THE BELFRY BULLETIN

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRISTOL EXPLORATION CLUB LTD

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Cover Images

Front Cover: Nigel Taylor and his beloved digger

Back Cover: Gary Cullen crossing the rift in Torca la Vaca, Matienzo, Northern Spain.

Photographs by: Martin Grass (front) Steve Woolven (back)

(*The editor welcomes contributions for the cover images)*

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Editorial

I am optimistically describing this edition of the BB as Summer but whether an autumn edition appears before the end of the year rather depends on what I get in terms of contributions. You will notice that I have relied heavily on images to supplement the text and provide some 'padding'. In my defence they do provide a permanent visual record of the club's activities as well as illustrating articles on caves that may be less familiar to some readers.

The 2020's are proving to be an eventful and unsettling decade and they haven't really begun. War in Europe, a pandemic and now the death of a monarch who seemed to be a constant part of our world. This year's loyal toast will be to the new King Charles the Third. In the world of cave exploration it has become harder to make new finds but they are continuing and on a wider front there are still parts of the planet that are almost virgin territory for speleologists.

The club is now a limited company and that should secure the future of St. Cuthbert's Swallet ensuring it remains in the guardianship of the club. You will notice that all our official documents and signs have therefore been amended. The Belfry has benefitted from some external improvements as well.

I am sure everybody is saddened by the loss of a club trustee Nigel Taylor (there are tributes to him within). He did a lot to assist with the acquisition of the land around St. Cuthbert's Swallet He also served on the committee in a number of posts over a 40 year period including Hut Engineer, Membership Secretary and was Secretary for several years. Farewell Nigel, we will miss you.

An observation I want to share is on the work of the committee. The challenges provided by a changing world have to be continually met. The committee has to contemplate numerous health and safety issues nowadays that weren't considered in the past. For example we have to have instituted a child protection policy, ensure that we adhere to fire regulations etc etc. Then there are issues revolving around IT such as internet connections, access to the Belfry (now electronic mediated, by computer) as well as entertainment technology– sound systems, smoke machines and the like. It's a wonder we get to discuss caving sometimes!

Events coming up include the November Fireworks Party and a Christmas Meal (Home Meet weekend at the start of December) apart from the formal dinner at Wookey Hole coming up rapidly. It is a great venue and we have an excellent guest speaker as well as the opportunity again to snoop at the Twentieth Chamber, which, as most of you will know was made accessible by our very own Nigel Taylor. This has led to further discoveries and a dry way to Wookey 24. It's strange to think that since I started caving Wookey 24 has gone from being a location accessible only to a few cave divers to somewhere that any competent caver can reach. It will be interesting to see whether the current finds lead further into the heart of the Mendip Hills.

I think I have done enough waffling. I hope you enjoy this edition. In the next I am anticipating a report on a club trip to Northern Ireland and I hope more reports on club activities. I leave with this photograph of the inimitable and inspirational Tony Jarrett sharing a meal with a rickshaw driver in Kolkata at the start of one of the Abode of the Clouds expeditions. You might like to put the date of the next digging award in your calendar now:

Annual Digging Awards, Hunter's Lodge Inn, 7.30 pm Saturday November 19th 2022

Any submissions for the award including a survey should be in by the end of October 2022

Digs

As part of an ongoing project to educate our newer members on the art of digging. and to encourage more caving members into this unique "sport" an email went out some time ago requesting details from those who go digging about the location of their digs, whether they require more helpers and how members could get involved. From the information sent back the list below has been compiled.. This information may be out of date but is the best your editor can do without the info!

The Pegasus Club Nottingham Ex Pats welcome B.E.C. diggers to the Burren, Ireland.

We proudly acknowledge the forty year extant mutual, reciprocal abuse rights with members of the B.E.C. Current project., Considines Cave, though several others are ongoing dependent on weather. We dig two or three times per week. Itis going well although shortage of personnel is affecting progress. Contact Stumpy via patccronin@eircomnet 00353 65 7075883, 00353 86 3502389. Currently (2022) Considine's is one of, if not, the deepest,, digs in Ireland.

The Pegasus website site http://chegchester.wixsite.com/pegasus-club-notts offers further data. This web page is well worth a visit not least to see the incredible engineering used in Considine's. The Roadside Bar Lisdoonsvarna micro brewery is the place of post dig refreshment. (where else), for drink, dance and music.

Cutlers Green Sinkholes, Chewton Mendip

New helpers welcome. Contact Estelle Sandford estellesandford@gmail.com or 07971 950639. Meet at Chewton Mendip at the dig site on Tuesdays at 7pm and drink in the Waldegrave after. The dig is ongoing and making steady progress.

Quantock Sites

A couple of caves here being dug. Please contact the editor for further information. Would suit members in the Taunton area.

Toothache Pot, Longwood Valley

More helpers required. Digging, winching and dumping. A deep shaft in the right place. Digging Thursday night 7pm - 9.30pm and some Saturday or Sunday when time required. Contact Robin Gray.

Hard Rock Café Daren Camp, South Wales

We've got plenty of projects and prospects afoot, but could really do with a few more keen people to join our crew. Anyone who would like to come along on a camp to give it a go and see what they think would be very welcome. Contact Mandy Voysey on mandola76@gmail.com for for more details.

Blorenge, South Wales

Various dig sites over the hill. Small but perfectly formed. Contact Henry Bennett for more details: henry@hbennett.com

Stock Hill Mine Cave

This dig conveniently not far from the Hunter's is being dug by Trevor Hughes, Duncan Butler et. al. Interested parties should contact Trevor.

UNCABAC and Damoclean Dig These are probably the furthest digs from the club being in Assynt, Scotland. However they have excellent prospects and a strong team is needed to dig them. Contact Stu Lindsay for further information. It is planned to reopen Damoclean when Campbell's has been 'shut down' and will be dug using equipment taken from Campbell's. There may well be other digs members know of, and if so, perhaps they could add them to the list.

Finally it might be worth speaking to Madphil Rowsell as to whether he has sufficient personnel for his project on St. Cuthbert's Sump Two. There might be occasions when extra manpower is needed..

This page hasn't changed materially for a while so if you have any projects on hand you want help with this is the place to put them!

B.E.C. on holiday *by Mike Baker*

One day six BEC members decided to have a camping holiday in France and Spain.

I had just passed my driving test in 1961. I had an Austin A30 (often called a 'Baby' Austin) and my passenger was Norman Petty. Tony Setterington (Sett) had his motor bike and sidecar with Nigel Hallet. Frank Darbon also had an Austin A30 and was taking Totty Chamberlin.

We set off from Mendip on a Sunday morning to pick up Frank Darbon from his parents' flat in London. We reached Folkestone and thought it was a good idea to have rides in the Fun fair before crossing the Channel to Boulogne -sur-Mer where we camped on the verge of the main road south.

The next day we went through the centre of Rouen where I had first sight of a traffic policeman with his white stick whirling around. (*If you imagine chaos, the policeman had white sticks to direct traffic not to indicate visual impairment – Ed).*

We camped that day at Montignac and toured Lascaux caves with its prehistoric cave paintings and were allowed to take whatever photographs we wanted (Lascaux is now closed).

Each morning we agreed a destination and left at different times. That day we left for Carcassonne after Frank Darbon and Sett. Driving on the main road through Toulouse I noticed car wheels up in the air in a side road. Something made me stop. It was Frank's A30. He had just been hit by another car. Frank and Totty looked okay but were taken to hospital for a check-up. Norman and I carried on to explain the accident to Sett in Carcassonne. After a look around the citadel, we went to Canet Plage where we were to meet up with two BEC girls Isabel and Pat (can't remember their surnames). We lazed about for a while. I do remember that Pat was jumping off a diving board and lost the top half of her costume! Later the girls decided to hitch their way back to England.

The four of us continued towards Spain to see the prehistoric cave painting in the Niaux. We went to a house near the cave and knocked on the door. A man appeared and we asked to see the cave paintings. "Yes" he said and went back into the house and came back with a key. He told us where to go, gave us the key and went back into his house. We took photographs of everything, locked up and returned his key.

We had all agreed beforehand to visit Lloret de Mar for a few days doing nothing much at a certain camp site. It had a nice bar which suited us perfectly.

