

Chelms Combe Quarry, Cheddar - 25 Feb

Gonzo, Tony Boycott, John Aylott, Alison Moody, Secret Diggers Matt Davies and Chris.

After a slight hiccup with Lee (from the company who own the quarry) arriving early and asking one of workers on site to leave the gate open for us we visited CC Quarry Cave and Box Cave.

Reynolds Rift was under a small pile of rubble, together with one boulder of about 1.5 tons right over the entrance.

I've just spoken to the owners and suggested that we do a day/weekend there sometime later in the year to remove the boulder (easy) and build some kind of wall around the entrance to protect it from the same thing happening again (plenty of raw material on site).

Perhaps we could also re-stabilize the entrance and fit in a substantial belay.

At the same time we could investigate the site in the combe, right next to the cliff edge described by John as a pot about 20 ft deep, loose-boulder filled, heavily scalloped and strategically well-placed.

Any volunteers?

Any suggestions for a date?

Gonzo

Chancellors Farm and Bowery Corner, Priddy - 24 Feb

Gonzo, Tav, Paul

Checked out the 5m deep well by the driveway to Chancellors Farm.

Flowing water at the bottom but no obvious way to dig.

Then checked out the first few metres of Bowery Corner to compare the flows but the streamway appears to be at a lower level..

Gonzo

Fernhill 24 Feb

Present: Alan, Clive, Dave & Duncan

Duncan served several courses of finest spoil. First up were several skips of locally produced freshly broken limestone (prepared last week by our resident rock butcher, Clive) with a thin calcite dressing. The main dish was a spread of free-range rock pieces nestling in a bed of East Mendip mud and gravel. Digging was ended with trays of organic sediment compot, delicately carved from the walls of the rift, accompanied by calciferous chippings.

The way on is down, possibly beneath an undercut, in feculent conditions.

Duncan

Fernhill - 17 Feb

Dave, Rich, Mike, Alan and Clive

Last weeks bang had done a good job and Alan spent some time at the base of the rift loading the skip with rocks both large and small.

By the end of the session a pile of 5 large blocks remained to be banged along with the 'base' of last weeks mega boulder. These were duly drilled and popped on departure.

The working area at the base of the rift is now becoming more comfortable - the rift width at this point being around 3.5ft. The base of the overhanging wall (to the right) is clearly well undercut, waterworn and slightly stal'ed and is heading away fairly horizontally. It impossible to see how far it goes due to the rubble in the way. No obvious draught at this point but the air does stay fresh.

There will be quite a bit of boulder removal to do yet awhile....

Clive

Hilliers - 17 Feb

I use the term "team" in its minimal sense since it was a team of one. Work resumed surveying inwards from station 66 to 95. 1 1/2 hours until my bladder, thirst & boredom got the better of me. Its is awkward going due to the bouldery chokey nature of the cave.

Duncan

Fernhill - 10 Feb

Rich, Dave, Gonzo, Duncan, Alan Gray, Clive

Having bagged up the tipped rubbish - most likely the aftermath of a rave or similar .... lots of bottles, cans crisps packets, T-lights and the occassional sleeping bag etc - and left it in the car park for the Martin Grass rubbish lorry we quickly got underground. That is after some of us were reduced to defrosting our hands on the radiator in Daves car!

Last weeks bang had done it job - a large piles of large rocks at the bottom and a very large detached piece of boulder left in situ at the top. This was duly roped-up and dragged out.

It then just remained to drill three full depth holes in the massive block at the foot of the rift then 'fire and retire' to a packed Waggon and Horses. Packed upstairs that is with the country and western crowd - who were absolutely quiet! You could have heard a pin drop!

Much publishing discussion ensued over the Wookey-Bookey etc and by around 11pm we had decided that we call it a night. It was commented that Mandy and Matt hadn't shown up and that as it was a freezing cold night and the West End Series wasn't our cup of tea - we go home!

(We felt they'd be in the hunters in front of a much warmer fire that the one in the Waggon!)

Clive

Fernhill - Feb 3rd

Mandy, Matt, Alan G, Rich, Clive, Gonzo & Mike R. Oh! nearly forgot, & Dave.

The Padlock on the Quarry entrance gate was probably the trickiest part of the evenings activities. With the padlock now at the end of its useful life. The right noises will be made in the right places to have it dispatched and replaced.

On arriving at the rift dig in Fernhill, Mike commenced digging at the bottom, passing up the spoil in the usual fashion whilst Matt, Mandy and Dave took a look at the passage that Alan had announced looked promising in the bottom of Curtain Passage. Neither Mandy or Dave managed to squeeze into the confined space, so that just left Matt to cast his eye over the potential site, suffice to it is without interest, so back to the main chamber.

After a suitable amount of spoil had been removed from the rift, Clive stepped in to drill three (I think) holes in the left wall and proceeded to repack them with a material that would when excited make a break for freedom. Mike, after his gallant efforts in the rift was making his own break for freedom with the drill. Unfortunately, Clive needed to ream out one of the holes so Matt was dispatched to catch up with Mike, hopefully before he got to the car park, and retrieve the drill.

Holes reamed, filled and communication link attached, all then join the exit queue at the bottom of the entrance rift. When all at a safe distance, Clive sent the exciting signal down the communication link to the hole filling material, which had the desired result of rocks being flung around. Dave, who had been waiting at the bottom of the entrance rift, cautiously entered the main chamber to observe the movement of the fine airborne particulates. The obvious draft through the break through passage kept the first half of the bench clear, but there was no discernable direction to the air flow within the main chamber apart from the void filling with the aftermath of the rock shattering commotion in the rift.

Then off for the usual re-hydration therapy at W&H's.

Dave K.

Fernhill - 27 Jan 2010

Rich, Alan, Mike R, Clive, Gonzo and Paul continued work in the rift.

Clive started at the face assisted by Paul with Mike at the top of the rift. The 'football' method of spoil removal was used with these being passed to Gonz and Rich for stacking.

At the bottom of the rift is now a muddy puddle one side and on the other a slab bridging the rift with the way on below it. Lying on top of the slab it was possible to clear the spoil to the side but we were limited to a arms length.

After reaching this limit Clive drilled and banged at the top of the rift. Mike uncovered a largish rock that needs popping before it can come out.

We now need to plan how to attack the slab (calling it a slab maybe a bit OTT but its a word we dont use enough). It goes roughly 3ft into the mud below.

Alan investigated a hole in Curtain Chamber and proved there is currently no voice connection with the rift.

Paul.

FCQ -27 Jan. Dave K, Matt and Mandy.

Fernhill Wed 20th Jan.

Matt, Mandy, Rich, Alan, Gonzo & Dave.

On the way in to Fernhill it was decided that we remove the various redundant timbers from the bottom of the entrance rift, since we never seem to get round to bring them out at the end of a digging session, probably due to being too dry of throat.

Gonzo then continued digging in the rift of the main chamber whilst Dave, Matt & Mandy passed the mud balls on up to Rich & Alan for stacking on the spoil heap. Towards

the end of the session the plywood board that had been deployed to prevent the spoil falling down the rift was removed. More digging still required.

Dave K.

Withyhill - 20 Jan 2010

Final surveying trip (solo). Picking up a few bits in the area of East Rift. Resurveyed through Bypass Grotto and to Helectite Corner where there is a view into 5m + of open passage beyond some calcited blocks. This probably connects with the same passage that Tav looked at above Bypass Grotto. The survey has identified several leads but all would compromise formations if pushed.

Got out at 10 pm to find Gonzo walking across the quarry to see if I was OK. Dave King kindly took my drink order as I got to the car park. Now there's service.

Duncan

Withyhill - 2 Jan 2010

Duncan did some more surveying in the area of East Rift and was later joined by Gonzo and Pete Bolt who had been down Fernhill. Then off to the W&H for some fermented apple juice.

Duncan

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

TJ's Swallet - 28 April

Gonzo, Mike, Dave, Alan and Rich by car. Duncan later by velocipede.

Cleared some surrounding vegetation (but not too visibly), cut new steps and built a retaining wall for future spoil.

No draught from the dig itself, but there was evidence of a small mammal nesting within. Nothing more to be done until rock demolition has taken place.

RW

Fernhill - 24th April

Paul, Brian and Robert Marchbank spent a great afternoon in the quarry. The draft in Fairy was considerable and very welcome today.

Removed the ladder from the rift in Fernhill and its now waiting at the MNRC to be retired/reused.

No sign of any further problems at Fernhill but the padlock did not want to unlock. Took awhile but did manage it.

Paul.

Fernhill Thurs 22nd April

In sorting out various nuts, bolts and steel plates, Dave found a more suitable eyebolt than Richards offering on Wed night (it will still come in handy one day Rich).

Armed with various bits of iron work, nuts and bolts, 2 battery drills, bucket, cement, shovels etc. Dave set about the required repairs to Fernhill entrance and fixing the ladder belay eyebolt.

