

SECRETARIES' REPORT

MARCH 2018 – MARCH 2019

Caving

A lot has gone on this past year in preparation for the Society's 100th Anniversary, with many caving trips and events taking place. Whilst student numbers have been slow to pick up, we have managed to get a decent group of people underground, particularly on weekend trips.

The Freshers' weekends were well attended, with trips to the Mendips and South Wales. We had a great response from Alumni cavers, helping to drive and lead trips. Thank you as ever for your continued help. As always, Bonfire weekend was popular and the annual lamb, fireworks and beer resulted in a good event. A small group of keen cavers went to the CHECC forum in Derbyshire this year, where despite heavy partying, caving did happen both days! The Christmas dinner weekend was likewise a success, although there wasn't much caving involved! A few UBSS members also went up to Yorkshire for a weekend of SRT.

2019 started with a rescue practice event run by Mendip Cave Rescue. Several members of the Wilderness Medicine Society joined us for this as well which was a great way to introduce new people to caving – thanks to Dickon Morris for organising this. We then had our 'Refreshers' weekend in South Wales which again got more new student cavers underground for the first time!

On top of this, there have been a multitude of mid-week caving trips ensuring everyone has had sufficient opportunities to get underground.

Caving Abroad

UBSS members have been to a huge variety of places during the past year. Highlights include a diving expedition in Mexico and a trip to West Papua. Several members were involved with Cambridge University Caving Club's annual Austrian expedition to the Loser Plateau, with some on their first expedition abroad.

A small group of students went to Co. Clare, Ireland to continue the society's work, mapping the Caves of Cullaun One and the Coolagh River Cave. This work will be included in the new publication of the Caves of the West of Ireland later this year. The society is very grateful for the grant from the Tratman Fund, enabling continued expeditions to Ireland.

Members of the society have also been involved in trips to the Ardeche in France as well as in the United States.

Research

Dr Gina Mosely has been awarded a €1.2 million research prize for her research into climate change in the Arctic, as part of the Greenland Caves Project. The START Prize fund, will enable her to undertake a large expedition to Northeast Greenland, to visit more caves and take extensive samples will be taken. These will then be analysed using state-of-the-art methods.

In January 2018, Dick Willis was part of a small trip to Mulu to assess the use of anemometers in the Clearwater system as a way of identifying wind movements in the caves and thus potentially finding new leads.

Other

SRT training has been continuing in the stairwell of the Students' Union. We have held a few sessions instructing those new to SRT as well as those in need of practice. Thanks to the Bristol Students' Union for continuing to allow this.

We have successfully managed to get a plug socket installed in our tackle store in the Students Union. Thanks to those involved in this fairly lengthy process.

Big changes have been happening at our beloved hut on Burrington Combe. As many of you will see later, extensive work has been done cleaning, repainting and recently plumbing to get it ready for this weekend. A massive thank you to Haydon Saunders and everyone else who has helped for all the work that has been put in.

Ashley Gregg and Helen Frawley

MUSEUM REPORT - 2019

This is my 10th report as museum curator. In 2009, I took over from the much-missed Christopher Hawkes who I'd worked closely with in the museum for several years. Chris remained a constant source of help and knowledge until his death.

Looking back through previous reports it's obvious how much traffic the museum sees from researchers and this past year has been no exception. I'd like to extend my thanks to Allan Summerfield and Wendy Russ for all their help. They both worked on a paper on Scragg's Hole on Crook Peak for last year's Proceedings as part of the effort to finally get the work at Picken's Hole into the public domain.

It's been an interesting year for recovering loan items. Royston Vranck came to me with a conundrum, namely a site called Lime Kiln Hill. He believed the Society might have material from there, but an extensive search failed to turn up anything. However, after a lot of detective work, the material was tracked down to the British Museum where it had been sent in the 1970s by EK Tratman. Unfortunately, he had sent them the catalogue along with the items, and after several moves any paperwork, if it ever existed, was long since lost. The material will now go to Professor Daniele Shrieve of Royal Holloway for further analysis before it finally returns home to the UBSS museum. Another long-standing issue has been partly resolved recently. The late, great Dr Roger Jacobi died ten years ago, with some specimens from the museum still in his possession. For various reasons, including the very large hole Roger's death left in so many places, it proved difficult to get a handle on where the material might have been and extensive enquiries all lead nowhere. Thanks to help from Rhiannon Stevens of the Institute of Archaeology, Nick Ashton of the British Museum and researcher Rob Dinnis, I've been able to identify just over half of the missing material, which I picked up from London last week and returned to the museum yesterday. The search for the remaining material continues, but in the museum world, you simply have to play a long game at times, as the history of the Lime Kiln Hill material proves. The moral of the story is clear, always record loans clearly and do your best to keep up to date with their whereabouts!

