

Rock Farm - Wednesday the 1st Jan 2020

The first day of the 2020 digging season!

Mud and Clive

The culvert stream was down to a more normal level and two pumps were able to handle it comfortably.

At the end the bang had been more successful than the previous one and around a dozen bags plus some large rocks are now ready to come up from the end.

A lot of time was spent hammering and chiselling away at the banged wall over the open bedding that takes the stream. Another three holes were drilled and fired before leaving.

The 'roar' is still clearly audible (when at the face) apparently coming from somewhere ahead.

Another session on Saturday!

All best

Clive

Viaduct Sink 5 January 2020 Dave King, Geoff Newton

An element of farce crept into this session, as the previous evening I had managed to leave a small bag containing a vital drill battery (and other things like my best digging gloves, thermos flask etc) by the stream at Rock Farm close to where we wash kit etc. I thought I had left it by the car. So the next day I was running around like a headless chicken trying to find it. Said bag was eventually found by Dave when he was washing kit from this Viaduct Session. Meanwhile Gavin had kindly lent us his DeWalt drill and batteries for our session in Viaduct. So things got off to a late start.

The session fortunately was less farcical. Two x 1m holes were drilled, plus a shorter one to use up a few small bits of cord and the stuff duly set off. The time is not very far away when we will need a longer wire. WE are working on this.

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm - Saturday 4th Jan 2020 Rich, Simon, Mud, Geoff and Clive

Last Wednesdays pile of bags and rocks were soon removed to the surface before Mud immersed himself in the lake which had returned at the end. The water had risen due to the build up of bang debris and by the end of the session he had managed to clear the blockage and remove a lot of cracked rock.

The water now gurgles happily away down the bedding for the couple of metres we can see (I reckon its the same bedding that has been opened up higher in the cave).

The 'roar' although much reduced, presumably by the general fall in water levels, is still there somewhere!

Three more holes drilled and fired

All best

Clive

2020 Weds 8th January at Carrion Slocker.

Paul had the lurgy so it was Matt, Mandy and myself to dig in Bethlehem. First, I managed to unblock the slocker drainage pipe using my drain rods just before M&M arrived. This worked well and stopped the surface overflow stream that runs directly into the entrance pothole.

This done, we descended to find a pretty wet cave with water running into Nazareth and Bethlehem, the short scaffolded pot which was very wet. Mandy followed me down to the dig face and dug out some mud and boulders from the descending rift that has a dodgy roof/wall, while I drilled/P&F the large boulder pulled out last time.

Matt followed us down into the Beth-Pot and stacked the base with rocks I passed up to him. He complained about being struck by a cricket ball sized rock; but what he said from then on seemed more sensible..

This all done, Matt climbed back up to the main rift and Mandy sat mid-way and I stood in the Beth-Pot with water pouring all around and loaded the skip and passed this and odd hand sized rocks to Mandy. This completed we climbed out very wet and moved all the rocks up the main rift and M&M hauled them out.

A short, very wet but constructive session. Over-suit's all cleaned but rather gritty.

All good
Andy W

Rock Farm Wednesday 8th January 2020 Mud, Tav, Dave and Clive

A very successful bang on the previous Saturday had given us a very good pile of large rocks (plus one exceedingly large one) all of which were removed to the surface during the evening.

At the end little more of the open bedding taking the water was visible but the approach was considerably improved. This work was continued with another four holes drilled and fired.

The culvert stream was low on arrival and the main stream in the cave almost non-existent. This changed during the evening when, apparently, there had been a heavy storm and this was reflected underground by a lively stream reappearing.

More on Saturday as its the Cavers Quiz in the evening Geoff and I aim to be at Rock Farm about 1pm

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 11th January 2020 Rich, Geoff, Simon & Clive

Lots of small spoil to come out this time compared with the heaps of rocks we had on the previous session.

All cleared to the surface over two hauling sessions and four more holes drilled and fired.

The cave culvert stream was dealing with by just one pump this time and the cave relatively dry for a change (apart from the two stream coming by the dig face).

And before you ask(!) no sign this time of the Tinnitus Falls!

Back to it on Wednesday

Congrats to the ATLAS team on another resounding win at the Cavers Quiz last night!

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Wednesday 15th January 2020 Tav, Dave and Clive

A 'three-pump' night this time after the rains – just enough to make it manageable.

Last Saturday's remaining bags and rocks were brought up from the streamway below the Stairs while Tav started his evening at the face clearing and attacking the well-cracked rood of the bedding ahead.

Around another 18 bags were filled and moved to the surface before three more holes were drilled and fired, this time concentrating on giving us more headroom as we move forward along and down the bedding.

What we can see ahead (which is not very far) continues to be the low bedding (3-4in high) which is taking the stream. No obvious 'roar' time!

No work from the regulars this weekend due to me being away and the bang course running at Westbury.

Resume again on Wednesday.....

All best

Clive

Carrion Slocker

Weds 15th Jan with Paul S. Digging at Carrion; very wet on surface and in the cave. Drain was blocked again, did not have my drain rods. Water pouring down cave entrance. We took some more scaffold poles in and left some in the swallet hole on the surface. Went down into a rather wet Bethlehem and moved a few rocks and set up some scaffolds to support the chamber / rift. Very cold on the surface.

Andy W

Viaduct Sink Fri 10th Jan.
Geoff, Mike Kushy & Dave.

Sunday 5th Jan bang had created a good amount of spoil that exceeded the capacity of bags available. Some chiselling produced a few more rocks. The filled bags and rocks were then hauled back to Downside Aven. Realistically to haul spoil back to Downside Aven requires three people in particular the crawl after Bridge Junction.

Viaduct Sink Fri 17th Jan.
Geoff & Dave.

The remaining spoil was bagged and hauled back to Bridge Junction along with a few more rocks chiselled out from the right hand wall. Not an easy task with just the two of us. A couple of longer ropes and perhaps some conveyor belt might be useful.

Dave.

Rock Farm - Wednesday 22nd January 2020 Mud, Dave and Clive

Two clearing sessions of around 15 bags a throw dealt with the results of the last bang before another three holes went in and were later fired.

More headroom has now been created as we moved forward and down following the stream.

Duncan – could you spare some more bags please? Ours keep ‘retiring’!

Dave and I would like to move this weekends session to Sunday - about 12.....

All best

Clive

Wednesday 22nd January 2020 Carrion this evening. Solo digging.
Took in some scaffold clips and some plastic sheeting to control the pouring water.
Firmed up some of the lower chamber scaffolding and drilled p+f a large boulder.
Stacked some up for hauling.

Significant hole opened up in the floor and water pouring down more to clear for access but it is about 2.5m deep. Left it all to settle down. Might need some more scaffolding but strong draft in with the water flow. All to play for on the Downhead Fault.

Andy W Vogon
Ps should i take some song sheets to the CSS dinner Matt n Mandy?

Viaduct Sink Friday 24 January 2020 Dave King, Rich Witcombe, Geoff Newton

Water levels underground were lower than in recent weeks. The water diverted into The Somme had retreated almost back to the end of that passage; whether this is due to decreased flow or clearing out of the choke remains to be seen. Given the stubborn nature of the current dig it would be nice to keep our options open here.

Rich (complete with poncho) built an excellent spoil retaining wall in Downside Aven from the blocks we had stockpiled there for the purpose. Suddenly the capacity of the storage area now looks immense. We may need it as the passage we are enlarging shows no signs of getting bigger in the near future.

Geoff

I should have added that Dave and me also finished transferring the remainder of the spoil from the last bang from Bridge Junction to Downside Aven

G

Rock Farm - Sunday 26th January Dave, Geoff, Tony Littler & Clive

Three pumps in operation soon reduced the cave flow to almost zero. This was to change both up and down during the session.

Around 25 bags in total (thanks for the new bags Dunc!) found their way to the surface. At the end Dave had a good session hammer and chiselling and we finished off with 6(!) holes drilled and fired (must be getting desperate!)

There should be plenty to do on Wednesday!

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Wednesday 29th January Dave, Mud and Clive

Water levels being down to a reasonable level just one pump was needed and a relatively dry and quiet cave resulted.

Around 30 bags removed during the evening of which around 10 or so are waiting to come up the drop and a few more are at the foot of The Stairs.

At the end Mud uncovered the downward continuation of the open bedding plane which has some solutional features and takes the stream. Attention is switching, for the time being at least to the area between the open bedding and the blocked rift a metre to its left.

Interestingly the 'roar' was apparent again, if faint, but we all heard it from the drop all the way to the end.

A late finish – 10.10pm!

More on Saturday !

All best

Clive

Tuesday 28th January 2020 Digging at Carrion Slocker with Paul, Matt & Mandy. We took a plastic sheet in to try to divert the waterfall onto the wall in Bethlehem. I descended into the wetness and Paul waited at the top of the rift in the dry. The hole in the bottom chamber had opened up more and the bridging boulder had fallen into the hole. Matt & Mandy arrived to join us so a complete team of diggers! I passed lots of rocks up to Matt who braved the wet bit in the higher pot area, albeit slightly dryer with the plastic sheet but not much, and he hiked them up to Mandy & then they were passed to Paul. The hole edge where I was perched at the bottom kept collapsing so I sent an order up for two scaffold bars, an eight foot & a six foot and two scaffold clips and spanner so I could put a bridging A-frame over the hole before I ended falling down it. This secured and completed and the hole still slowly enlarging with the water flow, we moved up the cave and I managed to kick my hammer which is now at the bottom of the 3m rifty hole.

Hopefully, I will retrieve this during the next few trips?

The plan going forward is to extend the drain pipe to divert the water across the top of Bethlehem and in to the Nazareth dig & payday chamber thus making the Bethlehem dig more palatable. As well pointed out that the lower back wall of Bethlehem needs some heavy duty mesh extended down to stop the lower part undermining itself. I will sort this next underground trip. All going well.

Regards All & I appreciated all the assistance
Andy

Viaduct Sink Friday 31 January Dave King, Geoff Newton

Hitting the right hand wall and right hand side of the roof in order to straighten up the dig face, in preparation for hitting the roof next week. All appeared to be OK.

We could do with a bit of help next Friday to effect a partial clearance of this week's spoil in order to gain access to the dig face for the scheduled attack on the roof in the same session.

All this in aid of providing work for a group of Wessex cavers who would like to have a digging weekend the week after instead for their usual tourist trips.

Dave changed the lock which had become difficult to close.

Geoff

Rock Farm - Saturday 1st February Geoff, Dave, Rich, Simon and Clive

Low water levels this time with just one pump running I believe.

An earlier start this time with the first task being to put CaveCam up the stream-bearing little rift up-dip from the end of the cave.

This was achieved successfully but although the resulting video showed where the stream started its run down the rift that was the limit of its interest.

The remnants of last Wednesday's bag pile were then removed to the surface from the foot of The Stairs followed by another load from the end.

Four more holes were drilled and fired in the bedding above the disappearing stream.

The distant 'roar' must have been even more distant than usual this time as no one could hear it!

More clearing to do on Wednesday....

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wed 5th Feb

Clive & Dave

Approx 20 bags of spoil and a number rocks cleared from the dig face. The rocks were left in the stream at the bottom of the staircase due to time restraints. The bags were hauled out to the surface where a welcoming party consisting of Gonzo, Karen & Kate L were met. Their assistance by emptying the bags was much appreciated. A short chat ensued before it was time for Clive and Dave to descend back to the dig face for more of the same whilst the surface crew headed off to the George to defrost. Some chiseling and another batch of bags filled that were then stacked on the shelf below the bucket pitch.

Between the bedrock sloping down at approx 40 deg and the roof/dig face above, lies a darker bed of limestone dipping in the opposite direction to the bedrock. This may be a displaced slab or perhaps but it appears to match exactly the contours of the limestone above and below it. The combined streams are flowing freely beyond the end of the intermediate bed/slab.

Three holes drilled above the joint between the intermediate bed/slab and fired before a late chilly finish and off to the George.

At the George Clive, Gavin & Dave joined Gonzo, Karen, Kate, Matt & Mandy. Matt & Mandy had been digging with Paul S & Andy W in Carrion Slocker unusually on a Wed evening.

For a change the ATLAS team out numbered the locals and were the last to leave after midnight followed by the lone barman.

Digging to recommence in Rock Farm Cave on Sunday at the earlier time of 12 O'clock.

Dave.

Weds 5th Feb 2020 Digging at Carrion with Paul, Matt & Mandy a full team! Paul and set about positioning the pipes and I had assembled and obtained some pipe joiners, brackets, tape, screws, rawlplugs, a new skip (cos Matt had said the old Fairy one that Paul had brought months ago was getting scary whilst hauling the bigger rocks out up the shaft) during the week for this activity.

M & M turned up while we were doing this and I suggested that Matt go down the still rather wet Bethlehem hole even with the plastic sheeting and install the steel netting which he kindly completed.

