

January 5th National lockdown commenced to prevent spread of Covid 19.

TLS & Hobnail 30/1/21 I trust all are well.

I popped over to TLS the other day.

Ferret shed ok.

But obviously the heavy rain we've had recently has washed a lot of debris down the stream, not helped by the road/stream side hedge having been flailed. Also on a previous visit I noticed that the oak board we use to dam/divert the stream was vertically against the TLS gate, very effectively blocking it. It's possible it could've washed into that position or perhaps kids have positioned it there during lower stream levels. I plan to remove it as soon as the water has subsided enough, but as yet haven't had the opportunity. It's a good job that we dug open Hobnail (any debris on the Hobnail gate would float as the water rises allowing the water to flow on down), otherwise the whole area could well have flooded.

The branches in front of Hobnail have a lot of leaf matter etc that appears to have been washed there by the stream, the debris on the bank between TLS and the steps give an indication of how high the level appears to have reached

Dave K

Early Feb Tony Dingle breaks hip at home in Surrey.

Feb 21 - It is with a heavy heart that I have to report the passing of original ATLAS member 001 Tony Dingle.

A month ago he suffered a fall at home which resulted in a fairly minor hip fracture. He was taken by ambulance to hospital in Epsom before later being transferred to a nursing home.

Presumably, during his stay there, he contracted Covid-19 and was returned to hospital yesterday where he died at around 2am this morning (Sunday).

Fortunately Tony's nephew, his wife and daughter were able to be at his bedside and a video link was set up so that Tony's sister Evelyn and her husband Alan in Shropshire were able to talk to him. Apparently Tony's eyes were flickering whilst Evelyn was talking to him and he also smiled so it would appear safe to say that he died peacefully.

I gather from Alan that Tony did have an underlying health condition which he had been dealing with over the past few months which would have contributed to his passing.

I will pass on any further information that is forthcoming.....

Tony was 89.

All best

Clive

Tony, of course, grew up in the London suburbs and his route to caving is an interesting tale. As a teenager in the 1940s he borrowed a Norbert Casteret French caving book from his local library and became intrigued to know if such adventures took place in England. He had heard of Cheddar Caves, and when on holiday in the west of England, he persuaded his parents to pay a visit. There he bought a copy of Balch's recently published "Swallet Caves and Rock Shelters", and decided to become a Mendip caver. He knew nothing of local clubs, but saw a reference to the University of Bristol in Balch's book and wrote to them asking for advice. Someone in the UBSS passed his letter to Frank Frost, Hon Sec of the Wessex, and he replied suggesting that Tony turn up at the Beechbarrow Headquarters (near Hillgrove) one weekend. In due course, Tony took a train from London to Bath, where he boarded the old Somerset and Dorset Railway, alighting at Maesbury Halt. From there he walked the four miles to Beechbarrow and duly became a Mendip caver. He joined the Wessex in August 1949, and until his death was the second longest serving member - Don Thomson (Club President and still with us) joined in April 1948.

Rich

March 31st Rock Farm Dave & Clive

A return to the fray at last!

First a major carry-in of drill plus Gav's drill as a back-up, drill rods, bang box, mega-bar, chisels etc. The surface stream was surprisingly high considering the recent dry weather and there was a 'normal' cave stream running. No pumps used this time.

Underground the bang wire was retrieved from the end and the smashed plastic reel replaced with a sturdier wooden one. Over the past three months there must have been a turbulent flow at times at the end of the cave as the det wire had become wrapped round and round the bang cable and took some disentangling.

Dave set to with much hammer and chisel work to make the most of the limited results from the last two-hole bang. He succeeded in producing eleven bags of spoil though which was a surprisingly good effort. These all found their way to the surface while Clive drilled a further 6 holes in the right hand wall and roof. The right hand side is where we are concentrating efforts as its where the 'roar' appears to come from and that is also where the low open bedding is that is taking the inward draught. The work on the roof is to give us some headroom and will enable us to lay/sit further away from the active stream.

A slight hitch occurred when Dave had to return to the surface to find the det box which I had left in the Shepherds Hut! A successful firing resulted.

A full team will return on Saturday after Dave and Geoff enjoy a session in Viaduct.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 3rd April 2021 Dave, Geoff, Rich, Simon and Clive....

Lunchtime surface support from Andy and Sue.....

Surface photo reconnaissance from Matt and Mandy.....

After an enjoyable lunch break enhanced by Andy and Sue supplying a range of cakes (thanks to you both for that thought) we morphed into the first full session of 2021 – Clive at the end enjoying clearing and chiselling the results of Wednesday nights' bang. Geoff just above in the new role of skip loader with Rich and Dave in charge of rock disposal (I'm not sure where Simon was working as I didn't see him until tea-time!)

21 bags removed from the end to the surface and a further seven holes drilled. The very low open bedding on the right is still taking an inward draught. No draught in the entrance passage though which is unusual. Low water in the culvert in the yard (no pump used) but a fair stream still emerging from just above the Mud'ole and down the bedding near the end.

Gav joined us for an enjoyable chat over tea in the sunshine on the lawn – very civilised!

No session on Wednesday this week – meet again on Saturday....

All best

Clive

Viaduct Sink Saturday 3 April Dave King & Geoff Newton

The plan when we arrived at the entrance was for Dave to solder on an extension to the bang wire whilst Geoff completed the stacking of spoil from the bang of 17/10/2020 in Downside Aven. Then we would clear spoil from the bang of 25/12/20 to The Toolshed. However we unlocked and opened the gate we found that persons unknown (who had access to a CSCC key) had thrown two large logs and a few small branches down the entrance shaft to more or less block it.

The longer (est. 4-5m long) but lighter of the logs was removed by combined tactics. The shorter (est. 3-4m long) but heavier of the logs, was too heavy for this. Dave went into the cave to fetch a hauling rope to assist with the lifting of the latter log, whilst Geoff cleared out the smaller branches to the surface and removed these, the log and other branches out of sight. When the rope was put into action we found that the log was still too heavy, so the log was pulled further into the cave to a position where it was no longer making access difficult.

Geoff then stacked the spoil in Downside Aven, but when he re-joined Dave, it was at The Dam. Dave had found the dam overflowing, with very little of the water being diverted to The Somme, presumably due to a partial air lock or partial silt blockage of the pipe.. His efforts to rectify this were only partially successful, so work at the face would still be carried out in the company of a significant stream.

Finally Dave soldered the extension onto the bang wire (with difficulty) whilst Geoff amused himself at the dig face. During our absence in "lockdown" there had clearly been a flooding event which washed 3 spoil bags down to the dig face and also messed up the working of the water diversion pipe. Whilst at the face, Geoff filled the bags that had been washed in and removed them and a few rocks to the Toolshed. There was no draught or roar at the face. By the time the soldering was completed it was time go back to Rock Farm for lunch. Clearing the bulk of the spoil to the Toolshed and beyond will have wait for another week.

Geoff Newton

Tuesday, 30 March 2021

Solo to Carrion Slocker with various bits prepared over the Covid lockdown. A 6 m ladder in the three bits, bought from a terraced house in Reading, the owners could not get it out of the garden as it was left over from a high roofing job, so I took my angle grinder and cut it up and carried the 3 bits all through the house, only cost £15. I may fit this on the entrance pitch and remove the aluminium one at some point. Carrion had suffered badly from the January/February floods and heavy downpours; the drain system had been well overrun and the entrance grid was blocked with sticks and lots of mud so the water had poured down the entrance shaft, along the rift and into Bethlehem and into the Nazareth area. Above the Fiat 500 rift it had all has been flooded heavily and much of this area needs re-stabilising, probably was more scaffolding. A couple of reasonable size lumps were moving slightly so I opted not to descend the rift.

Then off to Willets Lane Hole to see how it was doing. It has had some water, but looked as if no one had been down it since August 2018 when I cleared out lot the digging bits. Lots of sticks and leaves in both entrances from kids and walkers mostly. I saw nine bats scattered through the cave mostly lesser horseshoes. I went down to Crackpot Rift and decided not to go down the final rift squeeze into PVA Chamber as I have put some weight on during the long lockdown and it only has a single rope to pull on to climb out. I looked at the side passage too and I may dig some more here at some point, it will need widening as I'm not sure how I got through that 8-9 inch gap last time! I was pleasantly surprised at the whole cave was still in good order and that I'd left my dig areas pretty clean and tidy; that said I pulled out two short lengths of scaffolding not in use and tucked away. There are a few more bags in the side passage that must be from an earlier digger or perhaps someone has done some digging at some point.

Anyway all good, take care Vagon.

Thursday evening, 9th April 2021-Carrion Slocker solo

After my efforts last week I decided to look at stabilising the area above the rift pitch and to pull back the ladder section from Bethlehem that didn't fit down through the scaffolding and put the galvanised steel ladder into the entrance pot (4.5 m). So down the hole to retrieve the ladder section to the surface first achieved without mishap, then back down to the top of the rift pitch below Bethlehem to look at stabilising it. One very large lump had fallen down about 2 feet blocking/narrowing the entrance to the Fiat 500 Rift. I drilled a sticking-out bit of rock it was resting on and the large boulder slumped gently onto the platform-floor level, but it was still blocking the access. Now stabilised, this was a large dolomitic block so I decided to break it into two bits by drilling & plug and feathers which went very well and it separated neatly into two halves. One section dropped very conveniently to wedge against scaffold bar which I left in situ as it was quite stable and I thought I would push the other half over the edge and down the pitch. It was a large V shaped rock and it fell a few feet before mounting another sloping scaffold bar and it slid gracefully down to the bottom end of this without event. On my next visit I will see if it will go any further or I may be able to clear it down to the base of the rift. Looking carefully at where the large rock had dropped from, there was little else moving, so I secured the area above with another 6 foot scaffold tube clamped in at both ends-just in case anything else could move, but it looks okay. Back up to the surface and I bolted two sections of the new ladder together; removed the old aluminium ladder and inserted the new section into the entrance pothole then clamped it securely to the scaffold framework, all very satisfactory. Take care Vagon

Viaduct Sink Saturday 10 April 2021 Dave King, Geoff Newton

A lot of frigging about eventually got the water diversion pipe operating with something approaching normal efficiency, so that conditions at the face became less unpleasant as the clearing session proceeded.

The spoil from the last bang was moved from the face to The Toolshed and bagged. The way on now looks to be blocked with gravel and which is causing some ponding of water ahead, but I think that the gravel was probably kicked forward during the clearing session, because when I looked at the face last week at the end of a mini clearing session, the way on was open if still too tight to be passable.

The entrance gate has become increasingly difficult to close and lock, due to a lack of clearance between the lid and frame in the vicinity of the hinges. This was also threatening the long term life of the hinges. A lot of mud, rotten wood etc was removed from the problem area, mostly by Dave, who borrowed a stake from the nearby electric fence to assist in the job as we had no suitable tools with us, unless we were to fetch them from the dig. The gate now closes and locks easily, but we may chisel away a little concrete in due course to complete the job. Then back to Rock Farm for lunch.

Geoff

Rock Farm - Saturday 10th April 2021

Geoff, Dave, Pawel, Rich, Simon and Clive (+ a fleeting visit from Matt & Mandy)

A 10am start for Pawel and Clive – while Dave and Geoff set off for Viaduct we started the survey of Rock Farm and what was visible of 'Cave C'.

Lowish water levels helped and the whole exercise was finished by 1pm including the drilling and banging of two troublesome blocks in the upper dig and having emptied 11 bags removed from there.

Post lunch break the whole team busied themselves with removing the results of last Saturdays' bang (around 15 bags) with Geoff and Pawel at the sharp end (well blunt end really....)

By 4pm the early starters were feeling the combined effects of wet under and oversuits and a cold northerly wind and it was agreed to put off drilling and banging until Wednesday evening.

As the drill battery was only good for three holes and a recycled battery was due to be with us by Wednesday hopefully, it was felt that nothing would be lost by the delay.

All best

Clive

Wednesday 14th of April 2021 Carrion solo

I took my drill and went down the entrance pot along the rift down into Bethlehem Pot and took some scaffold clips and my drill etc. Down to the bottom of the Fiat 500 Rift this time clearing some of loose debris and checking out the recently fitted additional scaffold pole at the top which seems to help stability. This all needs more work to make the descent more suitable. Down into the Sitting Room area which was a bit of a squeeze (due to extended lock down!) so I took some edges off the rough boulders. I took in two scaffolding poles as well just to decide which bits to stabilise before digging out floor; this was successful except I forgot to take down a scaffolding spanner so they are only hand tight. I drilled two rocks and split them down using plug and feathers. There is an outward draft currently from the Sitting Room area coming from between the various boulders. Overall, a useful 2 hour trip and I also tidied up the swallet hole on the surface taking two bags of historic farm dumped plastic away for disposal.

Take care regards Vagon

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 14th April 2021 An almost unrecognisable Dave (due to major hair-loss and beard trimming) and Clive (....I can talk!)

27 bags of mud and some rocks removed from the upper dig. The rift has now deviated to the left (but carries straight on) with a solid face (the continuation of the previously banged rock) to its right. This appears to be a 'pendant' narrowing to its base.

The plan is to bang a protruding section of the floor which is hampering access and then to bang the main block ahead.....

At the 'lower dig' three holes were drilled (using the new drill battery) and fired. Only three holes this time due to a change of tactic....the 'seige' technique of several holes at once is plainly only partially successful due to the hardness of the rock and the lack of much space to bang into. Therefore I'm trying 'a bit at a time' now, only banging where I'm sure I can take off usable chunks. As space opens up (above and around the bedding which is taking the draught then hopefully more holes can go in.

Saturday meeting up as usual for lunch when Dave and Geoff reappear from Viaduct around 1pm.

Clive

Sat 17th April - Viaduct Sink.

Geoff & Dave.

Another trip with no kit (drill etc) to be carried in.

Surface stream although reduced compared to previous trips was still flowing past the entrance and water still seeping through the stream bed and into the entrance shaft. A clearing session moving all the bags of spoil (estimated 20 bags) from the Tool Shed to Downside Aven. With the limited number of two, it involved five separate hauling/stacking operations before the bags could be emptied in the almost dry Downside Aven. All went very efficiently and a return to surface at approx 12:30pm for lunch at Rock Farm. Dave

17th April - Rock Farm Cave.

Clive, Rich, Geoff & Dave.

Clive started with a pre lunch trip to drill and pop the boulder in the floor on the left of the upper rift dig that was hampering access to the dig face. Two holes drilled that went right through the boulder were subsequently popped before lunch on the lawn in the glorious sunshine - sun umbrella deployed.

At the bottom of Rock Farm Cave the previous bang in the right hand wall and roof had started to enlarge the dig face for better access. A number of bags of spoil and a few rocks chiselled out were hauled out to the surface before the obligatory tea break.

A special order of rocks were cleaned and crated for dispatch.

3 1/2 x 450mm holes drilled and fired in the right hand wall and roof whilst the rocks from the earlier popped boulder in the upper rift dig where hauled out.

Dave.

Tuesday, 20 April 2021 solo at Carrion Slocker

Fortunately last weekend my friend Phil Candy gave me some scaffold tubes from his workshop in Eastleigh and we cut these to length put them in my Jimmy and I took them to my dig today. The area is very dry now there were cows in the field which were very inquisitive but I managed to get all the scaffold tubes to the swallet hole without getting run over by a cow. I took two scaffold tubes down with my drill and bolt cutters to put some more mesh above the Fiat 500 rift and I installed two scaffold tubes for stabilisation using drilling and installing pins at one end and finally after much faffing around I took the scaffold spanner to the lowest point, the Sitting Room to tighten up the scaffold bolts there.

There was a strong outward draft on returning up through the tight spots at the bottom of Bethlehem pot which is encouraging as there was little wind outside. 2.5 hours. Upon exiting and driving up the road I met Rachel walking her dog who lives locally and does some embroidery for Warmbac and ordered a new oversuit.

Regards Vagon.

Wed 21st April

Rock Farm Cave Clive & Dave.

12 bags of hard won spoil which involved a fair amount of chiselling hauled out to the surface.

The draughting hole to the right has opened up a little more revealing a vertical joint/rift and what appears to be the right hand edge of the bedding plane.

Three or four holes (sorry Clive I failed to log the number in my memory bank) drilled, charged and fired.

Dave.

Rock From Cave - Saturday 24th April 2012 Dave, Geoff, Richard, Simon and Clive

After the usual pre-dig picnic lunch in the sun Geoff and Dave cleared the results of Wednesday nights' session from the end of the cave with the others in supporting roles up to the surface. Around 24 bags cleared.

The opening into the adjacent small rift was enlarged enough to get ones head into and look around. Unfortunately it appears to have reduced to a crack although I couldn't get into a position to look up-dip (I don't know if Geoff or Dave managed it). Down-dip on the floor it may enlarge a bit - there is a little pool there but no sign of the nearby stream having run through it recently.

The inward draught is still evident (although weaker as the hole is now much larger) and I got the impression (to be confirmed with some joss-sticks!) that it might be flowing up-dip!

After tea-break Dave and I were to return to drill and also to fettle some rocks into position on the lower side of the bedding at the end in an attempt to stop the skip from jamming under a rock protrusion its way up.

On the way back down the cave I noticed that a block had dropped out from the lip of the Mud'ole and I waited for Dave to join me so we could try manhandling it back into position (unsuccessfully as it turned out).

Whilst waiting at the Mud'ole I did a bit of poking around trying (yet again) to work out where the persistent inward draught from the entrance disappears to. (Its always very fresh up to the head of the pitch and the walls dry when there is high pressure, wet and no air movement below the pitch). I stuck my head into a niche on the west or right hand side of the rift adjacent to the Mud'ole and was more than a little surprised to hear a mini 'roar'!

Dave heard it and subsequently Geoff too. We were also able hear it further up the main rift towards the bottom of The Stairs.

It sounded like falling water rather than a stream although I do wonder if it might be the same water that flows down the final bedding plane at the back of the cave. It could be the same bedding plane - maybe Pawel's survey will answer the question.

Intriguing!

Four more holes-worth to be cleared on Wednesday night.

