

THE BELFRY BULLETIN

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRISTOL
EXPLORATION CLUB

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Front Cover: Near Pot Sump, 1937 series, Dan yr Ogof

Back Cover: Group shot Dan yr Ogof

Photographs by Stu Gardiner

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Editorial Summer 2019

Welcome to the latest edition of the Belfry Bulletin. I have almost managed to get it out before the end of summer. The autumn edition will come out when I have sufficient material. I am very grateful to Nigel Taylor, Laura Benn, Babs and Jeff Price for their contributions. I am looking forward to reports from the Dachstein expedition as well as from those members who popped over to Cantabria for a bit of caving. Club members are busy digging down various holes and there have been one or two significant finds on the Hill. If anybody has been anywhere interesting I know other club members would love to hear about their exploits.

Autumn is traditionally the time of year when cavers meet up for dinners, AGM's and conferences. I have placed the dinner letter at the back of the BB. Please note the cut off date. It is becoming well booked so get yours in (that includes me at present!). The AGM at the Belfry is on the same day and, as usual, there will be refreshments if that acts as any kind of lure. It would be good to see more members standing for committee places. The expanded committee allows us to spread the load of responsibilities so no job is too irksome. There have been great turnouts for working weekends this year and the Summer Barbeque was a great success although some individuals took the words 'have a smashing time' a little too literally. Angie Glanvill had a fall and broke her wrist. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Wendy Williams for her generosity in ferrying us both to casualty in Taunton and then waiting three hours whilst Angie was treated.

As I write this, Project Main Room has taken another step forward. After a few hiccups the room now has a shiny new resin coated floor. Getting furniture out before the job was challenging (the table had to stay suspended in mid air so to speak) but now the job's done and we can get on with other refurbishments in there. That room is one of the club's major assets due to its size so a fair bit of thought and discussion went into how it could be best be utilised. I hope most members will be pleased with the end result.

I am pleased to have a response to my plea for cover images and I am hoping other members will come forward with suitable photographs. This edition features some lovely pictures by Stu Gardiner taken on a recent trip into Dan yr Ogof.

I trust you will enjoy browsing through this BB.

BEC calendar of events 2019

24th-26th August Cavefest Wales

6-8th Sept Home meet weeken (Rescom is on Mendip this year)

September T27/28/29 Hidden Earth, Wrexham, North Wales

Friday 20th September Fairy Cave Quarry film in Priddy Village Hall

4-6th Oct Home meet weekend

5th Oct Annual dinner – booking now possible

1-3rd Nov Home meet weekend

2nd Nov fireworks party and food

6-8th December Home meet weekend

7th December Christmas party

If you can offer trips during home meet weekend anywhere on Mendip for those interested or new members let me (Louise Hull) know please so I can let people know. SRT and rescue practice dates to be arranged..

BEC and Related 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 in 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.

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, Considine's Cave, though several others are ongoing dependent on weather. We dig two or three times per week

Contact Stumpy via patccronin@eircomnet 00353 65 7075883, 00353 86 3502389.

The Pegasus website site <http://cheqchester.wixsite.com/pegasus-club-notts> offers further data. The Roadside Bar Lisdoonvarna 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@pgmail.com or 07971 950639. Meet at Chewton Mendip at the dig site on Tuesdays at 7pm and drink in the Waldegrave after.

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 Stu Lindsay. Robin Gray is currently recuperating from a prolonged illness.

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 more details.

Bloreng, 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 probably contact Trevor. There have been significant developments here in the last few months.

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. The dig was extended in April and another trip was made this summer. 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.

How I started caving

Jeff Price suggested this might be an interesting series of pieces and I hope the contributions in this issue will lead to more for future BB's.. I await your contributions!

Jeremy Henley

I started caving for the following reason. I had been living in the Republic of Ireland for three years and got my exercise through walking the Comeragh mountains south of Clonmel, County Tipperary with work colleagues. When I returned to the UK and started working in Shepton Mallet I decided that walking the Mendips would be nothing like as interesting as the Comeraghs so I asked a work colleague for ideas about exercise. He was a scout leader and mentioned that a group of scouts would be going down Goatchurch in a few days time with Hedley Hill and suggested that I joined them. This I did and was completely hooked. I did a couple of trips with Hedley to Shatter Cave and decided to buy some kit. At that time there was a caving shop in the old bus station in Wells run by, I think, Chris Bradshaw though I may be wrong (*you are right– Ed*) and asked him about caving clubs. He recommended the BEC ,which I joined but I did a lot of my early caving with Brian Prewer's Friday night trips so visited a wide selection of Mendip caves.

Jeff Price

It was 1970 and I was 12 years old. I was sitting in my English class at Connaught Secondary Modern School in Bristol and my English teacher announced that she wanted every pupil in the class of thirty to find a project or hobby to pursue, with merits to be given at the end of term. I didn't like football, cricket etc. What should I do?

One hour later I found myself in the school library looking for ideas – nothing!! On the last bookshelf on the top row, I found a book that looked interesting. I picked it out. There on the brown dust jacket were the words 'My Caves: Norbert Casteret'. It sounded good to me and seemed to be adventurous so I thought I would give it a go. I had nothing to lose and I might even get a few merits for my English project. I took it home, read it and got bollocked by my parents for staying up all night which made me even more determined to try caving!

Two weeks later it was time for the teacher to assess the English projects. Shit! It was my turn next...

"What about you, Jeffrey?"