A steel plate with tapped hole and eyebolt screwed in and locknut behind, fitted below padlock staple on existing bolt. Second bolt fitted right through eyebolt plate, staple plate and pipe wall etc. Replacement nuts locktited on existing bolt. The whole lot then walled in with rock and cement, then covered with loose spoil as had been done to the rest of the pipe on Wed night.

There is now no access to feed a sling or chain through the hole in the pipe, but instead an obvious 1" diameter ring just below the padlock staple. This should negate the need for anyone to try and put a krab through the non load bearing padlock staple.

Dave.

Fernhill Wed 21st April.

Andy Watson, flying visit earlier to kindly deposit 2 bags of cement by Fernhill entrance.

Alan Merry (car park only) to donate some hose pipe to the cause, Dave to store (always space for a freebie).

Alan Gray, Rich W, Clive N, Mike R, Dave K, joined later by Lee H, & Jackie A.

Dave had brought along an eye bolt for a more permanent ladder belay, but Richard raised the stakes with an Ex-MOD threaded eye bolt but no nut. Fortunately Dave's nut was a perfect match.

All on surface duties only.

The vandals had had another go at the entrance, but with much less vigour this time. It was noticed that the nut was missing off the bolt that secures the padlock staple to the top of the pipes. With very little effort, they could then have pushed the bolt through the plate where it would have dropped down the shaft, and opened the gate/lid with the staple plate and padlock still attached to the gate. But this would have required a level of IQ they probably don't possess. Alternatively, perhaps someone has pirated the entrance and put the bolt back afterwards.

Several batches of mortar were mixed and the exposed vulnerable pipe was soon protected by a natural stone and cement overcoat. This was then supplemented by a huge volume of spoil covering the cemented rocks. A gap was left to carry out remedial work to the padlock staple plate and the fixing of the eyebolt, which Dave will attend to Thursday morning.

A good evening's work, lots done, time to re-group & re-hydrate at W & H. Joined later by the Yoxter Shafters and later still, Tav.

Dave K.

Yoxter - 21 April

Gonzo, Kate, Mandy, Matt (and Dylan the digging dog).

Back to Chancellor's farm to revisit 'Barbershop' Mine (which Richard assures us already has a name but I bet it isn't as good as 'Barbershop' Mine!).

With the aid of a makeshift dexion and rope frame, 3 pulleys, misc. tat and elbow grease the wedged stone cap was removed.

Gonzo then descended to investigate the disconcerting objects that Mandy had observed last week. Down the slope below the ladder, next to a large, orange, gas cylinder was an alarming-looking grey metal object about the size and shape of a colander. Kate went down with a brighter light which showed . . . that it was indeed a colander and not something more sinister.

There was also a barbecue and a bus stop sign so someone obviously had a good party!

The mine is about 40 ft deep, full of rubbish and with no clear way on.

A few more sites to check out in the next few weeks. Photos with Paul.

Gonzo

Hilliers - 18 April

Antoinette Bennett, John Cooper & Duncan Price surveyed the Red Room area. On exit, an alternative and easier route through the 4th boulder choke was noted which will require measuring. A wet puddle was also passed to enter a sizeable side chamber which also needs mapping.



Antoinette left a karabiner behind in the car park if anyone finds it...

Duncan

Fernhill - 14 April

Whilst Rich and his stalwart team of cement-mixers and allied trades got on with securing the Fernhill entrance (full report from Rich no doubt) Dave King, Peter Burgess and Clive went underground.....

Several large containers of fresh water, a wheeled plastic tank, assorted brushes and miles of hose had been carted across to the cave. All this was to clean-up the formations (in the main chamber) which had got a bit muddied during the recent digging operations.

The system worked well and all the affected stal received a wash and brush up plus the steps down into the chamber.

In addition Dave and Clive drilled and bolted the steel ladder to the base of the piped shaft.

Clive

Yoxter, Priddy - 14 April

While the trusty stalwarts got their hoses out over at Fernhill the renegade B Team of Gonzo, Matt, Mandy, Paul and Kate went to investigate some mines over at Chancellor's Farm.

We started at a small hole that a cow had disappeared into some years ago. A small void was noted but a lot of spoil would need to be removed to gain access.

The second, provisionally named Barbershop Mine, was descended by Mandy for 8m to a sloping chamber requiring a re-visit with more ladder. Various bits and pieces will need removing before safe progress can be made.

We then moved on to Bedstead Mine (so named by Kate for obvious reasons!), noting recent collapses on the way. BM is about 3 m deep and appears to be choked.

On again to a third site where Gonzo descended for 6m to see a continuation down a steep slope requiring rope or ladder for safe access.

A revisit with more equipment is planned for the near future.

Photos with Paul.

Gonzo

Hilliers - 5 and 7 April

Duncan Price surveyed through the 5th BC into the Red Room. The latter will require at least one trip to measure. Exited cave and got to pub to find everyone on their second drink.

05/04

Duncan Price & John Cooper surveyed from the cross-roads in Cambridge Grotto (where the Stream Series and Brenda's Chamber lead off) to the start of Suicide (5th BC). We then visited the Red Room and climbed up to the very top of the western end of the chamber. A stream was flowing in Hilliers. Another trip should see the survey reach the Red Room. No cats were rescued.

Â Duncan

Fernhill - 7 April

Rich, Dave, Alan and Clive (Gonzo down Withyhill)

Â It was decided to clear out the digging tools and tidy up prior to departing for pastures green (should that be brown?) ie TJs, for the summer. It was noted that someone has been climbing over/through the wire fence and that a scramble bike had been active in the quarry.

Â Rocks had been tipped off the wall by the entrance and the concrete ring at the top had obviously come under considerable attack with rocks as had the metal lid. There were a number of smallish rocks at the base of the entrance pipe.

Â Underground the tidy up was quickly done, the end looked at by CN (looks good, if a bit squalid) and the 'strain-gauge' on the big block checked - all fine.

Â Loads of Great Crested newts in the pond!

Â Next week the plan is to build up a cemented rock wall around the concrete ring to protect it and maybe do some washing down on the stal underground.

Â Clive

Fernhill - 31 March

Gonzo, Dave, Alan, Duncan and Clive

Â Just enough for a 'crack' (or should that be 'cracked') team to dig in Fernhill.

Â Gonzo at the sharp end sending large amounts of 'feculence' up the rift much to the delight of the others who ferried it to the 'dump slope'.

Â Clive on light duties at the top of the slope, due to a bad back. (I just hope I put it all in the right place....!)

Â A few large rocks were left in the 'pending' tray awaiting Rich's return.

Â Not much more to add unless Gonzo can throw some more light on the way on????? (They are in Darren this weekend I believe

Â Free cottage pie in the Waggon afterwards.....

Â Clive

Fernhill - 24 March

Alan, Dave, Rich and Mike

Before venturing underground the large pond to the right of the spoil heap surrounding Fernhill was visited. There were over 100 toads and over 100 common newts present. The toads were on the surface and some were seen in the act of mating. To the edge of the pond a clump of frog spawn about a foot in diameter was seen; far less than in previous years. Next, the pond close to Balch Cave was visited and in there were over 30 toads with a similar number of common newts but no frog spawn.

At the dig the rubble and rocks from last weeks effort was removed before getting down to removing gloopy mud. A large boulder was uncovered which with a large effort was rolled out of its muddy home. The way on looks to be downwards through more mud and rocks.

Alan

Hilliers - 24 March

Duncan and Tav surveyed Brenda's Chamber and the very impressive streamway. Gonzo took some photos and Mandy assisted.

Duncan

Fernhill - 17 March

Dave King (late), Clive North, Duncan Price, Mike Richardson, Mandy Voysey & Rich Witcombe.

Mandy dug out several skip loads of feculence to expose a big boulder blocking the NW side of the dig against the bedding roof. This was attacked using physical means and a variety of tools by Duncan before the decision was made to "go chemical" aided by Clive. Three rocks were treated. Clive and Dave installed some reference points in the rift to check for movement.

Duncan

Fernhill - 10 March

Dave, Mandy, Mike & Rich

Placed the new fixed steel ladder (from Grefield Wood, courtesy of the Woodland Trust) at the bottom of the entrance shaft - it was not fixed owing to absence of Clive and drill. Dave will attempt to fettle the old aluminium ladder for possible use in future projects.

No movement being apparent in the girt wall slab, RW did his first spell at the dig face for many a month. Drying mud and broken rock shifted. The left hand wall is sloping inwards but there is a

sizeable undercut on the right. Straight ahead, there is a restricted view down a steeply descending, nicely sculpted phreatic passage with a stal floor almost meeting the roof a few feet ahead. It appears to be emitting a slight draught.

All spoil was neatly tidied away by Mandy.