Paul, Mandy & I successfully installed the new water drainage system to shoot the water into Nazareth hole. Finally, I descended Bethlehem with a bag and ladder and another hammer etc with the aim of clearing the couple of big boulders so I could access the rifty chamber below about 3+m deep. The water from Nazareth was coming back into Bethlehem but against the back wall through the other inlet noticed before (see digging log dated 18th Dec). I managed to sit on the scaffold bar part of the framework installed before and put the bag on the shelf which you land on when entering the bottom chamber. Using the crow bar/s I cleared lots of cobbles and mud and loosened one big boulder that dropped in the hole, then carefully did the same with the bridging boulder. All good. Except then some mud moved and the whole entrance shelf collapsed into the hole taking my bag with it. A prompt exit was required using the scaffolding framework and taking all tools with me, except the bag with the hammer, rope, old ladder, a couple of krabs which is now down the hole with the other hammer from last week! Hopefully, it is not too buried and I hope there are not too many further collapses otherwise we might need to move from Bethlehem back to Nazareth. All out safely, but rather too exciting.

Andy W/Vogon

Viaduct Sink February 7 Dave King, Rich Witcombe and Geoff Newton

Dave & Geoff cleared the spoil created last week as far as the The Toolshed where it was bagged for removal next week. Three more holes were drilled in the roof and fired. Hopefully the combined spoil will be cleared next week by a troop of Wessex cavers on their "digging weekend".

Meanwhile Rich, having done his back in on the railway, contented himself with removing gravel from the floor of the crawls between The Threshold and Red Aven, part of our campaign to tempt ATLAS people suffering from Viaduct Sink Phobia back into this interesting cave.

Interestingly since we have started digging, a tiny inlet has begun to come in from the left hand wall just before the start of the dig. The flow from this was noticeably bigger on the day, despite stream levels on the day being generally lower than of late. The flow was large enough to create an audible sound in the streambed. As far as we can tell the inlet is due to the general saturation of the ground rather than anything we have done.

Geoff

Wed 12th Feb
Rock Farm Cave

Clive & Dave

Gavin is a little closer to completing the shepherd's hut such that it was suitable for Clive & Dave to use as a changing room complete with lighting and stable style door.

Whilst fettling the culvert pumps a frog was rescued from one of the pump buckets and relocated amongst the rocks beside the culvert. The second time it was rescued it was set free on the edge of the stream a little distance from the culvert.

Two pumps were found sufficient to pump the culvert into the stream. First task at the sharp end was then to fill the remaining empty bags and add them to those on the shelf at the bottom of the bucket pitch from the previous Wed's session. The combined stash of bags were then hauled out to the surface and emptied whilst the rocks were added to the pile in the streamway at the bottom of the staircase for removal during the next session. The empty bags were then taken back to the dig face where most were refilled with loose and chiseled out spoil and stacked on the shelf below the bucket pitch along with a few more rocks.

More of the slot of the bedding plane is now exposed allowing the water to flow down at various points below the dig face. Three holes were drilled and fired to open up a little more space at the dig face to allow better access for chiseling and clearing.

Just Clive and Dave off to the George to re-hydrate.

Clive has just restocked with £250 worth of supplies which progresses both Rock Farm Cave and Viaduct Sink, so once again the hat is been passed around.

Friday 14th Feb.

Since Geoff has organised a Wessex team to assist and experience the delights of digging in Viaduct Sink on Saturday, we will not have a VS session tomorrow (Friday 14th). Instead Geoff and I will visit either Shatter or Withyhill in Fairy Cave Quarry. There is space should anyone else wish to join us (2 more if Withyhill & 3 more if Shatter), we will meet at the MNRS (home of the MNRC) at 1:30pm. Let me know if you're interested.

Dave.

13th Feb 2020 Carrion Slocker solo short visit

I took down a cut down figure of eight abseil device made into a large fishing hook and entered the unstable lower Bethlehem carefully and crossed the scaffolding – looking down gingerly into Tombstone Rift I could see

the green kit bag (containing the rope, ladder and hammer) about 2.5m down on a shelf and so I went fishing. After a few efforts I managed to hook the bag and pulled it up through the dodgy large rocks. I could see the hammer from the previous week but no chance of hooking that this time. Once the bag and fishing rope and slings were back up safely in the base of the Bethlehem Pot I descended again with the long crow bar to check the stability of the shelf remnants – all fairly iffy still but can be sorted. I climbed out with the bag etc and then descended into Nazareth where the water is going from the new drainage system, wet and washing through okay into the back of the lower chamber as mentioned previously. About 1.5 hours.

Andy W/Vogon pulse still beating!

Viaduct Sink Saturday 15 February

Kim Lake, Chris Williams, Courtenay James, Mitch Parry, Jenna Overstolz, Geoff Newton

The surface stream was in mild flood, water quite cloudy. The cave was wetter than had I seen it before. Water falling down Downside Aven was partially obscuring the walls. The new inlet near the start of the dig continues to grow in volume and makes a good chattering sound as it runs down the dig.

Most of the accumulated spoil from the past two weeks activities was cleared to Downside Aven. There is space behind Rich's Wall for maybe one more good session before it needs raising. Spoil was relayed out using an intermediate stack near Somme Junction.

A bit more spoil still remains to be taken out. Although there was time to take this out we called it a day as everyone was wet and Kim, Mitch & Geoff were very, very wet. We had intended a quick look at Rock Farm Cave but this was given a miss for the same reason. The water from the old mill was crossing over the lane on the surface as well as underneath and the bridge to the tea-break island was in danger of being washed away.

During the proceedings the pipe to the Somme became temporarily detached from the whilst I was trying to clear it of gravel. The resultant flood pulse made Jenna fear the cave was flooding. I was impressed by the fact that the orifice in the dam passes a much greater volume of water when the pipe is in, than when it is out, demonstrating the efficiency of a siphon.

Geoff

Wed 19th Feb Rock Farm Cave

Clive & Dave.

Water flowing in the culvert was still quite high so it took all three pumps with pipes suitably fettled to just cope with the flow, but with no rain forecast until very late in the evening this wasn't going to be an issue.

Since no digging session over the weekend due to storm Dennis the first task was to clear the previous Wednesday's spoil. The rocks were added to the increasing pile in the stream at the bottom of the staircase whilst the bagged spoil was hauled out to the surface and emptied. Back to the dig

face for more bag filling and chiseling with the resulting rocks and bags stacked on the ledge below the bucket pitch. The floor level bedding plane of approximately 10cm high runs across the digging face and appears to continue on down for some distance and also off to the right. Three holes just above the bedding plane and one hole in the roof drilled and fired. By the end of play the water levels as anticipated had dropped and proved three pumps adequate but two still wouldn't have been sufficient at the end.

A lot of spoil bagged and shifted meant for a late finish, 10:30pm before it was back to the Pseudo Ferret Shed where Clive's oil filled heater had done a grand job taking a bit more than just the chill off.

Clive & Dave joined by Gavin headed off to the George where Peter (the landlord) looked at his watch as we walked in and wondered if we'd broken through.

Re the shepherd's hut that Gavin has kindly made available, I suspect it will also be used by other visitors & builders etc working on site, I suggest we try and keep it from getting plastered in mud by keeping muddy oversuits outside. Gavin does have a plan to re-site it since it is currently right behind his own caravan and shepherd's hut extension and any noise can be a disturbance, particularly on a Wed evening when the children may be in bed.

Dave.

Viaduct Sink 21 February Geoff Newton

Hammering and chiselling at the face and removing the last of the spoil to Downside Aven. Water levels back to "normal". Also tried moving some mud from the end of the Somme. Not a pleasant job so wont be repeating this anytime soon.

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 22nd February Geoff, Simon, Rich and Clive

Three pumps pressed into service and very little water to deal with in the cave as a result. Even the 'extra' stream at the dig face was much reduced on this occasion.

Wednesday night's bag pile at the bottom of the pitch were initially brought back by Geoff and Clive to the Landing before being sorted on the surface by Simon and Rich.

After an early (and very pleasantly warm and comfortable) tea-break with Gavin in the Shepherds Hut all headed to the end for a sustained clearing and chiselling session.

Another 15 or so bags plus rocks were stashed at the base of the pitch ready for Wednesday before three holes were drilled and fired at the end

It has to be said that the omens don't look especially promising at the moment. We are still uncovering the full extent of the accessible bedding taking the stream and the latest bang should enable a much better look into the continuation. The very limited view at the moment seems to show several more feet down dip with a height of just a couple of inches.

We should have a better idea after Wednesdays session.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wed 26th Feb

Clive & Dave.

3 pumps started up in the culvert.

Saturday's stash of bags on the landing hauled and emptied on the surface. Despite 3 pumps successfully redirecting all the water from the culvert, at the bottom of the staircase there was still a small stream flowing as seems to be norm when the ground is so wet. On to the dig face a lot of spoil dug and chiseled out comprising the usual mix of rocks, chippings and gravel. All the bags refilled and hauled out as far as the landing. The rocks from Saturday's and this session were taken as far as the stream at the bottom of the staircase.

Still a lot more fractured rock to come out so it was decided not to drill and bang but continue removing the fractured layer of rock above the bedding plane on the next session. A little more of the bedding plane exposed and it is hoped that after Saturday's session it will be possible to get a better view down the bedding plane and possibly deploy cave cam.

Running a little low on bags again due to manhandling the bags most of the way out as opposed to hauling in skips.

Another late-ish finish before Clive, Gavin & Dave headed off to the George to join Gonzo, Karen, Kate, Tav, Mandy & Matt.

Tav gave a 10 min demonstration of how to fit the plastic cover to his new book that is being launched on Sat 7th March.

Dave.

Mon 24th Feb Paul S & Andy W visited Carrion after collecting Dave's Super Magnet from MNRC and Andy went fishing with it and retrieved Thor the lump hammer lost down the hole about 3 weeks ago. Very wet but drainage system diverting well into Nazareth rift only to reappear in the back section of Bethlehem lower unstable rift. Needs more scaffolding to stay alive I think.

Also Weds 26th Feb Andy visited Hillgrove to see how wet it was; stream water not reach in main entrance as most of it was sinking at the old Wessex? dig site. Went right to the bottom past all the drag trays & rope clutter still as it was about 5 years ago when I last dug there; leafy, some evidence of ponding noting leafy flood debris in the roof of the last section. Some water from Wessex old dig making its way in at the lowest level. This 100 years of digging site still needs a massive team.

Andy

Rock Farm Cave - Sat 29th Feb

Clive, Geoff, Rich, Dave & Simon (not Meade King).

The stream and culvert levels were both very high and three pumps had little effect on the flow in the culvert.

After a quick visit to the sharp end where Clive, Simon & Geoff declared it to wet to work and proceeded back up to haul the rocks from the streamway and the bags from the landing out to the surface. Rich and Dave arrived in time to empty the bags.

An early tea break in the comfort of the shepherds hut was taken to decide the next move. Joined by Gavin, Erica & Monty, Rich read out again a couple of very interesting paragraphs regarding the history of the earlier buildings in the area.

After tea, cake and chocolates the team split three ways.

Geoff & Simon headed off to Viaduct Sink.

Dave went down Rock Farm Cave to the dig face to view the stream and bring back an entrenching tool for Rich.

Rich started digging the continuation of the entrance rift at the top of the landing whilst Clive hauled the spoil out.

Although very wet at the bottom Dave did chisel out a quantity of rock and spoil from just above the bedding plane. The resultant four bags of spoil and large pile of rocks were left stacked to one side at the bottom. Although the bedding plane is now a little more open a view down was not possible due to the volume of water cascading down, however the roar of the stream could again be heard emanating from the right hand end of the bedding plane.

Dave.

Viaduct Sink - Fri 28th Feb. Geoff & Dave.

The stream flowing past Viaduct Sink was quite high and for the first time there was a large puddle of water on the opposite side of the entrance from the stream.

A reasonable shower was evident at the bottom of the entrance shaft that obviously sinks through the stream bed adjacent to the entrance. Downside Aven was also very wet with a little more of a stream flowing on to Bridge Junction than usual. The flow at waterfall was over topping the dam but a little fettling with the pipe soon rectified this. The trickle of water that flows in from the left hand wall near the dig face was not surprisingly more than usual.

Two holes were drilled a short way back from the dig face and a further five holes were drilled in the roof further down the passage, but only the five holes were charged and fired due to the distance being too great between the sets of holes. The plan will be to increase the depth of the two unused holes and pop them next week to create a little more headroom.

Dave.

Viaduct Sink Saturday 29 February Geoff and Simon Twiss

Walk over to the cave even wetter underfoot than the day before. Although the recent collapse in the field has been filled in it looks like another one may be about to occur a few metres downstream. Surface stream very high. The intention was to put in an hour or so clearing some of the spoil created the day before.

