

TLS Flood Flood Debris Clearing Fri 30th Dec 2016  
Belated report.....

Dave, Simon, Mud, Rich and Clive plus Dave and Richard from the MNRC.

The previous cleared section near the adit was eventually extended right up to the confluence with the Hobnail channel.

Countless (it seemed) barrow loads made their way to the tipping zone well above 'normal' flood level upstream of the main part of the depression.

The Hobnail channel was left still well blocked as even vigorous probing with the mega-bar failed to allow any more water to pass.

Its now the plan to try and clear this on Wed evening, the depression having suffered a mini-flood on Sunday when the Hobnail channel simply couldn't cope and the stream made its easy to the adit again and half blocked the gate up with leaves etc. This was discovered by Dave on the day.

Dave was aiming to divert any water away from Hobnail today (Tues) to give the Hobnail channel time to 'dry out'.

7-ish at Thrupe for any volunteers and no doubt the George afterwards.

All best

Clive

Hobnail/Thrupe Lane Swallet Wed 4th Jan 2017

Clive & Dave - Duncan on pub duty.

The Hobnail channel was still dry after the stream level had dropped following the heavy rain on New Years Day. Using long handled gardening tools a lot of flood debris etc. was dug from the stream entry point and the approach channel was also cleared. An attempt at plug & feathering the corner of the left hand boulder didn't go as planned although some of the corner yielded to a chisel & hammer. With the slightly improved access more debris was extracted along with a few rocks making the cavity larger and deeper than it had previously been. The stream was then re-diverted down Hobnail and although taking all of the stream, it was still backing up a little. A good furler around with the long wrecking bar soon saw the stream flow much more freely. The stream has been left flowing down Hobnail in the hope that it might wash away a little more infill from between the rocks allowing the stream to flow more freely still.

The Thrupe Lane Gate was also cleared of flood debris.

On Friday Clive or Dave will divert the stream back down TLS giving Hobnail time to dry out such that underground work can recommence on Saturday.

Dave.

## **Cobbling it all together - The Hobnail Hole story**

*Simon Meade-King*

Situated on eastern Mendip below the sandstone ridge of Masbury, and draining a large area of marshy ground in between, Thrupe Lane Swallet has always been prone to flooding. But the inhabitants of Thrupe - just a collection of 4 farms and a couple of cottages - sleep a little easier now with our adit to dispatch the water on its subterranean path to Wells. However during the monsoon weather of 2012 the cave entrance became impassable for months on end, continuously choked with debris and taking the full stream. An overflow pipe that had diverted the flow in high water was now left high and dry due to downcutting. An alternative sink was urgently needed and we might always find new cave in the process.

Prior to the major surface collapse of 1967/8 that led us to break into the original cave, the stream sank in the north-east corner of the site. It seemed logical therefore to concentrate the search in this area. Furthermore bank erosion had exposed a small hole in the cliff face emitting a warm draught - enough to shake a cobweb anyway. But whatever the prospects, the idea of a pleasant surface dig stretching through the following summer (it was now Jan 2013) was an appealing one. Situated as it was only metres from the Ferret Shed (our hut) and with little danger (initially at least) of having to venture underground it seemed ideal. The rest of the ATLAS team were meanwhile engaged elsewhere (when not propping up the bar of the Wagon and Horses). I would need to produce some hard evidence to tempt them back.

My first point of attack was some 8m to the north against a small exposure close to the line of the Thrupe fault, but at 2.5m depth it bottomed out with no obvious way on. Moving along the cliff face to the right a second dig was started. Large quantities of earth and rock later an undercut materialised and looked promising. In the course of these excavations a variety of rubbish was unearthed including the soles of hobnail boots (giving the name to the cave). Sadly the undercut ended in a solid wall. Nine months work and I'd got nothing to show for it, but scraping the floor before giving up dislodged a small stone and from a hole below blew a cool draught. Game on! The main ATLAS strikeforce (Emma Gisborne/Dave King/Clive North/'Spike' and Rich Witcombe) was reemployed and progress accelerated.

However in mid Nov the dig fought back as a flashflood undid our work burying the dig in mud and leaves. Debris cleared we were on our way again only to have a repeat on Christmas eve following a night of torrential rain. But despite storm after storm in the wettest winter in living memory, the dig grew deeper and the draught ever stronger. Aided by chemical persuasion the next months took us down 6m in a hading rift. We intersected a narrow cross rift and to one side an unstable ruckle below which was an apparent space. To reach this safely a shaft was sunk through 3m of solid rock. And solid it certainly was, blunting drillbit after drillbit in quick succession (Superheated rock on a major fault) July 2014 and we holed through into a bouldery waterworn void approx 2.5m wide and 1.5m high (the Coal Cellar) blocked by collapse at either end. It was alarmingly unstable, even a section of wall peeled off without warning. But stones dropped through the floor bounced for some distance. Two months of probing passed, but after a particularly worrying incident we gathered up our tools and beat a retreat.

While this work had been proceeding 9m below ground, Rich had also been meticulously walling up the entrance shaft against the cliff. This work has ensured that we have a permanent structure not only capable of withstanding the worst flooding but also

aesthetically pleasing.No concrete pipes for us! A fixed ladder was also incorporated into the north side and a heavy duty lid completed the picture

Where to look next? The obvious move was to deepen the entrance rift.This area had clearly taken a lot of water and might provide a bypass to the instability below.Progress was rapid but 1.5 down we hit a solid floor.Attention then focussed on a silted up undercut leading back under the entrance rift This was cleared out and we uncovered a bedding plane sloping down East-West.A chunky timber roof support gave it the feel of a POW tunnel so we named it Colditz.Despite very fresh air the bedding ran out into the collapsed ground under the depression,so we reluctantly abandoned it.

With all other leads getting nowhere, April 2015 saw us back to engineer a way through the Coal Cellar floor.A reasonably secure corner was chosen and we inched downwards concreting and installing RSJ's as we went.This softly softly approach finally paid off and on 9th July the last rocks were removed and we could peer into a black space.It looked suspiciously like open cave! The following week we returned with high hopes to examine our find.Sliding down over a huge boulder a clean washed cherty rift dropped 3m from the far corner.After careful gardening a descent reached a narrow rift.Forcing a tight corner it was possible to look down into a bell shaped chamber another 3m below.Water falling from the roof disappeared in one corner.Luckily an alternative was found in the form of a 1.5m diameter pot dropping to the same level.At it's foot a 1.5m pot led in one direction to a stalled up rift.(This was later forced round a right angled bend into a triangular shaped chamber.)In the other direction a crawl connected with the chamber seen from above, it's creamy argonite walls suggesting the name of 'The Dairy'. The breakthrough had taken us down to a depth of 19m below the surface and ahead the water disappeared down a beautifully scalloped passage falling to the north.Clearing this exposed 2 parallel elliptical pots approx 2m deep both leading to the same eyrie overlooking a large chamber. (Part 2 to follow shortly)

Hobnail Session 7th Jan 2017 - (very) Belated Report

Simon, Rich, Dave, Mud, Emma, Duncan and Clive

Following the previous stream debris clearing sessions there had been heavy rain and quite a lot of sand had been washed back into the stream bed we had cleared so thoroughly! (To be expected to be fair).

The trip down Hobnail involved Duncan shooting a video for us as he, Emma, Simon and Mud made their way to Atlas Pot.

Rich repaired the flood damage at the base of King Cobble Hall/the top of the slope down to Carrara Crawl, where quite a few large rocks had been moved before turning his attention to a similar but less spectacular situation at the start of Carra Crawl itself.

Dave and Clive spent some time inspecting the worrying 'bridge' of jammed boulders that one tends to climb over on the way down from Upper Butts Chamber. There is an alternative route which is more secure but quite exposed. After a lot of head scratching and having measured up it was decided to take a length of timber down next time (if it fits the approach passages) with a view to possibly installing a steel beam (RSJ) below the offending rocks and

building up a boulder 'supporting' wall beneath. We will see!

Clive

Before exiting Duncan took some evocative stills in Butts Chamber (which involved Simon standing below the main part of the falling spray for some time - what a star!)

Sat 14th Jan 2017.  
Emma/Rich/Simon.

Lunch out of the chilly wind in the ferret shed, after diverting the stream down the plughole. The good news is that after recent clearance, it swallowed the sizeable flow without backup. This bodes well for a more permanent arrangement in the summer. Mud kindly brought over a 20ft ladder for our use, and shortly afterwards Emma and myself descended the TLS entrance shaft whilst RGW continued with surface works. After negotiating the Railway Series we arrived at the low crawl to Bamboo Aven. It's difficult to know when this was last flooded, but it was partially blocked with gravel and stones, although it was possible to see through. An hour or so's work later and I was able to push my head and shoulders into the base of the aven. The next session we can further enlarge from the far side where there is ample dumping space. By this time Emma was overheating in her wetsuit so we turned for home. Exit was not without incident as the Triangle Chamber ladder (attached for the bottom few feet) snapped as I put my weight on one of the rungs. I think this ladder has probably had its day! We were all rapidly revived by tea and Emma's fancies to finish off the day.  
Simon.

Cobbling it all together - The Hobnail Hole story. Part 2.

From somewhere below came the roar of water. Time to exit and discuss our next move over tea and biscuits in the Ferret shed. Hopes were high that the worst was now over. All that remained was to stride down an evergrowing streamway to its junction with Thrupe Lane swallet. But this was not to be. On the next trip a small charge removed a suspect flake above the constricted pitch head and a ladder was threaded through. The first man down landed on an inclined sloping boulder floor a mere 3m below and was soon joined by the rest of the party.

The chamber itself was steeply inclined on an approximate North-South axis. At its upper end a massive ruckle closed off any potential upstream progress whilst the roof contained colossal boulders seemingly defying the laws of gravity. It was from the lower down-dip end that the sound of a large stream was emanating and a scramble down a rift for 5m took us under a secure roof and to a point where the water was emerging from under the slope. Unfortunately it almost immediately disappeared again to one side into impassable fissures. A disappointing conclusion and hopes of a rapid advance were dashed. Apart from an unstable parallel rift the only option was to open up the path that the stream was following.

It was now the end of July 2015 and the siege was to last over a year, inching forward as drillhole followed drillhole, the floor continuing to drop, before levelling off in a section of low flooded tunnel. Evidence of the fault was apparent in a band of pure white Aragonite, its resemblance to marble suggesting the name Carrera Crawl. As in the entrance series superheated rock put up a fierce resistance. This was probably the most uncomfortable part of the operation, for Clive (our bangman) at least, as he took out the roof ahead whilst lying in 18cms of water.

It was an abrupt change of the passage direction to the right that gave us the first hopeful sign. Squinting half submerged at the way on, it looked as if the roof rose not far beyond. Draining the pool would make life a lot easier and to that end Dave manufactured an interesting hybrid tool for just such a situation. Disappointingly for my own offering this tool proved remarkably successful. The dam breached, the pool rapidly drained and excavating the floor enabled Dave to force his way through into open passage. We had intersected a sizeable rift 2m wide by, in places 6m high. But Hobnail had one last trick to play as, after a short 7m, we were confronted with a dead end with no obvious exit. Anticipating another siege the rift was called the Waiting Room.

Much head scratching later and attention focused on the point where the stream disappeared under the right (West) wall in a letter box like slot. Encouragingly it looked as if a much larger

space lay the other side and spirits rose. A little more precision banging and after tackling the squeeze feet first, Dave slid down into a large area of breakdown with a balcony overlooking the impressive void of Butts' chamber. We'd made it at last! All that remained was a trip down to the edge of Atlas pot to confirm that we were really there.

Our objectives had been achieved. A much needed additional sink for floodwater, and giving us the option of diverting the stream from the adit if required. The hope is that during the summer months the cave will be thus dried out and fully accessible, whereas in recent years this has not been the case. Hobnail Hole will be open all year, once work has finished, and there is no intention to lock the grill. It's been a very enjoyable few years and Thrupe Lane has joined the select ranks of Mendips' twin entrance caves.

Simon

TLS Gate Removal - 18th Jan 2017

Dave, Mud and Clive

Using ladder etc from the MNRC we spent a busy hour hammering and chiselling away at the concrete holding the inner gate of TLS.

The old gate had been holding up flood debris in the past causing a blockage which meant flood water had diverted down into the Railway Series instead.

The 40-odd year old concrete put up a determined fight but was eventually overcome and the gate hauled to the surface. (another exhibit for the Ferret Shed black museum maybe?)

Clive

Hobnail Hole, Sat 21st Jan.

Mud, Clive, Dave & Rich on surface support + Viaduct Sink visit.

Today's task was to continue work on the levitating boulders between Butt's Chamber & Upper Butt's Chamber.

Dave had bought along a length of timber to act as a pseudo beam to test the logistics of getting a suitable length of steel down into Butt's chamber. It was quickly agreed that the length of the steel required would be unwieldy and too risky to both carry down and position under the boulders, therefore there was no need to test with a length of timber until a revised plan has been hatched.

Two BDH canisters of sand & cement were taken down. This was poured in behind the boulders to consolidate the area where a steel beam would sit, and also cement in a few rocks to further reduce the larger boulders from moving. More cementing to follow.

It's now thought that the best approach to stabilize the boulders would probably be a steel beam in two or three sections spliced together, and a bracing leg. The void beneath the boulders can then be filled to add support.

Clive then took some photographs for the record before exiting Hobnail.

On the surface, Rich had returned from his surface inspection of Viaduct Sink with a sack

full of rubbish cleared from beneath the viaduct.