"I've written to several caving clubs Miss"

A long pause ensued and I thought "That's it, I've buggered this up!" It was quite the opposite. "Excellent" she said, "I like to cave on Mendip".

During the 6-week summer holidays my teacher and her husband picked me up on Wednesday nights at 6pm and took me off to Mendip to meet a man called Mike (Mike York – Wessex CC Hut warden). We were joined by two other novices, one freaked out at the triangular stone built entrance and didn't go down because of the water gushing in (Swildon's if you haven't already guessed).

The would-be cavers went down the Long Dry Way to the 20' pitch, then back out by the Wet Way. Excellent! I was hooked.

We then went off to a place called The Hunter's; I also liked that! I vowed that I would be back! I was finally dropped back home by said teacher and husband. I was tired wet and cold but on cloud nine. I slept well!

After the six weeks school holidays, it was time to return to school. No teacher. Bugger! Where has she gone? No one knew.

I wrote to the Wessex Hut warden who said he spent most weekends on Mendip and if my parents would agree, I could meet him at Bristol Bus Station on a Friday evening at 6.45pm to catch the 7pm 376 bus from Bristol to Wells, getting off at Green Ore or if the driver would drop us off, at the Priddy turn. There would be a walk to the place called the Hunter's. Incidentally, a weekend's caving, hut fees, pub and a saucepan of milk from Eastwater Farm would cost about £1.00 at this time! If I spent too much money in the Pub, I would hitch or walk home to Bristol.

In the 80's I joined the BEC because I was caving a lot with both clubs and knew a lot of BEC members. Mike Wheadon was secretary of the BEC at the time. Mike York would take me caving on Saturdays, often Swildons, Sludge Pit, GB, Nine Barrows etc. and would arrange for me to go caving on a Sunday.

In 1972, I was asked if I would like to go to County Clare in Ireland for two weeks. My parents reluctantly agreed as they could see that I wanted to go (I would have gone anyway by hook or by crook!). I was taken with JRat, Titch Thompson, Rich Law, Dave Savage, Mike the Fisherman and Aubrey Newport.

There was caving every day: Faunarooska, Pollnagollum/Pouleva, St Catherine's/Fisher Street in Doolin through trips etc. finishing up in O'Connor's bar. .

The following September I went to Spain with the Wessex to the Picos De Europa working on Cueva Embudo (Gully Cave) which was a Wessex project for many years. We actually managed to bottom the cave on ladders as SRT was not around then — or only just starting.

I continued caving, then years later the Falklands War started and finished. Whilst watching the BBC news at 6pm, I recognised a name and a face. Shit! It was my teacher from 1970 and her husband. She was teaching in the Falklands and her husband was doing a penguin and albatross count when the Argies invaded. Sometime after the Falkland's war was over I managed to contact them by telephone because they were repatriated to the UK as the flag flew over Port Stanley. I now take them caving every so often.

I have had some brilliant caving and wild times including the Berger, PSM, Casteret's Ice Cave, Mammoth Cave, Carlsbad Caverns and Krizna Jama all with interesting people.

Some thirty years ago, I was an MRO Warden and one Bank Holiday weekend I was called to help extricate a girl with a suspected broken leg this side of sump one on the boulder pile. A rescue ensued. The girl's name was Babs but that's another story!

Oh, and by the way, I got top marks for my project!

Babs Price

It was 1987. I was 27 years old and living opposite Ronnie Scott's in Soho. I was the archetypal London 'wild-child' and my primary interests were sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll! To say I was 'cruising for a bruising' was an understatement.

Then, my brother Jingles read a book. It was called The Darkness Beckons by Martin Farr. My brother was hooked and had an overwhelming desire to become a cave diver and as he had the will and I had the wheels, we decided to go to the West Country

God knows how we found ourselves in Burrington Combe doing the classic numpty thing of holding a hand torch and wearing t-shirts, jeans and trainers as we ventured into Goatchurch Cavern. I must admit I was pretty scared but we seemed to manage okay, slipping and sliding all over the place and finally getting out without incident. Then my brother decided we needed to go look at another hole he'd found out about: Swildon's was its name. I looked down the entrance and all I could see was a great deal of blackness and a hell of a lot of water. The handheld torch jeans and t-shirt seemed like a pretty bad idea now. Fortunately for us, before we could go down, we heard a lot of clattering and four creatures dressed in helmets, lights and wetsuits appeared out of the darkness. They advised strongly against proceeding down the cave and suggested we join a club. We went back to London.

In those days, there was no internet (or Google) so we looked up speleology in the Yellow Pages and found the Chelsea Caving Club who met on the Kings Road in a pub called the World's End on a Tuesday night. Excellent! Off to the pub we went and met some very unlikely types. Even more excellent! We immediately made friends with two great people called Henry (Bennett) and Sarah. We bonded straight away and got thoroughly pissed. Two weekends later we were at the Chelsea hut - Whitewalls.

We fell in with another bad crowd called the Cavers of Worcester (CoW) and joined them. We travelled to Yorkshire with them to do Alum Pot which I loved but I nearly shat myself looking over the top before abseiling down!



Yorkshire with Cavers of Worcester



About to descend Alum Pot

Our après-cave shenanigans at the Chelsea were quite hard-core. I might have developed a little bit of a reputation! My caving career at the Chelsea came to abrupt end when, as a complete numpty novice, I got bored in Agen All-wedd and decided to make a sculpture of a large penis and testicles in what was (I didn't realise) a pristine mud bank. A phone call from Clive Westlake followed, informing me that I was being chucked out of the Chelsea for defacing something that was probably thousands of years old. I had no idea what I was doing! Prat!