A useful little session.

RW

Hilliers - 10 March

Breaking News:

Â Duncan and Tav surveyed from station 90 to the "crossroads" where Brenda's Chamber and the route leading to the streamway go of right and left respectively from Cambridge Grotto.Â Gonzo took photos.

Duncan

Fernhill - 3 March

Alan, Dave, Rich, Mike and Clive

Armed with oak timbers and a sledge hammer courtesy of Dave Speed we set-to in an attempt to reassure ourselves as to the safty of the overhanging wall, roof of the dig.

There is no doubt that since last week the crack has widened again by a few millimetres.

We spent some time sawing and shaping three baulks of timber which were wacked firmly into place giving the rift the appearance of a small scale Cornish tin stope.

I'm now happy that we have done all we can to 'hold' the right hand wall and that it is unlikely to fall across the rift.Â Whether it would slip downwards though remains to be seem.Â

Before departing we drilled two small holes on either side of the crack where Dave will Epoxy in two metal reference points which means we can monitor any further movement.

If there is more movement though I think it would be foolish in the extreme to carry on work in the rift.

Oh, and Mike managed to cleared several exceedingly claggy loads of mud from the far end....

Clive

Hilliers - 3 March

The intention was to continue the survey from last time. Mandy offered to assist with note taking as there was already a full service of Fernhill chefs. We had barely got started when the Shetland Attack Pony packed up on the third survey leg. Instead we checked out the rest of the cave, taking in Brenda's Chamber (Mandy has never been here) and the streamway (neither of us had been here and it is most impressive despite its welming feculence). Visted the Red Room from which it took 40 minutes to get out.

Duncan

Balch Cave - 30/06/2010

Cast of thousands extracted 152 bags from the base of the pitch to the surface. An excellent effort which enables us to dig a further 152 bags to fill the hole back in!

With apologies to anyone I've forgotten the chorus included :- Mark Ireland, Matt, Mandy (big muscles), Mike, Tav, Clive, Dave King, Gonzo, Duncan, Rich, Alan, Tony Boycott (without helmet).

Tav

Balch 23 June 2010

Mike, Gonzo & Tav

32 bags filled at the face. 75 bags hauled back to the base of the pitch and 55 removed from Erratic and emptied outside. Loads left to haul up

Tav

TJ'S Swallet 23 June 2010 Dave, Duncan and Clive

Dave and Clive collected a steel ladder from Speedys parents cottage (this was one I 'rescued' from being scrapped by Bath Uni years ago, there are three short ones left) and took it over to TJs.

The ladder fits perfectly and proved very handy when it came to dragging large rocks up by rope.

Last weeks debris was removed and much progress made lifting large rocks out and removing fair amounts of ochreous clay. Most of the rocks proved reassuringly waterworn especially those from the right hand end of the rift.

Most interesting though was a distinct cold draught issuing up through gaps in the boulders near the right hand end of the rift. By the end of the evening ( coincidentally as the surface wind died down) the draught appeared to have reversed its flow.

Three large blocked were drilled and dealt with before leaving, this time, for The Ploughboy.

It was agreed amongst the three of us that the TJ Team should offer our services to the Balch Crew for next weeks session.....

Clive

TJ's Swallet 16 June

Clive, Rich, Dave K, Gonzo, Duncan and Paul.

Good progress was made clearing the debris and rocks from the entrance and the 'cableway' was tested, adjusted and put into action.

Tony Littler dropped by to check on progress.

Paul.

Balch Cave dig, 16 Jun 2010.

Matt, Mandy, Tav, Alan, Mark Ireland.

A useful session in dry conditions. Alan and Mark filled the 40 empty bags available, then 75 bags were hauled up the pitch, with 50 of those being pulled up into erratic ready for emptying. About 400 bags remain at the bottom eagerly awaiting the same treatment!

Matt.

9 June 2010 – Hayes Mine (Shipham) – Alan Gray, Mark Ireland, Clive North, Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe, Dave King.

Dropped the floor level at the bottom of the shaft by four feet; now well into the solid rock. This was easy digging just pulling out mainly fist sized rocks mingled with small amounts of mud. An interesting mine that is well worth a return visit.

Al

9 June - TJ's

Last Wednesday saw Dave Speed, Dave King, Richard and Clive finish installing the cableway at TJs along with the associated tree-mounted clamp and pulley assembly.

All went very smoothly thanks to Speedy's ingenuity and we now just have to add the rope and karabiner to make it work.

Wednesday can now be a normal digging night not forgetting we still need to do some grouting of the shaft soon.

Although the Hayes Mine visit at Shipman wasn't written up the pictures from Paul were fairly self explanatory! (See Photos section)

Clive

4 June 2010 – Hayes Mine (Shipham) – Alan Gray, Mark Ireland

A collapse occurred in a field that Mark rents close to Shipham Square about three weeks ago. This morning Mark called me and I went across to have a look. The shaft is 4m deep and is beautifully ginged for the first 2.5m. The most unusual thing about it was that the shaft is oval 1m by 0.75m something that Mark or I have never seen before. From a bowser over the period of half an hour 750 gallons of water were emptied into the bottom of the shaft. It did not back up and it could not be heard falling away but neither of us were at the bottom of the shaft. However it washed clean the rocks at the bottom revealing that the ginging is sitting on bedrock. At the bottom of the shaft are several boulders that could easily be hauled out and also what looks like the remains of a cap stone which will probably require breaking up.

It is an interesting site sitting between Singing River Mine, Winterhead Shaft, Star Mine and the mines in Dafodill Valley.

Mark asked if ATLAS could help with the rock removal and i'm sure that a small effort will reveal the mine.

Many thanks

Alan

TJ's - 2 June. Attoinette, Duncan, Josh, Richard, Paul, Clive and latterly the two Daves - King and Speed!

The remainder of the clay overburden at the north end of the rift was removed revealing the rest of the remaining large boulders. These were deemed 'safe' and will be the basis for a grouted wall. The 'near' side of the shaft will also have its boulders grouted.

The large rock previously dropped into the dig was banged just before Speedy arrived with a drum of cable for the 'cableway'. Branches were cleared and the lower fixing to the big tree behind the depression spoil-tip was made. The upper fixing (a tree again) will be a bracket fixed by Speedy. Hopefully this may all be in operation by next week if the pulley arrangements can be sorted.

Digging wise there is the remains of the banged rock to be removed plus a fair amount of material that has fallen in over the past couple of weeks.

All best

Clive

Balch Cave 2/6/2010 - Al, Mike, Matt, Mandy & Tav

Another good clearing session. 114 bags excavated which takes us back to the base of the newly conected rift and all at a relatively roomy hands and knees size. The next step is to clear back down into the sandy pot before driving forward again towards Sand Aven. There are roughly 300-400 bags waiting to be removed, which will be fun!

Tav

TJ's - 26 May

Rich, Gonzo and Clive backed up later by Dave and Andy.

The remainder of the unstable 'roof' at the north end of the rift was systematically removed, the spoil being dumped in the depression.

When finally uncovered the large block we had been eyeing suspiciously from below succumbed to a gentle tap and promptly dropped into the dig leaving two others precariously perched.

These will be disposed of next week in addition to digging back a bit further to the north to try and pick up the apparent solid wall, running at right-angles to the rift, which can be sen below ground.

If this continues upwards it will provide a second secure face. There is some conjecture as to whether this wall is a heavily jointed natural feature or a wall of placed limestone blocks....we'll see!

All best



Clive

Balch - 26 May

Alan, Matt, Mandy & Tav

100 bags filled and stacked in the sides of the approach passage. Shed loads more to comes out before we get back to Sand Aven. All rubble bags welcome.

Tav

Hilliers - 26 May

Duncan Price surveyed low level and easier route through the 4th BC and also into the steeply ascending bedding chamber off to the side of the entry into Cambridge Grotto. The duck into this had dried up but was still very muddy.

Balch Cave dig, 19 May 2010. Alan, Mike, Matt & Mandy, Tav, Tony B.

All straight into the cave to check out the breakthrough achieved by Mike and Alan the previous week. Tav quickly reached the top of Geoff's Rift and we were soon amused to hear him holding a pleasant conversation with Tony, who had just entered JW Passage above. As predicted by Duncan's survey the rift does indeed connect directly with the bottom of the pot in JW Passage, indeed the connection had actually been made the previous week. Matt then slithered through to make the first round trip via this new route, closely followed by Mandy. Unfortunately Tav and Mike soon found the constraints of the vertical chimney a firm deterrent to attempting the same.

Debate ensued as to whether this new route could be used for spoil removal. The top is close enough to the old tipping site for the Pool Passage dig, but it might require some engineering to eliminate the

knobbly obstructions to skip hauling.

Digging attention in this cave must now shift to reopening the previous

draughting void back at the far end of the passage below Geoff's Rift.

