



CAMBRIDGE
UNDER
ground 2012

The journal of
Cambridge University Caving Club
and Ex-Cambridge Speleologists



▲ Serena Povia in Main Passage, Agen Allwedd, March 2008. 📷 *Mark Shinwell*
Cover: Serena and Olly Madge in Otter Hole, 2008. 📷 *Toby Speight*

Infinite thanks to authors, photographers, illustrators, reviewers, proofreaders (particularly Tess Jones) and to all who make CUCC a great club.

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CAMBRIDGE UNDER ground 2012

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Olly Madge

Mark Shinwell

Ollie Stevens

Andy of TSG

Phil Underwood

▲ Ollie Stevens, Andrew Hacket-Pain and James Hickson in the Grotte de St Marcel, France, June 2010. 📷 Mark Shinwell

Bull Pot of the Witches
on a very wet day.
Left to right: Olly Madge,
Matthew Watson, Adrian
Horrell, Alex Crow, Serena
Povia, January 2011.
Mark Shinwell



Presitorial

April 2012, *Aiora Zabala*

The first time I went caving I spent the whole week after thinking of one sole thing: leaving my career and becoming a professional caver. Later I acknowledged that there is no such 'profession' as caving. Crazy as this tale sounds, there will be hundreds of great stories by everyone who has been in the club over the last thirteen years. Unfortunately, one journal cannot capture all these tales; hence, this one just has the humble and paradoxically ambitious objective of giving a rough overview of what has happened in CUCC this millennium.

You may already know, or otherwise it is time for you to know: this piece in your hands is the first Cambridge Underground in thirteen years. Why now? For the superstitious, 13 and 2012 sound like good numbers; for the pragmatic, thirteen years of caving will become progressively fuzzier and eventually almost forgotten without this *aide de memoire*.

Despite having been in the club only very briefly, I think it is accurate to say that the club has undergone major changes in the last decade. Caving has become brighter and lighter; surveying and photography have definitely gone digital; as overseas travel has become easier so have international caving expeditions. Some things however remained as they were (Why change what is already fine?): the awesome feeling of playing as a team; the caving chats on the table with a drink or two; the unique caving games; and the apparently messy, yet surprisingly emergent organisation. Above all, something that will certainly remain for years to come is the feeling that dark, unknown places attract cavers like black holes attract matter.

We cannot predict when the next journal will happen. All we know is that it will happen. No matter if it is in 2013, 2024 or maybe in 2584 when future archaeologists conclude that the devices that we lost in caves during our trips were objects of religious worship. In the meantime, Enjoy this one!

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Club members and Committee officers in recent years

Key:
 ■ insured in CUCC
 ■ other insurance
 * honorary member
 PR president
 SC secretary
 JT junior treasurer
 ST senior treasurer
 TK tackle master
 SO social secretary
 TR training officer
 ME meets officer
 LB librarian
 LM lamp post
 WB web officer

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Wafa Abutaleb									■
Laurence Aitchison				■	■ TR	■ TR	■		
Josephine Anrep		■	■						
Bryony Baines						■	■		
Tim Baker						■	■		
Lawrence Baker								■	
Rupert Bateson	■								
Sam Bayliss						■			
Stuart Bennett	■	■	■	■	■			* TR	* JT TR
John Bennett		TK	TK						
John Billings				SC	■ SC WB	■ WB	■ WB		
Steve Bishop	■	■	■						
Jennifer Brown				■	■				
Peter Buchlovsky				■	■				
Jonas Bystrom			■						
Jessica Chatwin									■
Peter Clifton	■ LM	■ LM	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Tom Cowton				■	■				
Rowena Crawford			■	■	■				
Kevin Crooks									■
Alex Crow								■ TK	■
Aaron Curtis		■	■ TK	■ PR	■				
Edvin Deadman			■	■	■ ME LM	■	■	■	■
Kim Deadman							■		
Bela Dimova				■	■	■		SO	■ SC
Mikaela Ediger							■	■	
Philip Endecott	■	■	■						
Anya Ermakova								■	■
Anna Franz				■	■				
Lucy Freem			■	■ ME	■				
Joe Galvin							■	■	
Benjamin Gibson					■	■ TK	■ JT		
Nimrod Gileadi							■	■	■
Lucas Goehring					■	■	■		
Jude Gomila	■								
Martin Green	■ TR	■	■						
Madeleine Gregory-Clarke					■	■			
Andrew Hacket-Pain			■	■	■		■	■	
Tom Handford			■ SO	■	■	■	■	■	■
Peter Harley		■	■ PR	■ TR	■	■	■	■	■
Jessica Hatchett				■	■ JT	■	■		
Cecelie Hector				■	■				
James Hickson	■ ST	■ ST	■ ST	■ ST	■ ST	■ ST	■ ST	■ ST	■ ST
Kathryn Hopkins			■	■	■ LB	■	■	■	■

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Adrian Horrell						■	■	■	■ LM
John Hunt	■	■	■						
Alex Hyatt				■	■				
Martin Jahnke				LB	TR	■ LB	■ LB TR	■	
Olaf Kahler								■	
Konstantina Karagavriilidou					■				
Adam Kessler			■	■ SO	■	■	■		
Nadia Kevlin				■	■				
Ramana Kumar									■
Jessica Lam			■	■	■				
Rebecca Lawson							□		
Jooyoung Lee							■	■	
David Loeffler	■ JT	■	■	■		■	■	■	■
Thomas Logan					■	■ SC	■ SC WB	■	
Siobhan McGowan									■
Oliver Madge	■ SC	■	■	■ TR	■	■	■	■ WB	■
Sophie May		■	■						
Earl Merson	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
David Molnar						■	■	■ JT	★ LB
Yves Moussallam									■
Chantalle Mouwer		■	■						
Krista Mumdzjana								SC	■
Richard Mundy			■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Vinay Neogi						■	■		
Elaine Oliver								■	
Nial Peters	■ PR	■ PR	■ TR	■	■	■	■	■ SO	■
Gareth Phillips						□	□	■	■
Serena Povia		■	■	■ JT	■	■ ME	■ ME	■	■
Simon Redhead	■	■	■	■	□				
Tony Rooke	■ TR	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Vittorio Scardaci		■	■						
Cornelia Schoene						■	■		
Richard Shaw	■								
Mark Shinwell	■ ME	■ TR	■ JT	■	□	□	□	■	□
Jeff Snyder	■								
Toby Speight		■	■	■	□	□			
Oliver Stevens			■	■ TK	■ PR	■ JT	■ TK	■	□
Jessica Stirrups				■	■ SC	■ PR	■ PR	■ LB	■
Daniel Storisteanu									■
Mike Tanner	■	■	■						
Xian Jie Tay									■ TK
Letty Ten Harkel	■	■	■						
Julian Todd							□		
Vasilios Tsiopanas					■				
Frank Tully						□	□		
Hang Tung Chow	■								
Oliver Van Acker	■								
Djuka Veldhuis	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■
Rachel Villnow				■	■				
Matthew Wallen				■	■ TK	■			
Matthew Watson							■	■ ME	■ ME
Sarah White		■ SC	■ ME	■	■	■	■		
Emma Wilson		■ JT	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Aiora Zabala								■ PR	■ PR
Franklin Zhong Lei	■								
Wookey	■	□ LB	□	□	□	□ LM	□ LM	□ LM WB	□ WB
TOTAL	26	29	41	44	50	42	48	36	37

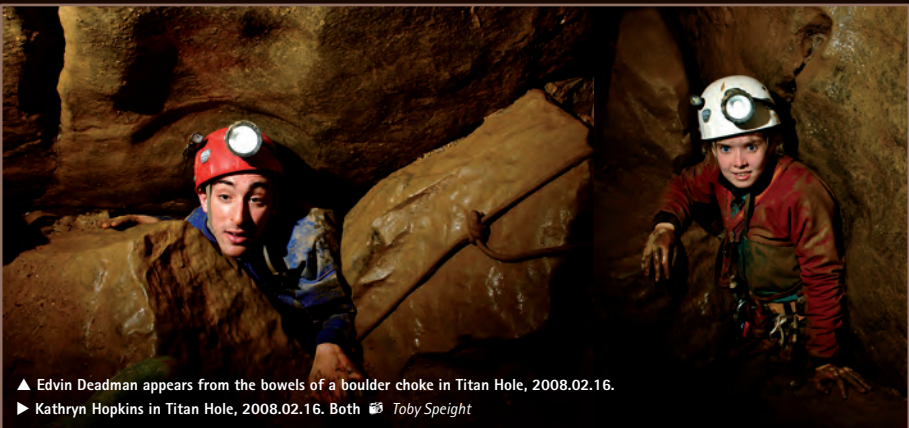
Photobook



Jess Stirrups on the wet tension-traverse in Peak Cavern, 2009.04.11. 📷 *Toby Speight*



▲ Bela Dimova, 2008.02.16.
◀ Jess Stirrups, 2009.04.11.
Both in Titan 📷 *Toby Speight*



▲ Edvin Deadman appears from the bowels of a boulder choke in Titan Hole, 2008.02.16.
▶ Kathryn Hopkins in Titan Hole, 2008.02.16. Both 📷 *Toby Speight*



▲ Manor Farm Swallet. Left to right: Frank Tully, Jess Hatchett, Ollie Stevens, October 2008. 📷 Mark Shinwell



▲ Serena Povia emerging from underground in Otter Hole, 2008.08.23.

◀ Mikaela Ediger in a rift traverse from Wretched Rabbit to Pool Sink, 2010.11.27.

Both 📷 Toby Speight



At Lowe's Chain, OFD I. John Heathcote and Doug Florence, January 2009. 📷 Mark Shinwell

Bela cleaning off after P8, Peak District,
2009.04.12. 📷 Toby Speight



Wretched Rabbit to Pool Sink, where the two groups met, 2010.11.27. Left to right, top to bottom: Kathryn Hopkins, Sytske Besemer, E M Condrill, Toby Speight, Wouter van der Linden, Vanesa Loo, Bryn Dickinson, Adrian Horrell, Olly Madge, Anya Ermakova, Aiora Zabala, Mikaela Ediger, Edvin Deadman. 📷 Toby Speight

Illustrations



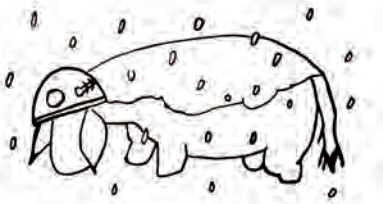
CUCC expo 09

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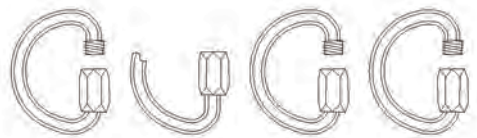
- Welcome to the underworld, 2006. ↗ *Djuke Veldhuis*
- Danger, CUCC Expo 2009. ↗ *unknown*
- Confused noise, unknown date. ↗ *unknown*
- CUCC Expo maillons, 2009. ↗ *Ian Walker*

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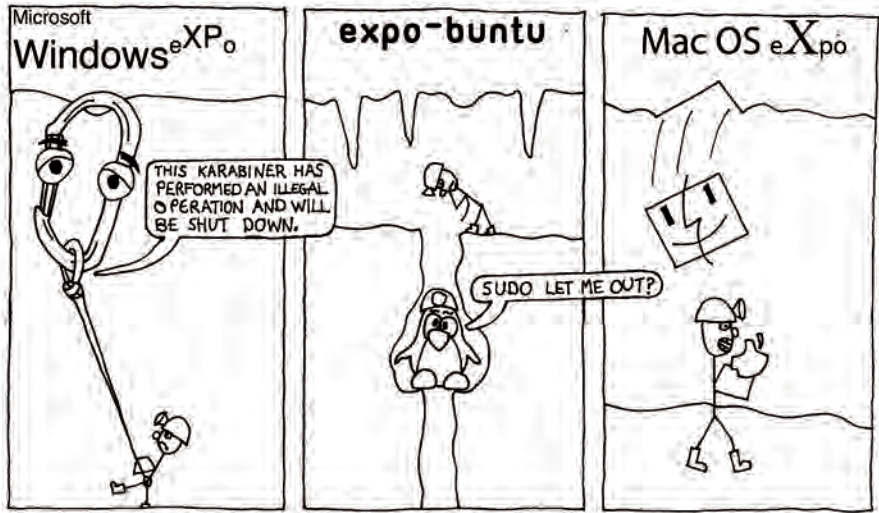
- CUCC expobuntu, 2009. ↗ *Edvin Deadman*
- Man is but a caver, 2011. ↗ *Djuke Veldhuis*



"This isn't an Expo...
it's simply a Confused Noise"



expo 09



CUCC EXPO 2009



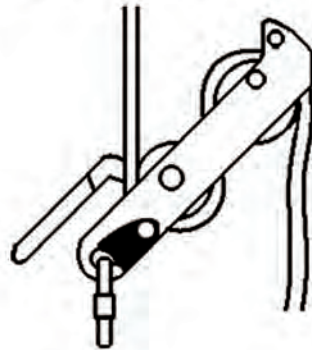


SRT: Sitting, Ranting, Taunting, unknown date. ↗ unknown

Sex and the bivy, 2008. ↗ Olly Madge



SEX AND THE BIVY



Presidents' reports: 2004–2012

2004–2005

Nial Peters

What began as a pleasant afternoon drinking beer at Expo basecamp, ended with me becoming president of CUCC. As with most disasters, it was not a single event that was the cause, instead a combination of many incidents, bad judgements and human errors were to blame. The exact details are somewhat hazy but the most likely explanation is that the consumption of alcoholic beverages led to an “I don’t mind” statement being issued. Slight intoxication meant that critical warning signs were ignored and competition over the beer tally led to a committee meeting, a drunken speech and finally an election. This was 2004, I had just finished my first year of undergraduate, been on my first Expo and now I was supposed to be in-charge of the club. I remember finding that prospect fairly daunting.

In fact, the committee that year was excellent and things ran remarkably smoothly. Our freshers intake included Emma and Sarah, the first new female members that the club had seen for a while. Despite everyone’s best efforts to be as “male” (read: creepy and weird) as possible we just couldn’t get rid of them. I’m sure that everyone who was a member of CUCC in 2004/2005 would agree that the story of the S&Em years of the club is a complex one. More to the point, it is a story that my poor literacy skills cannot do justice to, and so I won’t even try. However, what I will say is that it was the beginning of a great time in the club. The undergraduate membership increased, our female:male ratio crept inexorably towards a less embarrassing number and the club continued to expand its caving horizons. Of course the

normal level of incompetence persisted, all the usual mistakes were made and general ranting continued unabated. Special mention should probably be made of the following people:

- Rupert, who managed to get his entire set of caving gear put into the college waste compactor.
- Tony, for going caving in an Inglesport bag having forgotten his oversuit.
- Peter Clifton, for managing to acquire a 5 kg tub of industrial thermite from his father and then for having the inspiration to use it on various containers of fuel, a can of WD40 and a microwave.
- Jeff, who cartwheeled out of a top bunk in the YSS whilst projectile vomiting bright-orange scrumpy all over the room.
- Mark, for leaving his car keys at the bottom of County Pot, and not realising until we were all back at Bull Pot Farm.

The list goes on....but I won’t bore you with all the details. Stuff got burned, stuff got broken, stuff got lost and stuff got forgotten. Ask me in the pub if you want the full story.

As far as I can remember, my second year in office was much the same as the first. If you re-read the above paragraphs then you will get the idea of what happened. So, rather than repeat myself, I will end here by apologising for such a poor account of two years of CUCC’s history and by making my final confession as ex-president: Toby, it was me that poured a jug of iced water into your pants at the annual dinner. Martin just looked more guilty than me.



Tacklestore in March 2012. 📷 Aiora Zabala

2006

Pete Harley

Back as a naive first year student I fell for the oldest trick in the caving team book - volunteering for a committee position.

And so, with traditional levels of ranting, (after what I seem to remember as being one of the more controversial elections) began my exciting year as president.

I'm sure the year was filled with the appropriate levels of caving and beer drinking, although not much sticks out in my mind now, probably because I didn't do enough of the former and did too much of the latter. I do, however, remember the freshers' trip to Mendip, and a couple of keen PhD students that decided to

brave Swildon's sump one on their first trip! They both went on to go on almost every trip that year and the year after - commitment I think I could have learnt a lesson from!

The year saw just a couple of major changes for the club. I believe this year saw us move from our old tackle store on West Road to our current location on Grange Road - yet again we had Dr. Hickson to thank for helping the club in a time of need! Secondly, and most importantly, toasted sandwiches were added to the caving lunch menu!

As is traditional the year ended with a civilised annual dinner, this year held in Trinity College (with thanks, I think, to Stuart for organising). The highlight for me was watching Billings perform for us - I'm sure there's a video of this hanging around somewhere...

2007

Aaron Curtis

My presidency started with disaster. I was summoned to the office of some Gonville and Caius bigwig who in a haughty faux-apologetic tone announced that we were to be kicked out of our tiny tackle store, a dank closet in the corner of Harvey Court. Caius was erecting a new building and thus could no longer afford to give us the space. Yes... I'm still scratching my head over that one. Many of us suspected it really had something to do with our bad habit of washing ropes in the Caius bathrooms.

Djuke and I sent some fifty letters to colleges and departments and other fiefdoms begging for a few square feet. For our pains we got four or five replies, all negative. James Hickson saved the day, as he is wont to do. He found us a Pembroke-owned garage which had previously been occupied by an auto racing club. The garage was full of treasures; Tony Rooke led the effort to haul out a rusty engine, while Pete Harley and I admired the wall coverings in the attached shed: several busty pinup nudes and a full page spread poster of Adolf Hitler from a genuine 1940s fascist paper. The latter was repurposed as the Dictator of the Year Award. We all spent a weekend or two breathing lead as we stripped the flaking paint off the walls, and a couple more weekends high on paint fumes as we re-painted.

Expo was a big hit— we surveyed lots including the first trips in Tunnockschacht. The Bergmeister showed up and presented us with an award at Hilde's place. I was summarily thrown into the river for my expedition as is right and fitting.

When it came time for the annual dinner, I found a surprise waiting for me in the Robinson porter's lodge. As it was too big for my cubbyhole, the Shaft of the Year award sat on a shelf where the address taped to it was clearly

visible to all passer by. In large bold font it read "AARON CURTIS, PRESIDENT, PHALLUS APPRECIATION SOCIETY." I'd been away and most of the college must have seen it. Thanks, Dave Loeffler! I'd also like to take credit for the invention of the Stalk of the Year award which was a celery presented (if I remember correctly) to Tom Handford for his creepy Facebook habits.

Of course there are many more stories, but I can't remember if they were 2007 or not... Who could forget Adam Kessler's locust lunch, Tony caving in an Inglesport bag, or the gangsta undercarriage lights on Mark Shinwell's Subaru?

2008

Ollie Stevens

The 2008/2009 caving season, unlike the previous year's haul of abductees, didn't see a huge influx of new cavers; but instead saw the experience and keenness of our undergraduate cavers grow dramatically.

The 2008 Easter trip took a departure from the usual excursion to the Ardeche; CUCC explored the Massif Central, in the Causse Mejean area, which although lacking the blissful warmth of the Ardeche, provided us with some sporting trips and stunning formations. Memorably the first week culminated in an assault on the deepest cave in the region (~300m) by Adam Kessler, Aaron Curtis and me. As we staggered out of the hut with two tackle-sacks each, the rest of the club placed bets on how deep we would get, and what time of the morning we would return. However, all bets were called off; despite being armed with a GPS, we'd rather embarrassingly ended up in the wrong cave.

Expo 2008 was shaping up to be a fairly uneventful small expedition, but unfortunately

will be remembered for CUCC's first serious accident since the 1980's. Keith Curtis, a visiting American caver, took a long fall down the 204e (Steinbrükenhöhle) entrance pitch. The resulting rescue took many hours being complicated by the very awkward pitch-head, but was a very professional, slick operation thanks to the tireless efforts of the Austrian cave and mountain rescue teams. Keith had broken his pelvis, and fractured a vertebra, but went on to make a good recovery.

Neither the accident nor a week of heavy rain could dampen spirits however, and plenty of new discoveries were made – Tunnockshacht, fast becoming a sizeable cave, had only revealed one stratigraphic layer, and many attempts were made to find a second level. In the process 'The Thin Red Line' was dropped, a 126m deep pitch which we believed to be the deepest in CUCC's area of the plateau. 'Team Zeus', an all-female caving squad comprising of Emma Wilson, Jess Stirrups and Kathryn Hopkins discovered 'pussy prance' in Steinbrückenhöhle, an area of considerable importance as it has is located tantalisingly close to Kanichenhöhle, and still promises to connect.



Muddy Jess at Peak, 2008.02.16. 📷 Toby Speight

Edvin Deadman and Pete Harley made a valiant return to Hauchhöhle, but only managed to push it slightly deeper despite a herculean effort.

Towards the end of 2008, CUCC once again returned to Bull Pot Farm for the New Year meet of 2008/2009. A spell of very cold weather, whilst hugely increasing the seriousness of a change into caving gear on Leck Fell, kept water levels low and we enjoyed many excellent trips.

2009

Jess Stirrups

The 60th year of the club's existence... So what happened in this year? Well, it wasn't an entirely uneventful time...

We decided to have a change of scene for the Easter trip, and went back to Mallorca, which turned out to be a good decision as we had a whole week of glorious weather and some fantastic caving.

After a variety of summer term and holiday trips, which included a long weekend at SWCC and, of course, the club's 60th Anniversary dinner, Michaelmas was mostly concerned with trying to attract more freshers to the club. This year turned out to be quite poor, with things looking bleak for the next committee.

New Year was spectacularly snowy, with the few of us who made it to the Farm being marooned up there... It took us nearly a month to retrieve all our rope -we couldn't carry it all down the lane! (thanks for retrieving it Stuart!)

The annual dinner was held in Pembroke, and resulted in James being ambushed in the bar of his own college by several girls wielding tights... no-one had done anything particularly

idiotic underground, so the golden boot went unclaimed, and Gareth was given “shaft of the Year” for bolting The Usual Suspects on expo (which subsequently was the site of a very miserable several hours for Becka, Julian and Steve!).

Which brings us back round to the AGM again...

2010

Jess Stirrups

As we'd failed to attract many freshers, we were left scrabbling to find people to fill committee positions. As a result, I somehow failed to say “no” loudly enough at the requisite moment and ended up Pres once again...

This year was perhaps a little less eventful than the preceding one. There was no Easter trip, as too few people were keen to return to the Ardeche, though a number of trips were run in the summer term and early holidays, including another weekend at SWCC. Expo went ahead as usual, though quite a small select group.

Michaelmas term was swiftly upon us, with a hectic round of novice trips to Swildons and P8. Things started looking up, as we attracted a bunch of keenies, one of whom even emailed round surveys of the weekend's trips with the route we'd taken marked on them... The end of Michaelmas term turned out to be very exciting as it snowed on the CHECC weekend, and Adrian earned the “Driver of the year” award by navigating his car down a very snowy farm lane without brakes, only to end up in a ditch on the flat bit at the bottom!

New Year was once again quite snowy, though not as bad as the previous year, with a variety of trips, some of which were quite wet (the snow melted...). We had a number of good trips

in Lent term, including a very enjoyable outing to St Cuthberts in Mendip, where Olaf and David ended up attempting a very interesting roof level traverse of wire rift – unsurprisingly they were the winners of the Golden Boot...

And of course, there was the annual dinner, held this year at Newnham, with an after-party at Serena and Olly's...

2011

Aiora Zabala

I fell victim to older members of the club who convinced me, probably due to my novice naivety and keenness, to undertake presidency. I should have been more discrete and less of a happy caver. In any case, I unexpectedly found myself juggling with cross-fire of opinions about which I knew little, wondering what the club's customs were, and eventually found a disorganised chaos which came together via some last minute organization. Certainly I learnt loads.

So what's been happening? The club bought harnesses and helmets, which looked like the rest of the old gear after a few uses; Alex [Crow] our tackle master put some much needed martial order into the T-store; the wiki-website and the expo website got a new fancy look; the gear signing book was used again after a couple of years of giving it a break; Expo was very successful in attendance and hours underground (expo merits are dealt with later in this journal); Dávid [Mólnar] our heroic treasurer got a Master in Misery (due to the home-made software he used for doing not only this year's, but also last year's accounts and providing the club with an unusually elegant summary of them); the committee re-entered the digital era by meeting via VOIP; lots of newbies went caving; lots of club members helped Mark Shinwell taking cave pictures; our SocSec

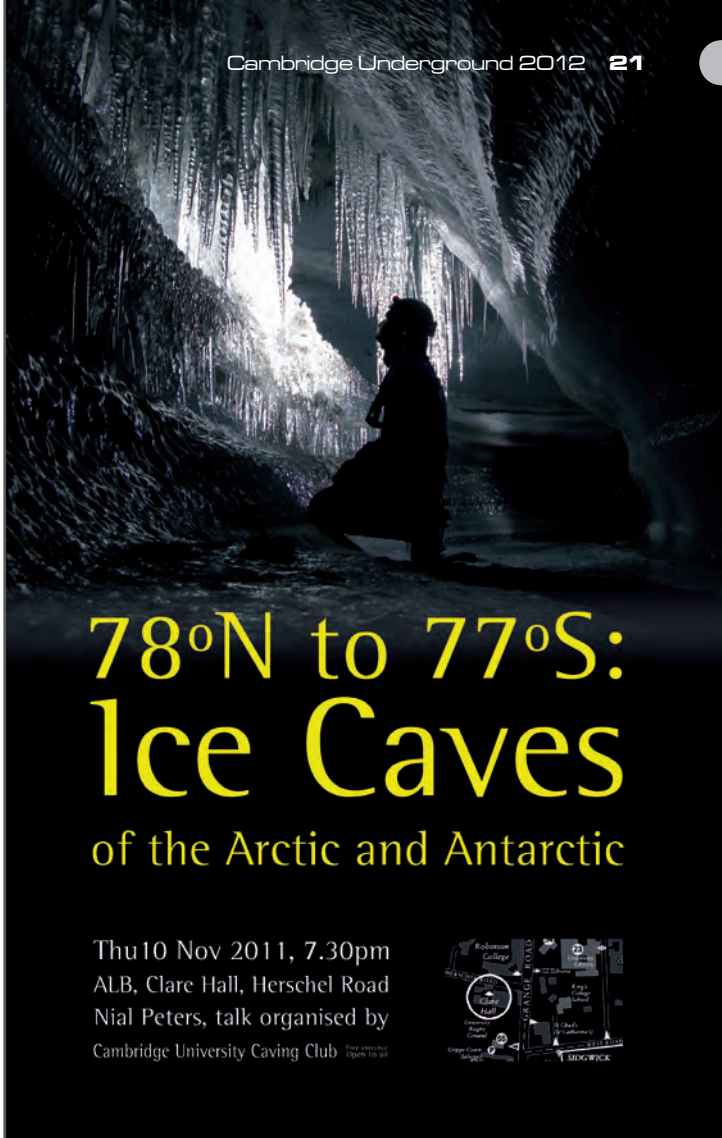


▲ Varsity curry in Cambridge, November 2011. Left to right: Ben Hudson (O), Andrew Mawer (O), Olivia Espy (C), Jess Stirrups (C), Tess Jones (C), Nial Peters (C), Mark Shinwell (C), Dagna Drzazdzewska, Bela Dimova (C), Vicky Lim (O), Alan (O), Katie Hsieh (O), Ramana Kumar (C).
▶ Two aliens dressing up for the Annual Dinner 2012, Nimrod Gileadi and Anya Ermakova.
▶ Annual Dinner 2012 at Selwyn. Emma Wilson, Ollie Stevens, Martin Green, Kevin Crooks, Kathryn Hopkins, Alex Crow, Jess Stirrups.
All 📷 Aiora Zabala

Nial Peters organised a Varsity weekend with 17 known covers from the 'other' place; a meet accounting policy was drafted; the logbook appeared and disappeared; Expo had the best Treasurer ever, Olaf, who made a one year star appearance at the club, to later be sent as a spy to 'the other place'; and remarkably, this journal was edited to entertain you.

The Annual Dinner was again, much fun and freak, with very elegant aliens and all sorts of creatures mixed with black ties. As usual there were a bunch of well deserved awards: *Golden Boots of Incompetence Underground* for two unbelievable stories of caving mis-navigation; *Driver of the Year*; *Shaft of the Year* to Becka Lawson and Holly Bradley for 'This is the way to do it' –finding the final connection between 204 & Tunnocks; *1960 Rigging Award* for an entangled tyrolean in KH; *Pier-pied* to Olly Madge for saving people from getting lost eternally in Easegill; two *Special Awards of Incontinence*; and a *Special Fashionable Cock Award*.