Simon found that his boots were too loose a fit and these came off in the s-Bend of "Passchendaele". As the stream in this passage was substantial on the day, he became rather wet, water flowing up his leg and out via his collar and he elected to go back to Red Aven and wait for me there.

I finished reeling in the wire and took a look at the end. As expected the spoil was rather gravelly. It completely obscures the way on. There was a sound of running water from beyond this temporary blockage, but this may be water from the new inlet near the start of the dig which was running even higher than the day before.

The dam and pipe were working really well despite the even higher water levels..

Geoff

Rock Farm - Wednesday 5th March Dave and Clive

Three pumps again this time (although one was running at reduced efficiency for some reason). Underground there was still a fair stream running to the end.

Dave's efforts late last Saturday had produced a good pile of large rocks and accompanying bags at the end. These were added to during the evening as yet more rock was prised out of the bedding overlying the ongoing low bedding.

The 'roar' which had been very evident on Saturday had gone (again!) but in its place could be heard very clearly the sound of a fast running stream (or maybe a fall) ahead.

I took the opportunity to put Cave Cam down the furthestmost bit of open bedding (where the stream sound was emanating from). The camera went in the full length of its pole (about 8ft) into what appeared to be a slight enlargement.

Viewing the results the camera came up against a wall or block with a small streamlet running down a gently hollowed bedding plane just in front. I couldn't tell really what happened either to the left right due to the lack of room for an angled camera on the approach.

What was noticeable though was the level of the stream sound which was recorded. The camera's mike is hidden away behind a waterproof cover and tends to hear very little as a result (voices close by are very muffled for instance). The sound of the stream though was very clear so I take this to mean that the source of all the noise must be close at hand.

Not conclusive evidence by any means but still intriguing!

Next session on Saturday – looks like we will have Pavel with us to stand in for Dave. Anyone else??

Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 7th March Pawel, Rich, Simon and Clive

A two pump day due to the third having been put out of action by Gav with his digger breaking off the plug. As a result the cave stream was moderately high.

Welcoming Pawel Krawczyk to the ATLAS fold (I will include him on the Thrupegroup) we started off by clearing Wednesday night's pile of bags and rocks from the base of the drop (Simon hauling) up to the surface followed by tea and a linguistics discussion in the Shepherds Hut.

Then Pawel and Clive to the end to start clearing Wednesday night's bang debris while Rich and Simon dug at the back of The Landing.

I am very happy to report that the 'roar' is back! Pawel and I agreed the best word to describe it now is not a roar but a 'torrent'!

There is falling water ahead (and a lot of it currently by the sound of it) – ahead being along and gently down the bedding at the back of the dig (closest to Wells!)

Happily Pawel was there to corroborate the news (I don't think he suffers from sympathetic tinnitus!) on our return to the surface to Simon and Gavin. (Rich had left by then).

I'm guessing of course but considering Cave Cam went in around 6-8th (of which the last bang has removed a foot) to an apparent blockage there is that much at least of rock to remove but I feel that the water can't be that much further ahead. I feel that the water must be coming down a lower level of the rift which forms Cave 'C'.

There is much cracked up rock to remove on Thursday (changed from Wednesday this week) plus there are a dozen bags of rocks to come up from The Landing to the surface first.

Duncan has kindly provided another dozen bags and I have taken over some lighter-weight bags as well, plus there are a few of the original salt bags left so we are fairly well covered on that front at the moment.

Game-on again! Clive

Monday 2nd March 2020 Carrion Slocker Paul & Andy we took in some more scaffold poles and clips to fit in the chamber above Tombstone Rift below Bethlehem – installed some but more to do, drainage pipes working well and we removed the plastic sheeting used before we diverted the water.

Friday 6th March '20 Carrion a solo trip with more scaffold poles and clips to fit at the top of Tombstone Rift or as Mandy now calls it the Pit of Doom. I fitted the ones I needed and I cleared out a small amount of rocks but I did not fancy tackling the large wedged slab on my own – it needs two holes drilling whilst hanging / spanning the pit of doom and then plug n feathering to dispense with it, probably down the hole! I added some more mesh in Bethlehem pot to stop rocks falling on Matt; moved one big cobble, although I considered it might take the attention off his dodgy knee if it fell on his head. Water still running along the drain well and washing the floor area of Nazareth.

Vogon Andy W

Thursday 12th March 2020 Solo digging

I took my drill to the top of Tombstone Rift and took in some scaffold poles & clips down.

I drilled two holes & using P&F split off a large end of a slab (16" roughly), this dropped and wedged against

another large jammed boulder over the hole. After much un-jamming I managed to get them to drop. I then

Installed 3 scaffold tubes to stop the other rocks moving. Agh I dropped my spare drill battery down the hole

& out of sight (Dave Magnet again please put in locker with book), With some support I need to get down

the hole to retrieve the battery.

Regards Andy W/Vogon

Rich and Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 14th March A low-key visit this time as we were short of staff.....

Last Wednesday nights bags were brought up, from the head of the streamway, to the surface and the accumulated rock pile in the stream there brought up to The Landing ready for later removal.

A lump hammer and crowbar were retrieved from the far end to use in Rich's dig at the back of The Landing (Corona-Rift? – just joking). The stream was lively with no pumps in action. A brief look at the end revealed a very satisfyingly-large pile of broken rock awaiting our next clearing session. This was all from the roof and will really help with access to the current end face.

The obstructive rock protuberance on the left of Rich's dig finally succumbed to a suite of holes and plug 'n feathering. This will ease access to clear the rift below (approximately 2ft wide at this point. There is another lump which could well do with the same treatment at some point.

At the moment there is only possibly Mud and me on Wed. I think Dave is due back on parade on Saturday.

All best

Clive

March 2020 All digging and caving suspended due to COVID-19 pandemic

Tuesday 9th June 2020 - Thrupe Lane Swallet and Hobnail Hole....(surface!)

Simon, Rich, Emma and Clive

Whilst observing social distancing at all times an enjoyable and worthwhile session of nettle clearing followed by a complete emptying of the mud and gravel in the Hobnail sink and some of the debris in the adit entrance to TLS.

Some useful PR was performed with two of the three new 'neighbours' over the road involving exchange of contact details for Richard, Dave and myself. A conducted tour of the surface site took place for the benefit of the couple living in Hay Loft (or was it Hay Barn?) opposite.

The usual tea ceremony was performed (outside the Ferret Shed) in the sunshine – great to reinstate at least a little of our usual activities.

All best

Clive

Carrion Slocker 30 June Tuesday PM session with Andy W and Paul S

The hole is now gated with a mesh door and a bat grill gate by Andy & Paul S. The 3.5 metre entrance ladder has a fixed aluminium ladder in place. The slightly descending rift* runs for about 4m and straight on into Nazareth, a descending cross rift that current stops in a small stand-up sized chamber with no obvious way on. *About 3.5m down the rift above is a side hole on the right, Bethlehem Pot which is scaffolded and meshed about 2m deep. At the bottom is a slot to be climbed down carefully on to more scaffolding, and some supported large rocks. Ahead is a small rift which seems to continue but too tight the shelf by the scaffold bar is stable and where you can stand. The 2m deep hole in the floor with more scaffolding is the way on and care is required to wriggle under a scaffold bar below which is a drop but the sloping rift ceiling is stable with some helpful foothold ledges. There a slings and a rope which are secure as the floor is steep and muddy/crumbly. To the east is a horizontal rocky crawl into to standing space, big enough to swing a cat! But with no obvious way on. Below you is a 9 metre drop which needs a wire ladder to descend. Fortunately the roof of the rift you enter looks pretty stable, the sloping floor is less accommodating, take care. The base of this rift has loose rocks and has ways to descend east & west, west & down looks okay, east looks horribly unstable.

The story so far, I descended the 9m rift today for the first time from the breakthrough point. Conservatively I think the length is now around 25m (80 feet or so) and the vertical depth is 18m / 60 feet. A way on is visible so watch this space.

Andy W

Friday 3 July 2020

DK and RW

Whilst CN, EG and SM-K carried on with surface/Ferret Shed maintenance work, the above duo descended Hobnail Hole in a socially distanced way to inspect the dodgy boulder in Black Pot. The offending article, measuring about 3' by 2' by 10", was jammed in the far wall of the pot at a point where a casual caver might to be tempted

to use it as a handhold or foot hold. It rocked slightly when any pressure was applied.

Thought was given to grouting it in place, but the heavy drip at this point would gradually wash out any fixing and the problem would recur. It was decided to apply the more drastic remedy. A rope was affixed to the protruding end of the rock, and it was then heaved and rocked out of its resting place. It duly dropped in a fast, slightly controlled, way to the floor of Black Pot, about 6' below. Here, it was man-handled into a position of safe repose alongside the approach to Triangle Chamber. All routes are now safely open.

Rich

Fri 10th Jul 2020 Thrupe Swallet

Clive/Richard/SMK.

A pleasant languid day, commencing with an alfresco lunch on the lawn. With the last of the strawberries consumed, we were reminded of our plan to visit Thrupe swallet. On arrival we were greeted by an impenetrable jungle and no sign of our goal. However with forays from all points of the compass, the entrance finally revealed itself. After a short struggle the lid was lifted and all appeared in reasonably good order. This was confirmed by a descent by RGW and SMK. A brief look down the next slope and we beat a retreat to the surface. I'd forgotten how much work we'd put into just the entrance shaft, but it has stood the test of time. Back to Thrupe for tiffin.

Simon.

Tuesday, 21 July 2020 Carrion's Slocker

I met up with Paul with the two bags of cement and then Matt & Mandy came to join us at the cave. We took one bag of cement, 25 litres of water, one bag of sharp sand down to the bottom rift and to the rock bridge to cement it. Matt and Mandy did an excellent job on this and we consider we might need a short support bar just to make it fully safe. I drilled and plugged and feathered the East End passage which now has some promise, but needs further enlargement at low-level. The western rift floor was also drilled, plug and feathered to get to a lower passage, which after moving several large rocks, it gave us about 10 m of sloping bedding passage with no obvious way on, but it did show some possibilities. All a bit ache'y today.

Andy W

Post Lockdown Meet at TLS - Sat 25th July 2020

There was a late start due to torrential rain at lunchtime. Rich, Geoff and Simon made their way over to the entrance, with Dave due to follow soon afterwards. They descended to the start of Inside Out, where a trickle of water was running. Rich and Simon left for the surface at this point. Geoff found Inside Out to have been washed clean of worms and foul odours by the high water levels earlier in the year. He made his way to the pitch head and then made a start sending loads of liquid mud over the pitch. Dave soon arrived with drill and after more bailing, he started drilling a 2" dia hole through to an undercut below the lip in an attempt to drain Inside Out. Meanwhile Geoff probed the passage

floor further back without finding a drainhole. Time and the batteries ran out when the hole was about two thirds the way through. An exit was made to find Simon waiting for us at the surface.

Geoff

Tuesday 28th July 2020 - Carrion Slocker - Solo trip, repairs+

I took my drill and t'other bits to do some stuff; this included fixing the 4" drain pipe that had come adrift of its bracket at the bottom of the entrance pot.

I took two scaffolding bars down to Midway just above pitch rift to secure one here to stop the previous loose end moving and to support another hanging but secure rock. This was done with an old drill bit in the far wall, a swivel clip and the new & old scaffold bars very successfully.

I descended to the bottom of Fiat 500 Rift and descended the easterly option and checked out Mandy's first 'that might go' option, shifted a few rocks and it might go, but does not look that good, albeit washed pretty clean. I then went to the Bridge of Sighs where Matt & Mandy grouted the wedged boulder in last week and did a similar thing with a very short bit of scaffold located on an old drill bit that now supports the boulder slightly too (needs a bit of grouting too, next time we do some more cementing - I double bagged the cement too Mandy), I then went westerly and rechecked out all the sloping bedding trying to see which way looks best to tackle, westerly looks better. I drilled & P&F'd a short roof section which may allow access further west, but the roof is very hard to drill (that red stuff again Paul!), and I nearly lost both P&F but managed to free them but only broke off a tiny bit with each as it seems to be very tough and not veined regularly at all. Above slightly on the west there is an option that may allow access at the foot of the rift above with jammed boulders which I had a little prod at. This may allow access to more sloping bedding on the west side which may be promising.

I retreated up and down the ladder with the bag, peli case, long spike which I brought out, rather tired and headed for home.

Andy W – Vagon

Sat 1st Aug

Geoff, Pawel, Clive, Simon, Rich, Emma and Dave.

At Ferret Shed etc.

Geoff, Pawel, Clive and Dave met at the Ferret Shed such that a large boulder could be moved from near TLS entrance further up stream to be the start of a silt/shingle trap. It was soon declared to heavy to move between the four of us so Geoff & Pawel continued on to Viaduct Sink. Clive and Dave managed to reduce the boulder and relocate the smaller half up stream.

