

11 January 2009 - Fernhill Cave [Fairy Cave Quarry] – Tony Boycott, Chris Davies, Alan Gray & Duncan Price

Several large calcite slabs were broken up and evacuated to the rockery pile in two stages (up to the bottom of the pipes and thence to surface). Duncan got a splinter of calcite in his left eye (2 mm cube) and Dr. B attended.. In all 23 loads made it out in 3hrs.

14 January 2009 - Fernhill Cave [Fairy Cave Quarry] – Gonzo, Steve Sharp, Richard, Alan, Dave, Duncan, Mandy, Matt, Tav and Dylan.

An entertaining evening's work with Richard shoring the 'rift' and Gonzo, Steve and Alan enjoying themselves attacking the steep rubble slope and posing for Steve's 'Fernhill - the movie'.

The left hand side is now clear down to a sloping calcite floor while, despite our best efforts, there is still a mass of rocks and calcite slabs to be moved on the right.

We were visited part way through proceedings by the 'secret diggers' who popped in for a tourist trip. 73 skips out.

21 January 2009 - Fernhill Cave [Fairy Cave Quarry] – Matt & Mandy, Gonzo, Dave, Alan, Richard, Steve Sharp, Rob and Andy ..

The hole was very draughty especially on the middle ledge. With Richard's timber bits into the hole for shoring up the loose side of the rift, which had moved again, and Matt on the first ledge, Rob and I started digging at the bottom. First point after clearing the back log of spoil was 6" down finding a nice natural calcite shelf covering a square metre of the digging floor, this must have been there for a while and was some one centimetre thick with 10 cm of mud underneath. So I moved over to the right a bit near to Richard who was shoring and doing a bit of gardening so I was now dodging the loose and falling stones. Towards bucket load number 50 I moved some rocks that caused a large slab to move and the whole slope to creep somewhat. After moving this and more of my own gardening we were at bucket number 70 and 'times up' was called. A great evening with downward progress of about one metre.

24 January 2009 - Fernhill Cave [Fairy Cave Quarry] – Gonzo, Alan & Paul

No new roof collapses since last Wednesday which was quite surprising because there had been several heavy rain storms. Stal and rock breaking sessions. 80 lumps of stal/limestone and 40 buckets of gravel/mud were deposited between the two large boulders in the South Passage. When this was full another dry stone wall was built behind the second boulder and this was also filled to the roof. The floor area of the chamber has now been doubled since last Wednesday.

A hole was also dug at the junction with the northern wall and the eastern spoil heap for a depth of two feet hoping to locate the top of the northern passage. Alas not yet.

28 January 2009 - Fernhill Cave [Fairy Cave Quarry] – Alan Gray, Steve Sharp, Andy Watson, Dave King & Duncan Price

Filming a history of the cave in South Passage. As shoring was taking place we were not required in Fernhill so along with Steve Sharp, Andy Watson, Dave King & Duncan Price I went to the Fernhill boulder choke in Fairy. Dave was filmed by Steve while Duncan visited Dissappointment Chamber.

WEDS 25 FEB

Surface party - Tav, Matt & Mandy

Underground party - Paul S, Dave, Clive & Rich

After fixing a "long stop" end board to the high-level roof, work started on the intermediate concrete platform. Three steel rods were driven into the eastern spoil face, and a concrete and rock/stal retaining wall was started. This will reach up to the high level roof. A token four skiploads were sent up to the surface.

The lower shoring will also need to be "re-arranged" in due course.

No digging Sunday, but if a large enough party is around next Wednesday, we can finish the wall and clear a fair amount of spoil.

RW

Sunday 22nd Feb

Clive & Dave.

Met at busy carpark about 10am. A Withyhill and Fairy Cave trip were being prepared for.

Clive and I kitted up and headed off to Fernhill with a drill and carrier bag full of spanners and other assorted iron work.

Two brackets were fitted to the timber roof supporting beam, and the concrete shelf support was checked to see if brackets required, concluded not required.

The stemple was fitted just above and towards the back of the concrete shelf, located in two drilled out depressions. The stemple can then be walled and cemented in along with the existing jammed re-bar. This should form a very secure blockage and prevent any more rock and mud slides descending beyond this point. Provided we don't undercut the shelf too far without securely shuttering as we go down.

Returned to the surface in bright sunshine after about an hours work and met Rich heading up to the entrance with a potted ash sapling in hand and an oak to follow. Perhaps a long term stabilisation project of the ground around the entrance.

Dave.

Fernhill 2009

WEDS - 18 FEB

Present - Paul & James Stillman, Chris Davies, Rab Garrow, Gonzo, Clive, Dave, Mandy (Matt in pub), Alan and Rich

There had been a further (not unexpected) high level collapse at the far end which effectively filled in the void created by last Sunday's run in. It also hit the top level "roof" which sank a few inches onto its "reserve" stemple. This stout timber will be reinforced with angle brackets bolted to the wall. The rest of the shoring is still in situ.

A few skiploads of spoil from the bottom were brought out by the early starters, after which the main effort switched to shoring matters. RW created a rock ceiling at the far end of the high level roof, drove a further timber into the spoil, placed a piece of angle iron across the rift and concreted the whole mass together. Meanwhile DK cleared the intermediate concrete shoring platform of loose rock, sending some of it to RW and some to the surface. It is intended to push this platform as far to the east as safety allows and then insert some steel stemles around which RW will build a concrete and stone retaining wall. Work will then shift lower still to sort out the timbering above the South Passage entrance.

After the shoring work, ML sent up a few more skiploads of spoil from the bottom. Does anybody know what the skip total for the evening was?

On Sunday a small team will be needed to drill bolt and stemple holes. Next Wednesday the intermediate wall can hopefully be started (more cement someone) using rocks sent up from the bottom.

A useful little session.

RW

15 Feb

Gonzo, Richard, Alan, Tony Boycott, Pete Flanagan.

Richard spent most of the session, occasionally helped by Alan, installing shoring at a level half a metre below the lower lip of the entrance pipes. This was successfully installed and will prevent any infill falling vertically on the diggers below.

Pete was ensconced in South Passage and skips and boulders were pushed through to him to be incorporated into the walled off area,

which is now nearly full. Meanwhile Tony was using the plug and feathers to great effect breaking up the large boulders pulled out of the heap of infill.

After a lunch break large boulders were placed at the near end of the bedding plane and a wall built to become another underground spoil storage area. There were a few minor tumbles of rocks from the spoil heap above but nothing too serious although these kept our concentration levels up. Large and small boulders were removed from the northern wall of the bedding plane and it appears that character of the rock face is changing – possibly the start of North Passage?
2pm and things were going well.

From this point everything changed, quite quickly. There was another collapse, luckily not a quick one, but it lasted for about 30 seconds with rocks and mud trundling down the spoil heap. Pete and Alan climbed the ladder and Gonzo stood on top of the newly created wall with Richard and Tony safe on the ledge higher above. After the noise had subsided Gonzo and Richard descended the ladder and surveyed the situation. A large amount of boulders and mud had now tumbled into the digging chamber and this had come from beyond the shoring installed over the past few months however the shoring has remained in place.

Now we have to install yet more shoring and there are once again many loads of spoil to bring to the surface.

12 Feb

Gonzo, Dave King, Rich, Tav, Alan and Clive (+ Mandy and Matt at the pub)

Pre-changing - a amusing five minutes was had, at Daves expense, whilst he attempted to retrieve his van from the clutches of the snow and mud in the lower part of the lane.

Manouvring the van in the parking area was not without its moments too!

Anyway, Clive and Tav to the bottom first where it was established that one of the long pieces of shoring had dropped out of the top of the bedding plane along with some rocks.

This was encouraged to stay in place and work commenced at the base of the bedding on the right hand side clearing up loose rock. This eventually revealed a flowstone 'floor' attached to the back wall which extended along to the right under the boulder pile. These boulders are pretty large and well compacted against the wall and, if they continue to the east, may well provide a more 'stable' area to work in compared to the 'scree-slope' conditions a little higher up.

In all around 45 skips (I wasn't counting) went up and several snowballs went down (our necks too!)

Sunday looks like being a shoring/cementing day.

Clive

Sunday 1 February

Alan, Rich. Guy Travers (Axbridge & ex South African gold miner), Paul S and Kate L.

Conditions a little bit on the cool side.

Leaving one person always above the "collapse zone" some useful work was done below. Two more high-level timbers were inserted as well as a long steel rod after which loose material was gardened from this area. While PS and KL went into South Passage to receive and stack rocks passed in by either AG or GT, RW continued with the low level shoring. The long timber installed last Wednesday was resited more securely and another long timber was jammed in at a lower level stretching from a nice pocket on the north wall to a cut slot in the stal on the south wall. Bracing timbers and steel rods were also inserted and a piece of plywood was nailed on top to form the first section of the "bomb shelter". Quite a lot of rock was disposed of in South Passage but a good clearing session is needed on Wednesday. More timbering must await a further downcutting of the spoil heap.

RW

Fernhill Digging report Sun 29th March

Clive, Richard, Alan, Paul, Gonzo, Pete (Flanagen?), Dave & Dillan (Stick patrol).

Most of the team arrived for a 10am start (I assume), by 11am we were all there, well those listed above anyway.