The longest debates within the committee this year were about cowstails, namely about how often to replace them and whether to take the training ones underground. Fun debates were also had about meet costs; bolting and most crucially, about which pub to choose every week. The latter was especially heated. Surprisingly, the fact that 200 m of newly bought rope was labelled as 'missing' did not raise much debate. I suspect that this was because the actors in this



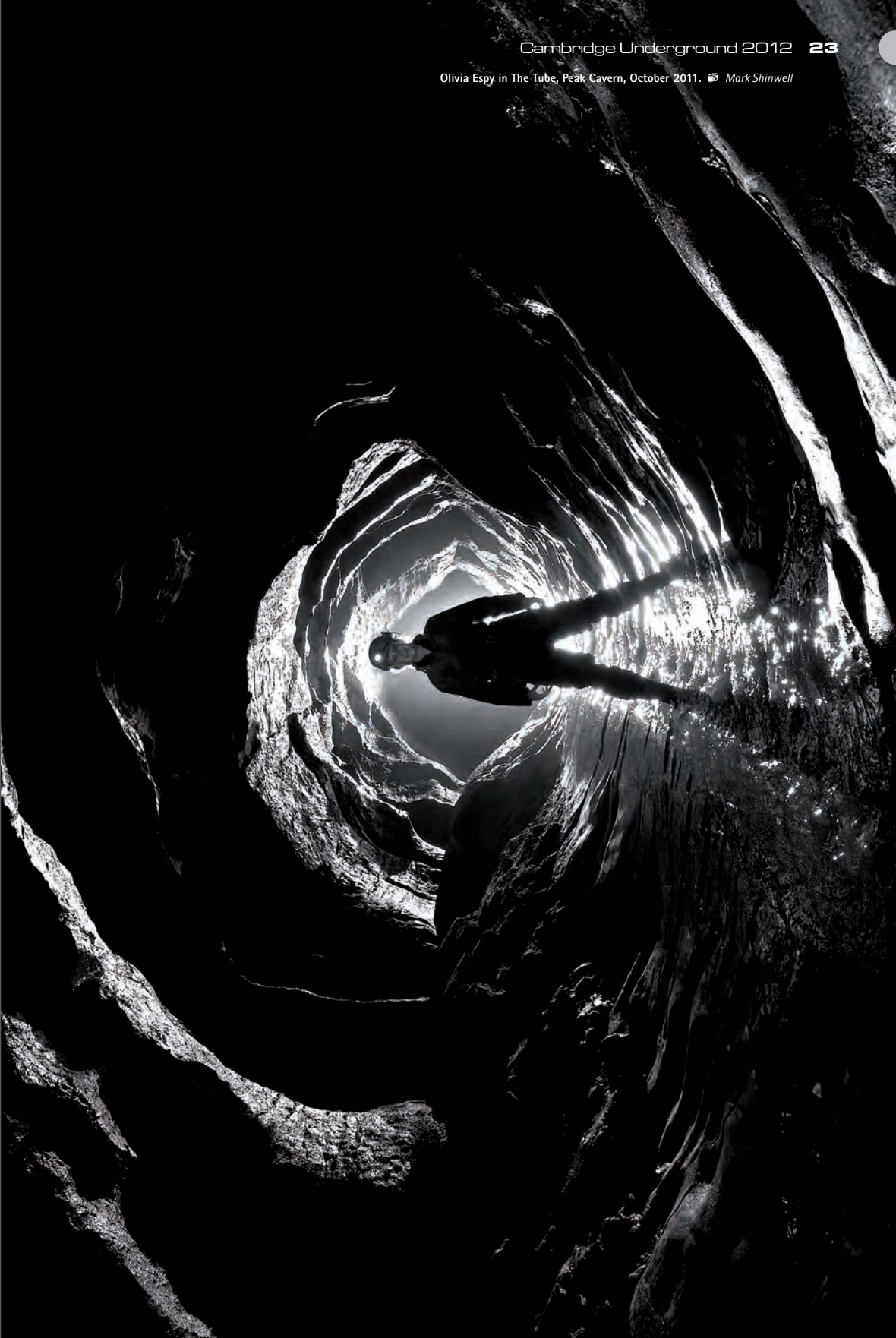
▲ Poster for the ice caves talk, 2011. 📧 Nial Peters, design Aiora Zabala

debate were spread out over different emailing lists after expo. Actually, most debates now happen on email lists...

Other events that took place: cave-diving talk by Clive Westlake jointly with the diving club; ice-caves talk by Antarctic caver Nial Peters; caving trip to Otter Hole in September; training sessions at Queens' stage in darkness, to make it feel more real, tailored by Stuart Bennett; Christmas Meet to Yorkshire; curries, pubmeets, slideshows, and many caving weekends thanks to Matt Watson's enthusiastic effort. ■

Meets and covers in 2011/12

	Peaks I 2011.10.15-16 TSG	Peaks II 2011.10.22-23 TSG	Yorks I 2011.10.28-30 Bull Pot Farm	Mendip I 2011.11.18-20 Wessex	CHECC 2011.11.25-27 Dalesbridge	South Wales I 2012.01.27-29 SWCC	Mendip II 2012.02.24-26 Wessex	Peaks III 2012.02.09-11 TSG
Stuart Bennett	■							■
Alisdair Bolger		■						
Alex Broekhof	■							
Jessica Chatwin		■		■				
Nhan Dao	■							
Edvin Deadman	■		■					■
Bela Dimova		■						
Mikaela Ediger	■			■				
Anya Ermakova					■			■
Olivia Espy		■						
Alexej Funke	■							
Sarah Gales		■						
Nimrod Gileadi					■			■
Martin Green	■	■	■					
Tom Handford						■		
James Hickson				■				
Kathryn Hopkins	■		■					■
Adrian Horrell	■		■	■				
Tess Jones						■		
Olaf Köhler					■			
John Kendall							■	
Rachael Kendall							■	
Ramana Kumar		■		■				
Jan Lellman						■		
David Loeffler							■	
Siobhan MacGowan						■		■
Olly Madge	■		■					■
Matthew Morgan		■						
Yves Moussalam		■	■					
Nial Peters		■						
Gareth Phillips				■				
Serena Povia	■							
Eliza Prettyman		■						
Tony Rooke		■						
Fareeha Safir				■				
Mark Shinwell			■	■		■	■	
Jess Stirrups	■	■		■	■	■		
Daniel Storissteanu						■		■
Xian Jie Tay		■			■			
Keshav Thirumalai		■						
Frank Tully							■	
Josh Walker	■							
Matthew Watson			■	■		■	■	
Clive Westlake							■	
Emma Wilson		■			■			■
Lee Joo Young	■							
Aiora Zabala			■		■	■		■
Wookey						■		
TOTAL	14	16	9	10	7	10	7	10



Caving trip!

2006.10.24, *Adam Kessler*

When I said I was going caving the responses were largely discouraging. Seven people confidently predicted my near-certain death. A further five cast aspersions on my state of mental health. Even my mother told me to wear thick socks. Nevertheless, I continued undaunted. Caving had been a dream of mine ever since childhood. The mere word conjured up fantastic images, hidden grottos sparkling with crystals and diamond seams, jewels and dinosaur fossils lying out across the floor, waiting to be discovered. Caving was a chance to throw off the shackles of our capitalist society, discover a sport where people work for the love, not for the money. Besides which, I'd already paid my twenty-five quid.

So caving I went. The journey down to South Wales was uneventful, enlivened only by a few hours jaunty meandering round the river Severn, looking for the motorway. We eventually found it, which made us so happy that it took a good fifteen minutes to notice that we were driving down it the wrong way. A mere three hours later we arrived in a small hut in South Wales, our home for the next two days.

The next day we drove up to a little square building, which served as the drop-off point for the nearest caves. We clambered, squeezed, wriggled, and eventually managed to drag ourselves into our bulky caving suits, before setting off across the muddy grass. Five minutes later we arrived at a tiny door, perhaps a little bigger than a tea-tray, set into the rock. It swung open at our approach, like a budget Star Trek, and we dropped through into the dark cavern behind.

"Ooooh!" I said as I picked myself up off the floor and swung my head round, the bright blue LEDs illuminating the cavernous space. "OOOH!" It would turn out to be the most coherent thing I could say over the next few hours. My shivering light picked out dark, rectangular blocks of rock, overlaid with muddy brown clay that curled and rippled under the constant patter of water droplets from above. The musty, damp air surrounded us in a cloak of dusty velvet, creating an eerie silence punctuated only by my constant refrain of "ooh, ooh, ooooh" like a sexually aroused metronome. We wandered down through the open cave, my head swinging wildly like a ball on a string, twisting from one wonder to the next. Giant luminous spaghetti strands hung down from the ceiling like badly combed facial hair, a little drop of water glistening at the end. The drop would occasionally succumb to gravity and fall with a respectful "plip!" to the floor, where over the centuries it had created a large phallic stalagmite. For some reason the deposit was a waxy white, looking quite out of place amidst the murky browns and greys. Hundreds of these rose up in formation, mostly stretching up a foot or so, stained at the bottom with the mud of centuries and with a slight dip at the top, where the water had worn away its own creation. We progressed through the cave, torch-light picking out a surreal dream-world rendered in yellow, white and brown. To the left a bulging pile like a



million maltesers crushed together, to the right a stern judge, waxy wig flowing over his rocky brown back. We followed a narrow winding stream down flowing passages, wincing as the icy water surged over the top of our wellington boots and trickled down to mingle with our toes. The journey back was equally eventful. Our leader, Mark, told us disdainfully that it was time to do some real caving, which made my rate of oohing double instantly, much to the alarm of the others. This 'real caving' took the form of a tiny squeeze about a foot tall, down which we wriggled and cursed, helmets banging against the roof if we ever dared to raise our heads. Beautiful crystalline rock formations were totally ignored as we inched along, and even my happy oohing took on a lower,

slightly gutteral tone. With one arm stretched out in front and one trailing behind, like a pissed off superman; we eventually wormed our way out and stood up, a much underappreciated pastime that has never seemed as sweet as it did then.

Back home now, mud and oohs left far behind, swapped for the fierce rigour of my philosophy essay. But as I contemplate the merits of indirect consequentialism I find myself wondering if it's possible to get from the shelves to my bed without touching the floor, casting longing glances at the cool, dark underside of my desk, and just occasionally a slow, mournful "ooh" scapes my lips. Next trip in two weeks. ■



"Damned if I'm going to let this arse of a cave cheat me out of an Otter Hole trip"

Jess Stirrups

Where: Daren Cilau to Price's Dig through trip (+ Otter hole)

Who: Jess Stirrups, Emma Wilson, Olly Madge, Sarah White, Serena Povia, John Billings

Well, nearly a through trip. We got sooooo close! We all wanted a reasonable trip and were feeling quite keen, but didn't want an epic as some of us were going to Otter Hole the next day and had to leave by 9am. So we decided to look at Crystal Oxbow just beyond the time machine before attempting to complete the through trip. All proceeded fairly well, with several sculptures being added to the top of the ladder, until we got to the time machine. I've always liked this bit of cave, a big space with a line of cat's eyes (some of which would be at home on a motorway, others decidedly more home-made) stretching into the distance. After considerable boulder hopping, we got to the end, and didn't manage to miraculously waltz straight through to Bonsai Streamway, so got the survey out. We poked around various boulder clogged bits of passage, and stood in clusters around the survey, but even synchronised head scratching didn't seem to make the way on any more obvious.

Eventually we worked out where we were, but still couldn't find the right passage, so headed off down a narrow windy rift which, according to the survey, should bring us out right at crystal oxbow. It was a very nice bit of passage, with lots of fine crystals on the walls, though a little narrow. Soon enough, we emerged just a bit along crystal oxbow, had a look around

and at the sign post to select spots deeper in the cave, before heading back to the time machine (no problem in this direction!), then back to Big Chamber Not Near The Entrance.

At this point the group split, with Serena and John heading out through the usual route, leaving myself, Olly, Emma, and Sarah with instructions for the through trip - "*past the antlers, down/up all the handlines, and along antler passage into Busman's Holiday. Then look for some tape into a dig - its the way out!*". None of us had been there, but how hard could it be? We took the passage towards the Antlers, and started walking. After about three quarters of an hour and no Antlers in sight, we decided something was wrong, a feeling which was compounded by the passage ending in a dodgy-looking choke. However, we were nothing if not determined, so spent some time ferreting around in the choke, before admitting defeat and back-tracking. After about half an hour of speedier walking, we got back to where we had gone wrong, and this time took the correct turn. Soon enough, the Antlers hove into view, and we rejoiced in our knowledge of where we were.

We carried on along Antler passage, clambering over boulders, under boulders, around boulders, and up or down the various handlines we came

across (all according to our instructions!). Eventually we reached a slightly smaller bit of passage which ended in a closed down bedding on one side, and a choke on the other. A taped path led rather incongruously towards the choke, stopping just shy of it. This couldn't be the dig referred to, we hadn't reached Busman's yet. Well, could we find the way on? We looked to the left, we looked to the right, we looked up, and down, and along every hole all the way back to the Antlers, but couldn't find the way on. We somehow missed the straight-on option that the tape was pointing at... Perhaps the beer and previous late night were beginning to show, it was eleven pm by now...

So, all the way back we went. This was rather annoying, as Emma and me were down for the Otter Hole trip the next day and thus had a deadline to meet (and would have quite liked some sleep first!). We had pretty much run out of food by now, and were really quite tired, as Olly and Emma explored every hole a human could possibly fit down all the way back to the Antlers. I was in a foul mood, as I was tired and didn't want to have to skip the Otter Hole trip as a result of this one going wrong! When we reached Big Chamber, the horror began to dawn on us. Yes, we really were going to have to go back out the entrance crawl.

I hate that bit of cave. Really hate it. I don't know why, its rather irrational, as although I have a severe dislike of crawling you really don't have to crawl most of it. So I was not happy, and neither was anyone else. Emma and Olly were a bit quicker than Sarah and me, so headed out ahead of us to cancel our 8am call-out, joking as they went that they'd send someone in with a flask of hot chocolate, or perhaps a hundred strong force from the local cave rescue to carry us! Sarah shared Emma's last snack-sized Mars bar with me and we set off. It may have been a joke, but an image of that hot chocolate floated before my eyes all the way out! What seemed like hours later we

emerged into daylight. Daylight! It was 4am and the sun was rising over Sugar Loaf and the Black Mountains... Even without the hours spent underground it would have been really rather spectacular.

We both stumbled back down to Whitewalls, where Serena was still awake, cooking our "dinner"! Apparently she'd been adamant that we wouldn't make it and would need rescuing, and was now feeling a little smug that things had indeed not gone to plan. Well, not really, but she wasn't quite as annoyed as perhaps would be expected after being woken up at half three in the morning to be told hungry tired cavers were back and was there any dinner left... Indeed, I believe Emma and Olly woke everyone up by yelling that Sarah and me wanted rescuing. [*Note from the editor: This version of events is disputed*] Humph! Though a hot chocolate would have been really good...

Got to bed at five, and woke up again at half eight to go to Otter Hole. Happily, it was a between-tides trip, so there was no pressure to get to the end of the cave, or anywhere near, which was just as well, as I was knackered, and Emma wasn't looking quite as spry as the day before! So instead we had a really laid back trip to the Hall of Thirty and back, which was great fun! Otter Hole really is beautiful, and the mud is really gloopy, as Emma found out - on the way out we had to get across a gap and up a mud bank. Some of us (not me!) managed the jump in one, others (me) slid down to the bottom and clawed their way up the mud bank. Emma missed the point a little though. She didn't realise that people were aiming for a specific handhold on the mud bank when jumping, so just launched herself blindly into space, hit the mud bank, bounced straight off, pirouetted in mid-air and landed with a glop into the deep glutinous mud at the bottom, still up-right but facing back the way she'd come!

■

How I got the Golden Boot of Underground Incompetence

2011, *Olaf Kähler*

I only started caving in Michaelmas 2010, but still managed to win one of the rare awards, that were handed out by the club at the Annual Dinner in February 2011. And as I got the award due to a rather memorable incidence, I decided to write it down for future generations.

We went to the Mendips at the end of January and despite some disputes about the trips, I was assigned to go down St. Cuthbert's Swallet, which is without doubt one of the finest

caves in the area. We had booked a leader from the BEC and apart from me, there was Jess [Stirrups], Anya [Ermakova] and Dávid [Mólnar] in the party. After a bit of faff we found the right caving hut, met our leader and went down into the cave.

There were some tight bits and a few ladders close to the entrance. Then our leader said *"Don't fall onto the ladder on the next bit"*. I found this rather odd, as there was no ladder in sight and nothing to fall down either. But it all made sense around the next corner, where the narrow and rather deep Wire Rift was awaiting us. Traversing high up on some small ledges we could hear the small streamway underneath and looking for it I even saw the ladder. Anyway, there was a bit of a squeeze over a boulder, then we were climbing down, took a last ladder into a small chamber (Mud Hall), and had finally left the tricky entrance series behind.

We then had a long and nice tour through the whole cave. It is



definitely well worth a visit, regardless of what you think of Mendip caves. We passed a series of chambers, some intermittent easy crawls and climbs, and lots of shiny pretties everywhere. However, for some reason I ended up at the far end of the party. I therefore missed the first half of every explanation and story our leader had to tell, barely managed to memorise any of the junctions, and in fact occasionally had to struggle to keep up with the head of the group.

Eventually we came to the far end of the cave, Beehive Chamber and then The Duck. Apparently, I'm renowned for not liking wet caves; but as most of the group was really keen on going through this duck, I eventually followed, trying to express my opinion on water with some grunting noises. Only Dávid stayed behind, waiting for us.

After a couple of minutes, everyone had enough of the small streamway beyond the Duck, so we returned to Dávid and started heading out of the cave. Again we came past plenty of decorations, various chambers and so on, and again I was at the back, missing most of everything. I noticed that Dávid was falling behind as well.

Nevertheless, we all came back to the first iron ladder on the way out, Dávid and me being last. I saw the others disappearing one after the other up the ladder and into Wire Rift. Dávid was very slow on the ladder, and once we were up, the others were gone and we were on our own. Dávid was not feeling all that well anymore, and rather cold. He hadn't noticed, where the others had gone, and eventually refused to move.

After a short discussion, I decided to go ahead for a bit to find the way and get one of the others, but it was all getting rather creepy now. One of the problems was that I hadn't seen where anyone else went either and couldn't figure out an obvious way on. There must

have been that little squeeze over the boulder next, and then the don't-fall-onto-the-ladder traverse. So I started heading up the rift and slowly along it. No sign of the boulder that I seemed to remember so clearly, no sign of a ladder either. But a rather long way to fall down, at least in that I was right. Despite the uneasy feeling, I headed on, up and slowly along the rift. We definitely had not passed this wide bit on the way in, it was rather scary. And had we really been that far up above the streamway with its stupid ladder? And this mud feels a bit strange, as if it hadn't been touched in a long time. Still the rift was going on, further and further, higher and higher.

After spending some ages up there, I heard a feeble voice from underneath. Jess had come back to look for us, and apparently she was rather surprised to see my light up in the ceiling, 10m above her head. "*What are you doing up there?*" Good question. In a rather awkward manoeuvre, I turned around and slowly climbed down the rift. "*The way onwards is right down here in the streamway!*". Obviously! "*Come on now, let's go!*". What an excellent idea!

It was not far to the entrance anymore. Dávid was close to hypothermia, but managed in the end. With rather shaky legs and freezing terribly from wet gear and cold wind, we finally arrived back at the Wessex hut. A group of UBSS cavers who also were in St. Cuthbert's that day had similar freezing issues and a rather hard time on the entrance climbs, but they also managed in the end.

A week later we had the Annual Dinner for 2011 and Jess - president at the time - was very relieved that they had finally found someone for all of the regular club awards. After a long year of exceptional underground competence, there was one small incident just a week earlier in St. Cuthbert's. So the most coveted Golden Boot of Underground Incompetence could rightfully be awarded - to me! ■

Burning fun

2006.11.09, *Adam Kessler*


"Hopefully we'll run over a hare" Nial yelled over his seat, as the car hit a bump and leapt into the air like a rubber elephant. "Then we can have some decent meat" I snatched a quick glance over my shoulder at the bulging bags of Tesco's finest chicken, chilli, and assorted vegetables, and I couldn't help feel that several thousand years of human development had just been lost. My intuition was confirmed as we drew closer to the farm, which glowed a bright, unhealthy orange in the dark. Fireworks slammed into the night sky, bathing the whole scene in a shower of burning fire. As we cautiously approached a green firework leapt out of the night and burst into the car in front, to the understandable alarm of the driver. We parked where we were and ran into the farmyard as quickly as we could, using the ash-covered cars for shelter. After a few near misses we arrived mercifully unscathed, so I grabbed a beer and surveyed the scenes of devastation around us.

It was a pyromaniac's wet dream. In the room to the left people were dissecting fireworks and chucking matches on the powder, to horrific screams of 'Hulp, hulp, een gek meisje scheert

mijn pubic haar. To the right was Djuke clutching a large lit firework, surrounded by a large circle of interested onlookers. Yep, Djuke's younger brother, was standing by with an expression suggesting that he'd just thought of a new and entirely unpleasant reason why their house burnt down seven years ago. I gave him a little shrug which said 'Yes, your sister is setting people on fire for fun. Deal with it, kiddo.' Over in the kitchen people were conducting impromptu experiments with carbide, water and fire, amidst screams of



Bonfire night, George in fire-poi frame 2006.11.04.

 *Toby Speight*

happiness or intense burning pain, it was rather difficult to tell. I'd just decided that was the group likely to provide the maximum amount of amusement with the minimum amount of spontaneous combustion when Ollie popped out of a cupboard, clutching his camera and mumbling manically to himself.

'Are you OK?' I asked slightly nervously.

'Fire!' Ollie burred. *'Fireworks...explosion... BANG!'*

Oh God, I thought to myself, now I'll have a hysterical casualty to reassure.

'You'll be OK' I said tentatively. *'Go upstairs, you'll be safe there, do you want me to take you?'*

'VIDEO!' Ollie suddenly yelled. *'MUST...GET... VIDEO!'*

And with that Ollie plunged through the glowing smoke, camera outstretched, ready to tape the devastation. I followed, and through the billowing smoke saw two people having a fireworks fight in the small contained room, launching white rockets at each other which fizzed and spurted and shattered into purple sparks. Meanwhile Ollie danced between them like a paparazzi elf, capturing angles and light and occasionally burning rockets. He seemed oddly happy so I continued on outside, where some people were gathered round a massive bonfire.

The flamethrower was, without a doubt, one of the best things I've ever played with. The deodorant can bombs gave us much amusement and mild tinnitus. The bonfire devoured all surplus rubbish, from empty cans to unclaimed items of clothing to kitchen furniture to boxes of fireworks. The axe destroyed anything untouched by fire. It was a truly spectacular weekend. Just give me a year to recover.

(p.s. It should be noted that a large amount of the above is slanderous fiction, but hopefully it captures the spirit of the event...) ■

Comments:

Aaron Curtis

Fiction? Which bit's made up? I didn't notice the firework dissection, but it sounds like a good plan, will remember for next year. You didn't mention Toby's window being smashed by a fragment of an exploding coffee cup, or that the iron bars on the back of the fireplace appear to now have a huge bite taken out of them.

Sarah White

I miss the farm :(... wish I had been there, we had no explosions at all -now where is the fun in that!!

Emma Lauder

Erm...so did you actually go into any caves on your caving trip, or just play with fireworks? I can't tell what is fiction and what is not. :/

Djuke Veldhuis

I'm innocent! I did nothing of the sort :-). I'm a very responsible, well mannered, polite, conservative Dutch girl thanks very much!

"that" Titan trip...

2008.02.17, *Jess Stirrups*

Where: Derbyshire,
Titan to JH 4 party exchange

A commonly heard phrase in the caving community is "what could possibly go wrong?", often uttered in jest when plans for a trip are either non-existent, or become perhaps a little overcomplicated or over enthusiastic. Well, in this case there were plans, and they very definitely fell into the enthusiastic and complicated categories, as well as not being as well thought through as perhaps they might have been. A 4-party exchange between Titan and JH, with multiple side trips and photography, as well as two of us in our first year of caving? What could possibly go wrong? Quite a lot, as it turns out...

We were staying at the Orpheus hut near Stoney Middleton, so had a bit of drive to get to the cave – even if we were efficient, we wouldn't have got underground that early in the morning. And we weren't efficient. Having spent much time drinking tea and faffing, we finally departed from the hut at 10:45, and drove to the TSG in Castleton to pick up a couple more people. Having completed the faffing started at the Orpheus, we all piled into cars and headed up the pass to the farm where we parked to get changed. It was at this point that things really started to fall apart a bit. We discovered that we'd left Serena behind in Castleton, Bela had no cows tails or safety cord, and Toby had forgotten his handjammer. This resulted in a return trip to Castleton to pick up Serena, Steve and Bela had to drive to Hitch 'n Hike to buy rope to replace the missing parts of her SRT kit, and Steve lent Toby his spare handjammer. Unfortunately, the Hitch 'n Hike

side trip was a bit time consuming, so Serena swapped into Bela's group, which triggered further re-shuffling, meaning that the 2 novices (myself and Laurence) were now in the same group, with Toby and all the photography kit. We were also meant to be de-rigging JH.

Bela and Steve returned, and the first wave down each cave set off. After giving the rigging teams an hour or so head start, the rest of us followed them into the darkness. As myself, Steve, Bela, Laurence and Toby set off, we looked at our watches. It was now 2pm – not unreasonably late, but later than planned. The entrance pitch was really rather impressive, especially knowing that it was dug. It was also the longest pitch that I'd ever descended. It didn't hold that distinguished title for long, though. The echoing drop of the Titan main shaft, descending into blackness, was somewhat off-putting, and I'm not quite sure how many times I checked that I'd loaded the rope into my stop correctly before finally testing it and un-clipping my cowstails. Happily, I hadn't mucked up, and had an uneventful, if slow, abseil. Had a bit of bother at the event horizon re-belay, as I had never attempted anything remotely resembling a free-hanging rebelay outside of the safe environment of training before, but I managed to sort myself out and abseil the rest of the way, again quite slowly.

By the time I'd reached the bottom and scuttled off into the safety of the choke, I was beginning to realise just how much I'd bitten off, coming on this trip. The idea of prusiking not just back up the distance just abseiled, but in fact a little further was daunting. But I'd wanted to see Titan since I'd first heard of it, so gave it little more thought and along with Bela helped Toby take some photos in the choke while waiting for the others.

Once we were all there, we set off again. At this point, the caving becomes a bit of a blur. We

quite quickly met the team who'd rigged JH, and went on a couple of side trips to the major sump and the Lake of a thousand banana skins, where we ended up having a mud fight while poor Toby tried to take some photographs! We headed back to the main route, and a while later we met the other team heading out of Titan. We were moving at a reasonable speed, considering the inexperience of myself and Laurence, but had fallen behind the group heading out of JH ahead of us quite considerably.

Perhaps at this point it would have been sensible to call it a day and head out, but both Laurence and myself were really enjoying ourselves and weren't feeling too bad, so we went on another side trip to Salmon's cavern. This was the point where things really did go wrong. Laurence managed to fall off a short climb and land on his back on a rock sticking out of the floor. Thankfully he wasn't too badly hurt, but was bruised and shaken up enough to wait where he was while the rest of us headed up the handline and down into Salmon's cavern. The handlines were really quite muddy, and I found them quite tiring. The hand line down the other side to the floor of the chamber was even muddier... The chamber itself was quite impressive, as were the miner's clog prints preserved in the muddy floor. After Toby spent some time poking around in a steep rocky tube, we decided to re-join Laurence and head out. I had some problem returning up the first handline, however. It was really muddy, and I couldn't grip it properly. After what seemed like ages, I struggled to the top and dropped down the other side, completely exhausted. It was then that I remembered just how far I was going to have to prusik. I thought that I probably ought to mention that I was feeling rather worn out, so told Steve and Toby that I was feeling "a bit tired". They didn't say anything for a moment, then suggested that we ought to start heading out. Apparently it was at this point that the same thought occurred to both of them – "oh shit this isn't good we're a

long way from the surface and she's already tired". They did a good job of not showing it, though, and stayed remarkably cheerful all the way to the bottom of JH.

Toby started up the pitches, with myself following with a case of flash guns, then Laurence with the tripod. Steve took Bela to see the miner's toast to stay warm and give us a bit of a head start. Prusiking was VERY slow. It felt like I was crawling up the ropes inch by inch. Then I got to a rebelay. Couldn't get my chest jammer off. Tried again. And again. Eventually, Toby had to clip into my cowstails from above and pull me up enough to get my weight off my jammers, at which point I could get them off the rope. I was now even more tired than before. Prusiking continued, slowly. All the rebelay and the stretches of rope between them have since merged into one long montage, with the thought that I might be too tired to walk back to cars and would have to crawl playing through my mind. Bitch Pitch didn't really seem any worse than Leviathan, until I got to the pitch head where Toby had to pull me across onto the bit of what appeared to be railway track sticking out of the cartgate. We set off along the passage, and after a while got to the foot of the entrance pitch. Toby left me the camera box and his car keys in case I headed out, and returned to Bitch Pitch, to help Steve, who was de-rigging.

There was no way that I was going anywhere. I didn't think that I'd be able to lift the lid at the top of the pitch (my fingers by this point had cramped up into tight fists, as if still maintaining a death grip on some piece of rope), and that was assuming that I'd get past any rebelay (I didn't know it was a straight hang at the time). I had this hideous mental image of myself, stuck somewhere on the rope acting as a giant cork blocking the way out, with everyone stuck below me. So I sat on the camera box and waited. And waited. And waited some more.

Eventually, I thought I could hear someone coming along the cartgate.

About ten minutes later Laurence emerged, looked around rather puzzledly, and asked me if I'd seen Bela. I answered quite truthfully that I hadn't, to which the response was "*shit! Shit we've lost Bela!*". Apparently Bela had gone missing somewhere, mid-pitch on Leviathan. That took a bit of time to sink in. Not everyday someone manages to get lost mid pitch. Laurence decided that he was also too tired to try the entrance pitch, so we sat and waited for the others. We were there about 40 minutes when an unexpected grinding noise was heard above us, and a square of night sky appeared, with a head silhouetted against it. Wookey's voice came drifting down to us "*do you want to come out?*". I slowly inched my way up the rope with toby's car keys and flashguns, and eventually got to the top. I got myself off the rope and standing on the scaffoldbar, but couldn't quite work out how to levitate the last 4 foot or so onto the surface. This problem was rapidly negated as the 4 people stood around the entrance all grabbed a handful of oversuit and lifted me out. I sat down and said I'd wait for the others before going to get changed.

Then I realised how cold it was – it was a clear night and there was a layer of frost covering everything. My hands were sticking to all the gates as I returned to the cars, and my oversuit froze solid as I was taking it off! By the time I was changed, everyone (including Bela) had made it to the entrance pitch, and Laurence was wandering back across the fields towards me. We were all out by 4am, and were all stuffed into sleeping bags in Wookey's van, and given flasks of tea and a bag of Haribo. It all felt a little surreal on the drive back to the hut, a feeling heightened by the addition of an unexpected passenger – a bloke who'd been kicked out of his girlfriend's house and was walking the many miles to Buxton pulling a suitcase. Not sure what he felt about cramming into a

van full of filthy people encased in sleeping bags, but the lift was evidently too welcome to turn down...

Got back to the hut and ate a very delayed and very welcome, if slightly crunchy dinner, before uncurling my cramped fingers again and collapsing into bed.

As can be expected, it was rather late in the morning before any of us emerged, at which point we all tried to fill each other in with what had happened. We had missed our call out of midnight by a long way, but we weren't the only ones. The team de-rigging Titan were also late out, though not by so much, and got to the cars at the same time as the 4 people from the earlier groups who had been sent to see what was going on. The searchers then wandered over to JH to see if there was any sign of us, at which point they saw Laurence and me sat at the bottom of the entrance pitch.

Toby, Bela, and Steve reached the entrance pitch as Laurence was prusiking – Bela had got confused at one of the rebelay on Leviathan, and gone up a dig rope instead of ours. Having reached a vaguely horizontal area with no more rope, she started wandering around, at which point she was spotted by Steve, who by now had de-rigged the confusing rebelay and was level with her. Apparently seeing a light wandering around above the pitch and nowhere near a rope nearly gave him a heart attack – never mind that she was somewhere totally unexpected, and a whisker away from being de-rigged on...

