

RFC - Saturday 1st January 2022 Geoff, Richard and Clive

Although the cave was still very wet it was as nothing compared with the previous session!

After setting two pumps in action I found Geoff at work at the end merrily filling a few more sacks. These were added to the heap at the bottom of the Waterslide before being dragged to the Bucket Pitch. All were removed to the surface before tea-break.

After tea, while Rich emptied the bags Geoff and I returned to the end where I found the face a very comfortable place to work (at last!)

Interest has moved away from banging down into the 'open' rift below to removing the fill in the roof area. The passage is now a classic keyhole shape with the broad section at the top around 2ft or so across. The rift below is open for about 3ft in length and drops about the same to where it appears to be undercut on both sides.

The fill above is a course sand with blackened areas topped with very fine dry clay up to within an inch or two of the roof where there is a band of wet grey mud. There are a few flat rocks buried in the sandy section which no doubt originate from the roof.

I took down the prototype blue drag tray which had been tried out a while ago below the Bucket Pitch – it turned out to be just the right size to catch spoil dug from the roof before bagging avoiding it falling into the rift below. I aim to find a suitable plank to put across the rift to stand on and also keep spoil out of it.

There is a large, but slim, rib on the left which is useful to sit on but which is in the point of coming away. We should remove this next time – this will make the working space even better

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 5th January 2022 Dave (back again!) and Clive

Water levels back to a low level no doubt helped a bit by the two pumps....

The first job was for Dave to see how the end had changed and then for me to put CaveCam down into the rift.

What was thought to be undercuts on both sides proved to be wrong and the view on down the rift at floor level showed it to become blocked again viz:

The rift higher up was the same....

Dave then inserted the plank he had shaped, to my vague suggested dimensions, over the open part of the rift which worked well when augmented by a couple of spoil filled bags jammed in the remaining crack.

He then attacked the rib/ledge on the left which gave in easily providing several good sized rocks which I fashioned into a reasonable step up out of the rift to augment the slippery bedding slope.

Then to haul the 25 or so bags left at the bottom of the Waterslide last Saturday upto to below the Bucket Pitch.

I enjoyed a session at the end of 'proper' digging shovelling nice chinks of clay and sand off the wall ahead straight into a skip and then into bags. The digging area is now fairly comfortable, even for my height, and we soon filled another 25 bags and accumulated some more rocks.

A final hauling session (Dave hauling again) upto the Bucket Pitch (now fully stocked with bags!) before finishing with a beer and chat with Gav in the Shepherd's Hut.

Theres plenty to clear to the surface first thing in Saturday before lots more bag filling!

The cool inward draught was very noticeable all the way into the cave and I was able to confirm it does in fact go into the low bedding near the end where some of the stream sinks. No air movement at the dig face though.

All best

Clive

Weds 5th January 2022

The East Mendip Atlas Team (Matt & Mandy, Paul Stillman, Sue & Andy Watson) went to Vallis Vale Quarry Cave and had a look around, cleared out all the rubbish from the entrance passage a dug in the old dry trench dig to see the end and breathe the fresh air as we think it loops back round to the entrance passage possibly - a joss stick will probably identify this next visit.

Mandy Voysey dug in the second chamber low part enthusiastically and pushed a squeeze in the nasty nasty mud into a slightly larger section that closed down with an old shepards crook shaped lever bar probably an old quarry bar?

Rubbish removed, matt & mandy washed in the brook.

A useful evening.

Vogon

Saturday 8th January 2022

Rock Farm Cave

Geoff, Clive, Rich, Tony L, Alex R & Dave.

Geoff made an early start before lunch with an aquatic trip in since no pumps running at the time. He bagged up 16 bags of spoil before a noticeably less damp trip out since Dave had set two pumps running in the culvert, he then joined the rest of the large team in the shepherds hut for tea/lunch.

After lunch the team spread out down the cave to haul out the 50+ bags and rocks left below the Bucket Pitch on Wednesday. Tony and Dave worked the Bucket Pitch, Rich moved the bags over the Mud-Ole whilst Geoff, Clive and Alex moved the bags on up to the Landing. Once all the bags and rocks were beyond the Bucket Pitch Tony Dave set about hauling Geoff's 16 bags up the Water Slide, up the Bucket Pitch and on to the bottom of the Staircase. Hauling up the Water Slide and loading for the bucket pitch was very wet due to a heavy shower up top which also meant every bucket was half full of water by the time it arrived at the top.

The last 16 bags arrived at the Staircase as the upper team had just finished shifting the earlier bags and rocks out to the surface, instead of all pulling out for a well earned tea break it was decided get the last 16 bags out to the surface, emptied and bags washed before finishing with a well earned end of play tea break.

Whilst below the Bucket Pitch, Tony took the opportunity to carry on down and inspect the progress at the dig face since we had only just started down the Water Slide on his previous visit, I believe he was suitably impressed. However Alex once on the surface understandably declined an unnecessarily wet trip to view the dig face.

A fresh start at the dig face on Wednesday since no spoil left to haul out. We may have a new chap join us on Wednesday evening - Paul Quinton, a new member of the MCG.

Dave.

Thursday 13th January

Rock Farm Cave

Clive, Paul Quinton & Dave.

After a chance meeting last Sunday on the viaduct, Paul Quinton a relatively new MCG member was very interested in getting involved in digging with us. He joined the MCG back in July last year and has since visited Swildon's half a dozen times inc the Old Forty on ladders and down to Sump 2 plus many other well visited caves on Mendip. A few messages back and forth and Paul was able to join us on Thursday evening.

Two pumps were more than adequate to cope with the culvert stream and so very little water flowing below the Staircase.

With the cave already cleared of all the previous bags of spoil it was straight down to the sharp end where Dave filled a couple of bags to give Paul an idea of what he'd let himself into before swapping places. Paul then got stuck in filling and passing back bags of spoil. Beyond the dam there is very little air movement which means it gets a little warm digging in the restricted space, so Paul and Dave took it in turns to dig whilst Clive ferried the bags back to the bottom of the Water Slide. Once all the bags we had at the bottom were filled, Clive loaded the skip, Dave hauled whilst Paul watched the first few skips come up before he needed to head out. Clive and Dave continued hauling until the alcove below the Bucket pitch was full leaving a few bags still below the Water Slide.

It looks like we have a new member joining the team.

The rift at the bottom has a narrow point which is making a bit restricted when digging, but an obvious part of the left hand wall will easily succumb to a little chemical persuasion. The roof is still trending down and larger rocks are being revealed in the floor probably blocking the lower level of the rift.

Dave.

Ps. Clive and Dave will be digging from 10:30 Sat morning, with Clive continuing with the afternoon shift.

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 15th December 2022 Dave, Geoff, Rich and Clive

A mid-morning start this time for DK and CN – first job was to lift up the mass of bags from the base of the Bucket Pitch to the bottom of The Stairs. Nearly 60 bags in all plus some rocks.....a quick trip then to the bottom of The Waterslide to load up and haul up around eight more bags and some rocks.....

This was all completed by 12.30 ie before lunch. Geoff then duly arrived hot-foot from Cloford Quarry Cave before Dave departed for some well-oiled Wassailing in deepest Somerset.

Clive headed to the end to start drilling a couple of holes in the left hand wall to ease access to the face. Geoff filled a few bags and succeeded in removing a large waterworn slab from the floor revealing in the process a bit more open rift, only about 4inches wide though.

The bang was set off and, with Richard's help all the bags and rocks were lifted up to the surface followed by a very well-earned teabreak and a mega session of bag washing in the stream.

On Wednesday there should be the banged rock to remove plus renewed attack on the choked rift. A further bang is likely.

Clive

Rock Farm Cave Wednesday 19th January 2022 Dave, Paul Quinton and Clive

A useful little session!

Only one pump in use as water levels were low. At the end the bang had done a good job and there was a good pile of rock to remove before attacking the fill in the rift. The bang enabled easier access but needed another later in the evening to push the widened rift a bit further on.

Another mega pile of bags and rocks made their way to The Waterslide and then to the base of the Bucket Pitch to await clearing on Saturday. Several sizeable rocks appeared from the fill, one of which was a mega slab of limestone jammed end-on down into the floor but which finally succumbed to Dave's efforts – amazing what you can achieve despite a hernia!