All best

Clive

Tuesday 27th of April 2021 Carrion Slocker solo

Having driven down to Mendip with some new scaffold clips and a couple of short scaffold poles I proceeded into Carrion, down Bethlehem pot which seems to have a light draft in these days and I fitted a short ladder section down to the top of the rift area to make the access of it safer instead of landing on gravel and rubble slope. After this work I relocated the electron ladder down into the rift, but I realised on my way out this is now a bit too low and needs to be mounted slightly higher. Then proceeded down to the bottom and into the Sitting Room and fitted couple more scaffold poles stabilising the rocks before doing some drilling & P/F and digging in the floor and clearing some more rocks. I am still deciding whether to proceed downwards and under the large boulder or whether to drill, plug and feather the end of one of the large boulder to see if it moves at all. Next visit we will see. The Mendips are very dry at the moment and there is no water running in the field. Take care, Andy/Vogon

Rock Farm Cave - Wed 28th April 2021 Dave and Clive

After admiring the heavy excavation work carried out by Gavin with his digger behind one of the barns (Incidentally he uncovered another couple of open rifts, but lets not go there!) we set off for the end to clear Saturday's spoil.

The three holes had done an excellent job and a dozen bags came forth plus a good number of large rocks.

The resulting space made access to the little rift much easier and it was possible to look vertically up the rift which was about 6in wide. Jammed cobbles obscured any further view but the draught was moving freely upwards.

Dave found that the crowbar could be pushed for its whole length into the mud and water at the downdip end of the rift.

Work continued chiselling away before another three holes were fired.

On the way out of the cave some draught-detective work was carried out with a smouldering joss-stick around the Mud'ole area. The two rifts in the roof above the Mud'ole seemed to take a gentle draught but nowhere was there a definitive spot which could be blamed for the regular strong inward flow of air at the entrance.

More on Saturday!

All best

Clive

1st of May 2021 Carrion Slocker Sue & Andy

We went to Carrion Slocker to clear out some more of the black plastic in the swallet hole to keep it tidy after the rains had washed lots of the soil off the old farm rubbish buried previously, it look a bit tidier now.

Then off to Asham Wood to cycle up the Whatley Brook bridleway to check on progress at the quarry's by Hanson Heidelberg. Surprisingly there was quite a lot of water in Whatley Brook so they must be pumping a lot out of Mere Head Quarry at the current time. Seven Springs was flowing in slightly from Whatley Brook. Yogi pot is still covered but the whole area of Asham Wood Quarry is now fenced off with private keep out/danger signs this area encompasses Bradshaw's, Yogi Pot and Hovvy's Rift.

Interestingly there are some new jointly installed information signs by Hanson and the Somerset Wildlife Trust that include in the wildlife list 'bats' as well as various rare plants. This is clearly good news as two of the caves are bat roosts so we may be up to protect them yet. I will try and follow this up with Hanson and Somerset wildlife trust to see if I can get a positive response.

Take care all, Vogon

Richard I plan to roughly survey Carrion Slocker on Tuesday so I will give you some measurements Weds hopefully

Sat 1st May

Viaduct Sink.

Geoff & Dave.

Approximately 25 bags of spoil cleared from the sharp end back to the Tool Shed.

Before the next bang more spoil to be chiselled out and dug out of the floor and a large hauling session back to Downside Aven.

The way on is quite small at present and appears to be blocked by spoil.

Dave.

Ps. Geoff - list, feel free to add if you recall anything else :-

Chain for padlock

Hammer & chisel

Bags

Rope

Wooden wedge

Bang warning sign

Sat 1st May Rock Farm Cave

Clive, Geoff, Rich, Simon & Dave.

Usual lunch on the lawn before re-grouping and heading down RFC.

A little wetter at the bottom after the recent damp weather. The pillar of rock between the stream filled bedding plain and the hole on the right is slowly diminishing as the access hole to the joint/rift increases. A large number of bags filled and hauled back to the Landing before the obligatory tea break in the sunshine. After a longer than usual tea break Clive with Simon in support role headed down to drill and charge 5 holes whilst the spoil was manhandled to the surface by the rest of the team.

More rocks added to the crates, so there are now 3 full crates. This includes those that Clive and Dave filled on Friday afternoon.

More empty crates will be available shortly ;-)

Dave.

PS The Rock Farm water was muddier than usual and I shared my hauling position with a small but active black leech.

Rich

Carrion Slocker 4th May 2021 Solo

A rough survey was completed throughout the cave giving a length of 65.5m and a depth of about 29m and some drilling, P&F and some spoil removed completed the evening. It was very cold & drafty I guess due to the external low air pressure. Result is still going down! Only 56 feet to go to get into open passage if it is a similar depth to Heale Farm Cave that is along the adjacent fault line. Not without interest, full of eastern promise and still no friends. May be Matt and Mandy would like to assist at some point again.

take care, Andy Vogon :-)

5th May Rock Farm Cave

Clive and Dave.

Dave rocked up with trailer in tow loaded with another five pallet crates, subsequently unloaded and stacked against Cave C entrance.

The leech is still residing at the bottom of the slope (Rich's hauling station) after the Bucket Pitch.

Approx 20 bags of spoil were cleared/chiselled from the dig face and hauled back to the shelf below the Bucket Pitch, a few rocks taken to the surface and one large boulder that will require the boulder net was left on the final approach to the dig face. Three holes drilled, charged and fired.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 8th May 2021 Pavel, Dave, Geoff, Rich, Simon and Clive

After lunch in the 'dining car' Pawel and Dave headed for the far end of the cave whilst Geoff, Simon, Rich and Clive set to lifting Wednesday evenings' spoil bags up 'Bucket Pitch' and thence to the surface.

The bags were augmented by further supplies from the end totalling 33 by the end of play.

Five further holes were drilled and fired at the end.

Notably this time the normally constant inward draught in the entrance passages had turned into a 'breathing' draught – alternately blowing in and out.

At the end of the cave, in the new rift, a similar phenomenon with the drill dust and our breath vapour.

I am instructed to report also that Larry the leech is still happily curled up in his/her usual spot below the pitch on the right.

During tea-break Rich suggested that we seriously consider half filling the Mud'ole rather than bringing all the spoil to the surface. It was agreed that we would do this but only using spoil which wouldn't risk blocking the stream.

On a different note – Gav and Lee (the step-son of Mike Oram whose farm is opposite) were very busy with the big excavator and Mike's mini-digger which was equipped with a hydraulic 'pecker'. They were lowering the track behind the barn by a couple of feet or so which exposed much bedrock and more natural rift features. The latter were studiously ignored by all present!

More fun and frolics on Wednesday.....

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 12th May 2021 Dave and Clive

A very wet evening weatherwise!

Dave started early around 5pm with a trip to the end to start bagging up the spoil from 'Saturday's bang including moving three large blocks away from the face 'parking' them in the stream.

Later Clive added to the tally with further clearing and some handy-sized rocks. No doubt partly due to the surface rains and the escape route for the water at the bottom of the bedding plane being partly blocked by spoil, water began to flow into the narrow open rift we were attacking. The inward draught was still there dragging the drill dust with it and both Dave and I could hear a bit of a roar as well. To be fair Dave also discerned a similar sound from the direction of the open bedding half way down the cave where the stream emerges into the main rift. There is plenty of clearing to be done on Saturday – there are bags stacked at the end of the cave (along with large rocks needing the boulder net) and more at the base of Bucket Pitch. Fine gravel is destined for the surface, chunkier rock can go into the Mud'ole and the larger bits to the surface.

Good progress was made overall and a further four holes were drilled and fired before retiring to Gav's warm caravan to put the world to rights along with a beer.

More on Saturday (and Simon – I have your new elbow pads)

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday May 15th 2021 Dave, Geoff, Rich and Clive

A day of dodging the downpours!

As there were still loads of bags and rocks to be removed from Wednesday's session that became the focus of the day, with accumulated heaps at the base of the Bucket Pitch and on the Landing. Having cleared those then the remainder from the end of the cave had to be cleared as well. Geoff got stuck into this and produced another batch of bags and rocks!

Quite a session!

Before finishing Clive had a go at the end removing some more rock including one very large bit in addition (boulder net needed)

Drilling etc postponed until Wednesday's session.....

All best

Clive

Tuesday, 11 May 2021 Solo at Carrion Slocker

The swallet looks much tidier now after removing a fair bit of farm dumped plastic from the site and covering the remnants with rocks & boulders.

Once down the cave in the Sitting Room I continued to drill/P&F the large boulder to take the edge off it, after a while this was successful and allowed safe access to another metre of horizontal passage. I then drilled a block in the floor of this short passage and split some of it off and we can see downwards another 18 inches or so. That said, I thought it was possibly easier to clear some of the 'gappy' boulders in the entrance rift area to the Sitting Room as I think this way down will possibly take us to the same place. So I cleared some rocks in the floor of the rift gap and can see a short distance down which probably joins the same area of open boulders. There is still a draft here, which could be promising and it is all about finding the safest way down without adding more metalwork if at all possible. When leaving at the end of the session climbing upwards there was a strong outflowing draft in Bethlehem Pot. After shifting quite a lot of boulders this evening and using up the brill batteries I was feeling very stiff by the time I drove home.

take care all

Andy/Vogon

May 13th Just P&F in Carrion Slocker down in the Sitting Room. Andy

Not Viaduct Sink - Saturday morning May 15th 2021 Geoff Solo

Having carelessly misread Dave's email and assumed he was unavailable for Viaduct Sink this weekend instead of the 22nd, I resorted to my fall back of Snake Pit Hole. I first removed a few large rocks from the intermediate stack to the surface whilst I was still fresh, before going on to the sharp end.

Water was still ponding in the dig at the terminal "chamber", but having previously established that water bailed into a "rabbit hole" in the right hand wall did drain away quickly, I thought I would dig this for a bit. The rabbit hole soon morphed into a fine scalloped rift, with that rarity for Snake, apparently solid walls. The further down I dug, the coarser the infill became. All we need now is an airspace and a draught! Anyway, next week when Dave is actually unavailable, the intention is to give it a good go in a more optimistic mood than recently. All welcome. Cheers

Geoff

Sat 15th May

Viaduct Sink

Dave solo

Although arriving early at Rock Farm, departing for Viaduct Sink was a little delayed - ref Geoff's previous email. The time was usefully spent repairing the next wooden crate to be filled before setting off to Viaduct Sink at 10:30am.

At the entrance a little chiselling of the concrete and rocks beneath the hinge side of the gate frame, this allows any trapped debris to more easily drop away rather than jamming preventing the lid from closing freely. At the bottom of the entrance shaft the short railway sleeper stemple that had previously dropped out was repositioned and securely wedged. Two laminated signs warning of digging and risk of bang fumes taken in, the first placed above the steel shoring and the second placed at Downside Aven. At the Tool Shed hauling and pull back ropes measured, cut and attached to the low spoil drag tray. On down to the sharp end where chiselling added a fair amount of spoil to that which the previous week's bang had produced, in addition a small knob of rock chiselled out from the floor that had been hampering skip hauling. Hauling was tested by clearing a couple of skips of rocks up to the Too Shed. Time check revealed it was 12:30pm, time to head out picking up a few more rocks from Bridge Junction and depositing at Downside Aven. Back at Rock Farm another time check indicated 12:45pm! Good job watch hadn't stopped an hour earlier!!

Dave.

Wed 19th May

Rock Farm Cave

Clive & Dave

Most of the stream at the bottom is flowing down the rift on the right but since this is very narrow and blocked lower down there is a bit of a lake. The water flows over a small drop approx 1m ahead. beyond the small drop it appears that the rift widens. The rift is also wider above the water level and higher up the right hand wall is obscured by blackened water worn rocks and cobbles.

A small amount of spoil was chiselled out and a further 1/2 dozen bags filled and added to join those at the bottom of the Bucket Pitch along with a few extra rocks. After the spoil was hauled up the pitch Clive drilled four holes (two in roof, two in LH wall of rift) whilst Dave ferried the spoil on up to the surface.

Dave.

Ps. Geoff - 8 new spoil bags left in the shepherds hut (beyond the table and chairs) for Viaduct on Sat.

Rock Farm - Saturday 22nd May 2021 Geoff, Pawel & Clive

Despite the recent heavy rains there was little water flowing through the culvert into the cave (the era of pumping from there looks to be history now) and the other underground streams seemed to be little higher than usual. The 'missing' inward draught at the entrance had returned although not strongly and there was a slight inward draught right at the end of the cave again.

Wednesday evenings' bang had been particularly effective and there was a large pile of rock to clear from the end.

There were plenty of large rocks (very suitable for the crates Dave!) amongst the varied spoil and many bags and rocks were dragged up to the Bucket Pitch by Pawel with Geoff feeding the skip and Clive enjoying the, relatively, more spacious conditions at the end.

There was a suitably dramatic moment when some large pieces of the roof were easily barred down leaving both a much more comfortable space and a solid arched roof to work under.

The ongoing open-ish rift still looks interesting with plenty of jammed, waterworn rocks, blackened stream cobbles and sandy mud in the wider section just ahead which is about 8in wide.

After the traditional tea-break in the sun all the bags and rocks were hauled up the Bucket Pitch and on to the surface, save for those which ended up in the Mud'ole.

The end of the cave was left un-banged with a fair amount of material still to be cleared from the rift on Wednesday when we will no doubt drill some more.....

Clive

Viaduct Sink Saturday 22 May 2021 Pawel Krawczyk, Geoff Newton

Stream levels on the surface and in the cave were nothing special. The tiny inlet by The Toolshed is still slowly and steadily becoming less tiny.

With most of the bags already stacked full up with spoil at Bridge Junction, we had just the 12 new bags that we took in to take the spoil from the last event. These were duly filled with spoil from the face and taken to the foot of the dam. A fair number of largish rocks were also taken from the face to Somme Junction. A lot of gravel remains to be cleared from the face and is still totally hiding the way on.

We then cleared a lot (I lost count - maybe 25?) of the bags of spoil stacked at Bridge Junction out to Downside Aven where the contents were stacked. Lunch Time at Rock Farm approached before we could complete the clearance of the bags from the Junction.

The time is not far off when we will again need to avail ourselves of Rich's wall building skills in Downside Aven.

Cheers

Geoff

Friday 21 May 2021 Snake Pit Hole Geoff Solo

With Upper Pitts partially open I was able to book some overnight accommodation for the weekend instead of making it a day trip

The "new" rift uncovered the previous Saturday morning, did not live up to its early promise and pinched out. Fortunately I took the spoil out to the intermediate stacking place rather than backfill the nearby main dig.

The dig is back on the "Back Burner".

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 26th May 2021 - a 'Breakthrough!' Dave, Alex and Clive

After Saturday's mega session there was still plenty to be cleared at the end and Alex was 'awarded' the job of clearing it. The spoil was the remnants of the bang but especially the contents of the continuing rift, namely, stream pebbles and cobbles, sand, mud and some fine waterworn slabs which were destined for the crates on the surface.

Having cleared those Alex probed upwards into the rift, in the process bringing down more slabs and assorted debris. "Its open up there!" he reported at one point when all I could see of him was his lower half, the rest having been inserted into the rift above.

After more clearing, some more of him disappeared accompanied by muffled descriptions of what lay above.

Its possible to stand up in the rift (even for me!) which is about 14in wide and look into a widening of maybe 3ft at head height. Down-dip the rift is blocked by a bank of sand and pebbles with a 1inch air gap at the top next to the roof. Looking back up-rift it continues for around 8ft with a flowstone feature coming in from one side. All around the rock is blackened and waterworn (the distinctive 'ribs' of rock we are used to much in evidence). The base of the rift down-dip and downstream appears to open up a bit (we can see it being about 6in wide) with some of the stream g along running through a ponded up section. At this point and also on the same side looking up-rift there seems to be another parallel join/rift just a foot or so away – that side of the rift also seems to be quite well fretted and waterworn.

The obvious next point of attack is the bank of silt and pebbles blocking the rift ahead. To access this the approach needs to be widened further and this was done with four strategically placed holes drilled and fired before leaving.

No noticeable draught, either in or out, at the entrance or the end of the cave this time.

A celebratory beer with Gav afterwards who was very pleased with our news!

More to do on Saturday!

All best

Clive

Sat 29th May - Viaduct Sink.

Geoff & Dave.

Surface stream not as low as it has been and some obvious flow disappearing between the rocks adjacent to the entrance. More of the stream bed seems to be washing out which may in due course allow more of the stream to flow down the entrance shaft. Downside Aven was surprisingly drippy and the small trickle entering below The Tool Shed is still flowing causing a puddle at the bottom that blocks the continuation.

20 - 25 bags of spoil dug out from the sharp end that included chiseled out rocks and a lot of silty slurry from the floor, these were all stacked at The Tool Shed. On exiting, the previous weeks bags were moved from below the waterfall to join those already stashed at Bridge Junction. The next session will be to haul all the currently filled bags from both Bridge Junction and The Tool Shed back to Downside Aven.

Arrived back at Rock Farm at about one O'clock for Lunch in the sun.

Dave.

Ps. Any extra hands always welcome. With extra hands it may well be that we can dig and clear all spoil back to Downside Aven in one session. This could then mean drill and bang on alternate visits rather than every third as is often the case.

Rock Farm - Saturday 29th May 2021 Dave, Geoff, Rich, Simon and Clive

After a particularly pleasant lunch in the sunshine work resumed at the end removing the results of Wednesday nights bang. Geoff was suitably impressed (I think) with the prospects overhead in the rift and soon filled around 20 bags and added several good sized rocks.

With Simons' help Dave and Rich hauled everything to the top of the Bucket Pitch before tea-break while Clive levered a few more bags-worth out ready for the next time plus drilling and firing three more holes in the left hand wall of the ascending rift.

Rich had a good look at 'the extension' and his furling with the crowbar produced some nice hollow sounds from ahead. He was able to confirm blackness ahead and the rift continuing at around 2ft wide at that point.

All spoil cleared to the surface by end of play.....more to do on Wednesday!

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Digging - Just thought it worth mentioning that Rock Farm underground work is fully open to all who have had 'the jab' (at least until the powers-that-be move the goalposts again). Wednesday nights from around 7pm)

We're very happy also to see 'non-jabbers' socially on the surface as well (lunchtime on Saturdays 1-2pm and tea break around 3.30).

