

Wed 24 Feb - Stoke Lane

Matt, Mandy & Tav enjoyed a spanking good trip exploring every crevice in Stoke 1.

Successfully sorted out the confusion over the entry points for Stoke Lane Quarry Cave and Stock's Hole, which in the case of the former is incorrect in the last MU.

Conditions - moist and cold, but still enjoyable in an under-rated part of the cave.

Tav

Wed 24 Feb - TJ's

Gonzo, Alan, Rich, Dave and Paul

Dank, drizzly evening - everywhere very slippery. Inserted a timber prop against the suspect section of cliff face, and then brought up a modest amount of clag before Gonzo set about reducing the split rock with the heavy lump hammer. Several large chunks were raised to the top of the wall using the dumpy bag. The session finished with more cement walling.

Digging remains fairly straightforward if rather strenuous, although there is a wall slab that needs watching.

Adjourned to the W & H to meet up with Tav and the Voyseys who had returned from a sporting MU checking trip to Stoke One.

Rich

18/2/11 TJ's - Tony A & Tony B

Attempted to slice the offending boulder with wall friendly 2 d**s & water in 10mm holes ; failed so P&F'd it; split neatly vertically. The loose portion will need more excavation before it can be used as

walling, or sledged, the other piece is secure as support for the boulders above. May call in Wed after Gough's trip.

Tony B

Wed 16th Feb - TJ's

Gonzo, Rich, Mike, Alan, Dave & Dylan.

Digging continued in the mud as usual, bringing the spoil half way up the entrance and depositing it at the bottom of the ladder. The lower section of ladder has now been removed, since the top ladder can be reached from the spoil dump. To finish off, Rich did a little more walling and cemented in a scaffold tube to support one of the more insecure rocks at the bottom of the existing wall.

Re-hydration therapy at the W & Hs.

Dave K.

WEDS 9 Feb Gonzo, Alan, Dave and Rich

Since the weekend, mud had slumped from the south end dig face revealing a view into the "old cave" and the underside of the the shuttering. The latter was further propped with rocks and the area was then walled up. There is still plenty of room to go straight down in the floor and plenty of mud to come out. I suggest that next Weds we expose all the floor rocks and decide which ones can go and which need to stay. The walling will probably have to continue down with us in Stanton fashion.

A few rocks were also added to the top of the shaft wall. Towards the end of the evening a creature well known to us went past the waller and disappeared into the hole in the floor. It did not reappear.

In the W & H met up with Duncan, Tony and Tav (who had been unable to proceed to St. Dunstan's Well Cave because a neighbour's car had broken down in front of

his drive! - No.263 ! in the Manual of Excuses for Not Going Caving).

Rich

Sun 6 Feb - TJ's Gonzo & Tony B

A cubic metre of clay and a few boulders removed.

Undercuts encouragingly to N & W.

Great draught!

South, beneath our protective wall needs TLC and mortar.

Dr Nobel could be gainfully employed in a few instances but there is plenty more soft clay to come out in the interim.

Adjourned to the Hunters for libation and waffle.

Gonzo

WED 2 FEB - TJ's

Gonzo (plus Dylan), Dave, Paul and Rich

The "way on" seems to be down to the south west i.e. into the undercut and under the southern stone wall. By the end of the digging phase, Gonzo had a view down into rubble voids and the draught had returned. Some concrete walling was done in an arch beneath the existing wall to prevent imminent collapse. A few rocks were also cemented to the top of the wall.

Before any persuader can be used we need to expose more of the way on and probably re-inforce the left hand/roof area still further. Sorry, Tony!

Back to the W&H to discuss diving projects in St. Andrew's Well with Duncan - amongst other things.

WED 26 JAN - TJ's

Gonzo (plus Dylan), Dave, Mike, Rich and Clive

More clearing from the bottom of the pit, exploring the extent of the undercut in the west wall. Very claggy fill.

Rich

26 Jan - Hilliers

Duncan, Tav & Martin Newman went to the Red Room and did a modicum of surveying from the furthest point down to the base level (4 legs). Tav was shown the entry to Joans Grotto en route. We attempted to enter the side passage just beyond the 2nd BC inspected by Mandy on 12/1 but neither Tav nor Duncan could fit in. A ROV (Remote Operated Voysey) will be required for this bit.

Amphibious exit via Fairy. The duck was high but the first wet corner in d/s Hilliers was dry (silted up?).