Some fill was cleared from this area and 17 bags hauled to the top of

the pitch before our little hands got tired and the call of beer took

over.

Matt.

TJ's - 19 May

Present: Alan M, Clive, Dave, Duncan, Gonzo, Paul & Rich (ATLAS) plus Simon, Sue & Josh (Ores Close Farm)

On arriving at the farm Duncan went to see the residents about trying to GPS the location of Ores Close Folly Mine which was explored and surveyed by OUCC in the '90s. Apparently there is a shaft below the patio but Sue then pointed out a small manhole at the bottom of the garden. Lifting the lid of this revealed a shaft at least 6 m deep (according to Duncan's laser rangefinder). A ladder was put down and the slimmest\* member of the team present, Duncan, was inserted stoutly lifelined by Gonzo. At the bottom of the ladder the shaft continued at an angle and this was free climbed for another 20 ft whereupon the walls were devoid of holds so a retreat was called and a difficult exit made from the top of the hole.

The group, swelled in numbers by the addition of the residents of the farm deemed to TJ's were a number of buckets of earth were removed from the north side of the entrance in order to cut back the opening and make it more stable. Meanwhile Duncan was shown another collapse feature under a wall near to Dallimore's Cave.

Subsequent correspondence with Chris Densham (OUCC) confirms that the shaft is the mine that they mapped and this pins down the survey. The entrance pitch is 80 ft deep with a second 50 ft pitch further in - this being under the shaft reputed to lie under the patio. The end point of the mine is 35 m due east of TJ's although there is a passage at the base of the entrance pitch in line (due south) of TJ's but about 60 m. Both points are 30 m down.

Simon & Sue are agreeable to replacing the existing cover which something a bit more user-friendly. Trevor Hughes says that he has a manhole cover and frame going spare.

Duncan

\* relatively speaking.

Balch - 17 May

Paul Hadfield & Duncan Price surveyed the bit found last week at the top of Geoff's Rift. Haven't entered data yet, but passage at the top follows the same bearing as that below and was draughting into the cave. Paul had difficulty reaching the top of the rift due to his height and shoulder width. On exit we walked around to the R/L point. Nearby in the cliff face is a hole (Hobgoblin Hole?) which was draughting out strongly. This would suggest that the draught in the dig is coming from new cave rather than from the surface. Alan's "20 ft" might be an overstatement - the two survey shots at the top of the rift were no longer than 2 m apiece... Duncan

Balch - 12 May

Alan Gray, Mike Richardson

The task for tonight was to remove a large boulder perched on a muddy shelf about 25 feet up Geoff's Rift. Alan climbed the rift and hammered the boulder which released it from the mud and with expert use of the crowbar it was rested upon the ledge; luckily breaking into three as it was lowered. Each lump was then rolled down the rift and cleared by Mike. Alan took the first digging session upwards at an angle of 45° through dry sand. Three feet of upwards progress was made and it looked as if the rock was closing in.

Mike then took over at the face while Alan cleared below. Twenty minutes later Mike shouted that his crowbar had hit airspace. He dug out more sand and could see blackness with a strong draught that could be felt at the bottom of the rift. Mike said that he was coming down, I urged him to continue through but he declined so I took over. It was awkward thrutching up the newly uncovered rock tube. I jammed myself in and in and quickly removed more sand opening up a large hole. I was able to pull myself up into a small chamber 10 feet long and three feet high which looks blocked ahead; almost overhead is a one foot diameter phreatic tube about six feet long. Just after the start of this chamber is what looks like a rift heading downwards with boulder and mud infill and this is where the strong draught is emerging from.

On exiting the cave we met Tony Boycott whose car had broken down on the way to the cave.

Balch Cave extended by 20 feet, Duncan's theory of a few feet more of digging before we hit airspace proved and now an interesting dig following the draught.

I feel like Charles Atlas's victim still having sand in my eyes and hurting.

Alan

Yoxter - 12 May

Kate L, Gonzo, Mandy, Paul, Cavers dogs, scaffold poles and ladders crossed the range stopping at several sites including one partially uncapped mineshaft which was descended by Mandy and Paul for 25 ft to a rubble and cow bone choke. Other sites were noted. We plan to identify and document all known and new shafts over a few more visits if you fancy an entertaining Sunday in the near future. Gonzo.

TJ's - 12 May

Richard, Duncan, Dave, Andy and Clive The troublesome large boulder which had fallen into the dig was popped and the remains removed by Andy and a new spoil tip was established in a nearby small depression. Further digging by Andy and removal of two more boulders by CN completed the evening, prior to the pub. Plans were laid for a cable system to carry the spoil out of the depression and agreement reached on the next stage of stabilising the dig. Till next Wednesday then... Clive

Balch - 5 May

Alan G, Mike R.

Wishing to avoid being mozzied to death, Alan and Mike went to Balch's, digging at the top of Geoff's Rift. Removed a large quantity of infill, several large rocks and one very large rock. An even larger rock (which Matt had previously though was bedrock) will need breaking up or it will block the way out. Left with a long crowbar pushed full length in heading up at about 45 degrees. Still promising and the air is fresh.

Mike

TJ's - 5 May

Alan M., Dave, Duncan, Gonzo, Kate (Paul's Kate, not Bob!), Mandy, Matt, Paul.

An evening of step building, debris clearing at the dig face, mozzy thwacking and much reducing of the overburden held back by the large rocks above the entrance before dropping the largest boulder in the hole for Clive (or Tony?) to deal with.

Met the A team (and sundry others including Tav and Richard's Thrupe Swallet Nemesis) for libations and an appraisal of marketing possibilities for a recording of Andy 'Vogon' Watson singing Mott the Hoople's 1972 classic 'All the Young Dudes' Gonzo

TJ's - 1 May

Andy and Sue, Duncan and Clive

The long awaited return to TJ's to finish last autumn's banging session .....

An additional rock was drilled to add to the three left over from last year and fired and the results cleared followed by another two ..... the debris from this last bang awaits clearance on Wednesday.

A couple of holes against the wall could be seen continuing down for around six feet (no draught), the floor consisting of large jammed boulders and earth.

As the dig has progressed northwards for a few feet it is now directly underneath Andy's original spoil heap and the 'roof' is a mass of loosely compacted earth and rocks (some large).

Before going any deeper the rift needs opening to the surface to remove the impending collapse danger and the bank possibly stabilised. This shouldn't take too long but does need doing urgently.

The downside of this will be that the tipping space will be greatly reduced meaning that it may not be too long before spoil has to be brought out of the depression completely. (Visions of a funicular spring to mind!)

Rich and I don't expect to be out on Wednesday although we may well make the pub.....

All best

Clive

25 Aug - Balch Update from Mandy

Slumpage was definitely sent forth from the dig face. I took advantage of the new ladder bypass route to have a good look at the front. Geoff's Rift is still as it was, so the infill could only have come from beyond.

Looking forward to yet another dig in the direction of Sand Aven next week.

The news from Balch is that ML, RW and DP cleared the 100 plus bags from Erratic while MV & MV inspected the end to find that, as expected, the deluge had caused the dig to slump, filling the 2-3 metres from the corner again.

Personally I think that this is excellent news as I would rather be dealing with sand in the crawl than half way up an aven!

Joined in the pub by Fred Davies recounting tales of Australian rodeo stars being tossed while nonchalantly waving their cowboy hats in the air, but that's another story . . .

Gonzo

25 Aug - Poulnafearbui

Cheg Chester, Tony Boycott, Pat Cronin

The plan was for TB to attack the boulder blocking the duck with assistance from CC while PC went to the breakdown area to excavate beneath the fill around the circumference of the chamber which is safe enough as a section of bedding covers the diggers head.

CC joined PC and the pair removed two metres of a sand and gravel fill with assorted lumps of sharp sided limestone, nothing like the rounded cobbles along the streamway, what does that mean?

CC & PC then assessed the relative positions of the pool, the end of the upper passage and the two vertical calcite veins, that appear to be the main cause of the instability of the area. There is now the need for a accurate survey, so that'll commence shortly.

TB did an excellent impression of a rubic cube whilst trying to shrink the size of boulder, this was partially successful.

TB is about to leave for the UK so, will the next shift prepare for action.....

Pat C

19 Aug - News from Ireland

Poulnafearbui

Good Doctor Boycott, Cheg Chester, Pat Cronin

The upstream boulder obstacle was last visited with Gonzo, tonight, using the Pegasus Cheating Sticks,

the whole area beneath the awful hanging ceiling was removed, much to The Doctors amusement having

never witnessed the like before. He very quickly became expert with them.

The way on now is large enough to hands and knees through it, though a bumps a daisy may be out of the question.

The distance cleared is almost four metres to the far side of the collapse area when a rift like entry can be seen to open, Pat threw stones alinto the far gap to listen for a drop and was rewarded with the sound

of a pool of water. The roof was carefully checked and two areas require the soft touch and shoring, once

secure then progress to the other side will be made.