Another small section of 'open' rift was revealed by the removal of the aforementioned slab with the hint of a bedding plane below opening on the right. Whilst drilling later I noticed a little of the finer drill dust falling into the rift was being, apparently, sucked down-rift.

Paul continued the work and exposed a large section of a vertical slab which had been peeking out of the sandy fill. This turned out to be a very soft mudstone which absorbed hammer blows to no effect. When hammered 'it' sounded very hollow – something noticed by us all. A small bang should have reduced its size hopefully.

The choked rift continues at a steady width of around 15inches I would guess although a bit wider at the top where the rock is thinly bedded. The face, as we left it, exhibits three clearly defined areas – sand and waterworn slabs of mudstone at the base with a blackened undulating band across the top (presumably indicating a period of time when it was exposed to the air), another band of sand etc above it and then the fine dry, grey clay above that.

A fresh cold draught was still flowing throughout the main part of the cave including into the bedding at the end which takes the water.

On Saturday there is the pile of bags etc to come up from the Bucket Pitch (oh joy!) plus a number of rocks at the base of The Waterslide. Plenty of loose rock from the bang no doubt to clear as well....

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 22nd January 2021 Geoff, Dave, Rich, Alex and Clive

Low water levels in the cave again.....

Geoff made a start before the rest of us by moving rocks from Wednesdays bang up to the base of the Waterslide.

There just followed the small matter of a fairly major pile of bags and rocks needing to come up the Bucket Pitch and out to the surface.

All the bags etc were moved up to The Landing for Dave and Clive to haul out to daylight and for Rich to empty whilst Alex and Geoff brought the next batch up the pitch. These then were quickly added to the surface pile before a very welcome teabreak!

After tea Dave, Alex and Clive headed to the end where Dave enjoyed his last dig at the face before his temporary hernia-induced absence. Some very well filled bags(!) and a load of rocks were produced and stacked ready for hauling up at the next session. The last

bang had made working conditions much more comfortable and the dig face has now pushed on another couple of feet with an indication of some possible widening on the left.

There is still some of the mudstone slab left in the centre of the face which is still nice ancient sandy fill with lots of blackened limestone fragments embedded in it.

Paul and Clive will meet up on Thursday evening this week for a short session to haul up the latest pile to the base of the Bucket Pitch (I can't remember if Alex said he could come along or not....Alex?

As we are digging on Thursday this week (as I am dragging Dave in for his hernia on Wed to make sure he actually goes!) I would prefer to move Saturdays session on to Sunday. How does that sound team?

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Thursday 27th January 2022 Alex, Paul Q and Clive

Very low water – too little in fact for the pump to pick up anything in the culvert.

Paul and Clive headed down to the base of the Bucket Pitch and the bottom of The Waterslide respectively to haul up the big pile of bags and rocks left there on Sunday.

As the session wore on I became aware of thumping noises from somewhere, the mystery eventually being solved by the appearance of a mud-spattered, Paul armed with filled bags, from the end rift!

Paul joined us and we moved around 20 bags and more rocks to the Waterslide therefore neatly undoing all our previous clearing work!

The team returned to the pitch and hauled up the previous load and thence to the surface finishing up washing the bags in the stream.

At the end Alex says he has pushed it back by another 2-3ft but could do to lower the floor more where there is a large rock causing problems. The rift he says is starting to narrow again. A bang is planned on Sunday....

No doubt Geoff will want to add some more bags to the pile if he arrives earlier than the rest of us. We then obviously need to clear all those to the surface and put in the aforementioned bang.

Parking may not be as easy as usual as Gav is bringing in a lot of his vehicles from his Peasedown St John store.....

Usual time on Sunday.....

BTW – Paul Quinton has now passed the entrance examination to be included in the Thrupe Group (welcome Paul!)

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave Sunday 30 January Clive, Simon, Rich, Geoff

Geoff took a fairly early lunch and carried on the work of filling bags with spoil and adding them to the pile at the foot of the Waterslide. Initially work concentrated on digging around the large rock or rib in the floor and on scraping away at the walls and ceiling. Progress was initially slow but eventually the rib proved in fact to be a fairly thin slab over a metre long which was lifted out and rolled clear away. Once this was done it was easy to fill a lot of bags in a very short time. A total of 23 bags were filled before Clive called a halt to this work.

No further progress forward was made, but it can now be seen that the passage is not getting smaller or narrower, contrary to the impression gained by the mid week diggers. Currently it has a mushroom or keyhole shaped profile.

The accumulated pile of c.a. 50 bags and rocks were transferred to the foot of the Bucket Pitch with Clive hauling and Geoff loading. Simon was then added to the team as the bags and rocks were transferred to the foot of the Staircase. Rich, under doctors orders, was confined to surface duties. About two thirds of the bags were then taken to the Landing leaving the remainder for midweek diggers. A well earned tea break was then taken.

After tea the bags of spoil on the landing were taken to the surface and bags washed as usual.

Cheers
Geoff

RFC - Wednesday 2nd February 2022 Alex, Tav and Clive

I enjoyed a session at the sharp end actually digging rather than hauling bags to the surface, with Alex and Tav ferrying them back to the Waterslide. Alex also added more to the total.

Around 20 or so bags plus rocks were produced during the session. At the end the rift maintains its average width of around 14ins not narrowing or widening noticeably. The spoil came from the floor and a bit ahead as well.

All the spoil ended up at the Foot of the Stairs along with the remaining bags left from Saturdays session.

A bang is definitely now needed on the left hand wall to ease the constriction.

So on Saturday Geoff will no doubt produce some more bags before the main team arrives. Clearing the bags up from the Foot of the Stairs is obviously a priority as well before attending to any more or setting the bang.

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All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave Saturday 5 February 2022 Clive, Rich, Simon, Geoff

Geoff took an early lunch and went to the face to fill bags before the main group arrived. This will probably be repeated from time to time until we resume morning work in Viaduct Sink. The approach to the face was a little constricted, but eventually by trial and error, an efficient way of working was devised and 18 of the available 20 bags were filled and mostly taken to the dam, before Clive arrived a bit early as well. Clive hauled the bags up the Waterslide to the foot of the Bucket Pitch and Geoff loaded. These bags were left there for the midweek diggers.

The whole remaining stock of bags were already full of spoil, resting at the foot of the Staircase. With Simon & Rich now there to join in, the massive heap of bags, together with a large heap of rocks, were transported to the surface. It was necessary to carry this out in two batches as there was insufficient space for it all to be stacked at The Landing. A tea break was then called.

After tea Clive decided to enlarge the approach to the face with HE, involving the drilling of 4 x metre long holes, with Geoff providing some fetching and carrying. Rumour has it that this work is being carried out against the time when the diggers will need the passage big enough to take their zimmer frames. The indications are however that the passage is getting wider and if this trend is maintained such enlargement may not be necessary again. Maybe.

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 9th February Alex and Clive

Last Saturdays bang had worked well and left a big pile of rock to be shifted. The dig face is now much easier to work at as a result – I can turn round at the end now (albeit awkward!)

The plank we had put over the 'open' rift is now a few feet behind us and promptly collapsed as I moved into position. I therefore took the unilateral decision to park some of the larger rocks from the bang into it for safeties sake as much as anything. (plus it reduced the amount of rock to be transported to the surface of course).

During the evening most of the bags were pressed into service and dragged to the foot of the Bucket Pitch to join those already there, left over from last Saturday.

At the end the rift now shows signs of widening on both sides – fingers crossed!

Before leaving I measured up for two stemples to go in to support a cableway running down the straight part of the rift to enable bags to be hauled remotely rather than the exhausting lifting in stages operation.

This Saturday will be another day of hauling to the surface I'm afraid!

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 12th February Simon, Rich, Geoff, Dave and Clive

After planting the memorial oak tree sapling for Tony Dingle at Thrupe the team relocated to RFC for regular Saturday business.

This time it was to remove the very large pile of bags and rocks from below the Bucket Pitch up to daylight. This comprised 77 separate loads and was accomplished by around 4.30 (including a teabreak).

Only Geoff managed a look at the end but this time there were no bags available for filling. Dave, still in post-operative mode, became full time bag washer for the afternoon.

