinner. Sarah entertained us by losing control of her body and speech through sheer exhaustion!

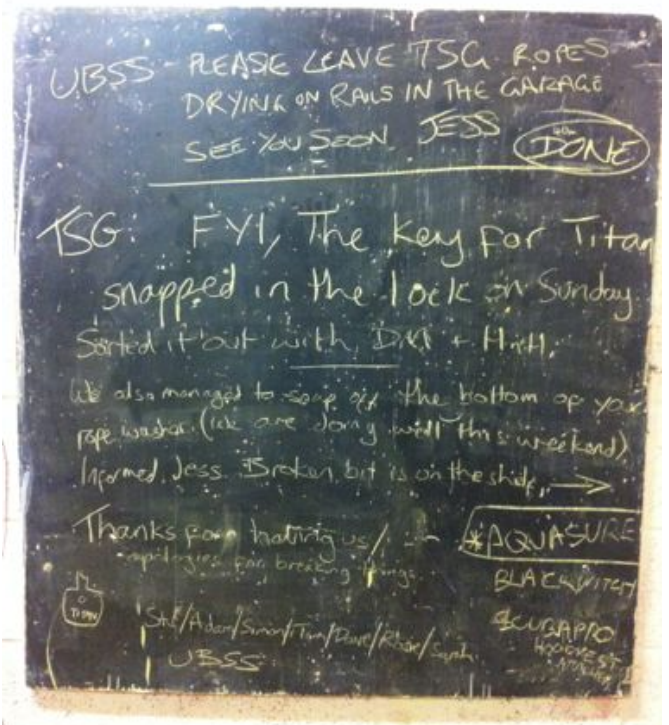


## Tuesday, Underground 18:35 - not even close!

The UBSS crew left Sheffield at 7am, not sure that Sarah was really aware that she had woken up.... Whilst I went back to bed till 1, before dropping titan yet again with Dave to go and fetch the rope, and catch 2 sets of people 'with their trousers down' on the roads above Castleton!

All in all a very vertical weekend, with many maladies, but no injuries! Phew

Adam Henry



Blackboard reads:

UBSS - please leave TSG ropes drying on the rails in the garage. See you soon, Jess

-----

TSG: FYI, The key for Titan snapped in the lock on Sunday. Sorted it out with DM + HnH. We also managed to snap off the bottom of your rope washer (we are doing well this weekend). Informed Jess. Broken bit is on the shelf.

Thanks for having us/apologies for breaking things.

Stu/Adam/Simon/Tom/Dave/Rosie/Sarah  
UBSS

# Chimera 2011

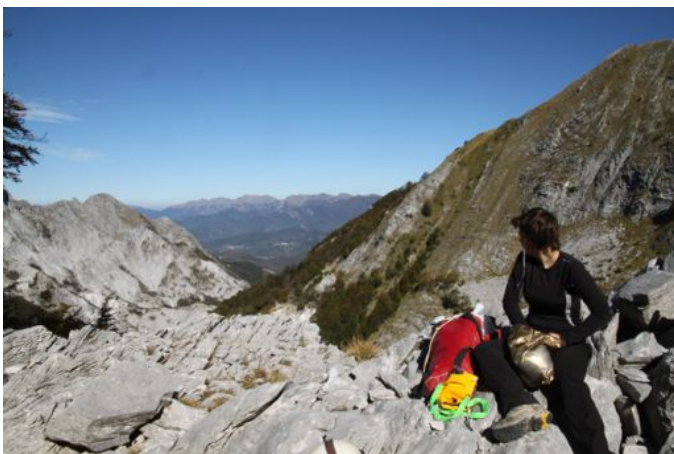


**I found myself in the sad position of having finished my degree last year, and not feeling particularly keen on entering the world of work, I somehow managed to install myself**

**in a Ph.D position in the Côte d'Azure (UBSSians: feel free to visit!).**

Of course this meant leaving behind the glorious (?) caves of the Mendips, but I felt sure that there must be some kind of caving going on in the surrounding mountains (to quote a local caver, who stated with absolute seriousness: "Sure, there are some small caves in the area reaching a depth of around -500m, but don't worry, there are some bigger ones not too far away"). A couple of weeks after arriving, I managed to get in touch with a local caving club. They (in retrospect, probably half jokingly...) said that they had been planning a trip to bottom the 1006m deep Abisso Chimera in Tuscany, Italy, leaving on Friday if I might be interested. I wasn't going to turn them down, and before I knew it I found myself immersed in a team of French and Italian cavers (almost none of whom spoke any English!). I think I made somewhat of an impression on them, and I'll include some translations of their club's trip report which are quite amusing:

*"To give you an idea of the legendary British hardiness; Ross is the type of guy who says "OK" when presented with a group of complete strangers who propose (on Thursday evening) that he accompanies them down a 1000m deep cave in Tuscany two days before leaving (on Saturday). – No comment!"*



So, before even leaving I was faced with my first challenge: my trusty Nova had decided to break down (the classic failure between the battery box and cable gave up...). This was solved by rather dubiously strapping a combination of a Petzl Tikka and a bike light loaned by the Italians to my helmet. In actual fact running both at the same time gave me something approaching 300 lumens of light, which was better than my Nova! Plus I rather liked the Heath Robinson-esque appearance.



After a 7am rise on Saturday, we found ourselves driving up to Apuanes at an altitude of around 2000m. It is a beautiful area, replete with immense marble quarries, in the process of being serviced by similarly immense vehicles, all traversing the tiny mountain roads. The hike to the cave took around an hour and a half, and on arrival we feasted on hordes of focaccia and pizza of a quality that only Italians seem to be able to achieve. And then we were off! I had been warned that the cave was cold, and so I diligently wrapped up in thermals, furry and Warmbac oversuit. This was my first mistake, as clearly 'cold' is a relative term. I quickly found myself overheating, and was observed bemusedly by the local Italians, wearing their super-thin AV-suits with barely anything underneath. Not knowing how to explain in Italian that I had been "mislead" about the temperature, I could do nothing but grin and look like a novice.

Whilst I appeared to have no clue on what to wear in a cave, at least I was able to show off some of my Mendips-style caving prowess as we attacked the 'tight' entrance series (these guys clearly haven't visited the end of the Virgin Series!):



“Around one hundred meters of frankly unpleasant tight passage... I regretted already that my kit was loaded with an incompressible sleeping bag and SRT kit. I turn around and observe with curiosity a certain Englishman who’s close behind. I see by his face he is perfectly happy. For him it’s spacious and easy, he’s not breaking a sweat and I see in his look he doesn’t understand why I’m not advancing more quickly!!”