Spoil removal began from the bottom of the "Bedding Rift" with approx. 40 skips hauled to the surface. A short break then followed in the glorious Mendip sunshine (yes the sun really was shining). A chance for a bit of fresh air, lung clogging or for making international calls. A change around of positions, and digging continued from under the scaffold tubes below the new cemented block wall. Unfortunately not enough time to reach the back of the tubes to measure fore the next stemple. A total of 60 skips were hauled to the surface before time was called. Paul, Gonzo and Dave stayed a little longer to take some photographs for the record of progress so far. During the photo session, Martin Grass dropped by with another caver, on their return from Shatter, for a quick look around taking in South Passage. Martin's first visit since we started the project.

Dave.

Wednesday 5th March B Team, Fernhill.

Rich, Clive, Paul & Dave.

The six sharpened scaffold poles (no George didn't help sharpen them) were ferried to Fernhill by Rich, Gonz and Paul (edited 30 March by PS).

The poles were then driven into the spoil slope along side the previous four, making a very secure roof from under which we can continue to remove the spoil slope in safety.

A wall was then cemented in on top of the poles to prevent spoil run in & also act as a bit of a counter balance weight on the scaffold poles. To finish off the evenings work, one end of a short plank of timber was secured to the underside of the upper concrete shelf, the other end resting on top of the new cemented wall. This should help prevent any small rocks falling from above.

De-brief and re-hydration therapy at the usual venue.

Dave K.

Balch

While the A team were in Fernhill the AAA team of Tav, Kate Hargreaves, Jack Patient, Matt, Mandy and Gonzo did more bag filling in Balch cave.

80 plus bags filled, 22 to surface with the remainder at the bottom of the ladder.

We could do with some more rubble sacks if anyone is passing Diggingbags R Us.

ML

Fernhill - Sunday 22nd march.

Richard, Paul S, Clive & Dave.

Dave had fabricated points on the end of four 5ft scaffold poles and also a selection of stemples inc two shortened acro props. This should give us a few more options for shoring.

More spoil was removed from under the lower concreted shelf and a stemple then fitted across the rift/bedding. The four scaffold poles were then driven side by side in to the infill across the top of the stemple, whilst a second stemple fitted further out but above the scaffold poles, ensured they remained in line. A few more scaffold poles will be required to give us a complete roof under which we can than continue digging.

Once we have enough scaffold poles filling the width of the rift, a wall can be cemented in on top of the protruding poles to check any run in below the previous shelf.

Following that, more spoil can then be dug from below the scaffold roof and another stemple fitted to pick up the sharp ends of the scaffold poles.

Six more sharpened poles are now ready for Wednesdays session.

Dave.

Balch - WEDS 18/3

The A Team: Tav, Gonzo, Mandy, Matt & Duncan

83 bags of spoil were removed from the bottom of the pitch and emptied on the surface. The A team were on standby in the pub nearly a pint ahead of the B-team.

DP

Fernhill - 18/3

The B Team: Dave K, Alan & Rich

A fairly frustrating session trying to instal the next stage of shoring beneath the intermediate shelf without precipitating a further run-in. Eventually the use of a steel stemple proved impractical because the depth of the natural pockets in the walls precluded the stemple being tightened. Instead a timber beam was installed with a timber cross piece jammed above to hold the spoil back. There was quite a lot of "muttering" from behind the shoring and occasionally a rock would fly out from an unseen hole, aiming for the digger's head. Eventually most of these holes were filled with cunningly jammed rocks.

The next stage of operations will be to create a roof further to the east by driving lengths of "sharpened" scaffold pole into the spoil, supported on a series of steel stemples. Hopefully the job will be completed before I retire from digging.

RW

FERNHILL WED 11/3

Tony B, Dave K, Clive & Rich - combined age in excess of 220 years (sorry, Dave)

Finished the concrete and stone wall above the intermediate shelf, leaving a slot at the top in case of a build-up of pressure from water or slurry. One extra piece of timber shoring was installed below the shelf, but further work here must await the manufacture of more steel stemples.

No digging on Sunday but A and B teams will be resuming work in their respective caves next Weds.

Rich

Balch Wed 11 March

Gonzo, Tav, Matt, Mandy.

After having extricated myself from the squeeze between Erratic and JW where I had firmly wedged myself in by carrying too many empty digging bags it was back to Balch business as usual.

A lot of bags were filled with winter's deposits from below Geoff's Latch Locker and deposited at the base of the shaft.

The floor still needs to be dropped by several feet (again) before we move forward.

We found that four people weren't quite sufficient and a fifth would make a big difference on both this and the next stage out so, if there are any closet diggers out there (Ken), your ATLAS needs you!!

SUNDAY - 8 March

Present - Tony B, Clive, Alan, Rich and Gonzo (late and still traumatised by his daughter's birthday party)

After Alan had had a consultation with Dr Boycott about his various hand injuries, and friendly chats had been had with trail bike riders (one of whom would like to try caving) and a party of elderly walkers (one of whom had been caving with Sidcot SSS), work started in dry and sunny conditions.

Below ground, there had been a further run-in from below the intermediate shelf and the draught in the upper part of the cave was strong enough to suggest that the collapse might be nearing the surface! RW continued his walling above the shelf with the aid of CN and AG, but ran out of concrete before it was finished. A piece of rebar was driven into the face and incorporated into the wall.

On Wednesday, there will need to be a further shortish walling session, followed by stemming for the next stage of the shoring. It would be best not to remove any more spoil for the time being as it will only encourage more run-ins - the wet weather is not helping. Some of the team might therefore like to visit Balch, where it may be possible to raise a few bags to J.W. Passage.

Despite a flood of derogatory comments by ML (evidence of his traumatised state), Dr Boycott's concrete mixing - latterly carried out in snow, sleet and heavy rain - was exemplary. The whole party vacated the site in appalling weather, but it had been nonetheless a useful little session.

RW

Dig report Wed 4th March.

Surface duties:- Duncan, Mandy, Alan, Kate L, Gonzo, Paul,

Bottom of Piped shaft:- Matt

Ledge below pipes:- Clive

Digging:- Richard (aka Rich Text)

Stemple fitting:- Dave

Stick gofer:- Dillan

A good turnout this week, resulted in 56 skips of spoil being hauled to the surface, whilst Dave installed the stemple under the back of the concrete shelf, including a length of 1" angle iron driven in above the stemple.

Richard started filling skips at the bottom until after the concrete shelf was secured and then proceeded to drive a length of 2" angle iron into the rift above the concrete shelf. This will then be cemented and bricked into the walling.

Clive, on his perch was acting like a woman! Well, having to multi-task anyway. "Take up the skip" "Pass down that empty skip" "Have you got that angle iron" "Pass the drill" "Take up the skip" "Pass down that empty skip" " Pass the stemple" "Take the drill" " Pass the spanners" "Have you got a chisel, no that's too long" etc. etc. etc.

More spoil can now be removed below the shelf to determine the position of the next stemple and vertical shoring.

No cementing done this week due, maybe next week if we have another large turnout.

Dave.

Fernhill - Wed 29 April

Alan, Richard, Clive, Dave, Andy Watson, Alan Merry, Duncan, Gonzo, Steve Sharp.

An evening of stempling, shoring and spoil removal filmed by Steve.

60 skips out.

Gonzo

Balch - 22/4

Duncan at the bottom of the pitch

Mandy and Tav at the top

Matt, Gonzo and Dylan in JW (Dylan in via Erratic and Bullrush Way - quite content but can we take a stick next time!)

Paul, Alan Merry, Andy Watson, Steve Shipston in Erratic.

65ish bags out.

Gonzo

Fernhill - WEDS 22/4

Dave K, Alan G, Clive & Rich

Installed one under and one over stemple about 18" below the first scaffold roof. Then after some rock clearing at the far end, nine 8' long sharpened scaffold poles were driven into the collapsing spoil ahead for some 3' to 4'. Work will continue next Weds.

RW

Fernhill - 21 April

Steelwork ready for tomorrow evening.

9 x 8ft pointed scaffold tubes

2 stemples, to be cut to length when underground.

Dave.

Fernhill, 15th April 2009

Richard, Alan G, Alan M, Clive, Tav, Paul, Matt, Mandy, Dave.

The entire team employed in Fernhill this week, free to clear spoil after the recent bout of shoring and engineering work. Mandy and Matt were posted to the bottom, set to work trying to make a dent in the huge pile of run-in from the east, while Tav and Rich marshalled the skips on their merry way skyward. 82 skips of rock and sticky clag surfaced, during which time Matt opened a small cavity at the extreme eastern end of the run-in, directly underneath (and beyond - tut tut!) the most recent batch of scaffold shuttering. Through this it was possible to see for about 30 feet to the east-northeast, including a tantalising view of the bedding plane roof starting to level off and all the signs of a large cavity, still occluded by spoil heap, lying beneath. The area is entirely unstable, and more shuttering is required before we dare

continue in this direction. The evening was concluded in gourmet style with all-you-can-eat helpings of free food at the pub courtesy of the skittles finals team, which we all agreed was a rather pleasing turn of events!

Matt.

Fernhill - 14 April

Dave and Clive

We successfully installed the latest stemple and drove the scaffold tubes in another foot leaving the ends almost parallel with Richards cementwork above.

The outermost stemple, now being redundant was removed and a fair pile of debris pushed down for the delectation of Wednesday nights diggers.