Duncan

19 Jan - TJ's

Rich, Alan, Fiona, Steve and Clive

Much removing of 'clag' from the end by balling it up and passing it up followed by a shortish cementing session.

Next week - back to digging....

Clive

19 Jan - Withyhill

Gonzo cleared out all remnants from the dig at Priceless Grotto (drum of cement, crowbar etc.) and the 2 skips and general detritus left by the previous diggers, while Duncan polished off his survey of Jonathan's chamber.

Gonzo

12 Jan - TJ's

Clive, Gonzo, Richard

Dreich!

The three aquaphobics sheltered in TJ's and cleared the fallen debris that had dropped from behind the ladder, cleared the results of Tony A's chemistry lesson at the dig face, re-positioned the ladders and built up the wall.

An encouraging undercut was revealed before returning to the cars where we were met by Tangent and a soggy, be-hatted ne'er-do-well from Horrington.

Then to the W&H for libations and a debrief for the fireside-armchair Voysey team.

Gonzo

This site inspection followed an aborted attempt to dive in the Skeleton Pit in Gough's Cave - on Saturday the site was a little pool at the end of the side passage just inside the Show Cave entrance, on arrival yesterday it had turned into a sizable lake. In lieu of diving, Rob Franklin and I took the cylinders that were to be used for the dive up to the top of Lloyd Hall for future.

According to Phil Hendy who was guarding the show cave, the water level rose 18" while we were underground. Tony Boycott, Clive Owen, Andrew Atkinson and Graham Mullan were meanwhile in the Oxbows tying in my diving survey to the master survey.

Duncan

11 Jan - TJ's Tony A and Clive to take a slice off the boulder below Richards wall.

On arrival there was a bit of a surprise in that the large block which we had pinioned with timber last week had obviously slipped there was a one inch gap around the top edges between it and the clay.

We both agreed that there was no way it could be allowed to stay hanging there so Tony set to with a crowbar and easily persuaded the rock to break into three large chunks which dropped into the tip area below.

One did make a glancing blow against Richs wall but the latter seems to have suffered no damage.

With the rock out of the way there is now more space for the ladders (which need repositioning again as a result) which is no bad thing plus it should make the hauling of buckets easier as well.

All seems as safe as it can be now although Tony did point out a section of the overhanging main wall just below the entrance level that seems very loose and we should look at that next time.

The bang went without incident and seems to have done the job asked of it.

So on Wednesday there will be some large rock repositioning to do at the bottom (there is a large flat slab part of which I'm sure Rich would like to incorporate into his wall in the future) then digging can resume below the wall as before.

Clive

5 Jan - TJ's

TJ's team - Gonzo, Dave, Clive, Mike & Rich

Arrived to find lamping in progress around the fields. They were probably after rabbits or foxes and did not approach us.

At the dig, a stout timber was cut to size and used to prop the dodgy boulder.

Walling then took place on the south and east side of the new dig corner. A

slightly early halt was called when cement ran low. There is now plenty of

dumping space behind the wall, and digging can resume for a couple of weeks

before we need to do any further walling. A large floor slab will be "examined"

in the near future by a new member of Dr Nobel's team, Tony Audsley.

RW

5 Jan 2011 - Hilliers

Following a tip-off from Richard who has been going through Willie Stanton's notes and a sketch survey from the same via Alan; Duncan, Matt & Mandy entered Hilliers Cave with the intent of locating Joans Grotto. According to Stanton's diary from 1957:

We returned, chatted in the Red Room, and set out for daylight. At the stalagmited hole just beyond S.P. extension Chris found a hole in the roof, and Joan as the thinnest member just managed to get through into quite a large & pretty roof chamber that was apparently new. I scrambled round to see if I could make contact, & found a thin crack guarded by a stalactite curtain, with a draught, many dead flies of 3 different kinds, & Joan close on the other side."

After a modicum of looking around beyond the unnamed chamber which lies beyond the 3rd BC we found a slot in the top right of the passage just before Suicide Passage conveniently opposite station 154 (the terminus of a surveying trip though 3rd BC towards the Red Room done by John Cooper and myself on 5th April 2010). Only Matt was able to pass the squeeze (which could easily be reduced with gentle persuasion) and dictated survey data to Duncan. 20 m of survey legs done in a chamber described by Matt as shaped like a cross. The north end is heavily calcified and probably links to the Red Room whereas the south end has a tube leading back towards the previous chamber.

We had a look at a side passage in the vicinity of the 2nd BC which needs surveying and so another trip or two is needed to complete the downstream sector. Got to the W&H to discover the TJs crew mid. 2nd pint.