Finally we arrived at Osanna, A fine and spacious 80m pitch carved out of the marble before us. I found myself struggling with the esoteric Italian re-belays, rigged to cover almost as much distance horizontally as vertically; it was impossible to pass them without using a good deal of upper body strength. I assumed they were just nuts, but I later came to understand that there was method in their madness...

Eventually we came to a series of pitches that could only be passed one by one, leaving a large gap in between each person. That seemed a little like overkill until I came to appreciate the frequent and unavoidable avalanches of rocks that fell at the slightest touch which were all around us. This cave isn’t like other caves I’ve been in. This cave feels like a 1000m extension of the “entropy increasing” scree slope in Xitu. The wide re-belays suddenly made sense. The last place you wanted to be on a pitch was underneath someone else, and I started to take comfort in even the widest and most testing re-belays.

After a slightly monotonous series 700m of pitches, we arrived at Chimera’s showpiece: “Touch in the Void”. This 160m monster of a pitch feels like an immense and impenetrable canyon; even the highest level on both of my lights failed to reveal walls opposite me, let alone below or above me.

““Touching the WHAT?? The void... The what? – The God-damned void!” Fred is in front of me and an “OH, F\*\*\*”, escapes him!

Me: “What is it Fred, a rock?”

Fred (in a small voice): “No, no, you’ll see...”

...

And there, I saw! Or, that is, I felt... the emptiness!

Oh my god!! It is a black hole. The most immense, horribly giant and enormous thing that the earth has created opens up in front of me and is about to swallow me up!”

This the first 1000m deep cave for my French comrade, and she was (understandably!) nervous. So was I. So once I found myself dangling from the roof on the 1cm thick rope, waiting for the next re-belay to free up, I couldn’t resist whipping out my trusty harmonica. This is an idea I unapologetically stole from OUCC’s David Rose. And what an idea! Despite my patent lack of any ability to actually play the harmonica, a stupid melody penetrating the immenseness successfully brought up the mood and we found ourselves cheerily descending the 20 Italian-style re-belays all the way to the bottom.



At this depth the cave changed character completely. We had entered a labyrinth of

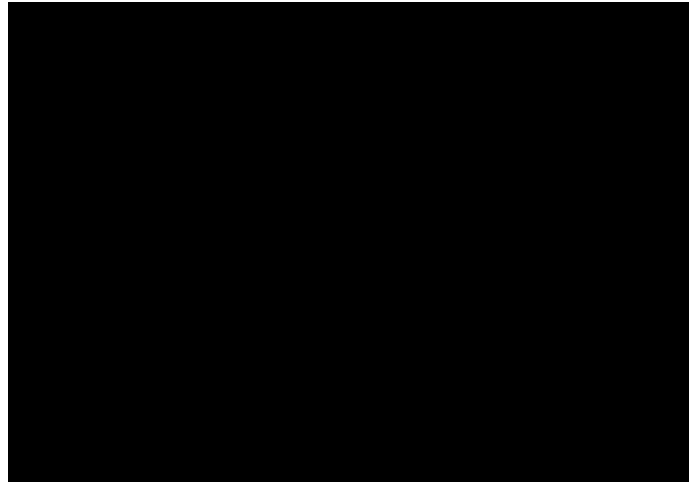
phreatic tubes occasionally frosted with “popcorn” type formations similar to that found in the Picos. It was here that I really started to first enjoy the caving. Winding passageways and small climbs are much more to my taste than endless pitches (I guess I have the Mendips to blame for that). But this section was all too short. It was not long before we found ourselves gazing into the turquoise waters of the final sump. A pleasing river leads up to a sandy “beach” by the edge of the water, and the passage dives straight down into the foreboding clear waters. This has been dived to a depth of 10 or so meters, and all I know of the outcome is that “It keeps going down”.

Well, now we’ve reached the bottom, I suppose I should come clean. I had decided to bring my camera with me on this trip. That is: my SLR, four high power flashes, twenty AA batteries and four sets of triggers, all in a 1.5kg Peli 1300 case. Oh, and a tripod. Yes, perhaps I overestimated my fitness when I imagined that I could carry all that, 2L of water, food, and a sleeping bag down to -1000m and back, whilst keeping up with my (somewhat less burdened) comrades. More of that later... For now, I took the opportunity to take a set of photos for the occasion, already not looking forward to the daunting climb back out.



Of course, on arriving back at the bottom of “Touch in the Void”, I couldn’t resist trying to take a photo before I ascended. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I ended up with a set of extremely underwhelming photos that I’d be embarrassed to show you. But I know you’ll still want to get some idea, so here’s an artist’s

impression of what the pitch looks like from the bottom:



Due to the faff (incidentally a word that is not part of the French lexicon. I’ve started introducing it: “la faff” is already catching on in my office...) of playing with various flashes and tripods, I found myself alone at the bottom of the pitch with Marc, as we waited to ascend. I was standing probably 30m from the bottom of the rope to stay out of the way of anything that might be knocked down, and that might seem like a lot. But suddenly there was a series of crashes from above, and I instinctively new to leap up against the wall. It was flat and unforgiving, but I pressed myself against it in a star-shape. The crashes got bigger, and more frequent, and it then it literally rained rocks. Not small pebbles, but large multiple-kilogram masses that hurtled down the shaft and splintered in front of me. I remember bracing myself for the possibility that one of the several slabs of car-like proportions, that I knew to be above me, might come unhinged and plummet to the floor around me. But fortunately it died down, and all that remained was a strong smell of gunpowder and a smattering of broken stone at my feet. Ten frantic seconds were spent as we shouted to communicate with those at the various stages of the pitch and to ensure that everyone was ok.

“The line of light above and below me is making steady progress... Not a sound... but then a SCREAM! The first Italian at the top of the pitch has shouted something!

I see a BOULDER, pass in slow motion in front of my eyes... I close them... and I await the immense crash below.



Below, yes, below with the rest of my team...  
I didn't want to believe it, it was a few fractions of seconds that elapsed before hearing a voice "Tutti va bene?"  
"Bene?"  
"Si! Si!"  
"Oui! Oui!"  
Everyone is alive.  
I don't remember saying any words other than: "Fred! I was scared..."  
And I didn't receive any response from him other than "Oui..."