Looking forward to seeing you all clamouring to get stuck in again!--

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 2nd June 2021 Dave and Clive

A heavy clearing session at the end ('Standing Room Only') after Saturday's bang. In addition to the large amount of rock removed from the left hand wall of the rift there was a lot of sand, mud and slabs waiting to come down from directly overhead. These soon succumbed to some prodding with the crowbar.

Around 40 bags and 10 loads of rocks were dragged back to the base of Bucket Pitch with the rocks eventually making their way as far as just below The Stairs. These await attention on Saturday along with the bags from below.

At the end as Dave cleared one particular spot (I'm not sure where exactly) we both noticed an immediate inward draught. This was very obvious even up on the wide slope where I was moving the bags up for the skip. Later when I was at the end I couldn't detect the air movement.

The main work of rift widening to allow access has now happened. The next step is to take out the sand and pebble fill near the roof. This is sitting on a big 'rib' below which will, no doubt, have to go. The rib goes back as far as we can see (around 6ft?) and is reminiscent of ribs we have uncovered previously.

Clive

Saturday 5th June

Rock Farm Cave.

Rich, Clive, Geoff, Simon & Dave.

After a pleasant lunchtime in the sun it was time to haul spoil and create some more. All 35 - 40 bags and rocks were hauled up the Bucket Pitch where intermediate sized rocks were deposited in the Mud'ole, this not only lightened some of the overfilled bags (for which I apologise) but also provided some empty bags to be sent back down for re-filling. More bags were filled and subsequently joined the procession of bags on the way to the surface. With most of the spoil on the surface, either deposited in the waiting skip or put aside for crating up later, it was time for a well earned tea break.

After tea the plan was to haul the last half dozen bags out whilst Clive drilled a few holes. However Geoff got stuck in filling more bags before Clive was allowed near the sharp end. Another hauling session saw all the bags and some boulder net sized rocks out to the surface whilst Clive drilled three holes in the central rib in the rift. A sheet of plastic on the floor should help prevent the shingle/silt infill that will be dislodged by the bang from blocking the narrow stream outlet slot at the bottom of the rift.

The rift is now a workable size being between 18 -24 inches wide. The rift can be seen possibly widening beyond the gravel and silt infill for a distance of between 6 - 10ft, with a roof continuing at a similar dip to the the current bedding plane.

The bang fund received a cash injection as a result of a dispatched crate of rocks, with another two crates awaiting collection.

Dave.

Saturday 5 June 2021 Viaduct Sink Dave King, Geoff Newton

On the surface the volume of water flowing down valley past the entrance was much reduced from last week and in consequence the showerbath in Downside Aven was almost absent.

We first attempted to drain the pool at the dig face using a crowbar and draw hoe but without success although in the process a small number of bags of spoil were added to the stack in The Toolshed.

We then transferred all the bags of spoil stacked in The Toolshed to Bridge Junction to join the bags of spoil already there. Dave continues to fine tune our methods of spoil transport which reduce the time taken for this process. Finally all the bags were taken out to Downside Aven where they were emptied onto the spoil heap. A third person would make this easier. There were too many bags to all fit in an intermediate pile at the S-Bend so this had to be done in two batches.

Then back to Rock Farm in time for a well earned lunch.

The next few sessions will be crucial. It appears that the stream may well be running into a gravel choke, which explains the absence of a draught. The nature of such a choke will govern whether or not we persist with the dig. At least we will have reached this point before we run out of stacking space.

Cheers

Geoff

Viaduct Sink Saturday 12 June 2021 Geoff Newton solo

Surface stream much smaller than last week with very little water going on down valley past the entrance. However more water seems to be sinking next to the entrance and to subsequently appear in the shaft. Downside Aven was almost bone dry.

The dig was still sumped off, despite a much reduced trickle of water entering it.

A total of ca. 3 metres of 20 g/m was distributed between a total of 7 holes drilled on the day and was duly set off. Hopefully this will eventually give better access to the ongoing passage to ease attempts to clear the blockage. However if clearing the blockage does not drain the sump we will probably be looking to work elsewhere in the cave.

Back to Rock Farm for lunch.

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 12th June 2021 Geoff, Rich, Simon & Clive

After the usual picnic in the sun it became obvious that we would have to go underground sooner or later..... so, Rich was inserted into "Standing Room Only" (ironically the driest part of the whole cave!) to deal with the fallout from the last bang with Geoff and Clive retrieving the filled bags etc and stacking them at the base of the Waterslide ready for hauling up. Simon positioned himself at the top of the Bucket Pitch ready to haul.

The latest bang had been very successful and by using smaller charges had started to reduce the big 'rib' in the centre of the passage to nicely sized chunks rather than gravel.

In addition large waterworn slabs from the fill in the rift came out, three of which now form a nice 'feature' in the abandoned corner at the bottom of the Waterslide where the stream disappears.

By the time Rich and Geoff had finished their turns at the face it had turned into a very comfortable place to work (and standing up too!) and the face had been pushed back around 18in overall. The view ahead is unchanged save for along the narrow rift on the left of the rib – removal of a loose slab which was blocking a clearer view ahead revealed the previously seen widening (It had looked like as cross rift coming in) to be a bend in the passage to the right, the visible portion of it apparently around 12-18in wide.

All the 24 accumulated bags plus some rocks made their way to the surface and measurements of the Waterslide were taken so we can add a couple of planks to prevent the skip from jamming on the way up. This will also allow us to load and haul up the skip from the very bottom of the slope instead of the current laborious method of dragging the bags part way up the slope before loading the skip.

On Wednesday, if Dave is back out to play, we may be able to fit the planks and drill and bang the rib again.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave Wednesday 16th June

Clive & Dave

Armed with the usual drill, bang box and drill bits plus the addition of two scaffold boards, battery powered reciprocating saw, hand saw and a bag of wedges Clive and Dave headed down Rock Farm Cave. With a bit of trimming/profiling of one scaffold board, both boards were soon wedged into position to guide the skips up and prevent snagging. Full testing of guide planks will commence on Saturday. A third

board may be added at the top of the slope to further ease the hauling. A number of the rocks that were helping to guide the skip were hauled up before Clive drilled and charged four holes (3 x 20gm + 1 x 10gm), hopefully more rocks than gravel will be produced by the smaller charges.

Whilst Clive drilled, Dave ferried the rocks and saw etc out to the surface before returning to assist with carry out of drill/bang equipment.

Four holes successfully fired before a convivial chat over a pint with Gavin. Gavin apologised for bending our ladder/slide which will require a little fettling. He also substantially boosted our bang fund.

Dave.

Ps. I bumped into Tony Boycott on Wed afternoon. He is still suffering from long Covid but is looking well and getting about a bit more. He hasn't seen any of our dig reports for sometime now and wondered if we were still digging. It appears that for some reason his email isn't receiving our reports - perhaps his email provider assumes they are all spam on not worthy of passing on ;-).

Clive is currently rectifying the issue.

Pps. Pat's rope donation will soon be landing at the MNRS. Thanks Pat.

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 19th June 2021 Dave, Geoff, Simon, Mike 'Kushy', Clive

The expected large amount of debris following Wednesday evening's bang didn't disappoint!

Plenty of large blocks and as a result next to no gravel to clear apart from the stream fill of pebbles, mud and sand.

Clive and Kushy at the sharp end digging and loading skips with Geoff and Dave doing the hauling up the Waterslide etc while Simon looked after work on the Bucket pitch.

What felt like a record breaking number of bags and rocks went up to the surface (having to squeeze over the accumulated pile at the Bottom of the Stairs gives you some idea!)

The newly fitted wooden 'guides' on the Waterslide made hauling more efficient with less chance of the skip snagging on the way up and down.

At the end the central 'rib' is responding well to banging with plenty of useful cracks to work at with the crowbar. The face has been pushed back now a couple of feet and its now possible to stand (!) and work comfortably in the rift which is about 2ft or so wide. The uncomfortable bit is turning round with a loaded bag to deliver it to the 'skip-loader' behind. This will improve as we move forward.

Various sections of the shaley roof were removed as they were loose. The rock above is massive and solid luckily.

There is still a chunky section of the rib remaining to be removed before the next bang. The plan is to do this next Saturday (no digging this Wednesday) with a view to drilling and banging again on the following Wednesday in time for another mammoth clearing session on the following Saturday.

Mark and Karen are planning to drop in on Wed 30th to heckle etc!

All best

Clive

Small correction:-

....with Geoff and Dave doing the hauling up the Waterslide etc while Simon looked after work on the Bucket pitch....

More accurately:-

....initially Geoff doing the hauling all the way to the top of the Waterslide and loading the bucket, while Dave hauled the bucket. Simon shifted bags across the Mud'ole, grading some to go down the Mud'ole. After a while Geoff and Dave swapped positions, Dave hauling up the Waterslide and bucket loading while Geoff hauled them up the Bucket Pitch.

I only mention this to point out that it is now possible post plank guide install to haul the blue skip from the very bottom right up to the bottom of the Bucket Pitch in one. We might need a longer rope soon.

Dave.

Viaduct Sink Saturday 19 June 2021 Dave, Geoff

I was expecting a wetter cave this week, but clearly there has not been as much rain on Mendip as at Bourmemouth. The surface stream was very low and no longer flowing on down valley past the entrance. However the stream was sinking audibly close to the entrance shaft and some work may be needed in the near future to protect the shaft.

The previous weeks bang had not achieved as much as hoped for, maybe go back to using 40g/m. The dig is still sumped. The spoil was removed back to The Toolshed and the draw hoe and long bar used to remove what we could from further in.

Dave plans to see if he can reduce / stop the trickle of water entering the dig by stopping leaks in the dam, prior to an attempt to pump out the dig.

Cheers

Geoff

Wed 23rd June

Viaduct Sink

Dave solo.

The plan was to fettle the waterfall pipe to stem the seepage that probably adds to the the puddle at the dig face. Plus possibly drill some holes in preparation for a subsequent bang. Armed with mastic gun, rags, drill and tube to blow out any holes drilled to reduce the chance of holes clogging with damp dust before charging at a later date. On arrival at the entrance it became apparent that the drill bits were still in the car, so the drill and batteries were abandoned inside the entrance. The blue plastic pipe that diverts the waterfall stream was sealed into its socket with the mastic, but in doing so it was necessary to allow the full flow to go on down the dig instead of to the Somme. After pipe fettling a quick visit down to the puddle at the dig face which not surprisingly was a little deeper than it had previously been and would have made for a more awkward drilling session. A bonus that the drill and batteries hadn't been lugged all the way in. The long bar was left with its point on a ledge at water level to give an indication of how much it might have dropped by the next visit. On the way out the 16 bags of spoil stacked in the Tool Shed were moved up the passage through the flat out crawl and round the corner.

Back at Rock Farm a quick visit down Rock Farm Cave to take a look at the spacious digging area, take in the empty spoil bags and measure up for possibly a third plank. The slope down to the bottom was surprisingly dry in places.

Dave.

Friday 25 June 2021 Viaduct Sink Geoff Newton solo

Stream levels above and below ground similar to last week.

Went to the dig face which was flooded to the same level as left by Dave King on his visit on Wednesday 23 June. Given that we may send the stream back into the dig at some point, I cleared a lot of loose stones, gravel and spoil from the slope between The Toolshed and the dig to prevent it being washed into the dig. This totalled 4 bags worth.

I then removed 6 bags worth of cobbles and sediment from the flooded dig using long crowbar and a draw hoe. I was interested to see that this process lowered the water level in the dig by between 2-3 inches.

Getting the bags up the slope to The Toolshed was a bit tedious. It then became necessary to exit the cave to prevent overrunning my callout time.

Cheers

Geoff

Sat 26th June Viaduct Sink

Geoff & Dave

Wednesday's pipe fettling/sealing at the waterfall seems to be holding and no water leaking past.

Dave headed straight down to the pool of water at the bottom of the dig with a 20 litre water container and a 4 pint milk carton and proceeded to bail the water into the 20 litre container. A full 20 litres was then hauled up by Geoff with Dave pushing from below and

eventually hauled and man handled to the waterfall where it was emptied and allowed to flow down the diverter pipe to the Somme. This was repeated three more times each time a full 20 litres deposited above the waterfall. Whilst Dave bailed Geoff kept himself busy shifting the 16 bags of spoil up the passage over the waterfall and deposited them at Bridge Junction. After 80 litres of water bailed from the pool the level had dropped 70 - 80mm but still no ongoing air space.

The 11 bags of spoil that Geoff had filled from the pool and the approach passage on his solo Fri trip were shifted to join the rest at Bridge Junction.

The hope is that the pool of water doesn't return to its pre bailing level. But if it does, is it due to the trickle running down the approach passage topping it back up, leveling out from the water logged un-dug spoil choked passage ahead or a silt/shingle filled 'U' tube passage (noting that prior to any bailing the level never backed further up the passage)?

It is not viable to bail on each digging session, so thoughts are for possibly pumping the water up the approach passage, past the Tool Shed on down the Somme, a distance of 25 - 30m.

Dave.

Saturday 26 June 2021 Rock Farm Cave Dave King, Simon Meade-King, Rich Witcombe, Geoff Newton

Initially Geoff loaded the backlog of spoil (mostly rocks) and Dave hauled to the Bucket Pitch. Simon joined us soon afterwards, loading the bucket whilst Geoff dug and levered. Once the backlog had been cleared Dave found he had enough time to haul the spoil right up to the top of the pitch.

Eventually it was time for Dave to take over hammering and chiselling at the dig, which he did to good effect. During this process the remains of the rock rib was seen to move slightly in its entirety. It is far too large to remove without application of chemicals, but when this is done it will create quite a wide passage.

While Dave was hammering and levering away, Geoff & Simon moved the bags of spoil to the foot of the staircase. We then broke for tea and emerged to find Rich had arrived and was trying to repair our drystone wall which had been accidentally modified by a JCB.

After tea Rich continued wall building whilst the rest of us hauled the spoil out to the surface.

Cheers

Geoff

Weds 30th June 2021 Carrion Slocker solo

The cave had clearly taken some water down the 4 inch drain during the recent heavy rains and was a bit drippy, but now with no water flowing in the field drain the drain flow had clearly stopped. That said, the adjacent Heale Slocker sink stream was flowing very slightly but all the water was sinking before the usual sink point, which was dry. This sink point was dug several years ago until a farmer filled it in after losing a chicken!

Back in Carrion Slocker hole after cutting down a few nettles to get in and a few brambles over the pothole entrance I proceeded down to the bottom of the cave to continue digging in the rift near the Sitting Room. After drilling, P & F a large boulder into movable pieces and moving them, I proceeded to clear more mud and smaller rocks and stacked them up. After P & F another edge of a large shelf boulder and clearing some more small rocks out of the dig floor, I moved some more big rocks and I think I can see into a lower rift due south of the Sitting Room, so possibly a lower level of the Fiat 500 Rift and slightly offset. The area has a gentle positive outward draft with no wind on the surface. I need some help clearing some rocks (Matt & Mandy please) from the base of the dig for stacking up in Fiat 500 Rift to make some more room. The dig is still looking reasonably good.

Take care, Vogon

Rock Farm - Wednesday 30th June 2021 Dave and Clive

The cave was draughting outwards for a change (same as Andy found at Carrion....) and was especially dry. The normally always wet Waterslide at the end was just damp this time although the much depleted 'main stream' was still running.

There was still chiselling and rock-worrying to do after Saturdays' session and Dave managed to manhandle a very large block out of Standing Room Only into the skip loading area.

A reasonable pile of rock was produced before the inevitable drilling began. Ahead, the working face of the rib had widened to around 18in by about 4ft high and was composed of the very hard, red, semi-silicified limestone we are accustomed to.

Three holes in the rib plus another tiny one at floor level, to remove a bulge in the left hand rift wall and another small one in the mega rock were fired before we finished for the night at an unearthly early 9pm!

We decamped to the quarry with Gav for a beer and were met by the sight of a camper van with two 'ne'r'r do wells' supping beer – we had forgotten Mark and Karen were dropping in for an evening of dig-heckling etc!

Mark had cycled from Castlemartin all the way to near Fowey over just five days, camping en route – quite a feat even with an e-bike!

We chatted until darkness around 11pm stopped play.

A major clearing session again no doubt on Saturday.....

All best

Clive

Saturday 3rd July Viaduct Sink

Geoff & Dave.

The plan was to probe the pool of water with drain rods and try and pump the water up and off down The Somme.

Geoff armed with a set of drain rods and attachments, Dave with ammo box containing 12v marine bilge/water pump, 12v 7ah battery and 34m of garden hose headed down to the sump/puddle/water logged silt & shingle. On route to the dig the hose was laid down to The Somme before reeling the remainder out towards the dig. Geoff first had a good poke with the drain rods and easily managed to push them in for approx 4m at a similar incline to the current passage through what felt like fine silts and shingle.

Dave then took the ammo box down laying the balance of hose pipe to the pool. With the pump connected to the pick up hose with strainer/filter attached in the pool the pump was switched on resulting in nothing but some gurgling. After most attempts to prime the pump failed due to working in such a restricted space the pump eventually primed and a good spout of water issued from the outlet port. The output hose was then connected and the water level very quickly started to drop. Things were looking good until the pump changed its tone and seemed to struggle. The fault was found to be collapsed filter/strainer blocking the pick up hose. A lot more faffing and cursing to re-prime the pump and hold the pick up pipe in clear water with no filter ensued with partial success and the pump started once again to lower the water level. Meanwhile Geoff went back to the waterfall to plug a possible leak with cement. Since it wasn't going to be possible to completely empty the pool with no filter fitted, lunch time was called. The drain rods and ammo box with pump and battery were hauled out leaving the hose pipes in situ.

Before the next attempt to pump the water a better more reliable means of priming the pump and a re-design of the filter/strainer will be required.

Dave.

Ps. I'm not available for Sat 10th July (away from Fri to Sun or perhaps Mon).

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 3rd July 2021 Geoff, Dave, Rich and Clive

Very dry underground, all things considered. A slight outward draught at the entrance.

Dave had fashioned a connecting alloy plate to firm up the join between the two planks which now ease the passage of the skip up and down the Waterchute. This was fitted and deemed a success!

Last Wednesday's bang had been extremely successful with a great pile of broken rock to remove. This resulted in 50 skips-worth heading to the surface.