Duncan

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

Wed 27 April - TJ's

Alan, Clare Cohen, Gonzo, Mark (MNRC), Mike, Paul, Richard, Clive, Steve Sharp, plus some bedraggled old diva (or was it 'diver'?) from Horrington.

Clare and Gonzo at the dig clearing clay from the south and the floor.

Things were going well until a half ton section of the overhanging cliff face behind their backs peeled off, knocking them off their feet and (mercifully!) breaking into 3 pieces on impact.

The rest of the evening was spent removing the offending lumps (the rock, not Gonzo and Clare!) using the white dumpy bag.

Regards

Mark Lumley

Wed 20 April - TJ's

Gonzo, Rich, Dave, Alan and Clive.

Another evening spent removing clay which has the consistency of half-set Araldite! A largish rock was dismantled and removed as well.

We now have a reasonable space to work in and the feeling is that we should now turn our attention to the south rather than straight down.

This we hope will at least hit the vertical joint which runs from the surface and should intercept the fabled small rift that Alan had seen on the breakthrough.

There is a large slab on end in the south face which will need persuasion this can be done after a bit more clay removal next time. The broken rock I suggest be used to stabilise the clay floor to prevent us sinking irretrievably into the mud!

All to clay for

All best

Clive

Wed 13 April - TJ's

Dave, Mike, Rich, Duncan (the last named making a slight visit - sorry site visit).

DP apparently took a survey measurement from the surface and left a strange hieroglyph on the rock face - is he in touch with aliens?

DK fettled the pulley while MR moved broken rock up from the dig face to various halfway points and RW sorted his walling stones. Later, one and a half courses were laid on the main wall and some steel and rock shoring was placed at high level at the northern end of the pit.

Rich

Wed 13 April - Balch. Gonzo, two ladders, one sock, no pants - to Carpal Tunnel.

The dig is remarkably unchanged since the autumn despite signs of ponding-up and we should be back to the front in a couple of shifts.

15 bags filled and back to the corner.

30 bags from Carpal Tunnel to the bottom of the ladder.

150 bags still to move out.

Out via Pool Passage for moth inspection (let's leave it for a couple of weeks) before adjourning to the W&H to listen to Richard's recollections of firing up old Bertha in Bridgwater docks . .

Gonzo

Wed 6 April - TJ's

Gonzo, Dave, Rich, Tav and Clive

Sterling work by Dave principally in the glue-like conditions at the bottom. He must have dropped the floor by a good foot overall and removed a couple of large blocks.

A bit of persuasion might not go amiss on a couple of large blocks, if we can manage it before next Wed.

All best

Clive

Wed 30 March - TJ's

Gonzo, Rich, Dave, Mike and Clive

Clive at the end for the duration " such extremely claggy clay down there its quite amazing!

Rich tweaking the cementing around the lower wall before adding another course to the top of the main upper wall.

Half of the copious results of the evenings work made their way to the top dump " the rest remain for another day..

Much high quality cement mixed by Mike and Gonzo.

At the bottom the ~hanging wall has now gone vertical whilst on the right (northern) side the solid wall turns out be around a foot thick with a continuation of the open rift visible above the clay for a foot or so before choking up again.

There are large boulders in the floor two of which will need attention chemically after the next digging session

Clive

Wed 23 March - TJ's

In order from the dig outwards:

Gonzo, Tony B, Richard, Mike, Tav, Dave, Dylan.

Plus some dishevelled bloke from W. Horrington with his prototype PervCam.

Mud-balling and rock-bashing, then cement-mixing, stone-walling and pub.

A further visit with plug & feathers will make the dig face 'deceptively spacious'.

Gonzo

Wed 16 March - TJ's

Dave, Andy and Clive to FCQ to collect copious quantities of sand etc for both TJs and use by the MNRC.

Rich and Mike reported that the boulder had been suitably demolished and had removed a large flat slab to the top of the main retaining wall.

Much high-quality concrete was prepared and Rich added another couple of courses to the top of the wall.

Next week back to clay ball removal.

Tav and the Voiseys were in residence when we all arrived for rehydration.

I may not be out next week if I am it will be later rather than earlier..

All best

Clive

Wed 16 March - Kate L, Tuska, Paul and various other Mendip people celebrated Kates birthday with a curry in Cheddar.

Tues 15 March - TJ's Tony and Clive sorted the offending boulder on Tuesday. It wasn't in fact connected to the rocks above it a mud-filled gap of an inch or so.