So yes, in answer to "*what could possibly go wrong?*", really rather a lot... Unsurprisingly none of the five of us went caving the next day, opting instead for a gentle wander along the Tissington trail and an icecream in some rather glorious sunshine. Hmmm... Next stop expo? After all,

...what could possibly go wrong?! ■

Atheromancy — an ancient caving ritual

Joe Duxbury,

with contributions from *Clive Westlake*

I joined CUCC in 1965, my first year at Cambridge. I did not drift into caving – the darkness had charmed me with its siren song.

After a few introductory trips, I eventually got to go on weekends away with the club, and was initiated into the rituals of CUCC communal catering. One of the traditions was The Making of the Porridge.

There was a half-serious belief in the omen revealed by its constituency. There was nothing complicated, no list of portents according to its exact state, but simply if the porridge thickened a good trip would follow, and if it didn't the trip would be shambolic. Thus was I introduced to the mysteries of atheromancy.

Because no-one ever actually recorded the state of the porridge, the reliability of the predictions was never verified. I suppose you could make simple interpretations based on particular conditions. For instance, lumpy, and there would be problems with boulders; too thin, we would be held back by high water levels; too thick, we would encounter lots of mud; burnt...hmm. What would that mean? Exploding carbide, perhaps. Or shorting lamp cables. But the Fates can be devious, and the true interpretations

could be less than obvious. For example, there are other less serious shambles that could arise – can't find the entrance, a wetsuit zip bust, the tackle for the last pitch got forgotten.

Clive Westlake relates how he climbed Illimani in Bolivia with the expedition cook: “At 0h Dear 000hrs we cooked porridge and I insisted it thickened and he insisted on flavouring it with cinnamon. I thought cinnamon comes in a packet from Sainsbury's, but found out it's tree bark. Anyway cinnamon flavoured – and textured – porridge is bloody excellent, and we knocked off the mountain.”



Devon Caving, Many cooks, 2007.03.17. 📷 Toby Speight

Perhaps the phenomenon should be examined in a more controlled fashion. There's a subject for a proper study. I wonder if you could get a grant for it.

On the other hand anyone reading this bald-erdash may wonder at students of a university of some repute having such a fixation with cooking porridge and reliving it forty years on. Clive confesses to “remain anxious that it [*porridge*] should thicken.” Maybe the distinguished speleo-psychiatrist, Dr. Gareth Jones could diagnose the disorder? ■

Michaelmas 2011 – Yorks I

2011.10.28 to 30, *Aiora Zabala*

Beautiful caving weekend at Bull Pot Farm. County Pot - Lancs exchange on Saturday, where one of the parties did comb some parts of the route up to three times (to make sure that we learnt the way properly) and finished an epic roundtrip by going back to Lancs from County above ground to derig the entrance. The team lost one of their exhausted members after six hours caving which had accidentally brought the team back very close to the entrance.

Short through trip in Heron Pot on Sunday, all the way down a pretty meander with a couple of wet pitches inbetween, where photos were taken. For the finishing touch, a fully soaking crawl right at the very end of the meander. Unfortunately we didn't arrive in time for a well deserved tasty cake & tea at Ingleton. ■

Meet leader *Matthew Watson*
Caves County Wretched and Lancs
Cavers *Kathryn, Olly Madge, Adrian H, Yves, Matt Watson, Martin Green, Aiora, Mark Shinwell and Edvin, Becca and Julian* in separate trips 'creating' new cave.

"...but when they got there, the T-store was bare"

2011.10.28 to 29, *Matthew Watson*

D'oh! Not to worry. After a quick head scratch and a thumb through the CNCC rigging guide, we managed to find some maillons, a few crabs and some ropes that were almost but not entirely the wrong length for any of the caving we were planning to do.

Cue some last minute transport-rearrangement faff and we were finally off to Yorkshire only an hour and a half behind schedule. Several hours, and a portion of fish and chips later, we arrived at the farm to find Edvin, Kathryn, Martin and a rather large pile of empties huddled up in front of the fire. Not wanting to be antisocial, we decided to add a few to the pile and come

up with a plan for Saturday's caving. For the first time I can remember, we came up with a plan that actually involved the caves we had permits for: County-Lancs exchange.

Lost in Lancs

Next morning we were up bright and early. Due to an error in the decimal place when calculating how many people to do the shopping for, we had enough food to provide everyone at the farm with at least two breakfasts, and still have leftovers for the next day! Replete, we then split up into our respective teams: Team effi-

cient and team keen-but-incompetent, and set off across the fell.

Team keen-but-incompetent were set to go down Lancs. Being quite a few meters shy of the suggested rope length, Martin took frugal rigging to a new level, and after rigging two rebelayes that were tighter than a ducks arse, arrived at the bottom of the pitch with the rope bag still half full. So far so good. The plan was to go down to the streamway via a loop round Montague West and Wilf Taylor's passage, climb up into the high level route at Stop Pot and then make our way over to County. That

was the keen bit, now for the incompetent part...

Rather than a blow-by-blow account of our navigational incompetence, which would be quite challenging given the number of unintentional detours, let's just say that nine hours after leaving the surface myself and Martin emerged into the mist and drizzle at County Pot having successfully completed the traverse. This was quite a feat, given that six hours into the trip we met team efficient 15 minutes from the Lancaster Hole entrance. . . ■

Heron Pot, Kingsdale

2011.10.30, *Adrian Horrell*

An early start at Bullpot Farm and perfect coordination brought us to Kingsdale at around 2pm (+/- 1hr). We changed and kitted up at the roadside and headed off across the valley floor with a few members of the party holding 'phones at arms length and pausing to squint at them from time to time. We continued over the beck and up the hillside in this manner, then fanned out along the ridge. Shouts of 'I've got it!' would be followed seconds later by 'damn! It's gone.' We had, of course, managed not to leave a call out.

We had a peep in the exit and decided it would go, then 'got it...damn, it's gone' our way to the entrance. Fortune smiled on us and we got a message through to the Fenland Control Centre. After a few minutes discussion with our Director of Photography, Olly descended

the entrance. 'Do I get a sherpa, then?' he called up. With a sigh I grabbed the rope bag and followed. The first few metres are best approached by crawling in the bottom of the rift. Olly dragged the bag and I helped it past constrictions. Soon we were walking in fine meandering passage.

I sensed a presence behind me. Looking over my shoulder I saw Matt's lamp approaching, carried, I assumed, by Matt. 'They've found us! Hurry!' I shouted to Olly, who then sprinted off down the passage. I followed at best speed, wishing I was thinner (more running, fewer pies). I arrived panting at the pitch head to find it already rigged, and our fearless rigger standing around the corner ready to descend. The others caught up and we had a debate about who would carry the flashguns and

where they would put them (I should have fled at this point, but I did not).

'Pitch free!' I made a minor spectacle of myself by getting my leg stuck as I part climbed, part thrutched on to the pitch head. I touched down on a short, rather wet horizontal section before the next pitch. Olly went off to rig the next pitch and Aiora was soon on her way down the first - rather more elegantly than your narrator.

Now the Director of Photography was in charge. Yves got on the rope, abseiled a few metres down the pitch and tied off his stop. Matt was stationed above the pitch head with a flashgun. I heard someone above bellow 'Cow! karabiner! waterfall! spanner!' I might be mistaken about that - the water was making a lot of noise. Eventually, through shouting, gestures and arcane lamp signals, I was positioned in the plunge pool, more or less under the waterfall, pointing a flashgun up the pitch. Here I remained for 20 minutes while the DoP composed the perfect shot. My good cheer deteriorated. I might have uttered an oath. Presently, the job was done. Yves unlocked his stop and descended to the bottom, complaining cheerfully about his numb legs.

Olly and Aiora had gotten restless and gone off exploring during my refreshing 20min frigid shower. They returned and Matt joined us at the bottom of the pitch. The DoP set about the business of re-rigging the pitch as a pull through. Descending the pitch, he asked Olly to hold the rope clear of the waterfall. Olly obliged and was rewarded by being yanked into the plunge pool. He kept his footing and avoided a soaking (or, at any rate, postponed it).

Soon we were on the move. The passage toward the exit is nicely sculpted, good splashy fun. There are a few flowstone formations to stoop under. After a while, it closes down to a longish, wet hands-and-knees crawl. Mostly this is on

smooth rock, but occasionally on cobbles. Trying to keep a dry-bag full of flashguns out of the water made this much harder work than it might otherwise have been, and the others disappeared into the distance. Eventually I reached the exit duck. I fiddled with my SRT kit a bit, ostensibly to avoid getting snagged in the duck, but really to play for time. I gritted my teeth, laid down in the murky stream and pushed myself into the constricted passage, emitting a strangled squeak as I got a gallon of freezing water down the front of my oversuit. I pushed the flashgun bag ahead of me to the DoP and squeezed out of the exit. The outside world was dark and the evening air mild. We walked back to the cars, sometimes chatting, sometimes in companionable silence.

We changed again at the roadside. I was advised to be circumspect when admitting to 'spannering Matt's maillon.' Mark showed me a preview of the pictures of Yves on the second pitch - they looked good, promising to be well worth a few minutes freezing. Soon we were in Ingleton, just too late for tea and cake at [insert name of your favourite gear shop/cafe here]. Doughnuts and drinks from the Co-op sufficed and after chatting for a while we got in the cars and dispersed.

A thoroughly enjoyable Sunday afternoon trip.

Cavers:

AioraMme. President
 Olly rigger, cynic
 Matt stalwart, meet leader
 MarkDirector of Photography
 Yves novice caver, model
 Adrian dogsbody, narrator
 Time Underground
 Not sure. I was a bit drunk when I adjusted my watch from BST to GMT. A few hours. ■

Lent 2012 – Yorks II

2012.02.10, *Matthew Watson*

We had a caving fail, due to the weather, so went for a curry instead.

Curryers: *Stuart Bennett, Tom Handford, Tess Jones, Mark Shinwell, Tony Rooke, Djuke Veldhuis, Matt Watson* and *Aiora Zabala*

Few beers in Live and Let Live and headed over to the Koh-i-Noor. Though much less glamorous than its namesake in the Tower of London,

they do a decent curry at a reasonable price and have the added advantage of a fairly “relaxed” booking system, so it’s not a disaster if you turn up with twice or half as many people as you told them. ■

Meet leader *Matt Watson*
Hut. Greenclose

Lent 2012 – Mendip II

2012.02.24 to 26, *Matthew Watson*

Saturday 25th: Myself, David, John and Rachael were joined by Clive for a trip down to Sump one in Swildon’s while Mark persuaded Frank for a rather more energetic trip: short round with detour to sump 4.

Sadly, our trip was cut short at the 20’ (a pitch fabled to be 20’ that clearly isn’t) where we met up with two scout groups. After waiting for half an hour, the situation clearly hadn’t improved so we decided to can it and come out the wet way. We met up with Mark and Frank on the way in who asked if any of us wanted to join them, but we’d done enough queuing for today so headed back to the hut. Myself and David were still keen to spend a bit more time underground, so we headed over to Eastwater, for a bimbles around the upper series (as we couldn’t be bothered to take rope and ladders).

In the evening we were treated to a slideshow by Clive and then headed over to the Hunter’s

Sunday 26th: For once CUCC made an early start and after minimal fuff we headed over to G.B. Once again, Frank had been persuaded that the wiring he was supposed to be doing at home could wait for another weekend, and so we were joined by him and Mark. We did a quick trip down mud passage and the gorge, then came back out along the gallery, over the bridge and back up mud passage.

A good weekend, though it would have been nice to have a few more cavers along from Cambridge. ■

Meet leader *Matt Watson*
Hut. Wessex
Caves Swildon’s and Eastwater on the Saturday, G.B. on the Sunday
Cavers . . . *Matt Watson, Mark Shinwell, David Loeffler.*

Guest appearances by
Clive Westlake (Saturday), *Frank Tully, John and Rachael Kendall*

Lent 2012 – South Wales I

2012.01.27 to 29, *Matthew Watson*

Saturday 28th: Team keen consisted of Wookey, Jess, Tom and guest appearance by Olaf. They decided to go practice their cave flying skills in OFDIII and came back looking very tired.

The second party consisted of Matt, Aiora and the newbies (Daniel, Siobhan and Jan), who opted for a more civilised bimbles round OFDII.

Sunday 29th: Nobody was feeling ultra keen today, so we all went into Cwm Dwr down

to the stream way - we split into two groups, one went via the wet way and the other via the dry way. Guest appearances by Olaf (who unsurprisingly didn't like the streamway) and Gareth.

Events of Note: Tess came caving! ■

Caves OFD
Cavers *Tom Handford, Tess Jones, Jan Lellmann, Siobhan McGowan, Mark Shinwell, Jess Stirrups, Daniel Storisteanu, Matt Watson, Wookey, Aiora Zabala*

Notes from the underground — a novice's account

2012.01.27 to 29, *Daniel Storisteanu*

There is something about being soaked and covered in mud inside a tiny crack of air underneath hundreds of thousands of tons of dirt and rock that ordinary people may find unsettling. Not cavers. Setting out on my first caving excursion I wasn't sure where of the two I would fit.

It started with a five hour drive through idyllic backcountry, where I became educated in a number of colourful British vulgarities courtesy of Mark [Shinwell], who was unhappy with other people's driving. Arriving late and tired to the caving hut, we went to the dorm to join a chorus of snoring. After a tenuous

night's sleep, we congregated in the kitchen in a zombie-like state of half-sleep. Breakfast was consumed and a rather vague plan for the day was hatched. The plan started with entering a cave and concluded with exiting said cave, but in between the details broke down.

We were separated out into two teams: the first was 'Team Keen', a group of experienced cavers led by Wookey, set to try some of the most daunting and dangerous passages offered by South Wales. Along with cavers Matt and Aiora, three of us wary fledglings were piled into the other team. Perhaps to avoid offence, we did not receive a team name. We hiked up

from the valley over the rolling hills, past the warning bleats of the sheep, to a rocky outcrop on the side of an escarpment that was home to a small dark hole. Fighting all natural instincts, I crawled into the gloomy entrance and found myself instantly enveloped in a starkly different world. The expansive rolling plains and wide sky instantly transmuted into a small and dank, dark cavern. Our headlamps cast long ominous shadows over large and jagged boulders, and lit up ceilings decorated in stony icicles and curtains of red and white crystal formations.

I barely had a moment to take in this bizarre new world before Team Keen raced forward and instructed us to tail behind. We moved quickly, scrambling up and down large boulders, treading past deep open pits, and free-climbing over ancient cave-ins. It dawned on me that caving is actually somewhat dangerous. More importantly, it's also immense fun. At any time we might be climbing up, down, sideways, and sometimes multiple directions were available. It's the adult version of the playground, only falls are a bit more consequential.

This fact was impressed upon me when we came to a traverse with a 10 meter drop below. We would have to cross it if we were to find something called 'The Maypole Inlet'. Matt wasn't all too fussed by the traverse and went back and forth a number of times. The trick, of course, was not to fall. Still, I had my apprehensions. Sensing concern amongst the novices, Matt astutely pointed out that one should not be so troubled by the drop, but rather by the 'fast deceleration' that follows, presumably as one hits the ground. This shrewd observation didn't manage to assuage our concerns. More effectively, Matt and Aiora decided to tie a rope around boulders at each end of the traverse, which promised to let us avoid any fast decelerations. In fact, the traverse was quite easy and straightforward. It brought home the point

that many of the challenges one faces in caves are merely psychological.

As we continued our search for the Maypole Inlet, we came to a section called the Maze which, unsurprisingly, was quite aptly named. Not only did we get lost, but in our attempts to leave the Maze we picked up two other groups which were also soundly lost. After quite some time, we concluded that we did not really care to see the Maypole inlet. Another caving challenge overcome.

We emerged from the cave to discover that the sun had not waited for us and, hiking under a sky filled with stars, we made our way back to the hut.

The next morning we rehashed the ritual of breakfast and vague plans. Having made it out with only superficial wounds the previous day, I wasn't immediately sure I wanted to gamble my life again. Still, something intangible beckoned me back, and later that morning I found myself with Team Keen, going down the unpronounceable Cwm Dwr entrance.

Entering Cwm Dwr involves slithering many meters almost vertically down a small concrete tube with freezing-cold water running down one's back. Olaf, who infamously does not like to get wet, started with his signature murmuring moans that can be likened to the long drawling coos of a whale, a tune that accompanied much of the expedition.

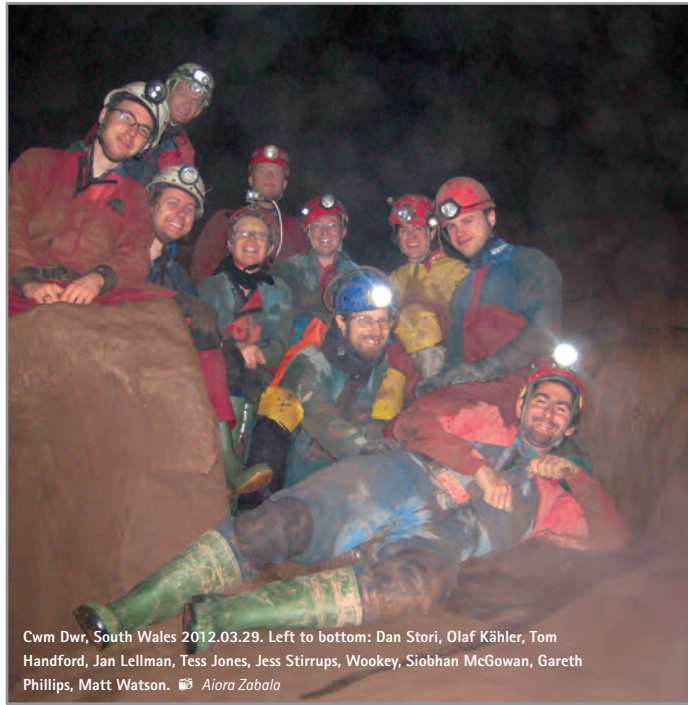
Down in the cave depths, finally free of the freezing tube, we found ourselves welcomed by a sign reading, 'Warning – Category 2 Confined Space'. Below it lay a small space in the wall that was little wider than my shoulders and no more than a foot tall. Team leader Wookey dropped down eagerly onto his belly and shuffled his body forward. As he disappeared into the wall I faintly heard him mumbling something like, "not suitable for fatties".


I followed unenthusiastically, having to keep my arms straight in front of me to fit as I shuffled my feet. The space opened slightly, allowing me to use my arms to advance, but this minor improvement was tempered by the shallow, cold stream that was now running under me. This wet 'crawly bit' continued for almost 100 meters in what was reminiscent of a certain jailbreak scene in the movie *Shawshank Redemption*, including the triumphant emergence at the end. It's the sort of situation one would generally associate with absolute misery and yet, somehow, once finally arriving into an open gallery I managed to convince myself I had just completed a fun challenge (still unaware that the only way out was back the exact same way).

Along with these physical and psychological challenges, caves offer a strangely calm and tranquil world. Turning off our lights we found ourselves in a rare darkness, and my attention focused on the light tapping of water dripping down from the ceiling, and a barely perceptible draft that was breathing old cave air past me.

After another good caving adventure that culminated in a soaking climb up a waterfall, we re-emerged to the surface to discover that the world we were returning to had again been transformed, and we were greeted by a beautiful white landscape enduring a wintery blizzard.

Any suspicions I had that one needed to be at least mildly insane to be a caver were only confirmed in the evening back at the hut. After a few drinks and the retelling of the day's adventures and misadventures, the natural progression of the evening led to cavers squeezing



Cwm Dwr, South Wales 2012.03.29. Left to bottom: Dan Stori, Olaf Kähler, Tom Handford, Jan Lellman, Tess Jones, Jess Stirrups, Wookey, Siobhan McGowan, Gareth Phillips, Matt Watson.  Aiora Zabala

themselves through small gaps of space in the furniture, occasionally getting caught in a chair with the torso stuck through the armrest. The evening activities culminated with the Oxford Uni Caving Club introducing 'The Constrictor'. The Constrictor is a contraption of two wooden planks held apart by screws so that the distance between planks is adjustable. In a perverse adaptation of the limbo, each person tries to pass their body between the two firmly held planks of wood. With each round, the planks are moved closer and closer and soon one has to exhale as the Constrictor is passed over their chest, and brace for substantial pain and bruising as it's pushed past the tailbone. "*The pain is temporary, but the glory is eternal!*" someone proclaimed.

The persistent pain in my own tailbone days later challenges this assertion. Still, I wear my bruises with pride and very much look forward to the next expedition. I think I'll fit in quite fine with the cavers. ■

OFD III to Smith's Armoury

2012.01.28, Wookey

Wookey was on his first caving trip since expo, a mere 6 months ago, whilst Tom was on his first trip since October 2008. (he's been skulking in Cambridge all that time but apparently avoiding potholes :-).

We wanted/needed some proper exercise and the weather was good (too nice to go caving really), so we headed across the traverses in OFDIII to Smith's Armoury right at the top end of the streamway. Not quite hard enough for the full 'welsh trips don't need ropes' approach we took a 'welsh SRT' approach with a 40m rope and another shorter piece, but no ladders and one foot-jammer each.

This is a very fine trip, although don't come if your shinning and 'ignoring big drops' skills aren't up to scratch as it has a great deal of shinning up and down and the famous traverses over rather large drops. It is possible to do the whole trip with no gear (Wookey was taken there this way sometime in the early 90's but even he thought it was a bit 'keen'). The 9m pitch/climb at the end of the crevasse really does need a handline+jammer at least. And a sensible level of gear is: 40m rope for the crevasse (5m down, traverse over big hole, 9m pitch). It would be a great deal easier if you brought a 30ft ladder for the 9m pitch, but we all managed with 1 jammer+footloop. There is also one 4m climb further on (before the traverses) which is sufficiently tricky that a rope is very sensible. A handy boulder at the top means you can pull it through afterwards



if you bring a 12m bit of rope, otherwise you need a competent victim to downclimb it.

We spent a good long time peering at the surveys to find the route and drew a very useful copy of the survey for the part from the Wedding cake to Bowhani junction, which is where most of the horizontal navigation is. The Wikipedia entry for the route from the crevasse to the streamway is really useful - we might not have made it without this as which level to be at is not totally obvious in places.

The shortest route is via Timo's table, but as we wanted to (a) go a way we knew at least the start of and (b) show the others the way we went via Salubrious streamway.

The two teams for the day joined up as far as the Salubrious junction so that Matt could remind himself what he was looking for on the way back. This caused a not-very-early start as

everyone got sorted, lights were tied to helmets etc.

We got underground at 12:30.

So the route is in ODFII, through the brick-yard, past the wedding cake, down the corkscrew climb to Salubrious then up Salubrious through a lot of passage that doesn't really look much like the survey (we tried to turn right too early and were generally confused for a while), before finally popping out after a short crawly bit into Chasm passage. It's a lower-level of Chasm at this point, so remember to look out for it on the return.

Go left along the very high Chasm for a short distance, then right into Poached Egg passage, crossing a junction to get to Bowhani junction where 5 passages meet. We took a worthwhile detour for 20m or so to the left to look at 'Straw Gallery' which is indeed very nice. Turns out you can't go round the loop back to the passage due to a big drop, so go back the way you came.

Going down to the right at Bowhani the general up-and-downiness commences, with a tricky climb and some traversing over holes. There is one more right turn to remember otherwise you'll go all the way up Creek Alley, and you have reached the crevasse.

This is an easy climb down made disconcerting by the 20m drop you could fall down, then you traverse over the hole and some false floor boulders to a 9m pitch. You can actually freeclimb this but it's really not very sensible, especially on the way back up as it's a slot you can fall out of into the big space, and it's very shiny and awkward. There are nice new stainless hangers+maillons on the crevasse climb+traverse and hangers on the pitch. We used a 42m rope which was plenty. This was handy in fact as when Wookey threw the tackle-sack down (after being reassured that that



was fine) it bounced off down the next drop to the bottom of the crevasse. Fortunately it was shinnable with a rope so was retrieved without too much difficulty.

We continued over more climbs in very up/down passage to get to a big space with a small boulder hole in the bottom corner. The easiest way is between the rocks but we did a tricky climb over the top instead. Down the bottom here seemed to be a dead end at moonmilky flowstone. We had to resort to the instructions as it didn't look traversable or shinnable. It is in fact a tricky 4m climb out of the bottom of the hole. This is the other place you would much prefer a rope (mostly for the return).

Shortly after this the traverses proper are reached. The first move is most entertaining as you have to use a ledge on the left wall and teeter over, but it does have some very handy stal fingerholds which actually make it quite easy. Just don't think about the huge drop. There are no bolts anyway (that we saw) so a rope won't help. More traversing follows, with an unhelpfully wide bit at the end. Wookey did all of it about 6 times back and forth, showing the best route, and everyone made it.

The dead-straight passage ends at a hole in the floor. down there, then back under the floor to climb down an awkward canyon then back again to a upwards squeeze which would keep the fatties out. You can just feel (more than hear) the rumble of the streamway by now.

Not too long after comes the bit in the photo with the really scary-looking ledge of calcited crap. This is in fact dead easy as you just step across the corner using a handy stal handhold. You have also become largely inured to big drops and delicate moves by now. There are some notable pretties along the way. All that caving and climbing has been an effective numpity-filter so things are not trashed.

Next is the comedy maypole bridge (long scaf-bar over big hole with the streamway below, which is also easier than it looks. God knows who carried that 15ft bar all the way down here! Well done to you sir.

Despite having arrived at the streamway (it's just below through holes) you keep going along this passage in a rather confusing fashion until you really do come out at the streamway without climbing.

Jess had been desperate for a piss for hours now, so enormous relief took place.

We plopped into the streamway and waded on up, accompanied by wails from Olaf, who

really doesn't like getting cold and wet. The stream is quite 'canal'y here mostly knee to thigh deep and very calm, but it was bloody freezing and my knees soon went numb. Turns out that Olaf the wailer has those knee-length wetsocks which are popular with welsh cavers, and was still moaning! The deepest water was just above MSBL but it's easy to trip over a rock or slide on smooth sandy rock and get wetter.

We saw 4 white cave fish, the longest about 12cm. They have eyes, but don't appear to be able to see.

The streamway is beautiful with marble streakings, sandbanks, and all sorts of forms. It's much quieter than down at I and II. It took about 40 mins to get to Smith's Armoury where we had a quick snack and bugged off out again. Wading for over an hour gives you thigh-ache.

So then we wizzed back out, not getting lost at all and not hanging around too much. There was a certain amount of quiet concentration and eheightened pulserates from Tom on the way back over the traverses, and we all struggled up the crevasse pitch with our welsh-SRT single jammer. But overall an efficient return was made and we were out in 3 hours (it took nearly 5 to get in).

Tess had been a star and cooked dinner for all by the time we got back, so a huge plate of pasta +veggie+oxfords leftovers was scoffed.

A most excellent trip with a great deal of caving in it. It should be done more often than once every 20years. I was knackered though and had to go to bed by 11pm.

Oh, and Wookey and Tom had terrible body-ache the next day.

T/U: 8 hours. ■

Where's my sandwich?

Caving in MALLORCA, 2009, *Jess Stirrups*

Who *Emma Wilson, Olly Madge, Kathryn Hopkins, Jess Stirrups*

We'd decided to have a slightly slack day, and had been seduced by the idea of a fairly small cave, whose entrance was at sea level in a sea cliff. To reach it we would have to walk over a headland to a small beach, and swim back around the coast for a mile or so. As we all had wetsuits, the weather was beautifully sunny, and there was another rather fine beach very close to the car park, we all felt that this was an eminently sensible option.

So, Olly and his "harem" made their lunch, piled into one car and set off. When we got to the "car park" we found it was actually a lay-by at the end of a dead-end road, but it seemed O.K. We got changed and followed the path down to the coast. The path ended at a large sandy cove, with a very enticing blue sea. Unsurprisingly, thoughts of caving vanished for a while as we all went for a swim...

Eventually we dragged ourselves away from the beach and walked along the increasingly vague path over to the other side of the headland. Once there, we once again donned the wetsuits and fins and, much to the puzzlement of the on-looking feral goats, launched ourselves into the sea.

It was a bit further than we'd reckoned, and took a bit longer, but it was really rather a nice bit of coast to swim along, with some impressive cliffs pierced with numerous small dark holes, each of which were greeted with enthusiasm

and cries of "*we're here!*". When we reached the cave we were aiming for, it was readily apparent we were in the right place – there was a huge arching hole in the cliff. Unfortunately it was also a very shallow hole, with seemingly no further way on. After much scrambling over some ledges and fallen boulders, we found it. A small tube lead off at sea level. It sumped every time a wave washed in. If we were going to go through, we would need either exquisite timing or an acceptance of periods in which we couldn't breathe.

Unsurprisingly, as this was supposed to be a slack day, we decided to give it a miss, and instead carried on swimming round the headland, back towards the beach near the cars. After a side trip through a sea arch (just to make sure we could claim we'd been underground!), we reached the beach and walked back to the cars. It was mid-afternoon by this time, and we were all quite hungry, and looking forward to lunch.

Upon opening the boot of the car, none of us could find any of our sandwiches! This prompted some more thorough searching, which revealed missing watches, money and phones. Some undesirable personage had picked the lock on the boot and stolen our stuff! And just to add insult to injury, they'd also taken our sandwiches! I don't care how hungry they may have been, but stealing our lunch as well as the rest really did take the biscuit (quite literally)!

So it was a rather hungry group which drove to the nearest town to report the theft... once



Fine formations in Mallorca. 📷 Edvin Deadman

there, I was left to guard the car (we weren't taking any more chances!) while the others went to the police station. I was sitting perfectly happily in the car in the car park, when all of a sudden, someone else came hurtling round the end of the row and drove straight into our car! As you can imagine, I was not a happy bunny, but decided that discretion was the better part of valour as the enraged local leapt out of his car, bellowed an uncomplimentary tirade in Spanish/mallorcan/local dialect at me before jumping back in his car and driving off.

The others returned to find me rather tight lipped and even less happy than I had been when discovering my sandwiches were nicked. There wasn't anything we could do, so we drove back to the villa in a bit of a hurry (we had long since missed our call out). Just to put the icing on the cake, it was mine, Emma's and Kathryn's turn to cook that evening. Oddly enough, the kitchen was eerily empty except for us... everyone else was keeping well out of our way...

Dinner was very welcome, and we began to cheer up. But just as we'd thought that we'd put the day behind us, what should we hear but a loud comment from the end of the table, concerning missed call outs and how irresponsible it was not to let people know we were O.K... When questioned what exactly we should have done, the rather surprising answer was "well, that's what people have mobile phones for, why didn't you have them with you?" (or similar wording, I can't remember it exactly!) Everyone went silent; you could hear a pin drop in the moment it took that comment to sink in. Emma was the first to react "*Well we did, but someone f***ing stole them!*" "*well, there's no need to be so aggressive*" was the muttered reply. Tony's comment later was that he'd never seen me, Emma or Kathryn so close to hitting someone, and he wasn't sure which of us would have got there first... Happily, everyone else managed to calm us all down, and after much local Sangria everyone managed to see the funny side of things. Though I'm still miffed about that sandwich... ■

On the (high) probability of finding a needle in a haystack

Caving in the PYRENEES, 2011, Aiora Zabala

First caving trip at home after being much of a novice caver in the UK. First time caving with a local group, Felix Ugarte Elkartea. I was utterly excited. We slept at the nice hut in Santa Grazi, Pyrenees, and we woke up early to take pictures of the enormous spaces in La Pierre de St. Martin. All indicated that we were going to be the only group of cavers that day in the area.