On the strength of this, the Cavers of Worcester suggested that there might be a club on Mendip that we would fit in well with. One misty November night I drove carefully up the Old Wells Road to a strange and wonderful place called Hunter's Lodge Inn. The minute I walked through the door I knew I was home! I was so excited to be there that I decided to eat the contents of an ashtray to show off. This was closely observed by a Tony Jarratt (Jrat) and Mark Lumley (Gonzo). Tony proposed me on the spot and Gonzo seconded me. The rest my dears its history!



Jrat 1987



Me and Jingles GB 1987

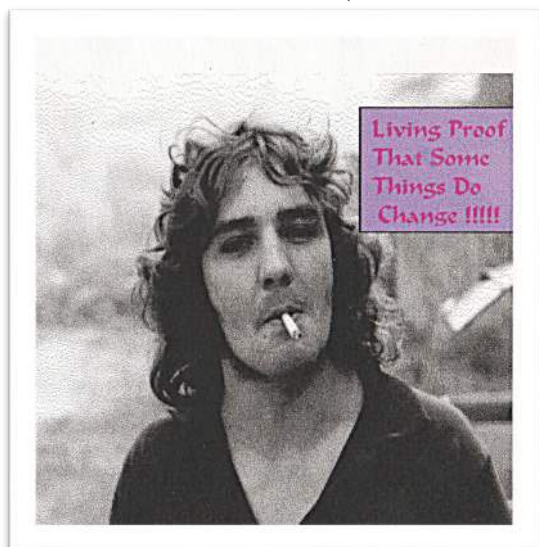


Belfry 1987

I can honestly say that I think the BEC saved my life at that point in time by giving me a focus for my excessive energy and insanity and providing me with a safe space where, for once, I could party hard to my heart's content with people who were like me and didn't judge (may it NEVER change).

Caving in Wales, Derbyshire, Ireland and Yorkshire followed and I was very happy to be part of this wonderful community (dysfunctional though it is!).

On Sunday 17th July 1988 at lunchtime, after a few pints of scrumpy at Hunters, we decided to go down Swildon's - not a great idea, as I was somewhat inebriated. Anyway, we were nearly at sump one, when I stood on a rock and my ankle went over. I heard something like a gunshot going off in my ankle. "Bollocks! I think I've broken it". My brother and friend (Mint Tulip) stayed with me to keep me warm and another mate, Stuart Lain, went out to call cave rescue. I was mortified! I got pretty cold, pretty quickly and the next thing I knew was the sound of a caver arriving. It was Gonzo who very kindly slipped a Temgesic under my tongue and the world soon started to become a better place. The next thing I was aware of was a gentle voice explaining my options for getting out of the cave. I was massively impressed by his bedside manner (being a nurse myself) and so I turned and looked into the eyes of a Wessex member called Jeff (I still maintain that, in my defence, I was under the influence of opiates at the time!!).



After that, my caving exploits really took off and I have caved with Jeff in the PSM, Casteret's Ice Cave, Mammoth Cave, Carlsbad Caverns and Krizna Jama to name some of the more memorable trips but that is another story!

We've all got one to tell, so what's yours?

P.S. What strikes me about both Jeff's and my story is the fact that for both of us, it was a book that led us down this road. Thanks for books, thanks for the library, thanks for the BEC!



Belfry 1987 Steve Milner on left



Caving with Young Henry, Dickfred, Gary Trainer and Brian Lupin



Images from Bab's Price's Collection



29th birthday 1989 in the Belfry



29th birthday 1989 in the Belfry



29th birthday 1989 in the Belfry



29th birthday 1989 in the Belfry



Xmas day, Belfry 1979 from left: Trevor Hughes, John Dukes, Tony Jarratt, Mike 'Quackers' Duck, Jenny Sandecott, Garth Dell

THE GENTILE CAVERS GUIDE TO HOLIDAY CAVING IN PARTS OF JAMAICA AND CUBA

By Nigel Taylor

Often, as we cavers get older, the thoughts of far off Islands, sun drenched beaches, warm water diving, and copious with plentiful alcohol see us fly off to various holiday destinations around the planet.

Like as not at my tender age, I no longer take any caving equipment and rely upon the ‘make do’ attitude that befits an Englishman abroad! Over the last few years, I have succeeded in dragging my poor unfortunate wife into various forms of Karst, in a typical tourist manner.

A few years ago, we thought that Cuba might fit the bill, and packing my plus fours, machete’s and jungle boots, we duly departed for Havana, courtesy of Virgin Atlantic Airlines, Queen of the Skies, Boeing 747 Jumbo.

A brisk trot around this charming but slightly decaying capital, made us decide to climb aboard a local tourist bus and head for the Vinales Region, which lies to the west in Cuba. We soon came to proper Karst Country, amidst thousands of acres of grasses, tobacco plantations and undulating countryside, .

Delighted that the only expedition equipment we would require was a hand-torch and mosquito repellent we duly arrived at a rather quaint show-cave called “Cueva del Indio” , which, as we all are used to hearing, “ disappeared



underground into the mountains for several miles”, and emerged in a crystal clear river, where we would return to our start point in wooden dinghies.

Well, not exactly! After a pleasant stroll along a cave passage, past a quantity of flowstone and well worn stal, we did indeed arrive at the shoreline, hopped into a dingy and were paddled back to our start-point. So we did get sort of underground!!