What happened next was surreal. Frank and Totty left hospital and hired a care while the A30 was in a garaged and decided to go to the Loreta de Mare campsite. On the main road south they saw Pat and Isabel hitching for lifts going north on the other side of the road. They turned round and picked them up then continued to Lloret de Mar.

They drove to the campsite to be told that we had left. In those days we had a green card that was given into the campsite while we were there. However, our card had been returned to someone else. Frank said a few of 'they words' and they decided to have a drink in the bar. You can imagine what they said when they saw us drinking there. After a few more beers we all left for Mendip. It was quite an introduction to my very early driving days The accompanying photo shows everybody wearing BEC ties with my A30 in the background.

(On the next page I have included a map of this 2000 mile round trip. No motorways then of course. A30's were still knocking about 40 years ago as my wife Angie had one when I first met her – Ed).

L to R Norman Petty, Totty Chamberlain, Tony Setterington, Nigel Hallett, Mike Baker abnd Frank Darbon in front of Mike's A30 behind Norman and Totty

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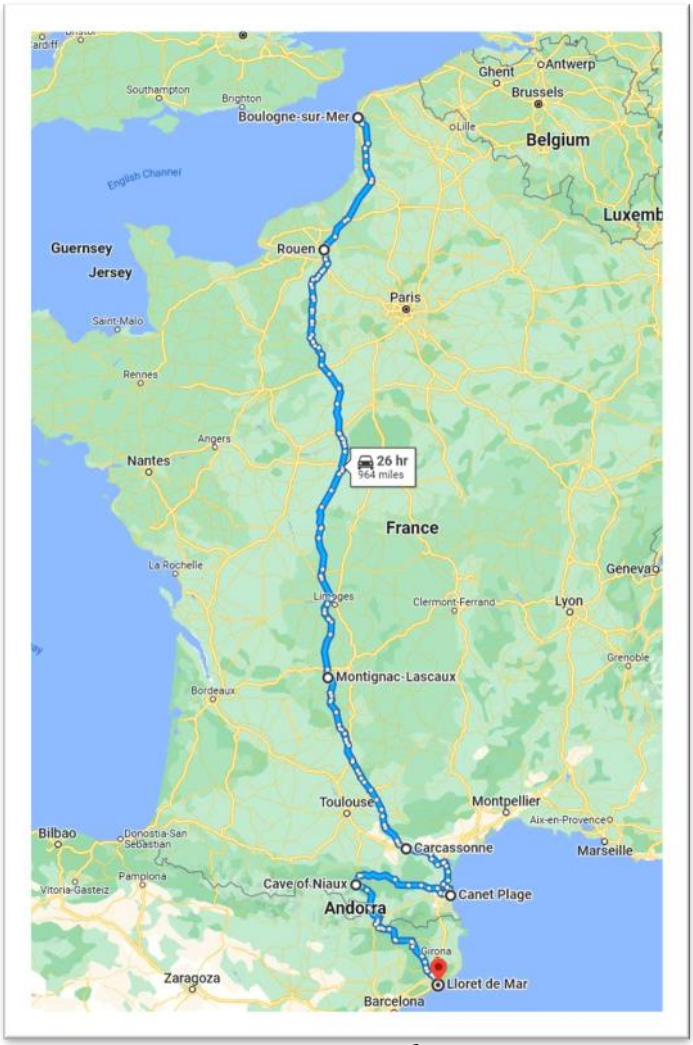


Thrupe Swallet, May 8th 2022 *by Matt Palmer*

Team: Matt Palmer, Ollie Legg, Ollie Dawson, Rich Smith, Dickon.

Flicking through the Mendip Underground for a trip a little off the beaten path we settled on Thrupe Swallet, not to be confused with Thrupe Lane swallet, this is a 'Mendip collectors piece' that none of us had done before. After taking my compact camera in for a few unglamorous photos I had committed to write this trip up for the BB, however I'm only now getting round to it 5 weeks later. My memory of it is a little hazy but here goes.

After a short walk from the cars across a field we found the entrance in a shaded hollow. Of note were some enormous-leaved stinging nettles. Rich was already sporting a bandage and cut on his nose from a dancing incident the night before. Held open with scaffolding, the first part of the cave is essentially a dig. The entrance is covered by a loose steel plate. This isn't ideal as Dicken found out when it fell back onto his head whilst entering, it sounded like it hurt!

Leaving a callout

Rich—as ready as he'll ever be!

Olli and Ollie negotiating the treacherous entrance-lid

Super-sized stinging nettles

After a fair amount of downward scrambling through dug passage held up with a fair amount of scaffolding and shoring, we reached the first pitch. This was a ladder pitch with some gloopy mud which must be belly crawled through on the approach to the pitch head. Ollie L and Dickon went ahead with the ladder and lifeline while the rest of us hung back at a spot that was better for waiting at than lying in gloop. Ollie and Dicken took long enough rigging for the rest of us to get a sense that this pitch head was going to be suitably grim and awkward. 'This is so shit!' shouted Ollie D as she proceeded into the gloop. Once attached to the lifeline and onto the ladder the approx. 10m down-climb was relatively straight forward, although quite drippy.

Ollie looking glam

Rich on the ladder

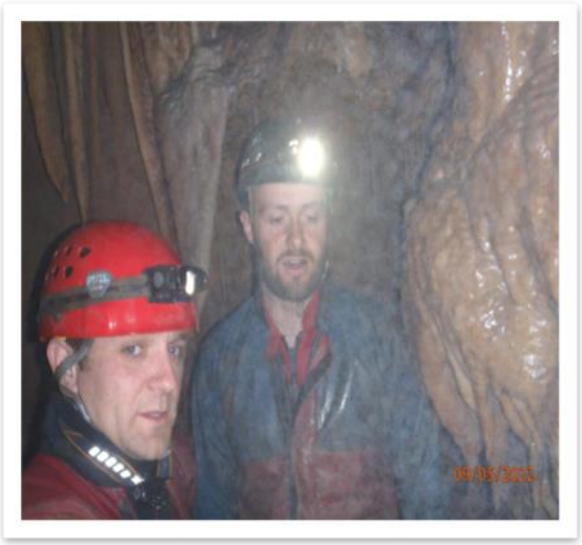
Another 10 minutes of caving took us to a hand-line climb which led onto some surprisingly well preserved calcite decorated passage. The highlight of this is some particularly well decorated but very small passage with good stal-actite coverage. Entering this passage through a sideways squeeze requires extreme care (and a good spotter) to pass without damaging the pretties. The 'bitter end' of the cave was perhaps another 10 minutes further on from the well decorated section.

Dickon

Dickon and Ollie

The way out was relatively uneventful (although I wasn't involved in any of the derigging). I was however a little alarmed at how tired my arms and shoulders were after climbing back up the wire ladder on my way out!

To sum it up this a typical small and grotty Mendip cave. Worth a look possibly, but just get someone to hold the steel plate back for you when you climb in! More photos on the next page.



Matt and Dickon

The walk back

Do you feel lucky? *by Louise Hull*

How often have you gone in a cave with a group or yourself and had no safety equipment or survival kit? Do you have the culture in your club of discussion around what each of you are taking or do you trust the people you are with to take care of that and are too embarrassed or gung-ho to ask?

The cave rescues lately and the fact that some of us caved less during the pandemic and became less fit has caused me to think of what do we need to keep ourselves safe in a cave in case something goes wrong. How quickly do you get cold? Very quickly in my case. Hypothermia is a potential problem on everyday trips not just expeditions.

The first rule inirst aid is to assess for danger and don't become a casualty yourself.

I asked what basic kit people take into a cave for themselves and what they would take if in a small group; The answers I got were mixed and some quite frankly shocking.

About to enter a cave in Yorkshire while in windy drizzly weather I asked the leader of our group if he had any first aid kit, food, survival blankets or a group shelter bearing in mind there are large often draughty passages there, longer trips than average, and the answer I got was; "… No, I never take them and have never needed them." He did however have a small amount of water and a spare handline, this came in useful at a later part of the cave when the climb up on a through trip proved to be a very slippery, exposed and challenging, and where the fixed ropes were extremely slimy with wet clay and next to impossible to hang onto! Having been told to ditch the SRT kit at the pitch head out I was extremely angry to be put in a position of doing two climbs in this life-threatening situation where I could have used a hand jammer while climbing or some other ascender to keep safe had I know this was ahead. I was all set to create a klamheist (*modified prusik loop—Ed)* with my sling around the rope before the handline was thrown down to me; not my day to die after all. Thankfully I had had a lesson in how to keep safe with minimal kit from Andy Sparrow. It's simply not good enough for a trip leader to assume that because they are prepared to make such an exposed and un-protected climb that everyone else can or would be prepared to; nor to put them in a position of having to look after you if you fall when it could have been avoided.