I was amazed at this group of cavers: a leading sprinter who could have gone back and forth three times before I arrived to Lepineux chamber; a wise geologist who was measuring a layer with his compass, wondering why its inclination didn't match with the overall direction of the layer in the area; another wise geologist who asserted that the short, ancient oversuit he used when caving in Venezuela was the best ever, and he was probably right; and a photographer who was more like an orchestra conductor, using all sorts of electronic toys to paint the large chamber with lights and directing a handful of people who understood exactly what to do under his orders. It was harmonious. I even had a role in this: "Aiora, please take the batteries out of the bag".

And the cave. It was a big cave. Very big indeed. Big enough for it to contain a waterfall and have no echo. I'll skip the particular details of the cave, for this is not the purpose here, and my novice self's view of La Verna chamber may be exaggeratedly bedazzled.

After a number of hours of caving uphill, downhill, and of taking pictures, we eventually


found a small group of cavers, also taking pics. They had illuminated a small pool which gave it the appearance of a jacuzzi. I thought, 'Mark [Shinwell] would like that lighting, I've to tell him about when back in Cambridge'. In thousands of cubic metres of cave vacuum, that was the only team we found. 'Nice', I thought, 'there are no crowds within continental caves!'

A little further down the way I saw that team's gear. "Curious, these cowstails are made of the same rope as that used by CUCC last year, they're the same as mine". But no, impossible coincidence: between Cambridge and the Pyrenees there are too many caves and cavers.

And after an excellent, long caving trip, extremely enjoyable for the absence of black, deep, unrigged holes beneath, we head out. Walking towards the car, half of my team was up ahead, in a hurry to get changed and arrive home by midnight. The other half still had an excess of energy and stood behind taking further pics of the cave. So I was on my own, happily enjoying the view of a pretty, fresh forest of what was probably *Fagus Sylvatica*, and visualizing how cool the caving had been.

Suddenly I was surrounded by a group of unknown *Cavers sp.* Interesting. I could quickly identify that they were not *Cavers Pyrenaica*, nor even *C. Iberica*: their disposition was that of a group feeling unease in an exotic habitat, aiming to move as fast as possible from safe-spot A (the cave) to safe-spot B (the car), while not being hunted or detected on the way.



A chamber in La Pierre de St. Martin.  Sergio Laburu and Felix Ugarte Elkarte group

¹ Photos and more on this trip: www.felixugarte.org/archives/1393



View of Santa Grazi village, Pyrenees, a few km below the encounter. 📷 Sergio Laburu

“¡Hola!”, I should never miss the chance to talk to members of such a rare family of species, unless there is something more interesting to pay attention to.

One of the *Cavers sp.* looked and roared something like an “hola” as well, but decidedly kept looking straight ahead as if they wanted not to interact with local fauna. Another member of the group looked. Right and left. He thought, ‘for God’s sake, this is as unlikely as a neutrino travelling faster than light’. Then he turned back and replied unemotionally: “Hello how are you”, as if we were just meeting for a beer at The Castle Inn. This was Ollie [Stevens], and the *Cavers sp.* turned out to be *C. Britannicus*, *subsp. Cuccensis* and *Bristolensis*: Ollie, Gareth [Phillips], Mark [Shinwell], and others. This was that ‘other’ group taking pics in La Pierre de St. Martin. That was funny. Very strange indeed.

Then suspicions came: ‘Has CUCC sent a special delegation to make sure that the President is compliant with her duties?... Do they want to make sure that I’m not actually conducting caving espionage?... Or is it just that they want

to be 100% certain that I am taken care of in alien caves? How kind of them... understandably the club wants to make sure that its novices survive. We are a scarcity nowadays!’

After subjective suspicion, clarity of mind led to more plausible explanations, and thus I developed a complete new theory which put the whole concept of probability under scrutiny. Plausible explanation I reassert: after many years of fighting to cram statistics into my brain, here comes CUCC to demonstrate, ‘don’t bother, stats don’t actually explain anything real’, and hereby comes the new theorem:

- The probability of finding a caver you know (after only one year of caving) in a space of many millions of cubic metres below the surface, within a 1,400km radius of Cambridge, is close to nil.

It will happen.

Two other events came later to provide further empirical evidence to this direct confrontation between caving and stats:



Javier Manteca, Aiora Zabala and Gorka Romero from FUE near La Verna chamber. 📷 Sergio Laburu

- October 2011.
 Expected route: Lancaster hole to County pot.
 Actual route: Lancaster hole + 6 hours of side walking + unnoticed 180° turn = Lancaster hole.
 Probability of bumping into Olly [Madge] to help me out, at the precise moment in which I was thinking, “either I eat a cow, or I sleep on this very cosy boulder, before I can continue three more hours up to County entrance”: $p < 0.01$.
 It certainly happened.
- December 2011.
 Expected route: something somewhere near Bull Pot Farm.
 Actual route: can't remember. At some point our group had turned into a bunch of ants confused over a spill of pheromones, trying to find a hole within thousands of cubic metres of boulders.
 Probability of finding the hole where we came from: 0.6. You guessed it. We did not. Not even Olaf's prodigious

cave-memory worked – Crisis! We were at risk of missing our callout.

Probability of bumping into Serena, Olly [Madge], and Mark [Shinwell]: close to nought.

Of course it happened!

The latter event in particular became even surreal when, after sparking thoughts predicting that we would have to sit and wait for rescue and die of hunger in the following hours, we still stopped for quite a while on our way out like tourists, to take pictures. Apparently it was worth it for one of them became a magazine cover soon after...

Conclusion: caving is to probability like relativity is to traditional physics. If something is probable, it probably won't happen in the way that your caving plan's probability function predicts. In contrast, moving to the extremes of the tails, the more improbable an encounter is, the higher the chances are for it to happen. ■

Da Xiao Dong

Caving in *CHINA*, 2001, *Wookey*

“*Come to China!*” they said. Slideshows of enormous caves, right by the road. It did all look pretty tempting. Like expo, but easier, and bigger, and more foreign. Oh, and warmer and less rainy.

Well, they were right about the foreign bit. Most of the rest turned out to be..., shall we say... ‘optimisitic’?

In 2001 I went to Tian Xing, on the last of the old ‘China Caves Project’ style trips, where we

paid a hefty day-rate to the Chinese for full-service caving trips: transport, accommodation, food, translators, fix-it men, and fancy dinners with officialdom. Erin was there, but hadn’t yet made the Hong Megui chinese caving DIY revolution happen.

The thing about China is the foreignness. You can’t speak a word of the language, none of the locals over age 6 speak any English, you can’t read signs, and you generally have no clue what’s going on. This is somewhat disconcert-

Da Xiao Dong entrance. 📷 *Chris Densham*



ing, but as a mere grunt it's largely not your problem. All you have to do is go caving.

But before you can do that there is a lot of etiquette to go through. Tian Xing is a long way from Cambridge, even more so ten years ago than now. You fly to Hong Kong, then get a bus across the border (because this saves a fortune over flying directly out of Hong Kong), fly to Chongqing, stay a night and sort gear. Bus to Wulong and another night and another dinner, then finally bus up the mountain to the village and get chucked out with your huge pile of gear.

And this process is full of mystery and surprise. I'd never heard of Chongqing before this trip, but it's a city of 19 million people - more than twice the size of London! It's huge. And the only thing you recognise in the whole place is Carrefour, which is kind of wierd. And it's much posher than one's impression of China had led me to expect. All the Chinese were much better dressed than English potholers, and had way cooler phones (or phones at all in my case).

Going away from the place you are staying at is tricky. The only way you can travel is to be given a magic token of squiggles which you are assured can be used to get you back again. I actually cheated and used GPS to walk back from town, which worked OK, bearing in mind that this was a 1996 GPS where you get a lat/long location, speed and direction, not a nice road map, so just setting off in the right direction could easily be foiled by rivers, motorways or railways.



Top to bottom:
 Press conference in Wulong
 Pile of gear on arrival
 Gear carry, chinese style
 Farmhouse we stayed in
 Lev chillin' with the locals
 Chris Densham

The Chinese love their dinners and official engagements. We had hours of fancy dining in Chongqing and then Wulong, and a reception with an 'Anglo-US-Sino caving expedition' banner 10m long and several hours of speechifying in Chinese which was probably pretty dull even if you understood the language.

The thing that bugged me about the dinners with the local party officials and bigwigs and hangers-on was that it never seemed clear whether we were paying for them or vice versa. And it clearly wasn't the done thing to ask either. There were of course a lot of strange foodstuffs: chicken's feet and frog soup (both mostly bones), some sea-squirt things (fairly horrid), a lot of tea (poured with extraordinary accuracy from about 4 feet away) and rice wine (dangerous). There was some fairly edible stuff, but on the whole it was a relief to finally get to 'peasant-village world' where you got sensible food like rice, eggs and ham. In fact that was largely it for 3 weeks, but it was a lot nicer than the fancy stuff.

We also got to see the pace of development - there was an enormous amount of road and bridge building, terrible pollution from chimneys, and massive dam works at the foot of the mountain as everything was being moved 150m up the hill ready for the Yangtze Dam completion in a few years time.

So finally, after several days of travel and preliminaries we got to Tian Xing. This was a proper hill village, looking just like the China I expected. Farmers, people carrying baskets of stuff nearly as big as themselves with headstraps, not a car in the place, apart from the TV crews that had followed us here (yes 3 of them - apparently we were a big deal!).

If you stood on a rise you could see miles and miles and miles of very lumpy karst, apparently about the size of Yorkshire, and largely unexplored from a potholing POV. Wow!

Caving, I hear you cry - what about the caving?

Well, yes, there had been a previous trip here in 1996 so some sites were known. But it turned out that whilst they did have at least one huge sinkhole, none of the entrances were very close by. For the first couple of days we got to use the TV-crew's pickups until they got bored and left, but the rest of the time involved an awful lot of trekking back and forth to entrances a few km away. In the pouring rain.

Oh, did I not mention the rain? It rained. A lot. Nearly every day. The paths got all slippery in the wet, our gear got wet, the caves got wet. One's enthusiasm seeps away. We were so bedraggled walking back from one trip that a local insisted on giving us their umbrella. They clearly thought we were idiots for coming here without an umbrella, and they did have a point.

There were various trips in the time we were there, but I'll just cover Da Xiao Dong (later renamed) as that was where we had the most success, and it was a place worthy of retelling.

The entrance was 7km from the village at the bottom of a truly stonking sinkhole. The depression was about 160m deep and 400m long. It was hard to get a feel for the scale of it as it was all covered in jungle so you couldn't actually see it all from anywhere. At the bottom a river came in from a waterfall at one end and disappeared into an entrance at the other end; i.e. it was straight out of those slideshows that got me here. Like Malham cove but much bigger: the cliff was 140m high, the entrance in it 100m high and 60m wide. Pretty impressive stuff!

Getting down the hole was tense. The first guide ran away after getting us all lost and stuck on a ledge. He was replaced by an ancient gent who did at least seem to know the way down. He



Wookey exploring DXD: Tree belay on 3rd pitch, bolting last pitch, surveying. 📷 Chris Densham

led the way, hacking back the undergrowth, but was clearly very worried about snakes. How poisonous are chinese snakes - anyone know? No, we don't. Maybe we should have checked... Oh well, what could possibly go wrong? We could die here in horrible agony on this unreasonably steep and very slippery slope full of thorny shit, in the pouring rain. Remind me why I came here again - it was supposed to be easy...

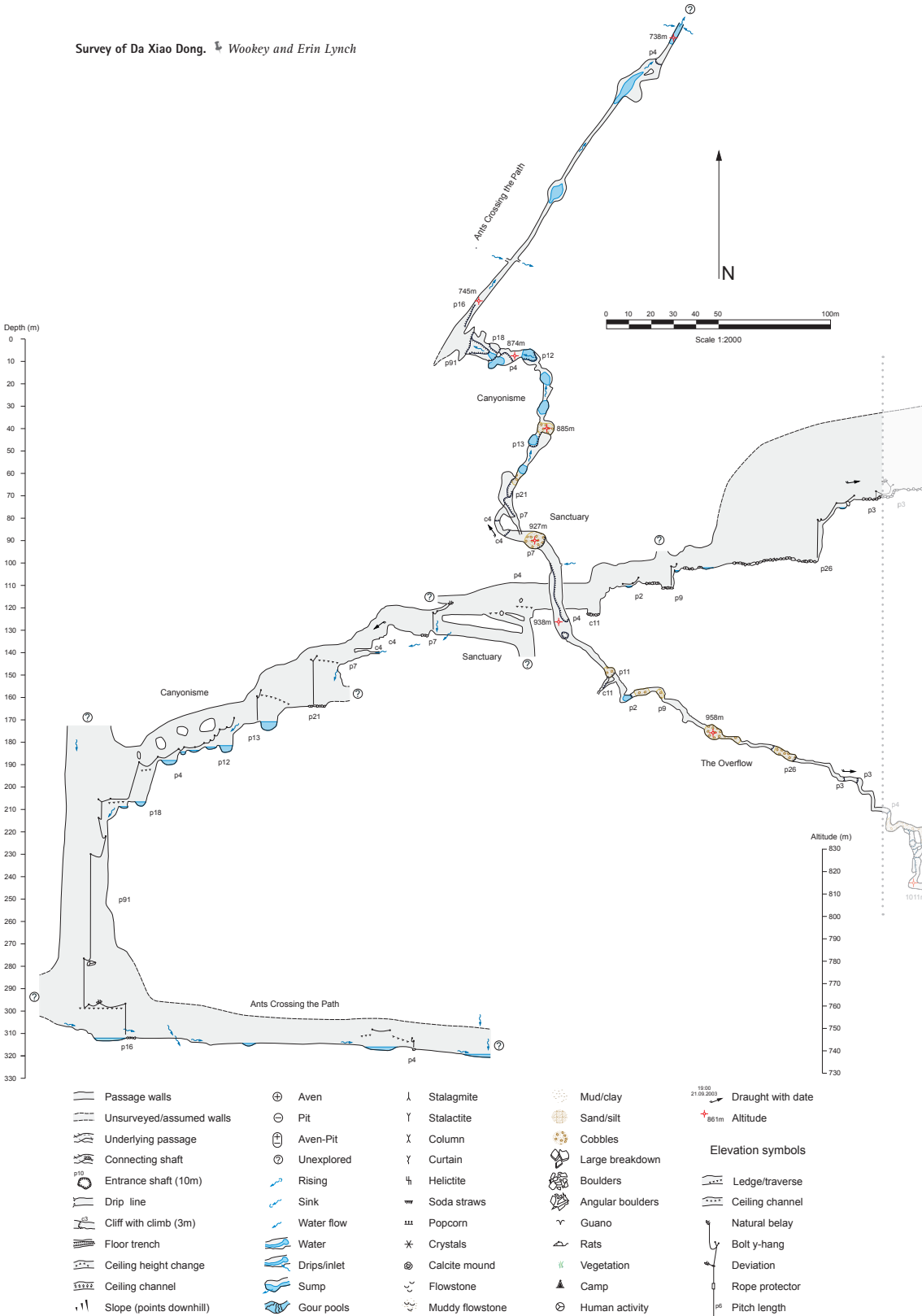
But our spirits rose on getting a proper view of that entrance. Wahey! This is more like it. However at the back of the entrance chamber the actual cave was about 2m wide and 4m high. Not bad, but something of a disappointment after the epic entrance. And all very smooth; disconcertingly so. It was essentially a nice yorkshire streamway cave, winding its way down interrupted by short pitches. So we shinned, rigged and bodedged our way down, not getting far on the first couple of trips, firstly due to lack of gear, and secondly being stoped by truly monstrous amounts of water making it

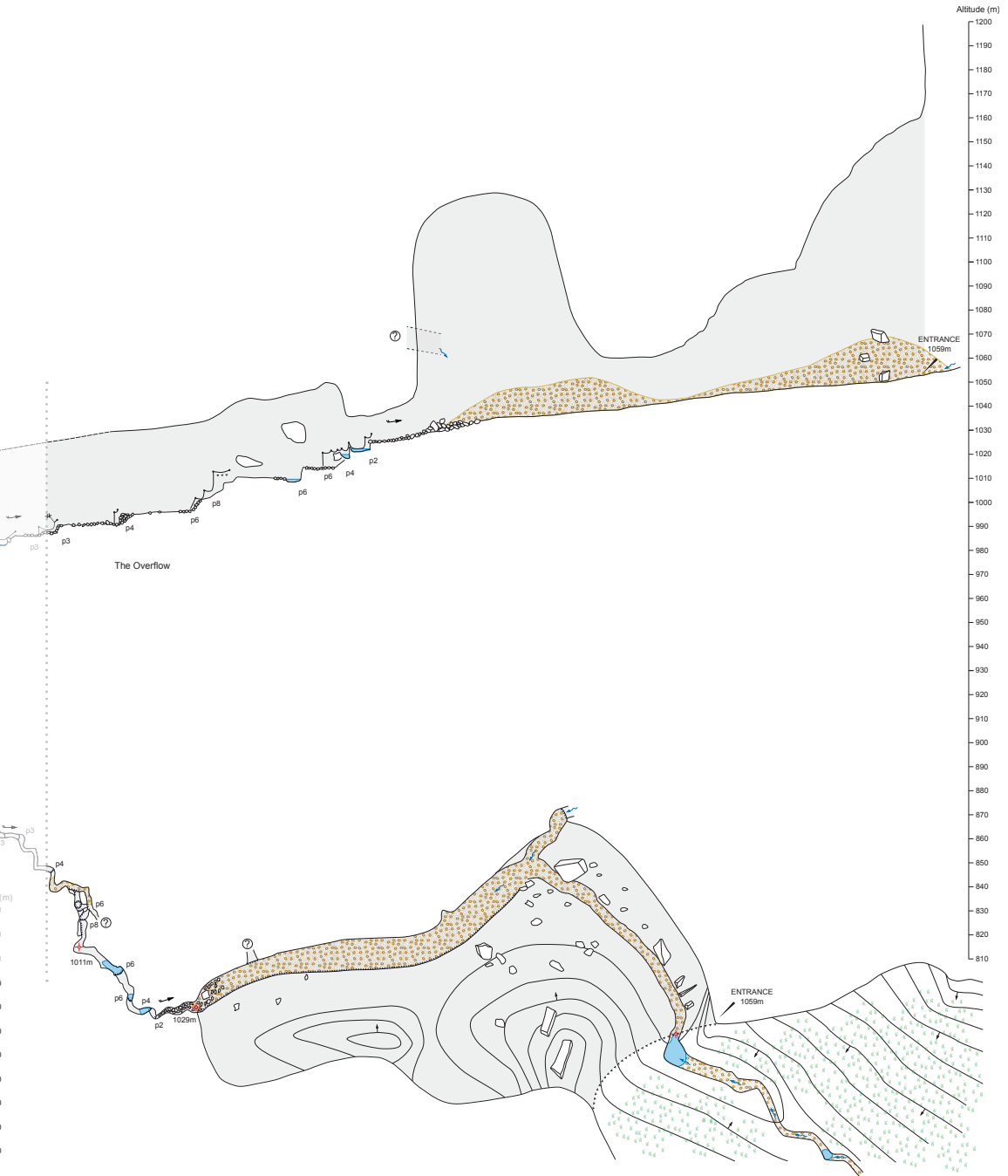
impassable at the 2nd pitch, so we ran away for a couple of days until levels dropped.

It was also pretty damn hard work walking 7km to the cave, down the depression, going caving and then walking all the way back (usually in the rain), and was clearly going to lead to very long days. So our minders arranged for us to sleep in a farmhouse near the entrance.

Now these farmhouses were quite something. The farmers appeared to be pretty-much subsistence and not well off, but they had remarkably big houses, maybe 25m x 10m with kitchen, living room, workshop, bedroom, store and a set of animal pens on one end, with a huge slurry pit underneath. They had power, TV and phone. The crapper was the end animal pen, which also contained a small pig, so taking a dump was a fascinating and frustrating exercise in lining up your arse over the holes in the slatted floor whilst fighting off the pig that was determined to get its snout in your poo. And of course if it succeeded, or the last visitor had been innacurate, it became much harder

Survey of Da Xiao Dong. *Wookey and Erin Lynch*





to fend off without getting covered in poo yourself. OK, now we're properly in the sticks. Those sayings about pigs and shit? : all true.

The caving was good, brilliant in fact. We had a top team of me, Chris Densham, Brian Judd and Lev Bishop. All good cavers, but Brian stands out as the sort of caver of which tales are told. He was relatively old at about 50 but extremely fit, and it was a good job as he was the world's most forgetful man. Once we'd got to the entrance and he'd forgotten his wellies. Normal people would take that as a jacking excuse, but not Brian, he scooted back up out of the massive hole, 2km to the farmhouse and 2km back in remarkably short time and caught us up underground. That sort of keenness is scary, but really gets stuff done.

We were also 100% LED cavers which was radical stuff back then, but very useful for caving a long way from base. On another trip to the Furong Dong showcave with hordes of TV-cameramen my 2W LED saved the day when their 50W filming lights went flat. The budgets ranged from Lev's very expensive lithium HDS Actionlight, through Chris's retrofit Duo and my DIY France array, to Brian's very cheap Gelert headlamp which had to have its battery cap snopped on.

As we worked our way down the cave we started to notice that it may not be a very nice place to be when it rains. Huge tree trunks were jammed high in the ceiling, and you wonder how they had got round all the bends so far, and every crevice in the rock had pebbles and small rocks jammed in hard. Every surface was scratched and rounded off, suggesting that the water absolutely thundered down here, bringing plenty of rocks with it. But it seemed benign enough in the current conditions, even though it had been raining a fair amount outside.

We had a wonderful time finding our way through the cave which seemed to have a dif-

ferent character for every trip. The entrance stream sank into boulders not too far in and the passage widened and quietened; a devious shin 11m down a little rift avoided a pitch; a confusing multilevel part where we followed fossil passage for a while: we called that 'sanctuary', as it looked like the only bit of the whole place that actually stayed dry. Plenty of threads and naturals were used.

After a while we were 9 short pitches in and down about 150m where the stream reappeared, larger than before and a 21m pitched dropped back into the canyon. Now it was a lot bigger and we were glad we'd brought lifejackets with us in case of swims. It was tricky but rewarding passage, with big pools to shin round. Chris D put in a fine teetery bolt traverse by the power of skyhooks, but the polished walls, flowstone slopes and undercuts meant eventually we had to get wet. In fact it was now pretty-much a canyoning trip underground and there were big grins all round. Ahead the stream clearly thundered down a big hole which sounded impassible, but in fact it did a most unusual thing - it forked. Most of the water cascaded through a hole down a waterfall, whilst some carried on over flowstone. An oxbow was just in the process of forming as a lower route captured the water. The upper fork was most convenient for us as it avoided trying to follow the pounding waterfall that nearly filled the passage.

Lev and Brian had even carried rubber rings all the way over and down the cave in case of canals - they weren't the handiest of items to cave with, and turned out to be entirely unnecessary, but Chris and I enjoyed taking the piss as they bounced and wrestled their rings up and down the cave.

At the end of the canyoning we arrived at something a lot more serious-sounding. Up until now the cave had been largely horizontal with mostly small pitches and climbs, but now the river (it was no longer just a stream) thun-

dered over the edge into a big shaft formed on a joint. It looked pretty intimidating with spray everywhere, but the joint was wide so it was do-able. It turned out to be over 100m deep, and part-way down we were on 8mm string as we'd run out of proper rope. Wet 8mil is bloody scary! To make it worse, about 60m down we abseiled past leaves and bits of twigs, and below that a big scum-line, showing that the entire shaft filled to a depth of ~20m in wet conditions. Being at the bottom of that, several hours from the surface, really isn't a good feeling.

It was dank, wet and oppressive down here but nevertheless we pressed on, following the river along a dead-straight joint, with some interesting traversing over the deep bits, trying not to get too cold and wet. At one point we passed something I've never seen before or since: two streams flowing across each other. A smaller stream flowed in one wall and out of the other, crossing the main flow along the fault, in a most unlikely fashion. Down yet another pitch back to the river level, there was also water jetting out of the walls, making something of a maelstrom and general washing-machine experience, as well as being deafening. I had to turn round and rush out of the cave, to get back to camp in order to catch a flight home. I'd spent the last couple of hours working out what time was the latest I could leave and still get back to camp at a reasonable hour. It was a terrible wrench to leave this marvellous (if now rather scary) cave when it was going like a train, but I didn't have much choice.

I left at 3.20pm and whizzed out of the cave, back up the doline, past the farmhouse to collect gear and then started the long walk back. Unfortunately it was soon dark and as I followed the short-cut we had used on the way there it became hard to be sure I was still

going the right way. Eventually I reached the road, with much relief, and set off, taking the expected first left. After a while of everything looking wrong it became plain that I was on the wrong road, lost in the dark in the middle of China. Much faffing and traipsing ensued, until eventually I found a house to ask (well, I could say 'Tian Xing' a lot and hope they got the message). A man came out and pointed up a path which really didn't look very likely, but I took it anyway and had another rather worrying hour or so, having decided that if it got to 10pm I was just going kip wherever I was and wait for daylight. But finally I came over a crest to see the extremely welcome lights of Tian Xing, from a direction I've never approached before, getting there a mere 6.5 hours of full-on slog (with all my soggy gear) after setting off.

It turns out that the others I'd left down the cave didn't get much further before deciding it was too wet and scary to continue and the smart money was on derigging and running away to return in a drier year. We did get down almost 330m in one of the finest sporting caves I've visited.

Various other caves were visited, some spectacular, and one rather poxy entrance we found, very close to the village, eventually turned out to be the deepest cave in China, but you really wouldn't guess from looking at it. Funny how things turn out.*

Thanks to *Chris, Brian and Lev* for some memorable caving.

Tian Xing 2001 expedition members
Erin Lynch, Chris Densham, Lev Bishop, Rob Garrett, Zhang Yuan Hai, Wookey, Brian Judd, Eoghan Lynch, Anne Lynch, Oz Williams, Conor McGrath ■

*Read the full trip log at <http://homepage.mac.com/brianjudd/cavedive/china/china01/2001loga/2001loga.html>

My most surreal caving trip ever: ice caving at 78° degrees North

Caving in SVALBARD, 2008, *Djuke Veldhuis*

Flying into Longyearbyen, the largest settlement on Svalbard, Norway, what strikes you is the sheer impact glaciers have had on this archipelago. The town itself is located in the valley of Adventdalen, by the bay of Isfjorden (located on the west coast of Spitsbergen) and nestled between mountains, most prominently Plateaufjellet. It is forbidden to die here. In the 1930s people noticed that bodies were not decomposing in the permafrost and so the local graveyard stopped accepting the dead. If you're gravely ill or old you'll be despatched back to mainland Norway. That's a reassuring thought when you've come to do some ice caving, inside a glacier, at a time when daylight is pretty much non-existent and temperatures without wind chill are a cosy -25° Celsius. At least no one would leave us lying around.

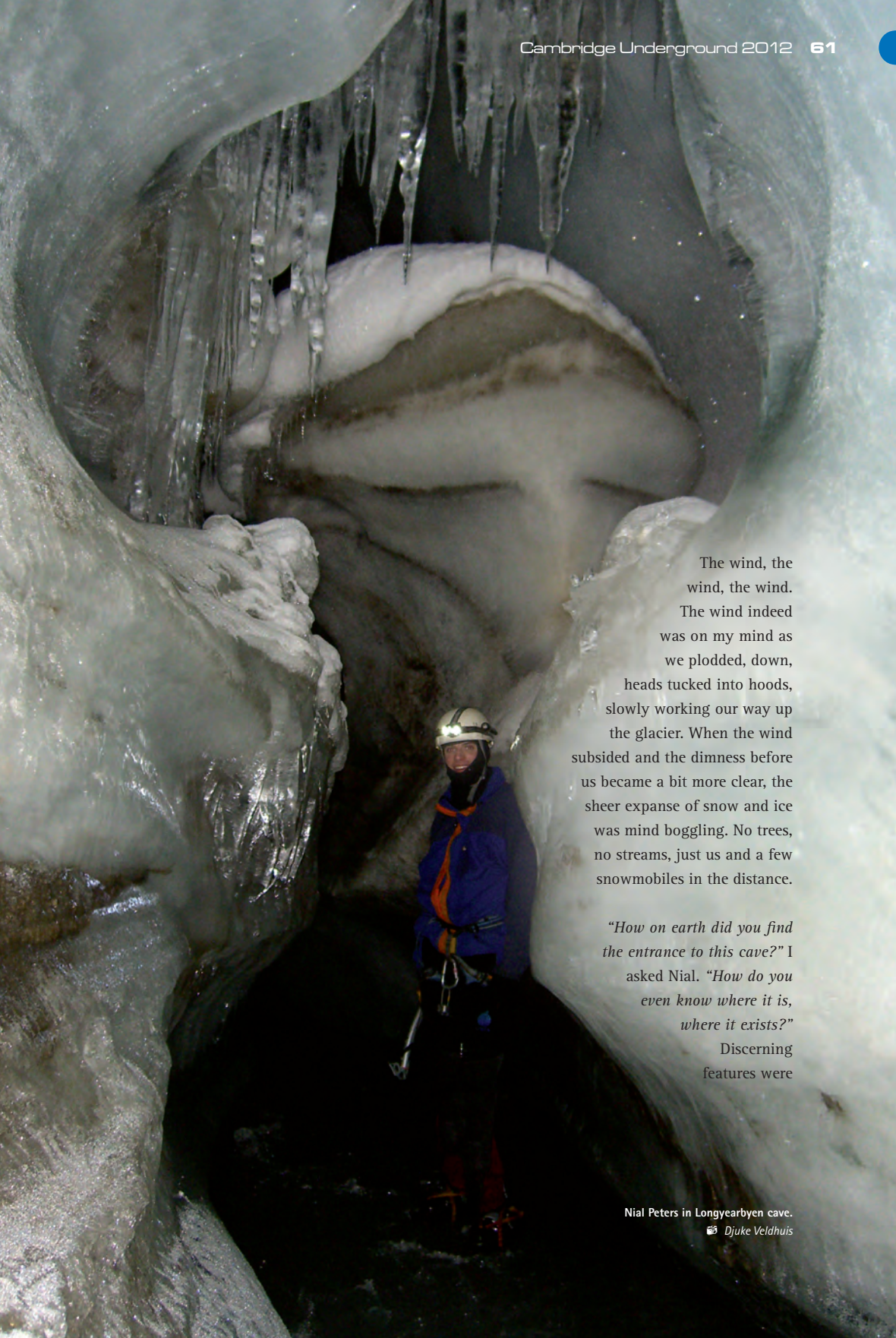
Stepping out of the tiny airport, not much more than a glorified hangar, the wind whips up around us in the darkness. Tony (Rooke) and I have come to visit Nial Peters, who is stationed here as part of a Masters degree. We soon learn that the caving 'kit list' is slightly different to the UK:

- 1) Rifle
- 2) Skis and poles
- 3) Super warm all in one furry suit
- 4) Crampons (OK, so, we use those in Austria too, but only for jollies)
- 5) Rope / helmet / lights / SRT kit (minus standard furry, oversuit, wellies or wetsocks)

Seriously, I was in heaven (a slightly darker and colder one than the usual tableau's presented in holy books, but still). Although a rifle may be of use trying to ensure an orderly progression of novices on their first caving trip, in this case it was a requirement by law. Nobody is allowed to go outside of Longyearbyen without carrying (and hopefully being able to use) a rifle which exists to protect you against polar bears. Cool as it sounds however, I soon learnt that rifles are:

- 1) *Heavy*: students typically use the rifles left over from WWII, not exactly the light-weight, up-to-date models.
- 2) *Probably futile*: remember that wind I mentioned? Well combine it with fine snow and a darkened landscape and I can guarantee you that your polar bear friend will be on top of you (with those nice soft padded claws) before you notice anything awry.