Work then started on the Ferret Shed before the arrival of Simon, Rich and Emma in time for lunch. After a long lunch break Clive and Dave continued fitting new joists and other timber supports in the Ferret Shed whilst Rich, Emma and Simon walked over to I believe Viaduct Sink via Thrupe Swallet and returned with Geoff and Pawel.

With the Ferret Shed work session completed for the day, Dave and Pawel set off for Thrupe Swallet armed with various tools inc SDS core drill, rawl bolts, spanners etc. whilst the rest of the team partook of more refreshments.

A quick trip down to Inside Out Passage where Pawel took the opportunity to view Persistence Pot pitch head before returning to where the Gonzole used to drain the small stream. Pawel set to work to try and re-establish the Gonzole and Dave continued the assault on the lip of the pitch with the core drill. The core drill broke through giving a 50mm bore hole at approx 45 deg down through the lip of the pitch. Although this won't drain the entire passage it does reduce the depth of the water significantly and makes it much easier bail the water and mud slurry over the pitch head.

The next task on the agenda was to remove the old rawlbolts that were installed when ATLAS were digging TS. All three bolts came out with relative ease and a new rawlbolt with angle iron bracket was installed at the pitch head. Two anchor points now available at the pitch head - M10 rawlbolt/angle bracket and the 50mm bore hole through the lip of pitch. Two more (or perhaps just one) bolts required to replace those removed from half way along Inside Out Passage.

Despite Pawel's best efforts at the Gonzole this could not be re-established. Before exiting Pawel took a final look at the now dryer pitch head. A very productive trip such that the next visit with an additional bolt or two will enable a descent of Persistence Pot. Pawel and Dave returned to the Ferret Shed by 6:30pm.

Dave.

Ps. The Penguin chocolate biscuit left for us back at the Ferret Shed was much appreciated, but two Penguins would have been preferred :-)

Viaduct Sink 1st August Pawel Krawczyk, Geoff Newton

The surface stream was dry, nothing coming down the avens and flow of the streams inside the cave was low.

Pawel started a new survey using his Disto-X with a little assistance from me. The main line was surveyed from the entrance to about 5m from the new end. The Somme was also surveyed. The other side passages will be surveyed at a later date.

The end of The Somme was still blocked with silt and gravel and was not draughting although the water was not backing up. Interestingly there was a draught coming out of the entrance to the Somme. The whole area of the cave downstream of Bridge Junction appears to be part of a phreatic maze, however apart from the Somme and the Main Line, everything is small and not passable by anything much bigger than a guinea pig or kitten even if they were not back filled, which the passages usually are.

The end of the main line was blocked with spoil. I assume that Dave and friend did some hammering in their recent visit. The end of the cave was open but too tight when I last saw it at the end of the Wessex clearing session, when we cleared loose spoil but did not have time to go hammering.

The predrilled holes in the roof at the end were used to make a loud noise and create more spoil. We were met by Rich, Emma and Simon on our return to daylight.

Geoff

Pawel Krawczyk, Geoff Newton

Pawel continued his Disto-X survey of the cave with a little assistance from me. We added Dismal Series and Shale End to the main line and then looked upstream from Bridge Junction.

The way on was too tight for Pawel's chest. I managed to get 5+ metres in on a flat out helmet-off crawl then up a couple of small cascades, before I was stopped by a tight S-bend. I could see another 3 m on to where the passage became a rift and bore right of sight. I then reversed out.

We then started clearing bang debris from the end. We filled the Toolshed with bags of spoil which were then transferred to Somme before we gave up and headed to the Ferret Shed for tea with Clive & Simon. This will go easier with more people.

The way on drops about 0.5 m, but has been filled with spoil so there is still more to clear before we can see the way on again.

Geoff

Rock Farm - Saturday August 15th 2020

After a five month absence from the delights of Rock Farm I felt it high time to take a look plus my osteopath had come to the same conclusion as me that my back needed it. "Get digging again!" he recommended!

The upper streamway proved to be silent and dry except for the usual amount of water appearing from the right hand wall just before the Mudhole and carrying on down to the end of the main rift.

The bang cable we had tidied up after the last session and the banged rubble was as I had left it – piled fairly high at the bitter end.

A small amount of water was still running down part of the bedding in the final section leaving it very comfortable for an hour's enjoyable hammer and chisel work bringing down some good sized sections of banged roof. Some time was spent head first in at the furthest accessible extremity removing bang debris to see the continuation of the waterworn bedding, still just a few inches high as far as I could see.

Needless to say there was no "roar" to delight the ear(!) but there is still clearly audible the sound of running water ahead. No draught though as ever. (The only time I think I've detected a draught right at the end was when Pawel and I witnessed what sounded like a loud torrent ahead).

The larger rocks were piled at the bottom of the main rift ready for hauling out. We don't have many 'salt bags' at the moment due to the Viaduct work but there are the lighter weight garden compost bags still. Any chance of a few more Duncan??

There is a pile of rocks on The Landing from Rich's upper rift dig ready to come out as well.

In short we have quite a bit suitable for Gav's attention....

Whilst there is still a great need for 'Covid-caution' I think it would be reasonable for two or three (at most) to work carefully at Rock at the moment. I did try wearing a mask underground to see if it became too hot and/or uncomfortable and have to report that it was absolutely fine. If you got really hot though I think it could be a bit of a pain.

I'm happy to have another go on Wed night if Dave, say, fancies a trip.

I was going to propose moth-balling the ATLAS virtual pub sessions for the foreseeable future as attendance has dropped off steeply now, no doubt due to the easing of lockdown.

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wed 19th Aug

Clive, Mud & Dave.

Face coverings were worn, although it must be said that Mud's appeared to be extremely transparent ;-).

Although it had been raining most of the day the stream in the culvert had very little flow and water entering the cave was from the usual points and not excessive.

At the beginning of the session the flow was cutting across the dig face and disappearing down the bedding at the far right, but by the end it was flowing down to the immediate left of the dig face. Plenty of spoil was bagged and along with a large number of rocks shifted to various locations towards the entrance, the furthest being at the bottom of the staircase.

Dave detected a noticeable if faint "roar" and Clive without prompting also heard and commented on it.

A number of shot holes (Clive can confirm how many) drilled and fired.

The next session proposed for Sat afternoon will be a mega hauling and bag emptying session.

Dave.

Four holes drilled and banged....

Viaduct Sink, Sat 22nd August.

Geoff & Dave.

An early start, particularly for Geoff with an 80 mile drive before arriving at Rock Farm for 10am.

An easy light trip into Viaduct Sink with no drill, bang etc to carry. At the dig face all the loose spoil hauled back bagged and stacked in the the Tool Shed followed by further chiseling of the roof and clearing the subsequent wall building rocks back to the Tool Shed. The view on down the continuation still remains obscured by unreachable spoil.

Rather than head out empty handed, a couple of wall building rocks were deposited at Downside Aven before surfacing in the glorious sunshine in time to meet up for lunch at 1:00pm before the Rock Farm Cave afternoon session.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave, Sat 23rd August.

Rich, Clive, Simon, Geoff & Dave.

With guest appearances from Andy W (& Sue?), Matt & Mandy.

Lunch on the lawn beside the yard entrance where Rich distributed the ATLAS mugs that he had commissioned.

Simon and Dave headed on down RFC to the stream and shifted the bagged spoil to the bottom of the staircase, whilst Clive (on the Landing), Geoff & Rich on the surface hauled the stock pile of rocks out and stacked them in a couple of the wooden crates. Once the landing was cleared the bagged spoil was handed up to the landing to be hauled out and bags emptied.

Stage three saw Simon loading the drag tray with the rocks in the lower streamway, Dave transferring to the the bucket for Clive to haul up the pitch. Then all moved along until eventually all the rocks were hauled out and crated on the surface.

By the end of play all the pre Wed banged spoil was out. A good catch up session which leaves clearing and chiseling before the next bang probably on Wed.

Tea and debrief etc was then taken on the lawn.

Dave.

Carrion Slocker Weds 19th Aug 2020

After crawling down a drain and Norman limestone culvert at Waterlip to check it for the local householder I bimbled over to Carrion.

After investigating the three leads and starting to clear the lowest, rather dodgy one (lead 1) and after crunching my little finger on the second one (lead 2), Matt & Mandy appeared through the sweet smelling joss stick smoke that was just filling the place up from three locations then rising up the pitch ladder slowly. We did smell nice!

Mandy disappeared down her No.3 lead to furtle, Matt kindly cleared some rocks from the lowest lead where I continued to wobble things and I eventually drilled & P&F some bits off a large boulder then succeeded in jamming two P&F's in a solid wall, which the hammer was bouncing off. Next time I will take more P&F's and a larger hammer. Matt then set about lead No.2 and opened it a bit more, I moved some more stuff and Matt went through for a look, a bit hairy by the looks of it and a possible pothole 2-3m? with a mantle shelf and a black cobble that looks like a vase on a mantle piece! Matt requested a set of steel balls to progress further this evening, we hunted high and low and could not find any just my squashed and split finger still bleeding in my glove. But there is a lead full of Eastern Promise...

Regards Andy Vagon W

Rock Farm - Wed 26th August 2020 Dave, Alex (sorry don't know his surname) and Clive

Dave and Alex started early and were well into clearing at the face when I arrived. The upper streamway was flowing gently augmented as usual by the 'leaks' from the under the right hand wall just before the Mud'ole.

A very fruitful evening spoil-wise with maybe around 40 bags I guess coming up plus a very large number of good sized rocks – some only just liftable in the confines of the lower streamway. Much boulder reducing was needed as a result but there are still some meaty chunks to bring to the surface.

There is now a mega pile of bags and rocks waiting at the foot of The Stairs ready to come up and a further few at the base of the pitch.

At the end some determined crowbar work by Alex pushed the working face back by a foot to 18inches and left a nice clean area for me to drill. Five holes in the face and another in a large roof bulge were drilled and subsequently fired adding no doubt to the clearing backlog.

The accumulated stream waters currently sink at the end of the main rift and in the newly opened slot in the bedding a few feet before the actual end. The bedding plane continues open and a little higher than previously and the 'roar', although diminished, is still obvious at that point.

As its Viaduct's turn for major attention this weekend I guess the next Rock Farm session will be next Wednesday as usual.

All best

Clive

Viaduct Sink - Dave King, Simon Meade-King, Rich Witcombe, Geoff Newton

After a bit of a "bug-out" in the Shed with Clive we had lunch. Then left Clive to continue the good work whilst we departed for Viaduct.

We found the surface stream at Viaduct was now high enough to flow past the entrance, thus ensuring that Rich had a refreshing shower whilst he raised the height of the spoil retaining wall in Downside Aven.

We first moved the slabs of spoil stored in The Toolshed to Downside Aven, so that Rich could get on with the wall building. Then the rest of us moved the bagged spoil from The Toolshed to Somme Junction to join the stash of spoil already there. Spoil was then moved to Bridge Junction until the available space was filled up. Then out for tea at the Ferret Shed.

Cheers

Geoff

Wed 2nd Sept, Rock Farm Cave.

Clive and Dave.

With plenty of spoil to shift, the drill and bang kit was not required.

It took three stages to haul the mega pile of spoil from the streamway to the surface, first to shelf below staircase, then onto the landing and finally up the ladder chute to the surface.

A quick inspection of the dig face after the previous Wednesday's six hole charge not surprisingly revealed a lot more spoil to move and options for more chiselling etc. Apart from a small poke with the mega bar the dig face was left untouched and attention directed to the spoil at the bottom of the bucket pitch.

Five stages soon saw the remaining bagged spoil and rocks out to the surface with the boulder net being deployed for some of the larger rocks.

All bags emptied and rocks piled on the walled bank by the entrance.

After the heavy hauling session Gavin met us in the farmyard sporting a gold glittering jacket. Earlier he had been announcing the Shepton Innovator Business Awards live on line. Peter and Veryan of The George Inn, Croscombe won the award for Hospitality.

For those on Facebook Gavin's award ceremony can be viewed here:-

<https://www.facebook.com/sheptonmallettowncouncil/videos/784105082364012>

Dave.

Viaduct Sink 5 September 2020 Dave King, Alex ???, Geoff Newton

First we transferred the bagged spoil stashed at Bridge Junction to its permanent home in Downside Aven. Then to the Toolshed. Whilst Geoff drilled holes in the roof of the "face" and inserted and connected the charges, Dave and Alex moved rocks from the Toolshed and elsewhere to Somme Junction, before assisting with preparations for raising the roof. In due course there was a noise which hopefully indicated that the roof had been raised. Then back to Rock Farm for lunch prior to joining the assault on Rock Farm Cave. A good session. Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 5th September Dave, Rich, Geoff, Alex, Emma & Clive

Surface support (collecting ATLAS mugs!) – Matt & Mandy, Andy (Vogon) Watson and Sue, plus Janet North en route to s storytelling event.