So the cave is, for once, completely clear and all set for another push at the end on Wednesday.

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 16th February Alex and Clive plus Dave (surface support)

Dave kindly was on site to re-install the pump setup which had been moved to enable Gav to dig a crater for his septic tank....

The water level in the culvert was surprisingly low considering the recent rain and one pump was more than adequate to handle the flow. In the cave the upper 'streamway' had only a trickle and the Waterslide was not unduly wet.

As the cave was clear of filled bags thanks to the mega clearing session last Saturday we headed straight to the end and between us filled 37 skip-loads during the evening.

The rift at the end, having widened slightly on the right, continues at the same width. Very easy digging (I wish the spoil removal was as easy!) – the clay layer at the top has shrunk to just a few inches topped off with a couple of inches of wet mud. The rest of the rift (I can stand up in it fairly easily in places!) is still the same sandy fill, very loose in the centre at times with a few small slabs.

It has to be said that when attacking the face with the pick or hitting an embedded rock there is a very distant hollow sound, something we have noted for a while but especially noticeable now.

All the bags and rocks are now at the foot of the Bucket Pitch waiting for Saturday, no doubt to be augmented by Geoff before the rest of us arrive (providing we can all get there through the tree-blocked roads we might be suffering from due to Storm Eunice).

Another bang is planned for Saturday as well.

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 19th February I refer the Honourable Members to my report of the previous Saturday (as this weeks will be almost exactly the same!)

Well around 57 skip loads this time....

Four holes drilled and banged at the end easing access to the face by shaving off the left hand wall again.

The face itself is maintaining its slightly wider width and is producing some nice waterworn slabs in addition to sand and pebbles.

Bang debris to clear on Wednesday.....

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 23rd February Alex, Tav and Clive plus Dave for post-digging 'debrief'....

Saturdays bang had been very effective and there was plenty of rock to clear which had come from the upper half of the left hand wall. Another bang this weekend will be needed to finish the job.

Clive enjoyed a good session at the end including clearing more from the face with Alex and Tav ferrying bags back to the Waterslide. The infill was still producing nice rounded blocks of red mudstone and occasional limestone. At floor level on the right the top of a large slab appeared.

Alex took over for the second and final session and managed to remove the brute of a slab (our biggest yet) which will now need popping. Behind it was a small open hole which appears to be a parallel rift. Alex was able to insinuate nearly the full length of the longer crowbar into it.

At the top of the face he also opened up a very loosely packed wet area of sand etc which gives the impression that we may be seeing the end of the tightly compacted fill.

All the bags and rocks were hauled up to the base of the Bucket Pitch before beer o'clock in the Shepherds Hut.

I won't be out on Wednesday or Saturday this coming week. Tav and Alex hope to be able to make Wednesday – maybe Paul Quinton??
Clive

Rock Farm Cave Saturday 26 February Clive, Rich, Simon, Geoff + Dave (surface support and bag washing)

Updating on the condition of the face as follows:

The passage is currently becoming slightly wider and lower. The fill is now all wet. Whether that is due to historic percolation water from floods penetrating the porous fill or due to ingress of water ahead is unclear. The floor is flat solid rock and the slot in the floor has moved to the left hand side of the passage and is less prominent than before. The fill ahead seems to be including more boulders. This is not unexpected. There needs must be some obstruction present to hold back all the fill otherwise we would be able to walk most of the way to St Andrew's Well. Areas of blackness can be glimpsed ahead on the right hand side. Whether these voids are between boulders and the wall or form a separate rift is not certain, but I favour the former explanation. The presence of voids explains the reverb. heard when we tackle boulders.

GN took early lunch and filled 21 bags and took these to the foot of the Waterslide. CN hauled these to the foot of the Bucket Pitch where they joined the mega pile of bags and rocks left on Wednesday. The whole underground team transferred the accumulated heap of bags and rocks to the surface with a tea break taken shortly before the end of the session. Total loads 77 including rocks.

The face was slightly awkward to dig but is getting easier as the passage widens. This is as well as there was no time to bang. Expect more boulder wrangling in future.

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Sunday 6th March 2022 & Tues 8th March Sunday – Geoff, Simon and Clive

Approx 32 skips of bags and rocks lifted from the end upto the foot of The Stairs. At the face Geoff uncovered several large rocks/boulders in the rift ahead. These appear to be mainly composed of the soft red mudstone which have encountered before and are rounded and waterworn. Banging is definitely needed for these. The 'main' rift walls are consistent in width at the moment at a reasonable 15inches say.

Five holes were drilled in the left hand wall on the approach to ease access and to remove a particularly annoying ledge of thinly bedded rock at head height. A further bang was set in the mega rock left in the floor from the previous week.

The bad news was that the firing circuit tested negative and wouldn't fire. A trip to the end confirmed the connections were good but still no luck.

On Tuesday I returned and carefully checked the firing cable and removed any lengths at the far end which could possibly be damaged. Still no luck with the circuit testing. A foot by foot check of the cable all the way up again finally revealed a bit of damage where the cable goes over the lip of the Bucket Pitch. Cutting into the cable here and checking revealed good contact both up and down the cave so a repair was made (temporary) and the det reattached at the dig face before a final successful firing was achieved. Phew!

Removing possible dodgy lengths of cable at the end reduced its working length such that it was only thanks to the over-long length of wire on the new det's we have (4m?) that I managed to stretch it to the first charge with about two inches to spare!

I will need to replace that end of the cable and fortify the join at the Bucket Pitch this weekend.

As we have two Sunday sessions in a row I was going to suggest a Thursday session this week but having just done the above yesterday I would rather not. I suspect Tav would have been at Wookey/Halloween in any case and I know that both Paul and Alex aren't around this week.

So reconvene on Sunday then. Geoff – assuming you are down before me can you clear the pile of discarded cable out of the way at the end and coil the good wire up into the bedding say? The cable drum has had it now I think. When the ropeway stemples are in we can fix the bang wire to them permanently.

Clive

Rock Farm Cave Sunday 13th March Sunday 13th March - Rock Farm Cave

Geoff, Clive, Rich, Simon & Dave.

Geoff & Dave started with a morning shift at 11am to install the aerial ropeway that Dave had been busy working on. It was anticipated to take a couple of hours if all went to plan. A fair amount of kit was carried/ferried down inc 2 scaffold stemples, Darren drum (containing cable, pulley assembly, cable clamps, various tools), skip assembly (containing larger tools) & drill. Whilst Dave set to work installing cable, Geoff got stuck in filling bags at the dig face (see 'overview sharp end' photo) after coiling up the bang cable. Upper stemple went in fairly easily, the lower stemple took a bit more fettling to make it fit. Cable fitted and tensioned up, pulley assembly fitted and skip hung. A

couple of test hauls revealed a little more fettling to alleviate a couple of snag points would be required. With the clock ticking a quick measure up for haul up and haul down ropes before heading out at about 1:30pm for lunch, passing Clive on the way in to carry out repairs to bang cable.

After lunch Simon & Geoff proceeded to move last Sunday's spoil from the streamway up onto the landing. Dave joined Clive who had moved down to drill the rocks ahead (hence dust in 'Current dig face' photo). A little chiseling to alleviate a couple of the snagging points, and a plan to surgically remove a rock edge with plug-n-feathers, possibly Wednesday.

Rich joined the team in time for tea break and on surface support after tea.

Clive revisited the drilled rocks to set the charge etc. Dave cut the haul ropes (thanks to Pat C for the haul up rope) and took these down to attach to skip. It was realised that a down haul rope wasn't required since gravity was doing quite a good job on its own. Geoff and Simon got stuck in hauling Sunday's spoil to the surface, emptied and washed bags etc expertly supervised by Rich.

Clive and Dave exited RFC with charge being detonated on way out, by which time Geoff, Simon and Rich had departed.

The rift ahead has large rocks (should be a little reduced now) and plenty of spoil to dig out with increasing voids between, particularly near the roof.

Total cost of parts for aerial ropeway £5 - bargain.

Approx length of aerial ropeway - 10m.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 16th March Alex, Paul, Dave (surface support) and Clive

There were three main objectives for the evening: remove a protruding bit of the floor part way down the rift which was snagging the skip on the ropeway, clear back the bang debris from the end along with the pile of bags stacked there and finally, bang the end again.