Where is the harm in asking if are you warm enough, what are your energy levels like and are you happy to climb this?

I would also emphasize the importance of reading your group & ascertaining the ones who are not as fast , experienced, or energetic, placing such people near the front of the group to set the pace for the others and enabling the more experienced/capable amongst the group to monitor and assist them and to negate the demoralizing effect of being “left behind” or straggling.

These are the most common bits of kit people recommend:-

To keep yourself warm and hydrated

Always have a bivvy bag, dry balaclava or buff, dry gloves and a storm shelter (for longer trips or groups or draughty passages) some always take candles as cold creates casualties. Take glucose tablets or fast energy food and water. I like hand warmers too.

Ian Peachy described going to a Yorkshire rescue of university students who had been lost for many hours and was expecting to find them hypothermic and difficult to rescue as a result, only to find they were warm under a rescue shelter with bivvy bags and candles singing caving songs. Happy days.

Kit to adapt to situations and help people out, tired on climbs or dodgy exposure.

A minimum of 2 spare karabinerss, 2 slings, and a handline. If you know how to use them and there are climbs, pulleys are useful and in my case I need 3 to haul anyone, or 2 to assist a climb.

Paul Fairman says his life has been saved by having a belt and a karabiner, and this has on numerous times helped him rescue someone. If they had not been wearing the belt then they would have had to await cave rescue.

First aid kit

There are no rules around what should be in a first aid kit except assess the likely risks and adapt a basic kit to meet the risks.

What are the most likely things to happen in a cave? Dirt in the eye or contact lens, cuts, sprains or fracture. So take sterile water tubes you can wash an eye or a wound. A plaster won’t do much good to keep the dirt out but a plaster or dressing with gaffer tape over will hold enough to let you cave out. It can be used to immobilize an area if you don’t have a SAM splint. For those of you who haven’t had the benefit of seeing a SAM splint, they are a lightweight aluminum roll or folded up concertina style, but when the edges are curved-up this creates a stiff splint to immobilize the area; No sticks or walking poles are available in a cave . A trauma dressing in case of major bleeds. Triangular bandages are helpful but you can adapt a buff for many things like a sling. Tough cut scissors for cutting away clothing are handy. Go on an outdoor first aid course or get your club to organize one. They are fun. A basic first aid kit with these extras will see you through and you can easily fit it in a Darren drum.

Chatting to a female member of a South Wales club and an experienced caver (ex RAF) she always carries a first aid kit and all of the above kit to stay warm including food and water on every trip and more stuff for a group. It all fits in a small bag. One male South Wales club member, also a very experienced caver said he never takes anything and hasn’t needed it but he said of course if he was taking a group it would be different. What do you define as a group? … It turned out that their interpretation would be if you were responsible for Scouts or something. I would argue when you go caving with someone else you are in a group, especially if you are the trip Leader!

It seems to me it depends on who first takes you caving that sets up the culture and thinking around what kit you carry down a cave. University clubs, the military, Scouts and Forest School Camps do set people up with the right ethics around safety and kit for a group trip.

I have found that the BEC to be one of the safest clubs to cave with despite their reputation for being a drinking club with a caving problem!! And I believe much of this is as a result of the high membership of ex University caving clubs. This is about safety kit for self and the group first aid kits and rigging; belaying on climbs and on ladders when other clubs are gung-ho in many cases. I would emphasise this is not all club members.

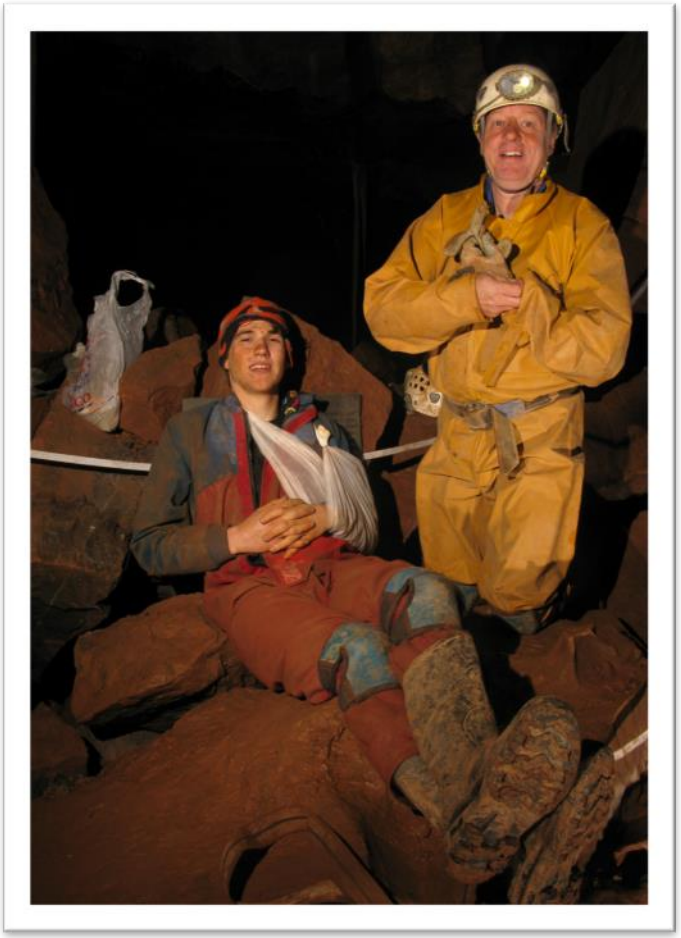
On the last trip I went into the Far North (Dan yr Ogof) a large bolder fell on the North Road the size of a fridge, catching the back of Paul Fairman’s calf, luckily not crushing him or injuring him in any way. We would not have been able to move it had it landed on his leg. When we emerged at the entrance to find the patio doors had been replaced and put the wrong way around. We couldn’t open them and get out of Dan-yr-Ogof and with 4 hours to go to our call out we were wet and hot but within 30 minutes we were getting really cold. Fortunately, one of our group

had a phone in order to take photos and we finally got a signal to the emergency services after the 3rd attempt. We were rescued within the hour but by then we were just climbing into our bivvy bags (Paul Fairman is pretty hot in a bag so he tells me and was offering freely for anyone to join him…) Had we been unable to get a signal, we would have had to wait for a few hours for our call-out and would have been very grateful for our shelters and candles, if we had had to sit there like lemons in the entrance until cave rescue. The other bonus was we managed to get fish and chips before they closed. *(Knowing about the river exit (if that isn't locked permanently now) would have been useful—Ed)*

We have a responsibility in our clubs to set up a culture of safety in caving while having lots of extreme fun so we can cave another day. So next time you go caving have a discussion with your group, look through the kit, help newcomers to caving that have not had the benefit of university caving learn what to take and why and not be embarrassed by what you take with you. Don't be shamed into leaving kit behind by the macho that have never needed kit, because one day they might…

I believe that there is a difference between a good caver who can find their way in and out in a fast time and a good Cave Leader. We want to encourage more people to start caving and continue to enjoy it..

Food for thought and a subject for perennial discussion. I may as well put in my two pennyworth and say that a roll of gaffer tape will cover most eventualities. My vade mecum when I started caving over half a century ago was David Cons's Cavecraft that was published at the same time. He suggests cavers should wear a light 15 foot length of nylon rope around their waist perhaps with a karabiner. He also recommended a compass, knife, pieces of strong string a simple first aid kit and some food. I have found a Swiss army knife very useful in the past not least the depths of Crag Cave to open the top of a shorting Oldham conversion belonging to my mate Ted. What constitutes a good first aid kit is debatable and in my opinion gaffer tape stands out! Although after we installed a first aid kit in the Frozen Deep in Reservoir Hole the most used item so far has been the triangular bandage! Ed.



Triangular bandage in action—Reservoir Hole.

Vale Nigel Taylor 1952 – 2022.

