
Wednesday Evening, 3rd January 2007 - Balch Cave [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Rob Taviner (Tav), Mandy Voysey, Alan Gray, Richard Witcombe, Dave King (with brief guest appearances by Alison Moody and Richard Warman (Kermit)).

Early start to get a few bags of spoil ready and stop the hauling party suffering from inactivity!

In the end about 50 bags were filled, the lighter rubble bags being infinitely more manageable than the heavier old ones, which have now been taken out for a sound thrashing.

The way on is narrowing slightly with a possible undercut to the right and we'll need to drop down a step to progress. The roof is heading in horizontally though, the air is fine and at one stage Alan and I convinced ourselves that there was air movement, although this is doubtful.

We seem to have gone through the thicker clay zone and are back to a sandier top-fill.

Regards

Mark Lumley (Gonzo).
Date: Thu, 4 Jan 2007 10:22:39 +0000

Wednesday Evening, 10th January 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Richard Witcombe, Mandy Voysey and Dave King.

We found a very wet Balch Cave. The Link Passage was particularly sporting with the paving slabs deep beneath a long pool. Two at the top of the pitch and two at the bottom made for hard work, but a total of twenty nine bags were raised and eventually dumped in Pool Passage. The digging

face is a diminishing roof tube but down to the right there is an undercut with roof pendants.

For a change, the team had a drink in the Waggon & Horses - quiet but pleasant.

Rich Witcombe.
Date: Thu, 11 Jan 2007 19:20:36 +0000 (GMT)

Monday, 15th January 2007 - Rose Cottage Shaft

Richard Witcombe and Tony Audsley

Ladder fettling and installation (and more walling).

Tony Jarratt.

Wednesday Evening, 17th January 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mandy Voysey, Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner (Tav), (Safe) Dave King, Alan Gray, Peter Flanagan, and Clive North

Battery, drill and a new roll of rubble sacks taken to the end. Dave, Mandy and Clive did the bottom of the shaft stuff, Tav and Peter did the hauling leaving Rich and Alan to stack etc in JW Passage.

One and a bit holes drilled (low battery power) for the bolts for hanging the one-ton bags from - finish the job next week. 36 bags eventually removed to the Pool Passage tip site. Dig face apparently still heading almost horizontal - air fresh - all to hope for!

Remainder of evening in the Oakhill with some somewhat mud-splattered Prices....

More of the same (or similar) next week....

[With detail corrections from Dave (I can be reckless sometimes) King and Rich Witcombe]

Date: Fri, 19 Jan 2007 18:18:43 -0000
X-me-spamrating: 0.092871 (whatever that means).

Wednesday Evening, 24th January 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Rob Taviner (Tav), Mandy Voysey, Dave King, Alan Gray & Clive North.

While Clive, armed with an errant drill, made 2 holes for rock anchors, the rest of us removed 37 bags of sandy fill from the adequately-sized, horizontal continuation.

This was then shuttled out to the spoil dump before beating a retreat to the creature comforts of the Oakhill Inn.

Regards

Mark Lumley (Gonzo).
Date: Thu, 25 Jan 2007 15:31:51 +0000
X-me-spamrating: 0.000028
[Gonzo obviously has a significantly lower spam content than Clive - - interesting.]

Wednesday Evening, 31st January 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Alan Gray, Richard Witcombe, Mandy Voysey, Rob Taviner (Tav), Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Dave King, & Clive North.

A nice dry cave, this week, for a change!

The chains, (courtesy TonyA) and d-shackles, (courtesy Dave) were fitted to the bolts to support the 1-ton 'sandbag' at the base of the shaft.

Alan and Clive spent the evening at the sharp end and in all 47 bags of sand made their way to the Pool Passage tip.

Much time was spent deepening and widening the final section immediately in front of the face to allow easier access and only at the end of the evening was the face itself attacked. This revealed, instead

of a continuation of the nice horizontal tube in the roof, a large nodule-shaped piece of bedrock running across the passage roof reducing its height by about 6 inches. Immediately behind this a slanting wall appeared, crossing the passage and sloping away at about 45 degrees.

So, it seems the passage has taken another dive downwards - lets hope its temporary!