I slightly timidly started ascending the rope, and after a further 30 minutes spent dangling around 150m off the ground at the top of the pitch waiting for the rope (which seemed to have got stuck or something? I don't speak Italian!), I was at the top. By this point I was quite tired, and I dragged myself back to the gallery at -700m that has become camp. It's a lovely camp, and for the first time I got to appreciate the pleasingly warm glow of carbide, as the Italians had set up some kind of huge carbide lamp in one corner that illuminated the whole chamber. But we didn't stay up long, some hot noodles were had and we finally hit



course got stuck at every opportunity, I was starting to struggle to keep up pace. I didn't want to seem unfit, and I had ended up caving next to an Italian who didn't speak any French, let alone English, so I couldn't really explain. Finally he saw me struggling and relieved me of a few kilograms. The going became much easier but I still felt like I was letting team-UK down by appearing to struggle with only one tackle sack! Finally though, we got to my favorite and squeezy entrance series, and we popped out to a spectacular sunset. I was more than a bit glad to be out, and after another feast on Italian focaccia, we set off on the five-hour drive back to Nice, ready for work the next day. Not too bad for a weekend's caving!



the hay at 1am (hay is probably the wrong word to use for the slab of cold rock which was the reality!).

We slept in until 9:45 the next day, and after a classic underground breakfast of whatever we could lay our hands on, we set off. It was here that I started to be worried about keeping up. With all of my photography gear filling an enormous and unwieldy tackle sack, which of



**Ross Hemsley**

(All photos in this article were taken by Ross Hemsley)

# Rescue Training Weekend



**As with all good weekends, things began with a healthy dose of ales and ciders, this time at the annual BRAG Festival.**

After failing unanimously to achieve the unofficial 'drink at least half a pint of everything' challenge, most of us spent the night at

Keller. Those members who survived to get up bright and early on Saturday met at the tackle store to pack all the kit we could manage for an assortment of rescue-based challenges – including an 80m rope which Anya estimated we'd need to scale the trees around the hut! In the event I was one of the members who hadn't survived and had to shamefully organise a lift to reach Mendip HQ for 10am.

Mercifully the first order of the day was to enjoy a much needed cup of tea (or several) and marvel at the attempts of our more alert members to rig the tree with several ladders, ropes and belays. Once the whole gang were awake enough we were treated to a talk from the Mendip Cave Rescue team before some actual physical labour assisting with feigned injuries from our best acting talents. Amy suffered first being fairly roughly manhandled into a stretcher – good thing she didn't really have spinal damage – before we got it right and took her for a stroll through the woods. Being strangely keen to suffer the same treatment, Adam was carried in the apparently far less comfortable fixed stretcher while the rescue team started work unpacking the underground radios for a demonstration in the marvels of modern technology. As it turned out the radios didn't work particularly well but unperturbed we

set of for goat church to save Cat from a sprained ankle.

We set up one radio above ground manned by Andrew and began the hunt for our injured comrade. This took a surprisingly long time since Cat had been injured in an inconvenient place and had to first meet up and try again. The radios at least seemed to be working this time so we could alert Andrew to the situation, not that he seemed particularly alarmed enjoying the sunny weather. Cat explained that she'd fallen of a rock and hurt her leg but was in no danger of falling unconscious so while we strapped her securely onto the stretcher she prudently opted to keep her arms free to fend off any rocks/cavers in danger of crushing her. In perhaps the slowest cave I've ever experienced Cat was passed carefully over her battered and wheezing army of rescuers and past a group of bewildered American tourists back outside. While Cat was as glad as the rest of us to be let out for a rest, it was inexplicably decided that Simon should be strapped in instead and carried the rest of the way back to the hut!



Back at camp we had another tea break with bonus cakey surprise before starting on the tree challenges. Jon Hauser had to be rescued from a ladder he'd fallen unconscious on by Rosie, but ended up having to rescue Rosie from the ladder she'd gotten tangled in. Stu Walker then attempted to rescue an



unconscious Rosie, with similarly mixed results. Cayley had a try at a different technique to save Adam, following instructions from Andrew that was even less successful – it seems that one only works if the heavier person is doing the rescuing! The main event was for every to solve how to replace a stuck jammer and get down from the tree without unattaching from the rope or using anything not already on the harness. While most people managed this fairly painlessly taking it in turns, Anya had a little more trouble (though she didn't benefit from seeing how it was done first). After 45 minutes of faffing without progress she worked out she needed to take off her central maillon, but two hours later she was still stuck in the tree with a homemade prusik and other gear mismatched and swapped around. Finally Chris had to help her down when she lost feeling in her legs.

Dinner consisted of a delicious assortment of curries made by Andrew complete with rum-soaked sponge pudding. As it turned out this contained rather more rum than sponge, but Chris apparently didn't realise until halfway through and was doing a poor job of giving up alcohol for lent. Evening games involved classic table traversing and climbing over a chair to pick up a cork using your mouth, neither of which went very well but both were as fun as ever. Cayley did all this in disgrace without taking her clothes off despite agreeing on the forfeit when she cheated during the tree