After a battle with cancer Nigel Taylor passed away on Tuesday 14th June. Nigel was only 70. He was known to cavers throughout the UK for his expertise and explosive knowledge. Nigel started caving in the late 60's and joined the Bristol Exploration Club on the 29th October 1971. His membership number is 772 and he was 19 ½ years old. He quickly gained the nickname "Mr Nigel "as he was so polite to his elders, prefacing their surnames with "Mr". We all soon learnt one thing, Nigel was a true gentleman. Over many years Nigel served in various roles on the BEC committee including Hut Engineer and Secretary, and in later years became a trustee of the club. In recognition of his outstanding service over the past 50 years Nigel was made an Honorary member at the clubs AGM/Dinner in 2021. As a trustee he was involved in the club's purchase of St Cuthberts Swallet and the land around it which is an SSSI. He was a director of the limited company (St Cuthberts Minery Reserve) that the club formed to administer the cave and land prior to the club becoming Bristol Exploration Club Ltd. in 2022.

There are so many stories involving Nigel it would take a few BB's to list them all. A few memorable ones include the time we convinced him to come on a trip to Dan Yr Ogof. It was the 30th December 1989 and Nigel was concerned about the Long Crawl. I remember we had to keep telling him it was getting bigger and it was not much further to the end. After a lot of swearing and cursing we got him to the "big stuff". I remember the draught kept stopping as he blocked the tube totally. On the trip was Arthur Griffin and Jenny Stanton (Willies daughter), Tim Large and Jeff Price plus our very own Secretary Babs!

And of course, who can forget the time we needed a barbeque and he turned up with an old oil drum. It needed ventilation holes in it. A tiresome job with a drill. Much better said Nigel, as a "firearms expert" for him to blast it at short range with both barrels of his shotgun. It worked but a few pellets came back and hit his legs!

Before he moved to Draycott he lived in Langford and rented a small field across the A38 from his house for a large all metal "bang store". There were bushes around it but it was clearly visible from the road. I'm not sure who's idea it was but myself Chris Batstone and Chris Hannam somewhat worse for wear (I honestly don't remember who drove) left the Belfry well after midnight in the early hours of Sunday morning and went to the store with two large tins of paint. One bright blue and the other white and we painted the complete store in nice diagonal stripes. We expected to hear something on the Sunday but nothing happened. I had to drive back to Hertfordshire on the Monday and made the detour past the somewhat distinctive blue and white cube. All seemed quiet. Unknown to us Nigel had the explosives officer coming on that Monday morning to check the store to renew his license. Luckily the officer saw the funny side. Nigel did not! We spent the following weekend painting it in rust proof dull dark red!

When Nicola and I got married in 1999 he insisted on supplying the transport back from the Webbington Hotel to our house in Draycott where the reception was being held. Nicola was worried that it would be a tractor and she kept telling him she had a nice dress on and not to arrange anything silly. To our totally surprise a helicopter landed in the field opposite the hotel and he had even arranged a camera to be left in it. After a flight around Mendip, we landed in Nigel's field. Now turned into "Draycott International Airport" with signs up for arrivals and a big H in the middle of the field.

As a warden of Mendip Rescue Organisation (later to become Mendip Cave Rescue) Nigel attended many rescues on Mendip. His strength and size were always helpful when carrying a heavy stretcher. On his retirement, after 42 years, as the longest serving warden, he was presented with a long service certificate by the British Cave Rescue Council. His size was also useful to have when we were called to Redcliff Caves in Bristol in the middle of the night to look for a missing person "known to the Police"," who maybe dangerous". We found his intoxicated companion and Nigel, using his Police skills, questioned him and checked his hands asking why they were all cut up. The companion was found a few days later in the river Avon.

Before joining the Police Force, he worked as the assistant to the renowned Luke Devenish and his Explosive and Demolition Company. Luke was a caver and not only taught Nigel about commercial explosive work but also its use in cave exploration. After working with Luke for a number of years Nigel joined the Police. He did his initial training on the beat in Bristol and had many stories to tell about crime in a major city. He became a firearms officer and Royal Protection Officer for the South West and was responsible for the safe keeping of all members of the Royal family when they visited the area. Always interested in explosives and firearms he had a fine collection of handguns until the legislation changed and they had to be destroyed. Nigel always wanted his own company and left the Police to form DemRock. As well as contract work for quarries, Nigel was responsible for safely demolishing numerous high-

rise buildings and other infrastructure such as bridges. These included two trips to the Falkland Islands to "lower" the height of a hill to allow larger aircraft to land and take off at Stanley Airport! And of course, he was one of the main supplies of explosives to Mendip cavers. When it looked like cavers may lose their licenses due to a change in legislation Nigel along with Nick Williams and Phil Pappard formed the Explosive Users Group and successfully lobbied for cavers to continue to have licenses. He then helped set up and run the training and exam weekends, holding them at the excellent Westbury quarry where he was a consultant regularly training special forces from around Europe as well as security teams. The quarry is ideal for film work and Nigel worked with various companies and TV shows including Top Gear. On the caving side his biggest "dig" was when I introduced him to Gerry Cottle and the team at Wookey Hole Caves as they wanted to blast a tunnel through to Chamber 20 to give access to tourists. Over a number of months, he supervised the drilling and the shot firing to reach chamber 20 at the desired spot. They have named the tunnel in his honour "Taylors Tunnel" and at this year's dinner we will all go through it to Chamber 20 and raise a glass to him. He was also one of the team that dug into and explored Manor Farm Swallet.

Jamaica was a destination he loved and he and Vivi his wife returned year after year for a three week break in early December. He would go diving every day in the warm, clear Caribbean. I met up with him on one trip and Nicola and I went with him into the bush for a caving trip into Thatchfield Cave. A large phreatic passage full of big stal, bats and other tropical wildlife all nicely ankle deep in "moving" guano. He was concerned about going into the countryside with a "lady", so presented me with a large machete he had purchased in the local hardware store, "just in case we needed it". I manged to get it home and still have it.

In recent years Nigel served on Mendip District Council and became Chairman of Somerset County Council and even found time to gain a degree in law. He was also a board member of the European Institute of Explosive Engineers. Because of his "be prepared" attitude he was the one to go to if you needed a mini digger, trailers, Land Rovers or dumper truck. You hear many things, good and bad about people but the one thing everyone says about Nigel is that he was the perfect gentleman. So farewell Mr Nigel old friend.

Martin Grass 4th September 2922

Memories of Nigel Taylor *by Martin Mills (Milche)*

I was saddened to hear of the passing of my friend Nigel Taylor on 14th June 2022 at the age of 70. The Shepton have always generally enjoyed a good relationship with the BEC, extending back to at least the late 60s/early 70s when we had joint monthly trips to Yorkshire to bottom the big pots. In March 1972 the Shepton and friends had a long weekend trip to Majorca for £18 for 3 nights from Lulsgate (now Bristol International Airport). The following February (1973) there was a slightly more expensive (£22?) long weekend trip to Sousse, Tunisia, from Birmingham. Our party totalled 9 and was to have included "The Wig" (the late Dave Irwin) but who apparently not unusually was unable to make it and Nigel took his place. He subsequently wrote "They sought them here, they sought them there – They sought those caves every-blooming-where!" BB Vol. XXVII, No. 2 (No. 304) pp. 38 – 41 (February 1973). A good time was had but the caves were scarce and the catacombs of Sousse were collected (18-minute trip including lighting the candle). Other highlights of the trip were that one of our two Peugeot 404 hire cars would not start unless you first tooted the horn and difficulty with road signs in Arabic as compared to our map, Tony and Anne Oldham had been there slightly before our trip and reported that the local spirit, Boukha, was much cheaper in the shops than from the hotel bar. Thus we were only buying round after round of soft drinks from the bar and topping then up with spirit at our table. We celebrated Nigel's 21st birthday on the second night. The barman became suspicious, especially as our gait became unsteadier, and came to our table and noticed the bottle tops. He appreciated that not everyone could afford the bar prices. We bribed him with a pair of Crange boots (who remembers them?) and a copy of Penthouse Magazine. However, **the** highlight was Martin Webster going off to bed early and losing momentum on the slight slope outside the bar doors and coming back through the now closed doors showering broken glass everywhere. Possibly the barman had difficulty explaining this!