Buckets and spades ready for next week then....

Clive North.
Date: Thu, 1 Feb 2007 12:43:23 -0000
(X-me-spamrating: 0.001312)

Wednesday Evening, 7th February 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

An early start by Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Followed by Dave King, Rob Taviner (Tav), Clive North, Alan Gray, Mandy Voysey (with bar room support from Richard Witcombe and a subterranean social visit by Alison Moody).

55 bags out to reveal the passage continuing down at a gentle angle and possibly turning slightly to the right.

Regards

Mark Lumley (Gonzo).
Date: Thu, 8 Feb 2007 10:13:25 +0000

Wednesday Evening, 14th February 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mandy Voysey, Rob Taviner (Tav), Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Clive North, Alan Gray & Dave King.

A touch wetter this week, the pool at the bottom of the calcite slope was once again back to welly

depth, and the connection passage was up to 3 inches of water.

Mandy and I headed in early such that we could adjust the tension on the chains retaining the one ton sandbag. Mission accomplished just as the rest of the team started arriving.

Then Mandy and I commenced digging, with a total of 52 bags being hauled up by Clive and Gonzo, and ferried down J W's by Alan and Tav (I think they were the positions held). Since we had run out of bags, Mandy tried to increase the count to 53, by emptying one out at the bottom of the dig and filling it again. So I suppose it was 53 filled, but 52 hauled out.

The rest of the bags were emptied as usual in the boulder choke and the walled in area in Pool Passage. Whilst digging a large detached water worn flake / flagstone (approx 20in x 18in) was removed from the right hand wall and placed as a step in the final approach. The flake took one casualty during its extraction, one entrenching tool handle. Oops !!

A couple of small air spaces appeared at roof level, large enough to get part of an arm in each, separated by about 18in of limestone, which may be more roof pendants.

The trend of the dig remains the same, very slightly sloping down.

Dave

King.

Date: Fri, 16 Feb 2007 22:50:05 -0000

**Rose Cottage Shaft - Massive effort !
Saturday 17th, Sunday 18th, Monday 20th AND Tuesday 21st February
2007**

Richard Witcombe and Tony Audsley

In a desperate attempt to show some progress, we worked four days in a row. (It STILL isn't finished).

Wednesday Evening, 21st February 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Rob Taviner (Tav), Mandy Voysey and Dave King. Plus a social visit by 3 generations of the Warman family.

Gonzo and Tav were at the digging face, Mandy and Dave were at the top of the pitch.

The passage continues sloping very slightly downwards, widening, with a roof pendant, now fully exposed.

In all, 40 something bags were filled and removed as far as the approach to the breakthrough squeeze, at which point we left as we were short staffed and last orders was getting perilously close.

As always, the guest beer did not disappoint!

Regards

Mark Lumley (Gonzo).

Wednesday Evening, 28st February 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mandy Voysey, Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Dave King and Clive North

An earlier start to clear last weeks 40 bags and to bail out the 'wet link'.

Mandy and Clive attacked the end whilst Gonzo and Dave alternately hauled and cleared the bags down JW Passage.

By the evening's end 38 bags had been removed (we think!) to the tip so nearly 80 had been pushed 'round the bend' - at some cost to the teams energy levels!

Adding to the problems I estimate that each bag must have weighed in the order of 2 kilos

EMPTY! They were so caked in mud that it took some time just to find a way into them for filling.

As a result, and also as many of them are wearing badly, it was unanimously decided to retire the lot (the bags that is) and get new ones for next time and to replace them more frequently. Assuming that Tav might be able to do the shopping for us we'd be happy to set up a 'bag-fund'.

At the end the passage has widened since I saw it last to about 5ft and the roof pendant turns out to be an impressive tooth shaped feature about two foot high. It's an isolated feature and behind it the passage continues almost horizontally being a couple of feet wide at the top.

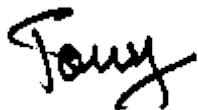
Occasional rocks are appearing in the sand at the back on the right hand side - interestingly they are not waterworn at all but angular in character. The present 'floor' at the face of the dig is now composed of very compacted, hard sand with a thin band of black sand passing through it.