After a pleasant lunch in the sun, which included fresh raspberries and figs from Geoff's allotment and a particularly fine Victoria sponge courtesy of Emma, the team set to in the cave with Geoff and Alex at the sharp end dealing with the pile of banged debris from the Wednesday before last.

Dave, Emma, Rich and Clive dealt with getting it all back to the Foot of the Stairs prior to the final haul to the surface before the tea-break. Around 20-odd bags plus large rocks.

After tea Clive had a productive chiselling session at the end filling a few more bags with Dave and Alex moving towards the surface.

Four half metre holes were drilled and fired before emerging into daylight again.

The work pushed the face on by another foot to 18inches and revealed a view down dip through the waterworn bedding (about 4 – 6inches high) to where the water could be seen crossing to the right. Whilst there was no obvious 'roar' of course but the area does now sound much more 'hollow' and there is a distinct sound of running water ahead.

Another session on Wed night but it looks like no Rock Farm work next Saturday as both Dave and I will not be around. I assume Geoff will be at Viaduct as usual though.

All best

Clive

A **cave hunt** in Western Mendip on the Sunday of an August bank holiday weekend 2020

Sue and I are waiting for confirmation of our house move date, from a somewhat traumatic chain, and our house is packed and we have two storage containers full of stationary engines, garage equipment, caving equipment and other garden paraphernalia and we are rather bored aside from the usual work/house routines. I optimistically suggested over the three-day bank holiday weekend we could have some 'cave hunt' adventures. This led to my suggestion early on Sunday morning to leave late morning, after an online church service from Andover (where we are hopefully moving to), to take a picnic rucksack, some loose caving kit in a rope bag and go walking in Western Mendip. Having done many of the caves in Western Mendip previously, and having recently read quite a lot of the new Somerset Underground volume 2 book I decided that there were some caves that I would like to revisit and to photograph the entrances and visit some obscure holes that we had never been to. Ones we had done previously over the years were Loxton Cave, Loxton Quarry Cave, Lost Cave of Loxton (all further west than today's walk), Coral Cave (a good 2x ladder or SRT trip), the small White Cliff Cave that we discovered on a wintertime snowy walk on Waverley Down area some years back, Denny's Hole, adjacent to the footpath up to Crook Peak (National Trust & popular – a good walk and a pleasant picnic spot with great views) along with its associated Fox's Hole (now covered with removable logs almost on the footpath) presumably to avoid people losing children or dogs, Sandy Cave (a short photogenic cave suitable for children in the small quarry on the left-hand lower down the footpath from Denny's Hole), Supra-Sandy Hole (a short rock shelter on the way down to the quarry from the footpath), Supra-Scragg's Hole (a small low bedding mostly blocked with blocks, but just accessible if you need a nap; 5m south-west of Denny's down slope) and Scragg's Hole a large double arch about 30m south-west of Denny's down slope with a galvanised tin-bath and bucket probably from the last occupying caver?

On the way back we stopped in Cross and walked up the footpath to Cross Quarry and checked out the Cross Quarry Geode hole (a good hidey hole) visible up on the left hand side as you enter and accessible by an easy scramble, but interesting. This quarry is a lovely safe (ish) place for a picnic with children or grandchildren and we picked some good blackberries.

Anyhow, I wanted to check which was of Scragg's & Supra-Scragg's as I had a photo from previous years that I was not sure about and I also wanted to investigate Wolf Den & Barton Shelter on the North West side of Crook Peak to photo the entrances for MCRA website. So we parked in what I think was Barton village and followed the footpath uphill that is well marked with yellow discs (off the road it follows a track to start with over two cattle grids and up past the National Trust building/office) then at a footpath T-Junction turn right follow along through a gate and over a stile into a grazing field and head up slope on the path but cross over to the right hand fence and this takes you up to a footpath cross roads go right along the edge of the hill circa 200m to the second obvious steep (ish) gully between low cliffs. Here, I left Sue sitting in the sunshine and descended with some bramble secateurs a bag, caving helmet, 25m rope (which I anchored initially at a small hawthorn bush some 3m down on the left and lower down again on a tree which gave me just enough to safely land by the Wolf Den cave [see photo] entrance (getting back up the hand line rope was very useful and reassuring).

Once photographed and briefly explored, I proceeded down to the left, north-west along the base of cliff for 50m and there you will find some big ivy type sticks and Barton Shelter complete with its more recent sheep bones and skull (Note: when Willie Stanton investigated and dug both these caves in 1944/5 he found both horse and wolf bones). Back up the way I came down with bramble scratches and nettle rash to find a very relaxed Sue at the top. Two more short holes explored.

Then we drove round the end of the hill to the obvious parking area where you can walk up to the caves (Denny's Hole etc) as indicated on the National Trust information board. Denny's Hole (I don't fit through the squeeze anymore to allow access to the second and thirds chamber – very disappointing, but clearly my chest does not fit or 'give' enough!). We visited Scragg's, Supra-Scragg's, Sandy Hole, Supra-Sandy hole and took some entrance photos. All in all a successful cave hunt and a good picnic. Andy Watson

Rock Farm Wednesday 9th September Dave, Alex and Clive

Straight to the end with Alex in charge of debris removal and initial chiselling etc while Dave and Clive moved the accumulated bags back to the pitch and then up to the Foot of the Stairs.

A change of 'chiseller' in the shape of Clive at the end produced a few more bags and a large rock before drilling time (after losing a chisel down the open bedding plane).

Three holes drilled and fired and all the bags deposited on The Landing ready for the final trip to the surface, presumably next Wednesday (no Dave or Clive this weekend).

All best

Clive

ROCK FARM CAVE

12 September 2020 Geoff N, Rich W, Simon M-K

All the bags from the ledge (and a few rocks) were taken to the surface, before a short digging session got under way in the ledge passage. Some small rocks were levered out, and a fair amount of brownish cave earth was sent up, together with two 10 cm femurs (? fox, dog or badger). The left-hand side is undercut but a number of large ribs are now in the way. They may be independent slabs, but could be solid. As Geoff said - "The jury is out".

Rich

Wed 16th Sept

Rock Farm Cave.

Clive Alex & Dave.

Plenty of spoil bagged and some rocks dispatched towards the surface. Whilst the first batch of spoil was on its way a lot lot more rock was chiselled out from the dig face. This filled the remaining bags but still left a lot more spoil to bag and chiseling to be done, therefore drill and bang not required.

The left hand end of the bedding plan has opened up with a joint in the upper surface giving a down sloping tube of about 8 - 12 inches and continues down for about 8 to 10ft this now takes the low level stream flow. The right hand end of the bedding plane is currently blocked by spoil but it would appear the left hand side is heading to the right further down, therefore they will most likely join once the central pillar of rock is removed.

All the 30 plus bagged spoil and rocks were stacked on the landing waiting to be hauled out on Saturday.

Ps. we've not yet rescued the chisel that went solo down the right hand side of the bedding plane.

Dave.

Tues 15 Sept

Apologies I forgot to write up last weeks Carrion Slocker work with Paul & I on Tuesday 15th Sept

After collecting the cement mixing spade from the bottom of the current cave/rift, we surface mixed some cement and then carefully took individual skip loads down to Bethlehem pot to

start stabilising the loose wall matter behind the heavy duty green fencing in Bethlehem Pot before the

wet season starts to try to prevent some of it washing out if the water volume exceeds the 4" drain volume

which throws most of the swallet water down Nazareth away from the digging area. That said it might come

nearer to the dig area now as we are a good 10m below Nazareth and Bethlehem so you never know.

By cementing and back filling with spoil rocks this should help keep the current way down clear of too many

loose rocks and stones. Five skips mixed and used at about 3 to 1 mix and by the time this was spooned into

position with the rocks it was a couple of hours and cool & dark on the surface. Cleaned up and left to harden.

6 x 6ft scaffold poles taken to the swallet surface too.

Andy/Vogon

Rock Farm Saturday 19th Sept 2020 Dave, Geoff, Alex, Simon, Pavel, Rich and Clive

Well it was expected to be a legitimate 'six' meeting up but a (very welcome) surprise attendance by Alex boosted the number a little!

The accumulated mountain of bags and rocks on The Landing were dragged to the surface while a Cave Cam session followed by comprehensive chiselling and clearing took place at the end.

After a well-earned tea-break four holes were drilled and fired at the end favouring the right hand side of the dig.

The CaveCam video worked very well and took a look at the apparent widening of the joint about 8-10ft down dip following the little stream. No caverns measureless were evident but it would be interesting (if academic) to repeat the exercise with the camera facing more to the left to see where the water goes.

The joint (which goes more or less straight down the dip, seems to intersect a bedding coming in from the right.

My feeling, in the short term at least, is to continue pushing to the right across and down the bedding in the direction of where we have heard the 'roar' coming from. When the wetter weather returns (assuming we are allowed to as well) hopefully we will hear the fabled torrent again and we can judge if we are on the right path.

A return is planned for Wednesday.....

Clive

Viaduct Sink 19 September 2020 Dave King, Pawel Krawczyk, Geoff Newton

The cave was pretty dry; none of the water in the surface stream was flowing on down-valley past the entrance.

The spoil from the last bang was cleared from the face to Bridge Junction, Dave doing the work of three people. Also moving the residual bagged spoil from Somme Junction to Bridge Junction. The area immediately in front of the dig-face is very cramped making extraction of the spoil rather tedious. This area will need enlarging before we can press on forward.

Alas no problem with the rule of six here on the day.

Cheers

Geoff

Carrion Slocker 23/09/2020

I drove over to Carrion Slocker to meet Matt and Mandy where together we took 5 scaffold poles to the bottom of the rift and to the 'potential pot' area along with the scaffold clips and spanner. I ventured in to the dolomitic boulder hole and we fixed up 3 scaffold tubes crossed over to support the Rock Lintel and hopefully make it safer and to stop it moving too far, if indeed it does. We dug out a few rocks off the balancing floor area and repositioned some of the 'balancers' to make it feel more secure.

In the lower dig site along the lower sloping rift I cleared the 3 rocks that were blocking the floor level entrance and retrieved the larger lump hammer before Matt & Mandy arrived down with the extra scaffold poles. Later Matt went to check this digging site out looking at the potential way to the western end of the sloping rift. A useful 2 hour session and it will be interesting to see where the water flows as we move into winter.

Andy (Vogon) W

Rock Farm - Wednesday 23rd September Dave, Alex and Clive

The hauling system at the end of the cave has now been updated, thanks to Dave, with the introduction of a replacement skip (less likely to spill its contents) and a decent hauling rope and haul-backline which now reaches from the base of the pitch/climb right to the end of the cave.

Its now possible for one person, at the pitch, to haul the skip right from the face and for the digger to return the favour by dragging the empty skip back again.

Having now done away with one or two people positioned at strategic points they can be redeployed (if they are there in the first place!) further up the cave moving spoil towards the surface. (so no redundancies!)

A little fettling remains to be done where the rope passes the sharp bend into the final section – the friction there is considerable and adds a lot to the effort needed for the haul. Maybe a roller or a vertical stemple on the corner would do the trick.

Having fixed the new system in place Alex cleared the pile of bang debris, this being followed by a chiselling session and the drilling and firing of five holes.

Having discounted the tube down which the 'main' stream disappears work continues following the original plan of heading across the bedding in the direction of the fabled 'roar' and no doubt the continuation, at depth, of the Cave 'C' rift just to the west.

Thanks to the new system all the bags and rocks were removed to the surface by the end of the evening before a 'tea and natter' session with Gav in his caravan.

On Saturday it will be straight back to clearing at the end....

Clive

Viaduct Sink 26 September Dave King, Mike Kousiounis, Alex Randall, Geoff Newton

The cave was very dry, clearly the heavy rain which fell on Bournemouth during the week had not also fallen on Mendip.

A large quantity of accumulated spoil, which previously had been stashed at Bridge Junction, was transferred to a more permanent home in Downside Aven. Some rocks were also moved closer to Downside Aven in preparation for more wall building. While this was going on preparations were going to enlarge the working area in front of the dig face. A loud noise was then initiated and the team departed for Rock Farm and lunch.

Geoff Newton

Rock Farm - Saturday 26th September Dave, Geoff, Mike 'Kushie', Rich, Simon and Clive

Another 'Covid-quorate' session!

Mike and Geoff straight to the end to begin clearing Wednesday's bang debris with everyone else spread out through the cave to bring it to the surface in more or less one go.

Dave observed the first few skips-worth as they left the face to see where the friction points were which were causing annoying drag on the rope.

It turned out that the protruding 'filler' on the cut down plastic container which doubles as a drag tray/skip was catching on rock projections on the way up – this will be sorted on the next trip by sawing it off!