Dave.

Hobnail - Wed 25th Jan 2017

Dave, Mud and Clive

Three BDHs of sand and cement were used to stabilise some of the steam debris floor below the 'dodgy bridge' in Upper Butts Chamber. Some useful time was also spent in lowering the stream bed downstream of Cowsh Crawl and it is planned to dig out the pile of stream debris accumulated from the last flood events. This should, hopefully drop the water level in the Crawl considerably.

The Cowsh Crawl pool had become effectively a plunge pool during the floods and excavated it to a depth of around couple of feet.

Plans for a descent of Persistence on Friday were put on hold for the time being - the next planned session will be on Wed.

Clive

Thrupe Lane. Old Wells Road.

Sat 28th Jan 2017.

Tony L/Richard/Simon.

A return to the Railway series to fully open the Bamboo aven approach. This was achieved in an hour or so and I lead on down pointing out features of interest en route. The terminal choke was carefully examined before setting off out. It's certainly apparent on the way back up how steeply the OWR is descending. The next trip will see the first attack on the choke.  
Simon.

Hobnail Report Wed 1st Feb 2017

Dave, Mud, Matt & Mandy, Clive

On arrival we found the stream had backed-up over the TLS entrance again and had overrun into the Hobnail channel blocking it completely with leaves and sand.

The grill on the latter had done a great job of keeping the rift within clear and we set-to repairing the dam, and digging out the mess in the channel. Dave I believe cleared the blocked up adit gate as well.

Underground Hobnail was very drippy as a result and the stream into Carrara etc the highest we have seen since the breakthrough.

Four BDH's of cement, sand and dust went underground along with Daves 8ft+ length of poly pipe which was used to envisage how the steel would work under the 'dodgy boulder bridge'.

Another application of concrete was applied and covered with a poly sheet to keep the drips

off whilst Mud constructed a useful 'step' of boulders under the downstream end of the squeeze into Upper Butts from TWR.

Matt and Mandy arrived just before we finished and enjoyed a trip to ATLAS and Cowsh Crawl etc.

Dave and I had a look at Cowsh Crawl and found a torrent crashing down Persistence into the pool at the bottom, creating a very strong draught as a result. The top of Bridge Rift was a roaring mass of spray - very dramatic indeed and well worth going to see as pure spectacle! I suspect that we would have been the first people to see it under such conditions as, prior to Hobnail, you couldn't have got there!

The expected storm on Friday will certainly flood the depression again as the water level is already quite high - as a result we had better cancel our session apart from sightseeing maybe.

Clive

#### THRUPE REPORT FRIDAY 3 FEBRUARY

Simon M-K, Rich W, Dave K, Emma G. Brief visit by Clive N early afternoon.

A damp, dreary morning, and with the stream running strongly into the adit and the threat of more rain in the afternoon, it was decided not to risk an Old Wells Road digging trip. DK had a sick note to stay on the surface and so he busied himself unblocking the adit gate, while the other three went over to Little Crapnell Farm in EG's Landrover.

RW went to see Bob Cowlin's widow (Stephanie) to hand over a free copy of MU5. She runs the farm with her two sons and was very pleased with the book, especially the illustrations of the local caves. She has no objection to cavers visiting Little Crapnell, Honeymead or Thrupe Swallet, and was very interested in all of the ATLAS exploration in the area. Her daughter (currently away at college) has ventured down the shaft at Honeymead and would be keen to do a proper trip. (Her boyfriend refused to accompany her beyond the shaft!) I said that we would arrange a trip for her in the summer.

The trio then proceeded to Little Crapnell Swallet. The new MNRC entrance ladder was fine, but sadly RW's light faded to nothing at the bottom. With the help of a glimmer from EG's back-up light, the team proceeded down to the Speedway where the handline still has a bit of life in it. It was good to see that the cave pearls in the side passage still have their tape protection. We climbed down into Great Expectations and found quite a large stream which we followed as far as the entrance to Uriah Creep - a wetsuit job. Returning to the surface (picking up a crowbar on the way), we went across to Honeymead Hole. With sheep in the field, SM-K had to be left on the surface to guard the open gate, but RW and EG went down to Slab House, before returning with two redundant digging buckets.

Then it was back to the Ferret Shed where DK had the tea ready and had finished the ironing. A pleasant afternoon's excursion.

Rich

Hobnail Report Tues 7th Feb 2017

Duncan, Max, Mud and Clive

During an early afternoon visit the stream was found to have overtopped and just about flattened the dam (since Saturday) and there was partial blocking of the adit gate. The Hobnail channel grill was cleared and the dam rebuilt just before an hour of heavy rain.

By the evening the stream had risen but the dam was still working and a 'drippy' trip down Hobnail ensued with Duncan and Max helping move the four BDHs of cement and dust.

They picked up the survey from Spike's last station in TWR whilst Mud and Clive added another layer to the fortifications below the 'dodgy bridge' in Upper Butts.

We had a look at the amazing torrent going down Bridge Rift and Duncan took Max on a quick trip to ATLAS for a look.

A very wet but usual session all round. The pub ensued.....

Mud and I plan for another go on Saturday.....

Clive

Hobnail Hole Sunday 12th Feb.

Clive, Simon, Tony L, Emma, Mud & Dave.

A good turn out for today's Hobnail session.

2 BDH's of cement, 4 BDH's dust, pickaxe & crowbar were all ferried down to Butt's Chamber.

Mud, Tony & Emma headed on down to Cowsh Crawl armed with the tools to continue digging out the down stream side of the crawl. The channel was soon lowered and widened to the full width of the rift lowering significantly the water level in the crawl. At one point a hole opened up in the stream bed between the Cowsh Crawl and Bridge Rift which then took a large proportion of the stream causing a little concern in case the whole of the floor were to drop out. Needless to say this didn't happen and the hole soon filled with shingle and the stream continued to flow on down Bridge Rift.

Meanwhile back in Butt's Chamber.

Clive Simon and Dave made significant progress with cementing beneath the levitating boulders between Butt's and Upper Butt's chambers. Due to the quantity of cement and dust carried down by the team, the height of rock and cement was built up to a suitable level for one end of the steel beam that will be installed in due course.



Tea and cakes to round off in the Ferret shed, before Emma departed early for another caving trip down Longwood Valley Sink.

Next session planned for Wed evening.

Dave.

Thrupe lane. Old Wells Rd

Fri 17 Feb 2017.

Dave/Smk.

A complicated programme of water management enabled parties to simultaneously descend Hobnail and TLS. First down was Max heading for the bottom of Atlas, followed by a hand picked assault team en route to the OWR. Finally after rediverting the stream a crack underground construction squad disappeared down Hobnail-destination Butts chamber. 20 mins later Dave and myself had arrived at the terminal choke and set to work lowering the floor whilst probing ahead. The fill is loose gravel with the occasional rock, carried down by floods from higher up the passage in the 10 yrs since the last ATLAS visit to the site. Useful progress was made, but it was noted that a long handled rake would have speeded things up - as would a third person. After 2 hrs we set off for home, having at least got this latest project under way.

Simon.

Hobnail Hole - Wed 15th and Fri 17th Feb 2107

Wed - Dave, Mud and Clive in an uneventful but successful session adding to the concrete in Butts Chamber.

Friday - Tony L, Emma and Clive

After diverting the surface stream (twice) to allow access to TLS for Simon and Dave (OWR) and Max Fisher (Atlas Pot via Perseverance) we took another 4 BDHs of dust and sand and two of cement to the dodgy bridge and made more progress - nearly half way across now!

We were amazed on arrival to find Max sitting in Butts Chamber waiting for us having already bottomed Atlas and failed in attempting to re-climb Perseverance against the full force of the stream (in advance of our re-diverting the surface stream on our exiting Hobnail)!

Max then had to wait for us to do our work and exit and allow time for the stream to diminish before exiting himself - a task he completed by the time we had all had tea and put the world to rights in the Ferret Shed.

Re next Wed - I don't think Dave will be out and I won't be either due to start of a holiday. I will miss the following Wed as well.

Clive

Friday 24th Feb

Thrupe Lane Swallet - the Old Wells Road.

Richard, Simon, Emma & Dave.

With the stream diverted down Hobnail to give TLS time to dry out, Rich finished giving a group of local ramblers the grand tour of the TLS depression and a brief history lesson, the team then settled in the Ferret Shed for lunch.

Lunch over and ramblers vacated but not before their finale tour of the Ferret Shed, digging tools selected and a plan formed.

TLS entrance ladder rigged, Simon headed off down to the OWR loaded with digging kit whilst Rich and Emma did a reconnaissance trip to the top of Perseverance and back.

With Rich safely back on the surface, Emma & Dave headed off down the Railway Series for a turn-around at Bleak Hall. With Emma back on the surface to do the washing and ironing in the Ferret Shed (well, Rich had disappeared off to Upper Pitts, and someone has to do it), Dave went on down to catch up with Simon in the OWR. Digging out the very loose gravel infill would be relatively easy if it wasn't for the steep inclination at the dig face and the distance the spoil needs to be ferried back up the passage. After the accessible passage was extended to approx 2m a closer look at the end unfortunately revealed that there is no air space over the infill, hence it is not possible to see how much further to go before unlimited spoil dumping space beyond is reached. If it could be seen to be not too far it would be realistic to dig it out to a minimum size to squeeze through and then enlarge from the other side.

En-route back to the entrance a few bits of rubbish collected to add to the unidentifiable rotting rubber that had been washed in from the old shaft were stuffed into a tackle sack that Emma had tossed down earlier were removed from the cave.

With Rich back from Upper Pitts, Emma woken from her siesta, Simon & Dave back from the OWR, tea & cake was the order of the day.

Finally the stream was re-diverted down TLS since Mud + 1 have a trip planned later to ferry some sand/dust down to Butts' Chamber.

Dave.

Hobnail/Butts Chamber Tues 7th March

Dave, Tony L and Clive

Last Wed Mud and a friend had kindly ferried a load of 'dust' to Butts Chamber and this was all used today alongside some of the supplies we had taken down.

Plastic sheeting was used to divert a 'new' streamlet which had appeared flowing down the opposite side of Upper Butts to the breakthrough squeeze. This one appears to be the main source of the heavy drip which affects the cementing work.

A very effective session - we are now up to 'steel beam height' across almost half of the gap.

One thing very worth mentioning is a large loose rock jammed on the rift half way down between the Lower Coal Cellar and Black Pot...

It may well just need another large rock jammed or cemented under it. It could be dropped

but it might expose a rock pile we planted a few feet above.

There are also two large loose blocks (neither in danger of falling) on opposite sides at the bottom of the entrance shaft....

Clive

Hobnail Wed 8th March 2017

Dave, Mud, Spike(!) and Clive

A welcome return 'to the fold' for Spike and his first opportunity to go beyond TWR into Upper Butts Chamber.....

Another session of concreting in Butts (it is moving on apace now....) whilst Spike and Mud had a trip to ATLAS and took a look at the torrent going down Bridge Rift.

Dave brought over a goodly load of free sand and gravel he had procured from a neighbour and I have seen Jim Young and identified a suitable length of steel for the Butts Chamber work.

I'm not around Fri-Sun this week but I believe Dave is free on Friday at least.....

Clive

Hobnail - Wed 15th March 2017

Mud, Spike and Clive

Another uneventful cementing session in Butts....

Dave - the plastic pipe measured at approx 111 inches with around a further 18 inches leeway available under the rock on the right.

An extremely busy George Inn visited afterwards - turned out to be 'Steak Night' with £3 off each steak. A group of gentlemen at our usual table in the window produced some very accomplished barbershop style singing - not to my taste but very well done and produced appreciative applause.

I am around Fri and Sat - would suggest Sat as Mud is keen to help Simon in the OWR and Dave and I, at least, could continue the work in Hobnail. (Need to probably drop the dodgy rock above Black Pot and tidy up after)

Clive

Thrupe Lane. Old Wells Road.

Fri 10th Mar 2017.

Dave/Emma/Simon.

A second session continuing the work of breaking the choke blocking the OWR. A useful volume of gravel and rock cleared from the steeply inclined approach passage. This is to free

up dumping space preparatory to pushing forward again next week. Surfaced about 1630 to find Rich engaged on repairs to a collapsed section of boundary wall in a corner of the estate. Tiffin taken in the Ferret Shed to round off the day.  
Simon.

Hobnail 18th March 2017 plus Survey

Dave and Clive to Butts to continue the cementing, with Rich attending to the two loose rocks in the entrance shaft and prepping the dangerous loose block in Upper Black Pot for safe removal later. (also more surface repairs due to a recent wall collapse)

By popular request here is the Hobnail elevation courtesy of Spike and Duncan, prepared for the forthcoming Descent article. No plan as it is far too complicated due to the passages being mainly on top of each other.....

Clive  
Sat 25th March  
Hobnail Hole  
Rich, Mud & Dave.

Team of three down to the dodgy cherty rock above Black Pot. With the use of straps and bit of careful maneuvering the rock was lowered to a safe position below.

Rich continued with fettling and gardening before heading back to the surface to continue rebuilding the dry stone wall in the corner by the lay by.

Meanwhile Mud & Dave carried on down to Butts' Chamber with more materials ready for the next cementing session on Wed evening.

Stock piled in Butts:- 4 x BDH's of gravel/dust decanted into rubble sack, 2 full BDH's cement.

Dave.