Disappointingly the hoped-for open onward rift has not appeared (surprise, surprise!) The face though, which is now becoming increasingly comfortable to work in as we move forward, has now been changed from two parallel rifts into a single passage about a meter wide and standing height choked with fallen blocks and fine grey silt at the back upto to roof level. A bit of a classic choke in fact.

The small open bedding at floor level, which takes a small streamlet, tantalises with a slight outward draught currently.

Before end of play Gavin took the opportunity to inspect his below ground estate and was suitably impressed with the prospects.

It would be great to see some more of the erstwhile ATLAS diggers return to help us, now that we have a fairly decent digging prospect again (rather than repeated banging through all but solid rock!)

All best

Clive

Carrion Solo 05/07/21

A short visit on Monday evening before the forecast of rain, just drizzling slightly upon arrival at the swallet to investigate the lower rift possibilities at the dig hole near the Sitting Room. I took in an extra scaffold pole and some rope and hangers, I used the scaffold pole to make a horizontal sliding pair of rails to remove rocks from the rift hole to the spoil area at the bottom of Fiat 500 Rift. This works okay but it needs some voysey support, to shift them big rocks. I moved some and put in two hangers for an assistance rope with difficulty near the rift hole and pulled out some rocks, I can now see down about 8-10 feet into a larger rift probably accessible if I can clear the large boulders and rocks at the top top safely. Cool out flowing draft. After exiting only 10 minutes before ETO call out with Sue, a good 2 hour session before driving home in heavy rain most of the way.

take care, Vagon

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 7th July 2021 Dave, Tav and Clive

Despite the torrential rain that had been falling all afternoon the surface stream appeared still at a low level but the cave stream was running appreciably higher than usual, as was the recently very dry Waterslide at the end of the cave.

A very productive session after an early start by Dave followed by Tav attacking the choke for the remainder of the evening with CN loading the skip and Dave subsequently doing all the hauling (valiant effort there as there were some very heavy loads coming up!)

By the end of play the majority of the obvious rocks had been removed from the choke leaving just two large ones, one of which will need a bang. A lot of the immediate 'loose' fill has now gone as well.

When they have gone we can attack the back of the choke etc. Tav did also open up a bit of a hole at roof level to the right, which Richard had noted last week, which was draughting outwards.

Dave has also cleared the bedding at floor level (which was taking a larger stream this week) and you can see along it for a couple of feet before it bends out of sight – I may put CaveCam to work here for a look...

All the bags and rocks (we lost count but it was a major session!) are now stacked at the Foot of the Stairs waiting to come up on Saturday. Some rock was added to that in the Mud'ole – I think that has now been filled high enough, any higher and it will no longer be a very useful place to stand to manoeuvre bags etc past or to turn round before climbing down the pitch. The loose step at that point has now been reinforced with jammed rocks underneath.

Tav, I think it fair to say, was impressed with the way the cave is looking. After all the rain it would have been nice to hear the 'roar' again though!

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 10th July 2021 Geoff, Rich, Simon, Andy (Vogon) and Clive

After fighting our way through the assembled food stalls dotted around Gavin's yard for the Fun Day we set to removing the 50 odd loads-worth stacked at the Bottom of the Stairs up to daylight.

The heat generated doing this initiated an early tea-break (coinciding nicely with Simons' arrival!) followed by a return to the end of the cave. Andy had already been down and positioned the remaining pile of rocks from Wednesdays' session ready at the base of the Waterslide.

Andy dragged the skips up to the Bucket Pitch, Simon hauled up the pitch and Rich dealt with the bags while Geoff kept filling bags for Clive to load the skip with. By the end of the session another large rock had been levered up out of the floor to join the other two boulders awaiting a bang.

The low bedding taking the small stream was still draughting outwards but I couldn't any obvious air movement from the end of the main rift this time. The next phased appears to be compacted shale and rock along with a mass of compacted grey silt blocking the continuation of the rift.

Four small holes were drilled in the boulders, whilst the earlier spoil was taken to the surface, and fired successfully.

A replacement Petzl pulley has been obtained from Ebay and can be fitted on the Bucket Pitch on Wednesday – the existing one has all but worn away over the last couple of years or so! We can also try the new hauling bucket courtesy of Tav.

All best

Clive

I would add that the rift does not have a solid rock floor., rather its a mixture of mud and boulders which can be probed with a crowbar to some depth. Also the water entering the rift keeps finding new places to sink as we dig. The rift might be quite large if the fill were to be removed. Presumably though, we would initially just try to dig through at ceiling level.

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 14th July 2021 Andy (Vogon), Dave, Tav and Clive

I safely delivered another two rock crates (courtesy of Estelle) to top up our stock (just need to fill 'em now!)

Tav also delivered some smart new pulleys to go with the new hauling bucket which he and Dave fitted to the Bucket Pitch.

At the end the bang had worked well and reduced the three large rocks to handleable chunks. A few minutes were spent putting CaveCam to work again in the low bedding to the right which is taking a small stream and has been draughting slightly recently.

The resulting pictures didn't show anything of major interest.....

With Clive digging and Andy loading the skip, Dave hauling up the Waterslide and Tav doing the same on the Bucket Pitch the evening produced another mega pile of rocks and bags which ultimately found their way to The Landing to awaiting clearing to the surface on Saturday.

The fill in the rift continues to be mainly thin, shaley slabs collapsed from the roof embedded in muddy sand. The 'face' has been pushed back by a foot or two revealing a large boulder up against the left hand rift wall. This does however move slightly when crowbarred – probably a candidate for a bang. A few spadefuls of the black silt at the top of the fill were removed to reveal the roof continuing in the same manner for another 6ft at least with no sign of the rift narrowing at the moment.

The only problem turned out to be seepage from the small stream which flows into the low bedding mentioned above. Despite repeated back bailing this soon flooded the workings turning easily dug sand into a slurry. Dave cured the problem by clearing and lowering the threshold of the bedding so the stream flows into it uninterrupted. It may well need clearing periodically to keep the dig dry.

Assuming we can keep the water out we need to lower the floor as we go to maintain a reasonable headroom.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 17th July 2021 Dave, Geoff, Rich, Simon and Clive

On such a hot day underground certainly had its attractions and there was a reassuringly cold draught issuing from the entrance!

After a lunch in the shade of Gav's old railway wagon the team removed all Wednesday evenings haul of spoil from The Landing up to the surface.

Geoff then set to sending up rocks and mud from the end which ultimately also made it to the light of day.

A short photo session at the end (see below) followed by two holes drilled and fired in two blocks in the floor at the end.

The larger one was the one uncovered on Wed on the left hand side whilst the right hand one was prised away from the right hand wall.

The right hand one is broken off from a solid section beneath – most likely a section of the ‘rib’. The jury is out on the source of the left hand one.....

The rift continues at a similar width as far as we can tell but if the base of the rib continues in the same manner the available headroom may only be a 2.5-3ft – currently filled almost top the roof with black, sandy mud.

Work resumes on Wednesday!

All best

Clive

Sat 17th July

Viaduct Sink

Geoff & Dave.

Dave set off early to set up the 12v bilge pump with the new improved pick up pipe filter/strainer and a hand pump to prime the 12v pump. Before Dave reached the pool at the bottom of the dig carrying approx 8.5kg of pump, 12v battery in ammo box and a further 5kg of hand priming pump, strainer & hoses in tackle bag, Geoff was already hot on his heels after a good clear 80 mile drive up him from home. Whilst Dave connected the various hoses, connectors, valves etc Geoff busied himself by digging out the floor of the narrow rift opposite the Tool Shed (to be further investigated). Pump hoses all configured, the hand operated priming pump worked well and the 12v pump was soon pumping the water from the pool to The Somme. The water level was lowered by a good 150mm or so before the pump started sucking air. Pumping mission accomplished the two set off to move the 20 or so bags of spoil from Bridge Junction to the spoil dump at Downside Aven. With time in hand a re-visit to the lowered pool at the bottom of the dig where Geoff dug a few skips worth of silty slurry that Dave hauled, bagged up and stashed near the Tool Shed.

To improve access to continue digging the mud & silts it will be necessary to pop the roof and also deploy the hand pump (which can cope with grit and silts where as the 12v pump's valves will block or not seal) to further lower the remaining puddle into a 20 litre container.

The submerged passage would seem to continue at a similar angle to the approach passage albeit not very large. A solid 1.5m long bar could be fully pushed in following the roof line unhindered by silt and shingle. At a lower level it could be pushed full length into the mud & silts. On the previous session approx 4m of drain rods were pushed in with some noticeable friction through mud, silts & shingle before hitting solid (possibly just a dip in the roof).

Pump, hoses & battery stashed in the Tool Shed whilst the strainer assembly was taken out for cleaning.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 21st July 2021 Dave, Tav and Clive

Never has the prospect of going underground been more attractive than on Wed evening with the outside temperature being a modest 29 degrees!

The cave was delivering a welcome cold outward draught at the entrance and a further surprise inside....

Despite the near-drought like conditions on the surface the stream entering the Mud'ole was running well and the Waterslide near the end of the cave, recently all but bone dry, was running at all but full winter levels!

This confusing hydrological situation was later revealed to have been caused by Gav placing a ‘sluice-gate’ style board across the arch in the new all crossing the stream to raise the water level for son Monty to play in.

Some of the dammed up water was spotted disappearing into the bank whilst the level of the stream heading down valley was reduced to not much more of a trickle.

So the source of the two constant streams in the cave, long thought to be leakage from the surface stream, have been conclusively proved to be so!

At the end of the cave the augmented stream was overflowing into Standing Room Only, partly flooding the dig before disappearing into the low bedding on the right. As an indication of what the normal winter water levels might do to the dig it would be an idea to install a low rock and cement ‘bund’ at the bottom of the Waterslide to keep the stream confined to its exit there rather than overflowing into the dig.

Underground Dave was at the front with Tav loading the skioop and Clive hauling. Another bumper session of rocks, mud and oozing sludge were hauled out using the new hauling system (of hauling from the bottom of the Bucket Pitch using a longer rope and the new pulley). This seems to work quite well but needs a couple of minor tweaks yet.

All the spoil remains stacked on The Landing awaiting a keen crew on Saturday!

All best

Clive

Saturday 24th July
Viaduct Sink
Geoff, Pawel & Dave

Dave again this week went in an hour earlier to pump out the dig prior to drill and bang. With the pump and hoses etc assembled, the water level was soon dropping as planned. Whilst the pump did its job the previous stash of bagged spoil was relocated from the Toolshed through the flat out crawl and deposited in the passage heading back towards The Somme junction and Waterfall. After most of the water had been pumped from the dig to The Somme the pump, hoses, battery etc were dismantled and relocated back to the Toolshed just as Pawel and Geoff arrived. Geoff then proceeded to drill three 450mm holes in the roof above the now much drier dig face whilst Pawel and Dave continued to dig out the rift opposite the Toolshed (rift in the left hand wall looking down slope) and added the additional bagged spoil to the current stash. The initial spoil appeared to be possibly back filled spoil from the earlier days of digging, but as the level went below the main passage floor it became more like original undisturbed mud/silt. This rift is in line with the Toolshed that is the back filled passage towards The Somme, it appears to be deeper than the current ongoing solid floor that goes all the way down slope to the current wet dig, so it could be that the current dig is in fact an overflow passage from the rift/Toolshed passage. Also worthy of note is that between the junction to the start of The Somme and the point where the rift and Toolshed meet the ongoing dig passage no solid floor is apparent, but everything beyond and down slope is a solid tube that has been enlarged by blasting out the roof. Holes drilled, charge set, the trio headed out setting off the charge from Downside Aven as usual.

Dave.

Dave made an very early start, taking in a clean filter, setting up the pump, pumping out the dig. This was duly achieved and he was in the last stages of clearing up when Pawel & Geoff arrived with the necessary equipment to drill holes and carry out a "bang". The reduced water level does seem to indicate that the passage is levelling out, hopefully indicating that the sump is not too deep.

Geoff sorted out the drilling and charges whilst Dave & Pawel continued the trial dig near The Toolshed, started last week. The bags of spoil were stacked a little downstream if Somme Junction.

The charges were duly set off with some assistance from Dave & Pawel and we retired to Rock Farm for lunch.

Its too early to say if its worth pursuing the new dig. Early signs are not very promising, not surprising as the original explorers might have tried it instead of backfilling it. A floor of compacted clay and gravel has prevented water sinking here. However given the logistics of the stream dig, its worth probing this alternative dig further. to see where its headed if anywhere..

Cheers

Geoff

Further to your reports on the Toolshed dig, I have looked at the original Viaduct logbook.

On Saturday 25 February 1978 the team (Simon, Clive, Rich and Lawrence Kelland) made the first exploration of the streamway beyond Bridge Junction:

"We moved along it, at first at a high level and then at stream level, until some 30' from 'The Landing' (Bridge Junction) the way on became too narrow. At this point we called a halt with the water tantalisingly whirling out of site to the LEFT (my capitals)."

The following day a bang was placed on the right-hand wall at the end, and the route ahead and to the RIGHT was opened up. This passage, the scene of the present day dig, was taking the stream.

I wonder if the original (i.e. 25/2/78) sink point is your new rift dig. There is no mention of it ever being probed - we simply followed the stream.

Rich

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 24th July 2021 (belated report!)

Dave, Geoff, Pawel, Richard and Clive (Matt & Mandy on 'passing by' duty!)

With the water level reduced in the surface stream (by removal of Gav's temporary 'dam') and the blocking of the leak in the bank by way of a judicious application of clay, the cave miraculously dried out!

(just a low flow in the main rift etc).

Whilst Dave, Rich and Clive cleared the major pile of bags and rocks from The Landing up to the surface Pawel and Geoff battled a lake of sludgy goo at the end. This was the result of the previously mentioned 'flood' caused by the leak from the surface stream.

A particularly messy session ensued with leaking bags of liquid mud joining the usual spoil on its way to the Foot of the Stairs ready for removal to the surface on Wednesday.

Clive and Dave subsequently carried on at the end removing most of the remaining sludge and exposing three more lumps of rock in the floor that will need a bang on Wednesday.

'Our' Shepherd's Hut will hopefully have returned from its brief sojourn in the quarry last weekend where it was doubling as a bar for the student friends of Gav's eldest daughter Matilda who was celebrating her birthday.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 28th July 2021 Tav, Dave and Clive

After clearing Saturday's bags from the Foot of the Stairs to the surface Tav and Clive headed to the end to resume the 'goo-fest' which has taken the place of the regular, fairly civilised dig!

Unfortunately the end had turned into a lake again (although bigger this time) with water seeping through from the stream where it disappears at the foot of the Waterslide.

The lake was slowly bailed into the low bedding while Dave fettled 'the leak' and ultimately a crude dam was built using filled bags topped off with a large flat slab to keep the waters at bay.

Dave stood by on the hauling rope for quite a while the digging party got to grips with bagging up the 'slop'.

By end of play a fair number of bags and one big rock found their way to the surface where they were emptied and washed out in the stream. Quite a few needed to be retired however due to unfair wear and tear.

Three large rocks, all no doubt part of the original 'rib' were drilled and banged before leaving. These were obstructing access to the back of the dig which is now narrowing significantly which is worrying.

The continuing face appears to be sand and mud although only around 18in wide.

We could be somewhat short-staffed on Saturday as Dave will be away, I am not sure if Rich or Simon will be out. I think Pawel said he would be with us plus Geoff of course.

All best

Clive

Viaduct Sink Saturday 31 July 2021 Pawel Krawczyk, Geoff Newton

Pawel was delayed by traffic problems, so we had a late start.

I decided that as pumping was not available, it would be best to clear out the accumulated bags of spoil from the new trial dig. Somewhere between 15-20 bags (I did not count) edit – it was 22, of mostly overfilled bags were taken to Downside Aven and duly emptied there.

A joss stick smoke test was carried out at the new dig. No draught was detected. I will try again in the depths winter when the conditions might be more favourable and when we will have dug out more. In the process the whole cave stunk of cheap perfume (like a brothel?).

Finally Pawel extracted 5 bags worth of bang debris from the sump, using his wellies to pull the spoil back out of the water. Spoil was hauled up and bagged by me in the Toolshed.. By then it was time to go back to Rock Farm for lunch.

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 31st July 2021 Geoff, Pawel, Rich and Clive

All the bags from Wednesday's session having already been cleared and emptied an immediate trip to the end for Pawel and Clive revealed the, not unexpected, flooded dig.

Much bailing ensued followed by the removal of the bang debris from Wednesday's detonation plus lots of bags of 'slop'! These were all hauled to the base of the Bucket Pitch by Geoff.

Continued work at the face revealed more large remnants of the central rib in situ and the upper section of the choked rift continuing in the same (now somewhat) narrowed fashion.

As was pointed out, the narrowing of the rift means less to dig out(!) but as we have to dig more out of the floor to maintain working space I don't know if that theory really holds water (unintended pun!)

By the time all the bags and rocks had been dragged to the surface enthusiasm for a drill and bang (along with the time factor) had waned completely. All the bags were emptied, with the help of a surface- supporting Rich, washed out and the more worn out bags retired.

The plan now is to just drill and bang on Wed. Dave is not out so I'm assuming Tav could be support for that. Maybe we can move a few more bags back a bit as well.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 4th August 2021 Tav and Clive

The dig at the end of the cave was again flooded but it didn't take too long to bail the worst of it into the little bedding plane.

Tav managed to remove a six or eight bags of gooey slop from around the rocks which needed banging before gamely manhandling them up the Waterslide to the base of the Bucket Pitch.

Five holes were drilled and fired in the rocks in the floor of the dig and a bulge in the right hand wall. One small positive note was that the drill went right through the furthest two rocks in the floor indicating that maybe they don't go down too far after all.

More fun and games on Saturday!

All best

Clive

Saturday 7th August

Rock Farm Cave

Clive, Geoff, Rich, Simon & Dave.

Geoff & Dave just about managed to finish lunch on the lawn by the chicken coup before Clive & Rich arrived with the storm clouds, neither being prepared to leave the dry comfort of their cars until the rain eased.