Nevertheless, off we went: a rifle between the three of us strapped to a rucksack, skis strapped to our feet, SRT gear, fluffy hats, gloves and some chocolate bars. Brilliant and beautiful. There is nothing akin to "skiing" (lets not be pedantic here – though it is probably fair to say that Tony and Djuke did more 'waddling and sliding' than skiing), up the vast Longyearbreen glacier. The town's lights disappeared behind us and in the distance the fjord gleamed in the darkness.

A photograph of a person, Nial Peters, standing in a narrow, icy cave passage. The person is wearing a blue jacket, a white helmet with a headlamp, and a harness. The cave walls are covered in ice, and long icicles hang from the ceiling. The lighting is dim, highlighting the textures of the ice and the person's gear.

The wind, the
wind, the wind.
The wind indeed
was on my mind as
we plodded, down,
heads tucked into hoods,
slowly working our way up
the glacier. When the wind
subsided and the dimness before
us became a bit more clear, the
sheer expanse of snow and ice
was mind boggling. No trees,
no streams, just us and a few
snowmobiles in the distance.

*“How on earth did you find
the entrance to this cave?” I
asked Nial. “How do you
even know where it is,
where it exists?”*

Discerning
features were

few and far between. Every now and then I would stumble as in the blanket whiteness my depth perception was gone and my eyes continually played tricks on me. It turns out that another student was studying ice caves. During the summer they had gone and tracked some of the streams, noting with a GPS where the water disappeared went underground. They had subsequently come back in winter with some avalanche probes and by the sound of it spend an enjoyable afternoon literally poking in the snow. We were heading now, I was informed, for a pole with a little flag on it where we would dig our way in...

Yeah right! Right?

As I slowly plodded forward and the glacier stretched out into the forever dimming horizon – it was well past midday after all – I still remember the incredulous snigger that escaped my mouth when Nial said, “*I think it’s somewhere around here...*” Although the glacier was flanked by a mountain ridge and orientation was thus theoretically possible, I was still amazed how they ever found it in the first place. To say I would never doubt Nial again, would be overstating it, but I was suitably impressed when, true to his word, a short flag pole appeared through the swirling snow just ahead of us. It was in many ways the most unremarkable yet memorable cave entrance I have ever seen.

Pole in the snow, check. So what’s next? Digging of course...digging through snow into the hole below.

After a few minutes of digging, a body sized hole lay below us. I suddenly became very



Mesmerising cave formations all sparkling away in icy splendour. 📷 Djuke Veldhuis



Djuke squeezing between ice walls. 📷 Nial Peters

aware of where I was standing. How many other ice cave entrances were around here that Nial and his friends might have missed? No time to think about that. Why you ask? Well, I was uncontrollably giggling as we proceeded to dig a trench next to the hole. Why you ask? Well, to place some ski’s in around which we then tied our rope. What else were we going to use as a P-hanger :-). Time to get the harness and the crampons on then!

I had never abseiled into an ice cave before...

I had never abseiled into an ice cave *into a glacier* before...

I had never abseiled into an ice cave into a glacier *off some skis* before...

I had never abseiled into an ice cave into a glacier, off some skis *in the arctic circle* before.

Now I have and it's brilliant and I want to go again...

The first thing you notice as you abseil down the cascading ice while trying to avoid piercing the rope with your crampon points, is the sheer WARMTH. Seriously, I felt like I had just stepped into a cosy log cabin. With the howling wind now a lackadaisical breeze, other sounds permeated. Somewhere far below the trickle of water. Here, the ice utterly mesmerising: so many shapes, forms, colours, sounds....hang on, wait. Did I really hear WATER?! Yes, yes I did. Cue Nial pointing out that as we reach the 'bottom' of the pitch (read 'bulbous ice cascade'), we shouldn't be unsettled by the fact that the top layer of 'ice' is actually 'slush'. It was fine, he assured us, because underneath was probably solid ice.

[...Hang on. Time out]. Nial, did you say 'probably'?! "Erm, yeah" was the response, followed by a reassuring tale of one of his colleagues was in just such a cave assuming slush was 'supported' by ice, only to end up plunging into freezing water. But, said Nial with his usual smile, "*she was hard*". The story goes, that despite being alone, she crawled out (brrrr!) and managed to ski off the glacier back to civilisation. Nevermind, minor mishap.

Forget the top layer of soft, wet, disconcerting, distinctly unfrozen H₂O – I was hooked. It didn't scare me, not the cracks, the water, the slush – it was just absolutely BRILLIANT. In a place like that it is a privilege to be alive. In silence we drank in the splendour all around. Here we were, INSIDE a glacier; somewhere far down below, water cascaded and in several months time this would be a tumultuous river carving through rock and permafrost. The mushy top layer not withstanding, all around were ice



More cave formations. 📷 Djuke Veldhuis

crystals, curtains, walls and frozen waterfalls. I don't want to sound overly sentimental, but it is for such moments that I LIVE. Earth never ceases to astound me.

Sometimes you could see the rock through the ice. I can't quite explain it and it seems ridiculous saying this as a caver, but where you could see rock behind the ice, it felt alien and out of place. Oh and then there were the 'squeezes' – great fun, so EASY (well going across), slide, slide, slide away.

Needless to say, I can't do the place justice with words. I think the accompanying pictures will speak far more elegantly than my written account ever well... Thanks Nial & Tony for a caving trip I will never forget. ■

Spits, Gösser and flies: selected entries from a decade of Expo logbooks

Richard Mundy (compiler)

Journey – Packing and Journey to Austria

2003, Mark Shinwell

It appears that I have the pleasure of inscribing the first of what will

[LARGE DEAD FLY STUCK TO PAGE, COVERED IN CELLOPHANE, LABELLED “3D FLY-0-SCOPE - DIE FLY”]

Never look a log book in the mouth. As I was saying,

no doubt be the usual collection of impeccably *[sic.]* written reports, each written longingly with due care and attention (ignoring distractions such as *[illegible]* insects), with the authors in a sufficiently sober state so as to recount the superbly accurate tales in the worst manner possible.

Horse flies in Austria weren't the only ones taking the piss. AN excellent sponsorship effort by Julia led to the delivery of 125kg of noodles (912 packets, just think how far those noodles would stretch!) in 33 boxes of varying size. A mammoth van-packing effort, including trips to every corner of Cambridge (and Bury St. Edmunds, root of all evil) *[footnote: Greene King Ltd. (PLC?)]* managed to cram 100kg of the noodles and an amazing pile of other shit into Mark's van...

The Incredible Journey

2000, Duncan Collis

Up at 6.30 am. Finished packing. Drive to Sheffield (north from Chesterfield, grrr...) to pick up Mark [Byers?], then down to Cambridge to fettle the trailer. Much banging, spannering, socket setting and angle grindering on Wook's new driveway later and we gave up with the intended fettle half done as it was going to be far too hard.

Went to the tackle store to pack. Humungous amount of shit, so Earl + I ran away to get more shit from Earl's house, leaving Mark to pack the trailer. Returned to find the trailer FULL, packed with a mountain of shit rising high above the level of the sides of the trailer. Unfortunately, there was still one and a half times as much stuff lying on the ground waiting to be packed.

Advanced trailer packing methods were clearly required so we constructed a palisade of full tackle sacks standing upright round the edge of the trailer, and then filled up the space in the middle, making a mound which rose up well above the height of the tackle bags (there should be a photo of this somewhere). Got Mark to perch on the edge of the back seat of the car, and stuffed gear in beyond him right up to the roof. Eventually everything was packed except one bag of onions (Earl + Mark both refused

to have a bag of onions on their lap), and the connector for the lights on the trailer were less than 2 inches off the ground.

En-route to Dover, Mark realised that his passport was in a bag which we had carefully packed into the trailer. Fquit #1. Then Earl found the Tacklestore keys in his pocket. Fquit #2. So in Dover we had some Chish'n'fips and then team Einstein opened the trailer to rescue Mark's passport, then rang up Caius p'lodge to explain where the keys were, and posted them back.

Mark and Earl both enjoyed 15½ hours of driving across Europe; Earl couldn't move his feet and Mark couldn't move anything (in a traffic jam, we spotted some Germans pointing out Mark's face pressed against the window, and laughing), but did get to know whenever I used the indicators, as the buzzer was just behind his head.

Eventually we arrived and everything was alright. The plug on the trailer lights were only a bit ground down due to scraping on the autobahn. Into the Gasthof for Schnapps, food + bier, which did its stuff. Later we went back to the Gasthof again for a sesh, during the course of which I lost the ability to stand up and staggered around, to everyone's amusement, eventually falling over in the middle of the room.

Journey — The Lardmobile's First Trip

2002, *Wookey*

Having spent the previous week finally fettling the wookmobile to run on veg oil, using the system for the drive to Austria was something of a leap of faith, as, for example, only the day before I had melted the float sensor, and I hadn't got round to making the tank level

sensor work (amongst other things) requiring guessing how full the tank is.

Supposed to catch a 9.30 ferry & be at the port at 8.30. Left my home at 5.20, a mere 20 mins late for intending to get to Alex's near Colchester at 6. Unfortunately car died en route. Found that one of the 3 plastic T-pieces in the plumbing had melted, despite being OK for various trips in the previous week. Swapped bits around to get going again but dropped cap after bleeding system (aargh!) and wasted more time looking for it. Finally pinched one off a bike tyre and continued. Took ages to get to Colchester and then got a bit lost trying to find Alex's. All this meant it was 7.15 at Alex's (1 1/2 hours late). At this point realized Colchester is no closer to Dover than Cambridge. Net result is we missed the ferry by 15mins - first time I've ever missed an outgoing ferry. Waited until 01.45 (getting some kip) & then nice 2hr kip on board (Norfolk lines -> Dunkirk). Then usual drive across Europe, enlivened somewhat by buying loads of lard in supermarkets & pouring it into system (cheapest oil comes in 1 litre pots!) Arrived at Hilde's ~11pm in time for a couple of beers. Bloody Hell - it works! Only problem was a horrible graunching from rear left wheel which is obviously shagged - hopefully it'll make it back to the UK.

Taty Hut Fester

2000, *Duncan Collis*

Well, right now most have gone to bed. Phil U is face down on the table. Mark B has just sliced his hand open trying to open a Gösser with another bottle, and Mark S has got peanut butter all over his trousers. Duncan (your scribe) is surprisingly conducting himself with considerable decorum.

PS. Mark B is OK, now that he has had his hand plastered by the equally plastered Phil,

supposedly Dr. Phil. Hopefully I can go caving tomorrow (Mark Shinwell).

Base Camp – Duncan's Tasty Dish Pot. Ht.

2001, *Duncan Collis*

Written down by popular request

- 1 Pan
- 2 Add slart of oil
- 3 Add soy sauce
- 4 Chop 1 onion into little bits + add to pan
- 5 Chop 2 cloves garlic into slices + add to pan
- 6 Sprinkle into pan stuff like garam masala powder, cardamom seeds, ginger powder, mixed herbs ... other yummy stuff
- 7 Nearly forgot the important bit - chop heavy-as-lead bread into small cubes and add to pan
- 8 Light stove + start frying, turning contents occasionally
- 9 Crack 3 eggs into cup + whisk
- 10 Sprinkle into eggs more yummy stuff
- 11 Add slart of soy sauce into eggs
- 12 When stuff in pan is going a bit crisp and slightly browner, tip egg mix in
- 13 If possible, turn the omelette in one piece (ha ha!)
- 14 Probably end up just scrunging it around the pan. Make sure it's cooked through + then eat.

Rave Reviews!!

Very yummy indeed – *Mark Shinwell*
XLENT – *Brian*

Base Camp – Searching for an Alm (abridged) (Olly's Pissed Rant)

2003, *Olly Madge*

Once upon a time two cavers got pissed. “Wouldn't it be a good idea to walk up a hill which we have no idea where it is or what it's called?” said Mark. “Um. Gurgle gurgle hic hic” said Olly. And it came to pass that we did awake the next morning to the scorch of the sun and the scurry of ants, and after recovering from the previous night's excesses we needed something to take our minds off the dawning headaches. And with a vague recollection of the previous night's conversation, a compass bearing and a map kindly lent by Hilde we set off on what would become an epic journey. Caving is shit. Getting lost in a wood is worse. We walked for fucking ages, took a few pictures and bugged off into the fading light. It got dark. Fucking light. Bollocks. We got lost. Mark had locked our potential rescuers out of the spud hut. Bollocks! But we finally made it. (You probably guessed, dead people rarely write pissed rants in the log book.) Gösser is good stuff. Drink more! 2 crates and less than 2 days. Well, I've done my bit tonight. Wonder what comments Mark will make to this. Winning the beer tally (Mark) bastard! On the spot Gösser fines for limo aren't clearing it fast enough. This was supposed to be abridged and it fucking is! Stop complaining you c****. Mark's is fucking pages long. You could have stopped reading it if you were bored. Frank goes to bed. Fucking lightweight. Gösser braumeister says fuck off!

On a Matter of Stooling

2001, *Duncan Collis*

Read this. It is important.

You may think that you know how to wipe your own arse, and that you do not therefore need any advice on how to move your bowels on the Loser Plateau. However, following a number of rather unfortunate stool placements in previous years, and the need for Expo to retain its current good relations with the Austrian National Park authorities, the need for some guidelines as to where to have a shit has become apparent. I think a DOs and DON'Ts format is probably best – hopefully much of this will be very obvious to most people.

- DON'T bare your arse anywhere within sight of any tourist paths, for example the one which runs through the old Top Camp. The reason for this should be obvious.
- DO make sure that you drop your turds down a reasonably deep hole (preferably deep enough that the turds can't be seen from the surface). This makes it less likely that anyone will discover your clutch of eggs, and helps to keep the smell down.
- DON'T be tempted to shit in the vicinity of a bivvy site, even if it's minging it down with rain. On a hot day the smell will be keen, and disease rife.
- DO take good aim! The best spots (i.e. relatively comfy, not too far away, and good'n'deep) will be discovered and used by several people. No-one wants to see or smell yesterday's slop streaked down the side of an otherwise good grike.
- DO think about where your offerings may be washed during a rain-storm – into Steinbrückenhöhle perhaps?

Postscript: Over the last few years a certain grike close to the stone bridge has become canonical. Hence the importance of good aim is redoubled.

Also, it should be pointed out that if you choose to use bog roll (as most of us do, although more enterprising expo members have experimented with moss, bunde, and limestone), you should set light to each sheet before you drop it down the grike; there is a cigarette lighter kept with the bog rolls. DON'T drop the lighter down the grike.

204 – Steinbrückenhöhle

2000, *Becka Lawson*

Up to Top Camp - no one there so I stomped off to Steinbrücken to catch the other two as they were about to go in. They were going to finish off their infamous tape + notes but no compass or clino survey off 110-a-day. Whizzed down the 3 entrance pitches, dumped SRT gear + set off down stooey, crawly Swiss-cheese passage, holes off the side, in the floor + ceiling. Some draught though not strong. I poked at various QMs, seemed an interesting spot. The survey ended in a supposedly small chamber. I got here to find something larger than I was expecting + various leads. We split up to look round. I went up the ~25° ramp, stooping + found two walking passages off it, ending in large chambers - whoa, getting pretty damn excited. Back to meet the others who'd also found stuff so I armtwisted them to keep going with the survey. Found 3 more pitches off the bottom end of the 'chamber' then surveyed up the ramp to where I'd checked out the walking passages. I set off up the passage straight ahead to check if it linked back to the passage on the right I'd looked at before to decide where best to survey. It kept heading on up + got gradually larger ... and more + more drafty + lots of what looked like bat shit on floor. By now

I was stonking fast + then popped into a big walking passage, still heading up. Raced down + screamed at mark to get out of the scrofulous hole he had thrutched into + we abandoned the survey (I'd hardly any time before I had to go out to make the carpark for 9pm). Raced up into the walking passage + stomped off up the hill, passage getting bigger + bigger, lovely solution holes in the ceiling + still a draft. Finally it turned, continued, then came to a big chamber. Loads of ways on all along it and it continued down past the point that we had entered. Yelped a lot then headed out with Martin's carbide not lighting (+ he'd forgotten his duo) + Martin's lamp dead (and a dodgy zoom). Hopped off happily home. Great trip!

204 – Steinbrückenhöhle

2000, *Anthony Day*

Bombed down to the bottom of Mike & Becka's pitch series (descended on 11/8/2000). To push/survey the rift at the bottom until we got to the end or another pitch, or until we got bored, whichever came first. Rift is a bit of a pain in the arse - mostly ~50cm wide, apart from a widening at a ~5m cascade (handline useful), very sharp. Lots of shinning up and down the rift (which is essentially infinitely tall) occurred to try and find the widest bit. Got 90m of survey in the book when we came across a pitch of ~10m. Looks like the rift continues with significantly larger dimensions (though it could just narrow down again quite quickly). Last survey station (at the top of the undescended pitch) is at a new deep point of -365m. This is a good lead, but pushing it is likely to become a serious trip, esp. if the rift continues in a similar vein. There is a reasonable stream (estimate about like the TC water hole in spate).

Then derigged out, fairly efficiently, but it took a while. Derigged to top of Ariston greasing most of the spits (but no matchsticks). I spent

~ 15 mins trying to undo one of Mike's deviations, but failed so the sling is still there.

Rift is to be christened "Razor Dance" after the Richard Thompson ditty of the same name.

204

2001, *Andy of TSG*

WE SURVEYED THE PASSAGE TO THE AVEN (SPEAK TO DUNCAN) MICK + ANDY LOOKED AT THE CONTINUATION OF THE PASSAGE, ANOTHER 50 METRES + PASSAGE, ENDING AT PITCHES. (SPEAK TO MICK T) DUNCAN WILL DRAW UP SURVEY. [all the E's in previous write-up are indistinguishable from U's]

[In even bigger caps, pointing at above writeup] LURN TO FUCKING WRITU

[In another hand:] Is this in hebrew? MCT. [And presumably in response:] IF YOU LIKE, FUCK OFF

40 – Eishöhle, Window of Opportunity

2002, *Olly Betts*

Back to bolting across the top of Altausseehalle. Made better progress with the skyhook. Again Steve waited in the bivvy for a while.

I was hanging in space when Steve started shouting. He just heard on the phone that ARGE had made the connection [Ed: creation of the Schwarzmooskogelhöhle system by tying Kaninchenhöhle into the southern caves!] Suddenly my antics seemed rather pointless, so I finished off the spit I was working on, and then headed out. We had a brew then headed down the hill to hear the full story from the Germans in the car park.

Cave 2004-11 — In Your Face

2004, *Stuart Bennett*

“Come and look at our great new cave” they said. “Could be a new 204 entrance” they said. “DON’T YOU DARE FIND THE END OF IT” they (Becka) said.

Having been versed in how to drive a survey notebook by Martin, we set off into the strongly draughting entrance tube, which was extremely good at removing any heat one’s body could produce. After much laborious surveying around the small chamber at the end of the entrance tube, Martin returned from the front, where he was supposed to be bolting a pitch, announcing himself to be a fuckwit, and then scampered off to get the forgotten drill bit.

Very, very dodgy rigging (“It only rubs a little bit, so be gentle. Oh, and you’ll have to ascend the arm of the Y-hang to get back.”) leads to a huge black ice plug at the pitch’s base, and a dead-sounding and dangerous boulder choke.

Desperate not to incur the wrath of Becka, the two passages leading on from the far side of the pitch became interesting. The lower one was very tight phreatic dropping at about 45° to a wide low (~1m high) chamber. The phreatic had a breeze but this seemed to disappear into a critical angle boulder slope. In desperation, a small chimney was pushed to no avail, and the other way on from the chamber stopped.

Some effort was put into starting a traverse line to the higher passage leading on from the pitch head, but thoughts of food, warmth etc. caused the general consensus to be “jack”. Also, the



Cosy top camp, 2011. 📷 *Aiora Zabala*

probability of our only remaining lead dying was causing some perturbation.

204 — Scrotting

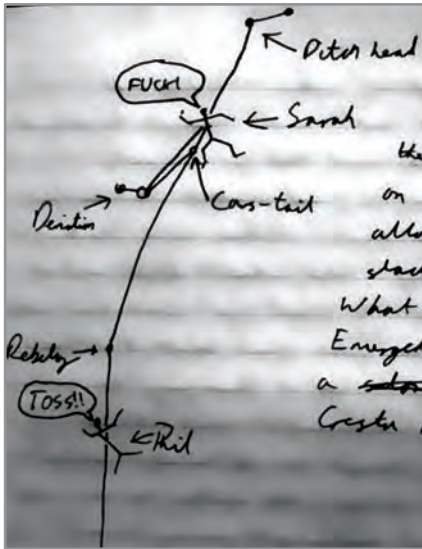
2004, *Stuart Bennett*

We proceeded to Insignificant Chamber, where Stuart went down a hole, believed to be the connection to Rhino Rift, wherein he found survey station “T2”, an old sling and greased maillon, and a difficult climb down. This satisfied Martin, and the only other noteworthy event was the Bastard Tackle Sack from Hell. This thing is inherently evil. Its malevolence knows no bounds. Small children hide under the bed from it. It eats small puppies. Several chapters of the Bible know it by the name Satan. It feeds off the terror, pain and anguish it creates. As an instrument of torture it is unparalleled. Within the Universe there is no darker force. To the unknowing observer it is a regular tackle bag, from which the shoulder straps have snapped at one end, and subsequently they have been tied to form a second donkey’s

dick. These two properties combine to form a dread object which is a blight to all caver-kind, getting stuck on EVERY SINGLE FUCKING THING, and thus causing its cursed bearer to fall flat on its nose every three paces. The horror inflicted by this item in Germknödel's Revenge mere words cannot describe. Let's just say that being moored by cave and tackle bag, and trying to turn round in the passage at the same time, is SHIT.

204 – Vague Wanderings in 204

2005, *Phil Underwood*



204 – The 11 Second Rattle Story

2007, *Ollie Stevens*

It all began with one rock, one pitch, a stopwatch and a certain lack of imagination on the part of those naming the pitch. It should at this point be noted that it actually rattles for longer than 11 seconds. But I digress. Armed

with 105m of rope, Richard, Sarah and I began the arduous task of negotiating Chocolate Salty Balls on the way to the 11SR, with the minor detour of liberating 33m of rope from 'Taking the Piss.' This rope had clearly been affected by its oppressor as it was the fastest rope I have ever witnessed. Still, I got my own back by using a full turn round my breaking krab and twisting the hell out of it.

After rigging the short pitch above the 11SR with a deviation Superman himself would have difficulty passing thanks to a school of rigging that involves ignoring obvious spits and letting the location of naturals decide the path the rig will take, we finally met the proverbial 11 second rattle.

Having carried a full suite of power-bolting equipment with us it seemed sensible to put in a Y-hang with the drill. It is often noted that problems between the keyboard and chair are the main source of computer problems, in this case I suppose the problem existed between the muddy floor and the trigger, when we found that the drill was not nearly as effective in reverse. I blame my thermodynamics lectures for teaching me that reversible systems are most efficient and my education at Cambridge for leaving me with no common sense. With a new burst of enthusiasm after realising our mistake, and the drill firmly switched to forwards we continued to drill. It is indicative of the human ability for learning that during the second attempt at a hole we noted more quickly that the drill was still in reverse.

One and a half holes later the drill decided that all this changing direction was a bit too much and refused to go on.

We went all Old Skool on the hole's ass and cracked out the hand bolting gear. One perfectly placed spit later, and we continued on our journey. I abseiled down a few metres to place a survey station whilst Sarah and Richard

admired my beautiful spit placement, awe-stricken at its poise, dedication and charm. One survey leg for good measure later, and it was time to go home. Nothing would prepare us for the following day's events. To be continued ...

Tunnocks – Crossword Passage

2008, *Julian Todd*

Rain and misery at the Stone bridge. Becka Lawson and Steve left early to do Gravity Always Wins, while Frank fuffed and Julian enjoyed the hours of not being in the cave while at the same time looking forward to trying out his inspiration of pouring boiling water into his wetsocks. The first lot was poured out after a long soak and the fear that too many nasty bugs would have been breeding. Frank asked if I was using custard. The second filling scalded my toes. As Frank considered completing the whole cave in nice dry woolly socks, I realised I had made a mistake and had soggy wet feet for the whole trip.

Frank rigged 2 pitches until scared off while I froze and took an action picture of the wrong drill. I looked into Andy A's horrid lead at the north end. We derigged. I strolled down from Starfish junction to Blind and Broken where Becka and Steve had dropped a pitch (blind) and now had rigged a free-hanging traverse across to a second pitch. I crossed, stupidly, and found rope on the next pitch, heading down at 45 degrees (it was pulled tight to get down next pitch) and shouted. Not much conversation with echoes. Frank arrived. I told him to go away as I crossed the 9mm rope traverse to prevent him from lighting the space below me. Technique was to have short cows tail from one bolt to next due to lack of faith in skinny rope. Took some funky pictures of self on ice shelf. Returned in the dark. Becka and Steve arrived within 10 mins of their callout.

The Butlins Night Shift

2011, *Edvin Deadman*

Some random thoughts on cave camping:

- 1 Leaving the hilti-setter at the bottom of Gaffered and prusiking up from the Underworld to fetch it defeats the object of camping.
- 2 Spare lamp and drill batteries need to be kept warm to prevent the loss of charge. Put them down your crotch or something.
- 3 Camping is surprisingly warm. Waiting around in furry and thermals whilst dinner cooks is completely doable.
- 4 Night shift was fine for 1st "night" since we were sufficiently tired. The second "night" was crap though, as our body clocks weren't fooled anymore.
- 5 When crapping into a bag, make sure you squeeze the air out before tying it shut: otherwise the Daren drum will fill up very quickly.

[Ed: More on this on page 98 of this issue]

Tunnocks – Konnisberg – that's the way to do it. CONNECTION of 258 and 204

2011, *Becka Lawson*

Despite sore knees we talked ourselves into another deep trip in Tunnocks. Wookey and Noel Snape whipped in ahead with the drill to start the pitches that were found off Above and Beyond yesterday, whilst Holly [Bradley] and I started to survey down Eh Bah Gum pitch and then to a small draft rift opposite their pitches. This rapidly popped out to a window into what we assume is The Beast again - stones thrown out beyond the immediate ledge dropped free for 4-5s - a project for another year. The others were still bolting so we surveyed a QMB I'd

spotted at the base of Eh Bah Gum. This was another small, drafty rift which, again popped out into The Beast but this time we could get out onto a wide ledge so we started surveying along the left wall with various tubes on the left. "Holly did you walk down that mud bank", "No, I thought that looked like footprints" I peered again - it could be due to rock fall, but it did look very like footprints..... and then I saw two more - we've definitely got to somewhere people have been before. I walked over with tape and straight to survey station 23 and we finished the survey then went for a run to see where we were. We traced the footprints back and into a small muddy tube. Holly and I muttered to each other that this looked very like The Wares - but we didn't want to count our chickens, so on we ran until "Oooh" said Holly pointing at a nondescript mud bank we had to crawl over "I've been here - for sure - its The Wares - WE'VE CONNECTED we shrieked at each other, had a hug then Holly showed me what she'd pushed on her 204 camping trip. We went back to the others where Wookey had put in 3 short pitches with minimalist rigging and they were surveying back so we yelled them our news then helped them to finish their survey and showed them the connection then steadily out with some gear. Great final trip of Expo for me.

Loser Plateau – Shaft Bashing

2004, *Dave Loeffler*

Rigged and descended a slot at the edge of a choss bowl near 2000-08. It didn't go.

Free-climbed down another hole to the north [*should read south*] of this. It didn't go.

Descended 2000-08 to look at the supposed dig. It didn't go.

Climbed into 2002-03 (near Hauchhöhle). It didn't go.

Walked down the hill with 29kg of shit. Drank Gösser. Utterly failed to cook Germknödel. Got very pissed. Listened to Mark drowning out Tom Lehrer with random accordion noises. Eating almost raw Germknödel gives you a bad stomach ache. It remains to be seen what effect Nial will experience from eating knödel seasoned with molten colander.

Base Camp – Germknödel

2007, *Unknown Author*

Makes 8 large/12 small or 4 superlarge plate sized

500g flour
1 packet germ/heffe - yeast
125g butter
100g sugar
3 eggs
Jam: powidl (damson)
poppy seeds
icing/caster sugar

Combine butter + sugar + eggs in pan - heat, with care to avoid making an omelette (in Aaron style!) In a separate bowl put the flour and yeast. Once the butter etc has melted pour the flour/yeast mixture into it, take off heat and mix until no lumps remain. Put in a warm place to rise for 1hr. Divide into the number of required portions, shape into circles, and form a dip in the middle of each. Then put a max of a tablespoon of jam into the dough circle, and fold the edges over to cover the hole.

Put the finished knödel into a warm place for 1hr ish then steam - super large for about 40mins-1hr, large/small for 20 mins (using colander over pan of water). Pour melted butter over then icing sugar and poppy seeds.