"Boulder have a crunch on me"

Love, Light and Peace

Pat C

Balch Cave - 18.03.2010

A small but beautifully formed team of Gonzo, Mandy, Tav, Mike, Dave and half a Duncan moved 107 bags from the base of the pitch to the slope at the bottom of the entrance. Tav and Mandy then dug 20 odd bags from the end to clear up more space to allow the cave to carry on self digging. This dig is dangerous so it is imperative that the space is kept on the large size and checked/cleared a little every week ... even during bag hauling sessions. All depends on how much is up Sand Aven. Time will tell.

Tav

18 Aug - Hayes Rift, Shipham

Alan, Mark Ireland, Pete, Kate Beard and Paul.

Hard fought progress was made at the 25ft ish level. Mark and Paul attacked the rock choke with the sledge hammer and drill to clear the jammed boulders.

More bones and pottery found.

Paul.

12 Aug - TJ's update

Stopped by at Ore's Close on the way home from work tonight. My caving gear was still in my car from yesterday. Had a quick look at the aftermath of last night's work. Pulled out a few broken rocks from the base of the S. side of the dig where the draught was coming from. Can now see down another 3-4' feet amongst blocks and there was a steady cold current of air. The solid W wall of the rift continues as before but the floor/opposite side is stacked rocks which will require reduction.

Duncan

11 Aug - Balch

Gonzo and Tony down early to take samples and photograph the sand layers in Carpal Tunnel.

There was a puddle at the base of Geoff's rift and clear signs that it had flowed, but the dug passage to the left was dry.

We then started digging to be joined half an hour later by Mandy, Matt, Mike and Tav.

From the spacious base Gonzo first squirreled ahead through wet sand to reach the 'sand aven' that we lost over a year ago. Several large rocks and plenty of wet sand fell from above to reveal a small, unstable, void.

We then put our efforts into enlarging the approach as a roomy escape route will be essential when we continue the dig further in. This point was drummed home when the aven collapsed as Matt was digging towards the end of the session.

About 150 bags were filled.

Carpal Tunnel and the base of the pitch are full to capacity and a couple of 'full-team' clearing sessions are now required.

Gonzo

11 Aug - TJ's

Dave King, Clive North, Duncan Price Steve Shipston, Fiona, Andy & Sue Watson & Richard Witcombe.

The debris from last week's fireworks were cleared and several large rocks were removed as well as some buckets of mud. Some of this was dumped in the shakehole, some removed via the cableway to the surface dump and some of the better-looking slabs of rock used to improve the stairs. Four holes were drilled (two in a rock blocking the draught and one in a part broken rock from the previous work and a final optimistic shot in a partially hidden slab), loaded and fired.

Duncan

06 Aug 2010 - More news from Ireland

Poulfaoicaislean, Co Clare.

Cheg Chester, Barry Sudell, Conor McGrath, Pat Cronin



We continued to excavate under the suspect solid rock to prove if it is indeed solid.

The tale-tales left in position indicated no movement had taken place. The next thirty minutes became a white knuckle experience as its true nature was established. The brooding lump is just that.

To ascertain it's actual length in the hope that the thing just wouldn't topple over into the pot we began to remove the overburden. During this task the use of a five foot crow bar finally proved that it is a large boulder give or take some two metres in diameter.

The task is now to install sections of telegraph poles(obtained locally, your honor), to temporarily brace and secure the boulder in its position, to surround the sides of the pot with close boarding, and a landing stage atop. This should give us sufficient confidence to excavate further in order to get a better idea of the task ahead. The way on appears to be underneath and to the right of the dam thing.

Last Sunday, following several heavy showers, Paul McGrath visited the site and witnessed a sizeable volume of water issuing from the surrounding cobbles at a depth of two metres in the pot and quickly disappearing in its base.

Pat C

4 Aug 2010 - TJ's

Andy Watson, Steve Shipston, Fiona (?), Dave King, Dave Speed (!), Paul, Alan, Richard, Clive

A fruitful evenings effort resulting in another couple of feet depth. Several large blocks manhandled to the surface in addition to the bang debris from the last session. The cableway was used to good effect this time whilst some of the excavated rock went into further 'fortifications' within the depression.

A lot of the overhanging pile of rocks and clay at the south end of the rift were removed but even more really do to go as well. It won't be much fun trying to remove this when we are much deeper.....

Its possible to see down for another yard, say, beyond the next set of slabs in the floor. A slight draught was noticeable coming up from the same area so we are still on track.

Before leaving four rocks were drilled and fired .....

We could do with a daytime cementing session sometime on the northern end of the rift (surface).

I assume that the Balch team can do without our support next week....if not, holler and I'm sure we'll help out.

Clive

4 Aug 2010 - Balch

Gonzo, Mike, Tav, Tony

140(ish) bags filled and stacked in Carpal Tunnel.

We're now down to the laminated bands of coarse golden and black sand and 2 foot along the last leg with the pendants in an easy, 'canadian canoe' digging position.

Gonzo

29 July 2010 - News from Ireland

Mark & I dug a site Poulfaoicaislean pronounced (Powl fwee cash lawn) to a point where the pit was over hung by a substantial lump of limestone, complete with nice scallops, very tasty. I managed to enthuse a couple of pals and dug again last night.

This site is along the conjectured line of the lower end of the Coolagh drainage, where it heads west from Ballynalacken castle from what I believe to be its original line of southwest.

Conor & Paul McGrath, Barry Sudell & meself

The floor was tentatively lowered whilst watching for any movement, several large stones and mud were removed and exposed what appears to be a solid clean washed vertical face.

A little more work produced a draught, that came and went as spoil removed. The exposed

area below the large lump suggests that the lump may well be solid and secure. Next step is to remove the remaining mud on the whole face working upward to check the integrity of the whole rock face, if ok then the plan is follow the wall down.

Pat Cronin

Balch Cave 28.07.2010

Cast of thousands :-

Mandy loading, Matt & Tav hauling, Clive and Paul in the link and Gonzo, Mike, Alan, Tony and Richard on Erratic and surface duty.

100 bags moved from Carpal Tunnel to the base of the pitch. 50 or so bags hauled up to Erratic from JW Passage then another 100 or so hauled up the pitch. Including those left in Erratic last week, a grand total of 200 bags were removed from the Entrance - which might be a new record for one night. Carpal Tunnel is now clear of bags and there should be more than 200 empty bags available for filling. Approx. 300 full bags remain at the base of the pitch for a later date. All ready for a good digging trip next week - we'll need four people.

Tav

TJ's - 25 July

Antoinette Bennett, Clive North & Duncan Price were delayed starting out by the owners' dogs and cat demanding their attention. At the dig (after snacking on raspberries) Clive and Duncan descended to drill 5 shot holes in various places and to various depths. The large rock halfway up that we dug out last time was dropped back in and broken up as was the big block in the floor. Two further slabs in the south side were popped all at once. Antoinette took lots of photos.

Duncan

Balch Cave dig, 21 July 2010

Tav, Matt, Mandy, Matt and Chris, Alan (part timer).

With welcome help from the "secret diggers" Matt and Chris this week,

the team started by hauling a significant but unspecified number of the filled bags from the bottom of the pitch into JW passage, where a smaller unspecified number of those were raised to Erratic passage by Matt and Alan.

After Alan left early for a meeting at the pub (!?) the remainder moved to the sharp end to fill and stack the remaining empty bags. The week's rain had thankfully not made ingress, and plenty of sandy spoil was extracted.

A concerted bag removal and emptying session is required next week - more manpower please!

Matt.

TJ's - 21 July

Dave King, Duncan Price, Andy Watson & Richard Witcombe cleared last week's debris. It is now possible to get underground beneath the north side of the rift but the draught is coming from the opposite end (where the ladder is). A couple of large blocks need treatment to afford more working space and open up the way on. It might be preferable to remove the overburden above this in order to make it more accessible.

Duncan

Balch Cave dig, 14th July 2010

Matt, Mandy, Mike.

After clearing the glittering quartz-laden shattered results of Tony's demolition work we commenced another useful session bagging some of the massive quantity of sandy fill lying between between us and "Sand Aven". We're slowly getting back to where we were 2 years ago, as indicated by the discovery of a pick and a rubble sack lodged in the sand, presumably placed "out of harms way" at the time. A significant but unrecorded number of bags were filled and stacked at the bottom of the

slope. We await the coming week's forecast rain with some trepidation as it was noted that a large volume of sand is ready to slump in from Geoff's Rift.

Matt.

14 July 2010 - Hayes Rift Mine, Shipham

Alan Gray, Mark Ireland, Doug Harris, Mark Ward, Peter Burgess.