Whilst Alex went to check out the end I drilled several plug 'n feather holes in the protruding rock and managed to reduce its height by a few inches. This proved to be insufficient though and I ended up having to finally bang it after we found that the skip still grounded firmly on it when loaded.

Alex's efforts at the end produced a steady supply of filled bags and rocks for Paul to load into the skip and for me to pile up near the Waterslide. Following this Paul repositioned to haul them all to the alcove below the Bucket Pitch for removal on Saturday. (a big pile btw!)

After repositioning the firing cable further up the rift to avoid fly-rock damage I set the small charges in the boulder and checked out the end which, at the moment is not looking so good again!

A lot of the face is taken up by large rounded boulders which could well have originally been part of a 'rib'. Alex managed to wheedle a particularly large one out (I think our biggest yet) which will need banging along with its smaller neighbour.

If you are down earlier again on Saturday Geoff could you clear and bag up the banded debris part way down the rift. (There are bags in the bedding.) I can reposition the bang cable later.

Clive

3rd February 2022 Vallis Vale cave solo

A short visit to retrieve my digging tools and to do a smoke test. A smoke test at the end of the trench suggested that the trench was not directly connected to the entrance passage as we thought was possible, but the air movement was very slight. I retrieved a good barbecue mesh left in the quarry by campfire party goers to use elsewhere later and the external dumped chair had been broken up since our last visit and some bits left in the entrance to the cave so I cleared these out to. I did leave a digging skip near the trench dig if anybody wants to dig here. I then visited Carrion Slocker to look at water levels (low still) and to put the said barbecue mesh over the old's Heale Stream sink point to keep the leaves out, which was dug some 45 years ago. So I may try to get permission one day to dig it, albeit it will need fencing. I also took some metalwork into the top of Carrion for eventual use near the bottom rift. The water levels of were very low and no water was running into Carrion and only small amounts in the Heale stream trench. This is probably due to the low rainfall and Merehead pumping more as they go deeper.

Note: My ex Christmas health issues have prevented any digging January/February/early March and I did a short test photographic caving trip at Attborough Swallet in early March to see how my lungs were bearing up! Just okayish.

17th of March 2022 Carry On Carrion a (solo digging).

After my partial recovery from some virus thing over Christmas which made me very breathless and after lots of drugs and a slow improvement programme I decided to go and have a dig at the bottom of Carrion Slocker at the entrance to Two-Penny Rift; I blocked the rift with the metal mesh to stop any dirt boulders falling down the clean washed hole and dug for about one hour or so to clear some of the overhanging mud and rock pile to improve the view and potential access downwards into the carboniferous limestone fault line (air was good with very slight draft) and to try to improve the sightline around the enticing corner. A gentle climb out of the cave removing some of the accumulated digging bits that will not be needed at the end now, this gave me a short trip of about two hours. I was a bit stiffer than usual and slightly heavier weight wise than pre-Christmas but with no significant breathlessness; thank goodness.

Take care, Vagon

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 19th March Geoff, Simon, Rich (surface support) and Clive

Geoff had cleared and bagged the banged bits from the protruding floor which had impeded the passage of the rope-way skip. This now works faultlessly grounded a bit only when heavily loaded.

The bang wire was repositioned down the rift and a number of bags and rocks were raised to the base of the Waterslide from Geoff's work at the end. These then joined the fruits of Wednesday nights session below the Bucket Pitch. Simon's arrival enabled us to haul around two-thirds upto to the Foot of the Stairs.

Post teabreak a 'Landing's-worth' of bags (40) was raised to the surface. End of play for the day.....

At the end of the cave the rift is looking rather unpromising as its is well filled with blocks which look as though they are just eroded out bedrock with sand etc in the cracks between them. There are a couple of mega rocks to be banged, along with others in the face, on Wednesday next.

The next metre or two we suspect will decide us on whether to persevere or transfer our energies to the bedding plane which takes the little stream and the draught. No doubt the aerial skipway will be invaluable for transporting the banged rock down to the end of our dug rift for careful dumping! At least no dragging it to the surface for a while!

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 23rd March Alex, Paul and Clive (plus Dave on surface support).

The remainder of the bags (33) and big pile of rocks from the Foot of the Stairs were dispatched to the surface followed by the remaining 20-odd bags and rocks from the bottom of the Bucket Pitch.

After Alex departed for an early finish Paul and Clive headed to the end and cleared another 20 bags to the base of the Waterslide followed by drilling five holes in the large loose boulders which were making access to the face a little difficult.....

All fired successfully before returning to the surface for a beer with Gavin in the shepherds hut.

As Geoff is out of commission this weekend I suspect it makes digging impractical as he and I are the main "deep diggers" while Dave is convalescing. We might have to have a Saturday off!

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 26th March Spike, Rich, Simon, Clive & Dave (surface support)

It was good to see Spike back with us helping out while we were short of staff.

It seemed only right that he should be allowed to clear the last bang and is so doing we managed to fill around 25 bags plus more than a handful of good sized rocks. The aerial skipway proved its worth again – to manhandle all those bags up to the base of the Waterslide, to join those from last Wednesday's session, would have been a killer. As it was we both had had enough by then and a lengthy tea-break followed by an early finish was called for.

As we exited the cave we found Rich and Simon at the entrance. Simon had gamely sat in the very cold draught near the top of the Bucket Pitch awaiting our return and the usual chore of hauling the bags up before getting them to the surface, or at the least a bit closer. So an easy day for the surface party. Just as we were packing the cars later Dave arrived expecting to join us for tea!

Whilst enjoying the sunshine during the teabreak I pointed out a curious feature in the cliff-face a few yards to the west of Cave C. There appears to be an exposed section of rift wall with maybe earth and rock fill. This piqued the surface teams interest in particular and provided an amusing conversation with Gav when he promptly appeared as we were probing the cliff-face!

The end of the cave still looks distinctly unpromising although we do need to push a bit further to be sure. The face is composed of large eroded out blocks in situ surrounded by sand etc. There is still the 4in wide rift to one side in the floor which we have had with us most of the way. A small parallel joint was opened on the right hand side at floor level, again something we have seen on occasion further up the rift.

Wednesdays session will, numbers permitting, have to be a concerted hauling session with hopefully time and energy enough for another bang.

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 30th March Tav, Alex, Paul, Dave and Clive (a record-breaking midweek attendance!)

Faced with a mountain of bags and rocks at the base of The Waterslide it was great to have a full team on hand to get them to the surface.

While Clive drilled and set the bang at the end Alex loaded, Paul hauled up the Waterslide, Tav hauled up the pitch and Dave stacked the results at the Foot of the Stairs. By the time the bang had been set the last bags were going up the Waterslide and we all 'moved up one' until all the bags etc were ready for lifting up The Stairs.

A combination of ladder use followed by everyone 'chaining' the bags to the surface ensued followed by bag washing etc in the stream.

At the end the rift is well filled with wall to wall 'rib' composed of eroded out blocks most of which are loose to a greater or lesser extent. There wasn't enough bang to fill all the holes drilled but five holes were fired so they will be plenty for Geoff to get to grips with on Saturday!

Its impossible to guess whether the rift will open up at all soon but we will 'get a feel for it' over the next couple of sessions and then decide whether to continue there or transfer our attention to the bedding further up taking the stream and slight draught.

On the surface Gav had put his digger to work on the possible new 'rift' to the right of Cave 'C' only to uncover solid rock!

On Saturday the new farm shop by the gate into the yard is to be opened by Michael Eavis so it may well be busy. I'm told the coffee etc there is excellent!

Clive

Monday 28th March 2022 - Carrion Swallet solo

I took my drill, plug n feathers down to the bottom/end at Twopenny Rift and drilled a broke up a large boulder, after breaking a few smaller bits off first and carefully dragged the various larger bits out of the hole, using the grid metal mesh stopping the larger bits from falling into the rocky but washed rift. You can't see very well round the corner, but the air is good with a slight draft so I am hopeful. This all took rather longer than I anticipated and as I was getting near my ETO/call out time I left the slope to settle and to recharge the drill batteries at home. A slow climb out and I rang Sue 3 mins past my ETO, just in time before she started worrying! Next visit I will continue progressing at the bottom improving the access and hopefully the visibility down and around the corner.