The return flight took seven hours via Italy and Stuttgart. At one stage a stewardess confirmed to 'Jesus' (P.B.) Smith that we were going to Birmingham after the Captain had announced another destination, to which 'Jesus' said

to the stewardess “You know we are going to Birmingham but does the Captain?” On landing at Birmingham, Butch (driving) made The Hunters’ in 1 hour 20 minutes exactly to arrive in time for a pint.

My favourite anecdote about Nigel, although largely based on hearsay, runs like this. One busy weekend at the Belfry, I would like to think that this was in the era when he was hut warden, a significant amount of money disappeared from members’ pockets and wallets. This undoubtedly left a bad taste. Towards the end of the weekend those members present sat down and worked through everyone who had been around and about over the weekend. There was one person nobody could account for or whose guest he was and his honesty. Meanwhile that person had left. Much later Nigel was at a BCRA conference and noticed this character. Nigel returned to the BEC stand and asked another reliable member to go down to the stand of such and such a club and see if they noticed anything interesting. That person returned and simply said “It’s him”. Nigel, being a policeman, returned to the other stand, cautioned the person, and asked the person to accompany him to the nearest police station where he was charged and subsequently convicted of theft. Nice one Nigel! Our thoughts and condolences go to Viv and the family.

Some photos of Nigel underground and working with his trusty digger.

Mendip Singers' Reunion 2022 *by Babs Price*

On the 2nd of August 2022 at Priddy Village Hall a little bit of history happened. Singers gathered from all over the country and the world to record caving songs of old. The event was led and organised by Roger Biddle whose piano playing and choral leadership in the Hunters' in the early years of the Mendip Clubs is simply legendary! In those days access to the back room of the Hunter's to join the singing was generally through the window because it was so jam-packed.

Roger, very sadly, lost his wife Sue to cancer and organised the singing event and in August, James Cobbett, Stuart MacManus and Murdo Macleod joined Biddle to walk the 102 miles of the Macmillan Way West between Castle Cary in Somerset and Barnstaple in Devon. This was a charity walk in memory of Biddle's late wife Sue in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support who had lost a third of its fundraised income due to the pandemic.

The caving singers who attended the reunion were from clubs including the BEC the Shepton, the Wessex, Grampian and MCR members. Those present included Vyvyan Brown, who was the first person down Saint Cuthbert's and Butch (Alan Butcher) who discovered Cuthbert's two.

There was an amazing recital of the Boatswain by Ken Dawes and Alan Kennet recited a speleode, Percy Pound.

Henry Dawson attended to lend his technical expertise to the occasion and thanks go to him and his friend who set up and drove all the recording equipment. Both gave their time freely and it was much appreciated. Martin Grass,

L to R ?, Roger Biddle (keyboard) Maurice Hewins,?, Brian Prewer, Alan (Butch) Butcher, Mike Palmer, ?, James Cobbett and with his back to camera Phil Hendy. I think two of the others I have queried are Vyvyan Brown and Len Dawe but I might be wrong

who kindly ran the bar with Nicola, became our self-proclaimed equality and diversity officer and was appalled by the language and lack of political correctness of the lyrics! I guess you just can't judge yesterday by today's standards!

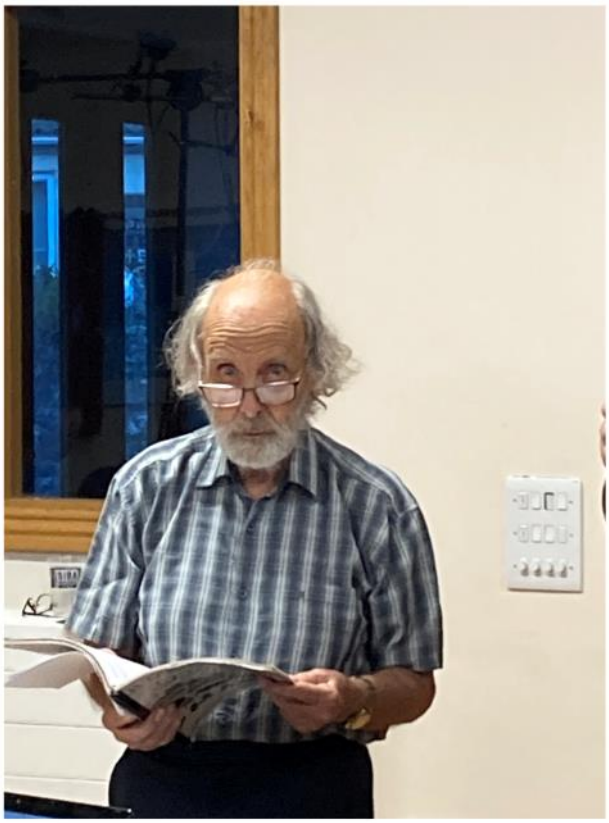
It was wonderful to watch a re-creation of the past when the Biddle would play the piano in the back room of the Hunters creating music much to the disgust of the landlord, Roger's Dad, Ben Dors, who would moan about "They Words They Words, they 'Orrible Words"!

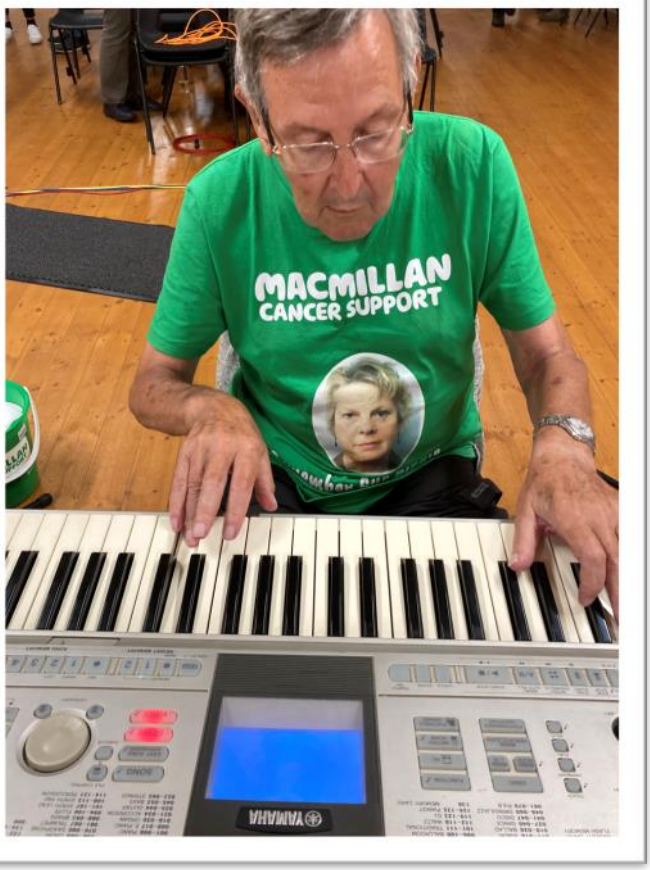
You can donate to Macmillan via Biddle's web site and see all the song words in his **Caving Songs Index.**

http://www.harmonieii.co.uk/caving/cavingsongs.html

It felt like a real honour to be there as I doubt very much if we will ever get that group of people together for a sing song again.