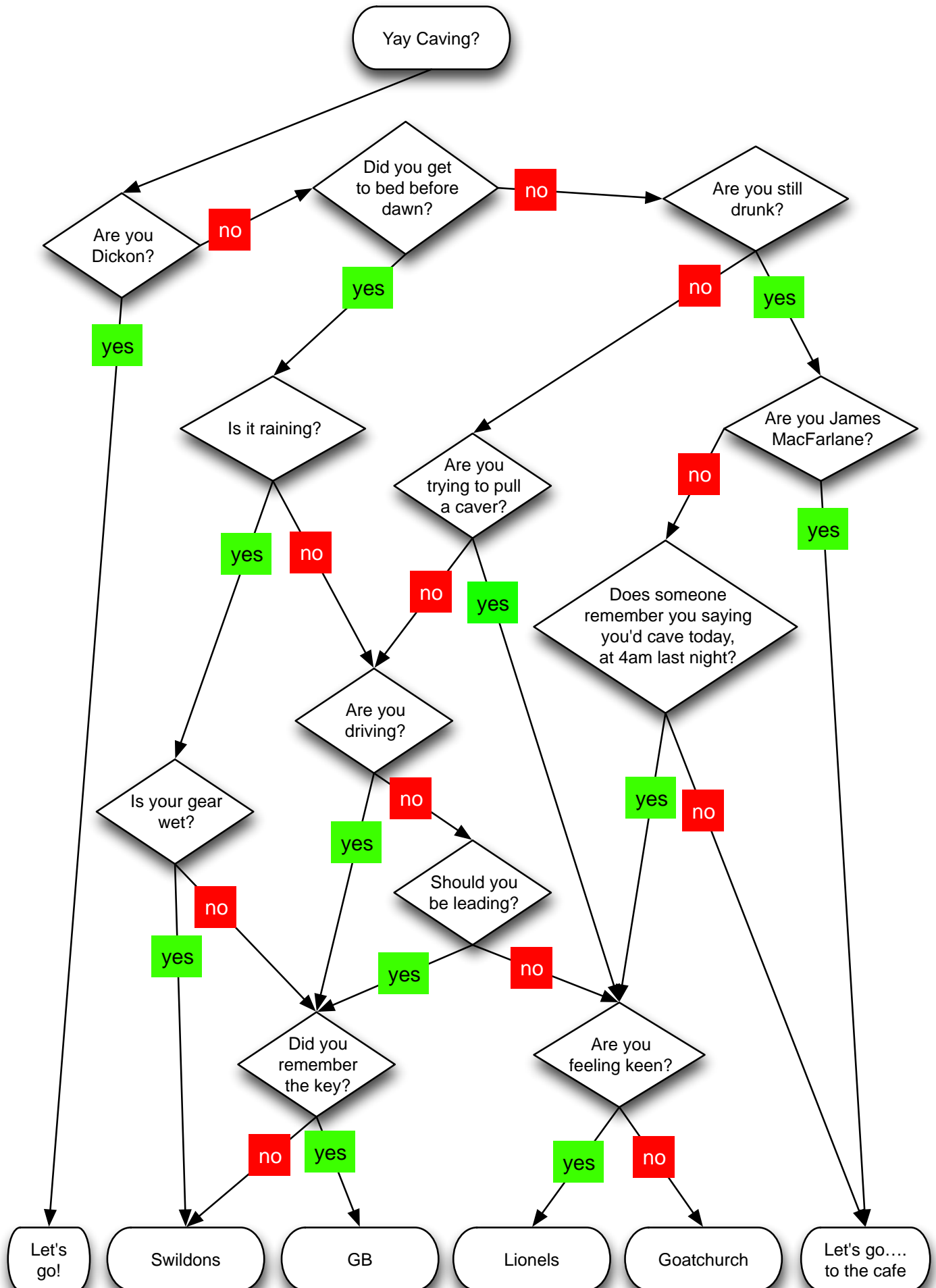
challenge. Meanwhile a car load of peeps visited the Manchester cavers while they were staying at the Wessex nearby. When Bill refused to give him any space cake Stu was very upset at not being allowed 'astronaut food'!

In the morning we all enjoyed a fried breakfast for motivation to climb back into the tree for another quick session before packing up. Anya's 80m rope actually found a use in rigging a tyrolean traverse between two trees which Cat asserted was done far more tightly than on the Austrian Expo, perhaps thanks to the efforts of everyone left on the ground heaving on the end of the rope through some pulleys. We finally derigged and tidied up the hut and had a quick stop at the Hunters for lunch on the way home. Anya even had enough time left on Sunday to prepare for her interview the next day.

### **Anya Keatley and Cameron Bullen**



# Yay Caving?



# Hole-y Unfounded

Simon Hadfield has been spied with his sheepish pregnant girlfriend (photo overleaf)

There is a highly suspect and unsubstantiated rumour that James MacFarlane has been spotted underground.

Manchester cavers have now become Manchester pot-holers. Eh, Bill?

The new junior secretary, Richie is said to have been missing so many caving weekends due to prior commitments as an international spy. But what side is he fighting for...?.

Alice, despite her absence, is alive and well...apparently. Whale spotting has now become a secondary caving sport.

Adrian Wilkins has made it a whole two weeks without getting lost in a cave! That said, he hasn't been seen since last Tuesday...

In an attempt to once again fit through Birthday squeeze, Graham has resorted to removing various internal organs. We can't really recommend this as a viable slimming regime, mostly as the results appear to be unsatisfactory.

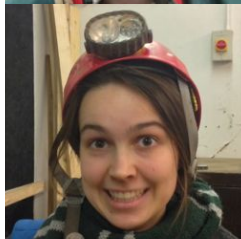
MI5 are still working on transcribing conversations with Stuart Walker. Work is ongoing, no end date in sight...

Sarah Rae, as it turns out, will do anything for a £1 challenge...  
And yes boys, we mean anything! ;-)

Amy's cleavage has now been rated a grade 3 crevice by the BCA. Open access, but be aware of grumpy landowner.

On a recent trip to Derbyshire, Stu A was unfortunately mistaken for a carrot and subsequently eaten by a horse. We're all hoping he'll complete the through trip soon!

# OFD1 to Top



Having been promised a fun, strenuous but not particularly long trip by Adrian we wetsuited up and headed out down the hill in the snow. An encouraging start was made when we overshot the entrance for OFD1 and were called back by the other trip going down for a pootele.

A little while down the stream way we split off from the other group and carried on further into the cave. After a short detour in the boulder choke Adrian found the way on, and a bit of a climb later we were at the letter box, which looked more challenging than it was but did provide quite a nice view of a pair of boots sticking out of the rock while their owner wriggled through.

We were directed to look for the way on, a small tube through which we could hear water. Anya found a calcite opening which seemed far too small to be the way on, but after trying a few others she squeezed in, heard the streamway and we all looked rather apprehensively at the largest member of our group. What was a strenuous low crawl for the shorter members of the group was more challenging for Adrian, who after finding out that he couldn't get through the bend in the entrance head first had to do some sort of feet first three point turn to get through. Some time later, we were all through and at the top of the waterfall. The way down the waterfall was an entertainingly high climb with just a hand line, but once we were down it was only a little further to the marble showers, the most fun and prettiest section of the trip.

Having learnt that trying to stay out of the pools mostly resulted in falling in anyway, with the added benefit of hitting various appendages on the rock, we started just jumping as far across as possible and realised why this was not a wetsuit optional trip. After some enjoyable swimming we got to the oxbow. After a look at the slippery and quite wide climb down, some of us went for the alternative route of climbing onto Adrian's shoulders.

We then got to a tight sinuous passage, easy enough for small people, but at one particularly tight bend Adrian got stuck. After some discussion, with Corin pushing from behind and me in front acting as a wedge we pulled him out and carried on.

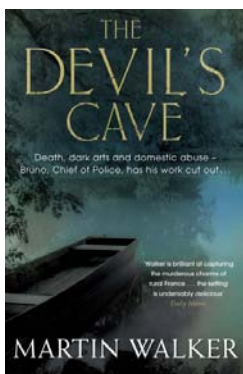
We knew we were near the entrance, but were very unsure as to where the way on is. We tried one passage that, after going past a large boulder, didn't look right. Rather than going the other way at the boulder we doubled back right back to the crossroads. Stopping in one chamber for a rest we discussed how much the little group of stalagmites on the floor on the other side of the chamber looked like gnomes, and whether this was therefore gnome chamber. This thread was returned to several times as we wandered around. Aware that we were two hours overdue, we began to wonder where cave rescue were, and were by this point largely content to sit still until they found us.