Take care all, Vogon

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 2nd April Geoff, Dave, Rich and Clive

A busy day at Rock Farm as it was the opening of the new farm shop. When I arrived at 1:30 there was a queue of maybe 30 people waiting to go into the shop and the 'lawn area' where we used to have lunch was full of people sitting at tables drinking coffee!

In the cave Dave set to clearing at the end while I while I hauled the filled skips up to the bottom of the Waterslide for Geoff to drag them up to the Bucket Pitch.

The customary tea break ensued after which it was decided to lift the bags and rocks up the pitch. This achieved I headed to the end to start drilling while Geoff and Dave moved the bags etc up to The Landing.

Seven holes were drilled and subsequently fired.

The end is still not looking particularly promising but my strong feeling was that we should persevere a little further to be sure that this was not an insurmountable blockage. Another bang or two I'm sure we'll decide this one way or the other.

The Wednesday team will be faced with clearing the bag pile from The Landing to the surface and clearing the debris from the dig face.

Clive

For what its worth I took an early lunch (no problem parking then) and took all the empty bags in. I then bagged most of the loose debris and mud at the face, totalling 15+ bags plus a lot of larger rocks for separate transport, all left at the bottom of the aerial ropeway. When nobody had joined me by 2.15 pm I surfaced to find Dave & Clive about to descend. This I definitely remember.

We all then descended to the foot of the Waterlide .Dave loaded and Clive hauled on the aerial ropeway, handing the spoil on to me to stack at the foot of the Waterslide. Dave then carried boulder wrangling and mud scaping, whilst Clive & me carried on transporting the bags as per his account to the bottom of the Bucket Pitch. When this was done I had a short break whilst Dave's spoil was hauled by Clive to the foot of the Waterslide, to then be hauled by me to the Bucket Pitch to join the accumulated heaps..

The rest as per Clive's account.

Apologies for all this boring detail, but if we are going into detail we should get it right. Perhaps a summary in future or our readers will lose the will to live??

Cheers

Geoff
Wednesday 6th April

Rock Farm Cave - Wed 6th April Alex, Clive & Dave.

Saturday's bang had created a lot of spoil to shift.

All the available bags were filled and along with the numerous rocks were hauled in stages and stacked at the top of the Bucket Pitch. There is still a good sessions worth of spoil to be dug out at the sharp end before a bang is required, hence no loud noises made on this session.

With no bags left to fill, the first task on Saturday will be to haul the previous Saturday's spoil from the landing to the surface. Gavin will provide a skip or dumper for spoil since he will soon be surfacing the track behind the barn conversion.

Farm shop will be open again on Saturday so parking may be limited, but there may be space at the far left-hand end of yard, particularly if arriving early (farm shop opens a 1pm if I recall).

Dave.

Ps. Alex, I hope finger your is okay!

Monday 4th April 2022 Carrion Solo dry in the field:

After taking a new knotted rope to the sloping pitch leading down the pitch to Fiat 500 Rift after taking the two old lengths last week (I wondered where my 10m coloured rope for rescuing novices had gone – I discovered it was one of these after washing the two lengths pulled out), I proceeded to the bottom and continued digging, drilling, P&F at Two Penny Rift. After clearing a couple of boulders & a few rocks out, I drilled and with two P&F's managed to split a large lump off another big boulder and rolled this out the way. I then spent some time clearing smaller rocks and cobbles (Note to self: take in a shallow drag tray next time to improve this process) and then used an old sling to wobble/rock a large jammed boulder only to subsequently realise that after lots of this loosening action I had simply run out of energy and enough strength to drag it out of the actual hole and my goodness it was very heavy and a rather awkward shape. Next time I will try again or spilt it into smaller bits. A good session, good air and still a gentle draft.

Take care all, Vogon

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 9th April Dave, Simon, Rich and Clive

A heavyweight session of removing bags and rocks from both The Landing and also from above the Bucket Pitch faced the team this time....

Prior to Richards arrival Dave, Simon and Clive moved the spoil from above the Bucket Pitch to the base of the stairs and hauled those from The Landing up to daylight. Gav had left a dumper truck by the Shepherds Hut ready for us to empty the bags into but that would have needed all the spoil lifting nearly 6 feet into the air to reach the lip of the truck. By upending a wooden crate on top of a pallet and using another couple of pallets as steps we are achieved a fairly comfortable way of achieving our goal!

With the Richards help underground we then lifted all the remaining bags rocks up the stairs to the landing thence to the surface. The two hauling sessions totalled an amazing 111 skips!

After a well earned teabreak, with Gav for company, Dave and Clive headed to the end to check out prospects, or lack of them.....

Following Wednesday's session there was still a lot of clay and small broken rock to be cleared away from the face. This produced another 33 bags of spoil which Dave hauled up to The Waterslide using the aerial skipway. (143 skip-loads for the day – surely a record!)

The in situ, and loose, lumps of bedrock received a lot of crowbar attention producing two large rocks in particular, one of which was parked in the approach rift. Bashing the rocks ahead produced an encouraging hollow sound which lifted spirits somewhat. It turned out that the hollow sounds were indeed just produced by the clay surrounding the rocks and not a potential open space ahead.

At the end of play we were left with solid rock coming in from the right hand side of the rift to approximately 12in from the left-hand wall near the roof and that gap filled by clay etc. Below that gap it appears to be fairly solid rock.

Dave suggests that we might use the mega bar the probe into that area to check just how solid it is. We might well do this next time.

Having said all that the feeling was that we have probably gone as far as that we can/need to in the circumstances. We would though like Geoff to give it the once over as well, as he has put a lot of time and effort into clearing the rift, before we are officially abandon the route.

Plans are now afoot to begin attacking the bedding-plane taking the draught and small stream.....a return to mining/quarrying operations!

The bang wire will need to be repositioned back up the cave to the surface, so we can fire from there, and the pump will be retrieved and stored.

Due to commitments for Dave and Clive Wednesday's session this week will be moved to THURSDAY..... hopefully this will work for Paul and Alex et al.

Before we do presumably abandon the rift and start back filling it would be good if Pawel were able to come along survey it so we have an accurate record of where it is in relation to anything else we may or may not find in the future!

Clive

Rock Farm Cave -Thursday 14th of April Dave, Alex and Clive

The first job for the evening was to take the mega bar to the end where Dave was able to push into the clay-filled rift at roof level on the left of the dig. Confirmed by Clive later the bar went in easily for around 18 inches before becoming too difficult to move although he couldn't truthfully say it had hit anything immovable. The rift there appears to be around about 6 inches or so wide with completely solid bedrock on both sides.

We also pushed the bar into the little parallel rift at floor level on the right hand side. Here the bar went in for about 18 inches again before becoming stuck.

Using the mega bar Clive managed to leaver two large lumps out of the floor before calling it quits. Alex then had a look to confirm our findings.

While this was going on Dave cleared the accumulated stream debris and gravel from the stream bed in bedding preparatory to the start of drilling and banging.

Clive retrieved the bang wire from the end of the rift which Dave and Alex then proceeded to reposition up the cave to the surface so that we can fire from outside the cave again. The 110v pump was also taken up and currently resides in the rift at the back of The Landing where it awaits being removed to the surface for storage.

While this was going on drilling then commenced at the back of the bedding to start 'Phase 3' of the dig. Seven holes above the open bedding taking the stream were drilled and subsequently fired from the surface. The gentle inward draft drew away the drill dust down into the bedding - it has to be said it was very pleasant working in the fresh cool air there rather than they confined stuffy atmosphere at the end of the main rift!

The plan for Sunday is to remove the large pile of bags from the bottom of The Waterslide (leftover from last Saturday) to the surface and to start work removing the banged rock from the bedding plane dig. Dave and I feel that we should only stack the larger rocks from the dig down the main rift and to bag up the smaller ones and gravel in bags to haul to the surface as usual. Should we, or anyone else in the

future for that matter (!), need to go back down the main rift then it will be much easier to remove the larger rocks than to try and excavate lots of small rocks and gravel et cetera from the descending passage.

Clive

Sounds good as some fresh air at RFC.