Loser plateau, 2011. 📷 Aiora Zabala

Sketching & Packing

2007, *Becka Lawson*

I started drawing up surveys at 7am. Around 10 people were starting to emerge after last night's deep fat fried glove extravaganza. The conversation idly turned to ferry times as Tony et al set off home. Dunks decided when on the 19th his ferry went and came back and asked the date. "The 17th". "My ferry leaves in 12 hours." "The 19th is when I fly to China." Fine-honed expo machine spluttered into action and within the hour the wheels were on the trailer, it was filled with rope and the tarps strapped on, Martin had been working from his hung-over lie in, their gear was packed up, they'd been fed a cooked breakfast, sandwiches packed and they were on the road... With a good chance of making the ferry. After this firestorm we slumped for a while then started cleaning and I sketched until 3am, by which time I only had Pete for company who was on a bender trying

to beat Nial's beer tally. The last bits of plan for maximum pleasure were a bit ropy but I got there in the end ready for a 7.30 start to catch our train to Italy.

Base Camp 6am

2001, *Hilary Greaves*

Is it against the rules to write friendly little notes in the logbook? Oh well.

Thanx for letting me gatecrash - it's been a top week! Top caves, top beer, let me see what else, oh yeah, the people were alright too. Hope the rest of expo goes stormingly!

I realise I owe you lots of money. Send me the bill (won't be able to pay it till October, in China :-))

Hope to see most of ya @ BCRA! ■

Exploration of the Loser Augsteck Plateau, Totes Gebirge, by CUCC, 1976-2011

Becka Lawson, Andy Waddington, Anthony Day and Julian Todd

History and overview

Cambridge University Caving Club (CUCC) was founded in 1949, though there have been student cavers at Cambridge since 1922. CUCC has a long history of cave exploration but in the early years this was limited to Britain due to the problems in moving people and equipment long distances. However, as travel became easier and cheaper, CUCC began organising expeditions abroad.

In 1976, after an expedition to the Pyrenees, nine CUCC members ventured into the Alps in search of a new area of cave exploration. The local Austrian cavers directed them to the Loser Augsteck Plateau (our area is Katastrgebiete 1623). This has a kilometre of depth potential and easy access thanks to the Loser Panoramastraße toll road from Altaussee. This ascends 800m up to the plateau, most of which is at around 1600-1800m.

CUCC has returned to the Loser area every summer since 1976, except 1986. During this time we have received a warm welcome and much support from local Austrian cavers, particularly the Verein für Höhlenkunde in Obersteier (VHO) based in Bad Mitterndorf and the Landesverein für Höhlenkunde in der Steiermark. We have also benefitted from a friendly partnership with the German Arbeitsgemeinschaft Höhle und Karst Grabenstetten (ARGE Grabenstetten) with

whom we have shared exploration of the Loser Augsteck Plateau since 1992.

CUCC's expeditions run for 3-5 weeks, and had an average of 13 members each year before 1986 and 21 members thereafter. There is a high turnover of cavers which is unsurprising given the distance of Austria from Cambridge (around 15 hours driving) and the nature of a University caving club. The fluctuation in team size, the loss of experienced members and the need to keep training novice cavers is a continual challenge for CUCC and at times the club has struggled to muster the manpower and knowledge to mount an expedition. However, our expeditions have introduced many inexperienced cavers to expedition caving and CUCC cavers who learnt to prospect, rig and survey on the Loser Augsteck Plateau have gone on to make major contributions to caving expeditions elsewhere, from Antarctica to China.

The history of exploration of the Loser Augsteck Plateau by CUCC can be divided into four eras: (1) early exploration including Stellerweg (1976-1985), (2) the revival of the expedition and discovery of Kaninchenhöhle (1987-1998), (3) the move north to explore Steinbrückenhöhle (1999-2004) and finally (4) making connections and the exploration of Tunnockschacht (2005-2011).



1. The early years (1976–1985): Establishing the expedition and bottoming Stellerweg (1623/41)

After the prospecting trip of 1976, the first proper CUCC expedition to Austria went for three weeks in 1977. Most British caving at that time used ladders but from the start CUCC expeditions also applied the recently invented single rope technique (SRT) which allowed them to descend multiple and large pitches in small teams. The initial focus was on gaining depth. Between 1977 and 1979 CUCC explored Bräuninghöhle (1623/82) to -215m, Schneewindschacht (1623/97) to

Above: a local Austrian caver, Karl Gaisberger showing Doug Florence (right) the entrance to Stellerweg (1623/41) in 1978.

📷 *Andy Waddington*

Left: typical equipment for CUCC cavers in the 1970's: Dave Harrison, Rod Leach and Jont Leach (all members of the first CUCC expedition to Austria in 1976) in Yorkshire in 1974.

📷 *Dave Harrison*

Right: the tackle and beer tent on the 1983 trip.

📷 *Dave Brindle*

-265m, Gemshöhle (1623/107) to -280m and Eislufthöhle (1623/106) to -506m. In 1980 the expedition explored Sonnenstrahlhöhle (1623/113) to -329m and discovered Schnellzughöhle (1623/115).



Chas Butcher swimming under the low arch of the duck at around -600m in Stellerweg (1623/41) in 1982. 📷 Dave Brindle



Skull found near the 'd' entrance to Kaninchenhoehle (1623/161). 📷 Andrew Atkinson

Below: Chas Butcher at the underground camp at around -350m in Stellerweg (1623/41) in 1982. 📷 Dave Brindle

These early expeditions prepared CUCC for the depths of Stellerweg (1623/41), starting in 1980. Stellerweg was discovered by local Austrian cavers in 1940 and was pushed to 86m deep in 1953 and around -200m by 1974. CUCC connected Stellerweg to Schnellzughöhle and then pushed the cave deep and beyond an intimidating, low-air-space swimming duck. In 1982 CUCC had its first underground camp to

explore the lower reaches of the cave. Beyond the camp and the duck the final, 90m shaft (Orgasm Chasm) was descended in 1982 to reach a deep, vertical sump at -883m below the Stellerweg entrance. This was close to the level of the lake at Altaussee and it remains the deepest location explored by CUCC.

In 1983 a higher entrance near Stellerweg was discovered, Schwa-Schacht or Tony's Second Höhle (1623/144). This was connected into Stellerweg in 1985, increasing the depth of the system to -959m.

A later discovery, Steinschlagschacht (1623/136), was explored in 1983 and 1984. The cave was disliked due to its loose rock and wet, cold lower pitches. It was surveyed to -194m but was pushed deeper, to around -260m, until it became too tight. This cave ultimately proved key to connections made in the 1990s.

2. Renaissance of the expedition (1987-1998) and Kaninchenhöhle (1623/161)

The connection of an upper entrance (Tony's Second Höhle) to Stellerweg in 1983 produced a system nearly a kilometre deep. This impressive achievement led to a sense that CUCC had largely exhausted the potential of the Loser Augsteck Plateau which, in terms of depth, was indeed true. Few of those involved in the early

years of exploration wanted to continue to cave in Austria and interest waned to such an extent that there was no expedition in 1986.

But then a new generation of keen students revived the expedition in 1987. Owing to the limited documentation of previous finds and minimal overlap between members of the different eras, expedition skills had to be slowly re-learned and knowledge regained. Also the aims of the post-1986 expeditions changed from going deep to concentrating on comprehensively exploring and mapping the complex maze of horizontal and vertical passage that are typical of caves of the region.

The first major find by this new intake to CUCC was Kaninchenhöhle (1623/161) which was explored to -250m in 1988. This huge, maze-like system was initially explored from a surface shaft, but a vertical squeeze made access to the main system difficult and caused two serious accidents. Bypasses and alternative entrances were later discovered which aided exploration and in 1990 Flapjack was pushed to -498m. A phreatic trunk passage at -250m was followed north for hundreds of metres leading to many significant finds in an area called The Far End but at its extremity there was no clear trunk route to follow. In 1995 an even bigger passage, Triassic Park, was discovered and a new, horizontal entrance (1623/161d). The resultant easy access to virgin passage lured 39 cavers onto CUCC's expedition in 1996, and Kaninchenhöhle was extended to 19.7km. In 1998, a small team pushing leads in the far northwest of the system (Siberia and Midnight in Moscow) increased the overall depth of the system to -534m.

An important find in Kaninchenhöhle was Stairway to Hell, in the far south of the system, near to Triassic Park. This led to the Forbidden Land, large passages heading towards the Schwarzmoozkogel system. This area was clearly important since other south-going leads

in Kaninchenhöhle had usually ended in break-down, probably due to the presence of a significant fault. Unfortunately, Stairway to Hell is a large, dangerously loose boulder choke and all concerned were keen to find an alternative route into the Forbidden Land.

Consequently, in 1997 CUCC returned to Steinschlagschacht (1623/136) since the survey data showed that it was close to the new finds. Use of drills to place bolts and a more sensible route down the main shaft meant that it was less dangerous than during the original explorations in 1983 and 1984. Major extensions were found via an eyehole at around -150m which headed away from the loose, wet continuation of the main shaft and, more importantly, towards the Forbidden Land. These led to a large but blind chamber, The Theatre, very close to the northernmost reaches of Kaninchenhöhle. An impressive bolted traverse above The Theatre connected Steinschlagschacht to the Forbidden Land area of Kaninchenhöhle that same year.

Having linked Steinschlagschacht to Kaninchenhöhle the search was now on for an even greater prize: the connection between the Kaninchenhöhle and Schwarzmoozkogel systems. The latter system included Schnellzughöhle, Stellerweg and Tony's Second Höhle and it had been meticulously re-mapped and extended by ARGE Grabenstetten in the years since CUCC had ceased exploring the area.

The first attempt at this connection was in 1998 when CUCC pushed leads in a beautiful cave, Eishöhle (1623/40) which was initially explored in 1929. It contains the largest chamber in the area, Schneevulkanhalle, which is 115m across and is stunningly decorated with ice formations. In 1998 Eishöhle was the most northern area of the Schwarzmoozkogel system, to which Eishöhle had been connected via Lärchenschacht (1623/88) by French cavers in 1987.



Julian Todd in Tunnockschacht, Expo 2010. © Mark Shinwell

Although the gap between Steinschlagschacht and Eishöhle was only 130m, with passages at similar levels, CUCC failed to find a way between the two caves despite considerable effort in Eishöhle in 1999, 2000 and 2001. In 1999 CUCC attacked the problem from the Steinschlagschacht end and made impressive finds with over 4km surveyed in an area called Chile. These finds headed south, parallel to Eishöhle but much lower, and ended in a sump (Totality) at -440m from the Steinschlagschacht entrance. The distance to Eishöhle was now just 75m but still the connection could not be found. By the end of 2001 the tight but drafting end of Eishöhle was pushed to around 40m above the Forbidden Land. Eventually the problem was solved by ARGE Grabbenstetten. They had been exploring from Tony's Second Höhle and descended a short pitch to drop into the southern end of Chile in Steinschlagschacht in 2002. This connection between the Kaninchenhöhle system and the Schwarzmooskogelhöhle system produced a 54km long network of caves.

3. Heading north (1999–2005) and Steinbrückenhöhle (1623/204)

During the 1999 expedition a small team found Steinbrückenhöhle (1623/204) and, in a few trips, started to explore its extensive network of phreatic passages and pushed it to -226m. Its entrance lies a few hundred metres beyond the northern extremities of Kaninchenhöhle, and it was immediately clear that Steinbrückenhöhle might extend the Schwarzmooskogelsystem much further north. However, it was difficult to push a vertical cave such a long way from CUCC's usual base near the Brauningnäse. CUCC therefore moved its camp to beneath a beautiful natural stone arch immediately adjacent to the entrance to Steinbrückenhöhle, which is around two hours walk from the toll road.

In 2000 Steinbrückenhöhle was explored via a fine set of shafts, the Ariston series and Kiwi

Suit, to -384m. Unfortunately the pitches ended at a tall, narrow and awkward rift with a modest stream in it: Razor Dance. Frequent changes of level are required to find the widest section and it is interspersed with small pitches. The difficulty of getting drills and rope so deep and through such troublesome passage meant that the subsequent, small exploration teams made only modest progress. But in 2007, a larger, stronger team pushed down to a sump at -622m in Razor Dance and, to their surprise, found a continuation by bolting a traverse over the sump pool. Climbing 120m up from here they emerged in a large chamber with several passages leading off. This area was close to Midnight in Moscow in Kaninchenhöhle, which was explored in 1998. Here, substantial, though mud-choked, phreatic development had been found at a similar altitude. However, though close, it seemed that

there would be no straightforward connection in this area and this, coupled with the difficulty of access, meant that interest turned elsewhere.

Meanwhile, exploration had continued apace in more accessible areas of Steinbrückenhöhle. Dogged persistence in exploring crawling leads in the upper levels led to the discovery of a series of trunk passages (Swings and Roundabouts, Treeumphant Passage and Crowning Glory) which were much larger than those near the entrance. Over the years



Nial Peters (foreground) and Becca Lawson in *The Convenience Series*, Subway below Gaffered to the Walls in Steinbrückenhöhle (1623/204) in 2007. © Andrew Atkinson

this led to horizontal development in all directions and several additional entrances were discovered. Most passages heading south at this altitude appear to meet a barrier to horizontal development. However, in 2009 some notable discoveries were made in the complex Pussy Prance area. As described below, we are quietly confident that a southern passage here might eventually connect Steinbrückenhöhle to Kaninchenhöhle.

Several pitch series descend from the upper trunk level of Steinbrückenhöhle. One of

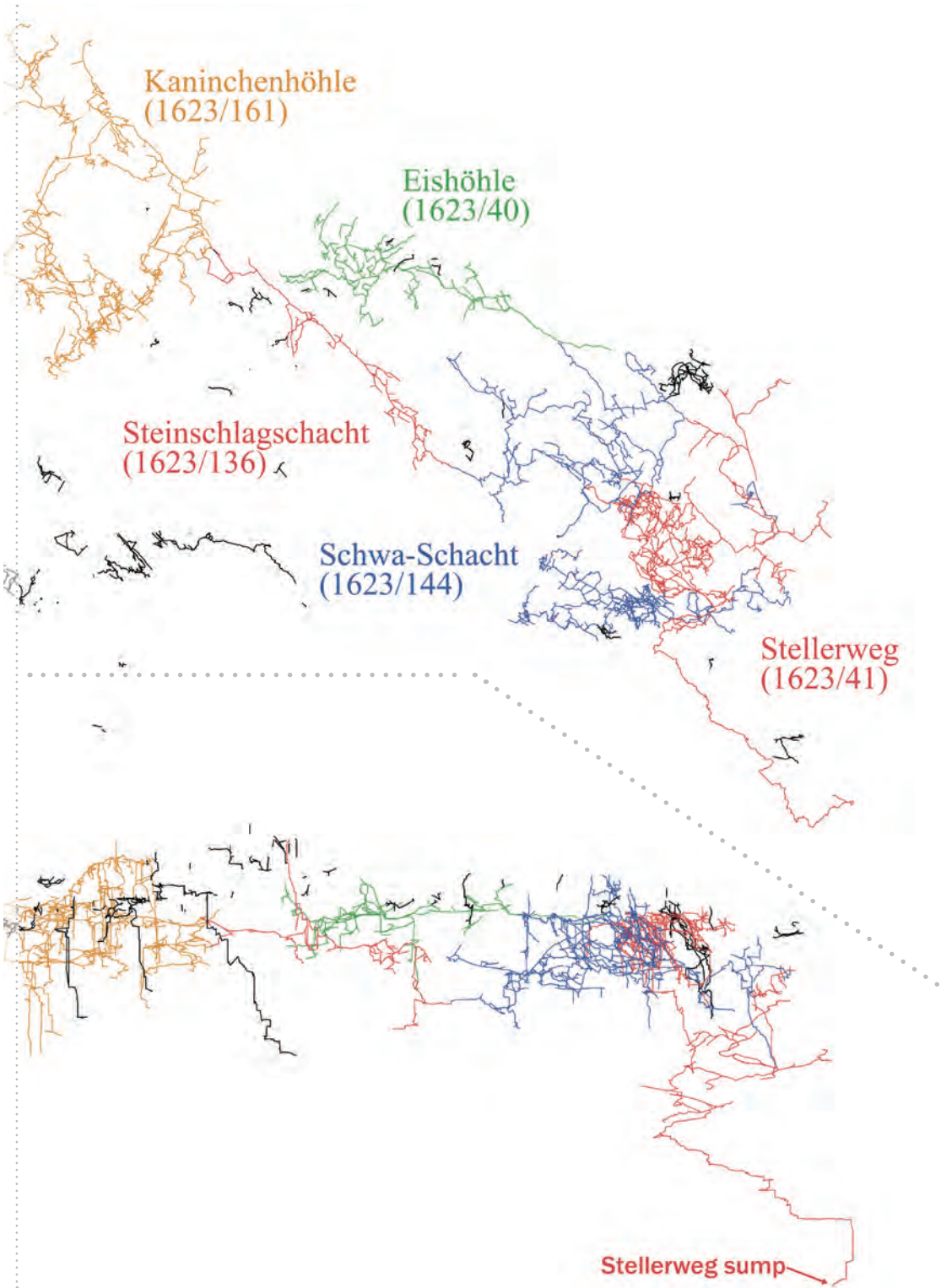
Tunnockschacht
(1623/258)

Steinbrückenhöhle
(1623/204)



Caves of Loser Augsteck Plateau Katastergebiete 1623





the most significant begins with a beautiful 70m circular shaft, “Gaffered to the Walls”. This was first descended in 2002 and led, via further pitches, to a series of mazes of much deeper, steeply dipping and complex horizontal passages at around -240m (The Underworld) and further down at -320m (The Wares and Subsoil) and finally at -420m (Subway). These areas are in stark contrast to the narrow rift of Razor Dance and the deepest are stratigraphically lower. Most significantly, The Wares extended far north and proved crucial in connecting to Tunnockschacht in 2011.

4. The current expeditions (2006–present): Connecting the system and Tunnockschacht (1623/258)

Tunnockschacht was discovered in 2006 and was extended to 3km in 2007. By then it was clear that it was the northernmost of the series of major cave systems explored by CUCC running from Stellerweg to Kaninchenhöhle to Steinbrückenhöhle. Soon people began to dream of the possibility of linking them all together to create a world-class system.

Tunnockschacht is a high, well-hidden entrance only a short walk from the stone bridge camp at Steinbrückenhöhle. The 80m deep entrance series is always difficult to rig safely due to loose rock and melting of the snow plug. From here an unusually extensive series of horizontal passages extends far to the north. A powerful, cold draft is felt throughout most of the cave.

In 2008 numerous deep shafts in Tunnockschacht were descended from the horizontal levels but all became too tight below 100m. However, in 2009 the 100m deep Usual Suspects shaft was found to lead to an extensive lower horizontal level. Due to the settled weather that summer nobody realized the inadequacy of the

rigging until a flood trapped a team below the shaft for 7 hours. In 2010 a dry parallel shaft, String Theory, was rigged to allow exploration to continue. A series of traverses led to major gains to the north whilst a hard-won series of chambers and pitches were explored to the south. This area proved critical for the connection. Here, in the passages surrounding The Beast (a massive, undescended shaft) a connection was made to the Wares area of Steinbrückenhöhle in the final days of the 2011 expedition. The resulting Steinbrückenhöhle-Tunnockschacht system is 28km long and 653m deep.

2009 also saw a return to Kaninchenhöhle to push the north-east leads in the Far End region which had not been visited since 1994. Some promising finds were explored but the most significant lead was a hole that was spotted in the roof of Repton chamber during derigging. Here a bolted route up a steeply ascending traverse accessed a strongly drafting passage but there was no time to push it. Returning in 2011, it was found to break through into a 10m round phreatic tube (Country for Old Men). This trunk passage was quickly followed north, down a pitch and, as time ran out again, exploration ended just 43m away from the Pussy Prance area of Steinbrückenhöhle. A main objective of the 2012 expedition will be to connect Kaninchenhöhle (part of the 65km long Schwartzmooskogelssystem) and the Steinbrückenhöhle-Tunnockschacht system to create a cave over 1100m deep and around 100km long.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the many members of CUCC - and especially *Andrew Atkinson, Andreas Forsberg, Julian Haines, Mark Shinwell* and *Dave Gibson* - who have contributed these and many other photos for use in this chapter and to be made available on the CUCC Expo website, <http://expo.survex.com/> ■



Julian Todd (left),
Becka Lawson (back)
and Wookey (right) in
The Forbidden City, the
large chamber beyond
the Razor Dance sump
in Steinbrückenhöhle
(1623/204) in 2007.
📷 Andrew Atkinson

Take your partners for the Razor Dance

Anthony Day

2000–2002: the early years

*“After the death of a thousand kisses
Comes the catacomb of tongues
Who can spit the meanest venom
From the poison of their lungs?”**

Steinbrückenhöhle was discovered in 1999, and by the end of that year’s expedition stood at 1365m long and 226m deep. The deepest point had been reached via the five pitches of the Ariston series, at the bottom of which modest

phreatic development was found. The horizontal level did not extend very far before being choked with sand, but there were two promising vertical leads: one small (apparently) and dry; the other of more impressive dimensions in all directions with a moderate trickle of water heading down it.

These deep leads were high on the hit list for the 2000 expedition. When Duncan Collis, Mick Thompson and I actually went back there however the big pitch suddenly seemed rather more intimidating than it had in the

pub. After much procrastination and wibbling, a flat drill battery provided the perfect excuse to wuss out and take a look at the “small” pitch (which ultimately turned out to be 112m deep). It was left to Becka Lawson and our visiting New Zealander, Mike Allen, to show us how it should be done. They rigged down the four pitches of the Kiwi Suit series, and were somewhat underwhelmed to find at the bottom a typically gnarly Austrian rift with a reasonable sized stream running into it. Mike, Duncan and I returned to survey it later in the expedition, and it was indeed exceedingly tedious. After lots of thrutching around in the rift and very short survey legs we were stopped by a pitch some 90m in. Duncan and I are both fans of Richard Thompson, and it was Duncan that recalled the track “Razor Dance” that seemed an excellent name to give to this rather tiresome piece of cave.

Later in the year, as thoughts began to turn to the 2001 expedition, I met Duncan in a pub and he asked what I was interested in pushing in Austria. The beer was flowing freely and I cautiously answered that I would like to go back to Razor Dance. Although relatively hard to get to, the lead at the end looked pretty good, especially as it appeared that the passage might get bigger at the bottom of the undescended pitch. To my surprise Duncan said that he too was interested in finding out where Razor Dance went, and so a plan was formed.

Of course when we actually arrived in Austria, exploring some of the wide open horizontal leads in the upper levels of Steinbrückenhöhle seemed a much more appealing prospect, and I spent a very pleasant expedition messing about within 100m of the surface. In 2002 however we had no such excuse and so we were obliged to return to the bottom. The toll that Razor Dance could potentially take on gear was demonstrated as, on his first trip there, Ben Shaw left large chunks of his Meander oversuit behind. After a protracted stay at base camp

to perform extensive repairs, he returned and managed to get in and out without inflicting any further damage. However, at the end of his third trip, a rather disgruntled figure was observed emerging from 204A with one yellow leg and one blue leg, the tattered remains of the oversuit that should have been covering it flapping behind. Final score: Razor Dance 2, Ben Shaw 1.

Once we actually got down the pitch that had been left at the end of 2000, it became apparent that the rift immediately narrowed down to its former inconvenient dimensions. This pattern was to be repeated many times over the years that followed. The rift opened out again at the head of a draughty pitch that required a bit of acrobatic rigging to get down in the dry. At the bottom, more narrow rift lead via an awkward little climb to two short pitches which marked the end of exploration for 2002. These pitches were also named after Richard Thompson tracks: “Black Lightning”, “Mystery Wind” and “Easy There/Steady Now”. By the end of the 2002 expedition Razor Dance was 220m long and the end was 430m below the entrance.

2003–2004: a war of attrition

*“I want to break out of this spin
The gravity’s pulling me in”**

Our efforts in 2002 had yielded a rather poor return in terms of passage found versus effort expended. Moreover, if the passage continued in a similar vein (and it seemed reasonable to anticipate that it would) getting the required gear to and from the pushing front was only going to get more arduous. If we were to explore this place efficiently, we needed to be a bit more organized.



Mark Dougherty negotiating typical narrow rift in Razor Dance. © Andreas Forsberg

The main issue was movement of tackle through the rift. We had by now discovered that, in many places, the going was easier higher in the rift rather than blindly thrashing along at stream level. Even so there remained many places that were awkward, especially with tackle, though nothing that would count as genuinely tight. Furthermore, carrying gear into the cave was not much more strenuous than carrying it out. We therefore resolved to carry a single long length of 9mm rope in as the pushing rope which would be cut to length on each pitch, with the remaining rope left at the pushing front. Similarly a drill would be taken in and left at the pushing front. The idea here was that we would go to the effort of carrying gear in once at the beginning and out once at the end, and in-between we would be able to get in lots of pushing trips where we could go in and out with relatively light loads.

The plan required a drill, and I had noted that the club drills had not been particularly reliable in 2002. I was assured that the club drills would be overhauled in time and it would be reasonable to take one down Razor Dance, but

as a wily old lag I didn't believe a word of this. Since I was a wily old lag with some cash in the bank, I procured a drill from eBay shortly before departure for Austria. I calculated that this would neutralize any potential arguments about taking communal gear to an inaccessible location, and the purchase turned out to be a good move since the club drills proved to be just as unreliable as they had been the previous year.

Duncan had by now moved to China, but I had some eager new recruits in the shape of Mark Shinwell and Dave Loeffler. On the rigging in trip, as the only person who had been to Razor Dance before, it made sense for me to go first to navigate through the rift to rig the pitches whilst my companions manhandled the rest of the rigging and pushing gear. It quickly became clear that I had landed the cushy job judging by the muttering and cursing coming from behind. The lesson learned on this trip was that putting all the gear in a single enormous tacklesack was a poor strategy for negotiating an awkward rift. Since the rift carries an active stream, with hindsight a tacklesack with some drainage holes would also have been advantageous.

On most expeditions before and since I have generally ended up doing more surveying than rigging. In 2003 this situation was reversed, and it made a nice change to be up front with the drill indulging in creative rigging exercises whilst someone else froze their tits off peering through a misty compass. My newly acquired drill generally performed well, but it became clear that the battery was far from waterproof. On several occasions it was inadvertently dunked in the stream and proceeded to rapidly discharge.

From the 2002 pushing front we carried on down a short drop where the rift widened out significantly for more than a few metres. Clambering through some boulders we emerged



George North surveys the food dump in God Loves a Drunk chamber. © Andreas Forsberg

in a small chamber with a small inlet entering. The chamber was christened “God Loves a Drunk”, another Richard Thompson ditty that served as a link to the following sequence of pitches that were named after brewing equipment. A short pitch, “Mash Tun” is immediately followed by the longer “Copper” pitch below which the rift once more resumes its familiar dimensions. We managed to coax enough life out of the battery to rig down the next pitch – “Yeast” – and after a bit more streamway found a dry traverse level above a particularly unappealing part of the rift. This was followed a little way until a bad step that needed rope for protection was encountered that marked the limit of exploration in 2003.

That was the end of my contribution as I had to return home, so it was left to Dave and Mark to complete the survey and lead the derigging effort. The surveying trip proved to be quite eventful as Mark got most of the way to the bottom before experiencing the urgent need to move his bowels, which he executed whilst hanging onto the y-hang at the head of Yeast pitch. Derigging also proved to be quite strenuous as the end of Razor Dance was starting to be quite a long way from home – the survey

data put the end almost exactly 500m below the entrance.

Overall the plan had generally worked, despite a few problems with equipment. However, the multiple pushing trips whilst relatively unladen had not really materialized since, with such a small team, by the time we had rigged to the pushing front there was little time for exploration before we were required to derig. The task for Razor Dance enthusiasts before the 2004 expedition was to try and recruit a few more punters, which was a tricky balancing act: we had to try to persuade people that pushing Razor Dance would be a satisfying experience whilst at the same time maintaining the illusion that we were in some sense hard for having gone there previously.

In the end this strategy pretty much failed and the 2004 effort ended up being a virtual rerun of 2003, though with a few changes in personnel. Rigging progressed smoothly, aside from an incident where Dave elected to descend the awkward climb below Mystery Wind head first. Fortunately he succeeded in landing on a full tacklesack at the bottom and sustained no injuries, but this novel technique for negotiating this obstacle did not catch on.

One notable recruit was Mark Dougherty, returning to Austria after an absence of 13 years. On the first (and penultimate) pushing trip we rigged a traverse across the bad step at the 2003 pushing front, which was named “Nordic Traverse” since Mark lives in Sweden and I had recently moved to Norway. From there we followed a comfortable dry rift to a short pitch – “13 Year (P)itch” into a small, dry chamber. From here, we rigged a further pitch, “Pepper Pot” to regain the stream before heading out, satisfied with a productive day.

By contrast, the final pushing trip of 2004 was a notably miserable affair. It had been raining for days and the gear I had taken to base camp

to dry out had singularly failed to do so. When I awoke the following morning to more rain, my enthusiasm levels for caving were at rock bottom, but since my drill was at the bottom of Razor Dance and I was about to go home I didn't have a lot of choice. Accompanied by Dave Loeffler and Martin Green I headed down, noting that the water levels were higher than I had ever seen. However most of the rigging seemed to be O.K. leading me to conclude that Razor Dance was reasonably safe in high water – a conclusion that later visitors would come to dispute. From the bottom of Pepper Pot we found more typical rift, rigged a short pitch – “Paster of Muppets” – and a little further on the stream disappeared down a most uninviting slot. As in 2003 however, an alternative high level traverse presented a more attractive proposition. Martin managed to place one bolt before the drill battery died, then proceeded to rig a traverse line that was more for decoration than protection given the large distance between anchor points. At the end, we found a pitch, and a single desultory rock was thrown down to ascertain its depth before we gave up and started the derig. The survey put us at 544m depth from the entrance, by our reckoning comfortably the deepest CUCC team in Austria since 1982.