We spent a couple of hours wandering around the Karst area, our travels punctuated by stops to sample supplies of the Amber Nectar supplementing roast pig and hunks of bread, plantain and green beans.

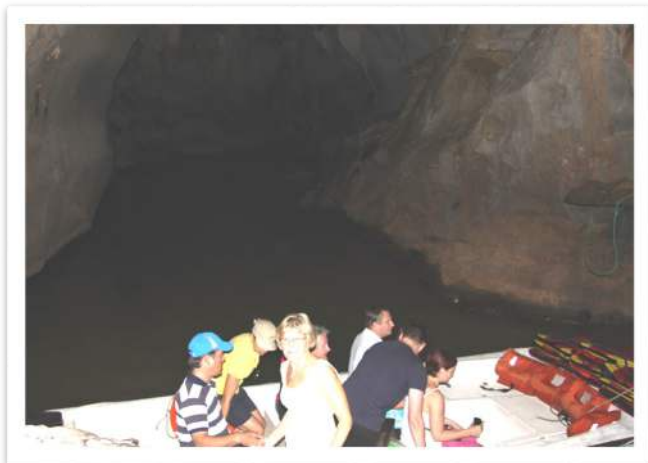
The liberalisation of the island is now opening it up to the mass tourist market, and the North Americans are eager to bring their influence, and it follows, the ubiquitous Big Macs, to this rather long and sultry island at the head of the Caribbean.



There is no doubt that the whole region has great evidence of cave formation and open passage can often be seen high up on sheer rock faces. Should BEC members intend to look at Cuba, this is certainly a region that would merit the less timid and adventurous traveller!

Cubans are naturally friendly and welcoming, though one has to be cautious about discussing anything that might have the slightest 'political' interest. We often found that our guides would look furtively around them, so there does appear to be a slight undercurrent of caution in this regard, as the state still appears to hold sway on this gem of an island. There must be plenty of literature about Cuban caves, though I have found it difficult to locate a hard copy.





PART TWO: THE GENTILE CAVERS GUIDE **TO HOLIDAY CAVING IN JAMAICA**

Chastened by expeditions to our finest far flung locations, we returned to our favourite Caribbean island, that being Jamaica.

On one of our visits, being armed with Alan G. Fincham et al. and that excellent work “Jamaica Underground”, we decided to hire a car and drive off-piste inland onto the fringes of “Cockpit Country” - thousands of verdant doline covered acres of limestone. Whilst not our British Carboniferous limestone, limestone it still is, and the whole area resembled a mad egg-box landscape, where the hollows fall away several hundred feet below you, and the natives each know, ‘that massive cave system that goes underground, with further vast lakes, and resurges sixty or so mile away towards the south coast’ !.

Resurge it certainly must as the tropical rainfall in this area helps the growth of some superb vegetation; palms, and floral displays assault the eye at every turn.





So armed with our camping stools, pots of Gentlemens Relish, gin & tonic and ice (personally never touch the stuff) and Busker Brown tropical wear, we drove westwards from Runaway Bay on the coast, up into the foothills of Trelawny County, to the plantation known as Windsor Estate, which lies at an altitude of only 115 metres, though the drive there seemed much higher than my imperial conversion of it lying at 379.5 feet (Note the point 5 of a foot !).

On our arrival, an amiable Rasta man complete with the biggest ganja spliff I have ever seen, in his mouth, and a machete in his right hand presumably to ward off the ever present mosquitos, emerged from nowhere and announced himself as our Chief (and only Cave guide).

We were then treated as if I was Dr. Livingstone, and welcomed to the 'Bush'. An informal introduction outside of his hut – entitled 'The Cave Man', and we were good to go!

Our valiant sherpa, armed himself with several wrapped up dried banana or plantain leaves and off we walked for about a third of a mile (that's whatever in those kilometre thingies). alongside a deep gulley which seemed home to every expatriate angry mosquito in Jamaica.

Soon we arrived at the **Windsor Great Cave** (Grid 07-1814-1886). This cave is recorded in Jamaica Underground on page 378 as being 20m deep, yet 2,980 metres in length and is described as a 'complex cave'.

Our trusty chap then lit up his bundle of leaves, and bade us follow underground, with the comforting words that 'we will go until it half burns out, then we go out '!

Inside the entrance, we saw several cave swallows (*Petrochelidon fulva*) around the entrance series, and my heart goes out to these little fellows as they predate upon mosquitos (one up for them!). Whilst we did not encounter them, we were warned that *Rattus rattus* – ships rats—scurried around the place. My good friend Donald McFarlane from the New World Academic Institutions, writes an interesting piece on Jamaican Cave Vertebrates, on pages 57-59. Jamaica Underground.



Several large chambers were explored, with many stalactites and stalagmites seen, including the excitingly named 'Brer Rabbit'. All too soon, the guttering of our guide's torch and his mutterings about 'going now', forced us back to the surface and the resplendent Tower Karst scenery.

Windsor Great Cave is more than just an idle curiosity, serious explorers may well find original passage were they mindful to visit, and a good survey can be found on pages 379 & 380. The book carries a cautionary note that parts of the cave flood, both quickly and severely to the roof, and with the sudden onset of the rains that occur in this island paradise, extreme caution is the order of the day !.

