

PETER ALAN STANDING  
16 February 1947 – 16 November 2019



Peter Standing was born in February 1947, younger brother to Ian and Margaret. The family lived in Manchester, where his father was a research chemist in the cotton industry. He was also a keen rock climber. Most family weekends entailed visits to gritstone outcrops, hill walks or antiquities, very much an outdoor life.

In 1952, their father joined Jacob Brownski's Coal Research Establishment and the family moved south to rural Gloucestershire. Peter followed brother Ian's outdoor interests and his first underground excursion was to the Box Stone Mines aged thirteen, led by Ian. He joined the Gloucester Speleological Society when fifteen and by age sixteen, in 1963, he was their secretary and librarian. At about this time he had his first encounter with the UBSS when Ian, already a Bristol student and UBSS member, arranged for Oliver Lloyd to take him and a school friend around Swildon's Hole.

By the time Peter came to consider his university options, he had decided to study medicine, he was already a keen caver and his choice was, in his own words "really based on the excellence of their caving societies, rather than their Medical Schools. So, Bristol just about came top. Narrowly ahead of Leeds." He thus joined UBSS in the autumn of 1965 and his first trip with the Society was to Lamb Leer on October 5th.

Whilst a student, Peter undertook some formidable caving trips, including the first Swildon's figure-of-eight, with Dave Savage and Mike Norton in November 1965 and the first 'Aggy Marathon' in Agen Allwedd, a twelve and a half mile trip which he completed, with Dave Savage, Mike Norton and Maura Irwin in eleven and a half hours in May 1967. He also took up cave diving in 1967 and became one of the drivers behind the exploration and survey of the Little Neath River Cave (LNRC). Eve Gilmore remembers "... spending hours with him, holding lights, getting cold and wet, as he did a very careful, accurate survey ..."

Peter wasn't just a hard sporting caver. He was responsible with Oliver Lloyd for the survey of Porth yr Ogof as well as that of LNRC and co-authored the reports on these caves in our *Proceedings*. Remarkably, the offprint of the Porth yr Ogof paper was taken up by the Brecon Beacons National Park as a guide to the cave and became probably the Society's best ever seller. He also followed brother Ian as the Society's Librarian. Ian thinks that between

them they did that job for about ten years and it is a testament to their work that the Society's Library continues to be amongst the best caving libraries in the country.

Peter qualified as a doctor in 1970 but before settling into his medical career had a last major foray into cave exploration when David Judson invited him to take part in the first expedition to Ghar Parau, in Iran, in 1971. Peter was one of three cavers on the final pushing trip who, using every single piece of expedition tackle, reached the head of a final pitch, 742 m below the entrance and overlooking a stream passage that disappeared tantalisingly around a corner and out of sight. A second expedition returned the following year only to find almost immediately a very terminal sump at a depth of 751 m. In Peter's own words "So it was rather a damp squib, the second expedition."

After leaving Bristol, Peter settled into work as a doctor, working as a hospital anaesthetist and entering into GP practice in Bury, Lancashire. At the same time, he largely retired from caving as a main activity and moved over to climbing and mountaineering. Naturally, he became accomplished at both and climbed all over the world, often in the company of two Bristol cavers who had made a similar transition; Chris Gilmore, the first diver to enter LNRC, and Peter Kaye, who had accompanied him on the first Ghar Parau trip.

Peter retired from medicine aged sixty. He had always wanted to go back and study geography in more detail, having caved alongside many geographers at Bristol, and so took a degree at Lancaster University. He followed this with a Master's on Cumbrian landscapes. Both his undergraduate and Master's dissertations were on limestone topics, looking at the formation of surface karren features. This work was used by him in the production of a series of walking guides detailing the geology, geomorphology and landscape history of the limestone areas around Morecambe Bay

He thus made a return to the world of caves, academically if not as an explorer, and I remember meeting him at a BCRA science symposium having not seen him since a memorable – for me, as a very young UBSS member – trip down Lost Johns nearly forty years previously.

Peter was too ill to attend our Centenary Dinner at Wookey Hole in March 2019. This was a great disappointment to him as he had been one of those instrumental in organising the Golden Jubilee Dinner in 1969. His speech was read on his behalf by Bob Churcher. He was determined, therefore, to make it to Bristol for the Society's centenary symposium, *Travels Beneath the Earth*, in November 2019. He did and he thoroughly enjoyed it, but it was his last outing; he was admitted to hospital and died a few days later. He is survived by his wife, Gillian, and his children Ruth and Oliver.

GJM