2007: getting it right

*“Blood boils, tears burn
Some people never learn”**

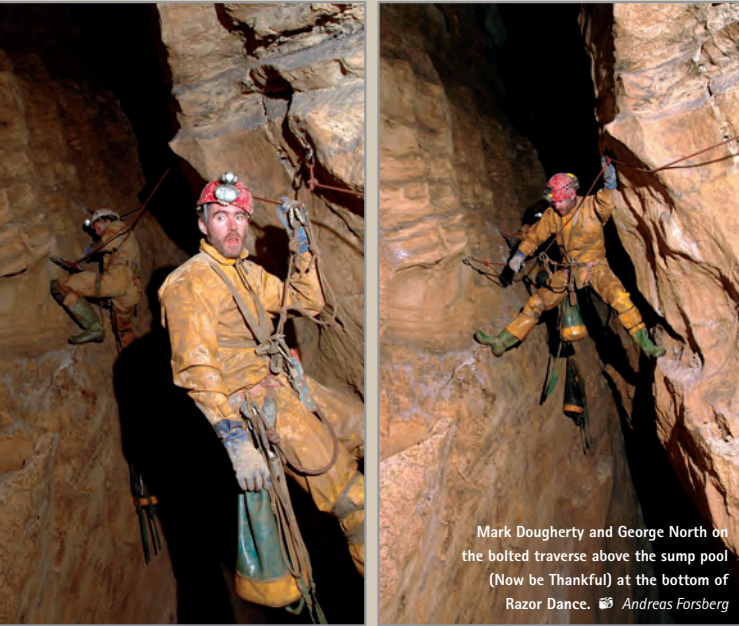
After years of struggling to get anywhere with small teams, all concerned were adamant that we were not going to return to Razor Dance unless we had enough people to do it properly. No such team materialized in 2005 so Razor Dance was left unmolested. However, at the end of a particularly rain soaked derigging week, aided by the application of liberal quantities of Dr Gösser's all-purpose remedy, Andrew



George North descending Mash Tun, one of the many (generally short) pitches in Razor Dance. 📷 Andreas Forsberg

Atkinson and I agreed that 2007 would be the year to have a crack.

Rather surprisingly, this is what actually happened. Prior to expo we set about recruiting volunteers and this time were quite successful. Most of the old hands were up for it, boosted by a guest appearance from Duncan, returning from China for the first time in five years. James Carlisle and George North were recruited, and Mark D brought along Andreas Forsberg, a Swedish prusiking machine. With Andrew and Jon Telling due to arrive for the second half of expo we had a pretty solid looking core team assembled. Even better, once we actually arrived in Austria, several other expedition members also chipped in with the odd trip here and there. This made an enormous difference to our efficiency, as well as reaffirming that the Razor Dance project was an integral part



Mark Dougherty and George North on the bolted traverse above the sump pool (Now be Thankful) at the bottom of Razor Dance. 📷 Andreas Forsberg

of the expedition rather than an ego trip for a select few.

We were also able to take advantage of the ground work that had been put in over the previous years. I had by now taken measures to make my drill battery more waterproof by replacing the poxy bits of cardboard that the cells were wrapped in with self amalgamating tape, and this proved to be quite effective. We had a comprehensive and accurate rigging guide at our disposal which allowed us to select the gear that was needed with confidence that we wouldn't be carrying any excess or have to abort early for lack of gear. I still remember the sight of all the rope needed to get to the pushing front laid out behind the potato hut: it looked like an awful lot and I began to feel the familiar apprehension that always preceded any Razor Dance trip.

Over the course of a couple of weeks, rigging in proceeded efficiently and without incident. A few extra bolts were put in to tidy up the rig and we installed a brew kit in God Loves a

Drunk. This had been done in 2004 to good effect, but this time we also had some dehydrated meals. For me at least, the psychological effect of knowing that the opportunity for a rest and some proper food existed was at least as important as any physical benefit I gained from it on the long slog out.

Eventually Duncan, Mark D and I had the honour of the first pushing trip. Descending the pitch at the 2004 pushing front we were treated to relatively spacious passage for a while, broken by the twin pitches of Left Zipper and Right Zipper, until we met

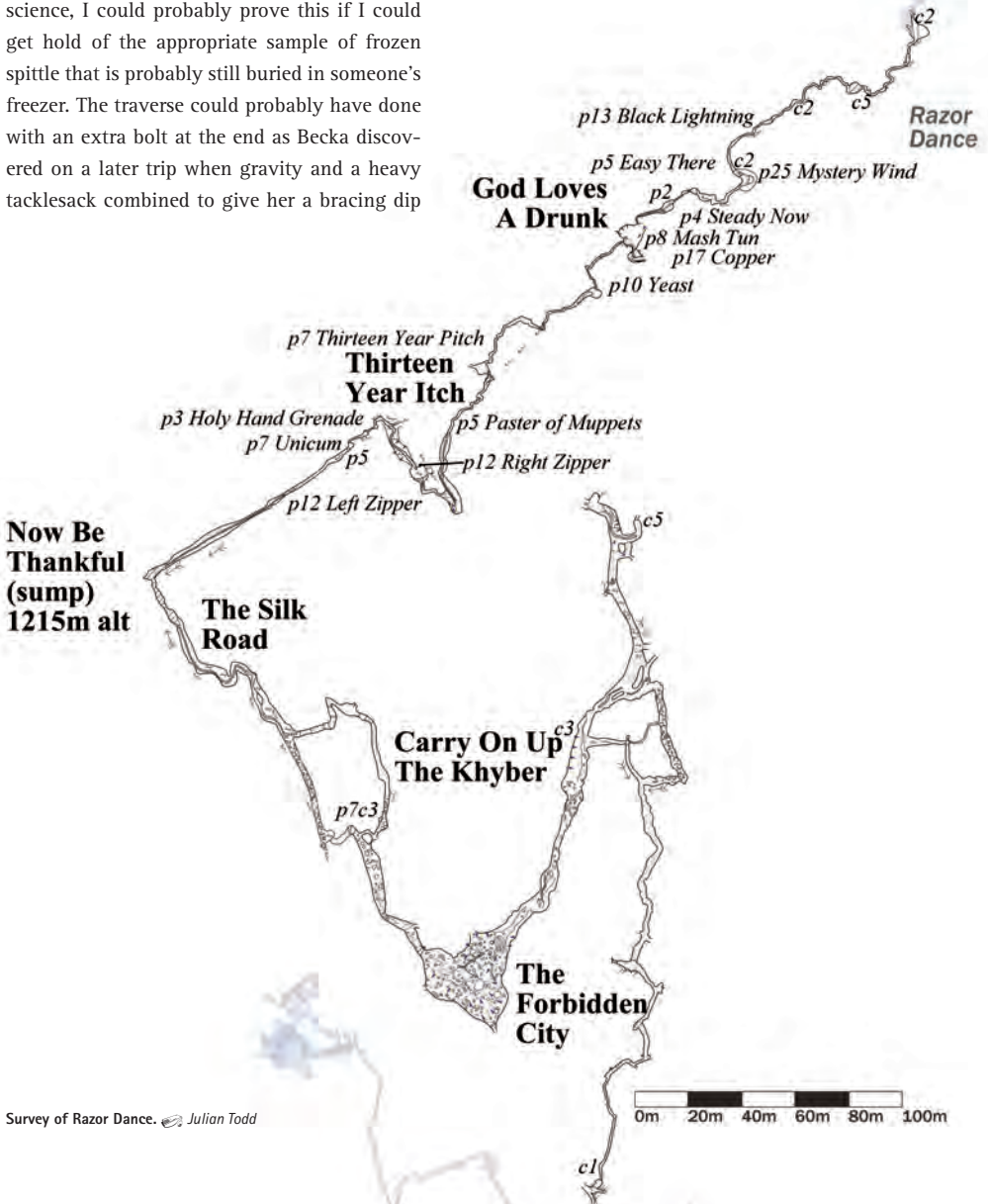
the stream again and the rift resumed in its usual fashion. The rest of the trip passed in a blur of water, 2m survey legs, a couple more pitches until we found ourselves looking down a drop for which we had no gear. On the next trip, Dave, Andreas and James dropped this pitch and landed in an arrow straight rift. A bit further on, this turned into a keyhole which got gradually wider until some protection was required. At this point, it was obvious that the explorers were traversing over a deep pool, but running water could be heard ahead. Was this the bottom? Andreas started rigging a traverse along the right hand wall but ran out of battery power before he could conclude one way or the other.

It fell to Duncan and me to finish the job. Richard Thompson provided us with two possible names: if the pool was indeed a sump, it would be called "Now be Thankful"; if the passage continued "Genesis Hall." Duncan wielded the drill and proceeded to rig along the left hand wall whilst I covered. Some time later it became clear that the pool would be chris-

tened Now be Thankful. We had bottomed the bastard some 593m below the entrance.

However, that wasn't quite the end of the story. The sound of water turned out to be coming from a substantial inlet of similar proportions to Razor Dance entering at right angles at the sump. Duncan continued the traverse into this inlet and eventually it was my turn to follow. I hated it, and since this was the year of cave science, I could probably prove this if I could get hold of the appropriate sample of frozen spittle that is probably still buried in someone's freezer. The traverse could probably have done with an extra bolt at the end as Becka discovered on a later trip when gravity and a heavy tacklesack combined to give her a bracing dip

in the sump pool. The inlet was definitely interesting however, and we followed it for a few hundred metres before it was time to make an exit. I was feeling a bit psyched by the distance from the surface and set a particularly sedate pace, coming to the conclusion that – even if most of them are quite short – thirty pitches is a lot.



Survey of Razor Dance. Julian Todd



Julian Todd in the passages beyond both The Forbidden City and the Razor Dance sump in Steinbrückenhöhle (1623/204) in 2007. © Andrew Atkinson

That trip turned out to be my last visit to Razor Dance. However, having gone to the considerable effort of rigging to the bottom, and with the knowledge that we almost certainly were never going to visit again, we weren't about to start the derig until we had eliminated all the leads at the bottom. In particular, the survey data indicated that the inlet stream we had found might well have come from Kaninchenhöhle: when projected up-dip it would intersect the bottom of Rasputin at the far northwest corner of that system, where a similar stream had been seen sinking into a gravel choke in 1998.

With this in mind, MarkD, Andreas and George were dispatched with instructions to sniff around for continuations. Since the passage was heading uphill, we anticipated that it might not be far before we encountered an insurmountable obstacle and would have to start the derig. When the explorers returned to base camp sporting mile wide grins, it became clear that they had done rather better than these pessimistic expectations. Aided by a serious case of exploration fever, they managed to get up a series of about ten increasingly sketchy climbs up dried out cascades ("Carry on up the Khyber") eventually emerging in a large

chamber – The Forbidden City – with many leads going off. All thoughts of derigging now dismissed, subsequent trips explored around 500m of dry, sandy phreatic passages – much more civilised than Razor Dance.

Eventually it became clear that we would have to derig the cave leaving plenty of tempting leads behind in The Far East, as the finds radiating out from the Forbidden City came to be collectively called. The derig from the bottom was achieved over three days by multiple waves of cavers including a massive paella and a close brush with a thunderstorm. This was all executed in an outstandingly efficient fashion – a casual observer might have mistaken us for the Oxford.

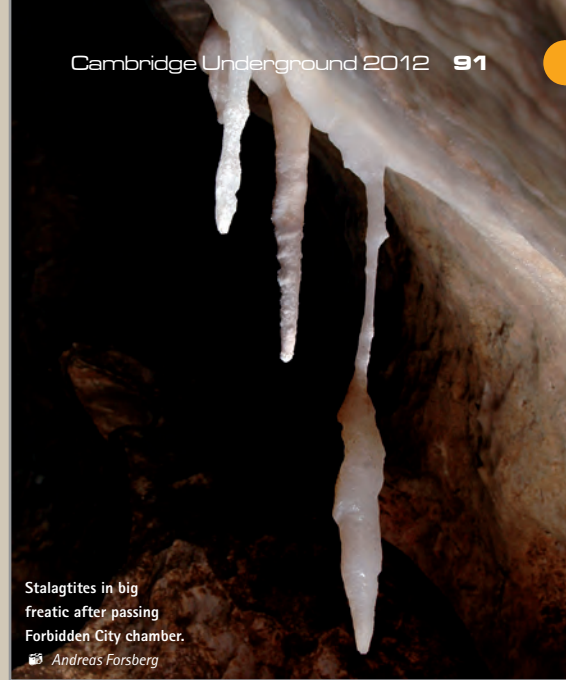
Epilogue

The effort to conquer Razor Dance was spread over five years, and the cave didn't give up easily. However, in the end we showed it who was boss and had the added bonus of the unexpected discovery of fossil phreas at the bottom. Given the relatively large distance to the rest of Steinbrückenhöhle, it isn't com-

pletely clear whether this level corresponds to any of the phreatic levels discovered below Gaffered – though the Subway seems a likely bet. In Kaninchenhöhle, phreatic development had been observed partway down Midnight in Moscow in 1998 at about the right altitude, and not far away laterally from The Far East, though apparently completely choked with sand.

While all this had been going on, the rest of the expedition had been merrily finding lots of horizontal levels in Steinbrückenhöhle stacked up on one another. In future years, whenever I glanced at the survey and saw the baleful presence of Razor Dance emerging from this technicolor yawn, I understood exactly why I had been so bloody tired. The other aspect that is obvious from the survey but rather less so when underground is that the passage maintains a remarkably straight trajectory, on a bearing of 235°. The only significant deviation is the traverse at the 2004 pushing front where the stream is briefly left. As soon as the stream is rejoined, the passage immediately snaps back onto its original direction. It is probably no coincidence that the Chile area accessed from Steinschlagschacht, the Stellerweg streamway and the valley overlooked by the lower entrances to Kaninchenhöhle also follow the same dominant orientation.

In terms of CUCC's exploration in Austria, Razor Dance comes in an honourable second place in just about every respect compared to the bottoming of Stellerweg back in 1982. The Razor Dance sump is at the lowest altitude outside Stellerweg (though the unsurveyed bottom of Eislufthöhle maybe lower), and the depth from the entrance from which the cave was bottomed (593m) is also a clear silver medal. In terms of personal records, we managed the second deepest underground case of the shits (MarkS, 490m) and the second deepest underground swim (Becka, 593m). I am pretty sure, however, that the 1982 team exclusively used



Stalagmites in big
phreatic after passing
Forbidden City chamber.
Andreas Forsberg

hand bolts, so I hereby claim ownership of CUCC's deepest ever drill.

Of course the difficulty level has to be put into context. Our friends on the Dachstein would probably consider Razor Dance to be a comfortable Sunday afternoon stroll compared to their misery caves (to which they are welcome), and Robert the Wondercaver would doubtless knock it off before breakfast. Frankly, I don't care. For me personally, the exploration of Razor Dance was both the most challenging and most satisfying caving project I have been involved in, and I am proud to be a member of the following team that pulled it off.

Mike Allen, Andrew Atkinson, Stuart Bennett, John Billings, James Carlisle, Duncan Collis, Aaron Curtis, Anthony Day, Mark Dougherty, Andreas Forsberg, Martin Green, Becka Lawson, Dave Loeffler, Olly Madge, Earl Merson, Richard Mundy, George North, Ben Shaw, Mark Shinwell, Ollie Stevens, Jon Telling, Julian Todd, Frank Tully, Wookey

* Thompson, Richard. "Razor Dance", You? Me? Us?. Capitol, 1996. CD. ■

Exploration of Steinbrückenhöhle and Kaninchenhöhle, 1999-2011

Anthony Day, Martin Green

The early years

The discovery of Steinbrückenhöhle owes much to a surplus of tea. The good people at Twinings had kindly sponsored the 1999 CUCC expedition to Austria with more tea than we could feasibly drink. So it was that, on one particularly sunny morning, Duncan Collis, Anthony Day and Mick Thompson found attempting to drink their own body weight in tea to be a much more attractive prospect than descending a loose, draughty pitch in Steinschlagschacht. Having festered around for long enough to ensure that there was no realistic prospect of going caving, they set off across the plateau to prospect for new entrances and eventually wandered up towards the col between the Hinterer Schwarzmooskogel and Niederer Augst Eck. This general area had been visited by many prospecting parties over the years, but clearly none of them had ever stumbled across the 10m x 3m entrance that caused Duncan to utter a suitably earthy expression of satisfaction. Once he got a bit closer, it became obvious that the entrance in question was a natural stone bridge. However, on turning through 180° he spotted the 204A entrance with the twin B entrance not far away.

This was clearly quite an interesting discovery, so a few days later Duncan and Mick returned with some rope. The entrance pitch is immediately followed by a second pitch, and once down it rapidly became obvious that they had stumbled upon a major find. They happily ran around in a maze of phreatic passages and returned with tales of multiple

leads that piqued the interest of other expedition members and ensured a number of return visits. The phreatic passages were found to be developed on two levels separated by about 15m. These are generally of modest proportions, at least relative to the major trunk routes in Kaninchenhöhle and elsewhere, but carry a substantial draught into the cave during the Summer months. By the end of the 1999 expedition, Steinbrückenhöhle had been explored to a length of 1365m and a depth of 226m with a number of promising unexplored leads, both vertical and horizontal. This ensured that exploration of Steinbrückenhöhle would be one of the primary objectives of CUCC expeditions from 2000 onwards.

2000 saw a return with a larger team who happily set about ticking off all the easy question marks near the surface. Towards the end of the 2000 expedition it appeared that the major shallow horizontal leads had all been exhausted and only smaller passages remained to be explored. This served to dampen the enthusiasm of the old lags somewhat, but the expo novices, and Martin Green in particular, were undeterred and proceeded to systematically explore all the crawling sized leads they could find. This dogged persistence was rewarded late in the expedition with the discovery of a major trunk passage – Treeumphant Passage – of considerably larger proportions than those near the entrance. Over the course of subsequent years this horizontal development was explored and found to extend the area of known cave development to the north.

This tended to involve going uphill since the local bedding dips gently to the south to the extent that the northernmost extremity of the system is at a higher altitude than the initial entrance.

Establishing the stone bridge bivvy

For the first two years, Steinbrückenhöhle was explored using our traditional Top Camp behind the Bräunignase as a base, which entailed a 45 minute walk in and walk out. This arrangement bemused our German friends, who wondered why we chose to slog up and down the mountain every day to a cave entrance situated right next to a natural shelter. Our chief concern at the time was access to drinking water: Top Camp was situated next to the only reliable water supply we had found on the Loser plateau in twenty years of searching. However, we reasoned that water was actually quite abundant in Austria provided we could collect enough of it as it fell from the sky – so in 2001 we resolved to establish a bivvy under the stone bridge. Some terracing was undertaken to create flat sleeping spaces and tarpaulins rigged to act as a windbreak and to prevent drips from the roof from landing on sleeping cavers. When the first thunderstorm of expo succeeded in filling our water butt to the brim, our biggest worry about camping under the stone bridge disappeared.

Over the years many improvements have been made, with Earl Merson, Tony Rooke and Frank Tully as chief landscape architects. The hole at the bottom corner that used to swallow gear has been filled in and a level surface created that is used for storing gear. A shelf bolted to the wall at standing height that houses the stove is a big improvement on the damp, sloping rock that served as a cooking slab at first. More terracing has been carried out, and the judicious application of Hilti caps has resulted in extra



The impressive 70m shaft, Gaffered to the Walls, in Steinbrückenhöhle (1623/204). 📷 Nial Peters

sleeping spaces where once there were inconvenient boulders. In 2011 we achieved a record attendance of 18, roughly double the number that could have been accommodated in 2001. The chief bottleneck now is sending all these happy potholers on their way in the morning with fully bellies and empty bowels. Rigging the tarpaulins remains a black art however: the first attempt almost always looks shit, though there is nothing like an impending thunderstorm to concentrate a few minds and engender a rapid improvement.

The presence of a camp at the stone bridge has facilitated exploration of this area of the mountain which was previously considered too remote from the road head for efficient exploration. It became clear that the area in the immediate vicinity of the stone bridge is rich in cave entrances, which is perhaps not surprising given the proximity of the horizontal development in Steinbrückenhöhle to the surface. Of the many entrances that were explored Hauchhöhle, whose entrance is located next to the path to the stone bridge, proved to be

among the most significant. This cave was explored to a length of 1285m and a depth of 145m before enthusiasm for the remaining leads dipped below critical. An active search for back doors to Kaninchenhöhle yielded two further entrances to that system during this period. The stone bridge also served as a base to extend our search for new entrances further north. In 2006, the entrance to Tunnockschacht was discovered some 450m beyond the stone bridge, and this find proved to be at least as significant as the discovery of Steinbrückenhöhle itself.

It was inevitable that some of these entrances would lead to the Steinbrückenhöhle system. On one occasion, a party arrived at a previously discovered aven to find a rope hanging out of it and a caver standing at the bottom who had correctly identified the corresponding hole on the surface using GPS location, and so the 204C entrance was found. 204D was discovered by a group following a large horizontal passage who suddenly found themselves at the bottom of a bouldery climb with daylight streaming down. One of the many horizontal surface holes was found to quickly lead to a pitch directly into the main horizontal level. This entrance, 204E, has proved to be the most convenient route into most parts of the system, since it avoids the crawling passages via which the main trunk passages were initially found. Finally, in 2005 a significant extension to the northwest was discovered leading to three new entrances. Overall, Steinbrückenhöhle boasts nine entrances and many other places where it is clear that the surface is not far away.

Going deep

Almost as soon as the first phreatic development was found in Steinbrückenhöhle, thoughts turned to a possible connection to Kaninchenhöhle, although we didn't expect it to be easy. It had taken many years to find a route from the southernmost point

in Kaninchenhöhle towards the rest of the Schwarzmooskogel system, probably due to the presence of a significant fault, despite no lack of effort. The route that was eventually found – Stairway to Hell – remains the only known connection between these two parts of the system. With this experience fresh in our minds we understood that any connection would most likely be a long-term project. In the case of Steinbrückenhöhle, the shallow phreatic development extended in all directions except one: there appeared to be some geological barrier to cave development at the southern extremity of the known system closest to Kaninchenhöhle that none of the major passages went past. It appeared we would have no choice but to head down.

A regular expo attendee at this time was Brian Outram, who developed a reputation for knowing exactly which rock to move to find caverns measureless to man. Unfortunately the passages he tended to find were usually inconveniently oriented for those of us who wanted to stroll into Kaninchenhöhle rather than drive a borehole directly to the Earth's core. It was Brian that discovered the Pleasuredome, a strategically important chamber that connects a number of vertical routes. One of the pitches leading off from here so impressed one of our Mendip boys, with its dimensions far in excess of anything found in Rhino Rift, that he scrawled "PHAT" all over the survey – and so "Brian's Phat Shaft" earned its name.

The 100m deep Brian's Phat Shaft is just one example of a number of shafts are encountered at this southern boundary to the cave where horizontal development appears to be impeded. In common with our experience in Kaninchenhöhle, many of the shaft series that were investigated didn't ultimately lead to any significant new finds. However, one shaft, named Gaffered To The Walls, which was first descended in 2002, proved to be an exception. This fine 70m shaft leads, via a series of further

pitches and a band of 70cm long bivalve shells, to an extensive phreatic level named The Underworld. Appreciation of the pitch series and its fine principal shaft is somewhat tempered by the tendency of mud from the horizontal level below to make its way onto the ropes, despite the installation of a scrubbing brush next to a fairly pathetic puddle as an aid to keeping personal gear clean, which makes for an often tedious ascent.

The Underworld is relatively well decorated, with stalactites and walls of strange upward protrusions. These white walls contrast to the floor sediment, with its thin crust of oxidized mud, which gives way to light brown sand beneath. This discovery, some 160m deeper than the phreatic development previously discovered in the system, was clearly significant. However, exploration of a pitch heading down from here revealed the presence of a deeper level of development that proved to be even more extensive. As with the shallower phreatic development, these levels are not strictly horizontal but follow the dip of the local bedding such that the northern end tends to lie at a higher altitude than the south. The northern part of this deeper level, known collectively as The Wares, extends considerably further north than any of the other phreatic levels so far discovered. In 2011 this area was explored from an underground camp, the first such camp conducted by CUCC for many years. Thanks mainly to the choice of an excellent campsite allied to a level of organisation uncommon to CUCC expeditions, this proved to be an efficient approach to exploration of the northern large chambers, pitches and avens. One of the primary aims of exploration in this area was to search for a connection to Tunnockschacht, where horizontal development had been discovered not far away to the north. In the end the connection was achieved from the Tunnockschacht side a couple of weeks after the camp was dismantled, allowing the former campers to return.

The southern end of this level, which contains fine examples of mud stalagmites and dried up mud pools, leads to a pitch series called the Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse. This pitch series leads down a wide clean washed rift to yet another level of phreatic development – Subway – at a depth of around 420m below the entrance. Taking into account the dip of the beds, Subway represents the deepest level of phreatic development in stratigraphic terms hitherto discovered in Steinbrückenhöhle.

Razor Dance and Pussy Prance

One of the first pitch series to be investigated in Steinbrückenhöhle back in 1999 was the Ariston series, which went on and on down five pitches reaching a small phreatic level at about 200m depth. From there another pitch series – Kiwi Suit – was descended to a depth of 330m, where a modest streamway was encountered flowing into tall, narrow rift passage which was christened Razor Dance. The exploration of this passage is described in detail elsewhere in this journal – suffice to say it was an awkward little sod but we eventually tamed it reaching a sump 600m below the 204A entrance in 2007. The passage heads in an interesting direction, having passed beyond the apparent barrier to horizontal development, albeit much deeper than any of the known horizontal levels in Kaninchenhöhle. At the sump, an inlet stream was discovered that might well be the same stream seen sinking in the Rasputin area at the northwestern extremity of Kaninchenhöhle. Furthermore, significant horizontal development was discovered, named The Far East. Evidence of substantial phreatic development at a similar altitude had been observed in Kaninchenhöhle in 1998, though it was thought to be completely choked with mud. These finds provided the first concrete evidence of a possible connection between Steinbrückenhöhle and Kaninchenhöhle.



Bracket Fungus formations in the Underworld in Steinbrückenhöhle (1623/204), 2004. 📷 Julian Todd



White formations near Dead Good Bat Chamber, 204, 2004. 📷 Julian Todd

Meanwhile, exploration continued apace in the shallower parts of Steinbrückenhöhle. A particular area of interest was a horizontal passage near the top of the Ariston Series, which seemed to offer the best hope of finding a passage heading towards Kaninchenhöhle at a more convenient altitude. There is an established CUCC tradition of significant finds being made from undocumented leads: the route to Triassic Park was discovered at a location where the survey showed a solid wall, and the Chile area of Steinschlagshacht which ultimately lead to the connection between Kaninchenhöhle and the rest of the Schwarzmooskogel system was accessed via a passage that apparently didn't exist two years previously. In 1999, an anonymous surveyor heading down a draughty south going passage noted a pit in the floor with a rift heading out of it that was obviously too tight. In 2001 someone with more imagination proved this assessment wrong and passed

through "The Slot" to emerge in a large chamber. The area was then largely left alone until 2008 when two further pitches were descended to a steeply descending rift (Pussy Prance), leading to a significant phreatic passage before running out of time.

In 2009 an all-female core team returned to Pussy Prance, operating under the monicker of Team Zeus for reasons that history has declined to record. Having first tidied up the rather cavalier rig that had been installed in a fit of exploration fever the previous year, they proceeded to firmly establish that there was a considerable amount of cave passage in this area. Most significantly, the new finds were firmly located to the south of the apparent barrier to horizontal cave development at this altitude, a barrier that had not been breached in the previous ten years of exploration. Although no clear single trunk route was found, a number of pitches were descended or traversed over

to find horizontal passages going in all directions and given a variety of cat-related names. On descending one particular pitch, Snow Leopard, the explorers discovered footprints and a hanger at the bottom and worked out that they had landed at the bottom of Brian's Phat Shaft. This connection will provide an alternative access route for further exploration of this area that will bypass some of the tighter sections. In 2011 the big pitch was rebolted in anticipation of a return to the strategically significant leads in this area.

Return to Kaninchenhöhle

Following the deep discoveries in Steinbrückenhöhle two years previously, 2009 saw a return to Kaninchenhöhle after a long absence. The connection of Kaninchenhöhle to the Schwarzmooskogel system had been

established by ARGE in 2002, and by 2009 Tunnockschacht was also firmly established as a major system lying not far to the north of Steinbrückenhöhle. Connecting all three systems together was starting to look like a realistic short term proposition.

It was clear that any connection between Steinbrückenhöhle and Kaninchenhöhle at the point of closest approach was likely to entail significant excavation at the extremities of the two systems, which didn't sound like a particularly practical use of our resources during a five week expedition. Instead, we elected to explore some of the many leads in the Far End region of Kaninchenhöhle and see what transpired. This area sported a number of good leads and had not seen active exploration since 1993. Indeed, one trip had the pleasure of placing anchors in holes that had been drilled in 1993 since the original explorers had forgotten to bring any anchors. Over the intervening years, the discovery of a number of new entrances had made the Far End area much easier to reach than had been the case in the early 90s. The 161G entrance was chosen since this has easiest access from our current base at the stone bridge.

As usual, exploration yielded quite a few dead ends but also a number of interesting finds and promising leads. However, it turned out that the most significant find was made by Wookey and Andrew Atkinson during derigging. They spotted a hole in the roof of Repton chamber that would have probably been completely invisible by the light of a 1/4" carbide flame in 1993. They were also armed with a much lighter drill battery than was available in the early 90s, and with this aid Andrew climbed up to the hole. They explored about 100m of comfortable sized passage with an enticing draught before running out of time.

This lead was the first target on returning to Kaninchenhöhle in 2011. After another 100m

or so, the explorers popped out into a 10m round phreatic tube heading in both directions. It quickly became obvious that this was a major breakthrough, and was named Country for Old Men after its relatively geriatric explorers. The passage continues approximately north directly towards Steinbrückenhöhle. It appears to be the northward continuation of the large phreatic level (YAPATE and Chicken Flid Nice) that was discovered in the early years of exploration of Kaninchenhöhle. The draught is considerable, and is noticeable despite the large passage dimensions, and becomes uncomfortably cold at local narrowings – particularly at the head of Mordor pitch some 300m in. On descending this pitch an even larger phreatic passage was found heading in both directions. To the south, it appears likely that further exploration will yield an easier route into the rest of the Kaninchenhöhle system. At the northern end, the point of closest approach to Steinbrückenhöhle is now 50m from the Pussy Prance area. That the gap was 420m at the start of the 2011 expedition gives some idea of the scale of the new discoveries.

Following these exciting discoveries, a connection between Steinbrückenhöhle and Kaninchenhöhle looks more likely than ever. Since the connection between Tunnockschacht and Steinbrückenhöhle was established was established in 2011, making this final link would give a system in excess of 90km in length and 1100m in depth – a truly world class cave. The Pussy Prance area looks like a good bet since it is at a higher altitude thus giving us a gravity assist in the search for a connection, and sports many leads in strategically important locations. My top tip is that these leads should all be ignored. Instead, the connection is most likely to be found via an obscure lead that does not appear on the survey – not due to any lack of diligence on the part of the surveyors, but because the cave boggarts haven't engineered it yet. See you at the connection point in 2012. ■

Camping in Steinbrückenhöhle: a numpty's perspective

2011, *Edvin Deadman*

One evening last August, I woke up from a fitful sleep to find myself in the pitch black, wearing some sort of slightly damp and smelly 'onesie'. My mouth was parched and my nose was full of solid bits. Two other people were lying next to me breathing gently and I had no idea where the hell I was. Piecing together these clues, I came to the inevitable conclusion that I had gotten very drunk at somebody's fancy dress stag do, snorted some drugs and then made off with a couple of strippers. 'Argh, not again' I thought... Then as my befuddled mind slowly cleared, I remembered that actually I'd just spent my first 'night' underground. I should probably start from the beginning.