A busy nights digging and hauling is in prospect.....

Clive

Balch - Weds April 8

Gonzo, Tav, Mandy, Kate H, Andy Heath

80 bag approx filled and stacked at bottom of pitch.

Signs of sedimentary fill reported from the end.

Added by Kate H on 16 April

Unearthed a pickaxe and got into fresh sand (lovely pretty layers). Back to pub for refreshment.

Gonzo

Wed 1st April

Balch - Duncan, Mandy, Matt, Gonzo and Paul.

60 bags to surface.

Fernhill - The A Team

Richard, Alan, Clive, Dave & Alan Merry.

Arriving at the entrance shaft, damage to the walling behind the entrance, close to the cliff edge was noticed and duly repaired by Richard. In addition the top padlock of the entrance grill had suffered a severe hammering, fortunately not enough to break it open, but unfortunately enough to jam it shut. Since the #*&%\$"£!@ were unable to smash the padlock open, they were only able to lob small rocks down the shaft through the entrance grill. We were still able to gain access to the shaft by opening the bottom padlock and pivoting the grill to one side. The first task was then to retrieve 5 skips of rocks (that had been thrown in) from the bottom of the entrance shaft and the Fernhill sign.

Alan Merry who had joined us on Wednesday in his brand new spotless caving kit, only to find he wasn't quite as fit as he was last time he went caving. Well the last time he went caving was the week before The Old Forty went in Swildon's Hole!

Alan Gray started digging the spoil from under the scaffold tubes, whilst Clive pulled the full skips to the ledge and sent down the empties. Alan M was stationed at the bottom of the shaft to guide the skips to the bottom of the shaft, which left Richard and Dave on hauling and emptying duties on the surface. After 27 skips of spoil removed the end of the scaffold tubes were in sight, to finish off Dave and Richard descended to assess and measure up for the next stemple to support the back end of the tubes.

Dave K.

Balch - 27 May

Alan Merry, Gonzo, Mandy, Tav

110 bags removed from JW Passage out of the Entrance. Then Mandy & Tav filled a further 72 at the end, leaving them stacked part way down the dig.

Tav

Fernhill - Wednesday 27/5

Dave, Duncan, Alan G & Rich. Guests - Phil Hendy, Ali & Pete Moody and Pete Hann

The new gate fabricated by Ivan Sandford and collected by Dave was taken over and fitted to the pipes. The old gate will be "recycled" to Home Close Hole.

Meanwhile, the guests enjoyed a general look around the cave, with Pete Hann taking a good many photos in Curtain Passage. Rich managed a quarter of an hour's work in the main chamber sand dig. There appears to be a continuing small air space to the east but how big the passage is remains to be seen. Ali spotted a possible passage blocked by a couple of rocks leading off the floor rift, but did not attempt to enter it (Gonzo please note).

With the new gate fixed, Alan and Duncan finished off the survey and Dave jacked up the front, slightly sagging, stemple under the first pole roof and replaced it with a stronger, more rigid version. The jack was left in place as Dave is not quite satisfied with the depth of the left hand socket. Rich made a start on filling in the void beneath the boulder at the entrance to South Passage with a dry stone wall.

All in all, a useful little session.

RW

Balch 20 May

Gonzo, Paul, Clive, Mandy, Alan Merry.

100 plus bags from the bottom of the pitch to JW.

80 then moved to just inside the entrance in Erratic.

Hopefully Alan's biceps will have recovered by next week!

Gonzo

Fernhill 20 May

Alan G, Duncan & Rich plus visiting dignitaries - Martin Grass & Brian Prewer (the latter visited the cave 46 years ago).

Martin and Brian "inspected" the cave and took photos of Curtain Passage.

Alan and Duncan continued with survey - just high level stuff still to do - and then helped Rich with his sand dig on the eastern side of the chamber. There is now an awkward view of a continuing triangular air space (a few inches square) over a mud and lightly stalled floor. No strong draught but the air is cool.

The team listened for the sound of Duck's Pot water in the rift in the floor but nothing was heard.

Probably shoring reinforcement next Wednesday.

RW

Wednesday 13 May

Steve Sharp, Gonzo, Dave, Clive, Paul, Alan M, Alan G, Rich and Andy Watson later.

All into Fernhill Regained where a mixture of filming, photography, surveying, conservation work and digging took place. The last involved cutting a trench through sandy fill to get round to the back of a stalled-in boulder, beyond which a tiny, largely choked extension can be seen.

RW

On Monday evening 11 May, a large contingent of the ATLAS team gathered at the Fernhill entrance – Antoinette Bennett, Tony Boycott, Alan Gray, Dave King, Kate Lawrence, Mark Lumley, Clive North, Duncan Price, Paul Stillman, Rob Taviner, Mandy and Matt Voysey and Rich Witcombe. After a session clearing back rubble to enlarge the approach route, the team wound its way down into the main chamber, with the more ancient and expendable diggers kindly allowed to go first! The 12m square chamber was once well decorated with fine stalagmites and floor deposits, but sadly heavy blasting has destroyed most of the formations. Beyond, the beautifully sculpted Curtain Passage had fared much better. Thirty metres long and up to 5m high, this rift contains the famous Fernhill curtain, missing about a quarter of its length but still impressive and surrounded by many undamaged formations. At the far end of the passage is a window into the Fairy/Fernhill boulder choke, which is just as uninviting on the Fernhill side as it is on the Fairy side! A voice connection was made on the night but there are no plans to dig it.

RW

Fernhill Wed May 6th

B Team Alan Grey, Rich, Alan Merry & Dave.

All four down to the bottom with the intention of installing a third stemple at the far end of the 8ft scaffold tubes.

Unfortunately what we found was the weight of the infill on top of the scaffold poles had caused the far end of the poles to dip down, lifting the front end a few inches clear of the first stemple. The whole weight of the infill over the length of the poles was then supported on the second stemple, which was of the smaller bore tube. All this weight had caused the stemple to bend.

The first job was then to wedge timbers under the far end of the scaffold poles to prevent further dipping. Timbers were also installed above the front end of the poles and below the previous roof of poles above.

The third stemple was then installed as a back up to the bent stemple instead of at the far end of the poles.

More spoil was also cleared from the slope and pushed to the bottom of the rift.

More substantial shoring will be required.

Dave.

Balch - 6 May

Gonzo, Mandy, Tav, Duncan, Paul.

Retrieved our old lump hammer from spoil ahead.

We're now down to original dig level with laminated black and gold sand.

I'd estimate tha we have another 2 m to dig to get back to our furthest position.

102 bags ferried to bottom of pitch.

Gonzo.

WEDS 24 June

Fernhill team - Rich and Paul underground. Kate L, Steve Sharp (filming), Duncan (in between surveying) and Gonzo (convalescing) on the surface. Dylan researching timber aerodynamics.

Rich started work on building the supporting stone and concrete wall beneath the second scaffold pole roof. More to do - possible day time job when the "resting" Dave K returns from London.

RW

Fernhill - Sunday 21st June

Dave K, Katie Hargraves, Adrian Hall & Dick(MNRC guest)

Since I'm not around this coming Wednesday and I wanted to fit the strut under one of the main stemples, I took the opportunity with a small team that were available at short notice on Sunday. We did a quick visit to the viewing gallery in Curtain Passage, then I tasked the team to try and re-install one of the angle iron supports in the scree slope that will take the scaffold board crawl way. Whilst they worked on the angle irons I installed the strut under the stemple. This done we exited and continued our planned trip into Hillier's.

With the Strut in position, Richard can now continue to cement and block up as required.

The angle irons will still require further attention before we can fit scaffold boards.

Dave.

Wednesday 17th June

Balch Cave

Team comprising of Paul Hadfield and Mandy, to be later joined by Alan G, Dave and Vern.

A really meagre turn out this week. After hanging around hopefully in the car park for a while it was decided that Alan, Dave and Vern would head into Fernhill to view and fettle, but as Duncan was already busy patrolling around the quarry with his GPS, this left only Mandy in Team Balch. Luckily after only a short time of ambling around the quarry she was joined by Paul. There were quite a few bags scattered through the caves in various locations so we set to on our task of moving them to entrance. First we moved the 28 bags from Erratic to the surface, then we set to on the 59 bags down in JW. These were hauled up and we were then joined by Team Fernhill who helped ferry bags to the surface and empty. In all 87 bags were emptied. There are still some remaining at the foot of the pitch, but with plenty of empties to be filled next week, these can be ignored till the next hauling session.

Mandy

Wednesday 17th June

Fernhill.

Alan, Dave & Vern Freeman (Fairy Cave Quarry Cave Leader).

Duncan, surveying Quarry lip.

Alan gave Vern the tour of Fernhill whilst Dave started installing the angle iron supports for the scaffold board crawlway across the scree slope in the Main Chamber.

After the tour, Alan drilled a recess to take the diagonal brace that will be installed under a critical stemple. Then both Alan and Vern assisted in installing the angle iron supports on the scree slope.

Since the A team were very light on numbers tonight, we then packed up and headed over to Balch to assist Mandy and Paul Hadfield in bring bags out to the surface and emptying them.

Debriefing and re-hydration therapy in the usual hostelry, joined later by Matt.

Dave K.

Balch - 10/6

Duncan Price, Antoinette Bennett, Tav, Alan Gray, Tony Williams, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Matt & Mandy Voysey.