It appeared to run underneath Rich's wall by just a few inches so was not providing any support to it.

Hopefully (!) there should be some rocks suitable for walling as a result..

I have collected the empty bags from the site in case anyone fancies a sand-shifting session at the quarry tomorrow. I can bring a barrow as well

Clive

WEDS 9 March - TJ's

Gonzo, Dylan, Rich, later Dave, much later Duncan and Clive

The application of the linctus had gravelised the boulder, leaving little walling stone - some people don't know their own strength! After the removal of quite a lot of clag (some of it painstakingly moved up the Great Wall using dung beetle techniques), a small session of bespoke walling took place at the very bottom of the shaft. The way on has not changed much although large rocks amongst the clag are becoming commoner.

For those of a destructive persuasion, there is a rock which needs careful reduction by plug & feathering, and a bigger slab further out in the digging area which could receive linctus. Again, this activity must await the "going off" of the cement - ideally four or five days.

Amongst the fill were the usual small mammal bones and a 95mm length of clay pipe stem - possibly 18th century.

Back at the W & H, the team was augmented by Paul and Tav, and served by a member of the Lumley clan (a son not the dog).

All in all, not without interest.

RW

Monday 7th - TJ's Tony A and Clive to break up the boulder sitting defiantly in the base of the dig.

Hopefully the smallish charge should have provided Rich with material for the walling and cementing session at the base of the shaft on Wed.

A reminder well need some bags of sand in the short term for the cement until we can get over to FCQ for an aggregate-shifting session..

Clive

March 02 TJ's - Clive, Dave, Dylan, Gonzo, Richard

Another 2 hour clay ball feast with walling for dessert while one team member chased sticks.

Gonzo

Templeton 02/03/2011 Paul, Duncan and Tav paid a visit to this mighty dig par excellence. Took some photos and generally got in the way before retiring to the pub suitably humbled.

A monument to the art of cave digging. It would put many a professional mine to shame.

Tav

All retired (except Duncan) to W&H for refreshment. We were also joined by Kate L.

Paul.

Balch - 29 June

Alan, Gonzo, Tav, Matt & Mandy, Mike, Paul.

Rich, Duncan and Dave in pub.

175 bags bought to the surface on a very pleasant evening in FCQ.

Paul

Balch 22 June 2011. Matt, Mandy, Gonzo, Tav, Richard, Clive. Beardy Dave on pub support.

With insufficient numbers for hauling we defaulted to filling a significant number of bags and stashing them in Carpal Tunnel. Sand Aven remains largely self-digging, a fact that soon thwarted Gonzo's intentions of practising some magic on the large boulder uncovered last week, now lost under this session's run-in. Notable finds in the fill: one LIVE snail, and one small twig. I leave you to make your own conclusions from this.

By the end of the night Matt got a glimpse through into an unstable cavity in the sand fill, about 1 foot deep and 3 feet up, with no solid walls visible. Plenty more sand to extract before it's anywhere near safe enough to stick your head in for more than 10 seconds before falling rocks clock you in the face.

Matt.

Balch 15 June

Tav, Gonzo, Mandy, Mike, Clive, Paul, Alan, Matt.

Richard on car park duties.

Dave on bar watch.

Carpal Tunnel.

Tav and Gonzo enlarged the approach to 'Sand aven' to gargantuan proportions before removing a couple of blocks from the constriction and moving back some of the blockage.

This resulted in an impressive slump from the void ahead, with rocks and saturated sand collapsing for several seconds before the pressurised, wet sand was extruded between the blocks into the approach - it was rather like being in a giant sausage machine!

The resultant sausagemeat was then wrapped in plastic skins before being passed back to Matt, out head butcher, who made a fine display at the bottom of the shaft.

Gonzo

A survey from 2007

<http://www.thrupelite.arcula.co.uk/balch01.htm>

Wed 8 June - Balch

Mandy, Paul, Tav, Matt, Duncan, Gonzo, Mike, Rich, Al + Dave K in the pub

260 bags removed from the entrance and emptied. A further 50+ were hauled up the pitch. There's about 100 left down below. Mandy checked the end - unaffected by recent heavy rain. A sterling effort.

Tav

Wed 1st June - Balch

Clive, Mike, Mandy, Tav, Matt, Duncan, Rich, Al + Dave K in the pub

150 bags moved from Carpal to JR, 75 from JR to Erratic, none to the surface as the upper entrance lock was jammed. Another 150 or so still at Carpal. Same again next week I guess.