At this point Adrian announced that he'd found the way on, and we made it the last few hundred metres to the entrance. We tried the door, and realised it was frozen shut. This prompted another few minutes of deliberation, after which we decided I was going to hold the latch open while Corin kicked it. I was not hugely happy with this situation, but on balance it beat someone having to pee on it.

Taking a look at the amount of snow outside we shut the door again and put on all available gloves and hats. When the door opened again cave rescue were at the other side. Somewhat sheepishly we headed back to the SWCC through a good foot of snow, changed, and tried to find someone with a mobile signal to call the others back at the Westminster and let them know we were out.

**Sarah Rae & Anya Keatley**

# Book Review



**THE DEVIL'S CAVE**  
by **Martin Walker**  
**ISBN 10 = 1780870671**  
**ISBN 13 = 978-1780870670**  
**Published by Quercus Publishing Plc**  
**Publication date:**  
**2 August 2012**  
**320 pages**  
**Hardback price £18.99**

Readers of novels featuring caving will possibly remember Martin Walker from his earlier book, *The Caves of Perigord*, a tightly woven tale moving through three distinct time frames, from the Upper Palaeolithic, to the Second World War and on to modern day.

Walker has returned to that area of France for a series of books featuring Inspector Bruno Courrèges, the Chef de Police in the small French town of St. Denis, just north of the Dordogne river. Each of the books has their own theme, ranging from wine production to truffle hunting, with detours into local archaeology and the darker side of the wartime activities that also played a part in *The Caves of Perigord*.

The setting in all the books is so vividly drawn that anyone who has visited the area on a caving holiday will feel instantly at home amidst the picturesque villages and the wide, sweeping oxbows of the Vézère as it meanders through Montignac and Les Eyzies, in a region as famed for its gastronomy as for its caves. The local produce features heavily in each of the books, but without turning them into the sort of gastronomic 'cosy' committed by Peter Mayle.

In *The Devil's Cave*, a woman's naked body is seen floating down the river in a boat. When Bruno and his helpers succeed in bringing it ashore, they find some disturbing evidence that a black magic ritual may have played a part in her death. The thought of headlines in the press along the lines of devil worship in St Denis do not go down well with Bruno's boss, the mayor, who only wants positive publicity for the area, not the sort of sensationalism that this discovery might bring.

As ever, Bruno has to juggle a number of vastly different cases, with an allegation of domestic violence at a lonely farm jostling for position against an enquiry into the bona fides of a property development company. The mayor thinks they will bring extra jobs and prosperity to St Denis, whereas with typical cynicism, Bruno believes that if something looks too good to be true, it probably is.

Bruno's investigations take him into the local tourist attraction, *The Devil's Cave*, which lends its name to the book. An altar in one of the chambers in the cave has been desecrated with black paint and the severed head of a goat. The newspapers pick up on this, much to the mayor's annoyance, due to a few indiscreet words from the local priest. Visitor number's really take off when a service of exorcism in the cave is announced, making Bruno wonder just who is pulling everyone's strings.

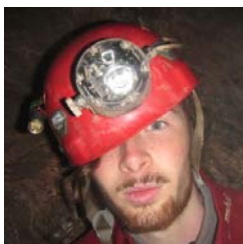
*The Devil's Cave* itself is not taken directly from life, but is an amalgam of two well known tourist attractions, – the Gouffre de Proumeyssac - only a short distance south of the fictional village of St Denis and the other – the Gouffre de Padirac – a little way further to the east. Walker's descriptions are good enough to be convincing, but will certainly cause cavers some wry amusement. I've been in Proumeyssac during the Spéléo Club de Périgueux's annual dig and I'm sure they'd be very happy to have access to the amazingly destructive plastic explosives that Bruno's opponents use. Breathing apparatus brought in by the local firefighters and used in a sump will also cause a few raised eyebrows, but that aside, the book does deliver relative convincing cave descriptions. And don't dismiss the secret tunnel out of hand. They certainly do exist in this area.

This is an excellent addition to a series that is maturing as richly as the wines and cheeses that grace its pages.

**Reviewed by Linda Wilson.**

This review was first published in the caving magazine, *Descent*, and is reproduced with kind permission of the editor. The publisher is very kindly donating a copy to the club library, but that's no excuse not to buy your own copy!

# UBSS Ireland Expo 2012



**The last 2 weeks of June this year saw our society return to Western Ireland. A party of 10 cavers journeyed across the Irish Sea led by Stuart Alldred, revisiting County Clare and scouting the less familiar**

## **County Mayo.**

On Friday 15<sup>th</sup> June we departed Bristol in two surprisingly comfortable cars, with Alex Crow to follow a day later with extra luggage (thus kindly reducing overall smell exposure). As business was halted in Bristol, Car 1 left our (soon to be missed) tackle store captained by Amy Matthews, carrying Sarah Rae, Chris Burnley and me. Stuart Alldred escaped the city shortly afterward, accompanied by Anya Keatley, Adam Henry, Stuart Walker and Cameron Bullen. A dozy night on the Holyhead-Dublin Ferry placed us on Irish soil at dawn.

We soon had our first experience of rural Ireland, when the settlement initially chosen for our breakfast meet was revealed to consist of 3 houses. A good breakfast and many car-hours later we arrived at our deluxe (but very cheap) rented cottage in Mayo. After the inevitable scramble to reserve beds, the majority of the group went for a 'bimble' (following Adam's rather specific definition) around the area, in an effort to stay awake and regain leg-awareness and managed to anger a local farmer. We finished our first day with a viewing of a rather interesting cave related film ('The Cavern', 2005 – [review in next issue?](#)).

Eager to achieve as much as possible before the arrival of our gear, day 2 was spent scouting for possible caves based on map references kindly provided by Graham, despite some uncertainty over their format. We finished



the day having found a thoroughly filled in cave, a partially blocked cave (later discovered to be St. Swithun's), and the well-known Aille River Caves. The arrival of Alex and the gear that evening was met with excitement as we already had caves to explore.

The following day Amy, Chris and I arguably became the first party underground with the investigation of St. Swithun's. The investigation



was cut slightly short, as we soon became aware that the very friendly farmer that we assumed to be the landowner was in fact only a neighbour of the actual landowner; perhaps the angriest person I have ever encountered. We saw enough to report no reason to ever return to the cave, with approximately 4m of passage.