On instructions from Alan, Duncan dug "Geoff's Rift" rather than "Sand Aven" in the hope the the former would connect with the latter after "a couple of feet" (according to Alan). Easy - if exciting - digging vertically upwards through the mud made 3 feet or more progress with no sign of airspace. Guru Tav says we need to go up another 10 feet to be at the same level as the base of the pitch. All the bags were filled but none emptied. These are scattered between the base of the pitch and the entrance. Sand Aven may be a better option but both sites are worthy of further attack. At the limit of today's dig the near vertical tube is leaning to the east.

Duncan

Fernhill - WEDS 10/6

Photographic session - Gonzo, Dave, Matt & Mandy

Tourists - Tony Williams, Andy & Rachel Sparrow

Conservation work - Dave & Rich

The latter taped Curtain passage and the stal bank in the Main Chamber, and also put in some stepping stones up to the entry point into Curtain Passage to prevent mud being carried in. A short digging session took place in the eastern passage, mainly work to break up the stal impregnated floor deposits. Some superfluous clutter was taken out of the cave (not you, Gonzo).

RW

Wed 3rd June Fernhill

Richard, Clive & Dave, and guest Aggie Forster

After a slow start due to a senior moment regarding, first forgetting followed by loosing the entrance key, the trio descended Fernhill.

The hole in the left hand wall was enlarged to better accommodate the larger stemple, which was then re-fitted. The temporary supports were then removed.

Dry walling was then built up under the large boulder below the entrance to South Passage which will eventually allow the removal of the 3"x4" timber beam from across the rift. Whilst the work was going on, a voice came from above and guest Aggie joined us and gave a hand with some rock ferrying in return for a peek at Curtain Passage.

"A usefully little session"

Dave.

3 June 2009 - Balch Cave [Fairy Cave Quarry] – Alan Gray, Mandy Voysey, Matt Voysey, Andy Sparrow, Rachel Sparrow, Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Duncan Price.

The 72 bags, left from last week in Carpal Tunnel, were moved via the chain of diggers and dumped outside the cave. Alan and Mandy then descended to the dig face. The sand choke was attacked with the crowbar and in a very short time the dig became vertical. Sand Aven had been rediscovered. This was first located on 21st May 2008 but due to the major flooding event of 28 May 2008 large amounts of sand were washed into the dig. It took one year, 28 digging trips involving 156 diggers removing 957 bags and taking approximately 312 hours to rediscover the aven.

More sand was removed from the bottom of the dig and a curved rock face was exposed then digging commenced upwards and when about two feet of height was gained Alan had to quickly exit as a head sized boulder that was suspended in the roof fell downwards accompanied by quantities of sand. More removal of sand from above and when gingerly looking upwards it appears that the sand had detached itself from the near face indicating that it could link with Geoff's Rift. The draught from the dig was quite apparent. When about four feet of upwards progress was gained Alan and Mandy changed places and Mandy also confirmed that the dig was draughting, she then tickled the roof of

the dig with the crowbar and a large quantity of sand mixed with small boulders quickly descended once again hiding the elusive Sand Aven.

We were then joined by Andy and Rachel who were both impressed with the dig and prospects for a breakthrough. These two departed and we were joined by Matt. After a few minutes we all heard a shout from Andy – "The Ladder is Broken". Thinking the worst (we would miss the pub) we headed to the bottom of JW Pitch to find that the short ladder attached to the main ladder had broken where the wire is swaged just below the C-links. Andy had climbed this ladder when one wire broke and had luckily just reached the base of the second ladder, with his hands, when the second wire broke. With a bit of a stretch it is possible to reach the bottom rung of the main ladder then using brute force you can pull yourself upwards until your feet reach the ladder.

When at the pub and hearing about Andy's escapade Tav suggested that this could form part of his next film Cave Dangerous!

When thinking about the dig it may be more productive to dig out the top of Geoff's Rift because if it does connect with Sand Aven you would be at least six feet above the existing dig face and would not have to contend with major falls.

Not to put a damper on things but very heavy rain is forecast for this weekend – hopefully we won't lose Sand Aven for another year.

Alan Gray

Fernhill - 29 July

Gonzo, Dave, Alan, Pete Flannigan.

An evening divided between extending 'Mad Mainwaring's Meander' off the Main Chamber for a metre or so to a calcite floor requiring Clive's services, before having a good look at the bottom of the rift presumed to be heading for Duck's Pot.

After removing a couple of boulders and digging out a few bucketfuls of clarty mud and rock we were able to gain access to the horizontal section observed by Alison. This simply hops towards Curtain Passage for a couple of metres before dropping for a metre or two at the usual angle with our familiar solid wall ahead and perched, muddy fill underfoot. A distinct 'pot' can be observed and this appears to be the focal point of all the development above.

Lots of muddy-spoil-removal will be needed to gain access (raising issues of where to deposit it) but the draught is very encouraging.

Dimensions can be engineered easily to accommodate even the most rotund ATLAS diggers!

Gonzo

Fernhill Wed 22nd July

Small team consisting of Dave down Fernhill. Intention was to drive two horizontal angles into scree slope and bolt to existing framework. Realised hole spacing on new angle iron different from previous, and so aborted plan but not before being joined by Andy Watson. Andy had hoped to join the Jonathon's Chamber team in Withyhill, but was unable to since they had locked themselves in and him out. We exited Fernhill and headed over to Conning Tower to join up with the surveying team, Alan & Duncan, and a quick look at the stream. We (Andy & Dave) exited Conning Tower complete with a bag of rubbish (are kids getting more thoughtful these days? Not only had they thrown rubbish down the entrance, they had also included a couple of unused rubbish sacks). To finish off we then took a quick look into Hillwithy, just far enough not to get too wet.

Angle iron to be drilled to match existing hole spacing for next week.

Dave.

Withyhill - 22 July

Jonathan's Chamber Extension dig.

Tav and Andy Heath demolished part of the boulder choke on the right to gain access to the start of the standing-sized rift observed 2 weeks ago.

Calcited blocks ahead with some black spaces.

Gonzo and Mandy then removed the blocks and floor from much of the lower slot dug last week.

Calcited blocks ahead with some enticing black spaces again.

All heading the same way, linked like a reversed 'L' and draughting.

Tony Boycott, our head spoil management operative then popped a couple of offending blocks before we exited after just over 4 hours for a photo finish to the pub.

Gonzo

Fernhill Cave Weds 15/7

Clive, Rich and Mike Moxon (MCG visitor/casual labourer)

More wall building (nearly finished although the stretch of passage to the east will require dry stone walling) and a short digging session in the Main Chamber.

RW

15 July - Withyhill

Gonzo to the dig beyond Jonathan's Chamber.

Cleared the spoil from Tony Boycott's 'snapping' on our Sunday trip, then drilled and popped another boulder before exiting with the drill.

Looks promising.

15 July - Hilliers Cave

Alan Gray (notes) & Duncan Price (instruments) surveyed downstream to a little way beyond Tar Hall. Another trip should link with the survey from Fairy. 30 survey legs in a 1.5 hours.

Duncan

Fernhill Survey Notes from Duncan

11 July -Antoinette Bennett (notes) & Duncan Price (instruments) surveyed from the Fernhill Choke though to the junction of the Upper Grotto with the main drag of Hillier's Cave. Two side passages were mapped: the ascending decorated passage after the duck/pool and Drop Out Rift. No attempt was made to enter the Secret Dig as it did not look too inviting. This point is 10 ft deeper than the Main Chamber in Fernhill and 4ft above the deepest surveyed point in the rift in the floor (in Fernhill) which we believe leads down to the Duck's Pot streamway.

8 July - Duncan No-Mates did a solo trip to continue the survey from the large chamber before the squeeze into the pheratic tube and then down to the end of Fairy taking in the start of the route up to Dissappointment Chamber and the lower digs. 1 1/2 hrs, 25 stations surveyed.

Might do some more tonight (Thursday) while I have Alan's toys.

Survey contains 62 survey stations, joined by 62 legs.

There is 1 loop.

Total length of survey legs = 176.97m (176.85m adjusted)

Total plan length of survey legs = 157.97m

Total vertical length of survey legs = 55.30m

Vertical range = 21.51m (from fernhill.0 at 178.50m to fernhill.34c at 156.99m)

North-South range = 32.44m (from fernhill.44c at 47736.95m to fernhill.14a at 47704.51m)

East-West range = 26.88m (from fernhill.39a at 65764.07m to fernhill.14 at 65737.20m)

12 1-nodes.

40 2-nodes.

8 3-nodes.

2 4-nodes.

This includes a survey around the edge of the chamber which is approximately 8 m x 8m and also one leg across the chamber to the start of the "attic" of 7 m. The diagonal of the chamber is 10 m.

The plan "length" is therefore: $158 - (4 \times 8) - 7 + 10 = 129$ m, and vertical range is 21.5 m.

The highest point is the entrance, the lowest point is the bottom of the rift to Duck's Pot.

Fernhill Weds 8 July

Alan G (still suffering from Post Festival Traumatic Syndrome) turned up to star briefly in "Fernhill - the Movie" with Steve S behind the camera.

Rich, supplied with concrete by Clive, laid another couple of courses on the Great Wall.