We drove homewards to our hotel, and within half a mile of the estate, stopped to pick up a young hitch-hiking American, who though somewhat high on Ganja, offered to sell his nearby 'hut', which by BEC Standards, was **not** the Belfry, but rather an assortment of palm leaves, wriggly tin and pallet wood with thirty thousand four inch nails clinging to the structure in unison. He said that it would make a good forward base for cavers !!! Personally, I hope the narcotics have worn off now!.

I brought back ten copies of *Jamaica Underground*, most of which went to Tony at Bat Products, but we placed a copy in the BEC Library. It is a glorious island, with limestone potential to the extreme, with fresh good food, bottled Guinness and Red Stripe beer, friendly Jamaicans and reasonable track-like travel across this superb and verdant island.

If I have pricked anyone's interest, speak with me or Martin Grass, Renown Honorary Jamaican and good friend.

This short contribution dates from 1957 but the same technique is still applicable today.—Ed

Why I'm Glad I'm Thin *by R.S. "Kangy" King*

As the traffic in St. Cuthbert's Swallet thickens, the likelihood of someone of portly dimensions, sticking in the entrance pitch increases.

Not to worry. The following method of extraction was used at Whitsun.

1. First wedge your victim.
2. Fasten a lifeline under their armpits. This pitch is usually climbed without a lifeline because it is tight but in a case of exhaustion it is probably of help to safeguard the reluctant cork. Climbing to the victim should be done, using the ladder as little as possible as possible to avoid overloading it. While the line is being tied, advantage can be taken of one's proximity to the cork to mutter encouraging words, such as Beer of Percentage Proof. (Though these were found to engender frustration).
3. The ladder can then be drawn up with the victim on it.

We were amazed how easy it was. Two could just manage to raise the ladder while three hauling brought it up like a lift.

The ideal number at the top of the pitch is four, one manipulating the lifeline and three hauling the ladder.

Someone in a fainting condition was extracted in this way while morale was boosted by shouting about the seventeen stone bloke wot we pulled out last Micklemas.

The method could be extended to rescuing unconscious victims by tying them to the ladder; in this case guides in the pitch would probably be necessary. This we haven't tried.



The entrance rift with the ladder in situ. Jim Durston is climbing the rift unaided.

China 2018 by *Laura Benn*

Nick, MadPhil Paul and me all found ourselves together at Chengdu airport on the 19th of December, ready for a BEC Christmas expedition! We were put up by Phil for the first couple of days whilst we made the appropriate travel arrangements and snack shopping (read – ‘all of the Snicker bars we could carry’), before setting off to the village of Tongzi Zhen and the Hong Mei Gui caving club hut via Wulong.

After sorting out authorisation with the Wulong government, we moved on to Tongzi. After a few more meetings with the local police and registering in the area we were now able to go caving. Our main objective for the first part of the expedition was exploring nearby Yam Ze Dong (Swallow Cave). Discovered in December 2017, the cave had been left at a length of 584m and a depth of 275m. This cave, besides blowing an absolute gale, was situated in an ideal location to break into the large system of San Wang Dong in the neighbouring valley. It was also seen as a much friendlier alternative to the formidable system “127”, something that sounded very much like an East Kingsdale – Dachstein hybrid and had been killed off on the same 2017 expedition.

We made our first trip underground on the 23rd, rigging the entrance pitches and taping an impressive collection of bones found at the bottom of the first pitch. The two most interesting leads in this system involved continuing down the formidable Honey Monster pitch (150m), or an airy traverse over the top to an ongoing high level passage. Phil did a great job at bolting the traverse on less than inspiring mudstone and calcite, allowing us to find ongoing passage over delicate popcorn formations and further animal bones.



Phil outside Yan Ze Dong



Nick crossing the Top Mudrock Traverse in Yan Ze Dong

The next few trips to the system had the team divided between continuing to explore this high level passage and entrance series side passages, and pushing the cave deeper at the bottom of “Honey Monster”. Due to the close horizontal proximity of the system to Queen of the Nile in San Wang Dong, we expected to drop into this at any point – remarkably, the cave continued to bore down past this point, heading towards the water table. We left this system at the low point of 453m and a new length of 1553m, stopping at the top of a large pit with the sound of water below and situated 50m above the lowest point of San Wang Dong,

The route above the pitch continued in comparatively smaller passage, with a few small pitches in muddy passage. The wind coming through a constriction at the first pitch head was phenomenal, suggesting that much bigger cave was to come. A small streamway was met as the cave enlarged to spacious walking passage, eventually terminating



Nick on the far side of the Mudrock Traverse in Yan Ze Dong



Laura & Nick in Yan Ze Dong

at a large dark expanse. We suspected this was a parallel shaft rivalling Honey Monster after numerous rocks were thrown over. However due to time and a fractured mudstone pitch head we were unable to drop this pitch – this time!

As well as the trips into this system, prospecting was conducted in the surrounding valleys. This was in part due to some unusually cold and snowy weather for the time of year, straining transport capabilities and requiring more exploration on foot. Despite the weather being against us, some blowing entrances were found and noted for future exploration.



Group Shot outside the San Wang Dong gate



Entrance of San Wang Dong

After the arrival of Mark, coming in from Hong Kong, we prepared for 3 nights at “Tomb Sweeper” camp in San Wang Dong, with the main objective of furthering the bolt climbing projects at the far end of “Topdog”. (*San Wang Dong is a cave in the Wulong Karst formation region, located within Wulong County of Chongqing Municipality in China. The current known combined length of its passages is 67,825 metres. – Ed*) MadPhil, Mark and I headed up on the second day of camp, a reasonably long trip from camp in exceptionally dry passage. So dry in fact that mummified bats could be found in various locations. Due to the cold weather outside, the draught had shifted from the final chamber and was instead heading up into two 30m aven. Phil proceeded to bolt climb up into one of the avens, but unfortunately this ended in dry mud chokes after 120m of well-decorated fossil passage.