Mike

Wed 25 May - Balch

From the dig face back:

Gonzo (minus wellies this time!), Mike, Ray Deasey, Tav, Mandy, Clive, Matt, Richard.

A metre and a half more Carpal Tunnel was cleared to arrive back at the start of the 'sand aven'.

A tall, thin boulder was standing upright, packed by sand and blocking progress.

This was removed to reveal more packed sand and boulders beyond.

With any luck the rain will slump in the next load from up ahead and we can repeat the process in safety.

An impressive pile of neatly stacked spoil bags awaits photography and removal at the base of the pitch.

Gonzo

Wed 18 May - Balch

Mike, Tav, Paul, Clive, Al, Gonzo, Matt, Mandy, Rich (possibly underground but definately in the car park)

First proper dig at the face this season. A space the size of a small shed was excavated in the fill at the end. For the first time in three years we have no backfill and very dry conditions ideal for digging here. This is the best chance we've ever had of cracking it so fingers crossed that the weather holds.

Tav

Wed 11 May - Balch

Rich, Clive, Alan, Tav, Matt, Mandy, Tony B, Paul and Dave K

Matt at the pitch base merrily loading bags, Tav and Clive working up a sweat hauling at the top of the pitch, Mandy and Paul at the halfway house in JWP, Dave working up a lather in Erratic and presumably (as I couldn't see them) Rich and Alan ferrying and emptying bags.

Around 120 bags I think it was by the time we had worn ourselves out and adjourned for serious rehydration.....around 50 left at the base of the pitch and twenty odd I suspect in JWP.

Back to digging at the Carpal face next week I believe. Maybe we should finish the bag removal at the same time....

TJs needs a reappraisal as to the best (ie safest way forwards or should that be downwards)

Clive

Wed 4 May - Balch

WEDS 4 MAY

Gonzo, Duncan (off to Shatter), Dave (dodgy stomach from too much Royal Wedding

food), Alan and Rich.

ML and AG shot down to Carpal Tunnel to start moving bags back while DK and RW made their way in more leisurely fashion to the top of the pitch. After DK had fettled the pulley mechanism, he decided to depart for the surface before nature caused an underground pollution incident.

RW awaited further re-inforcements in vain, and eventually descended the pitch to help with bag moving. All bar the stack on the corner were shifted to the bottom of the shaft and about 20 more were filled in a token digging session at the face. As we were finishing, Paul S turned up (underground and moved a few bags) to give us moral support.

At the W & H, the quarrymen were joined by Tav and the Voyseys, recovering from high temperatures in Scotland and a surfeit of peat (or Pete). PS proceeded to give us a graphic account of life and lust at Upper Pitts.

Big team needed next Weds to get all the bags to the surface.

Rich

Wed 4 May - Shatter

Solo trip to end (30 mins each way) to finish survey (50 mins). The only bits left to do are:

1. Drop Viagra Rift just inside entrance (ladders).
2. Do the hole down in Erratic Rift to the muddy bit (hand line useful).
3. Enter the balcony off of Tor Chamber (rigid ladder essential) "good photo opportunity".
4. Do the dig off of Fourways into the echo.

Duncan

Balch 24 Aug

Gonzo, Tav, Alan (new oversuit), Mandy, Matt, Mike, Mike M, Leonie, Duncan, Paul, Richard.

After quite a bit of local rain last week we were surprised that the end was not two inches deep in water as it was last week. More sand had washed in once again, and the surface was muddy but beneath was dryish sand. The floor was dropped by about 18 inches over the entire area and the tunnel was dug towards the mirage called Sand Aven which is now only about a foot further ahead. About 150 bags were passed up the chain and stacked at the bottom of JW Pitch on top of the 100 from the week before. All bags that were stacked in JW Passage were taken to the surface and emptied. Large hauling task next week if it is wet if not more digging.

Alan

Balch 17 Aug

Gonzo, Tav, Alan, Dave, Tony B, Mandy and Duncan in a new oversuit.

Last week's dam builders had done their work with aplomb.

Below the dam, Gonzo was wallowing in the quivering blancmange of the dig, while Tav, above the dam, festered in the swampy clutches of a new quagmire!

The dig approach was greatly enlarged before destroying the dam.

The bags are now stacked below the pitch and in Carpal Tunnel.

Joy!

Then off to W&H to meet deserter Mat and Bone Hole film star Mike.