After Alan had left early (yes - without going to the pub!), CN, SS and RW spent half an hour at the Main Chamber dig, mainly lowering the floor to allow diggers larger than RW (i.e. almost everyone) to reach the end without clouting a small stal curtain. CN pronounced the dig to be not without interest.

Gonzo paid us a brief visit after his cement carrying operation in Withyhill.

RW

FERNHILL Weds 1/7

Cast of two - Dave and Rich

Dave fettled his angle iron "crawlway" supports in the Main Chamber while Rich added a few rocks to his wall (with his one bucket of cement) and then removed a bit of spoil from the sand dig.

RW

Withyhill - July 1st

Field-tested the dodgy shoulder on a solo trip to reassess the dig beyond Jonathan's Chamber in Withyhill that Tony Boycott, Tav and I put on the back burner several years ago.

Our mouldy-handled hammer and crowbar were still in situ, the dig untouched since our last visit, and prospects look as good as ever with a very good draught and some enticing black spaces beyond some large, loose boulders on the right.

I'd suggest we do an occasional ATLAS Saturday foray to the site.

Next step would be to take in a small skip, short rope, chisel, second bar and do a good clearing session. Then a couple of trips with the learned doctor and his magical bag would be in order to make the loose boulders a bit more friendly.

On the way out I noticed that our bang wire has calcited over in places. In one area it even has a 'curtain' with a serrated edge!

Gonzo

Fairy Cave - July 1st.

Duncan & Mandy surveyed from the entrance to the big chamber just before the squeeze into the nice phreatic tube (taking in a couple of side bits en route - one being the ascending rift that Clive was digging a while ago). This took 2 hours and covered 30 stations. We then had a very quick look at the Fernhill choke to see where the digs were. Another trip should see the survey reach this. Thanks to absent Alan for lending us his electronic surveying.

Duncan

Withyhill 30 Aug

Antoinette Bennett & Duncan Price surveyed from the entrance to The Dam (just beyond Broken Curtain Chamber) to provide levels for the Withyhill drainage project. 3 hours/30 stations.

Duncan

Withyhill 26 Aug

Gonzo and Tony B in at 5.15.

Joined by Matt and Mandy later.

Half of the huge boulder which was popped on Saturday had been demolished.

The other half (about a cubic metre) was in situ, in pieces and caused much merriment when it started to slide down onto Gonzo in its entirety as he started to clear it.

Beyond it we were able to stick our heads up into a very well decorated space 'Priceless Grotto'.

This heads back to the right hand side of the chamber we started out from but would be impossible to follow without spoiling it completely.

To the left it is stalled up and there is a small, calcite slot between roof and floor with an echo beyond.

There are signs of a possible continuation ahead, beneath the grotto, so we photographed, cleared, popped and exited.

I'll send a couple of photos to Paul for the website.

Gonzo

Fernhill 26 Aug

Andy & Sue Watson, Dave K, Alan and Paul.

Dave continued work on the scree slope and installed two shortened scaffold planks. At the moment this resembles a park bench and is a nice spot to catch your breathe and take in the view.

We continued in 'the meander' and made good progress lowering the floor through muddied stal/rock on the right hand side.

Some of the wood and a bag of wedges were bought out and are currently at MNRC if needed.

Paul.

Withyhill Sat 22 Aug

Gonzo and Tony Boycott.

Cleared the remnants from Wednesday's efforts which had, mercifully, turned to gravel.

Looked into promising spaces ahead and above before putting 4 holes into the huge boulder that had been our roof. Hopefully it has been persuaded to join the floor without starting a domino effect with the even bigger ones above!

4 hours.

Gonzo

Wed 19 Aug Fernhill

Clive, Dave K and Paul

Dave installed some more metal work to hold back the scree slope in the main chamber. We then removed a large rock and debris left over from the bang last week. AULS.

Paul.

Weds 19 Aug Withyhill

A 5.45 start by Tony Boycott and Gonzo.

Cleared the remains of the 'snapped' boulder and then removed anything else that was remotely loose from the bouldery 'Jenga' up ahead.

Joined at 7.45 by Tav, Andy Watson and Mike (?) MCG.

Dealt with 3 large boulders when we left

Hopefully the roof will still be where we left it when play is resumed on Saturday morning!

Gonzo

19 August 2009 - Balch Cave [Fairy Cave Quarry] – Alan Gray, and Mike Richardson

The mud that was the consistency of liquid chocolate last week had firmed up somewhat. Digging continued vertically with mud falling in our eyes and ears and down our oversuits! Three feet of mud was removed and a roof scallop revealed so no more dangers of a major collapse burying the digger. A mud filled passage (crevice) was exposed on the left wall, at the top, heading possibly towards our old dig at the base of Geoff's Rift but about 15 feet higher.

I have been thinking about this old dig and the possibility of re-starting it if Geoff's Rift does not enter larger passages. The problem with the old dig is that after prolonged heavy rainfall, water from ahead carries large quantities of mud into the area already dug out. It took us a year to clear the spoil from the May 2008 deluge then this dig was only "open" for a few weeks before the next deluge washed in more mud. My idea is to dig down at the start of the 2m long crawl that leads to Sand Aven and install a wooden gate with holes near the top to allow water through. Then after rain all the mud would be retained behind the gate, not washed into the dig., and at the start of a digging session the gate could be removed. To remove the mud infill, left by the last rainstorm, will take about three months.

Alan

12 August 2009 - Balch Cave [Fairy Cave Quarry] – Alan Gray, Nick Powell (MNRC) and Mike Richardson (MCG).

Alan persuaded Nick and Mike to have a look to see if the lake at the dig had disappeared since last week. Seeing as neither of them had visited Balch before and believed Alan that the whole trip would only take half an hour they readily agreed.

Yes the lake had disappeared but had been replaced with a ten foot long and nine inches deep slick of mud the colour and consistency of melted chocolate. Alan crawled to then end and the other two were delighted when he announced that Geoff's Rift was accessible which means we can dig.

After one and a half hours digging upwards through the mud infill about three feet of progress was made quite a difficult tiring dig; balancing near the top of the rift with mud falling into your eyes and ears! Then it looked as if the top was pinching in but a few more hacks with the crowbar revealed an undercut in the left wall.

Unless a large amount of spoil is removed it that Geoff's Rift is the only digging option left. To progress the old dig (straight ahead) ten feet long by two feet wide by 18 inched depth of mud would have to be removed then we could dig under the lip for about a yard to reach the start of sand chamber. This coupled with the annual flooding makes this dig very unpromising.

We exited the cave by the long route and washed some of the mud of the lake in the quarry before a tourist trip into Fernhill.

Alan

Fernhill Wed 12 Aug

Fernhill team initially consisting of Clive, Rich, Paul & Dave, split in to two.

Rich and Paul mixed up another bucket of cement to continue the walling under the roof support of the break through point, and some dry stone walling at the end of the crawl.

Clive and Dave dug out mud from the approach to the meandering dig face and concealed it in the floor of the main chamber that had been cleared the previous week. This exposed more of the bedrock/boulder that restricts the access to the dig face, allowing it to be drilled ready for reducing, but not before protecting the small roof curtains with a piece of ply wood.

We were then joined, first by Kat Hargraves and Adrian Hall (both MNRC), followed by the Balch team of Alan, Nick Powell (MNRC) and Mike (MCG). With the extra hands available, a few more buckets of spoil were relocated and a couple of large boulders shifted in the spoil dump to increase its capacity.

Re-hydration therapy required, so time to exit and pop the boulder from safe distance at the bottom of the piped entrance on the way out.

We ascended to find the Whithyhill team (Gonzo, Mandy, Matt & Dillan on car park security) now on surface support, or was it just that their cars were boxed in.

To ensure we were not 13, Paul Darvil (Bucks Scout Caving Team) joined us in the W & H.

Dave K.

Withyhill - 12 Aug

Gonzo, Matt and Mandy.

Removed debris from our last trip's efforts then cleared out most of the rock and loose fill that separates both parts of the dig.

Lower route looks longer term while the top way is now a lot clearer to a point where you can see through, between some large boulders of dubious stability, to a solid right hand wall with small curtains.

There's an enticing echo from up ahead.

Popped an awkward block before exiting with the battery.

Gonzo

5 August 2009 - Balch Cave [Fairy Cave Quarry] - Alan Gray, Mandy Voysey

About two weeks ago I took a hike to the top of Shute Shelve Hill, Axbridge, to retrieve a ten foot long auger from The Rift dig . The auger will be used to probe the sand choke in Geoff's Rift. Last Wednesday it had been raining all day so Balch was not visited. Although it has been raining heavily for the last 24 hours Mandy and I decided to give Balch a go. We entered JW Passage via the short cut in Erratic Passage and within five minutes we were nearly at the end of the dig; unfortunately our way ahead was blocked by a fifteen foot long lake rising to the roof at the end. Still the auger was put to good use fishing out empty bags floating on the surface. We exited via the long route and the water was eighteen inches deep in the connection

- it was the wettest we had both seen Balch Cave. Then over to Fernhill Cave to join the rest of the digging team.

Alan

Fernhill team Wed 6th August

Richard, Matt, Dave. Later joined by Mandy & Alan.

Richard continued cementing/walling under the lower roof supports on the approach to the break through point.