At Carrion Slocker on 14/04 at an early evening session I drilled P&F the large boulder and cleared this away along with several skips of mud and small rocks and gained another 0.5m of depth. The air is still fresh at this dig in the twopenny rift hole with a slight draft. The field and Heale stream both dry again, goodness East Mendip needs some serious rain & so does my dig! I can see down another 12" or so but the way on is not very promising. Although, I am sure there is a rift here somewhere but digging is hard work when this deep without much promise, hey ho "keep on digging". Take care Vagon/Andy

Rock Farm Cave – Sunday, 17 April Dave, Tony L, Rich and Clive

The first job of the day was to check out how successful last Thursday's bang had been. Clive was happy to report that the opening salvo of 'Phase 3 – the Bedding Plane' had done its job and there was a significant pile of broken rock awaiting our attention.

The pressing problem though was dealing with a very large pile of accumulated bags and rocks at the bottom of The Waterslide also left from last Wednesday. This was accomplished with Clive loading at the bottom, Tony hauling to below the Bucket Pitch and then up to Dave at the top of the pitch where he was able to handover to Richard stacking the bags neatly at the Bottom of the Stairs. With the team moving up the cave all the bags were chained out to the surface for emptying and washing.

After tea Dave, Tony and Clive headed back to the bedding to sort out the bang debris et cetera - Clive excavating with Tony in charge of sending the larger rocks down to Dave in the rift via the aerial skipway.

A couple of nicely waterworn slabs were kept for a future crate on the surface with the rest being carefully stacked down the rift with all the smaller stuff and gravel bagged up at the base of the Waterslide and stacked ready for the Wednesday session.

The bedding is ready for its next bang now. It's difficult to get a clear view in at the moment but the bedding would certainly appear to be carrying on at around 4 to 5 inches high for a few feet at least.

Interestingly as we first went down the cave there was a very noticeable strong and cold outward draft at the entrance (unusual as it's usually the other way round). I think it might have been both inhaling and exhaling as we could find little evidence of obvious air movement beyond the Mudole and none at all in the bedding plane dig.

Clive

Clive, Geoff

Rock Farm Cave Saturday 23 April - The cave was very dry and moderately draughty in places including the vicinity of the streamway bedding.

Geoff arrived in time to put in an hour before lunch. He inspected the old face for the first time since work ceased there. The top half of the face looks pretty hopeless, but the lower part is obscured by loose mud and boulders. Content to leave it be for the time being, but it might be nice to tidy it up a bit before sending the stream back down it when water levels pick up a bit.

The rest of the time before lunch was spent hammering and chiselling the new streamway face and the product of this was put into 5 or 6 bags and added to the heap of bags already there at the foot of the Waterslide.

After lunch Clive and Geoff transferred the accumulated spoil from the foot of the Waterslide to The Landing. Clive had to do the work of two at the top of the Bucket Pitch. Then a well earned break for tea.

After tea Clive drilled 3 x 1 metre holes in the face and in the fullness of time a loud noise was heard; hopefully plenty for the Wednesday team to do. Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 27th April Dave and Clive

Good to see Dave back underground after his close encounter with the bugs of Stoke Lane Slocker!

The first job of the evening was to bring to the surface all the bags piled up on The Landing. This done and the bags emptied (not washed as they were hardly muddy) they were bundled up for their trip to the dig face.

There the bang had done a very efficient job and that there was a satisfyingly large amount of rubble and gravel awaiting removal. Dave set to at the face while Clive fielded the larger rocks, stacking them ready for their trip to the end of the rift and stacking the bags at the bottom of the Waterslide.

The three 1 m holes had dropped the roof of the open bedding neatly onto the bed below leaving a large amount of rock, although broken, all in situ on the low bedding. A little stream still managed to find its way through it all though.

By the time all of the easily accessible loose rock had been removed it was obvious that more roof would need to be removed if only to give access to the remaining bang debris. This would need to be removed in any case as we progress so that will be the next job for this weekend.

In preparing for that bang they've wrestled with a slightly loose but very obstinate large section of a roof which after about half an hour finally succumbed (not much longer and I think Dave might have succumbed as well!). It just remained for all the large rocks (of which there were a few very large ones) to be dispatched by the aerial skipway down to the end of the rift.

So a major hauling session is on the cards plus another bang this weekend.

Geoff – am I right in thinking that you might not be around on Saturday so Sunday might be better option for you this weekend? Dave is not around this weekend so manpower will be in short supply again.

If necessary I can always go down and drill and bang the face on my own....

Paul might you be around at all? Alex – maybe you'll be off to Wales with Dave as well?

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 30th April Geoff, Richard, Simon and Clive

An early start for Geoff clearing some more from the end of the main rift which mounted to about 15 extra bags to add to the pile at the foot of the Waterslide. (any thoughts on that Geoff?)

With Clive hauling and Geoff loading the skip a total of 60 bags found their way to the base of the Bucket Pitch.

With Richard and Simon's arrival above the pitch all the bags were manoeuvred first to the Foot of the Stairs and then on to the landing.

A very welcome tea break in the sunshine ensued before the final haul to the surface was achieved by G, R and S while Clive heading to the bedding plane for a solo drilling session.

Two 1 m holes were drilled across the roof of the bedding and one small hole in a big block still sitting on the floor from the previous session.

This bang, despite adding to the rock pile needing removing, will allow enough headroom to access the banged rock left over at the back from the last session.

I will be out on Wednesday but will miss the Saturday (7th) and the Wednesday Si

Clive

Wednesday 4th May Geoff

The last digging session had moved the top half of the face 2m ahead of the bottom half, the latter being covered in mud, gravel and boulders. The end of the main rift, ahead at roof level is clearly hopeless, but the floor is inconclusive due to the grot covering it. The work I carried out in the Rift this session had two purposes, firstly to see how far down I could dig in the floor and what voids if any are thus exposed and if there is a sign of the passage descending steeply to compensate for the pinching out straight ahead, and secondly to remove as much mud as possible prior to sending the stream back down the rift. All this is rather speculative but alas the whole project is becoming speculative. I did not reach the floor this time so more work is required to finish this job. Hopefully next time I have a spare hour or two. When this will be remains to be seen as we are back in Viaduct Sink next week.

Rock Farm Cave - Wed 4th May Rock Farm Cave

Clive, Tav and Dave.

No bags to haul so Tav went straight to the bedding plane dig, filling bags and passing them back to Dave along with the larger rocks.

Rocks were stacked awaiting aerial rope ride down the rift and the 60 or so bags were loaded for Clive to haul up the waterslide.

Once all the available bags were filled, Clive then descended the Waterslide to load the rocks into the aerial ropeway skip, Tav unloaded and trundled them on down to Dave for stacking in the floor of the rift.

There is still a good sessions worth of spoil to dig and chisel out from the bedding plane so no drill and bang carried out. The stream is still finding its way down the bedding plane although no open space visible since the dropped shattered roof of the bedding plane is still blocking any view of the way on.

60 or so bags stacked at the bottom of the Bucket Pitch ready for hauling out on Saturday.

On exiting a small juvenile frog was rescued from the below the Staircase and released in the surface stream.

The team, joined by Gav, finally left the comfort of the shepherds hut just before midnight.

Dave.

Viaduct Sink

Saturday 7th May

Geoff and Dave.

Nothing much had changed since Dave was last down Viaduct Sink back in October last year. The jammed drill bit still stuck in the dig face protruding out of the sump. Since Dave's last session Geoff had done a couple of trips either solo or with Mike Kushy and cleared the early October bang spoil.

Dave first set about retrieving the drill bit with the aid of a pair of Mole grips and was very surprised to find it popped out with ease. The pumping equipment was then assembled and most of the sump pumped out with the battery left in the Tool Shed back in October. Changing over to the freshly brought in battery for the last five minutes of pumping. Pump and plumbing packed back in the Tool Shed, Geoff the proceeded to dig out several skip loads of spoil that Dave hauled and bagged. A swap around and Dave chiselled a couple more skip loads out of the roof followed by pushing a long bar into the ongoing sump for a distance of approx 600mm through what felt to be just water above the infilled silts.

Due to the limited space the approach to the sump will need further enlargement to ease pumping and digging.