22/03/17 Belated Hobnail/TLS report

Clive, Dave, Mud and Spike

Surface stream was well up again, with repairs to the diverting dam required to limit the flow into Hobnail. TLS gate was inundated again, with debris up to halfway, and the water level at about a third.

Gravel and cement ferried through a surprisingly dry Hobnail (the Dairy was barely dripping) and into Butts' Chamber. More walling added by Dave.

I wandered off to have a look at Bypass Aven and Passage. Having not been that way before, the wall of water that was coming down the Aven was somewhat intimidating as I couldn't see what the floor did on the other side. Fortunately it's flat, and I only got wet. Couldn't really look up the Aven for the amount of water coming down, so will leave that for another time.

Bypass Passage contained some excellently sketchy boulders in the roof, and after finding my way down to Atlas I could see the connection to Marble Streamway but thought better of attempting it un-lined.

I also had a look at the Water Chamber upstream of the Showerbath, but time constraints meant I saved this climb for another time too.

There was a lot of water here, from at least 3 different sources. None of which is the water from Hobnail, nor the surface stream flowing down TLS, as these head off down Bridge Rift...

Spike

Hobnail - Wed 29th March 2017

Dave, Mud and Clive

The usual ferrying and cementing trip to Butts Chamber. A mega concreting session thanks to the previously dumped stockpile of dust and gravel from last Saturday.

Work has progressed so well that we should be able to get the steel installed over the next week or two....

All best

Clive

Hobnail - Sat 1st April 2017

Mud and Clive (plus Rich on surface wall repairs)

Another concreting session which finished the support surface for the steel beam.

The beam will be available to go down on Wed this week.....

Spike - are you likely to be around on Wed as an extra hand would be a great help in getting the steel underground along with another batch of dust etc.?

All best

Clive

Hobnail Hole - Wed 5th April

Mud, Spike, Clive & Dave

Clive had collected the steel beam from Jim Young.

8' of 3" x 3" angle cut into 2 x 4' lengths with 2 fish plates, all suitably drilled c/w nuts & bolts (not be possible to feed a single length behind the boulders at each end, hence the two sections).

To prevent causing damage to the cave, in particular Dairy Pot, the ends of the steels were carefully wrapped in large pipe insulation and gaffer tape and krabs attached to each for lowering.

Along with the "Big Boys Meccano kit" 5 1/2 BDH's of cement & 1/4" to dust was carefully lowered and passed easily down to Butts' Chamber. The left hand end of the steel was installed first followed by the two fish plates and the right hand section, all bolted and tightened and wedged into position tight against the under side of the central boulder. A start

was then made to cement the steel into position before calling "Time".

TLS stream:- Due to the current dry spell the TLS stream is very low at present with no water entering through the entrance, although water that is sinking at the bottom of the cliff face can still be heard entering lower down the entrance pitch. Whilst on a rock forage, Spike went through Cowsh Crawl and reported that there was still a reasonable flow cascading down Perseverance Pot.

Dave.

Hobnail - Sat 8th April 2017

Emma, Dave & Clive (plus Tony B visiting on way home from Upper Canada Combe after a dice-with-death session with some errant boulders)

A couple of BDHs of 'dust' taken down and a very good session of concreting around the steel beam ensued - very good progress achieved.

With the constant too-ing and fro-ing across the top of the boulder pile, starting to loosen some of the rocks, it was decided to position a handy very large flat slab across the affected area to give it some protection. This was achieved and has improved the situation markedly.

Another session on Wednesday..

Mud - would you have another tackle bag in your garage by any chance - the green one we use is starting to fall apart.....!

Clive

Hobnail Wed 12th April 2017

Mud, Dave and Clive

Yet more cementing - now 2/3rds of the way through the job.

Mud demonstrated his new super-duper lamp and in doing so spotted, in Butts Chamber, a strange patch of white in a bedding plane around 40ft up on the east wall. Could be a poly bag we thought but its around 6ft long. Will take binoculars on Friday for a closer look!

Dave also had a squirm into the phreatic tube low on the east wall which continues upwards - a job for Matt we think!

Clive

Hobnail - Fri 14th April 2017

Mud and Clive plus Rich on surface walling. Emma on Hot Cross bun support duty (thanks Em!)

The usual BDHs of 'dust' etc were dragged through to Butts Chamber and a very productive

session ensued. We are now over 2/3rds of the way through the job.

Binoculars were used along with spot lighting from Mud's lamp to have a closer look at the mysterious white objects noticed on the previous Wednesday, high on the east wall of Butts Chamber.

There appears to be possibly a bedding plane cavity, at the back of which we could see something very white stretching for maybe 6ft or so along the dip. We had wondered if it could be a large white plastic bag say. On closer inspection with the bins it was obvious it had texture and looks to me as though it is a large, possibly boulder, of white arragonite.

If this is the case there may be development there down-dip of, and on the same joint, as the Waiting Room.

Mud also tried inserting himself into the phreatic tube at the base of the wall which Dave had attempted on Wednesday. He confirmed that it carried on vertically for maybe 10-15ft with similar dimensions. Matt - your turn?!

Duncan might be using his Quadcopter on Wed night to have a closer look at the white objects to see if its worth a maypoling session maybe to get up there. Also there is the possibility of a passage to look at on the western wall using the drone.

Clive

Also on Wednesday Mark has said he will be at the George whilst hes in the area.....

Clive

Hobnail Update 22nd April 2017

Simon, Dave, Rich, Emma and Clive

A welcome return to the fold for Simon and his first visit to Butts Chamber for quite a while.

A full complement of aggregate was taken down and another good session of concreting completed.

Just Mud and Clive.....

On arrival one car in the layby and ropes rigged on the TLS entrance and the surface stream merrily still sinking down Hobnail.

Much head scratching ensued - do we wait for them to re-emerge, or divert the stream down TLS in the hope we are out before them and can re-divert in time, or just brave the wet in Hobnail?

The surface stream was fairly low so we thought we would chance it as we couldn't hear water roaring away down below this time. A sign was left, along with a shovel, just outside

TLS asking the party to divert the stream away from Hobnail when the emerged.

Turned out the cave was just 'drippy' - no problem at all. This bodes well for the 'exchange' trip if the stream levels are low-ish - no complicated system of diverting and re-diverting the stream needed. Also dual trips into TLS and Hobnail not a problem under those conditions.

In the cave the stream just beyond Carrara Crawl was down to just about an inch deep rather than the three we are used to.

No sign of the other party whilst we were in Butts cementing (good progress again).

On the way out it was obvious that the stream had been diverted as the dripping had all but stopped. On the surface no sign of the emerging party - already gone.

It might be nice to have somewhere for visiting parties to note down where they are going and for how long etc. Might be a God-send in case of floods or other mishaps.

Another episode on Wed - gosh we *are* getting good at this!

Clive

Hobnail 26th April 2017

Dave, Mud and Clive (Spike on late pub support after an interesting evening avoiding a bull and trying to find his way across Blackdown in the dark on a moonless night - without a torch apparently!)

Little to report except the usual - more good progress on the cementing etc.

Dave inserted himself into the tube at the base of the east wall of Butts and managed to get a good look up the continuation. It appears to arch over updip at the top. It await Matts attention....

Mud had a go at climbing up towards the possible passage 20ft or so up the west wall but sensibly gave up at an overhang. There is a plan for him and a friend to bring some lightweight poles in on Saturday with a GoPro on top to take a look ....

Next session on Friday at the usual time. Next Wednesday we will be joined by Ray on the first of this years visits from Oz.

Clive

Hobnail Report - Fri 28th April 2017

Whilst in the area, Emma and Simon both had a go at the phreatic tube at the base of the east wall - all agreed it was a job just made for the Voiseys!

Thanks to now having a powerful Fenix lamp, thanks to Muds lead, and complemented by



Emma's Scurion with its amazing spot setting - a good look was had at the 'white' bedding plane feature high on the east wall. Its really intriguing and just waits for Duncan to hopefully point his Quadcopter at it soon.

I noticed that there was quite a bit of spray coming down into the chamber from the high aven. On the surface most of the stream was sinking under the cliff near TLS so I assume that its finding its way directly to Butts. When we do the drone flight (hopefully) it would be worth diverting the stream, if still low, into Hobnail a day or two beforehand to give the aven time to dry out a bit.

Whilst playing with the spot beams on the lamps the opportunity was taken to look up the impressive aven above Butts - the first time to my knowledge that it has been looked at properly.

It really is an impressive feature and sports a mega boulder jammed across its width, not unlike 'The Bridge' in Alum Pot, with the aven continuing up beyond. If we do get a maypole sorted to check out the 'white' bedding plane this whole area could be quite interesting - including the down-dip continuation of the rift.

Mud's trip to put a Go Pro into a possible passage on the west side of Butts has been changed to Monday....

Hobnail Report Friday 5th May 2017  
Dave, Simon, Emma, Ray Deasey and Clive

Whilst Emma and Simon went off to Atlas with Ray (the first time in Hobnail for him since we were working at the threshold of the breakthrough point into Black Pot) Dave and Clive carried on with the cementing on Upper Butt's.

By the end of play we had all but completed the 'front' of the wall - a couple more sessions mainly filling in behind (from a hole above) and the job will be finished.

Clive

After all the identical concreting trips down there over the last few months I have to admit it was getting a bit tedious and repetitive to say the least!

Yet more next Wednesday.....

Clive

Hobnail Report Wed 3rd April 2017

Spike, Dave and Clive (Mud on pub support)

Mud and his team had taken down three BDHs of gravel etc on Monday so, along with the five we took down on wed night, we were able to have a mega concreting session. So mega in fact that we didn't emerge until 10.15 when we found Mud waiting for us at the entrance a bit concerned at our overdue state!

We now only need a couple more sessions concreting etc at the front of the wall then we can

start filling in from behind with big rocks and cement - this element should be much quicker than what we have become used to as we can use really large blocks.

In the pub Mud showed us the video he had shot on Monday, of the possible passage 20ft up on the western wall of Butts Chamber, with a camera attached to Dave's aluminium tent poles.

It turns out there is indeed a passage there - a well rounded phreatic tunnel (basically forming a roof tube) with wide bedding development below. Its difficult to estimate dimensions but it does appear to be man-sized with a diggable cobble floor and carries straight on.

Thoughts are now turning to obtaining a may pole, or the means to construct one, to access this passage and also the mysterious passage high on the east wall. Using Dave's tent pole Mud estimates this to be around 30ft from the floor of Butts but, viewed from the top of the boulder slope it does appear to be rather more.

Mud aims to return on Saturday to have another photo reconnaissance.

Emma, Simon, Rich - are you still on for Friday?

Hobnail Wed 10th May 2017

Dave, Ray, Mud, the Voiseys and Clive

Dave and Ray enjoyed a trip right to the end of Thrupe via the pitch below The Lateral plus a look at the upper end of the Marble Streamway (which is looking much less of a digging prospect than we thought, although an aven with a lot of spray coming down might be worth a look yet....)

Mud and Clive passed Dave and Ray them on their exit through Black Pot and continued to Butts to start the concreting.

Mud was keen to attempt a climb up to the possible new passage on the west wall that he had filmed previously. The climb did not go according to plan though as he peeled off about 6 feet up (handhold gave way) and fell around 10ft onto the boulder floor of Butt's Chamber. Luckily his helmet stayed intact and no doubt saved him from more damage but he did sustain a very nasty bump above his left eye, a cut just below and a cut below the jaw plus a few more minor lacerations.

Dave and the Voiseys arrived at this point and Dave escorted Mud to the surface and a trip to Shepton Minor Injuries Unit for a couple of stitches etc. Kerry picked up the car from Thrupe and all eventually (less Mud and Kerry) made it to the pub to compare notes.

Some concreting was done despite the drama and some more planned for Friday hopefully.

Clive

Re: {Thrupeswallet} Hobnail Wed 10th May 2017 (pt 2)

I forgot to record that Matt and Mandy managed to wriggle their way up the tight tube in the east wall of Butts Chamber (I've christened it 'The Squirm') to around 15ft by the sound of it (they will confirm no doubt) until it became too tight to follow having turned up dip.

Clive

Hobnail Report Fri 12th May 2017

Dave, Emma, Clive, Rich (surface wall maintenance) and Simon (Ferret Shed maintenance)

The usual cementing trip to Butts Chamber with the addition this time of drag trays to pull the heavy BDHs through the low sections en route. Wish we had thought of the idea weeks ago!

The front of the retaining wall is now complete and work has started on filling in behind. Some extra work we find is also needed to one side of the rock bridge which will take us a bit longer, but the end is now firmly in our sights!

More on Wednesday next!

Clive

Hobnail Hole  
Saturday 20th May.

Ray D, Simon, Clive & Dave.  
Rich & Mud surface duties.

Mud wearing his battle scars from his tumble the other week joined us for pre digging lunch, but unable/not allowed to venture underground due to a large lump/bruise on his leg. No need for Clive to frisk him for his nuts in case he was thinking of using any homemade climbers nuts for another attempt at the climb in Butts'.

Rich continued with his wall building at the end of the lay by in between heavy showers. Ray, Simon, Clive & Dave headed on down for more cementing, but this time all being carried out from above the boulders in Butts'.

With the Hobnail channel taking all the stream the route down was noticeably more drippy, particularly down the Coal Cellar. Dairy Pot was dry on the way in but damp on the way out after reacting to the rain on the surface.

More streamlets were entering Upper Butts' Chamber from the top left requiring some stream diverting to keep the cementing work dry.

Butts' Chamber had heavier rain from the roof considering the low surface stream level, presumably a combination of water sinking in the stream bed at various points and/or the Hobnail Stream channel water.