Dead Good Bat Chamber lies about 400m vertically down in Steinbrückenhöhle (204). It has a flat, sandy floor, is draft free and has a water supply nearby. It was discovered a few years ago and was always going to be a good choice of campsite if ever camping was deemed necessary. A few of us had decided that this year we would try it. This was partly to reduce commuting time to the leads in 204 (we were looking for the connection into Tunnockschacht, but the less said about that the better) and partly just to see what camping underground in Austria was like, none of us having ever camped underground before. I was also doing it to avoid doing the Gaffered pitch any more times than necessary because it's too scary.

Expo got off to a flying start this year for me, with a bit of a bender the evening before the first carry to Top Camp. I woke late the following morning with a splitting headache and a tongue so furry that it needed shampooing. Hilda's

campsite was a hive of activity and everybody was ready for a first carry up to the plateau. After drinking as much water as I could stomach, I drove a car load up the toll road, the meandering of the car remarkably coinciding almost exactly with the hair pins on the road.

A couple of days later, we were ready to start rigging. After a damp night at the bivy, Nial and I got up at 5:45 am (some sort of CUCC record?) and were underground by 7am. Several hours and 4 bags of rope later, we were sat in Dead Good Bat Chamber, contemplating what it would be like to actually sleep here. Twenty minutes later, with military precision, Kathryn, Djuke and Jess arrived, laden with camping gear. The Butlins Holiday Camp was born.

Kathryn, Holly [Bradley] and I were making up the night shift for the first camp (limited time and manpower meant we'd decided 'hot bedding' was the way forward). Underground in the mid afternoon, we made good progress down towards the camp, and I then made good progress back up to Gaffered to pick up the setting tool that I'd dropped. We caved through the night (bolting down a small pitch series) and at 5am we woke up the day shift (Nial, Djuke and Jess). Our first 'night' underground was very cosy. We were tired enough to sleep right through until the evening, at which point the day shift woke us up with hot drinks. The inner tent we were sharing, and the obscene quantity of thermals we wore kept us toasty warm.

We spent the next day (well, night really, but by now when I looked at my watch I couldn't tell if it was am or pm) in the Wares, hoping to find the

connection with Tunnocks (turns out we pretty much walked straight past where Tunnocks drops in, but the less said about that the better). Our second sleep was not so pleasant. Now our body clocks weren't fooled so sleep was difficult. None of us could stop peeing, and the constant dust had given me gigantic cave bogeys. After a few more hours of surveying, I was ready to be on the surface and never every under any circumstance head underground again. We began the long haul out and emerged at 3:30am after 60 hours underground. I was hoping for some sort of dramatically beautiful moonlit night, and then perhaps a ticker tape parade and some fireworks but we emerged to traditional Austrian style clag. We 'dealt' with our bulging daren drum, containing 18 person days worth of lovingly bagged human excrement, before sleeping at the Stone Bridge. If you see a particularly luscious looking grike on your wanderings across the plateau, don't look too closely...

Down at Hilda's to recharge our batteries (literally and figuratively), we discussed what we'd learnt about underground camping. It was warm enough to sit around camp wearing only thermals and a furry (but roll mat to sit on was important). Crapping into a compostable plastic bag whilst not exactly a delight, had proven to be less unpleasant than the Dunkerque ferry terminal toilets. But above all camping had worked and I didn't have to do it ever again!

As the evening progressed I entered a Gösser and germknödel induced stupor and before I knew it Nial, no doubt fueled by a competitive desire to find the Tunnocks connection before team Tunnocks (the less said about that the better), had persuaded us to lengthen our second underground stint to three nights...

We spent a day trying to find a way into Tunnockschacht by bolting down a freezing cold pitch series with a howling gale coming up it, convinced that any moment now we'd see lights below us, shake hands with team Tunnocks,



Kathryn and Holly at Butlin's Holiday Camp. 📷 Edvin Deadman



Holly and Djuke getting ready to swap shifts. 📷 Edvin Deadman

and return to the surface to be presented with medals and champagne. Unfortunately we were thwarted, partly by running out of rope, but mainly by the fact that we were looking in completely the wrong place (but the less said about that the better). Nevertheless, after a mammoth derig on the way out, we emerged after 72 hours underground to a beautiful sunset, with a good amount of survey notes in hand, heading south into blank space. And a lot more poo.

Expo was nearly over for me now. We'd found plenty of new stuff in Streinbrückenhöhle and shown that camping is completely feasible, but the really spectacular discoveries were to come later when Tunnockschacht was connected in and huge finds in Kaninchenhöhle meant that it is now only a few tens of metres away from also connecting...

Exciting times lie ahead for Expo! ■

Caving at altitude: Dachstein 2011

Becka Lawson

Most years I head off to Cambridge's Austria expedition to the Totes Gebirge. For the past two years a local caver, Robert Seebacher, has asked me if I wanted to join their Dachstein expedition. Last year Neil Pacey took the plunge, went along after CUCC's expedition had ended and had a great time. This year he and I both joined a small but really experienced team of cavers from the VHO caving club¹ immediately after the CUCC expedition.

VHO had arranged for a free cable car ride up to the Dachstein glacier for us and our gear. We then walked whilst a skidoo took our equipment to the Seethalerhütte hut where we stayed, at 2740m. The hut was charming but there was no power for guests so we had to beg the hut warden to charge our lights and drill batteries in the few hours when the generator was running. Fortunately the hut warden was a lovely, friendly Nepalese guide.

The main focus of this year's week long expedition was a cave called Voodoo Canyon with a murky history². The entrance, at 2629m, is just off a climber's route and around 130m down the 800m high, near-vertical Südwand (south wall) of the Dachstein. When VHO first started exploring it in 2008 they found ropes and gear left by a local climber and his son who'd been far inside in the 1990s. One day the VHO team set off later than usual. Robert started to descend the ropes that they had rigged for the abseil down the cliff to reach the entrance. He came to one rope which had been pulled up a short distance and had then had a cairn of

¹ <http://vho-caving-news.blogspot.com/>

² See <http://sub-glaciers.blogspot.com/2008/09/serious-speleological-work-and-thriller.html> for more



large stones piled up on top of it. If a caver had pulled on the rope from below to start to ascend then the rocks would have fallen onto him (and possibly his companions or climbers, immediately below) and could easily have killed him. It was a clever trap because once the rocks had fallen and the rope was hanging in its normal position there would be no evidence.

Rock falls often occur there naturally so nobody would be suspicious if someone was injured by falling rock. VHO informed the police and the culprit was soon found to be the climber who had first explored Voodoo Canyon. Presumably he wanted to keep the place for himself and was trying to scare away the cavers. His trap was foiled as he had failed to appreciate caver's interpretation of an alpine start so by mid-afternoon he was confident they would all be underground. When our 2011 expedition began he had only recently been released from jail.

It was just a five minute walk from the Seethalerhütte hut to the ropes down the cliff but it was along the edge of a glacier which, for me, was the most stressful part of each trip. I found it unnerving to be teetering across angled ice covered by a bit of snow (if you were lucky – slippery ice if not) with the crevasse cracks widening each day. We were wearing wellies and PVC suits plus heavy tacklesacks so it felt like one

missed footing and you would be sent tobogganing towards the edge. Neil did nothing for my peace of mind by telling me that if I slid I'd be falling inside the mountain rather than down the Südwand. The commute became surreal when, one day, our inappropriately-equipped gang had to pick our way over the ropes of a group of climbers who were geared up to their teeth and practising crevasse rescue.

The abseil down the sheer Südwand had spectacular views straight down to the scree slopes at the base of the cliff and to the green valley far below. However, once I started I could only focus on where I was putting my feet as the rock was loose and horribly frost shattered and any falling rocks could hit your caving team below or climbers. It was a relief to get into the cave where the main issue was staying warm. The temperature was just above zero and there was a healthy draft through most of the cave so it felt even colder than in the Totes Gebirge caves that I am used to. I ended up wearing two full sets of thermals plus two furries, two balaclavas, socks and wetsocks ... and I was usually still frozen. On the first trip Neil and I both also suffered from the altitude despite having spent most of the previous three weeks at 1800m but we acclimatised quite quickly.

On the first couple of trips we looked at leads in Voodoo Canyon left from the previous year's expedition. We dropped pitches and Robert free-climbed or bolted climbs up the more promising-looking avens but all to no avail. We started to worry that we would run out of leads. For the third trip Neil and I were offered three options - abseiling down the Südwand to look for new cave entrances, a bolted climb up a high aven or trying to hammer open a too-tight, drafting squeeze in a rift. It was pretty clear where our skill set lay so we were sent off with plug and feathers, an unfeasibly long drill bit and a chunky drill to an awkward, narrow rift.

It was, as advertised, drafty. In fact, it was well-nigh unbearable on the hands so we ended up alternating shifts with one person drilling or hammering at the squeeze until they couldn't take the cold anymore and the other draped in my 4 man bivvy shelter. Returning from one of my shifts, I was shocked to see a giant, green Vagon monster with a single, glowing yellow eye, wafting towards me - ah, no, just Neil trying to keep warm. We stuck it out a full day but we failed to get through and slogged, dispiritedly out. Unwilling to admit defeat, we went back the next day for more misery. After some hours of effort I had another go at the squeeze and this time I got through. I was now at the top of a spacious, promising-looking shaft so I rigged the rope the far side. From here it was easier to hammer the constriction and finally we were both through and could widen the squeeze enough for all the team to get past.

Cracking this squeeze turned out to be the key to a series of impressive, deep shafts. These plummet inside the mountain towards a cave system 700m below Voodoo Canyon called Südwandhoehle that VHO has been pushing for several years now. We had two final trips dropping shafts until we ran out of rope and rigging gear and then we had to leave. Neil returned in late September 2011 for another short pushing trip with VHO and in March 2012 I went with VHO on an underground camping trip. Voodoo Canyon is now -706m deep and is directly above Südwandhoehle, an extensive cave system at the base of the Dachstein that VHO has been exploring for many years. The nearest point to Südwandhoehle (Bereich Gletscherschlot) is now only 233m beneath the lowest point in Voodoo Canyon. This connection would give a vertical range of 1350m and there is considerable depth potential beyond that. Voodoo Canyon could thus be a key component to one of the deepest cave systems in the world ■

A very old lag goes to Austria

2009, *Mike (the Animal) Richardson*

Part way though their annual visit to Austria, Cambridge University Caving Club have an expedition dinner at the Gasthof Staud'n'wirt where they have stayed every year but one since the early 1980s; and part way though the dinner, Hilda, who runs the Gasthof, brings out the guest book, and we all write something in the book. This year I wrote (rather in the style of the London Underground logo): "Mike the Animal; 25 years in Austria; 1984 - 2009". And then, the next person - I can't recall exactly who - looked at what I'd written and said "Oh My God! I was minus five years old when you first came!" Ouch! But at least there were four or so other people there in their forties (well, early forties).

Despite (then) holding the sad-git-been-to-more-expos-than-anyone-else record, I'd last been to Austria in 2001. At that time I was caving maybe twice a year, and years of experience in no way compensated for lack of fitness. But since being sucked into Mendip Caving Group, I'd lost weight, developed much bigger shoulder muscles (Mendip may not be SRT territory, but crawling in and out of Upper Flood Swallet every couple of weeks makes up for it), and was suffering from an excess of enthusiasm. Earlier in the year I'd taken three people from CUCC down Upper Flood, as it turned out including the expedition's leader and treasurer, and Austria had come up in conversation. To cap it all, they were going back to Kaninchenhöhle after several years break, the cave I'd spent most of my time in in the late 1980s and through the 1990s. A strategically timed "chance" comment to the wife (fortunately an ex-caver and hence understanding)

that they were returning to Kaninchenhöhle secured a pass out, so that was decided.

First, maybe a bit about the caves. CUCC have been visiting Austria since the late 1970s, and are exploring the Totes Gebirge. This is across the valley from the maybe better known Dachstein, but has the advantage of a decidedly up-market base camp, and a road up to the plateau, which avoids all that tedious walking up big hills. Don't get me wrong, I like walking, I'm just not too bothered about combining walking and caving. From the top of the road its somewhere between an hour and two hours walk across the plateau (note, plateau, a word meaning reasonably sensible and flat walk) up to top camp. Top camp is currently a luxurious bivi under a large rock bridge at Steinbrückenhöhle, which I'd stayed at in 2001. Its progressed rather well since then; nicely terraced into sleeping platforms, water on tap from the rainwater/meltwater collection system, decent sized gas stoves. and solar power for battery charging. And, seemingly bizarre to me (who considers such things to be Satan's Spawn), excellent mobile phone reception, which meant I could stand on the limestone slabs outside the bivi and phone home.

Anyway, having driven from Bristol with Frank, a CUCC/Wessex caver, in a very nice (read, fast) car, and heading straight up to top camp with all my caving and camping gear, I arrived at the bivi in the early evening in a puddle of sweat but still feeling pretty good. I can't say for sure, but I suspect I also now hold the oldest-active-caver record for CUCC expeditions, and I had a slight nagging feeling I might make a total

idiot of myself, but it was a good start. I was encouraged by how much lighter my caving gear was compared to 2001; Llon/LED lights rather than a NiCd filled Oldhams case plus a carbide lamp; an alloy bar rack rather than my almost wear-free but heavy stainless steel one; and a lightweight oversuit (meaning I was prepared to risk the cost of trashing it against lugging a heavyweight one around). Plus, nice new Petzl chest and hand jammers (to which I shall return), and one of those spiffy Pantin thingies.

Next morning, I decided to take it easy, so - best laid plans and all that - I got onto a trip to the far reaches of Kaninchenhöhle, a bit where I'd been, just once, in 1992. Actually, this is significant. Kaninchenhöhle is the north-most part of the Schwarzmooskogelhöhle system, which is now over 50km long and over 1km deep. The north-most part of Kaninchenhöhle lies near enough above the southern reaches of Steinbrückenhöhle - around 16km long - so there was a lot of interest in trying to connect the two.

The northernmost parts of Kaninchenhöhle were last visited in the mid-1990s, and there are only a handful of CUCC people still caving who ever went there. Fortunately, life has got easier, since an entrance to Kaninchenhöhle which was found in the late 1990s shortened the distance quite a lot (or, while its not really a lot closer, its easier going). The route is mostly quite level, with only two or three pitches of any note, and I made it there and back. The far end was pretty much as I remembered it; we poked around in some holes that had not been looked at before, ran out of gear, and came out. The final pitch is 50m, and its a long time since I did anything that size (I hesitate to say "that big"), it was both less intimidating, because the top is lit by light from the entrance (so its nearly all over), and more intimidating, because the top is lit by light from the entrance

(so the height is quite apparent). That spiffy Pantin thingy really is the dogs though.

However, I was rather less than happy with my new Petzl jammers, the ones with the nice ergonomically designed release catches. Now, I'm used to a Croll with a nice large - and hence usable - ring release, which you can get a muddy finger into, and I've always used a Jumar as a hand jammer, which has a nice large - and hence usable - catch. Muttering under my breath about them, I decided that maybe I just needed some more experience. Needless to say, I shall return to these anon.

Over the next three days, I did three more trips into Kaninchenhöhle, one something of a tourist through trip, one a freezing poke near the entrance (Austrian caves are cold anyway, and this was a particularly cold bit of a cold cave), and one more back to the far end. This might have found something, but first I took the wrong sort of rock anchors; then we realised we'd not picked up any hangers at the gear dump two pitches back; then we just ran out of time. But I did get to try out a bothy bag, a thoroughly amazing bit of kit; basically a big rip-stop nylon bag you - and depending on size and desperation other people - can sit in. It gets really warm quite quick, I might have to buy one for use down Upper Flood.

Four trips in four days, something I have never done in 15-odd expeditions, so at that point it was back down to the fleshpots of base camp. Austria may be a bit expensive but for some reason bottled beer is really cheap, maybe 80p a bottle, and OK, its not proper British beer, but its not bad, especially at that price. And, the Gasthof has this really nice wood hut which is used in winter by the curling cum potato-eating cum oompah-music cum drinking club that we get to hang out in. Plus, a decent evening meal; that's evening meal singular, must be something about Mendip but the caves were calling.....

Back up on the plateau, I decided it was time for a trip town Tunnockschacht, which is the next significant cave to the north of Steinbrückenhöhle, so off I set with Steve (apparently an MCG member in the 1990s), Becka (seriously, seriously, hard caver) and Julian (also hard, especially when, how shall I put it, “encouraged” by Becka). This trip was to involve a 100m pitch with a free-hanging knot-pass about 25m down. OK, I’ve done knot-passes before, no big deal, but I’d not reckoned with the Petzl ergonomic release catch from Hell.

Arriving at the knot, I just could not move the Croll to down-prusik. It was not until much later I figured out that, using my old Croll with its nice large release ring, I’d got into the habit of down-prusiking by using the ring to swing the cam clear, rather than thumbing the cam itself down. That worked fine, but not with this nasty new ***** plastic illegitimate release catch thing; no (insert expletive of choice) way. So back up I came, cursing furiously and apparently freaking Julian out, and set off out. Just as well, because a few minutes later my headlight went off and I discovered I’d not got my backup. Fortunately I’d brought my super-bright spotter light, so that got me out.

Back at the bivi, in true Austrian tradition, the sky shifted from clear blue to utter darkness, lightening flashed and the heavens opened, and a group of CUCC walking up proved that chivalry is thoroughly dead, in an everyman-for-himself and the devil take my girlfriend “are you wet” sort of way. At eleven that evening, the callout time for the Tunnockschacht trip came and went, so we all got up and dressed, and variously stayed at the bivi “organising”, or walked up to the cave entrance - now in very light drizzle, or walked up to the cave entrance



and went down to see what was going on. As it turned out, the other three were sitting it out at the bottom of the 100m pitch which was now a significant waterfall; fortunately they made it up shortly after, and I offered a very small vote of thanks to Petzl. The plastic release catches are still rubbish though.

A return match a day later was rather more successful, bolting down a narrow rift with the aid of a nice little power drill, we made some reasonable progress, but then the giant call out board over the channel called, so that was that, and it was time to stagger back down the hill with all the gear I’d lugged up 10 days earlier, only damper and less well organised. Oh, and it rained.

So, how did it go? For me, pretty well. There’s no point in pretending I can do stuff like I did 25 years ago, and I’m definitely slower now, but experience counts for something, and regular Upper Flood trips seem to be doing a great job of fighting off the inevitable; and even the SRT wasn’t too awful. CUCC are a very accommodating bunch, and I reckon that if you avoid any of the “when you get to my age ...” boring middleaged crap, you can have a great time and everyone gets on just fine. Either that, or they are all very very polite people. ■

The joy of Expo

Wookey

Expo is special. It's addictive, and extraordinary, and frustrating, elating, exciting, miserable, boring, painful, and sometimes just plain peculiar.

It's a fine and notable thing that I think deserves a little study.

I first went to expo as a shiny student in the summer of 1988. That's quite a long time ago now, and I've been 15 times in total over the available 25 years. There has to be a reason for that behaviour, and I'm going to claim in this article that it's not just a lack of imagination, or nothing better to do, and try to explain why I keep coming back.

The thing about expo is the lure of new cave. The trips you really remember are the ones where you found something really impressive, and the ones where you scared yourself silly. The first time you put a bolt in and hang off it, come round the corner to find something enormous, sniff the draft and knowing you really are onto something, or are bolting down a big shaft with unhelpfully-shaped walls, climbing up dubious mud-slopes over big drops, or moving through loose boulders with enormous care. Those are the things that stick in the mind, and I've had my fair share of them over the years.

7 bolts and 40m down, still no floor in sight, swinging about to get to a rebelay, with the rope twanging disturbingly overhead. It suddenly comes to you just how thin that bit of rope is, and how exposed you are to the realities of gravity, the threat of sudden surprise, pain, and

death should it break, and the more mundane actuality of increasingly numb legs. You've been hanging around down here for over an hour now, and whilst it was exciting at the top now it's an odd combination of tedious and scary, and you really wish some floor would turn up, and allow you to return to a more normal way of being.

There is nothing to hang onto on the smooth wall so putting a bolt in, even with a skyhook, is strenuous and stressful, especially when the skyhook pings off for the third time. And you really, *really* don't want to drop anything important, but that paranoia means now everything is 'over-clipped', with crabs through crabs and too many things clipped in, so you can't get the damn crab open, and everything is heavy and your hips hurt. The awkward bolt finished, you finally descend another 20m to the blessed floor.

Guess what? The shaft continues at the edge of the ledge, looking like it definitely goes somewhere. But your enthusiasm is spent, your compatriots are almost certainly very bored by now, and anyway the damn thing needs surveying before you can make your way out from the arse end of nowhere, where, to date, exactly 4 people in the whole world have ever been.

We were a little cocky this time, but sometimes that's the way to get things done. "Today we are going to find a new entrance" we declared, setting off into 161c to descend the 200m pitch series of 'France'. It's a nice set of pitches and

we whizzed on down. There were only two of us, me and Atkinson, and the route was familiar so progress was fast. There's a fiddly 15m, a fine 40m (Francophobia), a 30m (Toothless) , then Frogs-legs of 14m, 12m, and 41m. This is a lovely cosy pitch series until you reach a hanging rebelay where the whole world disappears. First one wall, then the other, and suddenly there is nothing but space. Wow this place is quite something - it's huge! It wakes me up and I take a moment to marvel before squeezing the handle again and plummeting 20m to the floor.

Our optimism knowing no bounds we left our SRT gear here, and clambered like ants through the gaps in the house-sized boulders to find the devious route through the rocks, avoiding the great big hole to reach 'Flat France'. Traversing past said big hole we immediately wished we still had harnesses and a traverse line, but t'was too late now. Beyond, we whizzed along familiar territory, through the squeeze-which-shall-not-be-named-in-polite-company, up the ladder into Staud'n'wirt, and started our search. The draught we remembered from last time was still monstrous, which is what made us so sure there must be another entrance. All we had to do was follow the wind.

Something strange happens to you in these situations - a kind of exploration fever takes over - a determination to poke every corner and check behind every rock. Your fear diminishes and tricky climbs become easier.

We tried climbing up over boulders, but it got too steep after a while so we ran away. The first big horizontal passage choked almost immediately, which wasn't good. The next led to a pool but with no way on except up into the roof, where the draft must go. Hmm, this wasn't quite as easy as we'd hoped. Still, we weren't out of options yet. A climb on the left looked down 9m to a big space, but we had no gear for that, so having failed with the first



Wookey demonstrating the impressive draught at 161d. 📷 Andrew Atkinson

3 QMs, we follow the Salt Lake City stream-way and more draught, right at a T-junction, into new passage, stooping under arches. It's big beyond and our hopes rise again. But only 80m later we reach a choked dead end again. However it had dead bats, dead moths and what might be a bird skull. All of that sounds like surface not too far away, but how to get there, and where, exactly, is it? A tube above the choke was taking a strong draught so we dived in, excitement rising again, but it was blocked by a rock that we couldn't shift. Bum, now what?

We poked around nearby in the choke and found it went on the left through a tightish squeeze and we were into some nasty small passage, but the draught was massive so it was easy to follow. We scoffed about, getting into larger passage, but still 90% full of rocks so not much fun, but the fever was on us now. This gale went somewhere and we were bloody

well going to follow it. Eventually we reached a tiny hole with the wind howling through it, but it was too small! This had to be the way... Andrew tried again and managed to force himself through. I was astonished - it was tiny! Of course now I had to repeat the trick and with some pain and struggle passed 'The Battle of the Bulge' to fall into walking-passage. This wasn't a route for fatties.

We sprinted off round the corner, hoping hard that we weren't going to have to go back that way. A chamber, a shin, and it was done - we emerged into glorious sunshine on a very steep hillside. Wahey! We grinned from ear to ear. Ha - finding new entrances? - we're your men.

We were lucky the entrance was open at all - a huge chunk of the mountain had obviously come off recently and buried this area, but not quite enough to cover the hole. After surveying our finds we decided not to go back up inside the hill but to head up the surface instead. The problem with this is that it's a high-risk approach. We were on the side of a cliff, and nothing guaranteed that it was even possible to get to the top, and we could very easily end up stuck after doing too many tricky moves to go back. And we'd have to come back this way as our SRT gear would still be at the bottom of the pitches, so we get to do it twice. Still, nothing ventured, nothing gained, and luck had smiled so far, so we set off on slightly different routes. I certainly scared myself plenty but we did get up the hill, back to 161c.

Now that was a day to remember: decide to find an entrance from the inside, and succeed, in a mere 8 hours of pushing, shinning, thrutching and squeezing. It's amazing what you can find if you are determined. And I can still remember the feeling of joy as we popped out of that hill, 17 years later. That's why expo is great.

But of course most trips aren't like that, most trips are unremarkable. You trudge down to the entrance, traversing what are now very familiar rocks, get changed, hoping you haven't forgotten anything critical, trundle down the cave, for what must it be now... just how many times have you done this route now? - 20, 40? You rig a small drop, and find 20m of unremarkable muddy passage at the bottom, survey it dutifully, poke a couple of other things that were allegedly QMs but quite clearly don't go anywhere, then make your way out.

A tiny bit of the puzzle is completed, a couple of QMs knocked off, and a bit of passage visited that seems likely to be ignored for another few hundred years, but it wasn't terrifically exciting. It was still hard work, with a load of crap to carry and annoying cave to traverse. For what? It's hardly glory. You wonder on the way out why the hell you do this, why not get a nice hobby, go on a proper holiday somewhere sunny? And to cap it all it's raining when you get to the surface so you get a miserable change and a damp walk back.

But this is all part of the joy of expo. The careful calibration of difficulty, the fact that really exciting cave isn't found that often - you have to work for it, pay your dues at the coal face of tedium, get sore knees, and find a lot of cave which only its mother would love. It's all those unremarkable trips, and the ones which don't even get where you were going because the rope was too short, or someone forgot the spits, that make the exciting finds really exciting. If you could romp into a km of cave every day, surveying 30m leg after 30m leg, it would get dull very quickly. That is the joy of expo - you really do have no idea what you'll find today.

Caving on expo is not just about the cave, it's about the people too. Enthusiasm is impor-

tant. Always bring someone keen along; your chances of success and a good trip are greatly enhanced. If everyone is uninspired it's way too easy to find an excuse to turn round and go home, or not check the little climb over there because it's effort and it's awkward, and you are cold and sore. But that climb could be the key to miles of passage - you really can never tell.

Sometimes it's just marvellously companionable. You've got to know your fellow potholers pretty well over the last couple of years, and especially on expo. Sat at the top of a pitch in the dark waiting for someone else to rig something you sometimes get to talk about stuff that actually matters. This isn't something men do very often, but it happens underground, occasionally, with lots of time to kill, and no-one to overhear but a few large brown boulders. Those moments of trust are valuable.

And there is something special about a good team. Your compatriots may be 19 or 40, but so long as they are good it really doesn't matter: you respect their competence, and you know they can look after themselves, which means you don't need to worry about anyone except yourself. That's a really good feeling - it lets you concentrate on the matter at hand - the potholing. Life simplifies itself enormously underground. Gone are essay crises, work worries, your love life or lack of it, family stuff, to-do lists, money. None of it matters. All you have to worry about is not killing yourself, getting crushed by rocks, falling off stuff. Getting enough food and water to keep functioning. You get into the zone.

And it works the other way too - in a well-matched team you aren't worrying that you're not up to the trip - slowing the others down, needing extra stuff rigged, or being pushed into shinning up, down or across things you don't feel happy about. You've become intimately familiar with these people over the last



Salt Lake City. © Andrew Atkinson

few weeks. You've seen their arses, learned their foibles, ticks, annoyances and abilities. The extra efficiency you get from continuously working together is remarkable. Rope magics into bags whilst your back is turned, drill batteries are unpacked without you having to ask. Your huge and tiresome tacklesack is whisked up the climb just as you were starting to struggle.

Expedition caving is a group activity, especially when at the sharp end, but you often travel alone for most of the trip out, separated by pitches. You prusik in the almost-dark, conserving battery power, for hours, every pitch-head and rock intimately familiar. But familiarity breeds complacency, and complacency is your enemy - mistakes can be costly, so you take care. You've forgotten about the others now, and your life has reduced to a simple contest against the cave where all you have to do is get out uninjured, but the cave is playing



Dinner at top camp. Amy Matthews, Noel Snape, Andy Chapman and Emma Wilson, Expo 2011. 📷 Holly Bradley

the long game - it has all the time in the world to catch you out, and has left a lot of rocks and mud lying about in the hope that you'll fall over one or slip off something, or clip the wrong bit of gear.

You've been down here for 14 hours now and it's a long way back up - you are tired. But you persevere. Every prusik is a little closer to the surface and if you do it for long enough you have to get out eventually. Your world shrinks a little further, till there is nothing left but you, the damn tacklesack, about 2m of illuminated rope, and a bit of brown wall passing by very slowly. You spend as much time resting as prusiking, as you asymptote towards the entrance. God it's hard work. What was that about getting a proper hobby? But finally the smell of the air changes and you know you are close. It takes minutes to disentangle yourself and the bags from the top of the rope, as your movements have slowed to cold treacle, but eventually you are free to struggle the last 20m to the blessed outside, where you are greeted by the wan light of dawn, and a glorious view.

This is a truly beautiful place. The valley below is full of morning mist, and the view is of red-

tinged peaks as far as the eye can see. Off ahead is the Dachstein with its distinctive naked peak sticking out of the glaciers. Long shadows hide the valleys. You sit, utterly knackered, but also utterly satisfied. It was a great trip, and you got out alive, and now you have this marvellous view to drink in. It's not raining. It's not even cold. And the silence is remarkable. There is no-one for miles around except maybe some sleeping mummies at the bivi and a couple of worn out potholers somewhere behind you. Actually, it's not totally silent, there is a faint tinkle of cowbells down there somewhere, probably half a mile away, just to emphasise the silence. Not many people have sat here and seen this view; but today you earned the privilege. Changed now, you sit a while longer and enjoy it until you hear the faint noises of your fellow caver, struggling up the last few meters, so you turn to give them a hand out with all the crap.

Of all the fine things CUCC does, expo may well be the finest. And long may it continue. I hope you, dear reader, catch the expo bug too. ■

Comments?

www.srcf.ucam.org/caving/blog

Returning from top camp, Expo 2011.   Neil Percy