Paul and Nick planned to push “Not my Fault” on the same day; however they were pushed back due to snow melt making progress impossible. A previously dry pitch had become an additional waterfall.

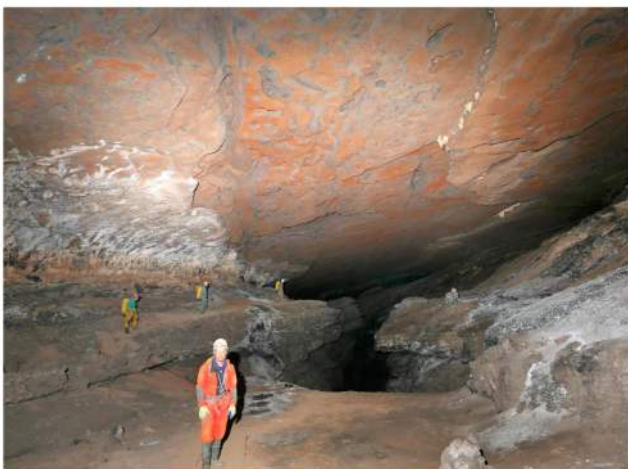
The next day was spent finishing up some leads nearer camp. A tight draughting dig, previously pushed in 2015, was revisited by Phil and Nick, before I was drafted in to help survey and continue through a tight rift with Phil. This opened after 15m into a low 150m crawl with a few constrictions to keep us honest. This opened up further into a system of small connected chambers with a pitch down into walking-sized streamway. Unfortunately we had run out of time to drop the pitch, but this was an exciting find due to the proximity of this passage to Yam Ze Dong and was named “Not for Fatties”. After uploading the survey data, we found another surprise – this was unlikely to lead into Yam Ze Dong, but is instead an unknown stream in the system. So, equally exciting!