Cowsh Crawl was dry apart from a couple of tiny remaining puddles since no water entering via TLS entrance, the Ferret Run and Perseverance Pot.

Dave.

Hobnail Hole, Wed 24th May

Spike, Mud (light duties), Clive & Dave.

Clive purchased 6 bag of gravel, and added to the pile under the tarp behind the Ferret Shed ought to see the job through.

More of the same as cementing continues working this time in Upper Butts' Chamber to fill in the cavity behind the boulders.

Spike took the opportunity to have a ferret around Bridge Rift and Cowsh Crawl and a "not without interest" report came back I'm sure Spike might like elaborate further.

Dave.

Hobnail 27th May 2107

Emma, Simon, Clive and Rich (surface support).

Although the stream could clearly be heard falling below the Hobnail entrance it was diverted to TLS to provide a dry descent.

A full contingent of seven BDHs made it to Butts where the remaining work on the right hand side at the rear of the wall was completed and the space on the left hand side half filled.

Another couple of sessions could see the job done depending on how much we feel needs to be done to some boulders on the extreme left .....

Another session on Wed.....

Clive

Hobnail - Wed 31st May - The Butts Chamber 'Wall' - FINISHED!

Dave and Clive plus Mud on late surface support.

Very, very happy to report that the support wall under the dodgy boulders at the top of Butts Chamber is now completely finished!

I was going to tot-up the number of trips etc involved but I only have the reports going back to 12th April - we've had 12 trips since then! If anyone fancies totting them up it would be interesting as a result to work out the approx amount of gravel etc we have carried down!

I will get a picture of the finished wall soon to put with the 'before' picture I have which can go to Descent.

Re this weekend Dave will be posting a suggestion.....

Clive

The 'Dodgy Boulder' Campaign - the Statistics

managed to locate the missing reports and I make it around 24 separate concreting trips to Upper Butts.

Working on an average of 5 BDHs of gravel each time at an approx weight of 6kilos each makes it 670 kilos or 0.67 ton!

Impressive!

Clive

An impromptu stream fettling session Sat 3rd June.

What started out as a bit of an idea a couple of months back saw Clive & Dave do a couple of rock ferrying runs from Rock Farm near WHFS. The rocks were placed in the undercutting of the TLS stream where a huge cavity under the hedges behind the Ferret Shed had been created as the stream eroded away the bank when in spate. It became obvious that a lot more rocks would be required to prevent further erosion.

Today the weather was right, we had access to the spoil heap of rocks at Rock Farm (where else would you get rocks from), Emma & John Gisborn were available with their large trailer. After a couple of phone calls and text messages and an impromptu rock shifting session was suddenly possible.

Clive, Mud & Dave loaded Clive's motor & Dave's motor & trailer with the first loads from Rock Farm and took them to TLS where they were unloaded and dropped into the stream for positioning. A surprise visit by Rich who joined us for lunch in the sunshine. After the first load of rocks were built into the eroded cavity Clive, Mud & Dave headed back to Rock Farm to meet Emma & John for the second load. Vehicles and trailers loaded once more before heading back to TLS. More unloading and shifting ensued whilst Rich inspected our haul and purloined a few choice rocks for stream bank repairs near the Hobnail entrance.

Tea & cake was then followed with more wet stone wall building in the eroded cavity.

Suddenly it had gone from nothing planned for today to filling the cavity and hopefully preventing further bank erosion when the the stream is in flood conditions.

WHFS etc.

Whilst over at Rock Farm, Clive, Mud & Dave inspected the WHFS grill and gate. The scrotes have been active again and shifted a large rock from the step opposite the gate and used it to partially force the gate open enough to gain access to WHFS. In addition the mud and rock slope above and behind the grill has been collapsed, again allowing access down the

back of the grill, albeit a very exposed climb with the risk of more debris collapsing on the unwary.

The stream is still currently flowing on the surface some of which is trickling through the dam and down WHFS, whilst the majority flows on past to the lower sink. Since the stream is now quite low it would seem feasible to divert all the flow into the bank on the opposite side of the stream.

The wooden board that blocked the access at the bottom of the entrance shaft has also gone, possibly forced on down.

A return to WHFS is planned for this coming Wednesday evening.

On the agenda:-

Divert the stream into the opposite bank.

Remove the wedged in boulder.

Check the stability of the mud and rock bank at the back of the grill.

Clear the entrance shaft etc of fallen/thrown in debris/spoil.

Assess what can be done at the back of the grill to improve both stability and security.

Assess the bottom slope and the slabs at the sharp end.

Time & stream diversion permitting. Dave.

Fri 2nd June

The Old Wells Road, TLS

Simon & Dave.

Cleared an amount of gravel etc from the first staging post to further up the passage. Next session can then be digging at the sharp end and tipping in the cleared staging post.

Dave.

A return to WHFS is planned for this evening.

On the agenda:-

Divert the stream into the opposite bank.

Remove the wedged in boulder from the gate.

Check the stability of the mud and rock bank at the back of the grill.

Clear the entrance shaft etc of fallen/thrown in debris/spoil.

Assess what can be done at the back of the grill to improve both stability and security.

Assess the bottom slope and the slabs at the sharp end.

Time & stream diversion permitting.

Who's about?

Cheers,

Dave.

A Return to WHFS

Just pre-empting Dave's report a little from Wed night.....

I have arranged to borrow Speedy's cordless grinder on Saturday (morning) to cut through the chain on the entrance to release the padlock. Mud has a length of suitable chain and I

have a temporary padlock we can fit until Wednesday when Dave will fit a CSCC lock.

Clive

Wed 7th June.

Clive, Mud & Dave.

The stream was diverted into the opposite bank, and a lot of debris blocking the hole into the lower flood sink was also cleared.

The wedged in boulder was hoisted from the gate.

The stability of the mud and rock bank at the back of the grill is okay at present, but will require attention for both security and satabilising.

The padlock on gate chain was found to be jammed probably due to scrotes clouting it with rocks whilst trying to and gain access. Dave eventually managed to break the key off in the padlock which made it clear that the padlock will require cutting off. Despite not being able to open the gate, Mud and Dave were able to squeeze through the gap.

There were some very large rocks dropped down the entrance shaft, one large slab was too heavy to lift but was eventually rolled into Pol Pot, along with all the other rocks and mud that had been thrown or fallen down the entrance. The large slab had either collapsed from the back/top of the grill, or the scrotes had rolled through the gap in the gate, the latter being more likely.

Unfortunately the pulley, rope & skip that we'd stored at the bottom of the entrance shaft was missing/stolen.

4 - 5 frogs/toads were rescued from the bottom of the entrance shaft.

It didn't appear that the scrotes had gone any further than the top of the first slope since all other tools etc were as previously left, probably due to the limit of daylight.

A quick look down at the sharp end:-

No water flowing or sound of from further down. Note that all the stream had been diverted into the opposite bank such that nothing was flowing past WHFS.

The way on is much the same as we have previously encountered. A bedding plane continuing down at the same angle of dip for 6 - 10 metres, approx 30cm high with a couple of small solution channels in the roof. A very slim caver might be able to slither down to have a look at the bottom, or a camera on drain rods might reveal what's next.

On leaving, the large boulder was leant back against the gate to close the gap off as much as practicable. A new chain and padlock to be fitted asap.

Dave did a quick search along the valley as far as the old explosive stores, in case the scrotes had dumped the pulley, rope & skip, but no luck.

Off to the George for the usual.

Dave.

Hobnail - Butts Chamber - 'Muds' Revenge'

ive a sectional 3.2 m ladder which we can take down to have another look at the passage on the west wall of Butts Chamber.

It doesn't sound long enough but having measured out 3.2 m (allowing for the lean of course) on the ground I think it will certainly get past the overhang at least - well worth a go. (with the ends well wrapped up to protect the cave)

Mud is around, Dave is away - any other takers (meet for lunch as usual)?

All best

Clive

Mud and Clive plus Simon later at Thrupe.

With the loan of Speedy's cordless angle grinder we soon cut through the chain and padlock at WHFS. The cave is now temporally protected by a new lightweight padlock until Wednesday when we hope to fit a CSCC lock to the substantial chain provided by Mud

Moving on to Thrupe we spent a fruitless half hour or so struggling to persuade they loaned aluminium sectional ladder to go round the bends between The Dairy and King Cobble Hall.

It was a close run thing but the ladder was just a few inches too long to pass through.

The only way to do it will be to drop it down Perseverance Pot on a rope and then retrieve it from Butts Chamber.

The plan for next Wednesday is to check out the possible ways on in WHFS, start work on securing the top of the entrance grill and fit the CSCC padlock.

All best

Clive

Hobnail Hole

Possibly my shortest Hobnail trip ever , meeting the ladder boys ( Clive and Mud ) as they emerged from below the Coal Cellar with the victim/ladder, following a titanic struggle below the Dairy. A TLS trip to follow. Afterwards took a copy of Descent to Rhina up the road.. Incidentally, apparently the vet has now moved into Lwr Thrupe Farm. Delivering a copy of Descent will be a good excuse to pay a visit.

Cheers  
Simon.

Thrupe Lane Swallet.

Fri 16th Jun 2017.

Clive/Emma/SMK.

Before opening proceedings, Emma and myself paid a visit to Polly and Charles at Lwr Thrupe Farm using the excuse of delivering a copy of Descent. They were very friendly and invited us in to see the newly refurbished interior. It has been transformed from its original state and is going to be very comfortable when finished. One bit of sad news is that Middle Thrupe Farm is on the market as the Groves are moving to a location near Trowbridge. Let's hope for similarly pleasant neighbours.

Anyway, to business. Extremely clement weather meant a return to outdoor dining before kitting up and disappearing into the coolness of TLS. However, the dryness of the Railway series and beyond tends to cause overheating as compared with Hobnail. On reaching the top of the OWR we took out Dave's surveying tape and ran it to the dig face. The measured length was 48.50m as compared to Andy Legg's figure of 50m, so, if his figure is correct we haven't far to go. After a worthwhile session we exited for tiffin on the front lawn.

Simon.



WHFS Update 14th June 2017

Dave, the Voiseys and Clive (Mud on pub support only due to a fire call)

The main focus of the evening was to concentrate the firepower of the 'thin man (and woman) squad', in the shape of Matt & Mandy, towards getting to the bottom of the next visible section of bedding passage.

I could see that the bedding was around a foot high at most and seemed to end after around 25ft at a blockage of bang debris.

Matt and Mandy might well write up the detail as they experienced it first hand, but as there was no sign of a significant enlargement we all agreed to abandon any plans to bang down the slope.

It was felt that the effort involved in dragging the debris back to the surface from that depth was too much as there was no imminent sign of any enlargement.

There is however a 'Plan B'. We have agreed to further push the rift at the base of the now 'middle' slope - just below where the water from the Lower Sink (presumably) enters. The rift here is the most well developed part of the whole cave and contains some fairly thick stal.

The idea is to push through the solid associated with the two joints for a couple of metres to see if there is something we missed when we were, perhaps, sidetracked in following the bedding off to the left.

The existing pile of rocks there will be stacked in the bedding towards the new lower slope (not thrown down the abandoned slope!) and the new spoil removed to the surface or, at the least stockpiled at the base of the upper slope (depending on manpower).

Before heading for the pub the gate was secured with a CSCC lock and the chain fitted tightly. Gavin met us at the car park and took Matt and Mandy for a tour of his cave sites including the abandoned quarry.

The idea is to start work at the bottom next Wed. Dave will be away so manpower might be an issue. Bookings can be taken now....!

Clive

Following on from our ramble round the Windsor Hill area last Sunday (Clive, Tav, Mud & myself), I have dug out the 1966 Mendip Caver report on the area by Keith Barber, Dave Everett and myself.

1. The cave buried in the left hand side of Gavin's lower quarry (and thought by Kev, the digger driver, to be the lost Windsor Hill Cave) is definitely Windlass Pot (ST/6146.4518) explored by the above trio in 1966. The cave is probably close to the

large tree and may be only lightly buried.

2. I will ask Alan G if he can scan the full article (which includes Grade 2 surveys) but in the meantime here are two snippets from the Windlass Pot description:

"In this chamber (*a very small boulder chamber*), to the left (north) a 3' drop leads down to a possible dig through an earth (*and*) boulder floor."

"After 10', however, a further squeeze leads into another choke, from which there are two possible extensions (see plan)."

3. No further work took place at that time as Keith moved to Taunton and I moved to London.

4. It is clear that Windlass Pot is not without interest!

Rich

The Through Trip  
Mon 26th Jun 2017

Clive/Dave/Emma/Rich/Smk.

At last, after several postponements, the great through trip got under way. Probably the most complicated journey ever between 2 points 50ft apart ! With all safely down the entrance pitch we worked our way down the distinctly unfamiliar ferret run. I had forgotten over the years how narrow this is and how vertical it becomes the deeper you go. After the final 20ft drop and a further climb down, a small chamber announced our arrival at the approach to Perseverance pot. A scramble down and before us was the welcoming sight of the original 43 yr old belay bar! It seemed none the worse for wear and surprisingly took the weight of the expedition members as they descended the 60ft Perseverance Pot, accompanied by the comforting clink of electron.