Around 30 bags were extricated before tea-break after which a few mags of chisel debris joined them and five holes drilled and fired.

Waiting on the return of wetter conditions in the hope that the 'roar' will return to help guide us!

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Wednesday 30th September Dave, Alex & Clive

After all the rain the cave stream was up somewhat but not exceptionally high. Certainly not high enough for the pumps to be needed.

A good clearing session from Saturday's bang saw all the bags cleared to the surface (BTW thanks to Duncan for yet more bags!) before four more holes were drilled and fired.

The 'roar' was not evident although at the end of the session Dave and I could both discern a faint rumble (not stomachs!) coming from somewhere but we could not work out from which direction.

All out of the cave by 9.30 and into Gav's caravan for some socially distanced beer-swilling!

On Saturday it will be straight into clearing from the end again.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 3rd October Dave, Geoff and Clive

At Gav's suggestion we assembled in the rain to help move our oft-missed Shepherds Hut from the quarry back to the yard area.

Before doing so Gav used his fork-lift to move the pile of heavy timbers from adjacent to our rock pile outside Rock Farm Cave to the quarry and also to move the three filled rock crates away to, I think, the yard. These were replaced with three more empty crates courtesy of Dave.

After towing the hut back from the quarry with the tractor much careful manoeuvring ensued around the scaffolding surrounding the barn (sorry Erica – 'the house'!) until it was finally positioned just yards from the entrance!

Suitably levelled and hooked up to a power source its now back in action, although temporarily without its heater. The remaining piles of small rock are due to be moved away in due course.

The heavy rain had produced the expected major rise in water level entering the cave. Only one pump was in action (this to be remedied very soon) and as a result the cave was very noisy, wet and sporting!

At the end the bang debris had, unsurprisingly, caused a frothy pool to build up which made digging out the spoil a fairly subaqueous activity until the bedding could be opened up and the stream sent gushing on its way. Rich positioned himself at the of the slope to haul the skips up, something he managed despite suffering from misted up glasses due to his mask.

Fairly good progress was made forward with a rewarding hammer and chisel session producing a view into more of the open bedding below – dramatic with the stream rushing into the hole.

With all the 'ambient' noise it was difficult to detect if there was a separate roar or not this time.

Four more holes drilled and eventually fired. I say eventually as there was an initial misfire which on later examination proved to be a short between the wires attached to the det. This was compounded by the failure of my exploder. Using the Hilti battery also failed to fire the shot and it took a 12v battery temporarily liberated from Gav's tractor to do the job!

More wet frolics on Wednesday!

All best

Clive

Viaduct Sink 3 October Dave King, Geoff Newton

A late start due to sorting out a submersible pump for Rock Farm Cave.

Viaduct Sink was unsurprisingly quite wet; in particular a torrent coming down Downside Aven sent a significant stream down the crawl to Bridge Junction, which it entered as a waterfall to join the main stream. However the dam continued to operate well, sending most of the combined water down The Somme.

The spoil created last Saturday was transferred to The Toolshed, together with an accumulation of gravel in the floor in front of the dig face. When that was done it revealed the 0.5m drop had in fact been passed last week. However although the passage gradient has become more gentle, the way on is obscured by a heap of spoil which has been blown forward into the unmodified passage.

Then to Rock Farm to help install the Shepherds hut, take lunch and help in Rock Farm Cave..

Geoff Newton

Viaduct Sink 10 October Dave King, Geoff Newton

The surface stream was still high and there were signs of it having overtopped its banks in our absence. A lot of mud had been deposited on the top of the gate lid. The entrance shaft and series were very much wetter than usual.

Surprisingly and fortunately, Downside Aven and the crawl to Bridge Junction were relatively dry. Thus we were able to move the spoil stashed at The Toolshed all the way to its final resting place in Downside Aven, without getting drenched in the process. A good piece of work for two people.

Geoff Newton

Rock Farm Cave - Sat 10th Oct

Rich, Simon, Clive, Geoff & Dave,

Before lunch the culvert and pumps were fettled and since the level in the culvert was quite low compare to the previous couple of weeks only one pump was required. After lunch on the lawn Clive headed home to collect forgotten kit whilst the rest of the team headed on underground. There was still a stream flowing below the staircase, on down the Mud Ole and below the pitch, most of which obviously wasn't from the culvert flow.

Geoff took the first shift at the sharp end whilst the rest of the team hauled the spoil back towards the landing. A swap round with Dave continuing at the dig face with some chiseling of the roof and right hand wall. The stream is flowing freely down the bedding plane and tube to the left hand side trending to the right. Approx 1m down it appears that either the bedding plane levels out a little or there is a build up of spoil, but whichever, this may indicate a slight change with possibly a joining flow coming in from the right.

All of the spoil was stacked on the landing before stopping for an afternoon tea break in the shepherds hut. Clive then headed on down to drill and charge five holes in the roof and right hand wall whilst the bags were hauled to the surface and emptied. Finally a test of the firing cable and det circuit with Clive's new compact tester before the charge was successfully fired.

Dave.

Wed 14th Oct

Rock Farm Cave

Darrel Instrell, Alex, Clive & Dave.

Plus a surface visit from Spike to say "Hi" before the team headed off underground.

Since Darrel hadn't dug for a while and not seen the current dig face he was sent down first to clear spoil. Unfortunately half way down he declared he was too broken to go to the bottom having done a 19 mile walk inc 900m of ascent earlier in the day. A swap round of positions was therefore required. Whilst Alex and Darrel were changing places at the bottom of the staircase/stream, the boulders in the rift through which the stream enters that Darrel was standing on decided to shift. Darrel had the sense to stop moving and so too did the boulders which meant they were not heading to where Alex was standing. Alex and Clive then continued on down to clear and haul back spoil whilst Dave assisted by Darrel reconfigured the boulders to a stable slope in the streamway. The cause of the boulders slipping may have been due to the flooding the other week washing out shingle etc form under the boulders and so undermining them.

Usual service then resumed with all the bags hauled out and emptied on the surface whilst Clive drilled and charged four holes subsequently fired from the surface.

Clive, Darrel and Dave joined Gavin for rehydration therapy that didn't last as long as the previous week. Dave

Viaduct Sink Saturday 17 October Dave King, Geoff Newton

Alas, the streamway that we are enlarging seems to be getting smaller. When we started it was almost big enough for a man to squeeze through. Now, several metres ahead, we are faced with a hole only a small dog could get through. This reduces our optimism and increases the amount of spoil that needs to be created and moved. No draught was noted, although the air remains fresh.

Drilled some metre long holes in the face and made a loud noise shortly afterwards.

Cheers

Geoff

Sat 17th Oct

Rock Farm Cave.

Clive, Geoff, Rich & Dave.

The culvert stream flow fairly low so no pumps deployed. The previous Wednesday's bang had not been as productive as anticipated. So whilst Clive was busy chiseling to create more progress and spoil, and Rich busied himself with a little fettling of the ramp built from the shifted boulders below the Staircase. The relatively small number of bags were hauled to the surface before an early tea break. After tea, the spoil bags were emptied whilst Clive & Dave drilled and charged six holes at the sharp end. Hopefully a lot more spoil to be cleared on Wednesday with better progress down the bedding plane.

Dave.

Tuesday, 20 October 2020 Carrion Slocker solo

There was no water running in the field and the cave was pretty dry. There was very little water running in the Heale surface stream.

In Carrion I re taped one drain joint and another needs a prop and slight repair, the drain must have taken a lot of water in recent times. I cut off the ends of several mesh tie wraps to tidy up Bethlehem Pot which also has taken a bit of water but the recent cementing is holding up well and it could do with some more at some point Paul!

The Tombstone Rift climb down section seems to have taken a bit of water too. Down the ladder into Fiat 500 rift and the rock Bridge of Sighs was all very dry. I entered the upper dig and drilled, P&F a boulder to carefully gain access to the pot beyond with the black cobble that looked like it is sitting on a mantelpiece; this small chamber is actually a dead end and will be known as the Sitting Room, as it is big enough to sit in and it has a mantelpiece with a black cobble that looks like rather like a clock.

It probably takes or has taken some water but this runs away southwards under boulders towards the other dig site. I looked at two possibilities in the sloping rift area, to the east end I drilled, P&F to take a large lump off the end of a large slab and realised this is the bottom of the trenchy bit that Mandy said was interesting slightly north from the bottom of the ladder. It's not really very promising and it is very hard to dig.

The west end is much more promising and I drilled, P&F the blocking boulder very well and the second part of it needs removing before we progress further. But down dip is definitely the 'way of the water' we are following and it is promising if we can find a body sized way on.

Vogon/Andy W

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 21st October

Clive & Dave.

With the rain during the day the culvert was up a little so two pumps were deployed. Below The Staircase the stream was lower than the previous week, however the flow down the bedding plane up slope from the dig face was higher than it has been seen for while. Saturday's bang as last week hadn't created as much spoil as expected despite the six holes fired. A dozen or so bags filled before a further few filled after some chiseling. Nothing to report regarding the way on since spoil is blocking the view down the bedding plane & tube. 16 bags hauled up the bucket pitch and then whilst Clive drilled and charged four holes Dave ferried and emptied all the bags on the surface. Dave rejoined Clive just in time to assist with carrying out drill etc. before the four holes were successfully fired.

The shepherds hut now has heating and so made for a pleasant place to change before joining Gavin for a socially distanced drink.

Dave.

Viaduct Sink Saturday 24 October Dave King, Geoff Newton

Before we descended into the cave Dave noted that a tiny hole seemed to have opened up in the stream bed next to the entrance. This was increasing the flow of water down the entrance shaft and if left unchecked could become a problem in future. We stuffed leaves and gravel into the hole and Dave diverted the water away from the hole by moving a few rocks and deepening the channel close to the opposite bank of the stream. This will need keeping an eye on in future.

The spoil from the last bang was removed to The Toolshed and bagged. This took a little longer than usual due to the cramped space in front of the dig face. This space will need enlarging before we try to move forward. Back to Rock Farm for lunch and the afternoon Rock Farm Cave session.

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm - Saturday 24th Oct 2020 Dave, Geoff, Rich, Simon and Clive

Over lunch at the Shepherd's Hut Gav looked in and said "very low water in the culvert – a good day for hearing the roar chaps!" or words to that effect!

As it turned out – hes was right!

It was Geoff's turn at the sharp end and the word soon came back "I can hear the roar"! Seeing that Geoff was always, lets say, mildly sceptical this was indeed a turn up for the books!

After handing over to Dave for more chiselling around 20 bags made their way to the surface before the tea break and a chance for Gav say "I told you so"!

I went to the end to drill five more holes and can confirm that I too could hear the roar – not anything like as loud as the famous occasion when Pawel and I heard it loud and clear but I also have to admit that my hearing in one ear is down by about half. Did Dave have his aids in I wonder as I got the impression that he may have thought it louder than I did or there might have been a fluctuation in water flow casing a variation.

It certainly seems to emanate from down dip somewhere as far as we can tell. When we have got in by around another 2-3ft which should have a better idea of whether its worth persevering or not as Cave Cam had shown there might have been a hint of something (probably small!) coming in from the right.

A return on Wednesday of course.....

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - 28th October

Clive & Dave.

After the two pumps that were required in the culvert were suitably fettled the pre-warmed shepherd's hut was a welcome spot for changing into caving kit.

Down in Rock Farm Cave the stream was low below the staircase but not surprisingly flowing quite well down the bedding at the dig face. Dave set about clearing and chiseling whilst Clive hauled the 16 bags plus one rock (we need to produce more rocks - more on that later) to the bucket ledge. All bags hauled up the bucket pitch before Clive went down to drill and Dave ferried the bags towards the surface. Before Dave had time to get the bags to the surface he was joined by Clive considerably earlier than expected. Unfortunately only one hole drilled before the drill died and it wasn't worth firing just the one hole. With the extra pair of hands the bags were soon out on the surface and emptied.

At the dig face the channel in the floor seems to be getting a little deeper and the gradient possibly a little steeper, but the way on is obscured by washed down out of reach bang debris. No "roar" heard on this occasion perhaps due to the water levels or that the way on is partially blocked with spoil.

A socially distanced convivial chat over a pint with Gavin revealed that their might soon be another cash injection into the bang fund. The crates of limestone have been getting some more interest on Ebay and possibly another four crates may soon to be dispatched. Fortunately Dave was one step ahead with two more empty crates that had leapt onto the car roof earlier in the day. A task therefore on Saturday will be a stock check of full crates and if possible rectify any shortfall.

There will be no spoil to clear from the bottom of Rock Farm Cave just a drill and bang so attention can be diverted to pushing the dig at the landing, does this require a drill and pop (extra det required) ? Since the bang fumes here would clear fairly quickly it is possible with an early pop that clearing could also be done on Saturday and it may help with any shortfall of rocks :-)

Dave.