Dave & Matt continued to work on the steel crawl way supports across the scree slope . When Mandy & Alan arrived we excavated an area at the bottom of the scree slope to enable us to stash the mud from the two digs without muddying the whole floor. We then pulled several buckets of mud out from the slot and pushed it down between the large boulders in the excavated area.

Dave K.

Wed 30th Sept

Balch - Matt, Mandy, Tav, Mark Helmore, Mark 'Bean' Easterling

After a quick guided tour of all of Balch bar Conning Tower, Tav, Mark & Bean joined Matt & Mandy at the face. A vast number of bags (150+) were trundled up the dig and deposited at the bottom of the pitch. As a result the 6ft too short ladder now nearly reached the floor! A goodly number of people are now required to help levitate these out of the cave. The dig at the end has now ascended nearly 20ft up a near vertical aven - a smaller version of the pitch. Care will be needed with some mud cemented blocks at the top as there is nowhere to run away and hide. On the plus side there is a surprisingly good draught which suggests that open cave passage and/or the surface is not too far away.

Tav

Withyhill

In the meantime, Antoinette Bennett & Duncan Price continued surveying in. Most of the work was to remedy omissions in DP's two previous session but we added a little bit to the end and managed to get a sight through Barborbah's bath to the same point from both ends so we have another loop. From the end it took about 15 minutes to rejoin the masses inside the entrance - it has taken 8 hours to survey that distance!

Duncan

Gonzo, Tony Boycott, Brian Prewer, Alan Gray, Mike (MCG), Paul Stillman, Alan Merry, Rich Witcombe

An evening spent breaking up boulders and shuttling them out to surface to improve drainage of floodwater from the cave, and as a precursor to any forthcoming drainage work in the quarry floor.

A large amount of fill was removed and the boulder-filled rift was lowered by about a metre from beneath the old gate, along to a point beneath the small, choked drainage pipes next to the concrete entrance pipes.

As a possible bonus there are hints that the lower passage may continue beneath the quarry floor.

More of the same next week to get us down to lower streamway level; all help appreciated.

Regards

Mark Lumley

Fernhill

Since so many diggers arrived, Somewhere between 12 & 15 vehicles, there were enough to assist in Withyhill and change left over for Fernhill and Balch.

So Clive N, Mark B and Dave K, headed down Fernhill. Digging concentrated on excavating around the two boulders that required popping. Clive set three charges (one in the left hand and two in the right hand boulder), whilst Mark and Dave started work on some steps in the mud slope at the end of the crawl boards. Exited to the bottom of the piped entrance for an audible thud as the boulders were reduced.

Dave K

Fernhill Fri 25th Sept

Ric & Pat Haliwell, Miranda & John Forder and Dave K.

A photo tourist trip down to Curtain Passage in return for the removal of some redundant timbers.

Dave K.

Fernhill Wed 23rd Sept

Rich & Dave started the ball rolling, first with a few finishing touches to the crawl boards (or park bench if you prefer). Digging then continued with Rich in the Meander increasing the dimensions on the last corner as you approach the dig face.

Numbers doubled as Alan & Brendan joined the team after first having visiting Balch. More spoil removed, concentrating on clearing around a boulder (approx 3ft x 1ft x 2ft) and breaking up some of the limestone restriction adjacent to it in preparation for some reducing techniques to be deployed on said boulder.

Exited Fernhill to assist the Balch team with spoil bag removal and emptying at the entrance.

Dave K

Wed 16 Sept - Fernhill

Another quite session down Fernhill with Dave K & Mark B.

At the bottom of the piped entrance shaft, some more rocks were found that had obviously been dropped in through the hole in the entrance gate. The piece of plywood seems to have done a good job in preventing the rocks from going on down the rift.

We took down 2 x 7ft and 2 x 10ft planks for the crawl-way into Main Chamber.

One of the short scaffold boards previously taken in was repositioned so as to prevent rocks etc tumbling down the slope towards the entry point of Main Chamber. There may be a need for some cementing/pointing just below this first board as you enter the Main Chamber.

The two 10ft boards were slid in behind the front legs of the "bench frame" and the space behind them was packed with rocks and stones. The two 7ft boards were then fitted on the seat of the "bench frame" to create the crawling surface. The crawl boards will require a little more securing, screwing them down will probably be sufficient. No time left to dig, so time to exit.

On leaving the car park for the W & H's, one of the "Secret Diggers" cars failed to start and nearly got left behind. Fortunately a poke with a bit of wire soon had the car started with a repeat performance required to restart on leaving the W & H's. But not before the usual beverages and snacks, supplemented this time with some homemade truffle choc's.

Dave K.

16 Sept Withyhill

Gonzo, Mandy, Chris, Matt, Richard (3 secret diggers)

Cleared the spoil from last Wednesday's pop which enabled us to crawl down a few feet into a low phreatic space with little promise.

According to Duncan's preliminary survey the site is about halfway between Jonathan's Chamber and Fourways Chamber in Shatter (not further to the right as the Cerberus survey suggested), so the right hand, draughting end of Priceless Grotto is our most interesting lead for new passage prospects.

The only realistic options now are:

- a. to hammer our way to the right, through the formations in Priceless Grotto to the continuation we can see
- b. drill and bang a bypass to the formations from below
- c. investigate a couple of interesting but long-term sites in the bouldery wall of the approach chamber
- d. climb up to the hole in the roof of the chamber that Tav and others have commented upon.

Shifted 20 skiploads of rocks out of the cave from the rift inside the entrance then exited to Addlestons and home made chocolates at the Waggon and Horses.

Regards

Mark Lumley

Wed 9th Sept

Fernhill Team: Rich W, Alan G, Mark Bridges, Hannah B, Dave K.

Mark and Dave headed straight on to the main chamber to continue digging in "Mainwarings Meander"?? whilst Rich and Alan mixed up some more cement to do some more work on the walling at the bottom of the entrance rift. After a short while at the digging face, Mark and Dave were joined by Hannah, Alan and Rich. Numerous buckets of muddy spoil were removed, including some calcited rock within the mud.

The passage (if it is) is tending away from the main chamber, but it's still too early to draw any conclusions.

Dave.

Withyhill 9 Sept

Tony B, Gonzo, Matt and Chris (Secret Diggers) Duncan.

While Duncan surveyed, Gonzo took the Secret Diggers on a tour before meeting Tony at the dig.

Popped the dig and exited taking the drill.

Tony then drilled and popped 3 large rocks just inside the entrance as a start to preparing a trench for the proposed drainage pipes.

More rocks will have to be drilled and removed; perhaps Clive could be coerced into lending a hand in Tony's absence.

We could also do with a 6 man team for a half day's work skipping the spoil to the surface if any ATLASians are at a loose end . .

Gonzo

Wed 2nd Sept Fernhill

Mark Bridges (MNRC) & Dave K

Intention tonight was to take down some more scaffold boards for the scree slope traverse. But due to car hunting I ran out of time to cut and collect the boards. Plenty of diggers about but only two for Fernhill, there would have been three but I'd broken Dave Cushing (MNRC) down Rhino Rift the previous day.

Since Mark works for Natural England (where some of the funding came from for re-opening Fernhill), I gave him an outline of the Fernhill story. We headed on in to Fernhill to carry on digging but first taking in the delights of South Passage and Curtain Passage.

Despite it being Marks first digging trip, the restricted nature of Mainwaring's Meander and his large stature, he made good progress at the digging face, which of course meant that I was tasked with a fair amount of bucket ferrying to keep up. A swap round of dutties and a few more large lumps of calcited limestone fragments removed, left the dig face a little more roomy, still following the roof line with a possible turn to the left heading it away from the main chamber again.

After changing back at the car park, a commotion was heard from within the perimeter fence, a couple of wild animals perhaps? No, it was Mike and Gonzo trapped inside the new fence with no key to get out.

Dave K.

Withyhill Sept 2

Duncan and Mandy surveyed out from Priceless Grotto to Jonathan's Chamber while Gonzo took Mike (MCG) to Green Lake Chamber, Pillar Chamber and then on to the dig.

We cleared away the debris from last week's efforts and were then rewarded with a constricted view into a low but 'open' space beneath and beyond PG, that appears to be the full width of the passage, dipping down to a constriction with slight but encouraging echoes.

Before leaving we drilled 4 calcited boulders for next Weds that will gain us safe access, rather than barring them away and disturbing a rather alarming block that constitutes our right hand wall.

Gonzo

Balch – 28 Oct

Alan, Mike Richardson, Mandy and Paul.

Paul and Mandy waited at the bottom of the ladder while Duncan did his radio location assisted by Alan and Mike in Geoff's Rift.

While we waited we cleared some rocks from the passage to the base of the ladder.

Duncan completed his operation and exited. Alan then started to drop large rocks from the rift and described this as 'scarey'. These were then loaded on the skip and hauled up by Mandy, approx 15.

Mike took over in the rift and started to drop the loose clag down to where I did my best to clear this before he blocked himself in.

A muddy/wet exit to see the radio location marks on the quarry floor.

Paul.

Oct 28th - Fernhill

While the radio enthusiasts wrestled with their antennas in Balch Dave K and

I did some more rock-wrestling in Fernhill.

Following on from Tony L and Paul's session last Sunday we managed to extract several more largish rocks and quite a few skips of sand (see how we've given up counting the skips/buckets now - great isn't it?!)