Geoff and Dave already being a tad damp from the morning Viaduct Sink session decided they might as well get underground into the "dry" and start digging. However before digging could begin they set about bailing the flooded dig. Just as the last few buckets of water were passed back the stream got considerably louder and soon the dam was overwhelmed and re-flooding the dig. Fortunately Dave was able to stack a large quantity of rocks on the dam before they were totally submerged beneath the flood water whilst Geoff loaded the skip for Clive to haul. The flood pulse put paid to further digging and it being too early for tea break all the spoil including the bags of gloop from Wednesday's session were all hauled to the surface where Simon and Rich were waiting to empty and wash bags. Then it was time for tea in the now returned shepherds hut.

After tea Dave, Clive & Geoff revisited the flooded dig to see how much deeper it had become or if it had started to perhaps recede. Much to their surprise the level had dropped by a good 150mm or so. It seemed a good idea to then bail the rest of the lake back to establish whether a bang would be required next time. Geoff was dispatched to collect the now redundant black bucket from the Bucket Pitch to speed up the bailing. With the dig bailed it seemed reasonable to fill a few more bags so Dave got stuck in and before long approximately 20 bags were filled with non gloopy spoil and about a dozen rocks were dug out some of which required an introduction to the lump hammer to render them haulable. Despite the infill mud/silt at the back of the dig having been below the flooded water level the water hadn't soaked into it, hence why it didn't turn to gloop when dug out, but the flood water level had dropped quite quickly, so did it flow away perhaps through a joint on the right?

The 20 ish bags and dozen rocks were hauled stacked at the bottom of the slope below the Bucket Pitch. Meanwhile Rich and Simon had been busy on the surface filling a crate with rocks and wall building.

Dave.

Saturday 7th August

Viaduct Sink

Geoff & Dave.

A previously Dave set off an hour earlier than usual to pump out the dig before Geoff's arrival. Geoff arrived at the Tool Shed a little earlier than anticipated just as Dave was packing away the pump and hoses after pumping as much out of the dig as possible. However the recent wet weather has meant that the surface stream is once again flowing on passed the entrance and near the dig face the trickle of water seeping in from the right hand wall lower down than the Tool Shed and new rift dig is a little more significant than the previous few months causing the water level to very slowly rise whilst digging.

With the pumping paraphernalia stowed in the Tool Shed, Geoff proceeded to dig a number of skips worth of spoil for Dave to haul and decant into bags before swapping positions so Dave could attack the roof with chisel and hammer. The spoil was then pulled through the flat out crawl and with the morning still young Geoff took the opportunity to continue digging the new rift filling a few more bags whilst Dave started shifting bags to the waterfall. Both Geoff and Dave then shifted all the bags to Downside Aven with time to empty them too. Since Dave is unavailable next Saturday Geoff plans to continue digging the new rift site.

The Jury is still out as to which is the more promising site to dig - the new rift or the current water filled dig. The new rift could be a continuation of the Tool Shed rift. The current dig although refills with water, is always at the same level on each visit.

Dave.

The current cave is mostly in my opinion a series of largish phreatic rift passages dating from an earlier landscape, which have been infilled to varying extents with gravel and clay. These have been invaded by the modern stream which sometimes utilises these rifts and sometimes, when these rifts are seriously infilled, makes its own immature routes utilising beddings and joints which may or may not become passable to humans, as in the Dismal Series and our stream dig.

The "New Dig" has an obviously phreatic rift which pinches out going forward, but a floor of compacted sediments which can be dug out to expose what will hopefully be a passable rift, maybe a continuation of the back-filled oxbow. Of course it might just be a phreatic pocket. Time will tell. Its clearly a very speculative dig (no draught at the moment), but at least the New Dig could be backfilled from the stream dig if it is not a goer. The stream dig of course has its own problems which could get worse if trickle entering near the Tool Shed continues to increase. PS. The trickle enters from the **left hand** wall looking downstream, not as Dave states.

Those of you who bother to read this may have noticed parallels with Rock Farm Cave, where the decisions on where to dig are easier, because the infilled rift where we are currently digging is a decent size and the immature cracks and tubes taking the water are so small..

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 11th August 2021 Tav, Dave and Clive

After lifting last Saturdays extra bags up the pitch and depositing them at the base of The Stairs attention turned to the end....

Dave and Tav bailed out the dig (expected especially after the recent torrential rains) and dug out above, beyond and deeper leaving a 'perched' slurry pool. Although the stream gravel and compacted mud and silt were below the perched water level they dug out dry (relief!)

The rift has narrowed slightly again but after pulling out one rock there was no further trace of the infamous 'rib'.

The evenings work produced a truly bumper load of bags and rocks. The bags were manhandled by the increasingly knackered team (I speak for myself at least!) to the surface leaving a goodly pile of rocks at the base of The Stairs waiting to come up next time.

I've checked with Simon and he will be at Thrupe on Saturday morning and Rock in the afternoon so getting those rocks to the surface might be an option....

All best

Clive

Viaduct Sink Saturday 14 August 2021 Mike Kousiounis, Geoff Newton

The surface stream was flowing on down valley past the entrance, with all that this entails further into the cave.

Before we started work we each took a quick look at the stream dig. My intention is to bang this next week. The main difficulty will not be the water, but will be the layers of soft shale which have appeared in the roof which will make the holes difficult to clear and maybe also absorb some of the force.

This was Mikes first session here for a long while ie before the dam. This time we concentrated on the "New Dig" and Mike dug out somewhere in the region of 25 bags of spoil, which I moved up to Somme Junction. The New Dig is getting a bit squalid due to accumulated water. Interestingly there appeared to be a slight draught issuing from the little rift above the dig, which had been absent when I did the

draught test. My plan was to allow sufficient time after the digging to take the spoil generated on the day out to Downside Aven and stack it there. So when I judged the time was right we combined to do this and still get out in time for a lunch at Rock Farm.

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave 14 August 2021 (pm) Mike Kousiounis, Rich Witcombe, Simon Meade-King, Geoff Newton

Initially Rich and Geoff moved the rocks left at the foot of the stairs on Wednesday, up to the landing, whilst Mike started work at the sharp end. Once the rocks were on the landing Geoff joined Mike at the sharp end, bagging the spoil Mike extracted and moving it to the foot of the incline. When the heap of bags looked substantial Mike loaded the buckets and I hauled to the foot of the Bucket Pitch. It was a bit early for tea so we returned to the face and I dug out a similar amount of spoil which he bagged. WE the exited for a late tea. Meanwhile Rich and Simon had moved the rocks from the landing to the surface and also filled a crate with rocks and carried out more wall building.

The sun came out for a convivial tea break and as time was marching on there was little enthusiasm for a return to the fray.

So the Wednesday team will find lots of bags of spoil at both the foot of the Bucket Pitch and the incline. There is a boulder which needs popping.

Cheers

Geoff

Bos Swallet Sunday 15 August 2021 Mike Kousiounis, Geoff Newton

The only thing I remember from my only previous visit to this cave, nearly 40 years ago, was being in the only decent chamber of the cave and looking up to see a huge boulder perched ominously high up one wall with some blackness behind. Mike's new dig in this cave started behind this boulder, which is now on the floor of the chamber.

The dig itself is quite civilised, which is more than can be said for the passage from the entrance to the above chamber. This is excessively sporting and rather squalid. Those of you who refuse to enter Viaduct Sink should note that, Viaduct Sink is a stroll in the park compared with Bos Swallet.

The previous bang in the cave had been very effective and a huge amount of spoil was removed to the chamber. Then Mike drilled some more holes in the dig (to be banged on his next visit.), whilst I added to spoil retaining wall, using large rocks from the spoil and a concrete mix made from sand and cement we had taken in for the purpose.

The dig has a decent draught and shows some promise. Whether the caving community will thank Mike for making this cave longer remains to be seen.

For the background to the dig please read Pete Hall's article in the current issue of Descent.

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 18th August 2021 Dave and Clive

All the bags were removed from the base of the Bucket Pitch and from the bottom of the Waterslide up to The Landing in readiness for their final trip to the surface on Saturday. 36 bags in total.....

At the end we bailed the dig – surprisingly, as the dig deepens the water only fills the bottom section not filling to the top as we might expect.

The rift at the end doesn't seem to be getting any wider – the opposite in fact probably. There is a lot more of the solid rib in the floor and on the right hand side as well which makes the working height of the mud-infilled section only a couple of feet high at most.

Four holes were drilled and fired – one in a loose block uncovered by Kushey and Geoff and three in the solid ledge in the floor on the right hand side.

It will soon be crunch time to decide if we persue the rift further – I might bring the mega bar on Saturday to have a serious probe into the fill at the end.

'Plan B' of course is the low bedding on the right taking the little stream, which we can bang out. The positive take on this is of course that we have a handy stacking area in the rift which would take a lot of rock!

No Dave of course this weekend....

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 21st August 2021 Geoff, Alex, Rich and Clive

After first clearing Wednesday evenings' accumulated pile of bags and rocks from The Landing up to the surface Geoff and Alex headed for the end of the cave.

After bailing the lake they soon sent up the first skips for Clive to haul up the Waterslide and then, via the doubled rope and pulley, up to Rich at the top of the Bucket Pitch.

Around 20 bags and a good number of rocks eventually found their way to the surface before exhaustion set in (for the writer at least) and an earlier than usual finish.

At the end it was reported that there was still plenty of mud and rock to come out. (Six filled bags ready to come up the Waterslide). The mega bar is yet to be wielded on the fill in the upper part of the rift to see if we can gain an insight into what lies beyond.

A return on Wednesday....

All best

Clive

Saturday 21 August (am) Viaduct Sink Geoff Newton Solo

Drill and bang the roof of the stream end dig.

Cheers

Geoff

Wed 25th August.

Rock Farm Cave.

Clive & Dave.

Water levels not surprisingly low and not too much bailing required at the dig face. Before Dave started to dig the mega bar was pushed into the infill in a few places and directions. Ahead the roof appears to continue at the same angle for at least 1m without hitting solid, probing limited by the friction of the bar in the mud infill. Probing the floor both vertically down and at an angle down/forwards gave similar results of approx 1m.

A number of bags were then filled, only a small number of which could be described as slurry, and were added to Saturday's stockpile along with a few more rocks. With stacking space running out, digging stopped and Clive hauled all the bags and rocks up and stacked at the bottom of the slope below the Bucket Pitch. Clive then drilled and charged two holes in the rib in the floor on the right hand side. Probably the last bang to be fired from the surface unless the bang wire is extended, but more likely it will be moved on down the cave and firing done from either the top or bottom of the Staircase.

Dave.

Ps.

A reminder re TLS surface clearing on Sunday and Monday from 10am onwards with BBQ lit for lunchtime cremations.

Saturday 28 August 2021 (am) Viaduct Sink Dave King, Geoff Newton

Dave in early to pump out the dig. I arrived whilst this was in progress. Although there was little water flowing on down valley past the entrance, the various inlets in the cave were all still well active and helping to refill the dig, once pumping stopped.

Last weeks bang had been less effective than usual. Only 12 bags of spoil and one large rock were removed. There was time to take all the bags back to Downside Aven and stack the spoil, and still arrive back at Rock Farm for lunchtime.

The way on appears to be getting very small and is full of gravel. On the one hand the gravel is reducing the volume of water that needs to be removed, on the other hand the gravel will add to the pressure on stacking space and is difficult to remove as it rapidly becomes a slurry.

The New Dig also fills with water and hinders operation of the old dig.

A lot of decisions will need to be made in the near future.

Cheers

Geoff

TLS Surface clearance

We had a good turn out over the Bank Hol weekend for the TLS surface clearing. On Sunday 16 and Monday five inc eight ATLAS members.

Lots done:-

On Friday we cut and cleared the vegetation inc the tree that had collapsed over the Hobnail gate in preparation so we could actually see and access the area.

On Sunday & Monday the following:-

Cleared both flight of steps, Hobnail and TLS, of mud etc.

Hobnail Channel dug out and cleared.

Dug out the approach to TLS gate and added a couple more rock steps to the bottom of the steps down to TLS.

Dug out/re-established the stream route from the Hobnail steps past the Hobnail Channel and on to the cliff face.

Cleared any fallen branches, logs etc that could potentially get washed down to TLS gate.

Lunchtime BBQ both Sun & Mon.

Total of 11 did the through trip from TLS to Hobnail, some visiting Atlas Pot Balcony via Marble Streamway.

Write up of weekend and through trip inc photos sent off to Chris for Descent.

An enjoyable and productive weekend, a big thanks to all.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 28th August 2021 Dave, Geoff, Alex, Simon and Clive

Having hauled the previous Wednesdays nights' bags to the surface an early tea break ensued followed by Dave and Geoff heading to the end while Clive took over the hauling to the base of the pitch and then the lift upto to Simon waiting above.

All the bags and rocks were left at The Landing ready for the Wednesday session (tonight).

As I didn't see the end this time I have little idea of how it was left! Dave?.....!

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 1st September Wednesday 1st Sept

Tav, Clive & Dave.

Dave was volunteered to go down first and bail the dig dry whilst Clive & Tav set about hauling Saturday's spoil from the landing to the surface. The bang wire that had been relocated on Saturday to enable it to reach the dig face and firing from the bottom of the staircase still required pinning and securing out of harms way, Clive actioned this using the spare wooden wedges left from installing the scaffold plank skip guide whilst Tav emptied and washed the spoil bags.

With the dig bailed, Dave dug & chiselled out the usual mix of rocks, silts, mud and gloop which Clive loaded and Tav hauled up the Water Slide. With the rock rib on the right further exposed to a depth of approximately 50cm each side, Clive set about drilling three shot holes in the rib, leaving Tav & Dave to haul the spoil the rest of the way to the surface.

With shot holes fired from the bottom of the staircase, bags emptied and cleaned it was time to retire to the shepherds hut for a well earned pint, this time without Gav who had handed in his request to miss the post dig chat earlier.

Saturday's crack team should have more rock (or perhaps gravel ;-)) to pull out rather than the usual mud and slurry - after bailing of course.

Dave.

Ps. Reminder that I'm not about on Sat 4th or Wed 15th, I should be back in time for both Viaduct Sink & Rock Farm Cave on Sat 11th

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 4th September 2021 Geoff, Rich, Simon and Clive

Geoff and Clive straight to the end to bail and clear. Bailing the lake was tricky due to submerged lumps of bang debris so efforts concentrated on removing mud etc from the up-rift end. 21 bags plus some rocks resulted which made their way to the surface.

There is still submerged bang debris to clear next time.

Clive

Hi All,

My previous last visit to Carrion was on 30 June and the dig is looking good.

Monday, 6 September 2021 Carrion Slocker solo

After a long absence over the summer I went back to an overgrown Carrion Swallet hole. It has clearly taken some significant water in these climate change heavy precipitation downpours as the drainage grid was very blocked with leaves and sticks and nettles looked well watered and the rift steps when washed nice and clean stop I took along drill bits and a hanger to put into a large boulder in the way, With the hope of being able to haul it out of the way without it dropping back down in jamming like it had previously. From an awkward drilling position, I

successfully fitted the hanger in the part of the very heavy Boulder and connected it with a carabiner and rope. I managed to pull the Boulder carefully upwards into a small chamber and then wedged it 'reasonably' securely out of the way. Then I wriggled into the new space trying to decide if the new platform area was actually secure, it was. I then drilled two holders and P&F another jammed boulder and after splitting it I dropped the parts of it down into my new rift.

After more gardening to keep the new space safe to descend, I climbed down and repositioned the dropped boulders. The gained depth here is about 3.5m. The way on is drafting with a secure looking roof! I noticed my new second-hand caving watch was fast forwarding for did not know the time relative to my stated ETO with Sue. I therefore exited the cave before losing track of time causing unnecessary stress at home and a callout. 2.5 hours, good progress, +3.5 m depth and about 3 m plus of horizontal passage and a good view forward. A useful visit.

take care, Vogon

Rock Farm - 08.09.2021

A welcome return for the 'young' ATLAS team (Mandy, Matt and Spike), plus Tav.

After a brief perusal of the sizable puddle at the dig face Tav and Matt determined that only the honourable thing to do was to invoke the ladies first clause and Mandy was duly volunteered to immerse her yellow suited self into the drink to start bailing. That took about 20 minutes at which time Spike arrived and digging began in earnest. The three youngsters began filling bags and extracting rocks while Tav returned up the slope to haul and stack. Once the bags were filled Matt and Mandy came up to help haul it all up Bucket Pitch while Spike hammered out a few final stubborn rocks in preparation for the next bang. Then the whole team chained the goodly pile of debris up to the landing ready for the Saturday team to extract before decamping to Gav's place for a well-earned beer.

Some observations.

1. More bags are needed. To get all the spoil out required some of them to be filled on the heavy side.
2. Ideally three people are now required at the end, particularly during bailing.
3. The current way on is narrowing.
4. I found my missing rechargeable battery which was very pleasing. Which meant that the rather less pleasing task of emptying my wheelee bin while looking for it had been wholly unnecessary. Ah well.

Tav

Saturday 11th September

Viaduct Sink

Geoff & Dave.

On arrival at the the entrance it was noted that the entire small surface stream was sinking by the entrance and hence a dry stream bed beyond.

Since it wasn't an option for Dave to head in early this time round, both Geoff & Dave headed in together. To give Dave time to set up the pump, Geoff offered to carry the heavy drill box and drill tube whilst Dave went on ahead with the lighter bang box and a spare 12v battery for the pump. Geoff arrived at the Toolshed just as Dave finished setting up the pump and was about to switch it on. It took approximately 20 minutes for the pump to do its job although it could've been a little quicker with a fresh battery, but at least we know that one battery will do about three pumping sessions before coming out for charging.

With the pump system dismantled and stowed in the Toolshed, Geoff commenced drilling 3 x 450mm deep holes, but when drilling the first one deeper the 1m drill bit jammed and no jiggling or coxing could release it. The problem was two fold, one being the confined and awkward position and the second being that at about 300mm in the drill hit a band of soft damp grey marl that clogs the drill bit. Fortunately we had a second 1m drill bit, so Dave took on the task to drill the remaining holes deeper. Even with plenty of reaming and hole clearing, when the drill bit was removed the holes started to close up at the 300mm depth requiring re drilling more than a couple of times and in particular just before inserting the det cord in each hole. Finally three holes between 600 & 700mm drilled, charged and connected and one hole still retaining its tight grip on the jammed drill bit. Hopefully the drill bit will be salvageable on the next session. With the holes popped from the dry Downside Aven it was time to exit for the anticipated slightly late lunch break.