Some more photos of the sing song all courtesy of Babs Price

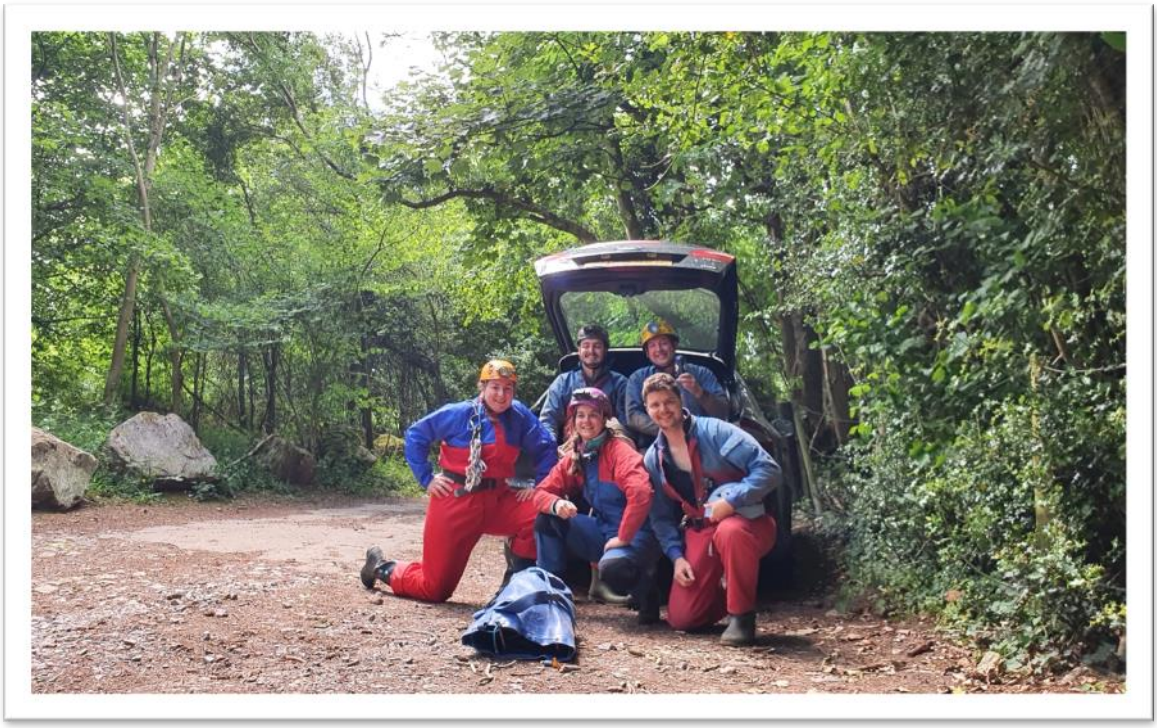



MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT
YAMAHA

Caving Trip Report —Rod's to Bath *by Grace Mason-Jarrett*

The Saturday began with a particularly excited Paul bounding into a sleepy bunkroom waking everyone up around 9am. While not my favourite way to be woken up, it was contagious and once breakfast had been done we had managed to pull together two groups for caving. Our group planned to do Rods to Bath as a quick and straightforward route with Paul leading, Rob and myself, and BEC-members-to-be Lorna and Mitch. Rob had not managed to pick up Paul's seemingly limitless energy and was struggling to manage the hangover but as a team we pulled together and bundled into the car ready to face a new cave.

I was excited as I've not done this route before and had been assured by Paul that this was a quick "in-and-out" through trip with only one ladder to rig. Our plan was to go to Baths Swallet first, set up the ladder at Shower Pot then come out, and head into Rods Pot to do the through trip. Easy. So easy, in fact, none of us thought to check the route and we all felt more than confident in our abilities to find the way on. Heading up the collection of gravel and potholes that claimed to be a road, we arrived at the car park at the bottom of the hill. Gearing up and feeling excited we set off.



Mitch, Paul, Lorna, Grace, and Rob ready for a quick "in-and-out" adventure.

Immediately, we encountered our first problem – finding the right cave! After 20 minutes of trudging up and down the hill we eventually found Rod's Pot. Paul went in first and indicates the rest of us to wait at the entrance so he could refresh his memory. This was not the cave we needed so back to the path and along to Bath's Swallet we went. Paul, Rob and I went into Bath's Swallet to set up the ladder, and we made sure to send Rob down to make sure the ladder actually reached the bottom of the pot. Once that was done we left Bath's swallet and back to Rod's Pot, picking up Mitch and Lorna along the way to begin the route.

We found our way to the main chamber, easily enough, avoiding any unplanned descents into the Blind Pots and clambering on down. Our pace was looking good and we stopped in the main chamber to take a look around. At this point, Paul declared that this was now the point at which "we need to send Grace to ferret around as I can't quite remember the way on". Hmm, perhaps we should have looked at the book after all.

Undeterred, I spied three obvious ways on to try, two downward passages behind some broken curtains in the middle of the chamber and a pebbly looking crawl over on the left-hand wall. Everything was looking pretty worn and I was happy to go and have a look. Trying the right-hand downward passage first I scrambled down and down, reaching a

narrow looking rift, then down again. I spotted a blue box and thought "ah ha!" and so called on the others to follow me. This proved to be a mistake as what I had actually found was Bear Pit. With the others heading down I continued on and slid into the bottom of the pit and sat to catch my breath and wait for the others. Rob and Paul soon joined me and I went to continue the tight looking passage at the base of the pit before quickly realising that this was too tight for me, and there was no way this was the way on. Sorry everyone, back up we go. Fortunately, Lorna and Mitch were not quite at the bottom so at least we didn't all have to do the whole pit. The climb out of Bear Pit was a little tricky but together we hoiked ourselves out and clambered on up to main chamber.

I then went on to look at the pebbly crawl. As at the bottom of Bear Pit, I felt this was too tight and it appeared to be sealed. Luckily there was a little room so I could turn around and wiggle out again but I didn't feel good about that being the way. I sent Rob to double check (he's a bit braver than I) but he also concluded it unlikely to be correct. Later we discovered this was the old passage to Hanging Rock Chamber, and indeed was sealed off following a ceiling collapse some time ago.

We were beginning to feel a little disheartened, and the climb out of Bear Pit had used up a good amount of our collective energy. The mood was dipping and we needed to think about whether or not we should continue or head back out Rod's Pot. Waiting around was only going to mean we got cold and so we began to head out, laughing at ourselves for not checking the guide book. I spotted something that looked like a pathway on the right-hand side (opposite the pebbly crawl). Crossing my fingers and hoping this was it I went on. The way was very worn, and I almost thought I could feel the slightest of breezes… was this it?? For the third time that day, I declared this was indeed the way "It's got to be right!" but my fellow cavers had now lost faith in my way-finding abilities, fair enough really. I pushed on, following a bit of a zig-zag, and a smooth, widening passage up and ending up… back at the main chamber! Rightiho then, home we go.

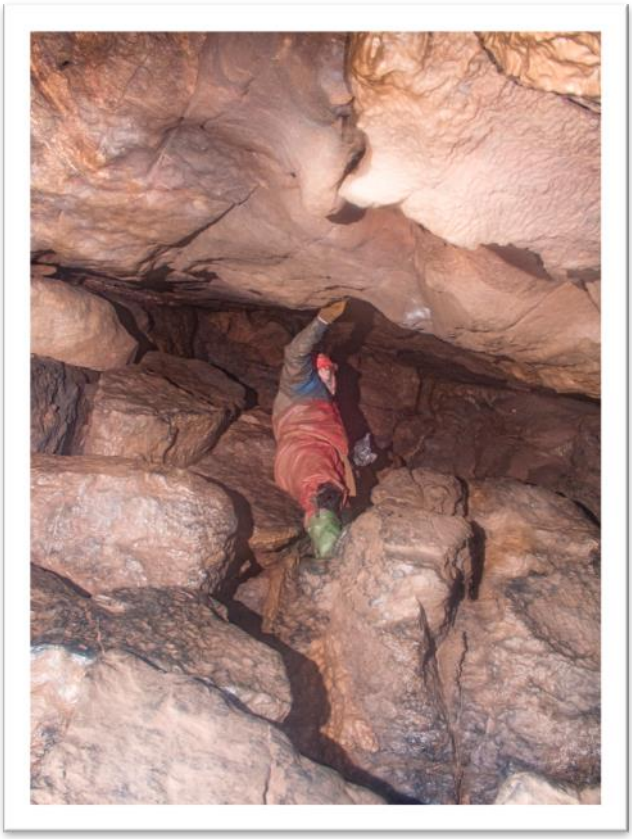
We went out, and finished the trip with a dip into Bath's Swallet to retrieve our sadly neglected ladder and rope. That ended up being faffier than necessary as the ladder caught itself on the way up and so Rob had to abseil down to retrieve it but hey, at least we got some rigging practice in, right?

Tired, a little frustrated, but generally happy to have tried, we headed back to the car. I might propose a new route for the guide books, "Bath and Rods and Bath". Perhaps not a successful trip but certainly had a bit of everything, and it didn't even deter Mitch and Lorna from wanting to join the BEC. So, success?