Gonzo

Balch Cave 10.08.2011

Mike, Al, Duncan, Mandy, Clive, Paul, Tav, Dave, Gonzo, Rich

Following a monster thunderstorm on Sunday the end was still far too wet to dig so a happy night was spent moving bags. The stack in the far alcove was removed to the base of the pitch and some of them hauled to JW. Meanwhile the existing stack in JW was removed to the surface. A total of 151 bags exited the cave. There are now no bags below the pitch so there's plenty of stacking room for diggers when/if the place finally dries out. Not today methinks! Lots of spoil to remove at the end, which hopefully means there's lots less up Sand Aven.

Retired to the W&H to be joined by Matt 'Smoking Fingers' Voysey.

Tav

Balch - 03/08/2011

From the bottom up - Gonzo, Dunc, Mandy, Al, Mike, Tav, Dave (a big welcome back), Mainwaring

Another sterling effort. The base of the pitch was cleared. Zillions were stacked in JW and 150 bags were removed to the surface.

Next week we can do (depending on numbers) :-

a) Dig the face and move everything back to the base of the pitch

b) Split the team - one team to dig the face and stack in Carpal and another to continue hauling bags out of JW.

Tav

Balch Cave 27.07.2011

Rich (walling), Mike (loading), Mandy & Tav (hauling), Matt (stacking) & Gonzo (dragging & hauling)

Moved all the bags from Carpal to the base of the pitch, then dragged a fair few up the shaft. Some were stacked in JW and some made it to Erratic.

We also moved the remaining empty bags down to Carpal and decluttered the dig - removing extraneous digging kit to Erratic.

A useful session. Next Wednesday can either be a full on hauling session or a digging session (provided the gloop has dried out a little).

Tav

FCQ 20 July

Tav, Duncan, Mike. Body shortage so went walkies instead!

Mike

Balch 13 July Cast of . . . er, two . . .

Gonzo and Tony Boycott.

Dig face had slumped a bit judging by the description from last week, but after pulling back spoil to turn the dig face into a porridgey water bed you could still see up for a few feet to a large boulder with no visible means of support.

Our aim was to pop the boulder in the floor beneath the arch but it was buried.

Having cleared it there was a further collapse and the process was repeated. This second sandy collapse had come from above the big, suspended boulder and it is now possible to see up for several feet beyond.

The aven also appeared to draught.

The boulder in the floor was popped and we exited to a cheery welcome from Captain Mainwaring who was collecting rubbish in the quarry.

I'd expect the larger boulder to drop after the next rainfall but caution is advised.

Then on to the pub to meet beardy Dave, Matt, and for Mandy to bless us with her flu germs.

Doolin beckons, see you in 2 weeks.

Gonzo

Balch 6 July

Smasher, Alan, Mrs Voysey, Paul, Tav & Richard:

shifted bags from Carpal Tunnel to base to pitch. These were replenished with wet sand dug from the end. A view into a 1.5 m dia. and 1.5 m high "chamber" in (Quick) Sand Aven was excavated. According to our savant this is the last aven before the lower passage heads off into the unknown. Beardy Dave & Dr Voysey assisted in the pub.

Duncan

Wed 28th Dec

Ham Hole

Last chance for a break through in 2011.

Clive, Gonzo, Alan, Dave, Mark Craske (MNRC), Tony Littler (to retain his digging license).

Gonzo was there early to take in a ladder for the climb down to the dig face. Thanks should also go to Gonzo's willing assistant, Karen, for helping to collect the said ladder from TJ's earlier.

Since neither Mark or Tony had dug here before, they were fairly quickly sent on to the sharp end, suitably armed with empty bags, spade and enthusiasm.

The remaining four of us were tasked with clearing the bags out to the surface, emptying and returning the empties for refilling. I believe by the end of play the floor was lowered by about a foot and good use, I assume, was made of the ladder that Gonzo had taken in.

Two injuries to report:

The first, Gonzo's toast to Clive of "Here's mud in your eye" was a little to literal.

The second, after a suitable warning of a rock coming through, which didn't perhaps indicate how far it was expected to travel, caught Gonzo on the hand. But in fairness he did put his hand in the line of fire, apparently to protect something that he felt was more important.

After a suitable number of bags shifted, we retired to the W&H's where we had the bar to ourselves.

Dave.

Ps. How's your eye doing Clive?

Pps, Note to self: Don't park on the East side of the road with three in the car (but at least I had 2 pushers).

Atlas Xmas Dinner 14 Dec - Waggon & Horses

Ham Hole 30 Nov

Chris, Gonzo, Mike, Alan, Mandy, Dave, Clive, Richard.