A lot of the spoil hauled up was back filled into the alternative dug rift opposite the Tool Shed, resulting in displacement of the water down towards the sump, hence why this was done last before exiting for lunch at Rock Farm.

During the dry season there is very little if any water trickling down towards the sump and refilling it after the pumping kit has been packed away, where as in the winter the sump quickly refills making digging/spoil clearing more difficult during the limited window of opportunity. Hopefully a decision will be reached as to whether to continue pursuing the current dig or relocate to The Somme before the wetter weather returns.

It was good to be back down Viaduct Sink, the last time I visited was 9th Oct 2021, due to a hernia (originally thought to be just a strain) reducing my activities to light duties.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave Saturday 7 May 2022 (pm) Dave, Rich, Simon and Geoff

First the whole team moved the 66 bags of spoil stashed at the foot of the Bucket Pitch up to the Landing before breaking for tea. After tea Dave and Geoff combined to move the bags to the surface whilst Rich and Simon emptied the bags where the contents could improve the tracks.

When the above was finished Rich & Simon took their leave and Dave & Geoff went down to continue the work of clearing the face for an hour or so. They produced a pile of bags at the foot of the Waterslide and a mountain of largish rocks to be sent down the rift. The approach to the face was also improved.

We have yet to expose a solid face of rock suitable for banging. Several layers of rock have slumped down into the bedding, partially obscuring the way on. Plenty of chiselling and hammering await the participants in the next session.

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 11th May Dave and Clive(!)

Against all expectations I was able to make it in time for digging on Wednesday after all.....

On arrival at the end it was quite an eye-opener to see the big pile of bags at the front of the Waterslide and an equally large pile of rocks awaiting a trip to the end of the main rift via the aerial skipway.

The first job was to send those rocks down to an eagerly awaiting Dave in the rift for stacking neatly at the end. Then turning attention to the dig face there was still a large amount of loose rock to be bagged up by Clive and some large slabs to be manoeuvred back to the "rock stacking area" ready for dispatching down the rift.

A fair amount of loose rock was also removed from up-dip before it had a chance to come loose on its own. Before long the long lost open bedding plane started to appear and by the end of the session a clear view onwards was obtained.

Horizontally we can see forward for around 8-10ft across the bedding, which managed a height of around 8-9 inches around 3 feet in but then degenerated to the usual couple of inches at the back. Up dip Dave could see for about 8ft but low and petering out at the top.

Down deep there is a bit of an obvious joint at that 3 foot position with a waterworn declivity going down dip for a few feet before the view is blocked by a rock which appears to be possibly calcited in. To either side of that waterworn dip the bedding reverts to its usual couple of inches high.

There is obvious scope here for a CaveCam session which is planned for this Saturday plus a bang to the left-hand wall, the roof and three large boulders on the floor. There will of course be a hauling session of accumulated bags from the Waterslide up to the surface.

Clive

Viaduct Sink Saturday 14 May Dave King, Geoff Newton

Cave very dry - nothing coming down Downside Aven. Dave in early to start pumping out the dig. Geoff in a bit later with all the stuff for drilling and banging except metre long bits brought in by Dave., by which time pumping nearly complete.

After pumping out the way on is obscured by a silt / gravel bank. This is presumably not hard packed as Dave would have felt it in his recent probing with a long bar. Two metre long holes drilled, to 600mm by Geoff and finished to 1m by Dave. The subsequent bang to enlarge the working space at the end, went without incident although it was noticed that the new detts. have a higher resistance than the ones used until recently. Out in time for lunch at Rock Farm.

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 14th May A full team of Dave, Geoff, Rich, Simon and Clive

Despite it being perhaps the sunniest and warmest day of the year so far constant barking from Lottie, barricaded at Gavin's caravan, drove us underground very swiftly after lunch!

The first job was to remove to the surface the big pile of bags from last Saturday's session (augmented by a few from Wednesday as well) stacked up at the bottom of the Waterslide. While Geoff loaded at the bottom, Clive hauled from the base of the Bucket Pitch and up the pitch to Dave who then had Richard and Simon to take over moving them to the Foot of the Stairs.

Approx 50 bags(?) in all which remained parked on The Landing until, after a sunny tea-break, all except Clive finished hauling them to the surface. Meanwhile Clive went to the bedding plane armed with CaveCam, drills and bang.

The camera was successfully deployed into the bedding before two 1m holes were drilled in the roof and three boulders on the floor prepared for popping. After a hiatus dealing with some breaks in the cable the bang was successfully fired using Geoff's exploder on the surface.

CaveCam-wise the video worked rather better than many times in the past (!). It is obvious that there is no sign of an immediate breakthrough(!) but the higher part of the bedding appears to continue downwards whilst to either side it seems to degenerate to the normal couple of inches in height.

It's worth looking with care from around 13:15:50 (turn the screen brightness up!) Where there appears to be an unexplained darker area might just be the continuation of the higher part of the central bedding.

The video is at: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/1v3mnjqpuscve6d/RFC%20-%20Bedding-plane%20Video.mp4?dl=0>

More rock to move on Wednesday!

Clive

Sunday, 15 May Carrion Slocker solo

The last digging session on 14th April was quite successful in Two Penny Rift but there was no obvious way on. This time I took some Joss sticks to make the cave smell nice; No, only kidding, it was to see where the draft was going really! Although, the air was relatively still at the bottom in the clean washed part of Two Penny Rift there was a small 2" diameter hole drawing the smoke in. So I worked on drilling, P & F on some large boulders and successfully cleared these away, stacking them higher up at the back of the sloping bedding chamber. I opened up a promising hole about 1m deep, with a (possible) small sloping passage leading off in a good direction. There is more to do, to clear this and to make the access better and perhaps I may need some short scaffolding to make the 1 m or so drops safer, to avoid a collapse in, but a potential way on, down-dip still following the old watercourse and not without interest. More clearing will be required to help open it up for access. So the question is do Matt and Mandy have any interest for a Wednesday evening this week perhaps?

take care Vagon

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 18th May Dave, Paul, Alex and Clive

A full team this week which made life a lot easier underground!

Paul and Alex went straight to the dig phase to start work removing me bang debris while Clive loaded skip at the front of the Waterslide for Dave to haul up to the base of the Bucket Pitch.

Several very large rocks were removed along with around 20 bags – these went straight up to Dave while the pile of larger rocks grew steadily awaiting removal to the end of the main rift. During a lull in hauling operations Dave came down and packed all the large rocks carefully at the end of the rift.

The end is now set for another bang this weekend after no doubt another clearing session from the Bucket Pitch to the surface.

During the evening there was obviously a rain storm as the little stream in the cave increase in volume considerably.

Clive

Wednesday, 18 May 2022 Carrion Slocker solo:

Still dry in East Mendip with no water flow on the surface despite the recent rain. Descending down to the hole in the bottom of Two Penny rift with a heavy load consisting of a recharged drill, some scaffold poles and clamps in case I need these. After clearing a few more skips of rocks and mud I drilled and plug & feathered a large bridging boulder and after several goes, more drilling, P&F etc and removing various large bits of rock from it I managed to finally spilt & drop it, then cleared it out of the way. This allowed better access and vision into the space and passage beyond. Through the hole which is about 50cm x 50cm I can now see down a gentle slope for about 3 m, the ongoing passage is about 70 cm wide and just over one metre high looking towards some 'possibly' washed clean boulders in the floor at the end. I cannot see round the corner, if it indeed goes round a corner, until I enter the passage fully. There is a large slab on the left just after the short first section on the right and this will need making safe prior to entry. I think it might be possible to lever this off the side wall from a distance using a long crow bar or scaffold bar, dropping it to the floor and then break it up for clearing.

Overall, at Carrion it is now quite a long way down to the dig face and I was hoping that it might stop 'going' but clearly not. I am still following the old watercourse which I hope will drop into good limestone eventually, may be, possibly...

Take care all, Vagon. Missing Matt n Mandy.

Rock Farm Cave Saturday 21 May Clive, Rich, Simon, Geoff

Despite the recent rain water levels were very low in the cave. Interestingly the only water coming in was from the culvert rift. The inlet near the Mud'ole was dry, as were the others downstream. Maybe the various groundworks carried out by Gav near the surface stream have introduced silt which has blocked the inlets from the main streambed. (Temporarily?)