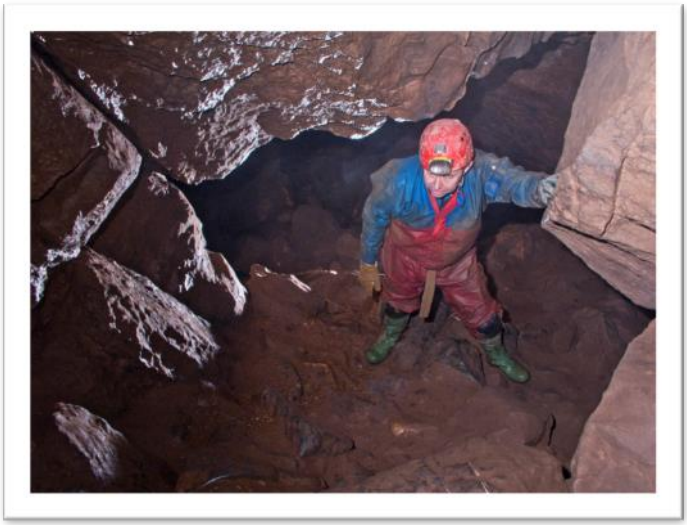
Completed! Sort of. Better luck next time pals.

Over the page are some photos of Rod's/Bath (the nice bits)

Rob Harper with despoiled Stal in the Main Chamber of Rod's Pot

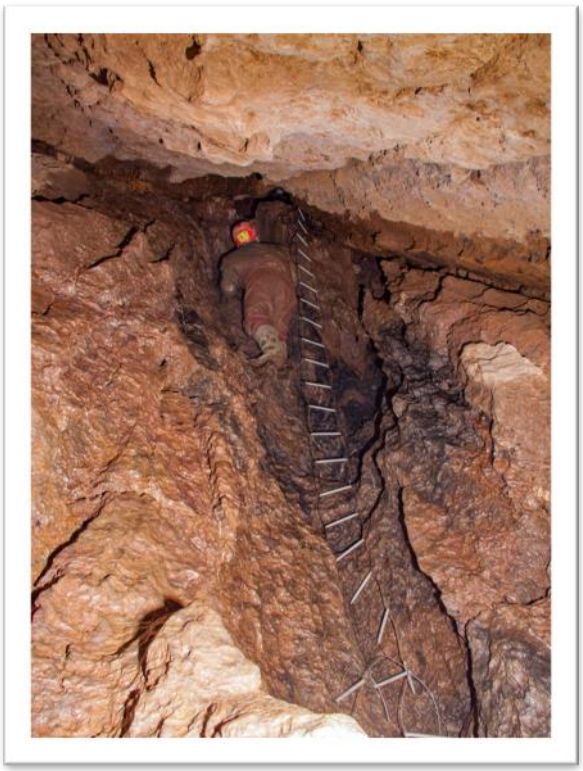


Rod's Main Chamber



Rod's Main Chamber

A cheerful Rob Harper in the big phreatic passage of Bath Swallet



The (almost) freeclimbable pitch out of Bath Swallet

Caving Trip Report GB: my first time leading

by Grace Mason-Jarrett

I remember the first time I went into GB and just being blown away by the waterfall. While the waterfall is currently inaccessible, this cave remains one of my favourites and most frequented on Mendip, having a little bit of everything. Until recently I had only ever gone to Ladder Dig and back, but on my most recent trip we pushed on through to Great Chamber. It's a cave I felt I knew really well, and so on Sunday morning I declared I was going to GB, and, not only that, I was going to lead it.

Rob and Alasdair came along with me, under strict instructions not to tell me the way unless I started running off in the wrong direction. Our goals were to one find Great Chamber and two, avoid Disappointment Chamber. Feeling confident, we headed down the passage and took the left-hand crawl to get to the Gorge. Finding our way to the main chamber was easy enough. I took a moment to mourn the loss of my favourite water feature in Mendip once more (I really can't explain why I loved it so much, just know that I did).

Over the bridge and onward (singing Lord of the Rings theme tune and a quick check for any Balrogs), we started the inclined schlepp up White Passage. I knew there was a left turn somewhere after that big white rock in the middle of the passage, but wasn't entirely sure where. This was the first of my slight falters in leading, but I found it quickly and happily we pressed on. I nearly passed the second left turn, but Rob quietly coughed and queried "Hmm I wonder if this is the way?", knowing full well that it was. As it wasn't a direct coach, more of a prompt, I forgave myself for nearly missing it and we soon found ourselves doing the familiar, slightly awkward down climbs into the tail end of Main Chamber.

I took a moment to check for signs of flooding, but actually we had all noted how dry the cave was so far. The water which can usually be found at the bottom of Main Chamber was nowhere to be seen. The walls of the chamber were damp, but there was no evidence of foamy flood lines. It was also very quiet, usually you can hear the main streamway gurgling but there was barely a whisper. All this and knowing that recent rainfall has been pretty sparse, we satisfied agreed that flooding was unlikely and we were safe to proceed.

Rob did a great job of rigging the ladder, and in no time at all the three of us were crawling along toward the boulder ruckle. This is where my memory gets a little rusty, but I figured that I'd remember as we went. I was half right. Slowly we followed the solid right-hand wall down until we reached the white tape. This looked very familiar - excellent. I knew onwards was Bat Passage, and so looked around for a way on. Finding an upward route on to my left we followed it and found ourselves in a second bounder ruckle. Weird, I didn't remember there being a second boulder ruckle. I also recalled something about a letterbox… do we go through it or avoid it? I knew it was one of the two but couldn't decide either way. Not that it mattered, as we hadn't seen anything that looked remotely like a letterbox.

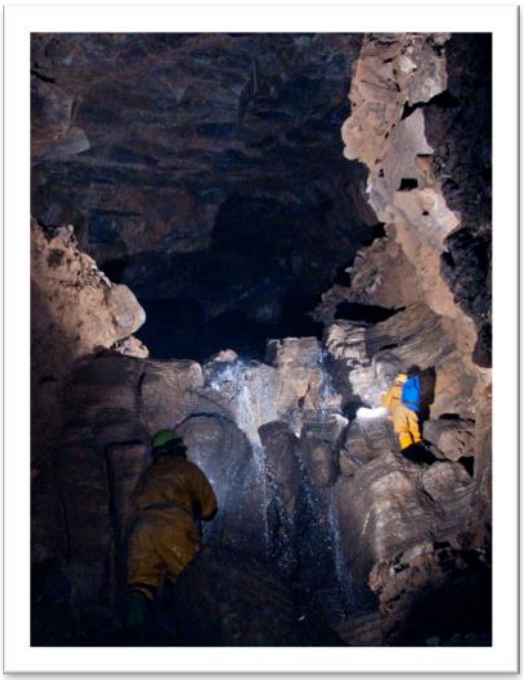
There appeared to be a way on right, and I began heading this way but stopped short. We had slowed down a lot now, and my confidence was waning. Indicating, to the others that we should allow ourselves 20 minutes max before giving up, I sat and closed my eyes, trying to pull the pathway from the depths of my memory. "*This way is Disappointment Chamber I am sure of it, which means we are practically in Great Chamber. If we turn around now, I'm going to be so annoyed at myself, but if we stay too long we're going to run out of time."* I could hear Alasdair shuffling and poking around various potential ways on but this being his first time in GB he was less sure than I and had little to go on for recognizing the way.

Ok, time to pass over the leading reins to Rob. He wiggled up behind me and Alasdair and disappeared into a slot formed between two very flat looking rocks – the letterbox! We had been sat underneath it for about 5 minutes, if only I had looked up! Elated, we squirreled our way through the awkward squeeze and into the Great Chamber. A moment or two spent looking around at the pretties, before heading back and out the way we came. GB is always an enjoyable trip, and I'm chuffed that I can now say I've actually led a cave (only taken… how many years??) and with the help from Alasdair and Rob we managed to achieve the two goals!