Due to the restricted nature at the dig face and the pool of water that remains even after pumping, a larger working space is needed and therefore enlarging the approach will be required.

Dave.

Saturday 11 September (pm) Rock Farm Cave Clive, Dave, Rich, Geoff

Either the someone has forgotten to report on this session or the report has got lost in the internet, so I will do one myself.

First Dave went to the face to commence bailing, whilst the others hauled the spoil stashed at The Landing out to the surface.

Then Clive & Geoff joined Dave to complete the bailing. Dave then dug, mostly forwards extracting clay, using a shovel whilst the other two transferred the bag of spoil to the foot of the incline. When Dave had exhausted this, Geoff took over, this time mostly digging down

with a pick, taking out muddy rubble and also extracting large boulders with a crowbar. Eventually all the available bags were filled and resting at the foot of the incline.

The three then transferred the bags and rocks to The Landing in stages before exiting for a late tea break, and to join Rich who had been wall building.

After tea Clive & Dave went in to bang the rock rib.

Currently the digging is very easy, once the bailing is complete. My impression is that the rift is no longer getting smaller, particularly if you dig both forwards and downwards.

Cheers

Geoff

Just to point out that I was underground (moving spoil back from the head of Bucket Pitch) not on the surface walling.

Rich

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 15th September 2021 Tav, Dave and Clive

While Dave headed on into the cave to test the new-fangled pumping arrangement at the end, Tav and Clive emptied The Landing of Saturday's heap of bags and rocks.

Several of the bags had to be retired due to coming to the end of their useful working life. I have brought along around 15 heavier duty black bags (ex-mushroom compost) which ultimately turned out to be sturdier underground. I will bring some more on Saturday.....

At the end Dave had managed to drain the lake over about 15 minutes with the Hilti drill powering a small pump connected to a few metres of hose. Setting it up is a trifle fiddly as the hose and pump have to be primed first by pouring water through the whole system and the drill then has to be kept running constantly to prevent water flowing back downhill which would mean re-priming again. This turned out to be an uncomfortable (and no doubt boring!) job for Dave in the muddy conditions.

The hose has filters to keep the muck out as the pump would soon grind to a halt – its necessary to keep the water and mud undisturbed for this reason.

With Tav on hauling duty on the Waterslide, Dave digging and Clive skip-loading a very useful session ensued (finishing around 10pm or so). Much broken rock from the banged central rib was removed along with a lot more prised out accompanied by plenty of mud and gloop. This all ended up at the Foot of the Stairs awaiting attention on Saturday (there is a lot!)

As far as I could see (over Dave's shoulder) the rift is maintaining its width, ie not getting any narrower at present, and the rib at roof height is just a few inches wide with a 6in wide mud-filled gap on its right and about a foot of fill on its left.

A bang will be needed next time in the rib ahead and at floor level to maintain working height.

Geoff – if you are aiming for a solo session on Saturday morning maybe move some of the bags etc up onto The Landing? If you go to the end instead hand bailing would be needed before you dig. If we pump later it would need clear water. There are still a few bags at the end I think....

Whist writing I may not be able to make this coming Wednesday evening but I will be there on Saturday (18th)

All best

Clive

Not Viaduct Sink Saturday 18 September 2021 (am) Geoff Newton Solo

Clearing spoil solo in Viaduct is not really practical, so I went to Rock Farm Cave instead.

First transferred Wednesday's spoil from the foot of The Stairs to the first ledge.

Then to the face to fill the 7 empty bags there with soil and stack at the foot of the incline. Then bailed the dig and spent the remaining time before lunch in hammering bits off of the rib/ boulder in the floor.

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 18th September 2021 Geoff and Clive

Following Geoff's morning solo session in the cave we moved the bags and rocks from the lower step on The Stairs up to the top and thence to the surface (24 bags plus rocks).

Then to the end with the latest batch of stronger black bags. Geoff had already bailed there in the morning (bar one remaining buckets' worth). Another ten bags plus the accumulated seven were dragged to the top of the base of the Bucket Pitch where they await attention on Wednesday.

At the end a large section of the rib was protruding from the floor – this was duly drilled, the two holes going right through so it may be the remains of a roof pendant perhaps. All fired successfully so there will be rock-wrangling at the next session.

The ongoing rift has not narrowed any further, with the rib removed its around 18 inches wide at its narrowest.

I may not be out on Wednesday (will confirm either way on the day) and due to a house-clearing session with my brother-in-law on Sat 25th Geoff and I have agreed to move the weekend session to the Sunday. Hopefully that might work for the other team members.

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Sunday 26th September 2021 Geoff, Dave and Clive

With plenty of bags and rocks waiting to be removed from the cave a busy session was in prospect....

First a left over pile of rocks on The Landing were removed to the surface before we all headed to the end to pump out the lake using the Hilti and the rotary pump attachment. Several large rocks from last Saturday's bang were removed before around a dozen bags of mud were added for hauling up to the Bucket Pitch where there was already a pile waiting.

By the end of play The Landing was groaning again under a large pile of rocks and bags which await attention on Wednesday.....

At the dig face Dave uncovered a substantial section of the central rib which will require banging next time. Spirits were raised slightly by a distinctly hollow sound which emanated from the roof to the left side of the rib. Uncertain what this is at the moment but Dave's theory is that it may just be a thinly-bedded section of the roof which has dropped slightly leaving a gap above.

All best

Clive

Sunday 26th Sept
Viaduct Sink Geoff & Dave

No digging in Viaduct Sink last weekend since Dave was away and Geoff soloed in Rock Farm Cave on the Sat morning instead. The previous Viaduct Sink trip was a bang and jammed drill bit, so the hope was to pump out, recover drill bit and dig out the banged spoil. Started well with nothing to carry in bar collect empty bags from Downside Aven on route. The drill bit was found to still be tightly jammed in it's hole so had to remain for another day. A few skips of spoil were first pulled out of the pond with the garden hoe to clear a space for the pump filter to sit as low as possible in the water. Setting up the pump etc is getting quicker so it wasn't long before the pump was primed and cycling water through the priming hand pump. Unfortunately as soon as the change over from cycling water to sending the water up the outlet hose to The Somme by means of opening/closing ball valves on the relevant hoses, the pump stopped and couldn't be persuaded to jump back into life. At that stage it was unknown as to what the cause might be - dead battery (first use of that particular secondhand battery), switch, pump motor etc. With the pump and plumbing paraphernalia dismantled, packed & stashed back in the Tool Shed, a few more skips of spoil were dug out with the hoe whilst trying to keep out of the water to stay dry, these were then hauled up and bagged.

An early retreat bringing out the pump, battery & filter (also required fettling) and the half dozen plus bags of spoil out to Downside Aven on route. Back at Rock Farm for about 12:30 and time therefore to investigate further the pump issue. Battery, connections and switch all tested ok. Fault found to be a sticking built in pressure switch on the pump manifold. The switch can be easily be bypassed so as not to have the same fault reoccur and whilst the pump is out the valves and ports can be fettled and cleaned along with the filter assembly. Just Geoff and Dave had lunch on the bridge in the sunshine prior to the afternoon session in Rock Farm Cave, since the anticipated Clive luncheoned at home.

Dave.

Wednesday 29th Sept

Rock Farm Cave

Clive & Dave

It was decided to first pump out the dig, drill and bang the rib and then clear the landing of spoil - time permitting.

Whilst Clive finished changing Dave headed on down with the pump, hoses and batteries to get the 12v bilge pump set up and commence pumping. The first thing to greet Dave at the dig was a 30cm high bank of foam sitting on the dam and foam around the walls and roof above the very large lake estimated to be about 4ft deep. The second greeting was from a frog sitting on a rock beside the lake minding its own business, probably washed in by the torrential rain the night before and wondering what its next move was going to be or where its next meal was coming from. With the pump removed from its transit bucket the frog was caught and stored in the lidded bucket to await its journey to the surface.

Clive arrived encumbered with drill, bang box and drill tube just as Dave had finished setting up the bilge pump. With high hopes of efficiently pumping the much larger volume of water than usual the pump was switched on. The pump primed itself as expected but the flow was disappointing to say the least. Air was getting into the pickup pipe and reducing efficiency. After a little fettling the solution was to remove the pickup pipe entirely and dip the pump directly into the water but keeping the motor dry above the water line. This improved the flow but it still didn't match the bailing with bucket rate but was far less tiring. A combination of bailing and pumping finally reduced the water to the gloopy slurry level exposing the rib to be popped, but this still took a lengthy 1 1/2 hours.

With the pump and hoses packed away, Clive set about drilling whilst Dave escorted the frog in the bucket (sounds like a pub) out to the surface along with some of the pumping kit. By the time Dave had released the frog in the surface stream and returned Clive was just finishing off setting the charge. Time to exit with the remaining pumping kit, drill and bang box etc, stopping on route at the bottom of the staircase where a reassuring bang was eventually heard. No time left to clear the spoil from the landing so that remains a task for Saturday.

Hopefully the water level on Saturday won't be as high and bailing won't take as long as Wednesday's session.

Post dig refreshments were taken in the shepherds hut where other options for pumping were discussed inc 110v submersible pump for which Gavin could provide a length of suitable outdoor cable to reach from surface to dig face. But we don't have access to a 110v submersible pump - unless someone knows different :-). Any other suggestions welcome.

Clive won't be around on Sat, but there is plenty of spoil to haul up from the landing and there will be bang debris to clear from the bottom assuming the more pond like volume of water can be bailed from the dig.

Dave.

Friday, 1 October 2021 solo Carrion Slocker.

Sue was at work at school so I used Paul Stillman as my callout. The view forward from the last visit was promising and so it proved be. As well, the short climb down had stabilised and I only had to relocate one boulder slightly. At the new sloping viewpoint I moved a few rocks to improve access and some very sticky mud on one side and I had a slope down at about 30°, so feet first I slid down about 2 ½ m to find a small hole with a diameter of about 0.75 m (more on this later). To the left and straight on was a view into a black space and after careful movements of several large boulders I cleared a way through carefully using a short crowbar and wriggled through into a sloping passage with the good very large boulder roof; to the right after 2 m was a big space, 2 m high, 4 m long and about 2 m wide (almost a chamber where diggers could gather!) and all looking pretty stable leading to an old water sink point at the end in the floor (this could be dug). More interestingly, back in the sloping passage was a small hole in the floor about 12 in.² (30 cm) down which you can see a clean washed rift about 0.75 m wide and about 3 to 4 m deep. This is not yet accessed by access may be possible. Back through to the 0.75 m diameter hole, by crouching carefully and low in this, I realised there was more big boulder ruckle bedding below the way I came in. I did some more digging here and this may be a safer access into the 3 to 4 m deep rift. All in all a very interesting 2.5 hours.

Considering all the rain recently I was surprised that the field was relatively dry, with the curious cows, and no water was running down our 4 inch drain. The cave has obviously taken some water in the last few weeks, but drier now as was the Heale Farm Slocker. I also noted that Heale Farm Cave entrance was and is very overgrown. All to play for, not many friends. So about 9 m of new cave passage and a view down of 3 to 4 m into a possibly promising rift. Take care

Regards Vagon

Saturday 2nd October

Rock Farm Cave

Rich, Geoff & Dave.

First task of the afternoon was to clear the landing, so Geoff loaded, Dave hauled and Rich emptied. Geoff then headed on down to make a start at the dig face whilst Rich and Dave washed the spoil bags in the stream, otherwise no bags available to fill with the anticipated

spoil. Rich then set about filling a crate with rocks and with washed bags Dave headed down only to be met by Geoff on his way out declaring that we're not going to get any digging done today, the dig was flooded over the height of the dam. Judging by the stream flowing below the Staircase a second opinion wasn't required but it was well worth a look. Both then went to view the 'swimming pool' taking the temporarily - hopefully - redundant clean washed bags.

The water was cascading down the Water Slide and round the right hand turn into the rift where most of the flow seemed to be going past the bedding plane on the right that normally takes all the flow. A small flow was probably flowing into the bedding plane but not noticeable, it's possible it may have silted up. The water level along the whole of the rift was above that of the dam but not increasing so it was flowing out somewhere but difficult to determine where. A few pokes with the mega bar in the bedding plane had no effect. The bar was also deployed in the tube(s) just below the end of scaffold boards to see if any of the stream could be persuaded to sink elsewhere, but to no avail.

Dave then went out to return with camera. A few photos taken and out for an early tea break and finish.

Dave.

Ps. A shorter version for Tav ;-)

Landing cleared, crate filled, rift flooded, no digging, early tea break & finish.

Viaduct Sink Saturday 2 October 2021 (am) Dave & Geoff

Last week, clearing spoil was inhibited by a pump failure with only 7 bags taken out. We returned this week with the pump and filter fettled by Dave.

When we entered the cave water conditions were relatively low, with relatively little water flowing on down valley past the entrance. However the forecast was for heavy rain and high winds for much of the day.

The pump operated OK this time. Once Dave had primed the pump I amused myself by removing a couple of bags of mud from the new dig, whilst not impeding the route for taking out spoil from the old dig.

When I started clearing spoil there was only a tiny trickle of water entering from the Toolshed inlet. However it was not long before the volume of water entering from this inlet increased seriously such that it was coming as fast as we had been pumping it out. The forecast heavy rain had clearly arrived. Once I had removed what spoil I could, Dave took over and applied hammer & chisel to the roof to good effect until conditions got silly. The total spoil, similar in volume to last week was then taken out to Downside Aven and stacked. Interestingly Downside Aven was not particularly wet, so maybe the the Toolshed inlet comes from a different source.

Cheers

Geoff

Wednesday 6th October

Rock Farm Cave

Clive and Dave

Already in the area, Dave ventured into Rock Farm Cave a little early with a set of drain rods. A stream was very much in evidence below the staircase, water cascading down the Water Slide and the dig dam overflowing although not to the extent it was on Saturday. The depth of water in the dig was a couple of feet lower than the dam itself and a constant level being maintained by the overspill. The dam was built up a few inches to see if the bedding plane would then take the full flow, but alas the level rose and again topped the dam so the extension rock removed. The rods were deployed in the bedding plain, ahead and below the water in the dig itself and finally in the tube below the scaffold planks, all to no avail. Dave then exited with the drain rods and met Clive on the surface. Clive carried on down to drill etc whilst Dave energised one of the submersible pumps in the surface culvert in the hope it might reduce the flow underground before joining Clive. Surprisingly the pump did make a significant difference and replacing the dam extension rock, all of the flow was soon disappearing down the bedding plane allowing the level of the water in the dig to slowly but noticeably drop by about 4 inches or so in the time it took Clive to drill three holes. The level then seemed to stabilise, perhaps indicating it had reached the outlet level. A tell tale in the form of a long chisel was left propped across the dig with the chisel tip about 1/2 inch below the water line. It will be interesting to see whether this will line up with the hollow/delaminated roof.

Three holes charged and then popped from the bottom of the staircase before a very early 8:30pm finish.

Dave.

Saturday 9 October 2021 (am) Viaduct Sink Dave & Geoff

The surface stream was flowing strongly on down valley past the entrance. In the cave, the Downside Aven showerbath was only moderate in volume, but the tiny inlet near The Toolshed was flowing strongly into the old dig. Fortunately there was no intention to pump out the dig on this occasion as blasting was to be carried out a little way back from the face, in order to create more working space.

Whilst Geoff sorted out the drilling and banging of the old dig, Dave found plenty to keep him busy, enlarging The New Dig, partially draining The New Dig (into the old dig) and reorganising the contents of The Toolshed.

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 9th October 2021 Dave, Geoff, Simon, Richard and Clive

As there was no spoil to drag to the surface this time Dave and Geoff headed straight to the end to see what had happened to the 'overflow' bedding after the bang last Wednesday.

The results were good but the blasted rock was outmatched by the blocks of adjacent rib which had to be removed to provide full access to the bedding plane.

Clive hauled the rocks up the Waterslide on the first leg of their journey to the surface.

Simon and Rich helped on the final legs of the haul to the surface after which it was found that there was enough rock to fill one of the surface crates completely!

The flooded rift was still, flooded although much less than previously. It seems very likely that the water is escaping at roof level at the back of the rift. If we can improve the flow out of the bedding plane sufficiently then maybe a pump will be the answer. At the moment it takes three of us to bail the water by hand from the end into the bedding.

After a well-earned tea-break for us all Clive fired three holes in the bedding to be cleared next Wednesday.

All best

Clive

In addition to Clive's report.

One pump was activated in the surface culvert and easily kept up with the flow such that it was gulping in air. Down at the dig the bedding plane was taking all the flow.

The tell tale chisel left after Wednesday's session with its tip sitting approx 1/2 inch below the water line was found to be about 1/2 inch above the water line. I guess indicating that is the height at which the water is flowing out of the flooded dig. A closer inspection required after the next bailing session.

Dave.

Monday 11th October 2021 Carrion Slocker solo (2.5 hours)

After the last breakthrough and hearing about a 'race' I thought I had better get the big boulder at the end under attack to see if we could get any further passage.

Description for Richard: From the choked rift adjacent to Sitting Room No.1 there is a dug out climb down of 2.5m into a short section of rift. A left turn leads to a muddy slide under a solid roof. Two ways on from the end; straight across some boulders leads to another short rift section and a right turn leads to an open space/chamber 1m wide, 6m long and 2m high that currently terminates; at the bottom of the muddy slide there is a hole 0.75m diameter drops down 1m and a sideways slope under dodgy looking boulders leads to Sitting Room No.2, a sloping bedding chamber about 2m wide and 3m long. At the lowest point is the Trap Door a dug hole that drops 1m into some more sloping bedding that descends for 4m with a roof height of about 1m and is up to 4m wide in places to the current terminal dig at the lowest point. Following the left hand wall as you go down the main slope you can find an upslope narrow passage that ascends a loose cobble floor for about 15m or more and eventually terminates in large boulders, this is Southern Inlet Passage another small water inlet.