An entertaining evening clearing the results from Duncan and Clive's earlier exploits and clumsily re-learning hauling techniques in a new environment.

Then off to W&H where Dave was chatted up by Miss Flite from Dickens' 'Bleak House'.

Vertical skip (I'll get one from TJs) and second hammer required.

2 more boulders require persuasion before next Weds.

Gonzo

Balch 23rd Nov.

Chris, Tav, Rich, Alan, Mandy, Matt, Duncan, Gonzo & Dave (is that correct ?)

Last digging session this season. The remaining 299 bags cleared from JW and Erratic Passage to the surface and emptied.

Pulley, skip bogie and rope removed from JW Pitch for winter fettle (ladder removed last week).

Next week the team will assist Chris at Ham Hole. If the boulder has been popped by then, we can clear the debris to the surface.

Dave.

16/11/11 Balch

Duncan, Gonzo, Mandy, Matt, Tav, Mike, Alan & Richard (Dave later in car park)

All of the bags were removed from the bottom of the pitch. Some remain in JW but there is a large pile of bags near the entrance awaiting removal and emptying.

PS. I forgot to add that the ladder on the pitch was removed for the winter. The pulley and runners for the aerial runway need fettling too.

Duncan

Balch - Wed 9th Nov

Dave, Clive, Tav, Duncan, Gonzo.

An adrenalin-filled evening of spoil-filled bag-shuttling from Carpal Tunnel to Erratic before re-acquainting ourselves with the W&H, sorting out Italy's financial woes and traducing the Hun.

Gonz

Ham Hole - Tue 8th Nov Chris Pollard, Matt & Mandy Voysey, Andy Watson

To atone for missing the regular Weds session due to Shepton carnival,

Matt & Mandy offered their services in Ham Wood on Tuesday. Jostled some

pre-filled sacks to the surface at which point Andy helpfully arrived to

assist with the emptying - a taxing job since the spoil sticks inside

the fabric sacks like glue. With a bigger team we could safely make use

of plastic sacks which will empty a lot easier and speed the process

significantly. Then back down for Chris and Andy to re-fill the sacks

while Mandy and Matt evicted a large number of rocks from the passage,

followed by another bag removal session. 66 sacks emptied tonight, a lot

more fill to remove yet, and the ongoing prospect looks not without

interest.

Matt.

Balch, Wed 2nd Nov.

Tav, Duncan, Matt, Mandy, Richard, Gonzo, Dave & Dylan.

107 bags cleared from the bottom of JW Pitch and taken out to the surface and emptied. A further 30 or so went as far as the link before the skip up to Erratic failed. A quick look at the digging face, to find it very wet and no sign of the boulder that had succumbed to gravity the previous visit. More sand/mud had slumped down due to the wet weather, concealing both the boulder and the aven from where it used to reside.

W & H closed due to "Kitchen Refurbishment", so a visit to The Duke of Cumberland instead.

Dave.

Wed 26 October

HAM HOLE - Chris Pollard, Andy Watson, Dave King, Alan Gray, Rich Witcombe

Spent the first half hour or so sightseeing and clearing various rock stockpiles to the surface. Andy then commenced digging at the far end (in the "wrong" direction due to faulty transmission of instructions) while the rest of the team filled bags and moved them back to the entrance. (The spoil is even more reluctant to leave the bag than TJ's mud).

By the end of the session Andy had uncovered a tiny (a few inches square) draughting hole in the floor. There appears to be a choke of clean washed rocks beneath.

The present extent of the cave is a tribute to Chris P's hard work and tenacity, and his recent find is an attractively decorated rift.

Next Wednesday should perhaps be a bag clearing session at Balch, but Chris

would appreciate more help later on in the autumn.

Rich

Balch 19 Oct - Only 5 of us tonight, it would have been 6 if someone hadn't locked Clive out.

Gonzo, Mike, Matt, Mandy & Dave.

Gonzo & Dave headed in early for a photo session, but were disappointed to find the turds had had a bad hair day.

On down to the digging front for some more photos, mean while a number of bags were shifted back up the passage towards the bottom of the pitch.

Dave digging at the sharp end, below the boulder of doom, and bags of spoil relayed back along Carpal Tunnel by the rest of the team. As in the past, the sand could be dug from the bottom of the slope, which was then replenished as a more sand slid down the dig face. This went on until the dig face was almost vertical and could be seen going up beyond the large boulder (which is at least the size of an armchair), with a football size rock bridging the gap between it and the dig face. On the left the boulder was resting against solid rock, but to the right it was only on sand infill.