However, surprisingly we had been beaten to the bottom by a mole, obviously attempting a depth record. Alas it hadn't lived to tell the tale. Dve then abseiled down behind us. Cowsh crawl seemed positively spacious and uncontaminated compared with its original state. (Possibly a reflection on the state of dairy farming) This was the point we crossed from dry to wet cave over the top of Bridge rift and up the steep climb into Butts chamber. Time for a break for a group photo before committing 'Molie' to the deep. Off again up the terrible 'North' wall of the chamber and through the pleasantly wet bung hole into the Waiting Room and the start of Hobnail Hole. We were now on more familiar ground as the climb back to the surface began. Up the short King Cobble pitch through the Dairy. and after the final ascent the welcome sight of daylight.

An enjoyable time was had by all. Special thanks to Dave, Emma and Clive for dropping down TLS again to recover the tackle.

An excellent celebratory tea followed outside the Ferret shed with an impressive selection of cakes. We are fast approaching the culinary heights attained at Holme Close!

Simon.

WHFS Wed 28th June

Mud, Spike and Clive

The first actual 'digging' session at WHFS since we were forced out by the major storm last November (?) .....

At the end Mud and Spike moved all the stacked rock debris from around the base of the 'main' rift and stacked it in the approach to the final (now abandoned) bedding slope, which Matt and Mandy had checked out during the previous session.

Clive set to and drilled a 1m and a 0.5m hole in the large block in the continuation of the main rift - the idea being just to see if this fairly major development has finally pinched out or whether they may be more to it than meets the eye. There is a low continuation of the open bedding plane to the right and a little lower with a small rift/joint in its roof so its not completely barren solid rock!

Hopes are not high for any promising signs but two or three bangs should seal the dig's fate one way or another!

Clive

Sat 1st July

Simon, Dave, Clive & Emma.

TLS

Simon & Dave headed down TLS for another session in the OWR. Several skips of spoil were transferred further up the passage to create space for spoil from the next session at the sharp end.

The recent comparison of the measured length of accessible passage to the survey data gave a distance from the dig face to the end to be approximately 1.5m (+/-??). Therefore after spoil shifting Dave went down head first to have a closer look where there is a definite opening in the roof to the right hand side. Poking the 3ft long handle of the hoe revealed open air space above, there is also a significant increase to gradient of the floor and a narrowing of the passage. This seems to be a very strong indication that the blank wall at the end of the OWR is very close. There is still a far amount of spoil to remove before access can be gained to the ramp off up to the right that leads to Bone Aven and the Great Western Rift. It is envisaged that the spoil won't need to be hauled very far up the OWR before it can be taken back down and through to the Great Western Rift once access is regained.

Dave.

Ps. Emma & Clive's Report for Hobnail to follow :-)

Hobnail Report Sat 1st July 2017 or - the Butts Chamber Mystery Feature

Emma and Clive

Armed with two Peli cases containing camera and 12v spotlight, plus Dave's 3m of tent pole we set off with two aims in mind.

The main one was to get some decent close-up pictures of the mysterious light coloured

patches high on the east wall of Butts Chamber which may or may not be an indication of development on that side of the fault - something we haven't previously come across.

The other aim was to double check the possibility of getting 3m scaffold poles down Hobnail (if at all possible rather than taking the Perseverance route) to build a maypole up to the aforesaid feature if it looked like it might be a prelude to a passage. Dave's poles were in fact a few inches short of the magic 3m so this had to be checked.

Mud had previously done this test and, I have to admit, I had found it hard to believe that 3m of pole would go through to the head of Black Pot, let alone to the head of King Cobble Pitch and round the bends associated with Cararra Crawl. Needless to say - they did! ("I told you so!" says Mud!)

In fact the full 3m of scaffold pole won't make it round the first bend of the crawl - the solution will be to remove around 8 inches of badly broken aragonite from the corner with hammer and chisel - it should then go through.

In Butts we set up the camera and tripod at the start of the crawl to the lower cave where there is a good view of Butts. There is only one spot, close to the roof, where you can get a view of the two strange white features on the far wall (first spotted by Mud on an early concreting session on the 'Dodgy Bridge').

Using the spotlight several shots were taken finishing with some taken by the light of Emma Scurion. The most representative ones are at:

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/7wjvjgllucoixg3/AACked\\_HLabh8\\_GY2hELRAvaa?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/7wjvjgllucoixg3/AACked_HLabh8_GY2hELRAvaa?dl=0)

Note that the files are big to keep as much detail as possible.....

The orange colour on some is due to the spotlight and its battery being somewhat down. The natural looking ones are of course taken by the light of the Scurion.

What comes across is the texture of the light coloured rock faces - they look crystalline to me with vertical streaks where perhaps mineral rich water has trickled down the faces.

Its still not possible to really make out whether there is enterable passage there - its physically not possible to get into a position to see properly. Ironically the best view is likely to be from Mud's Revenge which is probably about the same height and directly opposite. Maybe we need to get up there first?

My feeling is its a mystery we need to solve - lets get a shorter maypole up to Mud's Revenge so we can look at that and also reevaluate the possibilities of the opposite wall from there.

At least we know we can get 3m poles through Hobnail for sure.

Whilst in Butts we took the spotlight to the bottom of the chamber and shone it up the aven in the roof to get our first ever view of the top. Beyond the big boulder thats jammed across the rift the aven seems to go up for about 70-80ft to a bit of a flat roof (as far as one can make

out).

A big surprise though was a previously unnoticed parallel aven going up directly above the 'Dodgy Bridge' area. It appeared several feet wide, was well sculpted by falling water (now dry) and looked as though it might well connect, at the top, to the one next door. Its height looked around 50-60ft.

A very interesting little trip - a lot accomplished!

All best

Clive

WHFS Wed 5th July

Clive, Mud, Spike & Dave.

Gavin's digger almost back in service at Rock Farm.

WHFS:-

Spoil stacked in the approach to the final bedding plane slope, leaving enough space to retain access to the slope.

Mud poked a camera on a stick into the bedding plane to the right of where we're digging at the bottom of the current slope. It appears that it might open up a little. A number of shot holes drilled and banded.

On the surface, a temporary stemple was fitted to allow a cardboard template to be cut such that a sheet of plywood shuttering can be cut and fitted before filling/satabilising the back slope just below the top of the grill.

Dave.

WHFS Wed 28th June 2017 (belated report)

A bit academic but for the sake of completeness....

Mud, Spike and Clive

A session evaluating whether to carry on down the 'main' rift or not culminating in a 75cm long hole in the continuation of the rift drilled and banded.

All best

Clive

WHFS Wed 12th July 2017

Mud, Spike and Clive

Just a session clearing last weeks debris (stacking space now filled and the route to the lowest slope now blocked)

Three holes drilled and fired - 0.75m, 0.5m and 0.25m. The blast was clearly felt at the entrance of the lower sink as well (not surprising).

Access to the adjacent and lower section of bedding passage on the right should be achieved next week along with seeing, what if any, continuation of the 'main rift' exists.

Could be the make or break session!

A good pre-dig chat with Gavin occurred as well - his digger is now repaired and will return to the fray soon around the 'rifts' behind his barn.

All best

Clive

TLS/Windsor Hill - Sat 15th July 2017

Simon, Rich & Clive

Two Jeep loads of large rocks transported back to Thrupe for the flood prevention effort. These are now stacked by the Ferret Shed ready to be moved onto the streambed.

Gavin's digger now back in action although he has, as a result, buried most of his most promising looking rift! (temporarily though I'm sure!)

A big gathering was taking place at Toby's no doubt to mark their imminent departure to Italy.

All best

Clive

WHFS - Wed 19th July 2017

Mud, Spike and Clive

Fully expecting this to be a 'make or break' session we went armed with drill, bang and an endoscope to probe ahead.

Last weeks bang hadn't produced a massive spoil heap and after much hammering and chiselling five completely full skips were stacked up half way up the main slope (either for ultimate removal or abandonment - no didn't mean that really!)

We were left with a slightly better view into the continuation of the bedding off to the right and down and the hint of a small rift straight on down.

The endoscope was brought into play - it has a 10m cable, built in (weak) light source and transmits pictures via wifi to a phone or tablet. It was very difficult to work out orientation looking at the pictures plus the lighting was very poor and the focus is very soft beyond a few inches.

As a result we couldn't come to a firm conclusion - but it has to be said it doesn't look at all promising.

It was unanimously agreed that one last bang in the remaining (very stubborn) pillar would allow us to see if there was anything there or not before finally bringing the dig to a close.

Presumably next Wed.....

All best

Clive

Sat 22nd Jul 2017. OWR

Dave/Mud/Smk.

After lunch in the Ferret shed with Emma, the above 3 descended TLS to continue the siege of the Old Wells Rd. To start with, 3 bags of spoil were placed across the steeply falling approach to form a dam. A large quantity of material was then Gisborned out and tipped behind this. (For the purist it must be pointed out that these bags are strictly a temporary measure until we pass the choke.) This system worked well and by close of play significant progress had been made. The hoped for breakthrough was not achieved today but cannot be too far away. All then examined the working face before leaving. My extraction feet-first from the end was unfortunately one of the less dignified episodes of my caving career but was fortunately witnessed only by Dave and Mud, who have been sworn to secrecy! After this our exit was uneventful and Clive was on hand to lifeline us up the entrance shaft. Dave's birthday was celebrated with tea and cakes to round off the proceedings.

Simon.

Hobnail Hole Friday 28th July 2017

Emma, Simon and Clive

An expedition to try to get useful video of the mysterious 'white' ledge 35ft up on the east wall of Butts Chamber.

With Duncan's GoPro camera on loan a great deal of tests were done in the garden with Dave's 6m of tent poles and 12m of B & Q plastic/metal garden canes to see how feasible it would be to get the camera up to the ledge. The estimated height was 35ft.

Various combinations of poles with and without camera and led light were tried. It soon became obvious that there would be far too much torque to raise the camera/light combo above 25ft and even that was causing rods to bend and break.

In the end with just the camera in its housing 25ft would perhaps be possible, although even then the pole would have to be eased up as near to vertical as possible to avoid major bending of the pole.

Mud had estimated the ledge to be 35ft up and we went underground not expecting, realistically, to even attempt to get the camera there just have another go at filming Mud's Revenge which I was confident we could achieve.

It soon became apparent that if the attempt was made from the boulder pile in the middle of the chamber rather than from the base of the east wall then a shorter pole might reach - which in a 'dry' test without the camera it duly did. (around 25ft)

Incidentally there was a lot of water falling from the main aven despite low water levels in the surface stream.

The camera was rigged and the pole eased up at an angle, with the help of Emma and Simon positioned down the slope towards Bridge Rift, and then vertically up towards the ledge. Contact with the wall was made which helped the guiding of the camera to a good position with the help of Emma 'spotting' from the start of the Marble Crawl.

We used just Emma's Scurrion as a light source and rotated and twisted the camera to get a much coverage as possible. Camera and pole retrieved safely and the operation repeated with a much shorter pole for Mud's Revenge.

The poles were left in the cave in case a repeat performance is needed.

It turned out, after all that, that the video of the East Wall stopped recording just before it got level with the white ledge and whilst it was looking out over the chamber! So we will need to have another go....

The video of Muds Revenge though turned out well and can be seen at <https://youtu.be/lbrTS6IYK1A>

The phreatic tunnel looks to be about 1 foot across at the top widening at floor level with stream debris in situ. The roof looks well scalloped as well. An enticing dark space (or just shadow?) appears beyond....

Clive

OWR, TLS Fri 4th Aug.

Ray Deasy & Dave.

On arriving at TLS there was no stream reaching as far as the TLS gate, since large sink holes have appeared in the old shaft dig just back from the entrance. The vertical face of a



substantial timber, possibly a railway sleeper, is now visible in the North face of the shaft. The rock silt trap about 6m back from the entrance has significantly slumped down by perhaps 0.5m or so.

The now dry debris was cleared from the TLS gate and the still half submerged grill in the Hobnail channel was extracted, cleared and refitted. The dam was reinstated to divert all the stream into Hobnail.

Whilst climbing down the entrance shaft of TLS it was noted that a large cavity had opened up looking North into the rift towards the old shaft dig but above the piece of green corrugated steel that has been visible for a few years. Obviously more of the rift below the stream bed back from the entrance is being washed out.

Plaster Passage had taken a stream during the high water levels last week despite the Ferret Run showing no signs of having backed up. This is due to the water entering either the gated entrance or further back along the stream bed, following the dip of the limestone and tracking along the wall then spouting/deflecting into Plaster Passage.

A significant amount of shingle and gravel has been washed into the wallow just before Bamboo Aven, some of this we dragged through and pushed along Poltergeist Passage. Bleak Hall - If I recall, when we abandoned digging at the bottom we hadn't gone out of sight from the entry point of Bleak Hall, probably about 6m down dip. This has now been flushed out exposing a further 6m of leveling flat out passage.

At the bottom of OWR more spoil was ferried back behind the spoil bag dam and finally buckets were stacked full of spoil awaiting more bags for another dam. The space at the bottom now allows easier access to be able to look up the draughting void under the right hand wall.

On exiting the cave, the dam was installed to divert the stream away from Hobnail and down TLS ready for tomorrow's Hobnail trip.

Dave.

TLS trip Sunday 6th Aug

Ray Deasy, Matt, Mandy & I + 5 Chelsea members took a trip down the Marble Streamway via Hobnail Hole today. At Atlas Pot 2 of the Chelsea members headed back out whilst the remaining 7 of us headed on down Ledge Pitch and Slither Pot.

A few observations from the trip:-

The stream sinking in the old abandoned/filled shaft just before the entrance of TLS could be heard down the entrance and therefore it was flowing down the Ferret Run and on down Perseverance and through Cowsh Crawl. Confirmed by visiting Cowsh Crawl from Butts' Chamber side.