More fun and games next week.....

Clive North.

Tuesday, 6th March 2007

Apologies to regular readers (?reader) for the lack of updates, I was visiting an exotic overseas island full of strange people - (Isle of Wight).



Wednesday Evening, 7th March 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Rob Taviner (Tav), Mandy Voysey, Matt Voysey, Clive North & Dave King.

The connection 'wallow' took about 20 minutes to bail before, armed with an array of pristine, new bags, 55 loads were removed.

There appears to be a wall ahead to the right of the roof pendant, with the continuation either ahead to the left or down.

The 'chamber' at the end is taking on impressive proportions as we start to take the floor out.

Regards

Mark Lumley (Gonzo).
Date: Thu, 8 Mar 2007 09:14:53 +0000

Wednesday Evening, 14th March 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Mandy Voysey, Dave King, Rob Taviner (Tav), Alan Gray, Richard Witcombe.

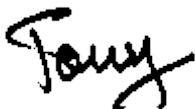
Cave fairly dry. Mandy and Dave at the sharp end. Fifty three bags of spoil raised and dumped. New roof pendant hovering into view.

Rich Witcombe.

Monday am/pm 19th March 2007 - Rose Cottage Shaft

Richard Witcombe, Tony Jarrat (JRat), Tony Audsley

At long last - IT'S FINISHED.



Tony Audsley.

Wednesday Evening, 21st March 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mandy Voysey, Matt Voysey, Richard Witcombe, Dave King, Rob Taviner (Tav), Alan Gray and Clive North.

Alan and Matt set to for the evening at the end and managed to dig out 47 bags worth of spoil.

I had a look at the end of the evening and was amazed to see how far back the face had gone in the two weeks since I last saw it. The dig face is now about 3ft beyond 'The Fang' roof pendant which really is very much in the way (don't worry I'm not about to *destroy* it - read on!).

Alan's work had revealed an open continuation of the roof tube which turned sharp left then sharp right (length about 3ft) at which point the sand came up to the roof again. The rift below was only about 6inches wide. However, there is a wide continuation of the main passage, just above floor-level, which appears about 4ft wide with small roof pendants. This avoids the need to follow the tube to the left, but would need the floor dropping considerably for access.

Whilst ruminating on the fact that 'The Fang' was right in the way of future operations, I spotted an inch high, horizontal crack in the left wall. It turned out that a very large slab of solid on a corner had dropped slightly. Getting the bar behind this showed that the whole corner was detached and loose. We managed to hammer off a large chunk and break it up with the sledge but we've still got the major portion still in situ.

We need to drop the floor a foot or so to release the block then break it up. This will give us a much improved working space to attack the end and remove the need to agonise about the future of the big roof pendant, which is such a major feature.

So rock-wrestling next week - sorry to hear of Gonzo's hand problem - maybe we should call the passage 'The Carpal Tunnel'??

Clive North.

Wednesday Evening, 28th March 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mandy Voysey, Dave King, Richard Witcombe, Alan Gray, Rob Taviner (Tav) and Clive North.

A fairly sombre start to the evening absorbing the news of Dave Irwins death.....

Rich renewed his acquaintanceship with the dig face and produced as a result the requisite 48 bags of spoil which were conveyed to the ropeway by Mandy and Clive.

Dave kept a lightless-Tav (sounds like some sort of almost extinct bird....) company at the top of the shaft whilst a sterling solo performance by Alan ensured the bags found their way down JW Passage.

At the end of the evening, Clive paid attention to the boulder which finally succumbed to an onslaught of levering and rocking and ended up slumped across the passage. It must be five feet by 3 feet by two approx. and the face of the wall left exposed is well eroded so it must have become detached an awful long time ago. The rock is far too massive for breaking by hand so some advanced techniques will be needed. This we'll postpone for a while. In the meantime, digging can continue to the right of the block where there is still some of the continuing passage visible to follow, and in the floor area generally. At worst this will give us a hole which can be backfilled with material from the face at a later date.

Rich made a good suggestion for evenings when we might be low on labour - with four it would be

easy to empty the one-ton bag at the base of the pitch which can then be refilled on other 'low-labour' evenings.