Doug and Mark investigated the two blocked passages at the base of the rift and decided that it would be a far safer option to remove the pile of rocks hovering directly above. Thus digging and hauling commenced and after a while rocks could be heard falling into water below. This was not the two pools discovered on 10 July but a pool further to the west. It seems that only two more digging trips are required to discover the source of the water that must be 50 feet below, however it is obvious that the pile of rocks is quite unstable so digging should start by the lip of the hole, that leads to the two pools, which has a solid floor.

There is a legend that there are four Cornish Shafts in Shipham and they are in a line and almost equal distant apart. Two shafts are known – Singing River Mine and Winterhead shaft. So while the others were digging Mark and Alan walked from Singing River to Winterhead. Almost adjacent and slightly to the east of Hayes Rift Mine there is a large depression with a different hue in the vegetation giving an outline of a rectangle about eight feet long and six feet wide. From this in southerly direction is a long depression in the soil also with a different hue in the vegetation could this be a passage leading to the chamber spied through the triangular hole; it is very close? Further down the valley another similar rectangle was noted; could these be the two lost Cornish Shafts?

Alan

14 July 2010 - TJs Swallet

Dave King, Clive North, Duncan Price & Paul Stillman - clearing gravel from last time's work. Several large rocks and a nest of twigs removed. Dig now 4' deeper and a view down of another 2-3' seen as well as a step back in the solid W wall of the rift. Draughting nicely. Some more gravel was prepared for next time.

Duncan

11 July 2010 – Hayes Rift Mine (Shipham) – Alan Gray, Mark Ireland, Guy Travers

Mark, in a wet suit, examined the two blocked passages at the base of the rift and thought that it could be dangerous to remove the infill. Mark identified seams of lead and calamine and also in the spoil that was removed were ochreous rocks. Our theory is that the passage seen through the triangular hole was the first mine. The rift was then ginged and minerals extracted from the rift at the same time the miners explored the small sloping passage leading to the triangular hole and saw that it connected with older workings so did not bother to enter as they assumed that it would be worked out.

10 July 2010 – Hayes Rift Mine (Shipham) – Alan Gray, Mark Ireland

As usual Mark hauling and Alan digging. After digging for a short time the northern rock face started to extend towards the centre of the shaft. This made digging downwards far quicker since only half the amount of spoil had to be removed. An hour and a half later and five feet further down the top of a rift ten feet long with a mud floor two feet down was exposed on the western side. Half an hour later the eastern side of the rift was opened up and the rift could be seen to extend for about 15 feet however the way downwards was via a precarious rubble slope to a hole in the floor. Mark had a look then I went in head first and pulled out a few large rocks. Mark then descended, feet first, and started kicking rocks down the slope. Thump, thump, thump sploosh! The rocks had fallen into water. Mark climbed down the rift followed by myself. The climb was about thirty feet with only a few foot or hand holds just bridging across the rift. At the bottom there were two small pools the largest being ten feet long by three feet wide. At both ends of the rift (west and east) which is twenty feet long are small passages both blocked with rocks. Due to the boulder slope above only one person at a time can ascend while the other takes shelter from falling rocks!

Alan

Friday 9th July

Tony Boycott & Jayne Stead

Balch Cave

Drilled & popped 2 boulders in the dig, wire was passed through the new tight connection & popped from beyond the S-bend to avoid unfortunate fume encounters.

Tony

8 July 2010 Fairy Cave Quarry

The owners of Fairy Cave Quarry, Hobbs Quarries, have agreed with the BMC to allow climbing in the quarry to BMC members ONLY. Therefore from Tuesday 13th. July 2010 a combination lock will be placed on the main gates to allow access to cavers and climbers.

The car park will still have the CSCC key on it and access will only be for cavers. Can I remind you that access to the caves and car park is for members and guests of CSCC clubs and those clubs are responsible when handing out the key to non CSCC clubs.

7 July - Balch

Clive, Gonzo, Mandy, Matt, Mike, Tav, Tony.

About 200 bags taken out of Carpal Tunnel to the bottom of the pitch. About 70-80 bags filled at the end and removed.

The passage at the end is 1 foot deeper, 1 foot wider and 2 feet longer.

Tony is 2 inches shorter ...

Gonzo

7 July - Hayes Mine, Shipham

Alan Gray, Mark Ireland, Doug Harris, Peter Burgess

The floor, at the bottom of the shaft, was deepened around the descending passage and mud and rocks removed from the passage. The passage is the top of a rift and is natural with calcite covering the left and right hand walls, however the left wall has several half inch diameter shot holes present. It descends for the first fifteen feet at an angle of 20° and then descends a bit more steeply for the next ten feet and is quite a comfortable crawl. At the end of the crawl is a draughting triangular hole in the floor about 2½ feet long. Through the hole the rift, which appears to be about eight feet high and four feet wide, can be seen to be continuing in an eastwards direction with a mud floor. Below the hole the top of an arch could be seen (?) which could have been the way the miners originally entered the rift. About fifteen feet along the rift there could be a hole which leads to a lower passage.

Two ways ahead - to enlarge the triangular hole and see what is in the rift, or to increase the depth of the shaft. After discussions in the pub afterwards agreement was that the hole should be enlarged but the depth of the shaft must be increased to reveal any more passages on the way down.

Alan

4 July 2010 – Hayes Mine (Shipham) – Alan Gray, Mark Ireland

Mark hauling and Alan digging after 1 hours the depth of the infill was lowered by 2½ feet and a lip was uncovered in the eastern wall which was draughting. More infill was removed for another hour and a passage descending at an angle of 20° was revealed which was draughting strongly, the specs of dust were flying past. The passage is almost square in cross section and just under 3 feet by three feet. About 10 feet along the passage there is a small pile of boulders and the passage can be seen to continue for five feet beyond this. It is not certain if this is mined or natural. It will take about another hours worth of digging before the passage can be entered.

Alan

30 Oct - TJ's Paul and Carmen Smith

Cleared some of the debris to have a look at the hole in the floor. Took photos until interrupted by rain and the slaves and flashes started to fail. Then to the Hunters' for debrief.

Paul.

28 Oct - TJ's

Antoinette & Duncan

Brief site inspection. The rocks we popped on Wednesday and nicely cleaved. Had a look through the slot. Appears to go 3-4 m down and off to the south. Draughting slightly. Tried to poke compact camera on the end of my folded up tripod through to film the unknown. Couldn't get enough light in to get a result. Then the camera batteries went flat just as I'd strapped my head torch to it.

Duncan

27 Oct - TJ's

Duncan, Gonzo, Rich, Mike and Clive

An interesting evening as Gonzos early efforts down the hole, opening up the previously noticed draughting gap, produced a view into a potentially larger downward continuation of the rift.

Its possible to see about 15-20 ft down through a space between the overhanging rock face and the boulder/clay fill. Stones thrown through give the impression of rattling down for maybe 30-50ft. Its very hard to tell but the sound of the falling stones does appear to get fainter as they fall, no doubt helped by the muffling effect of them no doubt bouncing down a mainly clay slope.

So the evening was spent enlarging access to the slot mainly by dropping the floor through heavily compacted clay and revealing more of the large blocks sitting there.

These were removed later by the usual means which should provide a good start to next weeks session.

Duncan was due to have a look after work today (Thurs) and report back on the state of play.

Cheers!

Clive



25 Oct - TJ's

Brief visit at Clives suggestion to look for wildlife. Apart from a few flappy birds disturbed on approach there was none. Dig draughting in very slightly at bottom.

Duncan

20 Oct

Dave, Duncan, Gonzo, Kate L, Matt, Mandy, Richard, Tav, Tony A., Tony B. (minus Mike R. due to a misunderstanding on who was doing what - sorry Mike, hope the FCQ car park wasn't a lonely vigil!!)

An evening off from normal digging activities to do some gentle prospecting on Western Mendip, followed by a look at Tom Chapman and Adrian Vanderplank's dig and a debrief at a hostelry on a Priddy crossroad.

Gonz

Lanzarote - 10 - 17 Oct

A group of eight went to explore the lava tubes. A full report will appear in the MNRC and Wessex Journals.

Paul.

TJ's - 13th Oct

Having just expected the TJs contingent to be just Dave King, Richard and I, I was amazed to find a mega-cast of Gonzo, Rich, Dave King, Steve Shipston, Fiona, Mike, Tony B, Alan, Clive and even Tav.

As a result all of the overburden has been removed and the place cleaned out thoroughly ready for digging (downwards) to recommence. Whether the appearance of the large moths will hold us back soon remains to be seen.

Just before packing up time a long-tailed field vole was rescued from the depths and released, in a somewhat confused state, into the wild.

Clive

TJ's - 6 Oct Gonzo, Dave, Mandy, Matt, Rich and Clive

A return was made to the problem of the overburden hanging above our current point of (draughting) interest

During the evening around one third of the compacted clay and rocks were removed up the cableway to the tip. A few large rocks were also trundled to the base of the rift to be dealt with later.