Further scouting proved fruitless, until Amy, Sarah and Stu W visited a cluster of caves near the village of Cong to the south, which had a huge fake castle popular with tourists and is the filming site for 'The Quiet Man' (1952). Due to Ireland's mapping system, it later transpired that on several days we were looking for many caves exactly 100km away from their reported location. This was picked up by Alex Crow amongst others, who being one of the few people with geological knowledge realised that the rock in our search area was unsuitable for cave formation. Inconsistencies in how different GPS devices handle coordinates also proved interesting but were compensated for after a lot of faffing in the pub.

Amy, Sarah and Stu W noted several very small and accessible caves, a couple with restricted access (a possible target for the future), and a pair of more significant caves that they marked for surveying (Lady's Buttery and Horse Discovery caves). At the same time, Stu A, Anya, Adam and Cameron returned to





Aille River caves for the day. Threatened by an oncoming storm in a cave liable to flood to the roof in typical Irish fashion, they overcame their nerves to enjoy a neck deep swim for an hour before common sense told them to retreat. 20 minutes later the storm hit, an all too common problem, with overall rainfall for the month being the highest in Ireland since records began.

Alex, Chris and I made the first of several visits to Ballymaglancy near Cong: a mostly linear cave totalling 1700ft of passage, was first surveyed by J.C Coleman and N.J Dunnington in August 1951. This is an enjoyable cave with a very active stream way and lots of pretty formations. Conveniently, it is known to be much less responsive to rainfall than other caves in the area, so focus turned to producing a modern update to the survey. A survey was produced digitally, with PDA and DistoX, over the remainder of the week, while Ladies Buttery was surveyed simultaneously using 'old' methods. Persistent rain caused a day of non-caving, in which half the group went kayaking off the coast of Westport.

Several surveying problems were encountered, mainly due to wet equipment, and a swarm of scouts that helpfully managed to kick Stu's car key into the stream without mentioning it, but we managed to finish all surveying in a last minute trip on our way to County Clare. Eventually, we achieved 100m more than the old survey, and adding another entrance that appeared on the relatively dry final day.

The Caves of County Clare are much better documented (in an excellent book), and we were joined in our second week by Tony Boycott, a fountain of wisdom and knowledge of the area. Sadly, our main target, Coolagh River Cave is very responsive to rain, flooding

to the ceiling in a matter of minutes in places and so our efforts to survey were crippled by the weather.

After spending most evenings watching Father Ted, the collective obsession grew to a climax when people visited several shooting locations including Aillwee show cave (series 3, episode 4) and Vaughan's pub in Kilfenora (series 3, episode 1). The discovery was made that the waterfall in Aillwee cave is an artificial one, fed by draining a sump.

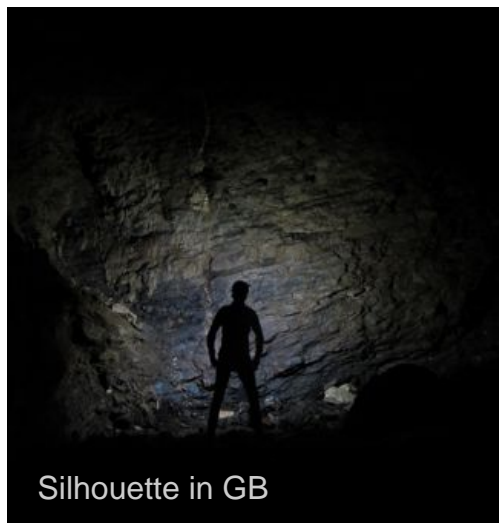
Without the chance to cave for much of the week, we visited a falconry centre, a sea-life centre, a civic museum, two castles and followed a historical trail. In the calm between storms, we risked some of the less flood prone caves: Poulmagree and Cullaun 2. Alex, Cameron and Stu W decided to visit Pol an Ionan for some sport caving after an extensive search of the guide book, which promised the largest stal in Europe, but were disappointed to be met with the Doolin show cave and a lot of clueless staff.

Despite being incredibly unlucky with the weather, we were all proud to have collected some survey data and laid a foundation for future expeditions, with the ultimate aim of an updated Caves of County Clare and South Galway.

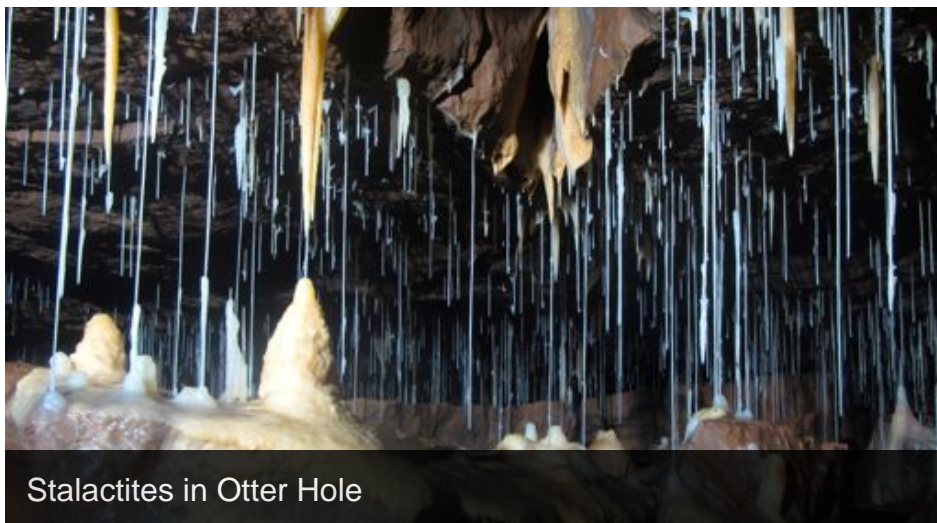


**Simon Hadfield and Stuart Walker**

# Some Photos From The Last Year



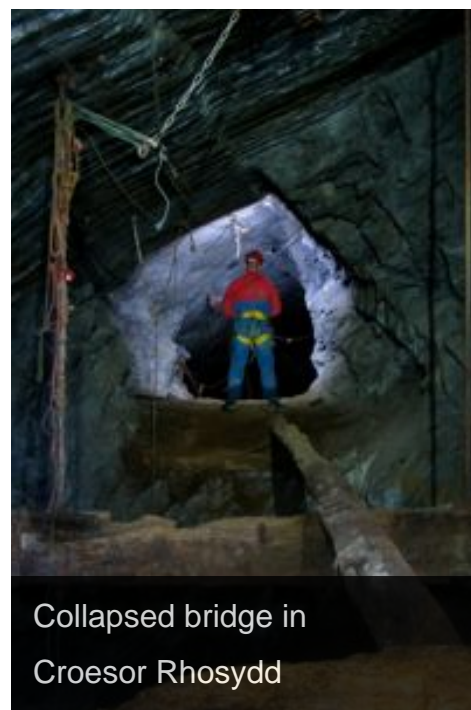
Silhouette in GB



Stalactites in Otter Hole



Simon's Sheepish Girlfriend, Castleton, Derbyshire.