Weds 28th Oct 2020

Carrion Swallet I drilled, P&F some large boulders and cleared some smaller stuff and gained 1.5m and put in a support for a sagging drain pipe on the way out and dropped some of the larger rocks on the way up the rifts digging ladder to make it less snaggy going up & down, lets hope the rest of it stays in place Matt during a settlement period that is needed.

Andy W

Rock Farm - Saturday 31st Oct Dave, Geoff, Rich and Clive

Attention turned to pushing the higher level of the entrance rift while there was no spoil to come up from the end.

The confines were tricky for Geoff and Dave to work in especially when it came to trying to manoeuvre sections of the large rib in the centre of the 'passage'. Despite this two large sections were removed to the surface successfully.

At the end, five holes were drilled and ultimately fired and, in addition, a small charge fired in the continuation of the rib in the upper rift.

At the end of the cave, crouched right down in the extremity drilling I could hear three sounds – the stream which rushes past down the ongoing tube, another sound which is most likely the water continuing somewhere ahead and a third separate sound (the 'roar') muffled but distinct nevertheless.

Work continues! (well not beyond Wednesday night)!

Clive

Viaduct Sink Saturday 31 October Dave King, Geoff Newton

Although the surface stream was higher than last week there was no more water coming down the entrance shaft thanks to Dave's engineering.

We transferred the bags of spoil and rocks from The Toolshed to Downside Aven, but the bags of spoil were not emptied behind the spoil retaining wall as there was an excessive amount of water falling down the aven. This job was left for a future, drier day when we would not be soaked in the process.

Back to Rock Farm for lunch and work in Rock Farm Cave.

Cheers Geoff N

Lockdown announced for one month in England from Nov 5th due to Covid19

Rock Farm Cave

Wed 4th November

Clive and Dave.

Two pumps were required to reduce the flow in the culvert.

The bang in the rift above the landing had done a good job of breaking up the rock in the mud filled rift. With no visible rock flake or boulder in the way digging should be relatively easy for a couple of sessions. It would however be a little easier if the bench rock on the LHS was reduced, possibly a plug-n-feather job.

The bang at the other sharp end at the bottom of the cave so far had done a reasonable job producing 17 bags of spoil with the additional help of a little chiseling. All bagged spoil hauled and emptied on the surface. Unfortunately the drill only managed a couple of holes before the battery died, but fortunately a few holes remained in the locked in but slightly cracked rock from Sat's bang. This meant five holes were charged and popped which should hopefully widen and improve access for spoil clearing - whenever that may be.

A number of chisels and the bucket haul rope removed for a little dressing/fettling.

Usual Wed evening chat with Gavin over a pint and homeward bound before the strike of midnight and commencement of lockdown.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave

To keep things moving Clive and Dave wondered about a couple of solo sessions, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. After confirming with Gavin that this was okay, Dave took the morning shift and Clive the afternoon shift (I assume, since our paths didn't cross).

Sat 14th November am - Dave (solo)

With both pumps in the culvert fired it was on down to the bottom of Rock Farm Cave. The previous bang had done a good job and with some chiseling 12 1/2 bags worth of spoil and four large rocks were dug out. The bedding plane has started to open up again on the right hand side leaving a pinch point pillar of rock between the new opening and where the water currently flows down the left hand side. As this opened up a significant draft blew out, possibly due to air being dragged down with the water on the left hand side. The four rocks stashed a little up slope from the dig face whilst the 12 1/2 bags were taken up to the alcove that houses the old det wire. The low rumble/roar could again be heard ahead. A few photos attached of the dig face and a little wildlife spotted on the way out.

Dave.

Ps. Clive, the bang wire reel has suffered again, but still just about functional.

Rock Farm - Sunday 15th November Clive solo....

A short session with Plug n' Feathers and a fully recovered Hilti drill in 'Richard's Rift' near the entrance.

The constriction on the left which prevented easy access took four holes to reduce its size sufficiently and a further couple in the resulting block to reduce it to easily manageable chunks.

This has now made the dig much more manageable. The rift ahead is a foot wide between lightly scalloped walls with a central block forming the roof which has a stal coated underside. There is a smattering of botryoidal stal as well on the left hand side of the rift.

The rift ahead appears to be choked only with mud at the moment.

As we are allowed to meet one other person outdoors for exercise etc it seems to me that the rockpile (and some diggable mud etc) could easily be removed during 'Lockdown-lite' by one person with another on the surface socially distancing.

If Dave or Rich would like to join me to do this we could do it on Wed evenings or on Saturdays. I'm reluctant to suggest daytime during the week (although it could possibly be warmer for the surface party) as Gav's builder/s would presumably be about.

If the end of the cave is ready for another bang (I assume it is thanks to Dave's clearing work) I could have a solo session there soon-ish.

All best

Clive

Wed Nov 18th Rock Farm Cave Clive & Dave

To keep things moving Clive and Dave continued progress in 'Richard's Rift'. Whilst Dave went down to the rift Clive remained on the surface to ensure social distancing was maintained. The rocks and debris from the previous bang and Clive's plug-n-feather attack on the left hand boulder were hauled out to the surface along with approx a dozen skip loads of muddy spoil. There are now a number of rocks on the surface that will require cleaning before stacking in the awaiting crates. The muddy spoil was wheel barrowed and tipped in the 'pond' between the culvert manhole cover and stream, as requested by Gavin.

Whilst digging out a couple of large rocks a small hole opened up on the left hand side in the floor so care now required not to lose a chisel or lump hammer. A large slab remains in the floor that will need to come out, but this is already loose and the long wrecking bar will probably do the trick. A bang will soon be required in the boulder ahead and it appears that as we follow the dip down the infill may become less densely packed.

Dave.

Friday 21st of November 2020 (during lockdown) Chilmark stone mines

I took a spade and a small rake with me to see if I could get into the No. 2 of the three entrances that I had entered previously (in 2013 & 2011). I removed the log I'd left in the entrance 3 weeks ago to stop people's dogs going in, albeit off the dog walking paths. I dug out the entrance so I could just squeeze through pushing a few boulders some sticks and some dry grass out of the way and succeeded in getting into the low bedding plane with a pillar that supports the roof opposite the 'WELCOME' graffiti (see photograph). This confirmed that this is the mine entrance through which I had entered some years ago in 2013 & 2011. I then spent time roughly sketching a layout of this part of the stone mine and entered some areas that I had not been in before and it is possible that all three low entrances are connected to the same mine system. The entrance No.3 towards the South West, is some 10m from away from entrance No.2 at the same contour level (the one I entered through) is most likely to join into the low earthy area shown on the right of my rough sketch.

The No.1 in the low cliff to the North West is possibly part of the same system, albeit I didn't get to it along the low bedding; as it is some 25 m away).

I now do not believe this mine is the same one that Andy Sparrow entered in the early 1970s with the Salisbury Caving group a roughly surveyed, that is a very different layout.

After exiting through No.2 again I went further to North West and down the hill slightly to have another look at the possible other entrance in the small field in a quarry which has obviously been in-filled and levelled off. I had a bit more of a dig there in the dark, I am pretty sure this area has another entrance up against the base of the steeply sloping overgrown quarry face and that if found it will be to a separate mine as it is on a different, 50ft lower contour and it will need a bit more digging out with a real spade, probably with some permission, as it's not too far from a farm or farm buildings a field or so away and it really needs to be done in the daylight.

So in summary, a successful visit and more to look at and of course 'not without interest'.

Andy W / Vogon

Rock Farm - Saturday 21st November Dave & Clive

Another of our 'socially-distanced' sessions with the aim of drilling at the end and possibly removing the bags of rocks left in the lower streamway by Dave last week.

Just one pump needed due to the low-ish culvert flow (just as well as Gav had accidentally damaged the outlet pipe from the other).

Acknowledging the prerequisite of keeping 'distanced' Dave came up with the brilliant tactic of hauling the drag tray all the way from 'Bang-Wire Alcove'(!) to the top of the pitch in one go thereby removing the need to stack at the base of the pitch prior to hauling up.

Using the haul back line to return the skip the whole operation of removing the dozen spoil bags can't have taken more than 20 minutes.

Obviously the skip would be totally unsuitable for lifting rocks up the pitch.....

Dave worked the bags back to the surface while Clive returned to the end to drill. Three holes in the 'pillar' at the end plus three in the roof at the back were drilled and fired.

The outward slight draught that Dave mentioned previously was still there but the chances are that it is just a result of the water entering the bedding at the end. There was no 'roar' as such but a repeated gurgle(!) that might just be the water backing up and clearing ahead.

On the surface the previously cleared mud-coated rocks from Richard's Rift were given a good wash and brush up prior to ending up in the crate (almost full now)

We aim to have another go on Wednesday – probably at Richards Rift again.....

Clive

Wednesday 25th Nov

Rock Farm Cave.

Clive and Dave.

Dave arrived already in caving kit and set both pumps running, whilst Clive took advantage of the pre heated shepherds hut to don his oversuit.

Dave promptly set to work at the sharp filling 11 bags with spoil whilst Clive hauled them to the ledge. A quick change of positions - Clive loading the bucket and Dave hauling. Once all the bags stashed at the top of the bucket pitch both went back on down. Dave fettled a few rocks to ease the skip hauling near the bottom whilst Clive set up to drill. Dave then headed out to ferry the bags to the surface, but was soon caught up by the sound of the drill box clattering up behind him. Unfortunately the drill had died, so all that was left to do was haul all the bags to the surface and empty before an early finish.

Nothing significant to report from the sharp end.

With a frost developing Clive again made good use of the warm shepherds hut and Dave headed home in furry suit.

Dave.

Chilmark Stone Mine Tuesday 24th Nov

You may wonder why I keep going back in the dark, dark woods on my own, just to survey bats in the mine really.

I went to look at a few extension possibilities and found a few bits and I also dug my way through leaves, sticks, small rocks & debris in a low section and broke into another bit which matches Andy Sparrows survey, so it is the same mine! It has two entrances now, since his few visits in the 1970's. So I have updated his survey a bit. The old AS entrance needs digging out on the inside, so I might do that next visit. I am pretty sure there is more to it too from the potential low cliff entrance I called No.1 although it does not quite connect yet.

Take care all, Andy W/Vogon

Mendip now in Tier 2 Covid restrictions

Rock Farm Cave

(Note no digging was done on Sat 28th due to poorly drill battery)

Wed 2nd Dec.

Clive & Dave.

Only one pump required to drop the level in the culvert.

Once drill and bang box etc delivered to the sharp end, Dave headed back up the the Landing to continue digging in Richard's Rift whilst Clive set about drilling six holes (three in the roof plus 3 in the right hand wall) using Gav's borrowed Dewalt drill.

In RR half a dozen bags of spoil dug out and stashed on the Landing but a stubborn large upside-down tooth shaped rock in the floor although loose could not be lifted out even with the application of the 6ft wrecking bar. Due to the shape it is unlikely a rope will grip it but an eye bolt inserted will most likely see it hauled out.

Clive's six hole were successfully fired.

Dave.

Just adding though that there hopefully should be a good amount to clear on Saturday for a couple while two others might like to carry on with RR. Richard – your turn in your Rift perhaps!

All best

Clive

2nd December 2020 Carrion Slocker (solo)

On arrival at the swallet hole I realised that our 4 inch drain and dam located down just off the field had become so blocked with leaves and field mud that it had massively overflowed into the pothole rather than going into the four-inch diversion drain into the Nazareth area. This must've occurred during the recent heavy downpours. I cut the ladder into two bits and drilled holes into the sides for bolts before taking two anchors and the ladder sections down into Bethlehem to possibly use as a more suitable digging ladder in the rift for a while. The cave had clearly taken a lot of water in several areas and below Bethlehem on my last trip (28/10) following a suggestion or complaint from Matt I had tried to enlarge the top of the rift by moving a couple of narrowing boulders which I did successfully. However, the heavy rainfall water has disturbed the whole area at the top of the rift and some large blocks have now slipped blocking the top of the rift. The area now needs some pins and scaffolding to make safer and avoid further slippage and some drilling, P&F to break up and clear the big boulders into the Stores area; then we can decide if it needs any meshes prior to any scaffold support. Depending on the winter weather we also need to get into the cave during a storm to see which way the water flows in flood conditions (Local Atlas team please let me know if East Mendip has a couple of days of heavy storms, it takes quite a lot for Carrion to get very wet). This visit Carrion Slocker was still into our drain dam so I cleared the mesh and the soil and leaves from it and there was no water was flowing off the field. The site now needs 3 and 6 foot scaffold poles and lots of clips to stabilise the top of the rift before further digging.

I went over to check the Heale stream and this was flowing slightly but sinking well before the normal sink.

Andy W Vogon

Rock Farm Cave

Sat 5th December

Rich, Geoff, Clive, Emma (flying visit) & Dave.