The year started with a visit from researcher Emily Weisendanger, a PhD candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London, looking at Late Pleistocene reindeer in Britain and western Europe. She was interested in studying the reindeer material from numerous Late Pleistocene sites including from Brean Down. Allan and Wendy were able to help Emily with the location of a large amount of reindeer material in the collection.

In summer, we received an interesting proposal from Dr Rhiannon Stevens and her colleagues who had worked on a lot of our material last year for the UpNorth project. This time, they are working with a developing technique called ZooMS, which stands for zooarchaeology by mass spectrometry, which is a proteomics technique that can be used to identify bones to species when this is not possible osteologically. Essentially this involves taking samples from large amounts of unidentified bone scrap in the hope of learning the species. This technique has now been used and is producing very interesting results. We are certainly not short of bone scrap from a lot of sites.

In September, I was put in contact with Dr Andy Flack of the Department of History. As a historian, Andy has a particular interest darkness, and adaptive relationships with it, both in humans and the animal kingdom. Andy proposed an ambitious oral history project involving our members, and particularly our older members. Andy and I worked on a grant proposal to the BCRA to help fund this, and Andy also applied for funding to the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund. This project is called Travels Beneath the Earth: 100 years of the University of Bristol Speleological Society. Both grant applications were successful and two history interns will be working on the project with Andy and I over the summer. This will be integrated into a larger project called 100 Memories, which will run alongside it, hoping to capture as many recollections of the society's history as we can during our centenary year and beyond.

Also in September, another very profitable collaboration took off, with Kostas Trimmis, an Archaeological Fieldwork Technician in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology. Kostas immediately pitched into work on what is now the society's only unpublished excavation, that of T5, a Bronze Age round barrow near the UBSS Hut. He has photographed all the objects in the archive. This provided a much-needed impetus towards publication, and Allan Summerfield has been working with the university's Print Service division to scan the catalogue and the written archive, including Herbert Taylor's notebooks, and the photographic archive. If anyone wants to have a go at helping to translate his almost illegible handwriting, I would be delighted to have more help on this and can make the scans available. I hope some of the work on T5 will appear in the forthcoming issue of Proceedings.

As ever, Aveline's Hole has been a focus for activity in the past year, with work starting on a paper for the centenary issue of Proceeding. Professor Rich Schulting has been leading this project, which has drawn together the results of the various investigations which started with the surprising DNA results obtained by Professor Ian Barnes and Dr Tom Booth of the Natural History Museum that some of the Aveline's crania are Neolithic in origin.

In December I had my annual fun and games with a film company, as I was approached by Blink Films who were making a series of archaeological programmes and wanted to feature the human remains from Fishmonger's Swallet in South Gloucester. This provided an excellent opportunity to see Mrs Hawkins, the owner of the site, who was intending to donate the collection of human and animal material to UBSS. I'm delighted to report that the paperwork has now been signed transferring ownership to UBSS. Professor Mark Horton gave an excellent demonstration to TV presented Clive Anderson on how to split a long bone to extract the marrow. He was using deer bones, but the results were almost identical to that of the human long bone split in this manner in the collection. The press do love cannibalism as a subject! As film work provides a valuable income stream for the museum, I was happy to stand around chatting and drinking TV, as well as producing a skull from a box in best 'alas poor Yorick' fashion.

The museum is in great shape at the moment, with a lot of important research being done on the collection and with the prospect of plenty more in the future. I've already been approached by Dr Lucy Flower of Royal Holloway who worked on wolf bones in the collection

several years ago and is hoping to identify some possible sites for dissertation students to work on. I'm really delighted to be entering a new period in UBSS history with the museum remaining an important focus for research both inside and outside this university.

Linda Wilson