Collapsed bridge in Croesor Rhosydd



Aille River Cave, Ireland



Simon very excited about surveying Goatchurch



UBSS hut



Sat on the bridge, GB



Trip down OFD1



SRT training, UBSS hut



Bottom of the second pitch,  
Croesor Rhosydd



Ready for action, Croesor Rhosydd

# Treasurer's Report



**This is the report that I would have presented at the AGM in March, had I not been languishing in a hospital bed.**

As can be seen from the bottom figure on the balance sheet, page two of the accounts, our cash holding is only little changed from last year. This is because there is some good news and I will deal with that first. In three respects we have done very well this year:

The Caves of County Clare Reserve Fund is up by another £520. Sales of the book have held up remarkably well these past few years – for which much thanks are due to Tony Boycott – but will now falter as we have, amazingly enough, sold out! I look forward to the work of the next generation, off to Ireland this summer, to see this book updated and remaining the must-have source for caving in that part of the world for a further 10 years.

The equipment hire fund is up by £520. And so it should be. This is meant to be self-financing and this money shall be used to keep our stocks of personal kit, oversuits, lamps and SRT kit, at appropriate levels.

Not registering on the Balance sheet, as we spent it, but also worthy of note is James MacFarlane's sterling effort in extracting a significant sum from the Union for replacement tackle. However, this will doubtless mean a lower grany in the coming year.

However, a glance at the Receipts and Payments account shows a continuing drain on our main finances. Costs in all sectors continue to rise, notably printing and insurance costs, our largest regular items, and the news that postage rates are about to take a further significant hike does not help. For that reason I had reluctantly decided to recommend that subscription rates needed to rise, for the first time in six years. Some market research beforehand showed that this was generally acceptable to the part of the membership that I was able to canvass and it was also accepted by the AGM. Thus from the date of the AGM (also the due date for 'senior' members subs) the rates are:

Student member £15 p.a.  
Ordinary member £24 p.a.  
Joint membership £36 p.a.  
Recent graduates (1<sup>st</sup> two years) £15.

Will those members whose standing orders have already been paid at the old rate please update them for next years and send through the additional sum. I know that many of you have already done so. Any UK tax payers who have not yet Gift Aided their subs please contact me as well and this can be arranged.

Finally, and on a brighter note, we have at last managed to find a decent investment for our funds and have purchased a 12 month bond from Barclays. At 2.8% this is by far the best return for our sort of organisation that we have been able to source.

I would say I was willing to stand again, but I gather I was voted in, anyway ...

**Graham Mullan**

# UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDING 31ST JANUARY 2012

2010/11	<u>Receipts</u>		£	£
£				
2,558.00	Members subscriptions			2,304.00
600.00	Student member subscriptions			624.00
875.50	<u>Union Grants:</u>	Capital	1,000.00	
		Current	<u>0.00</u>	1,000.00
150.00	Tratman Grant			400.00
21.54	<u>Interest on investments</u>	AMC Bank		18.36
511.37	Sales of Publications (not C.of CC)			563.57
2,067.00	Donations			85.00
544.26	Tax refund on Covenants			602.20
1.20	Sales of Charterhouse Permits			16.50
400.00	Personal contributions to PI Insurance			564.00
326.10	Miscellaneous			0.00
<hr/> <b>8,054.97</b> <hr/>	<b>Total Receipts</b>			<hr/> <b>6,177.63</b> <hr/>
	 <u>Payments</u>			
2,125.00	<u>Proceedings:</u>	Printing	2,594.00	
440.47		Postage	<u>463.12</u>	3,057.12
875.50	<u>Tools &amp; Equipment</u>	Capital	1,000.00	
103.54		Current	<u>106.41</u>	1,106.41
289.00	Library Acquisitions			119.50
25.00	Sessional Meetings			7.00
115.75	Other Postages			17.96
305.07	Stationery & Duplicating			70.85
1,382.00	<u>Insurances</u>	Third Party	1,505.00	
549.11		Property	<u>539.56</u>	2,044.56
154.00	Subscriptions			154.00
25.00	Donation to Mendip Rescue Organisation			25.00
0.00	(Surplus) /Deficit on Annual Dinner			300.00
173.67	IT expenses			6.00
38.10	Fresh			0.00
10.00	Miscellaneous			85.00
150.00	Tratman Grant			400.00
<hr/> <b>6,761.21</b> <hr/>	<b>Total Payments</b>			<hr/> <b>7,393.40</b> <hr/>
<hr/> <b>1,293.76</b> <hr/>	Surplus/(Deficit) for year			<hr/> <b>(1,215.77)</b> <hr/>

# Mendip CHECC 2012



**And so, in the cold gloom of a November evening, outside the student union at exactly just after half past eight on a friday, the last two car loads of UBSS CHECC goers departed.**

And despite Anya's best efforts, the number of wrong turns taken remained firmly in single figures. With the bulk of UBSS fashionably late, and parking space limited, there was much car based faffing to be done before we could join the first night's festivities. This was, of course, the fancy dress night. Bristol's theme? Finding Nemo. Some of the other memorable themes included zombie cheerleaders, cavers from the future and someone dressed as Jimmy Saville for reasons I don't quite remember.

The next morning everyone battled their hangovers, toiled hard to get in the cue for breakfast, heroically ate copious amounts of fried food, made use of the infinite tea and coffee with reckless abandon before planning the day's activity. There was SRT training being offered at the Wessex, but a few of us elected to go caving in an attempt to overthrow the statement I had heard many times in the couple of weeks beforehand; "the great thing about having CHECC on Mendip is that there is no obligation for us to cave". After a little confusion we finally decided we would go around the Burrington caves to gently ease our fragile selves back into the world of the living. After further confusion and indecision we finally decided we would tag along with SUSS plus other adoptees, and Anya and Sarah would show them around Eastwater Cavern. People who have been caving longer than me (not very long at all) can probably skip the next couple of paragraphs, since it will mostly be an account of a trip down Eastwater, and therefore dull to people who know the cave well.