Since the next shovel load of sand to be removed from the dig face might bring the boulder down and block once again the excavated space, it was felt that Mike, having not been about for a couple of weeks might like to see it first. He looked, poked a shovel at the sand, then made a very quick U turn and retreated as the dig face chased him out. Lots of rumbling for a number of seconds as the large boulder along with other smaller rocks descended to to have a closer look at who dared to disturb it.

The boulder now rests on sand about 1m above the floor level. More sand was dragged out from below the boulder to help things settle a bit, which seemed to make a difference as more rumbling could be heard. The rumbling might be the cavity working its way up through the sand and rocks above the large boulder.

Dave.

Balch Cave - 12.10.2011

Tav, Matt, Mandy, Duncan, Al, Gonzo, Tony B down below plus Rich and the Don Kings in Erratic.

Another vast pile of slurry/sand moved from the end, which now offers a very clear view up the now largely sandless Sand Aven, which is quite a roomy rift with two solid walls. About 6 feet up there is a huge boulder wedged? across the rift, holding up a pile of relatively clean-washed rocks. There is a good draught, which is no surprise given its proximity to known passages and the surface. The good news is that there is no more sand above so the the worst of it appears to be over. There is still a fair

bit directly ahead though which needs to be emptied to locate the long hoped for way on underneath. Care will need to be taken passing beneath the big boulder, although with a bit of winter-settling it will hopefully sort itself out one way or another. Progress up the aven is possible but not ideal as it will put us directly into the bouldery mess beneath the floor of the quarried away Main Chamber. Given the scale of destruction I fear that would be an insuperable obstacle.

Overall the lets-dig-a-big-hole-and-let-the-sand-collapse-into-it technique has proved to be a success, if a little repetitive !!

All to play for

Tav

Wed Balch 5 Oct Gonzo, Mandy, Matt, Alan, Clive, Paul.

I saw them crawl like greyhounds in the slips,

Straining upon the start. The dig's afoot:

Follow your spirit; and, upon this charge

Cry 'God for Addlestone's! Butcombe and Saint Dunstan's!'

About 100 bags of chocolate blancmange to the bottom of the shaft and more roggled down from Sand Aven before adjourning to the W&H and driving home to be temporarily denied access to my driveway by a bedraggled, fearless stoat!

Gonzo

Wed Balch 28/09/2011

From the bottom up - Mandy, Dave, Tav, Paul, Gonzo, Mike (minus his oversuit) and Clive (minus his boots) removed another 99 bags from the base of the pitch - which is now empty !!!

So long as it stays dry then digging at the face can recommence next week.

There was a large amount of moth droppings throughout the cave, so the clock is ticking. Also, a pile of either fox or giant mutant bat shit inside the entrance.

Matt joined us in the W&H for the 'guest crisps' extravaganza.

Tav

WEDS Balch 21/9

Gonzo, Nick Powell (MNRC), Dave, Alan & Rich

Despite the pitifully small turnout, a supreme effort was made and 99 bags reached the surface from the dump at the bottom of the pitch. The ATLAS Link Passage was very wet.

CN joined us in the W & H.

RW

Redcliffe Caves, Bristol 14 Sept

Cast of thousands joined Alan on his 500th guided trip. An excellent evening and a pint or three at The Ostrich after.

See the photos on Flickr.

Paul.

Lundy, Bristol Channel 8 Sept to 10 Sept

Kate Lawrence, Kate Beard, Dave King, Tony Payne, David Morrison, Paul Stillman, Tav, Matt & Mandy Voysey visited Lundy Island explored and swam with seals.

Balch 7 Sept

Clive, Dave (late on parade), Gonzo, Matt, Mandy, Richard.

Removed 60+ bags from JW and tried out a much easier 'standing haul' in Erratic before adjourning to the W&H where we met Tav who was concerned that he had a wind problem.

Gonzo

Balch - The pointy end 31/8/2011

Mike, Chris, Tav - dug the end in unspeakable conditions well beyond the call of duty. Roughly 50 bags of liquid gloop removed from the face by lying neck deep in freezing water and pushing the shovel feet first into the sand. An impressive amount of crap came down the aven though. Bags stacked in the rear alcove. Someone else will have to fill in the details of the main hauling party as by the end I was so cold I couldn't remember my own name, let alone anyone else's.

Tav (Stan)