The shower from the roof of Butts' Chamber seemed lighter than on previous visits.

Bypass Aven had a heavy shower, viewed from Marble Streamway (as Spike had encountered on a previous visit). Other occasions when I've been there it has been relatively shower free, so it would seem that this is an intermittent flow that cascades down Bypass Aven.

The steeply descending passage and two short climbs between the ledge and Slither Pot had a thick layer of undisturbed fine mud deposit and a thin coating on the walls. The walls

of Slither Pot itself were also completely coated in a layer of mud with a very even spread of stream debris stuck to the mud. It would appear that Slither Pot may have backed right up to the ledge and the mud settled out as the level went down. This implies that either the flat out crawl at the bottom that connects to the Lower Atlas Streamway has at some stage become blocked or just overwhelmed by the flow, or both Atlas Pot & Slither Pot flooded up sometime in the past few years.

The 5m climb from the Lower Atlas Streamway to the bottom of Atlas pot was extremely aqueous, not too surprising.

Dave.

Dear Team

I fear to waste your time, but, I do have enough humble optimism to inform you of the fun experienced at Considines Cave, Doolin.

Since last September work has progressed three times a week, consuming some 800 man hours, principally by Cheg Chester, Tony Boycott, Jim Warny and Meself.

This minor rift sink, swallowing two very small intermittent streams, is located on the south side of the lower Coolagh Valley at around the four hundred foot contour, therefore above the conjectured line of drainage of the suspected lower reaches of the Coolagh River.

The elongated open rift, at four metres deep, one metre wide, extends over some twelve metres on a north/south axis.

The original four metre deep rift was investigated in the early 80s by the UBSS, who dropped down a confined fifteen metre pot to a choke.

A chance remark led PC to this site on inspection it had potential but only if dug straight down ignoring the original pot.

The sinking of the new shaft meant shoring the metre wide south side with timber, (telegraph poles) to a depth of fourteen metres, whilst the north side was predominantly ginged.

All spoil is sent to surface by hand via a 2:1 system.

At 15m the walls began to narrow significantly; pessimism began to creep into the shadows.

The confines of the shaft meant also that anything falling during hauling could severely impact on old friendships.

Hauling was therefore split in two, firstly from the bottom to fourteen metres, where a narrow platform was constructed, thence to the surface once the digger has ascended to safety.

At twenty metres the shaft cross section is one metre by 0.3m, (The Pinch), this is where a long suspected capstone was found; a very long story follows here.

At 23.3 metres the dimensions have increased, two metres long by 0.7m wide.

The rate of enlargement strongly suggests by 25 metres the width will increase to one metre.

The rate of excavation has significantly increased since -14m as virtually no shoring work has need taken place.

The confined shaft is descended via short lengths of 12mm rebar inserted into holes as ladder rungs, since Saturday this allows full access to the bottom from the -14m platform, aka "The Plank". The 175mm lengths of rebar will all be removed on completion of the site.

It appears that other than the 35m open pot of Poulelva this is presently the second deepest, from surface, in the Republic.

The landowner repeatedly urged the Team on to greater depths....

Love, Light and Peace

O'Shortarse

Hobnail/TLS - Sat 5th Aug 2017

Emma, Mud and Clive

A 'Take 2' on the Butts Chamber video attempt. The camera went aloft with a small led torch attached this time and happily the recording went without a hitch.

On review on the pc the results were inconclusive though. I will have to carefully compare what I am seeing with the still pictures, taken previously, to get a good idea of what is exactly what (although I do know where the camera was facing throughout the shot).

My feeling is that I will probably have to have another go with the camera maybe tilted up a little rather than being at 90degrees to the support pole.

Clive

WHFS - Wed 9th Aug 2017 - Decision Made!

Mud, Ray Deasy and Clive

A most impressive session of 'solid' rock-wrangling by Ray and then Mud enabled us to get a clear view along the continuation of the rift.

The result, it has to be said, was not encouraging! The bedding continues on either side, just

a few inches high, and seems to level out little a few feet further down.

The continuation of the rift itself carries on at 3-4inches wide for a couple of feet before narrowing again and choking. It was a dismal scene!

As the bedding is of no interest, it being very low and having got around another 20ft or so deeper down the third slope with no sign of it getting larger, and the rift evidently all but petering out it was decided to finally call it quits on the dig.

One small point of interest was that there was a surface stream flowing into the lower sink but no water was present in the dig and there was no sign of there having been any during the recent storms.

It remains for us to pull out the digging ropes and tools and, at Dave's suggestion, reopen the way into the third slope and move some of the rock pile into the abandoned rift. This should help any major flood scenario and any future digging effort.

Whilst in the cave I managed a few pictures of the second slope and the bitter end with Duncan's GoPro. (see attached)

I won't be at TLS/Hobnail on Saturday, it being the 50th anniversary (exactly) of the breakthrough into Sludge Pit and the original digging team (minus John Cornwell....) will be having a reunion there!

All best

Clive

Butts Chamber High Altitude Video Attempt - Take 3!

Emma, Mud, Simon and Clive. Rich on tea-time duty. (Rich Tea Biscuits?)

Very pleased to report that at last we succeeded in our attempts to get some close-up views into the strange bedding feature high on the East Wall of Butts Chamber.

I've attached some relevant frame grabs here but careful viewing of the videos gives a better 'feel' for what we are looking at - its easier to get some idea of depth from the shadows as the camera moves.

It does look as though there is something there - a dark space does appear to exist on the right hand side of the slot at around 5mins 15 secs in on the video. (It could be shadow but I don't think so).

Definitely worth persevering with the maypole idea to get an eyeball-eye view of it all.

The video is at:

<https://youtu.be/SO5JcMHmXfc>

We also put the camera up the newly noticed 'second' aven in the roof - just to the west of the main one. It does indeed look as though there may be a connection at the top with the main aven plus possibly some other holes going off. This one is definitely only for the serious 'bolter'!

Some frame grabs of that also attached and the video is at:

<https://youtu.be/vw6TMEWuIGE>

I now have (courtesy of Tony Audsley) a further 2m aluminium scaffold tube which when added to the 3m one I have from Nigel Taylor will allow us to get to Mud's Revenge (we have measured the height accurately now). Hopefully we can have a go at this next Saturday.

My thanks to Duncan for the loan of his 'Go Pro' kit for this project.....

After the video work we all had a crawl under the boulders at the head of Bridge Rift to view the rift below and the dramatic fall of water - especially so when supplemented by Duncan's video light.

I do hope to get some pictures of this under high water conditions at some point.

On Wednesday its a return to WHFS to remove the digging gear and hopefully get some concrete in to seal the top of the grill.

Clive

WHFS Wed 23rd Aug

Clive, Mud, Ray D & Dave.

An inspection of the gap behind the grill and the sheet of wood blocking the bottom of the entrance indicated that WHFS had again been visited without the use of a key, whilst the padlock and chain appeared untouched.

The pre cut plywood sacrificial former was trimmed to fit to against the grill and stemple. Loose material (mud/rocks) were cleared from the back wall and the area cleaned to improve adhesion of cement. A length of steel rod was bent and fitted to reinforce the concrete/rock plug that was to follow. By the end of play the rock/concrete plug had been 2/3's completed making access beyond the grill extremely unlikely, with probably only one more session required to complete.

Whilst the the surface work was ongoing, Ray went down to the dig face to do some spoil relocating and clear out most of the digging tools etc. A couple of ropes, pulley, bang wire and buckets still to be cleared. Removed kit will be relocated to the Ferret Shed.

A late finish, but still plenty of time for the usual in the George.

Dave.

TLS Report (belated) - Sat 26th

Simon, Dave, Mud, Ray & Clive

After a lot of planning we finally managed to get enough aluminium scaffold pole, clips etc together to attempt to reach the infamous 'Mud's Revenge'....

All went well until we found we couldn't get the 3m scaffold pole around the bend in Carrara Crawl - the 'broken' aragonite on the right hand corner proved to be far less broken than we thought!

As a result all the kit, with the exception of the 3m pole, was left at the top of Butts Chamber and the team retired to lick its wounds over tea!

The plan now is to put a small bang on the corner (possibly tonight, Wed) in preparation for another attempt on Sat.

All best

Clive

TLS Report Wed 30th Aug 2017

Spike and Clive - quick trip to Carrara Crawl to bang the corner.

All should be clear for a trip on Sat to erect the maypole up to Mud's Revenge. Takers?

All best

Clive

Hobnail Hole, Sat 2nd Sept.

Clive, Simon, Mud & Dave.

Another attempt to negotiate Carrere Crawl with the last section of maypole.

The previous session's bang had done a good job of taking out more of the right hand corner, a bit of chiseling removed a few more chunks of shattered rock etc. The 10ft scaffold pole was maneuvered into position, but alas it still wasn't going to fit round. More chiseling, this time with the SDS drill and still the pole wouldn't fit. With plenty of time in hand Mud vigorously attacked the left hand wall and finally with a lot of jiggling, twisting and flexing

of the pole, it made it round the bend and into the waiting room with much relief all round.

All the kit was then ferried down into Butts' Chamber. Although now running a little late it was agreed we should proceed with project maypole since holidays and Hidden Earth etc would mean the next opportunity wouldn't be until Oct.

The maypole was quickly assemble using just three of the sections with two stabalising guy lines, lifeline and ladder attached to the top. The maypole was then hoisted into position against the right hand wall (looking down Butts'), the guys tied off to suitable rock anchors and was soon ready to be climbed. Mud climbed up to Mud's Revenge to view the phreatic passage as seen in the previous photos taken using a 20ft selfi stick. Afterwards Dave also then climbed up to confirm Mud's report. The phreatic passage less than 0.5m wide but narrowing and sloping down with a horizontal infill of stream debris that after approximately 3m meets the roof of the passage. The passage has formed above a narrow bedding plane that continues either side of the passage and also right round Butts' Chamber, the bedding plain continues in the left hand wall of Butts' Chamber. Butts' Chamber has probably intersected the earlier bedding plane development. After some photos were taken, the maypole was redeployed to the left hand wall to look at the bedding plane which appeared, when viewed from Mud's revenge, to be more spacious. Dave was able to climb through a shower and step off above the top of the maypole to gain a better look at the bedding plane. This too very quickly closed down to perhaps 10cm. From either of the two vantage points it wasn't possible to view the white looking rock higher up the bedding plane in the left hand wall. A return visit will be required using all four (or perhaps longer) sections of the maypole. A few more photos and time to dismantle the maypole. Ropes and rigging removed and maypole left in Butts' Chamber. A quick overdue exit with a fair amount of kit to find Rich on standby at the surface awaiting our return.

Maypole details:-

Total of four sections (although only three used today) comprising:-

1 aluminium 10ft

1 aluminium 6ft

2 galv steel 4.5ft

Connectors:-

2 external sleeve clamps

1 internal clamp

Note that the internal connector will only fit the 2 thicker walled aluminium poles, and even then allows the joint to bend unlike the more secure external clamps.

Head gear:-

Approx 6 inches from the top of the 10ft aluminium section an M10 bolt passes right through 10mm holes drilled through the pole. The bolt also passes through the end link of a 12inch length of substantial chain that has been fed down the end of the tube. The end of the chain hangs out of the tube and allows the exposed links to used as anchor points for the ladder and lifeline. Two pairs of chain links are then bolted under the head and nut of the M10 bolt (2 connected links on either side of the pole) which provide the two anchor points for the two guy lines.

Dave.

Ps. does anyone have an external, inline, sleeve type scaffold clamp they no longer require?

Windsor Hill 'Barn' Caves - 9th Sept 2017

Simon & Clive

Just a visit to Gavin for a 'catch-up' re his situation and the caves. (No visiting group at TLS by the way).

He has uncovered a couple more interesting looking rifts just to the east of the main area of interest.

Until he has obtained the planning permission for the building work he, understandably, would rather we do no work on the 'main' site as its so visible from the lane.

He is very happy though for us to work behind the building, out of sight, and I've arranged (weather permitting) that some of us will be there on Wednesday evening to do initial clearing and 'evaluation' on the various small open rifts there.

He has also agreed to probably come to the pub as well!

All best

Clive

Rock House Barn Cave - Sat 23.9.17

Rich, John and Emma, Simon and Clive

A good session utilising the Plug 'n Feathers to deal with a couple of large rocks in particular.

Rich had a theory that our highly-prized draught may just be a circulation feature from the nearby open joint (only a metre away)

To this end some highly scented deodorant was squirted into said feature and its rapid appearance in the dig noted.

However Rich noted later that the draught was emanating from a narrow rift in the floor ahead.

Under the main pile of jammed boulders there is a space about a metre wide and a foot high (mixing metaphors here) with apparently a bedding floor on the right sloping down to the left into a mud floor. This is under an obvious triangular boulder which we would like to remove. It doesn't appear to be supporting anything but if removed in the short term would not be able to stop any movement of the rocks above which would then collapse the pile completely.



The plan now is to install a steel beam to support the upper boulders to enable us to remove the triangular one and give access to the area beneath. Initial work on this is planned for Wednesday after a final cementing session above the gate at WHFS and removal of the last of the digging gear.

I won't be out on Wed. Next weekend is Hidden Earth so its unlikely much will be done then.....

Pictures attached of the dig as of 23rd Sept.