Gonzo and Matt both reported a healthy draught issuing from the dig face.

To be continued next week!

All best

Clive

Balch Cave - 29/09/2010

Fiona, Dave, Rich, Duncan, Tony B, Mandy, Gonzo, Pat O'Shortarse, Barry 'The Mobile Phone Babe Magnet' Suddall, Tav

Yet another valiant hauling effort. ALL bags removed from Carpal Tunnel to the base of the pitch. ALL bags left over from last week in JW hauled out of the cave and a goodly number more hauled from the base of the pitch to either JW or the exit. Not too many left at the bottom by close of play. 123 bags removed from the cave altogether. We congratulated each other by standing around on one leg as Tav said 123 was an unlucky number. This proved to be erroneous as the number is actually 111, but it was enjoyable anyway.

The end has a puddle but this will rapidly disappear once digging recommences.

Tav

Hillwithy - 22 Sept

Duncan & Mandy surveyed the cave except Chert Chamber Extension and the short muddy wallow into the terminal boulder choke (looked at by Mandy & Tav last Saturday) about 120 m in all with 12 m vertical range.

Duncan

Balch Cave - 22/09/2010

Tav, Mike R, Gonzo, Matt, Dave K, Tony Boycott plus Rich 'No Mates' Witcombe on a lonely Erratic vigil.

Stirling effort moved all the existing bags from Carpal Tunnel up to the base of the pitch. Most of these were then hauled up to JW Passage. Tav and Mike dug another shed load from the end and stacked in the rear alcove. Passage is once more a hands and knees crawl back to Geoff's Rift. Also cleared some of the hanging mud from the rift itself to prevent it filling up Carpal Tunnel again.

Tav

Fairy Cave Quarry, 18 Sep 2010.

Matt, Mandy, Duncan and Tav.

The highest point in Coral Chamber is at 178 m O.D. which is 1 m higher than the top of the 16 m aven in Aven Chamber. The lowest point is at 147 m O.D. at the clay choked archway below the pitches in Aven Chamber - a couple of metres below Carpal Tunnel.

The VR of Balch is therefore 31 m, the surveyed length of Aven Chamber is 103 m. Coral Chamber ca. 60 m - there are a couple of splay legs which would drop this to 50 m.

Hillwithy & upstream Hilliers await illumination by monochromatic light.

Duncan

Visit to the quarry for a number of research projects. First to survey to the very bottom of Balch Aven Chamber, during which Duncan demonstrated to Matt and Mandy the rudiments of how to do cave surveying by Disto and Shetland Attack Pony (in preparation for later). Two ladder drops got us and our laser beams to the very bottom, a nasty sticky place with a clay choked archway that really ought to go somewhere, and a slippery climb up rift to a too-tight bedding.

Then on to Hillwithy to look at the blocked connection with Hilliers investigated from the other side a couple of Wednesdays ago. According to reports from Tav at the front, this side currently looks like a rather desperate boulder choke that could warrant some specialist attention.

Finally Mandy and Matt were posted into Coral Grotto to survey the whole cave. We had a good go at it, and keenly await the tangled mess of a result when Duncan enters the data into Survex...

Matt.

15/9 Balch Cave

In proximity to dig face after Mandy & Tav:

Duncan (bottom of pitch & target for free-fall bucket)

Gonzo & Mike (top of pitch - singing)

Steve & Fiona (JW link)

Dave, Dave's mate Nick and Richard (being Erratic)

It was agreed to clear Balch again next week - I think. There are a substantial number of bags still in JW as well as those below the pitch.

Duncan

A cast of thousands removed 125 bags to the surface, while Mandy dug the end and Tav stacked bags (perhaps 75).

The bottom of the pitch is now almost clear of bags. There are approximately 200 bags below the pitch waiting to be moved up. Despite the recent very heavy rain the end had drained well and below the surface layer of liquid goo the sand was relatively dry. Carpal Tunnel was excavated almost back to Geoff's Rift, although it's well choked beyond. The next session should be a large scale digging and bag moving operation, which will require five or six people in Carpal Tunnel to get it all back to the base of the pitch. Hopefully it will keep draining well and we can soon get Sand Aven back into self-digging mode.

If someone else could supply the info on the hauling team I would be most grateful.

Tav

Steep Holm - 11 Sept. Rich, Tony B, Kate L, Mike Kirby, Matt & Mandy, Paul & Kate, Andy Heath & Sarah, Tony & Val, Fiona

Spent a wonderful day on the island with great weather. Visited Parsons Cave and explored the island fully.

Hayes Rift Mine - 12 Sept

Alan, Mark I and Doug.

Poured about a ton of concrete for a surround prior to fitting the lid in about two weeks time

Alan

FCQ - 8 Sept

Balch was considered both too wet and understaffed to dig effectively so Mike, Mandy & Tav spent an entertaining couple of hours messing around in both ends of Hillwithy Cave. The flat out grovel in Upstream Hilliers was enlarged to make things more civilised and Mandy was well on her way to West Sump when foul air caused us to beat a hasty retreat. To facilitate through trips, these approach passages could fairly easily be enlarged further and would be a useful side project - particularly bearing in mind a possible future survey. We then had a good potter around in Hillwithy Cave, exploring the two significant side passages and pursuing the main (very muddy) passage to a

pool just before the original connection with Hillier's Cave. If anyone is interested then a return trip is planned soon, at which point we'll try to re-examine the 100m+ of passages between here and the other end of West Sump.

Tav

TJ's - 8 Sept

Clive & Duncan cleared the bedrock, drilled and fired two shot holes in a couple of rocks. There has been small slump of mud on the east wall and other walls look precarious. In the absence of support the spoil was temporarily re-homed to the undercut on north side. A bigger team is required to clear this and the spoil created today. Nun draught.

Duncan

Balch Cave, 01.09.2010

Tav, Clive, Dave K, Rich, Alan, Mike, Paul, Matt, Mandy, Fiona, Duncan, Tony B,

Cast of many thousands. Not sure who exactly was there or where so someone else might like to supply the details. In essence 110 bags were valiantly removed from the base of the pitch to the entrance while Mandy & Tav replenished the supply with the all bags from Carpal Tunnel above the bend (approx. 150). The 150 bags in the alcove around the corner are best left there for the time being to prevent further run-ins. The existing run-in at the end is larger than anticipated and still wet so no digging was attempted. Hopefully it will dry out for a good digging session next week - there's a lot to do just to get back to Sand Aven (again!). On the plus side it's a lot of sand that's no longer up the aven!! Several hundred bags remain at the base of the pitch.

Tav

Updated Dec 30 2010

29 Dec - TJ's

Dave, Gonzo, Nick Powell and Mark Craske (both MNRC).

More boulder breaking and clay removal from the bottom right corner to drop the floor by a couple of feet.

A social visit was made to TJ's by Peter Bolt on his way to the Hunters' from Columbia, together with Richard Blake, clearly on his way to the Hunters' from just about every other hostelry in the county, and some hoary old geezer from Horrington.

We noted that the large boulder behind the lower part of the top ladder has, like Jordan's chest, little visible means of support and would benefit from some stout shoring before gravity takes its toll.

Gonzo

15 Dec - Christmas Dinner at Waggon & Horses

8 Dec - TJ's

Gonzo, Dave, Rich, Alan, Mike and Clive

The evening was spent (apart from nursing very cold feet) in raising a lot of the banged debris up to the tip whilst filing useful walling rocks at the bottom.

Decisions were made as to the best way to secure the rocks near the surface this will be by bringing the concreted wall up another couple of feet to pick up some existing large blocks, then installing some RSJs across into the bedrock on the north side. Wall building can then continue upwards from there to take in the blocks near the surface.

A lot of work but there is no other way we can see to make it safe. Needless to say this will have to wait until the freezing weather has gone. I think we should investigate a cement mixer as we will have plenty of concrete to mix. }

Clive

01 Dec - Balch

Tav, Mike, Alan, Dave, Mandy, Fiona, Gonzo, Duncan, Clive

As Tav had allowed his caving kit to freeze solid he selflessly volunteered to main the tip outside Balch whilst the rest of us basked in the relative warmth of Erratic and JWP.

Mind you, just sitting on the entrance gate to Balch was quite an experience in the gale of warm air blasting out!

During the evening 173 bags of crud were removed from JWP along with the ladder and pulley system from the pitch, for some TLC by Dave during the winter.

A roaring fire in the Waggon was a welcome sight, apart from the table full of strapping bikers and their ladies having their Xmas meal who effectively blocked it from view!

We decamped to our standby cold table by the door!

Clive

Gonzo's estimate of 60 was a little wide of the mark. 173 bags removed from JW to the surface in moderately chilly conditions, which is a goodly sum.