The end now, it has to be said, is not looking hopeful.....the half tube in the roof, veering off to the left at the end of the dig is choked with solid rock - a sort of very tough sandstone mixed with stal. The only way on is slightly to the left of straight ahead where a bar will go in for a couple of feet through very wet clay. There seems to be only a few inches of height here above a rocky floor.

We think that only a major effort here will advance the dig but and as the fill seem to be getting very wet the effect of the excavated material on the rest of the cave may prove very messy.

It would be worth a fresh team having a 'last go' here to make sure we have not missed anything. It was not worth a bang on Wed.

Not looking very hopeful though....

Cheers

Clive

Oct 28th - Balch

Surface party: Brian Prewer, Antoinette Bennett

Underground party: Duncan Price, Alan Gray & digging team.

After receiving instructions on the surface from Brian, the radiolocation equipment was successfully transported to the base of Geoff's rift without becoming the self-assembly radiolocation equipment kit. The antenna was laid out in rather cramped conditions only 1' in diameter. This caused problems in reception which were not helped by the switch-mode power supply in Brian's LED light causing interference.

Transmission was started at 8 pm and closed at about 8:30 with Duncan lying in a puddle of water the entire time. Then a survey was done from the location point to the top of the rift 6 m above and back to a known point on the existing survey.

The base of the rift (163 m OD) is 16 m below a large boulder in the floor of the destroyed Balch Main Chamber just where the survey shows it. The rift heads up and into the cliff face at an angle. The top is at 169 m OD with the local surface level at about 180 m OD (quarry floor).

I will survey from the RL spot to Balch entrance(s) to tie everything in on another occasion. I've asked Brian to photograph the spot in daylight for reference though it is marked with a big white X anyway.

Many thanks to everyone who helped or just waited patiently.

Duncan

Oct 25th Withyhill

Duncan Price, Antoinette Bennett, John Cooper & Paul Tarrant surveyed from GP Junction to Green Lake Grotto. On exit we wandered over to Fernhill where we found the entrance open and a ladder in place. John, Paul and Ringo* descended leaving George topside. We took in the sites and chatted to the diggers. One frog was rescued from the bottom of the entrance pipes and a stray, thin Burmese cat _temporarily_ rehomed from the car park to Antoinette's garage.

Duncan

* born in 1964 with a shock of black hair, that was the nickname that the nurses in St Martin's Hospital gave me.

Oct 25th Fernhill

Tony Littler, James and Paul Stillman.

Removed 20 bucket loads from the Meander. Tony persuaded two large rocks out which was quite an achievement considering the dimensions of them and the dig.

Took some photos and exited to find Dr Duncan Doolittle and the animal rescue team near the car park.

Paul.

Withyhill 21 Oct

Before joining the others I surveyed from the T junction from the high rift beyond Elephant's Trunk Chamber to GP junction. Please note that there are small postage stamp sized bits of paper with "110" and "130" marking the ends of this survey section - hopefully the cave won't flood and wash them away (but I know where the stations are). I will remove and replace with something more permanent but non-invasive.

Radiolocation in Balch next Wednesday (28/10).

Duncan

Gonzo and Alan Merry shifted the rocks that were stacked just inside the pipes before being joined an hour and a half later by Matt D, Mandy, Chris, Richard, Clive and Dave.

The mud and boulder floor was then lowered and the boulder slope graded.

Clive and Duncan then popped a couple of boulders which will need removing.

The trench is then effectively ready for the next stage of working out into the quarry, although we could lower the floor further if this was deemed necessary.

The next step is to drill drainage holes into the concrete pipe and the metal surround of the gate.

Leaders please note that the pipe is now very muddy. I'm away next week but if anyone is in the area there are buckets in the cave to wash it down. Failing that I'll do it the following Wednesday.

Gonzo

Couldn't resist this, the search results from last weeks atlasdiggers website log.

1: Dylan is famous.

2: Someone is questioning the reliability of ATLAS Diggers - how impudent!

It is always possible I suppose that he was looking for another (less well known)
sort of Atlas Digger

SEARCH REQUESTS FOR PERIOD 12/Oct/2009 - 18/Oct/2009

(1) Google image search requests

"tony boycott"

dylan the digger dog

(2) Text search requests (various engines)

atlas cave

atlas diggers

atlas diggers uk

how reliable are atlas diggers

--

Tony A

Wed 14th Oct

Withyhill

Dr William Nomates surveyed from just "upstream" of Barborah's Bathtub to the sharp right bend after Elephant's trunk chamber before joining Gonzo, Dr B, Alan M, Paul, Richard, Martin Grass and Dylan who were excavating the Panama Canal, Withyhill Extension. They have now seriously altered the dimensions of the entrance chamber and it will need resurveying

Duncan

Wed 14 Oct Fernhill team.

Clive N, Mark B & Dave K headed over to Withyhill to see how the flood prevention was progressing and whilst there kidnapped Pat Cronin to take him down Fernhill. Joined after a short while by the Balch team, Tav, Mandy and Alan G. A quick tour of Fernhill by Pat, before continuing digging in the meander. More mud and shattered limestone removal from the meander enlarged the dig face area. Meanwhile Mandy & Tav continued digging the slot in floor at the lower point of the main chamber.

Dave K.

Balch Cave Sunday 11.10.2009

Underground Part - Mandy, Matt, Tony Boycott

Surface Party - Tav, Clive, Alan G

Aim was to try and establish sound connections between the dig at the top of the aven and the old dig at the end of Pool Passage and the surface. The results were as follows :-

1. Surface to Matt at Pool Passage Dig - very clear vocal connection established.

2. Mandy (top of aven) to Matt (Pool Passage) - faint tapping from Mandy's hammer heard by Matt but no whistle heard. (we learned later that an element of user-error was involved in the whistling - but we clearly wouldn't have heard it in any case).

3. Mandy to surface - nothing heard

4. Matt to Mandy - nothing

5. Heavy surface thumper to Mandy - nothing heard

6. Bang - loud underground but very faint on the surface

Conclusion - the aven dig is quite deep. It does not appear to go to the surface. It probably doesn't go to the old dig either (at least not imminently). The source of the fresh air in a dig that should have next to none remains a clear mystery. The dig then still seems to be heading into unknown territory - which is good. However it is bad in that we have no immediate prospect for improving the spoil removal. Due to logistics we clearly can't go on for much longer - so I suggest a few more sessions at the top of the aven to hope we break into something. The main way on however is probably below the aven in the flood-prone continuation of the approach crawl.

Tav

11 October 2009 - Fernhill Cave [Fairy Cave Quarry] – Alan Gray, Elaine Johnson, Pete Flanagan, Guy Travers.

Tourist trip for ACG. Alan and Pete removed five skip loads of rocks from the dig.

Alan

Balch Cave [Fairy Cave Quarry] 7 Oct – Alan Gray, Alan Merry, Dave King, Rob Taviner, Mandy Voysey, Mike Richardson, Mark Bridges.

Removed 120 bags that were filled the week before.

Alan

Balch Cave Wednesday 7.10.2009

Mark, Mike, Mandy, Tav, Dave, Alan & Alan - 120 bags removed from base of the pitch and emptied (so we can dig again)

Tav

FCQ 7 Oct Not Balch, not Withyhill...in the absence of Brian's radiolocation equipment, Duncan surveyed from Balch top entrance to Withyhill.

For future reference the survey points are:

Balch top (the padlock)

Balch bottom (the padlock)

Conning Tower (centre of grill)

Shatter Cave (white paint mark top of entrance pipes)

Withyhill cave (white paint mark top of entrance pipes)

Duncan

Withyhill 7 Oct Gonzo, Tony Boycott, Paul Stillman, Martin Grass, Brian Prewer, Jacky Ankerman, Lee Hawkswell

Tony's plug and feathers worked wonders. Lots more boulders were reduced and sent out, with plenty more stacked by the pipe.

We now have the exit at a low enough level to pipe out into the quarry.

We have also enlarged the space beneath the old entrance to a comfortable crawl through to the passage beyond.

More of the same next week should see the floor lowered to the required level for the whole length but a bit of extra manpower would be useful if you could spare a couple of hours.

Mark Lumley

Just pulled some statistics from the 3D survey of Balch -

Old horizontal dig at the end of Carpal Tunnel (now blocked) to -

Bottom of thin vertical rift in JW passage = 7.3m vertical, 8m horizontal

Bottom of JW Pitch = 8m vertical

Start of ATLAS dig at the bottom of JW Pitch = 4.5m vertical

Lower entrance to Balch Cave = 4.5m vertical.

Geoff's Rift is approximately 3m high so we are quite close to the quarry floor and possibly creating yet another entrance into Balch!

Many thanks

Al

In the meantime, Antoinette Bennett & Duncan Price continued surveying in. Most of the work was to remedy omissions in DP's two previous session but we added a little bit to the end and managed to get a sight through Barborbah's bath to the same point from both ends so we have another loop. From the end it took about 15 minutes to rejoin the masses inside the entrance - it has taken 8 hours to survey that distance!

Duncan

Gonzo, Tony Boycott, Brian Prewer, Alan Gray, Mike (MCG), Paul Stillman, Alan Merry, Rich Witcombe

An evening spent breaking up boulders and shuttling them out to surface to improve drainage of floodwater from the cave, and as a precursor to any forthcoming drainage work in the quarry floor.