On the way out, I was following Mandy and about half way along Pool Passage I thought I saw a large rat scurrying towards me. On inspection it turned out to be a rabbit! A hop, skip and a jump chase followed until Mandy cornered it and gave it a home inside her oversuit. The M.R.R.O made its way out, passing said rodent hand to hand through one awkward squeeze.

On the surface it was released well clear of the cliff but was last seen bobbing along back towards the entrance!

Clive North.

Wednesday Evening, 4th April 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mandy Voysey, Dave King, Rob Taviner (Tav), Alan Gray, Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Tony Littler and Clive North.

Good to see Tony Littler back again and ditto Gonzo.....

Tony, Gonzo and Tav spent the evening at the sharp end sending a rapid-fire burst of bags up to Alan and Clive on the edge thence to Mandy and Dave in JWP.

A grand total of 53 and a half bags (yes - the half being the bag that the bags came in!) in total.

That's it - more next week!

Clive North.

Wednesday Evening, 11th April 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mandy Voysey, Rob Taviner (Tav), Richard Witcombe, Alan Gray, Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Clive North and Dave King [also known as 'Destructive Dave' or 'Dave - give me the job and I will finish the tools - King']

At the dig face Alan, Mandy and Dave kept up the pressure with 47 bags by the end of the evening. The need for removal of the boulder is being keenly felt but this will have to wait for a while. Clive North.

Wednesday Evening, 18th April 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mandy Voysey, Richard Witcombe, Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Dave King, Rob Taviner (Tav), Alan Gray, Tony Littler, Paul Stillman (!), Pat Cronin (!!) and Clive North.

For the first time we had enough people to enable the spoil to come out all the way out to the tip in Pool Passage in one go and as a result achieved a **record-breaking 75 bags!**

Consequently Mike, the landlord of the Oakhill Inn, couldn't believe his luck when we all tramped in for our customary couple of pints each plus hundreds of bags of crisps!

The big rock at the end has been persuaded to fall into a dug hole in the floor by Pat (maybe it was trying to get away from his singing...). Next week we aim to *break it up*.

Clive North.

Wednesday Evening, 25th April 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Rob Taviner (Tav), Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Alan Gray, Dave King, Paul Stillman and Clive North.

Due to the scarcity of diggers it was decided to spend the evening emptying the 'one-ton bag' at the base of the shaft. Tav busied himself with this with everyone else moving the bags (54 this week) back to the tip.

At the end of the evening the famous boulder in the dig was *demolished*. As a result of all the digging around the boulder in recent weeks, the chamber is big enough for some members of the team to stand in. Now the boulder is gone it will be enormous !

The way on is obvious at the back of the chamber behind where the boulder lay - carrying on horizontally with more roof pendants.

Soon we'll address the logistics of extracting the spoil through Erratic.....

Clive North.

Wednesday Evening, 30th May 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mandy Voysey, Matt Voysey, Alan Gray and Clive North.

Due to the lack of muscle we agreed just to dig and stack at the base of the shaft. A grand total of 52 bags now await removal.

Alan attacked the latest boulder with the hammer and reduced it by about a quarter, by which time we agreed just to stack it at the back of the chamber. If we get another big one we'll reduce both of them at the same time. It's not in the way at the moment

The face is looking interesting - seems to have levelled out (at the back on the left at least). There also seem to be an upward development (probably a pocket to be fair) which goes up for a foot or so in sand.

Pool Passage was expected to be awash after the rains but in fact was fairly dry - the link passage only had about 3 inches of water in it as well.

We've all signed up for next week - even Matt is showing interest!

Clive North.

Monday 28th May 2007 - Apologies to all (and sundry)

Once again, my apologies for the recent lack of updates. I have been away from the computer for a while, studying the migration habits of boulders. Boulders, like birds, like to move south in very cold weather. They are, however, much easier to photograph as they don't fly out of the frame just as the shutter is pressed. Here is one I caught resting by the shore. It could well qualify for the title of "**King Cobble**" as it is 23ft (7 metres) high and over 158 ft (48 metres) in circumference.

The foreground scale is 5ft 3¼in tall and as the ¼in is very important to her, this height cannot be metricated.