Digging Log: I installed some more scaffold under the dodgy looking hanging boulder at the base of Bethlehem Pot before descending to the terminal dig at the lowest point and dig a lots of clearing and drilled/P&F the large boulder blocking the way on and managed to move it downwards after reducing its size slightly and I plan to slide it to the left under an overhang to secure it safely. The boulder sitting on top was not too big and was extracted along with another boulder. The base section of the large boulder was also drilled/P&F off successfully and this will be extracted next session. Hopefully, once extracted and with recharged drill batteries we may be able to extend the cave a few feet? East Mendip currently very dry.

Regards and take care
Andy/Vogon

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 13th Oct Tav, Dave and Clive

Tav and Clive straight to the end on check on the results of Saturday's bang, Dave on hauling duty at the top of the Waterslide.

The bang had worked well and a fair amount of spoil resulted which all ended up on the surface. The bedding was taking very little water, due partly to the amount of broken rock blocking it.

The little stream was flowing past the bedding and the dam into the main flooded dig maintaining the water level up to roof level at the back of the dig where we assume its disappearing.

Four holes were drilled, two utilising the 1m drill bit to access the rock at the back of the low bedding. 40gm charges used as the previous results using 20gm had not been very spectacular.

One of the holes at the back actually broke through into an airspace – apparently about 6in wide. This would appear to be possibly a parallel rift and may be where the water from the bedding goes, albeit no doubt heavily choked.

An enjoyable natter with beer ensued in the Shepherd's Hut this time minus Gav.

Dave is away at Daren camp this weekend so we shall be short staffed if anyone fancies lending a hand?

All best

Clive

Carrion Slocker Friday 15th October 2021 solo

After some gardening work in Sitting Room No.2,

I went down to move the large boulder into a safe position, after more drilling/P&F I managed to manoeuvre it to one side and hauled out another large rock. I then set about making the way on safer and wedged some rocks against a large slab and drilled P&F another boulder then wriggled under a 'bridged' boulder into open small descending passage that dropped into another sloping bedding which then petered out under itself. With some more prodding and digging under a stable roof I could see into a small rift chamber about 1m wide. I made about 12m of progress and dropped about 4m in height. I think "that'll do" for the digging awards that close on 31st October.

take care, Andy/Vogon

Not Viaduct Sink Saturday 16 October 2021 (am) Geoff N Solo

With Dave busy in Daren and with Rock Farm being short handed in the afternoon I put in a morning shift in at Rock Farm Cave instead of Viaduct Sink.

The Wednesday evening bang had created a lot of spoil. There was enough to fill our entire current stock of bags, which I filled and stacked at the foot of the waterslide. The bang has also taken some very large slabs off the roof of the bedding, but these proved to be too far in to be removed at the moment.

When I arrived on the scene the stream was over-topping the dam. Whilst the bang spoil can interfere with the drainage within the bedding, it can also interfere with drainage into the bedding. This can easily occur accidentally as most of our activity takes place in front of the bedding. On this occasion I reamed out the channel into the bedding and lo and behold - the dam was no longer being overtopped.

Cheers

Geoff

Geoff, Richard, Simon and Clive

After Geoff's epic solo session in the morning there was a full house of bags and rocks stacked at the bottom of the Waterslide awaiting attention.

These were duly hauled to the base of the Bucket Pitch by CN, thence to the top of the pitch by GN where they were manhandled in turn by CN, RGW and SGM to the base of The Stairs. It was generally agreed that the resulting pile (neatly stacked by SGM) was probably close to a record breaker, it being quite a job to crawl/squeeze over the top!

After chain-ganging them to The Landing a welcome teabreak was needed before the final haul to the surface followed by CN drilling at the end of the cave.

The previous bang had worked well with the 1m hole in particular providing some large slabs, at the back of the bedding, which remained immovable until banged again. Geoff had cleared the rest of the spoil which allowed the small stream to flow much more smoothly away. The water level in the main dig remained at its previous level although the stream had of course been overtopping the dam due to the bang debris.

Four more holes were drilled and fired including two more 1m ones, both of which broke through again into the narrow, open rift at the back of the visible bedding.

Plenty more rock to shift I suspect on Wednesday!

All best

Clive

Not Viaduct Sink (again) Saturday 23 October 2021 (am) Geoff Newton solo

With Dave suffering from a strain which made a session in the rigours of Viaduct Sink unwise, it was back to Rock Farm Cave again. Having seen the amount of HE Clive used last Saturday and knowing that nothing was done on Wednesday evening, I knew there would be a lot of spoil to shift.

Stream levels were very high and it was obvious they had been much higher on Wednesday night. There was foam in the roof which indicated that the arch that you duck under to get from the Waterslide to Standing Room Only had been 1ft under water. When I arrived, the water level was just above the dam and the foam covered water in the main dig was at the same level. Working conditions were not ideal.

A lot of hammering and boulder wrangling was required and spoil had to be fished from underwater, so not all the spoil bags were filled, and some chiselling still remained to be done by the end of the session. However a lot of overfilled bags (my apologies, Rich!) and a lot of rocks were stacked at the foot of the Waterslide. Some of the rocks would be too big to be hauled up the Waterslide.

Spoiler Alert!

Towards the end of the afternoon session Clive & Dave extracted a poly bag from the far reaches of the bedding drain, and low and behold, the water poured in and the water level in the main dig dropped rapidly ,

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 23rd October 2021 Geoff, Dave, Simon, Rich and Clive

Following Wednesday's heavy rain there was a sizeable stream running through the cave, not much reduced by the one pump we pressed into service on the surface.

(I'll leave Geoff to report on his solo session during Saturday morning.....)

Following that session there was a lot of bagged debris and loose rocks sitting at the bottom of the Waterslide ready to come up. Geoff returned to the end to load up the skip, Dave elected to haul up to and up the Bucket Pitch, assisted by Clive at the top, with Rich and Simon moving the spoil to the Foot of the Stairs.

A 'mega-pile' resulted, similar to last Saturday's efforts, which was eventually dragged to the surface.

Now to the interesting bit (yes we do have them on rare occasions!)....

The mega bang last week had produced the desired effect, pushing the negotiable section of the low bedding on the right (taking the previous little stream) back to the suspected parallel rift which had revealed its possible existence when the drill broke through into airspace three times last week.

At the end of the session Dave, Clive and Geoff had another look at the end – the much augmented stream was still overtopping the dam and the stream flowing into the bedding was just slowly eddying round at the back.

After clearing a large submerged rock out of the floor Dave had a poke around at the right hand corner at the back of the rift and felt something suspicious. Giving it a good pull revealed a spoil-filled bag jammed in the floor. There then was a loud whoosh and gurgle as the ponded up stream suddenly emptied itself into the revealed hole followed by the sound of falling water!

There is a waterworn and blackened hole about maybe 6in wide which you can put your hand through and feel the water falling away. It doesn't feel big below but there is a healthy sound of falling water there.

We cleared more bang debris away from the area and bagged it up. The site was left with a filled bag blocking any debris from entering the hole (although the stream can flow past).

The water level in the badly flooded main rift dropped significantly during this time (30mins?) by around two feet as the dam was no longer being overwhelmed.

So we now have an operable sink for as much pumped water as we can put into it, or we can blast our way following the water....

I think (and I believe Dave feels the same) that we should stick to plan 'A' and finish pushing the main rift and leave the potential new sink as a plan 'B'. This would of course mean a mains powered pump, as has been discussed recently. Gav has kindly offered us a 110v supply and cable.

In the meantime (Wednesday) we need to hammer, chisel and prise out more loosened rock and clear up the area generally to keep the new drain clear. There are a few bags and some rocks to come out at the foot of the Waterslide.

At last a bit of positive news!

Clive

Monday 25th October Carrion Slocker Solo

The swallet hole has obviously taken quite a lot of water and although the inflow from the field was not flowing visibly, the Heale stream was flowing strongly towards the Heale Farm sink off the sandstone hill and sinking into the limestone fault line. In Carrion Swallet the drain grill was well blocked with leaves and sticks, indicating there has been some heavy rain and a high flow. This had overflowed the small dam and the 4 inch drain grill blockage had caused the water to overflow sometime last week and pour along the path and down the pothole entrance. This cleaned most areas in the cave and there were lots of small stones scattered around throughout the cave. I took in two scaffold poles and my drill etc down to the second Sitting Room and installed a scaffold pipe underneath the boulders/large rocks at the end of the muddy slide. After installing this I went down to the bottom of the cave to retrieve my rawlplug from the boulder I moved last visit. I then proceeded carefully below the boulders again in the passage towards the small Twopenny pot (the end for now).

Once on the other side I looked back towards the way through and drilled/p&f'd two large boulders in the floor and moved these out of the way to make the passageway bigger. Once done, I dug the heavy mud off the large bridging boulder to see if I could drop this safely to the floor, but although it moves very slightly under long crow bar leverage it does seem to want to drop without further attention. I think this is safely wedged, but I would prefer to drop into the floor, it would make the route through feel safer. Next time Matt and Mandy could take a look; a second opinion on safety is always worthwhile. Finally, I did some digging and rock moving above Twopenny Pot that had some foam around it (seen for the first time) and hopefully this will allow the water to flow and wash through easier. On the way out I dropped Matt's Concerns; the two boulders on the entrance to the Sitting Room No.2 successfully and safely. With the scaffold bar I installed earlier supporting the adjacent rocks with no apparent movement. I have left these to settle, if at all, before the next visit. 3.5 hours.

Take care regards Vogon.

Saturday 30th October

Rock Farm Cave

Morning session - Geoff, Darrel Instrell & Dave.

Geoff having arrived early went on down RFC but turned around at the Mud'ole due to the volume of water flowing. Darrel and Dave arrived and after unloading two crates from the roof of Dave's car, Wednesday's spoil was hauled to the surface - Geoff loading, Darrel hauling whilst Dave set two culvert pumps running and then helped with bag emptying and crate filling. The trio then headed down and although the two culvert pumps had made a significant difference to the flow below the staircase, there still remained a very healthy stream. So Dave returned to the surface and eventually got the third pump working in the culvert before joining Geoff & Darrel, by which time a good number of rocks and bags of spoil had been stockpiled at the bottom of the Waterslide. Geoff then loaded, Dave hauled and Darrel kept producing more rocks and bags of spoil.

With lunchtime approaching, the now very sorry looking skip was taken out to the surface to be replaced and at the same time using the hauling and pull back rope to measure the approximate cable length required to power the 110v pump that Clive had procured. The approximate cable length required from the bottom of the Waterslide to the entrance was measured at 35m + whatever is required to reach the shepherds hut where the 110v transformer will reside.

Lunch on the lawn by the chicken run, joined by Clive and Rich didn't last long as the sky clouded over and the temperature dropped. After lunch Darrel headed off since he had got soaked through and quite cold after a sterling digging session earlier.

Afternoon session - Rich, Clive, Geoff & Dave.

Geoff, Clive and Rich started moving the morning's spoil up the Bucket Pitch and towards the entrance whilst Dave sorted the 110v cable generously loaned by Gavin. Dave joined the rest of the team in time to assist with the spoil coming up the Staircase and on to the Landing. Geoff then loaded, Clive hauled and Rich and Dave emptied and crate stacked the spoil. With all the spoil dealt with it was time for an early tea break.

After tea the 110v cable was fed down the cave straight off the drum with Rich unreeling and feeding the cable, Geoff and Clive feeding/guiding the cable and Dave taking the socketed cable end down to the bottom of the Waterslide. With the cable roughly routed a quick look at the now more open bedding plane. The bedding plane lies at the same dip as the Waterslide with the water flowing along it for a distance of about a metre or so.

On the return to the surface the cable was secured out of harms way with various wooden wedges etc. although a few more wedges will be required to finish off the cable install. The surface cable end will be cut to length and plug fitted on Wednesday evening and possibly installing and testing the pump if it has arrived.

Very productive morning and afternoon sessions.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 27th October 2021 Tav, Dave and Clive

While Dave finished fettling two surface pumps this time, due to the relatively high water levels, Tav headed for the end and started work clearing yet more rock and gravel from the bedding plane dig.

By the time Clive arrived there were several bags stacked part way up the Waterslide ready for removal. Dave set to hauling and by the end of the session another 'bumper' pile had made its way onto the Landing ready for weekend removal to the surface.

Tav's efforts revealed, by stint of lowering the floor at the back, a continuation down-dip of the hole opened last week. Dave later dug down further and revealed a continuation of the hole. It turns out to be an open bedding plane rather than the rift we had expected.

The accessible opening is maybe a foot wide. Its unknown as yet as to the dimensions of what lies beyond – its likely to be another low bedding no doubt but it is eminently capable of taking plenty of water.

On Saturday we can probe it further – maybe put Cave Cam into it as well.

The agreed protocol, now that we have a good 'drain', is to get a submersible pump so that we can continue pushing the main rift dig to a conclusion. If that ultimately turns into a dud we can turn our attention to the bedding plane instead and use the main rift for spoil dumping.

Gav has promised to supply us with a 110v supply and cable. Putting in the cable will take a while – maybe this could be a job for this weekend as there is only the big pile of bags and rocks to drag finally to the surface....

All best

Clive

Wednesday 3rd November

Rock Farm Cave

Clive and Dave

Clive took delivery of the shiny new stainless steel 110v submersible pump and dropped it off to Dave to test and fettle hose etc before Wednesday's session. By Wed evening hose was sorted and a worn out digging skip repurposed to sit the pump in to prevent it sinking into the silt and mud in the bottom of the dig. In addition a new pull down rope and skip cut for the Water Slide.

On arrival Clive set the three culvert pumps running before Dave arrived with pump, skip, rope, 110v plug and tools.

Next on the list was cut and fit plug on the surface end of the 110v cable that was installed in the cave on Saturday, the cable could then be plugged into the 110v transformer sited in the shepherd's hut. With the new Water Slide skip fettled with ropes this was taken down inc:- pump, hose, pump skip/bucket, tools and camera.

The water level in the rift at the end was found to be only about 60cm deep with a further 20cm of washed in silt in the bottom, lower than it had been for the last few weeks probably due to water escaping slowly lower down and it not being replenished now that the bedding plane no longer backs up. Hose connected and pump lowered in to the water in its skip/bucket before cutting the hose to a suitable length to insert into the bedding plane. Pump plugged into the 110v supply cable and within less than 10 mins the most of the water was pumped up to the bedding plane.

So far so good.....

But then.....

When the pump was turned off it very quickly became apparent that not only did the water in the outlet pipe drain back through the pump, but the syphonic action sucked water from the bedding plain back down the pipe along with gravel that could be heard rattling down the pipe. Obviously the end of the pipe was sitting not only below the water line in the bedding plain but also close enough to the floor/infill to suck up gravel. Very quickly Clive pulled the hose out to break the syphon. It was then felt it was worth putting the pump into the bedding plane approach stream to flush it out with clean water. Unfortunately nothing happened, the pump lay dormant, not even a hum, jiggling of the float switch, the pump or replugging the cable made no difference. With thoughts that perhaps the transformer had tripped out Dave headed back of the shepherd's hut to check. All seemed fine with the transformer and the pump load could be detected by the slight dimming of the lights when the cable was plugged back in so with thoughts of the pump now working Dave rejoined Clive but hastily when on route it dawned that perhaps the pump was jammed and now stalling threatening to burn it out. This was confirmed when Clive reported no change in the pump so it was promptly unplugged. The pump was warm with water gently evaporating off, not a good sign.

An early finish with pump taken out for investigation and fettling and a pleasant drink in the comfort of Gav's caravan.

Today, Thursday. The pump dismantled, jammed gravel cleared from impeller, windings and armature all looked okay (NB it has a brushless motor), pump reassembled and tested okay. Relief!

Moving forward - A few tweaks to the system required:-

A mesh filter to prevent the pump picking up any gravel/rock fragments.

Similar mesh filter to prevent ingress of gravel etc at the end of outlet hose.

A non return valve in the hose to prevent back syphoning, possibly layflat hose will do the job.

In future when the pump deployed, keep the outlet hose end visible and above the water.

Dave.

Viaduct Sink, Saturday 6 November 2021 Mike Kousiounis, Geoff Newton

At last, some help to clear the bang of 9 October. On the surface the stream level was nothing special, but in the cave Downside Aven was surprisingly wet and there was a good sized stream flowing down the crawl to Bridge Junction.

We made a decent start to clearing the spoil, given the limitations of not pumping out the sump pool. We carried on until the pool got deeper and things got a bit silly. On this occasion I was filling the tray at the face, and Mike hauling and emptying them into bags. However Mike put 2 trayloads in each bag which made them a bit hard to handle. Nevertheless we took them all out to Downside Aven, together with a small number of bags already at The Toolshed.

I would have been happy for us to leave the bags in the passage, to be stacked in the aven when there was less water coming down, but Mike was made of sterner stuff, perhaps he thought his oversuit needed a wash. So by the time we were out of the cave we were both rather wet,

There is still fair amount of gravel to come out of the dig and plenty of scope for hammering when the pool has been pumped out. Interestingly the water level in the New Dig was quite low, so it might be starting to drain away to who knows where.

Cheers

Geoff

Wednesday 12th November

Rock Farm Cave

Clive & Dave.

Two pumps were enough to deal with the culvert stream.

With new filter tub attached to the bottom of the pump which consisted of a plastic box with 32 x 25mm holes and wrapped with a nylon mesh (as used successfully in Viaduct sink), the pump was taken in along with drill etc. A couple of M6 Rawlbolts were installed and the outlet end of hose secured above the stream entering the bedding plane/rift to ensure no back syphoning. The lake at the bottom was only about 150mm deep although still had very silty layer covering the bottom. With the pump deployed it was soon found that due the efficiency and hence flow rate of the pump the attached filter box offered too much of a restriction, but with this removed the water was

soon pumped out leaving the silty slurry covering the floor. The pump was then switched off (by lowering the float switch) to allow more of the water to settle out of the slurry and flow to the low point where the pump sat. But then when re-started the pump failed to shift any water/slurry. But this was soon diagnosed as an airlock in the hose caused by a water (and possibly the heavier slurry) sitting in a loop of the hose. With the pump switched off and the hose drained of all water and then restarted it worked fine.

A number of buckets of slurry were bailed and tipped in the approach to the bedding plane stream, the theory being that the fine particles will wash on down stream and any slightly larger particles (potential blockage material) will remain in the approach to the bedding plane and can then be dug, bagged and hauled out to leave a spot for further spoil cleaning if required.