Editor's comments: I make no apologies for posting some pictures of the cave now we can do so with decent reproduction. When I started caving I did all the leading and found a copy of the survey invaluable. It must be said

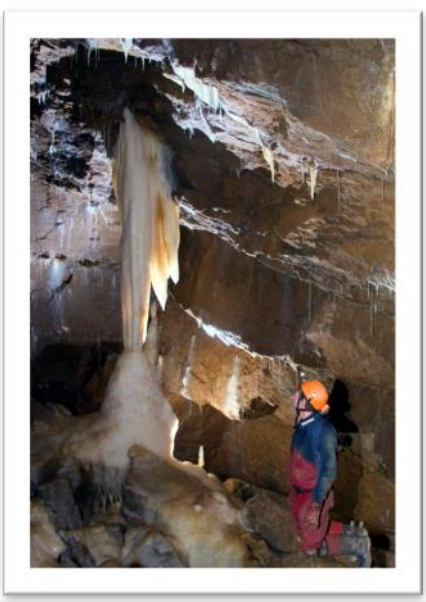
though that getting in Great Chamber is not helped by having a survey. There are at least three ways in by the way all tricky! Images not captioned are of Great Chamber including a panoramic view

The Bridge



Climbing the waterfall

Entering Ladder Dig



The Wessex Challenge 2022 *by Peter Glanvill*

After the pandemic scotched proceedings last year, the BEC, having won the last one,,like the Eurovision Song Contest, had to host this year's. A barbeque was scheduled for the evening, after the main event. The day dawned murky and damp. Angie and I cycled into Wells getting damp in the process (but using electric bikes) and returned getting tangled up in a tractor rally. Some of us were worrying as to what preparations were being made for what was being promoted by Josh Bratchley as a Crystal Maze experience as there didn't seem too much to see at lunchtime. Well, we were of little faith as a display of creativity unfurled before the waiting crowd. There were several teams dressed in a variety of costumes (some colour coordinated) and it was a hard fought contest!

Tribute should be paid to the team who put the event together, those who worked in the kitchen area and Ben Barnet our stalwart bar tender. Something that I did notice was the absence of older members which was a shame as it was a very enjoyable afternoon. The BBQ was excellent and the finale of the Crystal Maze, inside Mike Waterworth's geodesic dome was an hilarious slippery sock wrestling match. In the end the Shepton reigned supreme meaning that (Phew!) they are hosting the event next year. Carousing continued well into the night and the hot tub was occupied, although without any after effects this time. I make no excuse for filling up a few pages with photos of the event, in the absence of written contributions.

Preparing the salad

Our MC - Josh Bratchley MBE

Ben the barman

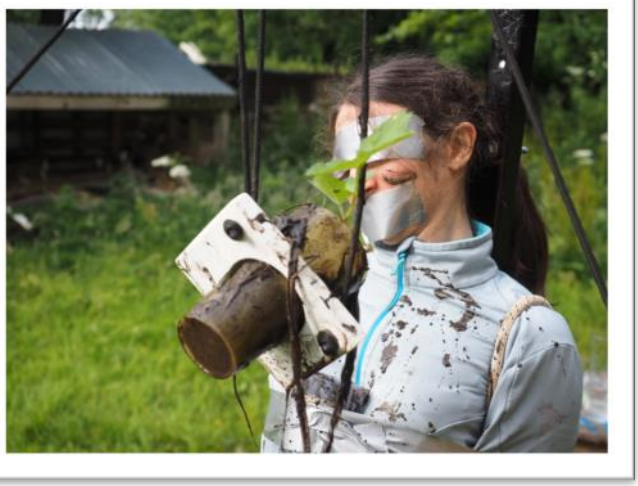
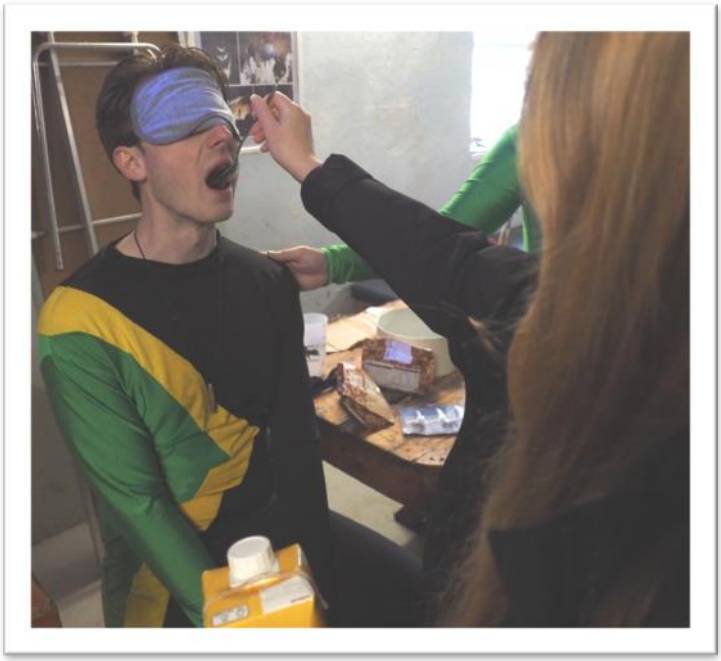
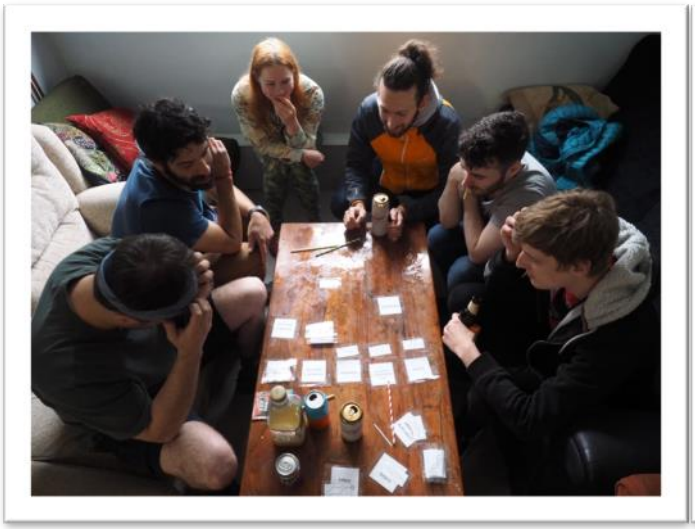
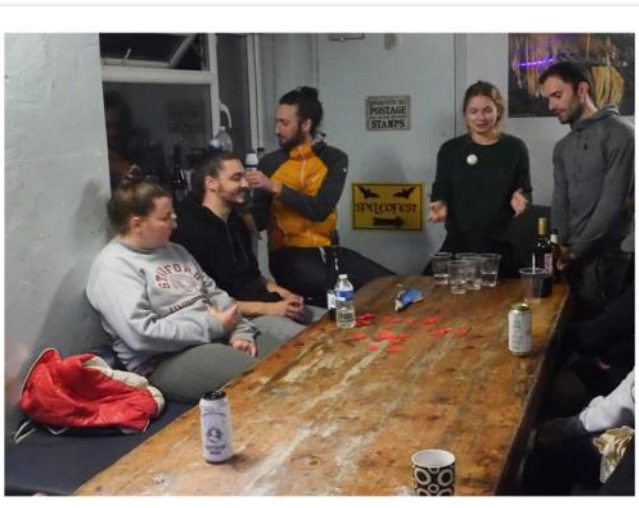
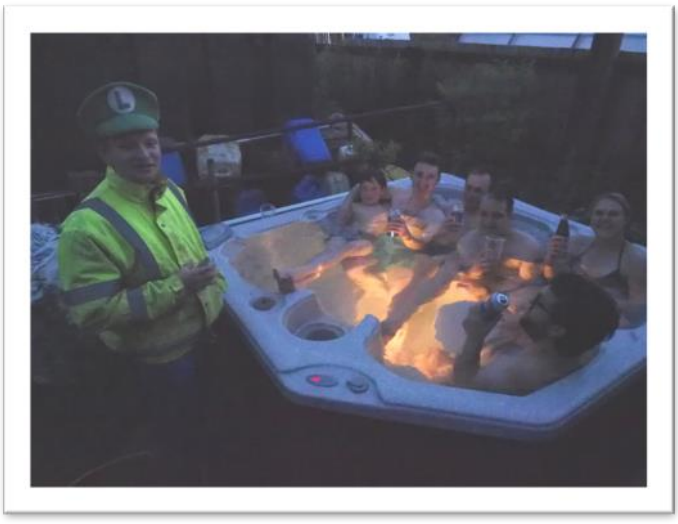
I think this is the SLAGS team referencing 'Cool Running'

Teams assemble

Fortifying ale

Under starter's orders

'It's behind you' The task: Grovelling for kit in the pool



Don't ask