Christmas cards exchanged before Emma departed, but before doing so she left some treats to go with afternoon tea.

One pump fired up in the culvert.

Geoff and Clive headed down to the sharp end to clear and haul back the previous banded spoil whilst Dave and Rich set about hauling up the five bags of spoil left on the landing from the rift. Once Dave had drilled and fitted a rawlbolt to the large boulder in the rift, Rich and Dave hauled it towards the landing, Rich hauling from the surface, Dave in the rift. With a lot heaving and gruffing, with the ladder ramp about 4ft further in and the application of an additional scaffold pole and board, the boulder was hauled onto the ladder ramp. With the boulder secure, Dave clambered over the boulder and up the ladder ramp such that both could haul from the surface. The boulder was then hauled off the top of the ramp where it then jammed in the entrance, so with it tied off and again secure it was left until the cavalry arrived from below. During the hauling a scaffold pole made a bid for freedom and clattered down the entrance rift and beyond, fortunately the cavalry were still busy with spoil lugging further down - phew! Then when the extra manpower arrived the boulder was soon lifted clear of the entrance.

A socially distance slightly chilly tea break around the huge stones beside the shepherd's hut followed. During which Geoff was asked if he could hear a roar when digging at the bottom. He replied with something to the effect - yes he could hear something when cleared open an air space. :-). The shortbread biscuits went down well along with Geoff's apple pies, but the Chloe's Continental live to be eaten another day.

After tea the dozen bags of spoil from the bottom that Geoff & Clive had deposited at the bottom of the staircase were hauled and emptied on the surface. Clive proceeded to drill and charge seven holes spread between the roof and the right hand wall, Dave dug another couple of bags of spoil and loaded another rock into the boulder net ready for hauling.

By this time Geoff and Rich had headed off which left just the final boulder haul and firing of the seven holes before Clive and Dave headed off too.

A very productive session.

Dave.

Tuesday, 8 December 2020 Chilmark Stone Mine (solo)

A surprise, I dug entrance No.1 open from one end of the low cliff (see survey) and expected to join up the low bedding going towards entrance No.2, but it did not connect. Instead after 2 ½ m of digging through rocks and mud the floor dropped away to the north and after another metre of digging to see where it was going, it dropped down a slope of 45° into a lower level. I found a lovely Corona bottle

with a rubber internal screw cap. I estimate this was from the 1960s, probably the last time this area/chamber was entered. At the bottom of the slope was a lovely five pillar chamber some 6 m wide, 8 m long and 2m high with a lovely big white stone pillar showing the cutting marks along the top where a large block had been removed from it, no graffiti here either. There appears to be some evidence animal activity in areas, possibly rabbits at some point. Some of the area has been backfilled and this was probably near the original entrance to the mine judging by the external surface contours. In one direction it goes low for about 3 m. In another direction it goes crawling low for about 8 m but does not seem to connect, but perhaps did once connect with the other mine. I saw three bats on this trip of which I believe two were tiny Pipistrelle's.

Another redraw of the survey is required

Regards and take care, Andy W

Rock Farm Cave

Wednesday 9th December

Clive & Dave.

One pump easily coped with the culvert stream.

24 bags of spoil cleared, hauled and deposited on the surface. Due to clearing the large number of bags with just two Wednesday nighters, there wasn't time to drill and bang. However there is still more spoil that could easily be chiseled out prior to the next bang.

The "roar" of stream ahead and down was again audible.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave Saturday 12 December Clive, Dave, Rich, Geoff

One submersible pump running. Rich attempted a water trace between the hole in the floor of Richards Rift and the streamway. This was inconclusive. It was agreed that we should repeat this with more water at some time in the future.

Dave to the stream end to see what he could loosen by hammering and chiselling. This proved to be 9 bags of spoil.

Meanwhile the others carried on digging Richards Rift. Countless bags (we did not count) of wet clay and cobbles were extracted from the dig and transferred to the surface, together with 2 small and one largish rock. There was some rotation of jobs. The way on is barred by a very large boulder which will need to be dismantled before it can be removed. Eventually a tea break was called.

After the break Clive drilled 3 holes in the roof and 4 in the right hand wall at the end, whilst the others cleared the above mentioned 9 bags of spoil to the surface. Shortly after there was a loud noise and e departed the scene.

Geoff Newton

Just to add to Geoff's report....

At the end the 'roar' was evident in addition to the sound of the stream which accompanies you as you work at the face.

Equally interesting this time was the fact that the fine drill dust from a hole I was drilling, just above a window into the low open bedding on the right, was being drawn swiftly inwards.

This is the first sign we have had of an active draught at the end (apart from when we had a slight outward draught caused by the stream flowing into the confined space ahead). Certainly an inward draught is of note if only because there is usually a strong inward draught into the cave which disappears just above the pitch into the lower cave.

Putting a hand into the hole it was easy to feel the cool air being drawn past.

One still lives in hope!

The next session will be on Saturday....

All best

Clive

Tuesday, 15 December Carrion Slocker – solo visit

The water/small stream was flowing freely in the very muddy field and some was going down our drainpipe. I cleared the drainpipe entrance chute and grid of mud and leaves and let it flow gently. I took 6 six-foot scaffold tubes into the cave and 8 swivel clips and carried these down to the bottom of Bethlehem/top of the rift carefully. After clearing some of the smaller loose debris that had slide down blocking the rift I then placed one 10 mm pin in the secure wall and installed two scaffold poles and a small piece of mesh to make the rest of the boulders more secure and make it safer to work at the top of the rift to clear the other dislodged boulders. I drilled, plugged & feathered these, cleared the way down and successfully opened up the rift again. Fortunately there was no damage to the electron ladder. The water from the end of our drainpipe feeding into Nazareth is now falling through into the Sitting Room below the Stores and from there only a small amount is trickling to the possible way-on, down slope at the bottom of the lower bedding. So maybe there is another way down where the water is descending? Perhaps under the Sitting Room?

Take care all,

Andy W / vogon

Viaduct Sink, Saturday 19 December Geoff Newton Solo

With Viaduct currently being considered covid-insecure due to the cramped working conditions, we are reduced to solo trips. The cramped nature of the cave makes solo banging trips rather extended and tedious. I thought that doing the whole thing in one hit would make me late for the afternoon Rock Farm Cave session, so I just drilled holes. Four and a half ones, plus one aborted due to a drill bit tip breaking off in the hole.

The cave was very wet. It looked like the surface stream may have been temporarily flowing down the entrance shaft. Although the dam was working OK, various minor inlets below the dam ensured that I became wet also and I was glad that I had not brought anything to fill the holes with.

Needless to say a torrent was coming down Downside Aven so the bags of spoil are still waiting to be stacked in their final resting place.

The wire Clive lent us was taken out to be used in Richards Rift.

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm cave - Sat 19th Dec.

Clive, Geoff, Rich & Dave.

Only one pump energised due to the three way adaptor being a tad elusive.

First task in RFC was to reduce further the remaining part of the boulder in Richard's Rift, this was successfully popped after after a dodgy connection was rectified that initially caused a misfire. Fairly quickly the fumes cleared which then enabled two to head on to the bottom and two to work on Richard's Rift. Geoff and Clive took the deeper option with Geoff digging and Clive hauling. In the rift at the top Rich dug out spoil and rock which Dave stacked on the Landing before the pair moved up and hauled it all to the surface. Rocks were washed off in the stream and stacked in the awaiting crate. The three way adaptor was also located and the second pump fired up which significantly reduced the stream flowing below the Staircase. Geoff and Clive then appeared with their bags of spoil which were man handled out to the surface before stopping for a well earned suitably distanced if short tea break.

After tea a large slab that Geoff had wrestled out was hauled up the pitch, Dave then carried on down for some enthusiastic chiseling at the bottom resulting in another doz or so bags and some rocks to haul out. With time ticking on Geoff headed out somehow managing to take the huge slab with him (I hope your back is okay Geoff) whilst Clive and Dave hauled the spoil up the pitch. Clive then proceeded to drill and charge five holes whilst Dave ferried the spoil to the surface. No misfire this time, the five holes fired at about 18:40hrs for a late finish.

Dave.

Ps. Next session Wed evening prob just Clive & Dave, the following session will move to Sunday 27th.

Wednesday 23rd December 2020 Carrion Slocker solo

Lots of heavy rain over the last 48 hours or so. I went to see where the majority of the water goes at the bottom of the cave. So upon arrival the field drain was flowing well and the surface of the field has lots of puddling and it was still raining! Our 4 inch drain was taking the majority of the field water that was flowing into the swallet and I cleared the leaf grid again to keep it flowing freely. Going down the cave it was drippy and filled with the sounds of water flowing down the drain pipe and dropping into the Nazareth Rift section. I climbed down into Bethlehem Pot which was drippy but essentially dry. The rift area, although gritty, has stayed pretty stable this Christmas so far, since I put the scaffolding

in last week. The water that drains into Nazareth flows through the Stores Area from roof to floor and then sinks away. Going down the Fiat 500 Rift ladder and down the lower rift slope at the bottom of the 500 Rift where the water could be heard in the Sitting Room. Going in, there is a lot of water coming from the roof and sinking away among the boulders in the floor. I moved a few rocks around and cleared some of the smaller debris and it appears that this is probably the continuation of the downward rift, a bit like Heale, but it was way too wet to drill and plug & feather today. It is possible to see down through the holes between the boulders for about 18 inches or so. This continuation of digging needs leaving until much drier weather. That said, in dry spells cave dries out reasonably quickly once the surface field water stops running. Alternatively, some work could be carried out with some plastic sheeting or an umbrella. I exited the cave soaked to the skin and had a limited change of clothes in the car so I had to drive home commando (no pants). It was a cool drive home, take care and happy Christmas, Vagon.

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 23rd December 2020 Dave & Clive

After a pre-dig session of port and mince pies courtesy of Gavin and a guided tour of the impressive upstairs renovations of his barn/house we adjourned to the regular chores – Dave at the end clearing the bang debris and Clive hauling back.

Only seven bags worth this time (this dammed rock seems to just get harder!) found their way to the surface followed by just two holes drilled and fired in the right hand wall due to the drill battery going down prematurely. (I had noticed a strange charging 'glitch' earlier which might have been the culprit).

Water levels were unsurprisingly high with the two pumps struggling to make much of a difference. The lower cave was especially noisy this time with the main stream overflowing the end of the main rift and flowing down the bedding plane which itself was running a larger than usual amount of water.

At the face the finer bang debris was clogging up the escape route for the stream and Dave had trouble shovelling the spoil from afoot or so underwater. The resulting raised water level meant a small overflow into the low open bedding in the right which a couple of sessions back was draughting inwards. This proved to be the case again as drill dust was sucked down the hole.

There was a distinct hollow roar coming from somewhere, discernible only at the end despite the sound of the adjacent main stream. The plan now is to concentrate on the right hand wall partly to give ourselves some space to work (and away from the active stream) and to increase the roof height. Heading off to the right may prove to be a good idea as that is where the draught is going and the potential proximity of the down dip continuation of the Cave C rift.

Due to the new Tier 3 etc situation Dave and I agreed that we should stop operations for the foreseeable and have moved the tools back from the face to the 'alcove' below the pitch.

Lets hope things stabilise quickly but it may well be a case of waiting on the Covid 'jabs'....

A Merry Xmas and a Healthy New Year to all our readers!

All best

Clive

Viaduct Sink Friday 25 December 2020 Geoff Newton solo

With Somerset going into tier 3 on Boxing Day and Dorset & BCP staying in tier 2 for the time being, Xmas Day was my last chance to go to Mendip whilst following the rules.

The drive from Bournemouth, so often a pain, was an absolute pleasure with sunshine, blue skies and almost empty roads.

Although the surface stream was down a bit from last week the cave was still wet enough to ensure I got really wet as well.

The purpose of the session was to use the holes drilled last Saturday morning. This went off OK. There was one interesting moment when I heard the sound of rushing water approaching from behind. This occurred whilst I was connecting the charges, so there was no option but to carry on. Fortunately the water was due to an air lock developing in the pipe taking water from the dam to The Somme. When this happens the dam fills up and spills over causing the flood pulse. However the head of water thus formed is sufficient to clear the air lock and the pipe becomes operational again without any intervention from us. Indeed as I sorted out connections to the wire the water pulse ceased. We have seen signs of this before, but this is the first time I have been present when it happens.

With Best Wishes for the New Year

Cheers

Geoff

Mendip goes into Tier 4 31 Dec 2020

If you live in a Tier 4 area, you must follow the rules below. This means that you cannot leave or be outside of the place you are living unless you have a reasonable excuse. You cannot meet other people indoors, including over the Christmas and New Year period, unless you live with them, or they are part of your support bubble. Outdoors, you can only meet one person from another household.