Mark in Valley of the Kings - San Wang Dong



Paul Fairman in Camp San Wang Dong



Heading out of San Wang Dong

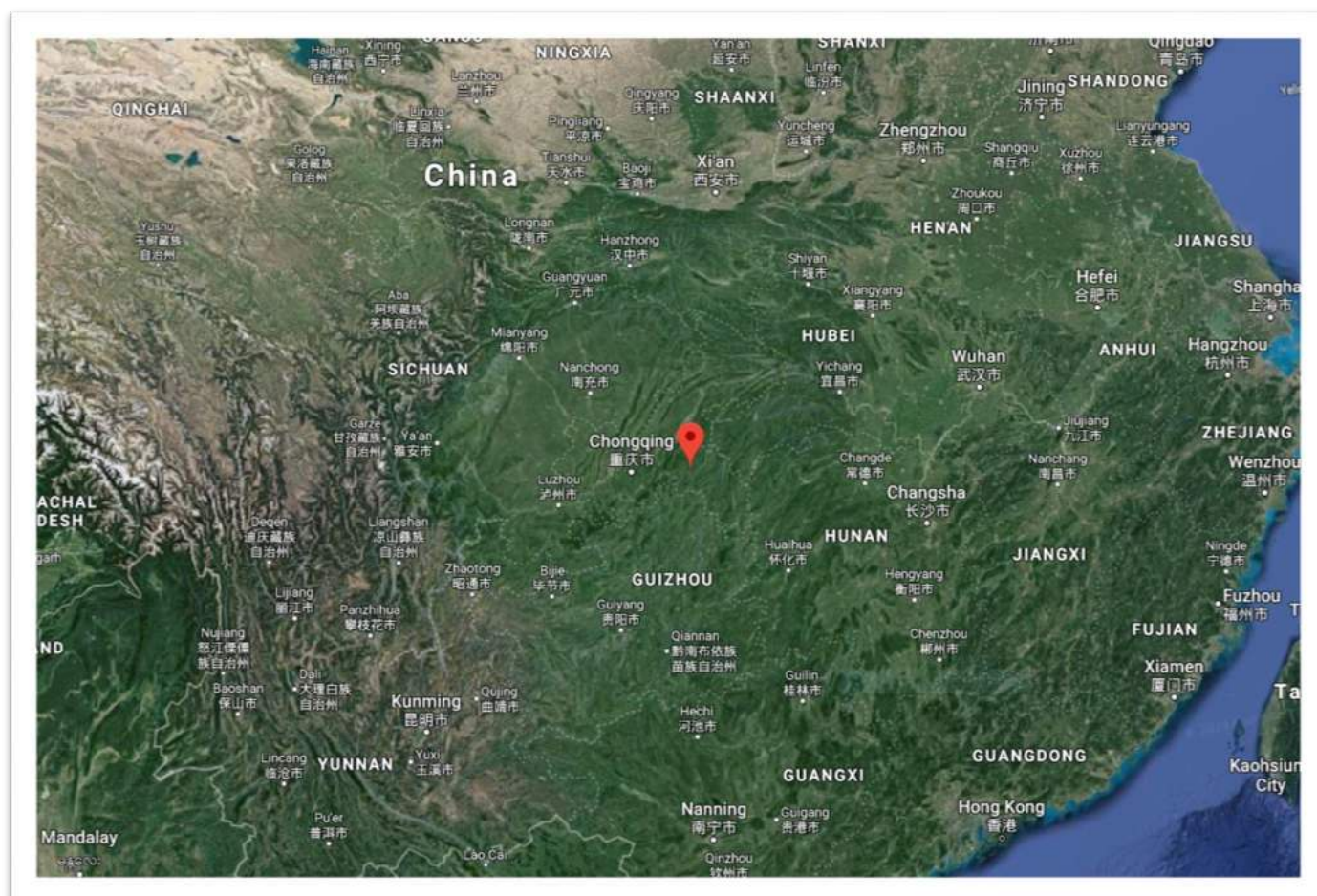


Exiting San Wang Dong

After clearing up camp, we headed back to the surface the following day. A few days of clear up and some de-rigging later and we were heading back towards Chengdu to fly home. Other memorable parts of the expedition included Christmas Day with the cowboy-style replacement of the hut electrics, delicious (spicy!) food and a few nights on fruit infused baijiu. *(I checked Wikipedia on this last substance and find it is a liquor made usually from fermented sorghum and is the best selling spirit in the entire world.—Ed.)*

A total of 1.3km of new passage was surveyed, with a lot of new exciting leads to go back to. Many thanks to Phil for his immense help in logistics, translation and cave navigation (aka everything important) and to the Wulong officials who continue to support expeditions to the region. With so much potential in an accessible region, we hope that BEC expeditions to Wulong County will continue in the future. If anyone is interested in joining us in the future, please get in contact with MadPhil or myself.

(The photographs were supplied by Paul Fairman. Below is a Google Map that shows whereabouts in China the caves are! The marker is on San Wang Dong—Ed.)



ASS Trip to Castleguard Cave

January 25th-27th, 2019 by Laura Benn

On the 16th of January, fresh off the plane from the UK, I made the fortunate decision to join the Alberta Speleological Society for one of their evening socials in the Civic Tavern. Despite this trip to Canada being a "break" from caving after several overseas expeditions, I quickly decided that there was no way this was an achievable goal and that I should get involved as early as possible.

After a very warm welcome, discussion quickly moved to an upcoming trip to Castleguard Cave, with the aim of collecting data from two cameras installed outside the entrance and in the ice crawls in December

2017. The aim of the installation was to monitor the resurgence activity of the cave over the course of a year and the effect this would have on the depth of the ice crawls. This would hopefully allow for subsequent prediction of what conditions are most likely to cause the ice crawls to plug the cave, helping in future exploration and save heartbreak at the entrance after a long and laden approach. The plan for this trip was to spend one day approaching the cave, collect data and take photos the second day, and slog out on the third.

I'd heard about the cave from Gareth Davies, a fellow UK caver. Castleguard was described as a spectacular experience and a highlight of his time in Canada, putting it firmly on my radar. As a result, the prospect of joining the ASS for a trip to the cave was extremely enticing; after some encouraging words from the club members and the courage of another pint, I signed up to join them.

Fast forward to 8am on the 25th of January when we were parked up at the Big Bend and almost ready to go. The team consisted of 8 people: myself, Katie Graham, Christian Stenner, Jason Lavigne, Greg Horne, Louise Horne, Will JR Smith, and Tammera Kostya. It was the first time visiting the cave for Will and I. Being decidedly less accustomed to the winter wilderness of Canada, I was the more nervous of the two. After kitting ourselves up, we began the long ski/snowshoe over the Saskatchewan glacier and towards the mouth of the cave. Due to an unfortunate running injury from the weekend prior, Tamara decided to turn back rather than risk further discomfort on the 22km approach. Conditions were spectacular on the walk in; the beauty of the Icefields Parkway accentuated by the blue-sky day. We were up and over the moraine in what felt like no time - this walk in wasn't as bad as expected!

I was very much incorrect. Energy levels dropped through the monotony of "the meadows", a seemingly endless boring expanse made even less interesting by the flat evening light. Upon reaching the trees and almost at our goal, some difficulty in finding the entrance itself resulted in an extended and entertaining game of backcountry "Marco Polo" before Jason's GPS revealed the way on. The camp was set up 10 hours after leaving the cars at the Big Bend; after a well-deserved dinner we settled down to bed, our sleep only mildly broken by the sound of curious pack rats.



Kate skiing through Castleguard Meadows

Greg and Louise arrived at the entrance the next morning after deciding to take a break for the night before the drop into the meadows. Louise opted to stay at the entrance to look after camp, whilst Christian and Greg went to collect the data from the cameras as intended. They were happy to discover that both cameras were still working when we arrived, 13 months after installation. Four resurgence flood events had been recorded: June 25th, July 18th - 20th, July 31st - Aug 3rd, and Aug 7th - 13th. Between flood events, the passage by the in-cave camera usually completely emptied of water, contrary to the belief that it would remain flooded. The inside cave temperature and RH data logger were reported to be working fine, however the outside logger on the tree

of the barrel cache failed completely. Crude temperature readings will be obtained from the cameras, which will then be compared to the roadside weather station data.



Flood event August 2018 captured by the installed camera



Greg Horne removing the camera from its housing



Nearing the camera location



Same location with ice to ceiling 2012

Starting from ruler install date of Dec 18th to 28th, 2017, the ice built to 20cm, then stabilized at 30cm by January 8th, 2018. The max height crested between April 27th to May 2nd at 40 cm. At 40 cm ice height, the cave would maybe have been blocked or very tight passable. During our trip this January, the ruler height was 31 cm and we could fit through the restriction just entrance side of the camera. As the conditions during the past deployment might have not been a blockage year, the need to do multiple years of monitoring was highlighted.