Enough of that. I have

filled in the missing entries for the 9th, 16th & 23rd May and will try not to be so lax in future. (Until the next time, anyway).

Wednesday Evening, 23rd May 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Rob Taviner (Tav), Dave King, Mandy Voysey, Alan Gray & Richard Witcombe, plus guest BEC digger, Matt Blount from Clevedon.

Cave was still wet and muddy - even fit Dave took ages ascending the Erratic Link. Forty five bags were raised and in due course dumped outside. At the face, the loose detached piece of wall fell over, hitting Gonzo's leg but luckily doing no damage to the passage. The two, by now very smelly, rabbit corpses were removed from the cave - Rich loaded them into a sack and Alan carried it out, (complaining bitterly all the way).

Pleasant sojourn in the Oakhill, but a surfeit of crisps, I feel.

Rich Witcombe.

Wednesday Evening, 16th May 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mandy Voysey, Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Dave King, Richard Witcombe, Alan Gray and Clive North.

Rich positioned himself in Erratic whilst most of the rest slithered down through the squeeze to the pot. Clive preferred the longer route in and found about five inches on water in the link crawl.

Alan and Clive attacked the end and after a while found the back wall is sloping away again at about 45° then it goes horizontal again.

Looking at the roof tube we have been following down the passage, it was obvious that its continuation was to the left at the back of the chamber. Some excavation was done which revealed the cracked blocked is probably another larger roof pendant and there may be something of interest on that side - very hard to tell though at this stage of the game.

It's obvious though that we need to form another 'step' in the passage and drop the floor by a couple of feet to continue forward, whichever direction we end up going in.

One casualty of the evening was the handle of the mattock which gave up the ghost. I'll see if I can get it sorted. In the meantime, there is no entrenching-type tool in the dig, only the spade, bars and hammer.

On my way out through Pool Passage I came across two young rabbits floating face down in a pool - gone looking their brother without a light I suspect.....

If someone can take a bag next week they are up on a ledge on the right-hand side (going in) about 10yds before the low crawl into the final bit of Pool Passage.

By evenings-end 56 bags, give or take, came out.

Clive North.

Wednesday Evening, 9th May 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Rob Taviner (Tav), Dave King, Mandy Voysey, Richard Witcombe and Alan Gray.

An entertaining evening with little to report except:-

- The 52 bags of spoil.

- The planks in situ to enable a free run of the skip up to Erratic Passage.
- The tape survey of the small pot by Alan.
- The near miss when the shackle pin came off the pulley and the skip and pulleys free-fell down the pot, narrowly missing Mandy. **[A good job she didn't damage the pulley !_(T.A.)]**
- The new skip in situ at the entrance
- The rabbit rescue. **[A young, very wet rabbit was found about 150ft inside the cave. Richard took it home but it refused all food and died later_(T.A.)]**

Regards

Mark Lumley (Gonzo).

Wednesday Evening, 2nd May 2007 - Balch Cave Dig [Fairy Cave Quarry]

Mark Lumley (Gonzo), Rob Taviner (Tav), Richard Witcombe, Alan Gray, Clive North, Mandy Voysey & Dave King.

Gonzo headed in early to sort the hauling skip for the Erratic Passage route. He found it was not necessary to enlarge the squeeze, so this feature remains intact, although a couple of minor adjustments were made below the squeeze.

At the front end, the boulder as expected was no more. Most of the debris was used to good effect by Rich in building a retaining wall/step into the now voluminous 'digging chamber'. Limited standing room now available, book early.

Some fumes were present, but by the end of the session they had dispersed.

Dave completed the emptying of the one tonne sack, whilst Mandy and Gonzo hauled the bags to the top of the pitch. The rest of the team (Alan, Tav & Clive) successfully hauled the bags up through the tight squeeze into Erratic Passage, and then up out of the entrance, to be emptied in the quarry.

A couple of well positioned planks (not a reference to any of the team) half way up the climb may guide the skip and save the need for somebody to manually guide the skip through.

Back at the 'digging chamber', the last few remnants of the boulder were removed to the empty tonne sack, to be used or hauled out at a later date.

Dave King.