Digging at last recommenced with a number of bags filled and rocks removed, all hauled up the Water Slide. Plenty more still to be dug out before a bang is required.

Further info:-

With the bedding plane taking a good stream flow it would seem that the dig is far less likely to refill except perhaps under exceptional wet weather.

The pump will work well as and when required but will need a more free flowing bucket/vessel to sit in (Dave will sort for Saturday).

Whenever the pump is started the outlet hose should be clear/emptied of any water.

The protection for the hose connection to pump requires reducing (Dave will sort this on Saturday)

Geoff - Re Sat morning. We can either visit Viaduct Sink or a morning session at Rock farm Cave. My preferred option would be Rock Farm Cave. Very little rain forecast between now and Saturday and so at the bottom of RFC we would remain dry.

Dave.

Saturday morning 13th November

Rock Farm Cave

Geoff & Dave.

Hose protection above pump reduced in length.

New strainer bucket for pump worked well and no need to remove the yellow box strainer bucket after the mesh was removed. The pump complete with the the yellow strainer was inserted in the new strainer bucket.

Once the water (approx 200mm deep) was pumped out of the dig and with the pump still running the pump was lifted out of the new strainer and placed in the black builders bucket before switching it off which enabled the water in the hose to drain and be collected in the builders bucket once the pump was switched off, rather than flowing back into the dig site. Note that the easiest way to turn the pump on and off (there isn't an on/off switch as such) is to lift or lower the float switch.

Geoff then set about digging producing about 17 bags and a few rocks which were subsequently hauled up the Water Slide to be stacked with Wed evening's spoil. All the bags were then hauled up the Bucket Pitch and moved along to below the Staircase to await the afternoon shift.

Dave.

Ps. I won't be about on Wed evening this coming week.

Reminders for Dave:-

Wooden wedges.

Rawlbolt hook to hang pump on when not in use.

M6 long gutter type bolt to fettle ally plate joining scaff boards.

Rock Farm Cave - pm Sat 13th Nov Dave, Geoff, Richard, Simon and Clive

The first task for the afternoon shift was to shift the accumulated pile of bags to the surface – I counted 44 in total, being the Wednesday evening tally along with Saturday mornings-worth.

Geoff and Clive returned to the far end to continue excavations (Geoff digging, Clive ferrying bags back to the base of the Waterslide) managing to fill all the 15 or so new bags brought down while Dave hauled them up to the Bucket Pitch.

Post tea-break all worked the bags up towards the surface whilst Clive drilled four holes at the end – three in the central rib plus one in a 'new' rib against the left hand wall.

Notably, again, two of the holes in the central rib which were drilled vertically went through the rock after around 40cms into mud.

The rift maintains its average 18-20in width with a slight widening appearing on the right.

Work continues!

Clive

Monday 15th Nov 2021 Carrion Slocker solo

I took an eBay camera Cannon G9 (after crushing my G15!) with me to take various photos for the digging awards presentation. I went to sort the two boulders I dropped last time on the way out that Matt was not happy about and repositioned these safely, one lodged behind a large boulder and one installed at the back edge of the trapdoor hole to stabilise the hole a bit. Then down to the bottom of the cave to look at slab again - I am still unsure how to deal with this roof level slab. I went down 'the drop' and did a small amount digging in tu'penny rift and it looks like it might possibly go at some point. East Mendip was very dry today with little water in Heale stream or Carrion Swallet. A large long pole may move/drop the large roof slab as it has a crack on one side, the safer side that might be accessible.

Take care, Vagon

Carrion Slocker comes 2nd in digging awards.

Rock Farm Cave - 20th November 2021 (and TLS....) Pawel, Tony Littler, Dave, Rich and Clive.....(plus Rich at RFC)

A TLS in the morning the Hobnail stream channel was cleared followed by the stream route on to the TLS entrance by P, T and D. (C claims no part in that only arriving in time to help haul a couple of dumpy bags of leaves up the steps by the TLS entrance!)

After those sterling efforts the team repaired to the Shepherd's Hut at RFC for an early lunch and natter during which Matt and Mandy appeared - unfortunately too well attired to be of any help underground!

The first cave related task was to scoop up the pile of bags that had been left the previous Saturday above the Bucket Pitch and at the base of The Stairs. These were quickly dragged topside and Pawel, Dave and Clive headed to the end of the cave (Tony L had previously left for cleaner pastures...)

At the sharp end the ponded-up water in the rift was higher than usual (about 0.5m) and the pump was set up accordingly but to no avail - no sign of life in the pump. After trying various options it was decided to remove it to the surface for checking whereupon, after we had all exited, it was found that an unconnected extension cable had been plugged into the mains rather than the 110v transformer. Much chagrin on the part of the resident engineer!

Returning to the end the re-connected pump promptly leapt into action and soon cleared the dig completely save for a few dribbles.

Pawel set to at the end passing backs rocks and bags to Dave and Clive and a very respectable pile of rocks and bags were soon ready for the haul up to the Bucket Pitch.

After the usual break for tea these were then hauled up as far as The Landing ready for clearing on Wednesday next.

Clive finally cleared the dig face of tools and bags etc in case of further flooding before exiting.

The face is now apparently devoid of the main (right hand) rib and the new left hand rib has extended itself into the centre of the rift instead. Well compacted clay fills the remainder of the rift. The next session will include more clay removal and no doubt a bang.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - 24.11.2021 Clive, Dave, Tav

Arrived. Started surface pump. Got changed. Entered cave. Cleared landing. Ventured below. Started underground pump. Watched pool drain. Started pump again. Emptied pool (almost). Dug. Filled a bunch of bags. Transported bags plus rocks to the landing. Blew up the rib on the left at the end. Exited cave. Got changed. Had a beer and a chat with Gavin. Went home.

Tav

Sat afternoon 27th of Nov 2021 Carrion Slocker solo. I took in a new digging tool for digging at the bottom. Storm Arwen was affecting England (especially the north) with sleet, snow and winds when I left Andover for Mendip. When I arrived in Mendip it was sunny but very windy at the swallet hole. With very little water and very dry in both Heale and Carrion surface streams. Down to the big slab at the end to deal with it from the safest side. After some more examination I drilled, P & F an adjacent boulder wedged up on the left hand side and took a 6 inch slice of the top successfully. But the bottom was still seriously wedged, but it moves very slightly when knocked with a hammer. I now know what a 'keystone' is Clive! Striking this firmly with the long handle lump hammer broke some bits off the top and then it moved upwards slightly like holding a Babybel cheese with wet hands! Once it slithered upwards and toppled forward 'everything' started to move pretty quickly. From the right a large boulder of several tonnes moved some 6 inches to the left. This knocked a boulder behind it which moved backward slightly causing the large roof level slab to move, and it fully snapped into two bits along

the crack line (noted last week) and it dropped both halves to the floor safely as I backed away wondering what else might move next! Nothing did, and after removing some 6 inches of mud off the top of the large boulder and some smaller rocks there is now an up and over safe access to the passage beyond and Twopenny Rift. Twopenny Rift is at the end of the current cave like a plughole with limestone lumps swirling from a low bedding. I dug here for a little bit, but it needs a strategy or perhaps Matt and Mandy's view. On the way out I found my first roosting bat in Fiat 500 Rift which I was very pleased with, as we have created a new bat habitat. 2.5 hours

Take care, Vagon

Saturday 27th Nov
Rock Farm Cave

Clive, Geoff, Rich & Dave.

Two culvert pumps fired up.

Wed's bags and rocks cleared from the landing.

At the dig face the pump quickly cleared most of the small lake followed by a little bailing to clear the remaining puddle.

Dave pulled out rocks and filled bags whilst Geoff and Clive shifted them back and then hauled them up the water slide. All then moved up to the Bucket Pitch where Dave hauled, Clive unloaded, Geoff and Rich ferried the spoil to just below the Staircase.

Tea break then interrupted play.

After tea a short session. Dave cleared the dig face of tools etc and couldn't resist filling a couple of extra bags providing a sump at the end for the pump on Wednesday. Clive, Rich and Geoff shifted all the spoil up to the Landing.

At sharp end the bottom of the mud/silt layer has been dug through into a coarser layer of gravel, although ahead and above the gravel there is still a bit more mud/silt to dig out.

Clive is not available this coming Wed or Sat.

I might not be available on Sat but will confirm later in week.

On wed, I may head in a little earlier to pump and bail before returning to Landing assuming other hands available to haul Sat's spoil out to surface. Tav and/or Alex perhaps ;-)

Dave.

Wednesday 1st December

Rock Farm Cave

Dave - solo

Both culvert pumps plugged in, headed underground a little earlier than usual.

Drilled and bolted corner of scaffold board joiner on the way down the Water Slide.

The dig face was found to be dry apart from a tiny puddle so no need to set up the submersible pump. Neither the surface stream or the culvert were particularly low so perhaps the dig now drains through the coarser gravel layer that was dug into on Saturday.

With no time spent pumping, all effort was spent digging and chiselling the rib on the left. 24 bags of spoil moved to the bottom of the Water Slide to join the 12 left there on Saturday. Approx a dozen rocks stacked at the bottom of the climb down to the dig face.

As on Saturday the cave walls were relatively dry and so to was the upper surfaces of the spoil on the landing. Not much of a draught detected in the entrance but below the Water Slide a small draught in the approach to the bedding plane, some of which seemed to follow the water but may also be going up the rift.

The combined spoil below the Water Slide and on the Landing may require a couple of sessions to bring out to the surface unless a few more diggers come out to play.

I'm not about for the next three Saturdays (4th, 11th & 18th).

Since Clive isn't about this Saturday either, it leaves the team a tad short on hauling capabilities unless any of our younger ATLAS members are about.

Dave.

Wednesday 8th December

Rock Farm Cave

Dave - solo

Culvert pumps not switched on since no plan to dig at the end.

Approx 24 bags of spoil pulled out from the landing and emptied on the surface, along with a dozen rocks that were subsequently stacked in the crate.

A visit to the bottom of the cave taking the empty bags down, revealed a relatively dry dig. Just a 2 inch deep puddle with no evidence of higher water levels despite the previous heavy rains. A small trickle may still be flowing past/under the dam but the assumption may be

that the water is draining away through the gravel layer exposed last week. It doesn't appear that the heavy rains had over topped the dam.

With time still to spare the large pile of rocks at the bottom of the dig approach slope were pulled out and stacked in the stream flow at the bottom of the Water Slide such that the flow might wash the mud off. Three larger rocks were left stacked on the dam.

A pile of approx 36 bags and numerous rocks, all at the bottom of the Water Slide await a crack team on Saturday - Happy hauling.

Dave.

Ps. I popped over to TLS on route to Rock Farm.

Most of the stream is still flowing down Hobnail via the channel despite the debris (mainly leaves) partially blocking the grill, the remaining flow sinking at the cliff face. No debris on the TLS gate although a lot of leaves in the approach stream bed.

Friday 10th December solo Egford Brook/Vallis area

I went to have another look at Egford Brook Quarry Fissure/Rift. I first looked at this potential dig site back in March 2019 and dropped the floor a bit after Chris Castle (WCC?) suggested it might be worthwhile. I then did four short visits of digging sessions during September in 2020 and increased the width and length to about 4 m with a level view on another 2 m looking very narrow and I have not been back since. I'm not convinced as the rift is fairly narrow, fairly low (some 15ft off the quarry floor) quite near the water table of Egford Brook in Vallis Vale and sometimes has a very weak outward draft. Lots of mosses and spiders this visit and someone has done some digging down in the spoil heap up against the quarry face and there was a shovel left in the cave at this time. I suspect they are thinking there may be a wider section lower down on the quarry face? This may be possible but it is probably of limited length I think. I will not bother returning, access is a pain and so is parking securely.

However, just the Thrupeswallow ears only and please not for repeating at this stage I did cross the stream and visited Vallis Vale cave which I last visited in the summer of 2014 and in one of the chambers I noted there is a very old trench dig about 3 m long. This cave was very muddy historically but it has dried out quite a lot. The trench has some potential for dig if anyone fancies it? Access is now 'controlled' in this quarry and it is now fenced off, but they do still get some small parties by the look of it and aside from being a bat roost and an important unconformity cave with some lovely scallop fossils it would be good to protect it. It had a large padlocked gated grid section fitted in around 2013 (now broken open for the last few years) but the entrance crawl has a great deal of rubbish and it has had a fire just inside too, a real shame. Perhaps Paul Stillman could contact the owners and agree that I/we could fit a new padlock or padlock and chain and clear out the rubbish, if we could check once a month to ensure it's secure for them and dig a little bit? Not sure if anybody knows who owns this area or whether that would be a possible option. Take care, Vagon

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 11th December 2021 Geoff, Rich and Clive

An energetic afternoon dealing with the daunting pile of spoil left by heroic Dave during his solo Wednesday session!

Having set two pumps running on the surface Geoff and Clive found the end of the cave was dry with no lake to deal with.

Approx 36 bags of spoil were hauled up the Waterslide, along with a goodly pile of rocks. An agreed 1hr delay on Rich coming down to help move rock from the top of the Bucket Pitch worked out well and even allowed time for Geoff to dig out a further half dozen or so bags from the floor at the end. (to be removed on another occasion)

A well-earned teabreak was called after all the spoil had reached the Foot of the Stairs.

Post-tea all was lifted up to The Landing and then dragged to the surface for tipping followed by the ritual of bag-washing.

At the end of the cave the rib 'on the left' seems to have grown in size but so has the space to its right so its not looking too cosy at the moment.

Geoff found the spoil is much grittier and sandier than before – maybe this explains the drainage improvement.

There is still hammer and chisel work to do on the rib before the next bang.

All best

Clive

Tuesday 14th December – Xmas dinner held at the Hunter's

Saturday 18th Dec

Rock Farm Cave

Clive & Dave.

Due to circumstances partly within my control I decided not to head over to S.Wales for the weekend and therefore available for Saturday digging.

A solo session before lunch filling bags, reduction of the rib on the left-hand side plus removal of insecure layers of rock from the roof. The result was a large pile of rocks and 30 bags of spoil added to the previous Saturday's 1/2 doz bags at the bottom of the water slide. A large rock that was too big to pull out was crowbarred off the rib and left at the bottom of the dig for chemical reduction.

Out in time to set the two culvert pumps running before lunch in the shepherd's hut joined by Clive.

After lunch all 36 bags hauled up the Waterslide and stacked in the alcove, the rocks were also hauled up the Waterslide and on up the Bucket Pitch. Dave ferried the rocks on up to the Landing whilst Clive proceeded to drill two holes in the rib and one in the large rock. Holes charged and popped before a late tea break with mince pies and an early finish.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave Wednesday 22 December 2021 Clive North, Dave King, Geoff Newton

With Christmas Day falling at the weekend, an afternoon session was arranged for the Wednesday before, enabling GN to take part. Clive, having eaten, set two pumps going whilst GN finished lunch. GN went in and reeled in the wire from the last bang whilst Clive finished changing and GN then started work at the face while Clive probed the water bedding with Cavecam, before taking bags of spoil back to the foot of the Waterslide, eventually joined by Dave.

GN concentrated on digging out the floor. Most of the spoil (other than bang debris) was heavily coated with a jet black deposit which indicated water had been flowing through it at some time in the past. Very promising. Eventually it was possible to lever out some large slabs, and poking around with a crowbar exposed small voids in the spoil. Moving more spoil eventually exposed a blackness which duly became hole which dropped about 1 metre into a passage which appeared to be passable to humans. By this time we had used all the spoil bags to hand. The hole will need enlarging before we can get through, but this will just require removing spoil from the roof (trying not to drop spoil and tools into the passage below).

The ongoing passage has a rubble floor and similar width to the rift we have dug out. The passage continues for 2-3 metres before bearing slightly right and out of sight. Alas there is no sound of running water ahead and little if any draught.

After everyone had had a good look through the hole, we set to and cleared the c.a. 36 bags of spoil stashed in the alcove at the foot of the bucket pitch back to the foot of the Stairs. A break was then made for tea and the imminent breakthrough was toasted with port, mince pies and Ferraro Rocher kindly provided by Gav. Finally the 36 bags were cleared to the surface together with the rocks left at The Landing by Dave in his last session.

A return is planned next Wednesday afternoon. Any takers?

Cheers

Geoff

Vallis Vale quarry cave Thursday, 30 December 2021

A solo visit taking a drag tray from Carrion Slocker and some digging tools to check out the old dig trench. Extended by about 1 m a passage going to the right, low passage ahead needs digging, air good, perhaps a slight draft, digging tools and tray left in the cave hidden. If anyone wants to go and have a prod feel free, just hide the tools again, or if you want to help me drop me an email, I may go week commencing 3rd of Jan not sure what evening yet. I pulled a large burnt log out of the entrance area, there is a lot of rubbish including broken glass that needs clearing in the entrance crawl passage. 2hrs

Take care, Vagon

Wednesday 29 December 2021, Rock Farm Cave Clive, Tav, Rich, Geoff

The surface stream was highish but not flooding. This made the climb down the Bucket Pitch quite sporting and when I reached the dam I found it overtopped and a small stream going into the dig. Clive arrived fairly soon after and the pumps he had set in motion reduced the overtopping to a trickle and by the time of close of play the water level was well below the top of the dam and the climb back up the pitch was less sporting but still damp.

The water coming down the Bucket Pitch went into the buckets as we hauled them up the pitch so that we were hauling a lot of water as well as bags of spoil, maybe 1/3 full of water. I suspect that the back-filling of the Mud'Ole has had the unintended consequence of making the top part of the pitch wetter in conditions like these.

I think it safe to say that when the surface stream is in flood there will be a lot of water going into the dig.

The massive pile of spoil bags and rocks from the previous session were transported from the foot of the waterslide to the surface in stages by the whole team.

The rocks and spoil which had been partially obscuring our view of the way on were removed. Alas, these had not been hiding a widening of the ongoing passage, which can now be seen to be too tight to enter. Special mention of Tav for removing a particularly large long rock from the dig with a little assistance from me and a short length of rope. This rock will need breaking up or maybe incorporating into the dam.

The only consolation is that the water going into the dig drains away. There was no sound of water from ahead and no obvious draught. The next session will require bang in the right hand wall.

Dave knew what he was doing when he went away on his travels.

Happy New Year

Geoff