Christian reassembling the camera housing



Camera reassembled

The rest of the team (Will, Katie, Jason and I) headed to the Subway to help Jason take some photos of the iconic passage. The ice crawls and waist-deep pools, whilst briefly unpleasant, were a unique experience and my first (if not brief) experience of caving in a dry suit. We quickly descended the 20m pitch leading to The Subway, with a little exploration into the fissures before setting up for photos and heading back. The Subway itself is an impressive phreatic solution conduit of reasonable length and a definite highlight of the trip itself. After 7 hours in the cave, we arrived back at camp to another surprisingly comfortable night at the cave entrance.

The next day we packed up camp back into the cache and began the long descent back to the cars. The weather was less kind on our return - as party members descended the glacier, a white out caused a much slower return than expected, turning the Icefield Parkways into a dreary landscape far removed from that of the walk in. The last of the group arrived back at the car 9.5 hours after departing the cave to a pleasant welcome from Tammera, hot chocolate and baked goods. Finally taking off my snowshoes, I vowed to learn to ski before returning back.



Happy team back at Big Bend



The Subway team, Laura Benn, Katie Graham, Jason Lavigne, Will Smith

It was an incredible experience to get to visit Canada's longest cave, with promising results for future monitoring of the flood cycle of Castleguard. Many thanks to the ASS members who invited me, supplied me with gear and generally provided excellent company. Photographs by Christian Stenner, Greg Horne and Tammera Kostya.

BEC Summer Barbeque August 3rd 2019



Bristol Exploration Club

84th Annual Dinner

Cameley Lodge Hotel & Restaurant, Cameley, Temple Cloud, Bristol, Somerset, BS39
5AH

Saturday 5th October 2019, 7:00pm for 7:30pm

Featuring a guest speaker and annual club awards.

Dear Belfryite,

The 84rd Annual Dinner will be taking place at Cameley Lodge (www.cameleylodge.co.uk) on Saturday 5th October. A private bar will be serving real ales and all the usual bar delights.

Meal tickets are on a strictly first come first served basis and will cost £25 per head.

A coach will leave the Belfry at 18:30 pm (calling at the Hunters Lodge Inn on route) and leaving to return to the Belfry/Hunters around 11.30pm. A return coach ticket will cost £5 per person. Places on the coach will be reserved upon booking/payment and are limited to coach size and usually sell out early.

As always expect a ‘donations’ barrel at the Belfry for the AGM and after the dinner.

Please be aware that the throwing of food or cutlery at the dinner venue will not be tolerated and also it is illegal to bring your own drinks into a licensed premises.

For those wanting to stay there is on site accommodation this year at Cameley Lodge – please see their website for booking information - www.cameleylodge.co.uk

Payment Options

Payment Options
You can pay either by BACS transfer into the BEC dinner account or by cheque.

If paying by cheque please complete the booking form below and along with a cheque made payable to 'Bristol Exploration Club' post/by hand to Estelle Sandford, Staddlestones, Litton, Somerset, BA3 4PL. **Do not post to or leave at the Belfry or Hunters.**

If paying by BACS please ensure you **reference the payment with your surname** otherwise it is impossible for us to tell who has paid and then email your menu choices to dinner@bec-cave.org.uk

BACS details are:- **Account Number: 26114868**
Sort Code: 30-99-29

Upon receipt of your booking form / menu choices / coach and payment, your place will be reserved and you will be notified by email (preferred) or telephone.

Yours sincerely,

Estelle Sandford

BEC Treasurer

Menu Choices Are:

To Start

- (A) Mushrooms in the European Style (vodka, cream, garlic.)
- (B) Oak Smoked Salmon & Prawn Parcels
- (C) Medley of Tropical Fruit laced with Elderflower
- (D) Homemade Potato, Leek and Chive Soup with Herb Croutons

Main Course

- (E) Roast Leg of Lamb with Redcurrant & Mint Gravy
- (F) Breast of Chicken with a Chorizo and Tomato Glaze
- (G) Fillet of Salmon with a White Wine and Grape Cream
- (H) Vegetarian Hotpot with Chickpeas

All Above Served with a selection of Fresh Vegetables

To Finish

- (I) Mixed Berry Cream Eton Mess
- (J) Fresh Fruit Salad
- (K) Homemade Profiteroles with warmed Chocolate Sauce
- (L) Hot Bananas cooked with Dark Rum & Brown Sugar
- (M) Cheese Platter with Fresh Fruit and Biscuits

Freshly Brewed Coffee or Selection of Teas & Mints

Allergen advice – Please specify any allergies or food intolerances on the booking form and return with your order

Booking form

Name of person making booking	
Email address/contact number	
Total number of dinner places	
Total number of bus places	
Total value of cheque enclosed	
Payment by BACS or Cheque?	

	Menu Choices*													
Name	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	Coach

Mark one from each shaded box for each person for the 3 courses, plus coach if required

Allergen advice (if any)	
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Checklist

Payment of £25 meal (+£5 coach):

Signed cheque made payable to Bristol Exploration Club

or

BACS transfer completed with your surname as a reference

Account Number: 26114868

Sort Code: 30-99-29

Menu Choice:

Post to Estelle Sandford, Staddlestones, Litton, Somerset, BA3 4PL

or

Email choices to dinner@bec-cave.org.uk