Ladder, pulley and crap removed from the cave which is now effectively shut down for the winter so that the moths can have a decent kip.

Tav

24 Nov - TJ's

Alan, Rich, Tony B, Mike and Clive

A freezing night to be mixing cement but we soon warmed up! (apart from the feet that is)

The b\*\*\* had done its job well but had also put in an extra crack or two in the right wall above the new dig face. All seem stable though.

Rich continued feeding concrete in behind his wall and reinforced it with Tony As angle iron.

By the evenings end the plug was finished up to the top of Richs wall. Digging can now recommence (only need two, one could in fact do it but for the safety concerns) the spoil being piled behind the new wall.

Clive

24 Nov - Balch

Gonzo, Tav, Matt and Mandy dug 100+ bags from the end and stacked them up in the 'Winter Wall Alcove' to prevent off-season run-ins.

There are only a handful of moths present but they're obviously going to increase as the temperature drops so I suggest we stop digging at the face until spring. We could really use one last concerted effort (and a skip!) to haul the big stack of bags in JW out to the surface and also to tidy up Erratic. We'll need to remove the ladder as well because Mandy thinks it's hairy and scary.

Tav

24 Nov - Hillwithy/Hilliers

Duncan surveyed Chert Chamber extension in Hillwithy and then made a start on working upstream in Hilliers from the entrance. Went over to Balch to warm up.

22 Nov - TJ's Clive and Duncan

Clive and Duncan removed the end of the big boulder that Tony attacked with plug & feathers last week. Our method was more effective but required two drill batteries. Outwards draught enabled us to see a big heap of suitable walling material for next time.

Duncan

PS. The survey of TJs from the other week is now done and available at [www.sump4.com/downloads](http://www.sump4.com/downloads) Ive put up a screen grab of this (as well as the FCQ one) for those without the necessary means of viewing the .3D files.

20 Nov - Withyhill

Duncan Price, Antoinette Bennett, Rob Murgatroyd & Dominic Watson

Surveying upstream of Pearl Chamber. We also intended to do some more work in Jonathans Chamber & East Rift " this was left for another day. Visited Fernhill entrance " appreciably grown over with bushes " on Sunday we went to Pennhillymunde for a few rocket trials and a view of the dig. All well (apart from our heads).

17 Nov - TJ's

At FCQ - Clive, Gonzo, Dave and Mike..

At TJ's - Duncan, Tony B, Alan and Rich. Kate L kindly left some heavy duty gravel bags.

The entrance to Pensioners' Chamber/Rift was boarded over using timbers and plywood, and a layer of rocks was then placed across. Concrete was poured in, and lots more concrete after the FCQ contingent arrived.

Alongside this activity Dr B attempted to surgically remove the lower section of the inclined slab using his NHS plug and feathers set. He bit off more than he could chew, however, and had to recover his instruments using brute force without severing the rock. Dr Nobel will be attending to the patient in due course.

Heavy rain eventually forced a retreat to the hostelry. More concreting next Weds.

RW

13 Nov - TJ's

Rich, Gonzo, Andy Watson & Sue, Duncan and Antoinette, Dave King, Alan, Tony B, Tav, Tony Littler, Paul, Brian Marchbank (MNRC) and Clive



A breakthrough was made into the nether regions (I'll leave that to be described by those who went there). Suffice it so that it turned out to be more lethal than the entrance shaft (which had, since Wednesday, collapsed further)

The result was a lengthy discussion and much head-scratching over what should be done. At one point we were teetering on the edge of complete abandonment of the site due to the risks and the vast amount of work needed to push the end via the new extension.

Rich voiced a scheme to begin a stone and grout wall from the bottom to the top of the shaft to enable work to carry on at the end. It was decided instead to wall up from the bottom, on a line roughly up the centre of the shaft, leaving the right (north side) open to enable digging to continue downwards at this point and the left hand side would be filled as we went (thus blocking the new extension)

The intrepid ones who had visited the new bit found it in fact worked its way back to the north and came across the downward continuation of the major northern wall which we had followed down from the surface.

The plan will be to follow this down, from below the alcove to the right at the bottom of the wall in the shaft.

So, after securing in place a large flat slab across the dig at the base, to act as a retaining wall, Rich set-to building up a rock and grout wall. Gonzo had brought plenty of scalplings from Fairy and we had enough sand and cement for the rest of the day.

There was though a sticky moment when a rock became dislodged from the side of the Ziggurat tip and narrowly missed Rich down below, trashing the bucket he was holding instead!

The afternoon ended with a fine display of rocketry from Duncan and an even finer sunset!

Clive

The view from the front -

On the last visit it was looking very good as we were able to peer through a slot into a chamber 20 feet deep and 15 feet long with a tantalising black hole in the floor and a howling draught (by Mendip standards).

We arrived yesterday to find a slump with a dangerous hanging boulder; this was removed and a protective cowl erected above the dig which was cleared of the debris. Andy Watson (who located the site) entered the chamber first shouting back what he had found as he proceeded "nice chamber, just going down slope, into a small passage, its getting smaller " send in Alan its too small for me".

Alan entered and swapped places with Andy, the dig had doubled back underneath the entrance rift and above were rocks and boulders suspended by friction and mud. I could see down a small rift, descending at an angle of 45° for about ten feet, but could not see to the bottom so the only one thing to do go in head first “ Andy assured me that he would pull me out by my feet. I wriggled in being careful not to touch the roof and could see a partially choked cross rift at the bottom about 18 inches wide. I shouted to Andy to pull me out and rather than pull he levered “ knees don't like bending forwards “ after two minutes of struggles I was eventually extracted. Others had a look at the chamber and poised rocks and like me deemed that this was a dangerous area and if we dug there would be constant collapses. The area was surveyed and then a stone retaining wall was started that would make the area safe. The dig will restart at the near end of the entrance rift where the rock is better.

Alan

10 Nov - TJ's

Andy W, Alan, Dave K, Duncan, Dylan, Clive, Gonzo, Mandy, Mark I, Matt, Mike, Paul, Richard, Tav, Tony B.

Cleared bottom and sides. Alan poked his head into the chamber below reporting it to be 15 ft long and 20 ft deep. Access for the more well-nourished caver was prepared by energetically attacking a boulder in the floor as we left. The slump previously reported needs attention and it was agreed to attend to this on Saturday. Draughting-in nicely.

Duncan

09 Nov - TJ's

Clive & Duncan studied the fracture mechanics of the partially broken piano-sized boulder at the bottom. It is no longer piano-sized. Very good inwards draught. The extent of what we can see into was measured using laser interferometry. 4.5 m down and 3 m along. The N wall has suffered a modest slump and needs attention.

Duncan

I should add to Duncans report that after our operations last night the fumes cleared in seconds “ inwards “ so we were able to go down immediately to view progress.

The slumping has occurred in the “loose” area at the north end of the dig under the large boulders jammed near the surface. Its obvious that they will soon be undermined and we need to take urgent remedial action.

I suggest that we have a daytime session this weekend to prevent something fairly catastrophic happening at that end.

Clive

04 Nov - TJ's

Quick visit to try out helmet cam actually attached to helmet. Have managed to set correct date but timestamp still on BST. Needs more light to make video less jerky so I wont post my results. A couple of GonzoLite donor torches either side would sort this out and the camera needs fine tuning to set to correct angle (not a snoopy loop and bit of folded cardboard!).

The top 6 inches of the big rock are gone but needs a long shot hole to break it properly. This could be done first thing next time (if Clive has a drill bit Ive got a long bit for Hilti capping but it is probably too slim and not SDS).

Good draught out. Way on looks enticing...

Duncan

03 Nov - Balch

Dave, Gonzo, Matt, Mandy

150 bags (approx) dug from base of Geoff's Rift and stacked in Carpal Tunnel to drop the floor and move forward, unearthing the bags stacked in the alcove on the right prior to the refilling of the passage.

Adjourned to W&H to meet up with the Hoi Polloi from TJs.

Gonzo

03 Nov - TJ's

Tav, Rich, Mike, Fiona, Paul, Duncan, Alan and Clive

The evening was spent clearing the bang debris from last week and further opening up the top of the rift. Alan managed a close view into the hole and reckoned the rift was around 5ft across impressive!

The base of the dig over the way on consists of an extremely large boulder which apparently runs away under the left (infill) side of the shaft. An attempt to drill a hole in this came to an abrupt end when the tungsten carbide tip of the 0.5m drill snapped off. Luckily we still had a short drill bit to hand so two short holes were drilled and fired. The idea being to remove the near end of the rock without damaging the remainder, which no doubt is the major support for a lot of material overhanging the void. The small bang will have cracked the end up but it will no doubt need more attention.

On site catering (fresh tea) was supplied by Mike and his fiery wood-powered stove!

Cheers

Clive