All best

Clive

Hobnail/TLS Tourist Trip - Sun 24th Sept 2017

Gavin Mayall (Rock House Farm), Peter Gordon (The George at Croscombe), Spike, Dave, Duncan, Mud, Emma and John Gisborne and Clive.

Having first offered a Thrupe trip to Peter about a year ago(!) we finally got round to making it happen this weekend accompanied by Gavin from Windsor Hill.

The idea was a Hobnail into TLS trip with a look at Bridge Rift and a peer down Atlas Pot.

Peter had caved before (TLS about 10 years back) but Gavin was a complete newbie. At around 6ft 8in (!) he was going to be a problem to kit out but both he and Peter were supplied by Dave and the MNRC.

A fairly raucous picnic lunch and briefing was enjoyed and the descent was uneventful - Gavin making it successfully round the bends above King Cobble Hall (he seemed to be able to almost concertina himself up in the process!)

At Bridge Rift Spike realised a wish to check out a possible lead under the boulders (no doubt a separate report will be forthcoming) and the obligatory group picture taken after in Butts Chamber. (see attached)

On to the Marble Streamway with the Gisbornes being led by Dave through the Bypass route avoiding the tight squeeze into the Streamway.

Both Bypass Aven and the Showerbath had a heavy downpour of spray to contend with although the Marble Streamway itself was low-ish.

All had a good look at Atlas (guests suitably impressed) before a gentle return to the surface and 'tea on the lawn'.

Following Peter's email on Monday Gavin sent this message via text....

< Big thanks for organising yesterday and looking after us. I really enjoyed it, I don't think

I'll be going down every weekend but now totally get it. I do still think you're all totally mad though !! But in the nicest possible way of course. Thanks again see you soon cheers Gavin>

Wed 27th Sept - Rock House Barn Cave.

Gavin & Dave.

A little light on diggers but Gavin was keen to assist in hauling buckets. More mud and loose infill was cleared from between the boulders to try and give a clearer view of what might lay ahead and which boulders may require removing or supporting etc. Several buckets later:

The now more clearly visible slope ahead was probed with a 6ft bamboo cane. The slope appears to be solid bedrock parallel to the cliff face and sloping up/back at about 45 degs. To the right is fairly choked with boulders. The lower huge monolithic boulder bottom right that points out towards the entrance is lying at approx 30 degs, and is unsupported for approx 6ft of its length. Two slices of about 3 - 4 inches thick had become detached from the underside of the monolithic boulder. A gentle prod and tap with a crow bar revealed that these two slices moved easily and were therefore cracked across their width somewhere down their length. A suitably positioned crowbar and a length of rope attached enabled these two slices to be dropped safely to the floor with very little effort. This was done last just before leaving in case anything else decided to follow the slices to the floor. The precaution proved unnecessary due to the tiny amount of force required to drop the slabs.

Note that on the front edge of the large step just down in the entrance there is a loose rock (approx 2ft x 6in x 6in) vertically positioned but is not secure. This is the obvious place to step onto, but removing it might leave the large step/slope less secure.

Dave.

Ps. Plan for Wed 4th Oct - finish off cementing top of grill on WHFS & removing the last of the digging kit.

Time permitting a further assessment of Rock House Barn Cave.

WHFS Wed 4th Oct

Rich, Clive, Mud (left before started due to work call out) & Dave.

Cementing in rocks at the back/top of the entrance grill completed.

The last four very heavy over flowing skips of spoil stock piled approx 20ft down the second slope were hauled up and deposited at the bottom of the first slope. The remaining digging paraphernalia (bang wire, lump hammer, pulley, ropes, skips and rubbish etc) was removed. The conveyor belt matting along with a couple of sheets of steel and particle board was used to block/secure the bottom of the entrance shaft to prevent rocks etc from being tumbled down the first slope.

Activities now completed at WHFS.

A look at Rock House Barn Cave then followed.

A couple or three large rocks removed from entrance. Draught very strong from the right.

There is also a large dark coloured stal looking boss lying on its side just out of reach down

to the right. Seems unlikely to be calcite due to its size (approx 400mm high and 200mm base dia). Could it be water worn limestone?

Clive & Dave finished with the usual in the George.

Dave.

SAT 7 OCTOBER

Clive & Rich

Started by paving some of the water-filled ruts outside the dig entrance with flat rocks. After measuring for various steel supports, the floor area was cleaned up, and the north face of the shaft was then carefully scraped back to reveal the protruding rocks. One large block was rather precariously poised but as it was holding back much of the loose material, it was decided to wedge it in situ. Large rocks were lowered and hammered into either side, followed by smaller rock wedges. This matrix will be washed down and packed with concrete next Weds, providing a safe base for the eventual north retaining wall.

Several tiny sandstone cobbles were found in today's fill, showing that a Beacon Hill stream once flowed into the dig. An attempt was made to pull out what CN thought might be an old stal boss lying in a void several feet ahead. It was lassoed but wouldn't budge. I suspect it is part of a much larger rock. Draught still present from the void where the "boss" lies.

CN will be posting photos later.

RW

Rock House Barn Cave

Wed 11th Oct

Clive, Spike, Rich & Dave.

A 2.7m ladder now gives easy access down the entrance "pitch" :-)

The lower stemple was offered up and the pocket in left hand wall enlarged. Using a core drill (courtesy of Gavin) a 55mm + dia hole was drilled in the right hand wall. Still not possible to fit the lower stemple, so revised plan for next visit.

Pilot holes drilled in both walls for upper adjustable stemple, this was fitted but requires the holes enlarging next visit.

Sat 14th Oct

Clive, Rich, Simon & Dave.

Holes enlarged and upper stemple refitted.

The lower stemple consisting of a scaffold pole with an OD of 50mm slid inside a 50mm ID tube to make a telescope stemple. This was easily fitted and a couple of wooden wedges to

secure between the the stemple and rock slab above.

A couple of the large slabs below the stemples were reduced/split with plug and feathers. Rocks & slabs were also cemented into place to start to secure and build up the North wall.

Dave.

Rock House Barn Cave Wed 18th Oct/Sat 21st Oct

Wednesday - Spike, Dave, Mud, Rich and Clive

Some 'monumental' boulders were lifted bodily from the end by Spike and 'handed' to the surface team!

Two boulders split by P & Fs and removed and a further section added to the top of the threshold wall by Rich.

Just before finishing a large section of the right hand wall, just below the entrance was noticed by Mud to be loose! In fact it is a large section of in situ bedrock with a waterworn joint behind.

Suitable treatment by Rich with jammed rocks and concrete solved the problem.

Saturday - Dave, Rich, Simon and Clive

Dave had removed some boulders in an early session before the arrival of the rest of the team.

More necessary building work completed on the threshold wall and much concrete and jammed rocks applied to the pile of rocks at the back on the left (see attached pictures before application of the concrete).

The way on appears to be to the right of the rift and a set of large rocks were slowly removed from there by Dave and Simon. Further widening of the access with P & Fs will be done on Wednesday next.

Work finished with the onset of the expected heavy rain.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Barn Cave - Wed 25th Oct

Rich, Dave, Mud & Clive

Some effort went into reducing the size of a slab restricting access to the back of the dig - 8 Plug 'n Feather holes followed by some deft sledgehammer work by Mud eventually achieved the desired result.

More height was added to the concrete/stone retaining wall at the entrance and further stabilisation added to the stacked 'dinner-plates' holding up the roof.

This is all now completed for the time being and a proper digging session is planned for Saturday to further probe at the back of the dig. There is mud at least to remove and further investigation of an open phreatic feature under what we had previously thought to be a solid wall.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Barn Cave - 25/10/17

Clive, Rich, Simon, Spike

Windy day – very draughty in the cave. Not 100% sure if it's circulation in the rifts near the entrance, or from elsewhere.

Initially set to at the mud-filled phreatic tube at the back, heading into the cliff face. Working here is a bit cramped, so an amount of clearing was done below the archway into the adjacent parallel rift on the RHS (as you look in to the entrance). This coupled with some clearing under the front of one of the pile of stacked plates allowed a digging bucket to be slid through to the digger without either getting in each other's way. More clearance of the mud showed there to be an increasing amount of solid rock present, reducing the dimensions of the choked way on to below human-sized. Probably still worth getting the mud out as this may be a temporary constriction and this is clearly a waterworn route, with a small airspace (1" diameter) over the top of the mud fill.

The adjacent rift then received a small amount of attention, before being declared as promising by RW. One large boulder removed, but in order to facilitate spoil removal, an unfortunately placed protuberance required modification by CN and his feathered plugs.

After the tea break CN set to with the drill while the rest of the team investigated an alternative proposition a few metres west along the cliff face. After some not inconsiderable boulder-wrangling, another pair of open rifts were discovered with rocks seemingly falling a reasonable distance (~10s of tumbling) and clear sight approximately 10ft into the cliff. Access to both of these rifts is impeded by a trio of boulders which could do with being moved by some machinery. This will then give us an idea as to whether we can go under the boulder at the face, or if that needs (more delicate) removal.

RN returned to help remove the final corner of CN's plugged & feathered protuberance, which yielded largely to some hammer & chiselling, but also caused the dislodging of a large flat slab above. This now forms a nice floor over which a digging bucket can be slid to aid spoil removal from either of the targets ahead.

Wednesday should hopefully see progress on both fronts.

Spike

Rock House Farm Barn Cave 4(!) - Tues 31st Oct 2017

The start of a 'second front' at the Rock House site.....

Gavin Mayall & Clive

Following inspection by Rich and Spike, last Saturday, of the main rifts discovered by Gavin during his excavation work early in the year it was decided that now would be a good time to give them some attention. This follows on from Gavins' request that we not push them until his planning permission issues were nearer being resolved and was the reason we opened up the Barn Cave 3 site (apart from the fact it was very promising!)

We spent around 4 hours on Tues with the big excavator and the two dump trucks and moved tons of rock and mud away from the cliff face. Most of this was 'dumped' material from the track work. The area around the two rifts was cleared and lowered and some mega rocks put into place as retaining walls to hold back the trackway and to protect the entrance. There is scope there now for steps down from the track etc to be added as rock becomes available.

As can be seen from the pictures there are two main parallel rifts, complete with some flowstone, stal curtain and even some poor quality helictites. The right hand one goes in for around 10ft to a right-angled bend and appears around 18in wide at that point. A lower section of the rift visible close to the entrance drops steeply and appears a foot or so wide. No draught.

To push this requires at least part of the large block between the two rifts removing. It will be partly supporting a large roof slab so care will be needed there. Having considered the possible methods of removal (including bang, but this is not a good option) I am looking at larger Plug n Feathers and Gavin is offering a large Bosch electric breaker. With the imminent arrival of his electricity supply this becomes a good option.

Active digging this evening (Wed) will be still be in Barn Cave 3 where access at the end has been improved (still needs diggers shorter than me!)

Clive

Rock House Barn Cave 3 & 4 - Wed 1st Nov

A bumper turnout - Rich, Spike, Emma, Tony L., Mud, Gavin & Clive

Both sites were pushed on this occasion - Spike & Mud working hard in '3' in a particularly awkward, constricted corner at the bottom where there is a view along a rift for around 20ft to the west. A cross-rift just above the constricted corner contains two 'hanging death' blocks so its best not to look up at this point!

In '4' the fill piled up against the big boulder blocking the rift was lowered to reveal another block with a wider continuation of the 'open' rift below. This was attacked during the evening with repeated plug 'n feather attacks which resulted in a satisfying amount of broken rock.

Gavin provided a sleeper and cut it to size with a chainsaw to provide a reassuring vertical prop supporting the large roof slab overhanging the dig.

On Sat the plan is, potentially, to continue attacking the block in '4' but this time with Gavin's concrete breaker. I hope that maybe the large plug 'n feathers I have ordered might have arrived in time as well.

Richard has proposed that the sites now be known as 'A', 'B', 'C' & 'D' - 'A' being the shaft started on the extreme left of the cliff, and the others left to right respectively.

The very first site we looked at (now abandoned) 50yds to the left is not included - it is Ham Lane Barn Cave (I think!)

All best

Clive

Rock House Barn Digs 2 & 3 - Sat 4th Nov

Rich, Emma & John, Gavin and Clive

The acquisition of the new 'mega-sized' Plug 'n Feathers made all the difference to the rock removal work on the lower boulder in the entrance, helped also by Gavin's heavy duty 110v Bosch breaker! By the end of the afternoon the job was half finished and it was possible to pop ones head through to view the continuation of the rift.

Its certainly man-sized and, again, shows a lot of solutional features including a distinctive 'sharks fin' section of, presumably, bedrock sticking up from the floor of the rift.

In dig 2 Rich, Emma and John lowered the floor under and just beyond the big slab. The next job will be to remove a section of bedrock which is constricting the working space.

More on Wednesday.....

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All best

Clive

Had a brief look at Dig 3, removed a few handfuls of rocks/mud from beyond the triangular boulder but as per Emma's report from Saturday, this needs reducing before any more can

reasonably happen. Getting to it to drill & P&F is going to require some contortion, and I suspect not all of it will come out – some will be lost to the rift depths below.

I then spent the evening attacking the floor in Dig 2, with a goodly number of buckets of mud and 5-6 slabs and small boulders removed. This has lowered the floor level under the big slab and through into the cross-rift by approx. 9 - 12” and digging there is getting easier. Buckets emptied into the dump truck, but the rocks were stashed at the bottom of the ladder for removal at a later date.

The undercut on the north side of the east/west cross rift is definitely increasing, as predicted by RW, and the material coming out is lightly compacted mud with a few rocks here & there. The narrow slot heading south toward the filled phreatic tube is packed with mud containing a number of small animal bones. I've pulled some more mud out of the tube in order to increase leg-storage space whilst digging.