Eastwater, they will tell you, is a dry cave. Despite the name you will not get very wet in Eastwater, they said. As it turned out a small stream had started to flow into the entrance, ensuring that the cave would be living up to its name for the time being after all. Because of

the kink in the way down at the entrance it was impossible not be directly showered from above at least twice before getting into the boulder choke, which had the handy effect of waking nine sleepy cavers up. Although, probably not awake enough. As soon as we were out of the boulder choke there was split in the cave, and a split in the consensus. After those who were certain that the right hand passage was the way we needed to go had gone right, they got sopping wet, gave up and came back, and we all went left. This finally lead us into the rift.



The rift probably isn't more than fifteen metres long, but the size of our group meant that it was impossible to go fast; in the end it must have taken a good quarter of an hour to clear it, with plenty of waiting around on your back staring at the ceiling (if there was enough room to turn your head), wedged in place with your elbows to stop you from sliding down the slope into the narrower bottom of the rift. During this time we were all amused by the story of someone had dropped their watch down into the inaccessibly narrow corner of the rift by accident. Funnier still, it even beeps on the hour every hour (apparently). The rift was the first part of the cave we had been to that was totally dry so this story seemed plausible, although I didn't see it myself.

Past the rift we continued up, and then back down, a chimney, eventually reaching the ladder pitch (Dolphin pot). On the way into the cave we had met cavers from Plymouth who had agreed to leave their rope rigged to save both groups lugging ropes down, and to save us faff rigging the rope when we got to the

ladder. Despite this it still took a long while to get all nine of us down the ladder and the general slow progress throughout the trip, along with the unexpected shower at the entrance, had left many of us feeling cold. With this in mind, we did not proceed much further past Dolphin Pot and ended up meeting Plymouth at the bottom of the pot, who explored a little further to give us time to get back up the ladder.

On the way back out, it was decided that we should go via the Woggle Press (so named because it once killed a scout) to avoid repeating ourselves, and to avoid the rift, however it soon became apparent that the way to the Woggle Press was not as easy to find as anticipated, so a second trip through the rift was unavoidable. At least, as promised, it was easier on the way back through. Leaving Eastwater behind, back through the refreshing shower of water which turned out to be running through a delicious mound of discarded tyres, we went out into the icy night air and rushed to change into dry clothes before heading back to base in time for Bolognese and more tea.

That evening was the topless disco, but first there was the very serious matter of beer pong. As UBSS's only attending fresher I was conscripted onto the team, joining Tasha, to hopefully reign victorious in the name of UBSS. After a close call in the first round against Reading we eventually made it to the second round, against Cardiff, which would turn out to be our finest moment. After both sides missed the first two shots we proceeded to whittle Cardiff down to two cups before losing a single one ourselves, and went on to win in graceful style. It wasn't until the semi-final that we were beaten, by Leeds (who went on to lose to Kent in the final).

After the beer pong an assortment of caving related games showed their faces, including saucepan and sling, in which UBSS got far only to fall later on, body traverse, which UBSS failed to muster a team for, and the squeeze machine. More than one person had to be released from the none-too-roomy grip of the squeeze machine, and it was responsible for

the initial loss of clothes which heralded the beginning of the topless disco.

The next morning the combined effects of two late nights and a day of caving were beginning to show on everyone, and enthusiasm for caving among the remaining UBSS members seemed minimal. Still, today was the AGM and the results of the raffle were to be announced, so after another breakfast, which managed to be exactly the right amount of greasy and filling for a morning hangover, everyone perked up enough to mill about happily until the day could begin properly.

In the end I did not go to the AGM and, along with the others that didn't go, I began to think about heading back to Bristol. We all clubbed together to clear up the debris from the night before whilst the others were at the AGM and then I got a lift with Jeff back to Bristol (unfortunately before the raffle was drawn although I heard afterwards that UBSS' own Stu Walker won the Scurion; lucky him!). And that concluded this account of CHECC 2012, in which much fun, and even some caving, was had by all.

### Jacob Podesta



CHECC was great fun (despite me being rubbish and not caving) and I particularly enjoyed it when I won a scurion by entering a raffle. It was nice to meet cavers from other clubs who

I hadn't seen for a few months. As is standard for CHECC, the evenings were filled with strange drinking games, though the music wasn't as cheesy as I'd expected. UBSS were obviously too awesome to need to wear good costumes for the fancy dress party so we decided to look vaguely fish like instead, whereas Saturday left me scarred for life after being forced to witness excessive amounts of teabagging.

### Stuart Walker

# Fear of the Dark



**Without attracting great attention, there was a small booth in one of the halls of the fresher's fair with lovely alluring people in funny red helmets.**

After some short kind of explanation about spelaeology, brief encouragements like: "Everybody can do it", followed by strange advice to buy wellies and plenty unlikely warm, old clothes to be able to go into the caves, I ended up driving to a really nice hut near Mendips to try this strange type of sports. Funnily enough I have never heard about that kind of amusement, in face of living for the last four years in the south of Germany near the great Alps!

Before I left my home in Bristol, my flatmate yelled after me to remember to wiggle, if I get stuck in the cave. I just thought: "Come on, don't overplay it, they will never bring the absolute beginners in a situation like that!" But who'd have thought it! Just a few hours after the arrival we found a hole somewhere in a field near a river and slid down a small waterfall into a wet, but beautiful cave called Swildon's Hole. In truth, it was amazing to scramble around, to search for apparently not existent animals and to discover that you can't see anything underground, nothing at all! Somehow, after a small but really needed chocolate break, we went on our way back to the daylight and there was the point when you've started to realise that you would be totally lost without the great leaders, who have shown us how to make it and get back again.

After a lovely dinner around a big fire near the hut, a well-earned cider or two, funny caving games and a bit cold and short night in the hut, we went to explore a totally different underground world in an another cave called Eastwater.



Small holes in between huge dark stones bringing us deeper and deeper downwards and here it was - the rift... Without being able to move your head around, lying 90° vertical to the ground between two huge rocks, we had to move upwards for assumed endless plenty of meters. There was the minute, in which I had to remember my mate about the hit-wiggle, thus I didn't know what would be better for the moment: to laugh or to panic. Nevertheless with the help of some black humour and our nice expert group leader we managed this part of the cave as well. Hence from that point on our pride knew no bounds and we could return to Bristol feeling really tired, in some point muddy and wet, but very happy and keen to go caving again and again!

**Alina Lyuleeva**



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

Thank you again to everyone who contributed towards the newsletter.

All photos taken by Stuart Aldred, Anya Keatley, Adam Henry and Ross Hemsley.