A large amount of fill was removed and the boulder-filled rift was lowered by about a metre from beneath the old gate, along to a point beneath the small, choked drainage pipes next to the concrete entrance pipes.

As a possible bonus there are hints that the lower passage may continue beneath the quarry floor.

More of the same next week to get us down to lower streamway level; all help appreciated.

Regards

Mark Lumley

Fernhill

Since so many diggers arrived, Somewhere between 12 & 15 vehicles, there were enough to assist in Withyhill and change left over for Fernhill and Balch.

So Clive N, Mark B and Dave K, headed down Fernhill. Digging concentrated on excavating around the two boulders that required popping. Clive set three charges (one in the left hand and two in the right hand boulder), whilst Mark and Dave started work on some steps in the mud slope at the end of the crawl boards. Exited to the bottom of the piped entrance for an audible thud as the boulders were reduced.

Dave K

Balch - Wed 18th Nov

Matt, Mandy and Mike down to Balch's soggy bottom for a session of initial bailing followed by mud wrestling to clear the run-in spoil from Geoff's Aven. Matt then proceeded to ascend and hack away at the roof of the aven for some time, concluding that it appears to be reaching its vertical limit; however a way on may yet lie behind the suspected "boulder" half-blasted a few weeks back. It will be necessary to clear the fill from around this obstruction to get a better idea of the situation. Later joined by Matt D for his first look at the end of the dig, we removed some quantity of bags full of variously graded slop to the foot of the pitch.

Matt.

FCQ - Wed 18th Nov

Dr Bunter and assistant (Alan) surveyed around the quarry from Fairy to Hilliers, Fernhill, the radiolocation point, Balch pool Passage, Conning Tower, WL, Hillywithy and Withyhill. This ties the cave entrances together and gives more accurate entrance co-ordinates for the survey.

Duncan

Fernhill- Wed 18th Nov

Gonzo to Withyhill to see if there was any sign of flooding before going to Fernhill to join a cast of thousands - Richard, Paul S, Secret Diggers Matt D and Chris, Moles Jim Lee and 3 others, Nick Powell(MNRC), Pete Fl for a tourist/photography/stal boss uncovering/ slope grading/Ducks Pot digging evening.

Chris was at the sharp end of the dig and sent up numerous skips of clarty mud and several large rocks. The rift continues under an arch and then down for a few feet with a few loose rocks.

Then off to the Wagon and Horses to watch the ATLAS Bunter Brigade wolf down copious helpings of cottage pie.

Gonzo

My apologies for not making it last night. I'm currently in Keswick. It's raining. Quite heavily. My car is underwater. My hotel room is flooded. I've had better days to be honest.

Tav

Wed 11th Nov

Fairy Cave Quarry

Rich W, Alan M, Alan G, Gonzo, Andy W, Tav & Dave K. (have I missed anyone?)

In an attempt to lose the tag "Reliable Dave" before it really caught on, Dave left the Fernhill key hanging on a radiator at home, no problem, there are still two more keys available. Rich didn't drive over, so his key was still in Clutton. Mandy has a key and Mandy and Matt were going to escape from Shepton Mallet before the Carnival laid siege on the town, but decided to watch the procession instead.

Problem: No Fernhill key, only option left, a game of "what about". Too late to dig in Withyhill. Too wet for Balch. Too early for the pub. Finally a decision was made, we would take a look at the rift we popped last year (or was it 2007) in Fairy Cave that we hadn't been back for a good look since. No digging tools, so resourceful Tav armed himself with a rotting stick! A quick poke with a stick and the rift was declared as "without interest".

Another quick game of "what about" to decide that a Fairy Cave to Hillier's, with a detour to The Red Room (Hillier's) was the order of the evening. No hanging about due to the time and also the Secret Diggers had got some back up to chemically enlarge their Drop Out Rift dig.

Alan M and Rich decided on a pootle around the main chamber near the entrance of Fairy Cave, whilst the rest of us carried on with the through trip. A good time to do it since the connection duck only had a few inches of water.

No digging to speak of but a worth while trip none the less.

Dave K.

Fernhill 8th Nov

Dave K and Paul made good progress in the rift. A number of rocks and much clag were removed.

Time underground 2.5 hours.

Paul

Fernhill Wed 4th Nov

Mandy V, Paul S, Rich W, Alan G & Dave K.

Mandy and Alan took a skip from Balch to Fernhill (not sure whether they skipped on the way over to Balch).

Rich had a look at Mainwarings' Meander, and confirmed the views from last week that it's now looking "without interest".

With the skip now available for spoil hauling, digging continued in the rift in the floor of Main Chamber. Several skips of spoil were hauled out along with a few large rocks/boulders, making a significant difference to the size of the void available to get stuck into (literally, due to the claggy nature of the mud).

On the way out, the now redundant (lovely word that) metal stakes were removed to go back into storage.

Dave.

Withyhill 4th Nov

Duncan & Tav surveyed from GP junction to Pearl Chamber. Cave was quite wet which made the trip more enjoyable. Tav spotted an inlet in Bypass Grotto from which a streamlet flowed - unfortunately the passage is too delicate to enter.

Duncan

Withyhill Weds Nov 4

Gonzo, Tony Boycott & Dylan the digging dog.

Cleared the remains of Clive's last bang, removed more boulders beneath the old gate and a few more blocks from the floor.

Tony drilled 12 mm drainage holes in pairs a couple of feet apart along the concrete pipe but larger holes proved impossible due to the strength of the concrete.

Skipped the spoil to surface before removing tools, skips and buckets, cleaning the pipes (and Dylan!) and heading pubwards for Addlestones and a juicy, meaty bone.

Gonzo

Honeymead - 30 Dec 2009

Rich, Al, Mandy & Tav to Honeymead to investigate the dodgy slab reported to Ali recently. Slab was found to be not much of an issue but with a bit of heave-ho was duly despatched to safer ground. All then descended to The Watershed and then Mandy and Tav went down to the terminal rift in Blood Alley to check CO2 levels, which were fine. Had a good nose around everything we could do without a ladder before heading out. Nice to see the old place which I'm happy to report remains a nice cave and still in remarkably good condition.

Tav

Withyhill - 30 Dec 2009

Antoinette & Duncan surveyed East Rift (near to Elephant's Trunk Chamber). The area is more complex than Wig's survey suggests therefore we didn't have time to pick up a couple of other places so another trip is required.

Gonzo & Gary Keily passed by en route to Prickly Grotty (or whatever) to recover some kit after visiting Fernhill.

Duncan

Withyhill - 23 Dec 2009

Duncan, Dave K and Rick Stanton surveyed from Pillar Chamber to the end. The final chamber is undoubtedly the best in the cave but a tight squeeze guards entry. This caused considerable gonad trauma on exit. Rick's first ever caving trip was to Withybrook Slocker in 1979 but we didn't have time to see the "other end". One more trip should complete work (I said that last time).

Dave K provided mince pies, Duncan forgot the mulled wine. Dave went home, Duncan & Rick went to The Hunters and then a surfeit of port in South Horrington

Duncan

Withyhill - 20 Dec

Duncan Price, John Cooper & Barry Weaver surveyed from Perl Chamber to the end of Pillar Chamber. The survey is complete bar a couple of bits near to Elephant's Trunk Chamber which I hope to do on Wednesday before drinking mulled wine over at Fernhill. No cats this time.

Duncan

Atlas Xmas Dinner - 16 Dec

A wonderful evening was spent at the Waggon & Horses with new and old friends. The evening started with skittles and after the meal the Fernhill film was shown. Alan Gray read out the annual report.

Withyhill - 9th Dec 2009

Duncan Price & Mike Richardson. Surveying the area of the 2nd boulder choke, the top of which is 10 m below the surface at ST 65571 47202. This is 2 m to the north east of the field boundary with the land containing Withybrook Slocker/Parfitt's Cave. The bottom of the choke is at the same level as the base level in Withybrook Slocker some 35 m away.

Duncan

9th December 2009 - Fernhill Cave [Fairy Cave Quarry] – Alan Gray, Gonzo, Pete Flanagan, Clive North, Alan Merry, Dave King, Richard Witcombe.

Down in the delightful rift that hopefully leads to Duck's Pot. Used the tried and tested method of removing the wet mud in football sized lumps and passing it out via a chain of cavers. Good progress was made and a four foot deep void was uncovered with clean washed rock on one wall but the other walls and floor are mud!

Alan

Fernhill - Wed 2nd Dec

Alan, Richard, Dave K, Mandy, Tony B, Gonzo and Paul.

The evening started with Dr B plug and feathering at the top of the rift. This was to allow more room for hauling the skips (certainly not the diggers!!).

During a break Gonzo persuaded Dave and Mandy into the rift and digging commenced. After the clag had been persuaded from the skip it was passed to Richard for stacking.

Alan inspected the rift wall and pointed out a worrying fault/crack much to the delight of the diggers below it.

Around 20 skips were emptied and then to the W&H to join the secret diggers who had ventured into Swildons.

See you on Wed I hope.

Paul.

Withyhill - Wed 2nd Dec

Duncan & Tav surveyed from the junction of Green Lake Grotto to the base of the ascending choke of doom close to Parfitt's Cave (station 197). One more trip would be required to take this in. The only major part of the cave un-resurveyed is from Pearl Chamber to the end beyond Pillar Chamber.

Duncan