Definitely worth pursuing, but not as promising as Dig 3. Keep attacking it when we've got two diggers spare, or are lacking tools for Dig 3.

Spike

P.S. are we missing a report from last Wednesday? IIRC we spent the whole evening P&Fing the entrance bolder, before finally gaining 'access' to the area of the still troublesome triangular boulder...

Emma, Rich and Clive

While Gavin enjoyed a noisy lunch party with friends (and no doubt celebrating the long awaited connection of the electricity supply!) we had a very good session widening the entrance with the P 'n F kit.

Late in the afternoon I tried to get at the big boulder propped up at the back of the little 'chamber' but I was just too long....Emma managed to lasso it and we toppled it towards the entrance, where, by dint of much contortions I managed to drill a couple of 6mm holes in one end before the first bang at the site.

This did a nice job of reducing its size considerably leaving basically one large slab which I think Spike will enjoy wrestling to the surface on Wednesday if he is about!

Easier access enabled a better view of the back of the rift where, near the roof, a sharp right turn in the passage is visible which appears to be around 18in wide.

Clive

All,



Rock Swallets look good, almost as good as some of Bradshaw's Cave last year.

Willets Lane Hole continues to go downwards in slightly cleaner washed cleaner rocks and I can see about 9-10 feet down a rift, still plug & feathering as I go. Hauling out rocks n mud. After a couple of ours on Thursday walking back up to the car about 2100 I tripped and badly twisted my knee. Doc says it will recover but strong anti inflammatory tablets for 2 weeks. That really hurt 1 week in it still hurts and is pretty swollen. Going to Wales soon but probably walking!

Regards to all, Andy W

Rock House 2 - Wed 22nd Nov 2017

Emma, Mud, Rich, Dave & Clive (Gavin on surface support)

An early start to drill and fire a couple of 'trimming' charges to finish the job of widening the entrance.

Thanks to carpet and conveyor belt brought by Mud and some small hale bales by Emma we managed to reduce the noise of the bangs very considerably helped by the almost gales force winds(weather not draught!).

The results were very satisfactory and relatively easy access to the little chamber was possible even by the tallest member of the team.....

After some contortions in the limited space it was possible almost to get a view into the rift which appeared to bear off to the right. To get a better view some careful and serious gardening of overhanging boulders had to be undertaken producing a large pile totally blocking the way ahead.

During the remainder of the evening these were removed one by one to reveal the dimensions of the rift to the right - about 10ft long but only 6inches wide! No joy there....

The main rift though could be seen to continue straight into the hill for another 15ft but only 6-8in wide again.

However at the confluence of the two rifts, looking down through gaps in the remaining rocks, the rift appeared to be roomier - maybe a couple of feet wide.

In any case that is the obvious point to push on down in the hope of gaining wider passage.

On Saturday a P & F session or bang will be needed on a large piece of detached wall which is impeding access before removing more of the boulder fill in the rift.

On a positive note there appeared to be a slight outward draught and the flat bedding roof of the little chamber has quite well-defined

scalloping visible.

--

All best

Clive

Rock House B - Sat 25th Nov 2017

Emma, Rich, Duncan, Simon, Dave & Clive

Some effective P & F work on a big block of loose bedrock half way in resulted in some welcome extra turning and manouvring space.

A six-way set of 5gm charges were drilled into the assorted large blocks at the back of the dig which produced a fair bang despite the entrance being well blocked with hay bales.

After a lot of contorsions Emma and Duncan managed to wrestle out most of the offending rocks leaving a large vertical slab of bedrock to be banged next time.

The first frozen feet of the winter were experienced by all this time!

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All best

Clive

Rock House Dig B - Sat 2nd Dec 2017

Rich, the Gisbornes and Clive.

A small double charge on the prominent rib of rock impeding progress was fired early on. This cracked it up enough to allow a lot of it to be removed during the afternoon thanks to some concerted work, especially by John G.

Another charge, lower down on the same section was fired before finishing - this should mean some concerted rock removal will be needed early on Wed.

Our system of relatively small charges muffled by old carpet and straw bales is having the desired effect and banging is now definitely 'de rigueur' again.

Richards stone-walling is improving the look of the site week by week - we just need to wrest some mega slabs from the hole to form some steps.

All best

Clive

Rock House Dig B - Wed 6th Dec

Rich, Spike, Dave and Clive

Saturdays bang had done a good job and there was a lot of rock for Spike to work back to the surface.

After clearing, some gentle wiggling with a bar on the next section of vertical 'rib' that needs removing revealed the fact that two big boulders sitting in the approach rift were moving in unison and they would need to come out as well. The risk is that they would be almost overhanging the way on down.

A suitably well-muffled bang on one of them followed with yet more rock to clear. Another couple of bangs will be needed on Saturday or maybe some P & F work will suffice....

The view on and down the rifts still look enticing and there is an inwards flow of air.

Richard carried on with the 'battlements' around the site and installed some sturdy steps from the large blocks coming out.

Retired to The George with Gavin to be regaled with tales of, and many pictures of, Peter's new grandson!

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All best

Clive

Rock House B - Sat 9th Dec 2017

Rich, Simon & Clive

The large block that had been left over from Wednesday's session was eventually dealt with by way of the P & Fs and produced some particularly fine flat slabs for Richards walling efforts.

A fair amount of 'standard' cave-digging ensued involving clearing sand and gravel from the floor and the infill from the right hand rift.

At end of play we were let with a view down the right hand rift to where it appears to be somewhat wider. The left side of this is composed of in-situ detached slabs which will come out relatively easily. We have to be very careful though as this section could well be holding up the left hand wall which has large detached slabs. Ditto the roof in this section although that is so massive I think it will be pretty secure.

In the short term we will continue dropping the floor, if practical, in case this gives us another way into the visible section ahead.

As its ATLAS dinner on Wed we thought we would have another go on Tuesday evening. Rich can't make it in fact - any takers for Tuesday or Thursday?

--

All best

Clive

I think that I speak for everyone in thanking Dave for organising another most enjoyable evening. Everything went like clockwork and the food was excellent. It was nice having Gavin and his partner there (and he bought me a pint of Thatcher's gold !) Let's not wait until next Christmas to do it again.  
Simon.

Rock House 'B' - Thursday 14th Dec 2017

Rich, Dave, Emma, Darryl and Clive

On arrival we found that the part of the stream was overflowing across the farmyard forming a lake about 50ft across and 6in or so deep. In the centre it was sinking into a well known section of collapsed concrete outside the barn. We always assumed that this must be connected to the manhole-covered rift under the barn floor.

In the dig, after suitable appraisal it was decided to fit a wooden 'stemple' across the continuation of the rift to reinforce the left hand wall (composed of a large block of detached bedrock) before removal of any of the rock below. The stemple was cut to size by the ever-helpful Gavin and fitted by Rich.

Two very large slabs were dragged to the surface using the boulder net before Darryl set to work clearing some of the mud and clay in the floor of the rift.

Meanwhile Dave 'The Finger' King was busy furgling around in the farmyard sink with the mega bar until, with a sudden gurgle' the lake began to pour easily into the 'sink'.

Moments later Darryl shouted "I can hear a stream!" This was confirmed during the evening by us all and indeed there is a distinct roaring from somewhere below which sounds like a waterfall. It sounds not dissimilar to the sound we heard in Windsor Hill Flood Sink when the cave was in spate - impressive!

So, at last, we have a connection between the surface stream and the dig.

In the rift we have about five feet of very narrow rift to enlarge before a visible widening below in what looks like a bedding development with a mud floor.

We may need a bang on Saturday to progress.....

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All best

Clive

Rock House B - Sat 16th Dec 2017

Duncan and Naomi, Rich, Simon, John & Emma and Clive. Gavin and Shaun Wolfe (with small son) on periodic surface support.

After an excellent start to the afternoon with mulled cider and mince pies, courtesy of Duncan and Naomi, things deteriorated with a couple of hours of fiddly and messy mud removal from the rift at the end.

Following a tea-break (more mince pies, from Emma this time) a 0.75m shot hole was fired in the large cracked section of bedrock on the left side of the main (ie right-hand!) rift.

This did a good job and much rock was cleared before the cold and dark took over around 5.30pm.

There is some good (if a tad constricted) rock wrangling to be had on Wed (Spike??) before another bang on the left and then maybe on the right of the rift. (The right hand side in fact comprises a substantial rib of rock again).

Attached are some 'before and after' pictures of the entrance to 'B' just after we started work and after we had finished the widening operations. Also a join-up of the end of the rift taken after Saturdays' session - the top section of this picture is actually looking almost vertically upwards so don't think that's the way on! The last shot is the rift as we left it - the right hand side of the rift is the aforementioned 'rib' with another narrow cleft behind it.

All best

Clive

Rock House B - Wed 20th Dec 2017

Mud, Spike, Dave, Rich and Clive

An early bang on each side at the end of the rift left a pile of rock to be removed. Mud, Spike and Dave laboured particularly over a couple of giant rocks which were eventually dragged to the surface.

The 3m aluminium ladder from dig 'A' was used as a base to drag the boulders and skips to the surface. A plywood insert will be added next time to cover the rungs to ease traffic further.

By the end of play the interesting potential widening of the passage which had seen previously, through the narrow rift, was accessible and turned out to be a continuation of the main rift about 18in wide - choked but well developed and with plenty of botryoidal stal on the walls.

Of more interest though was an open downward continuation of the rift a little further back, just 6in wide, through which could be heard the stream. Also it was taking an appreciable inward draught. Rich also found an interesting bedding development at this point going to the right ie down-dip.

Earlier Mud had pointed out a very large vertical slab on the left of the entrance rift which has little apparent means of support. It appears to have an air gap nearly all the way round it!

On Sat the plan is to fit a couple of sturdy timber 'stemples' across the rift to encourage that rock to stay where it is, fettle the ladder as described and put a bang or two in at the back.

Talking of which we are getting through the bang and dets at a steady pace now. Rich and Dave have kindly contributed towards the costs - other contributions greatly appreciated!

The evening also included a sherry and mince pie break courtesy of the Rock House management!

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All best

Clive

Rock House 'B' - Sat 23rd Dec 2017

Rich, Emma and John, Mud and Clive

The new 'Skip Slide' had its first outing - the aluminium ladder with a solid plywood centre - and really proved its worth. Its so much easier to drag the skip (and a well-filled boulder net) up to the surface and easy to get it back to the bottom afterwards.

Rich and Mud manhandled a large rock into place, at the base of the threatening left hand wall, and fitted a freshly cut section of ash tree near the roof to make sure the wall stays in place.

A effective session of mud and bang debris removal ensued at the end with Mud and Rich. This provided some welcome extra space along with removal of a large piece of protruding left hand wall at floor level. This left another large piece, some of which was removed with Plug 'n Feathers, to be finally dealt with by a bang.

Before finishing Gavin had a look at the end and was suitably impressed with progress since his last foray into the cave.

The stream could still be clearly heard somewhere below us but last Wednesdays' strong inward draught into the rift in the floor seemed to have disappeared this time.

Another session is planned next Wed evening.....

A Happy Christmas to all our readers!

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All best

Clive

Rock House Barn Cave Thurs 29th Dec

Clive, Emma, John, Mud, Darrel & Dave.

A frosty start but warmed by the brazier, tea & bread pudding.

Before digging commenced, it was noted that the large slab on the left hand side with security log prop/stemple had a couple of previously un-noticed horizontal cracks. These may have opened up since the log was wedged in place perhaps putting a little pressure on the top section of the slab. Further security measures may be required.

The "roar" of the stream was still audible from the slot in the floor and a smoke test using a smoldering stick from the brazier confirmed again the strong inward draft.

More of the infill was dug out and dragged up the planked ladder, followed by a surgical drill and bang in a large boulder on the right beside the drafting slot. The broken up boulder was easily hauled out in the boulder net and a couple of skips. Another bang required on the right to enlarge the slot lower down. Two holes drilled and fired, but this left the obstructing section of rock in place and had only reduced it slightly towards the right hand side due to the mud layer packed behind it. Bang debris removed, including some of the step on the up slope (north) of the slot. This does mean that the last step before the slot is now less secure, but it does give better access to drill and bang the rib of rock left from the previous bang.

A little later than usual Clive, Mud, Darrel, Dave & Wendy (Mud's taxi driver) retired to the George for a thaw out rehydration. Being a little late didn't cut short our stay, it being Fri morning before departing.

A final 2017 digging session to take place on Sat 30th.

Dave.

Rock House 'B' - Sat 30th Dec 2017

Rich, Darryl, Dave, the Gisbornes, Simon and Clive

For the last session of 2017 it was agreed that another wooden stemple support was called for to back up the previous work on the left hand wall of the rift. This was duly cut to size by Gavin and fitted by Dave and Rich.

Rich and Simon then proceeded to remove a good amount of mud etc from the lowest point of the rift following Thursday evenings' bang, discovering while doing so a couple of small limb bones possibly of fox.

Three shotholes were then drilled in the remaining large 'rib' of rock in the base of the rift and duly fired producing a good pile of fragments. By the end of the session the floor area had been widened by

about a foot and lowered by around 18inches.

The usual strong inward draught was noticeably absent due, no doubt, to the rift having been blocked by the bang.

The sound of the stream, however, was clearer than ever - it can't be too far below us now.

Another bang next Wednesday .....

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All best

Clive