Viaduct did not happen in the morning as Dave was unavailable, so G spent a couple of hours before lunch pottering at the end of the Rift. Surprisingly a definite sound of a stream could be heard emanating from a small hole in the right hand wall and/or a crack behind a rock rib adjacent to the wall. Not heard this before! Attempts to investigate this further by manually removing the rock rib or enlarging the hole met with little success this time. Also dug down into a narrow gravel filled rift in the floor adjacent to the left hand wall and got down 1 metre without reaching the bottom by lunch time. Eight bags of the said gravel and small rocks were taken to the foot of the Waterslide, a task not made easier by the accumulated backfill.

After lunch the rest of the team arrived and the spoil left from the Wednesday session at the foot of the Bucket Pitch was taken to the surface as was the few bags of gravel from the end Rift.. Rich and Clive also paid separate visits to the end of the Rift to listen to the "new" hidden stream. Consensus is that the sound is not impressive enough to warrant any significant action for the time being, but it will be interesting to see what happens if the stream is diverted into the Rift. (Not worth doing whilst the stream levels remain low at present.) Also if this new stream noise is permanent or transitory.

Apologies for not listing who hauled, loaded what and when. Its getting complex and tedious to relate.

Tea was taken towards the end of the spoil transportation. After tea Clive drilled and banged the stream bedding, and there should be plenty to occupy the Wednesday team.

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 25th May Dave and Clive

Despite the early rains the cave was still very dry, even the persistent little stream flowing down the bedding just before Mud'ole has disappeared.

In the bedding plane the results of a very successful bang were plain to see and while Dave fettled his rock stacks at the end of the main rift Clive produced a load more from the bedding.

Much hammering and chiselling ensued with Dave managing to remove some very stubborn bits of the left hand wall before we finally packed up.

A goodly pile of large rocks were despatched to the end of the main rift and we left the cave with an even goodlier pile of filled bags stacked up ready at the base of the Waterslide. Yet again another frog was rescued from the Foot of the Stairs and removed to the most salubrious surroundings of the surface stream.

The rock removal has now taken us as far as the plank we had inserted to stop rock fragments falling down the bedding plane. Averting one's gaze and looking up the bedding for a change I discovered that you could see a good 10 feet up-dip with the bedding the usual few inches high with a slightly larger area visible at the top on the right which may have some connection with the upper reaches of the main rift.

Periodically during the evening a slight but definite cool inwards draft could be felt in the threshold to the bedding.

On Saturday I have to be away early so my plan is, particularly if Geoff is agreeable, to go down late morning (say 11.30) and haul the bags up the Waterslide to the Bucket Pitch. After a lunch break when Dave is hoping to be back on the scene I can go to the end and drill and prepare for a bang while the rest of the team remove the bags to surface. I must be away about four and can leave Geoff to fire the bang in my absence.

Does that sound a good plan to the team?

Clive

Carrion Slocker Friday 28th May 2022 Solo

After taking my drill a long crow bar and two of Dave's donated three scaffold poles to the bottom of the cave, I set about deciding how to approach stabilisation and the potential access to the new section. After some clearing I decided that I would use some scaffold to make the entrance to the new hole safer and installed three scaffold tubes with the fittings and next time I will take a couple more fittings and some mesh to finish this work off properly. I tested the rock on the side which I thought was leaning inwards, but upon inspection and tapping / trying to lever this is actually still well attached to the wall, so it's not as bad as the one that I discussed with Dave, who was

involved in dropping the large slab in Fairy Quarry/Hillier's Cave a while back that had moved. After this careful inspection I proceeded into the new short section Two Penny Rift which is as previously stated 2.5-3m long and is a watercourse historically and probably still is in flood conditions. East Mendip is very dry still and I have only once seen some foam in the cave above Two Penny Rift where it obviously has backed up due to rock and silt blocking into a 'swirling' bedding just above where I am now digging. At the end of the new piece of sloping passage there are some clean washed rocks and you can see down about 4 to 6 feet in a narrow rift still full of boulders and this is a mixture of Carboniferous limestone lumps, cobbles, conglomerate with oolite and smaller lumps of that funny red hard stuff we have found all the way down the fault line since we started digging from the surface. I have to say although I can see further down in the rift at the end it is narrowing and does not look particularly promising but the air is still good and there is a draft. It would be good to visit the bottom after a serious thunderstorm but we've not had any in eastern Mendip that have created any significant cave water in Carrion for several months. So in summary, Carrion is still going down but is rather lacking Eastern promise. Take care all, Vogon.

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 28th May Geoff, Dave, Rich, Simon and Clive

A late morning start this time for Geoff and Clive as the latter had to be away mid-afternoon. Geoff had another look at the end of the main rift and reported that he could still hear the sound of a trickling stream apparently coming from the right hand side of the rift.

The first main task was to haul the accumulated pile of bags from the front of the Waterslide to the Bucket Pitch. (Geoff loading, Clive hauling).

Nearly 40 bags soon stacked and the dynamic duo returned the service for lunch break to be joined by Dave and Rich.

Post lunch we all returned to the pitch area where Geoff loaded the skip, Dave hauled and Clive and Rich stacked the results at the Foot of the Stairs. Around this time Simon arrived to help and Clive headed to the bedding plane to drill and bang while the bags were taken to the surface for emptying.

Three x 1m holes were drilled in the roof and left-hand wall plus another very short one in a big cracked slab on the floor ahead. There should be plenty of rock to clear on Wednesday evening.

A slight inward cold draught was noticeable through most of the cave, it being just detectable at the start of the bedding plane.

A notable non-cave event also occurred on Saturday as Gavin and Erica finally moved into their house. A working, flushing, inside loo was the immediate benefit according to Gav!

Clive

Wednesday 1st June Rock Farm Cave Clive, Paul, Alex & Dave.

Both Paul & Alex went to the end of the rift to listen to the small flow of water that can be heard through via small letterbox low in the right-hand wall.

A large number of bags were filled and transported to the Landing above the Staircase, whilst rocks were sent down the rift and laid in the floor.

No drill and bang, but probably ready to drill and bang on Saturday.

A half hearted attempt to dam the stream where it turns right towards the bedding plane to establish if the bedding plane flow is the same as that heard through the letterbox. But as fast as the dam was built the level rose and flowed over the top and hence unable to easily stem the flow. However it was possible to let a small flood pulse flow when the dam was removed, but this was not enough to detect any audible change in the flow heard through the letterbox. Further thoughts required to stem the flow and/or send a much larger flood pulse down the bedding plane.

Early-ish finish and surfaced into daylight, no sign of Gavin and no shepherds hut so re-hydration therapy was taken seated on the picnic benches on the lawn. Gavin appeared just as daylight was disappearing and it getting a tad chilly so Paul and Clive headed off, Alex had already gone. Dave was then invited into the new residence to finish his pint but also to make arrangements for collecting a couple of 3,000 litre water tanks - but that's another story!

Dave.

Ps. I'm not about on Wed 8th but could possibly do Thurs depending upon whether Daren camping Fri to Sun, or perhaps Wed afternoon instead of evening.

Viaduct Sink Saturday 4 June 2022 Dave King, Geoff Newton

The last bang had made the hoe disappear temporarily, but in the process of clearing the loose spoil, it was eventually found underwater. After Geoff had cleared the loose spoil which could be cleared with out pumping, Dave took over at the sharp end with hammer and chisel and bars and produced an impressive amount of blocks suitable for building retaining walls. One block was too large to be hauled out and will need to be broken up with a little HE. Dave can now turn round at the end.

The bags of spoil were taken out to Downside Aven and emptied there, together with bags of mud already stashed at the foot of the dam after the last session on the now abandoned "new dig". The blocks produced by Dave remain at The Toolshed to be brought to Downside Aven for wall building (Rich?) in due course. The hoe was taken out for repairs and the pick being redundant, was taken out for use elsewhere. Back for lunch at RF.

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 4th June Geoff, Dave and Clive

With a not a great list of tasks lined up for RFC it promised to be a fairly relaxing afternoon! A big party was being held in the quarry so there was quite a bit of coming and going past the cave and of course the Shepherds Hut was being used as a bar down there!

While Geoff and Dave sorted out the pile of bags residing on the landing and hauled them to the surface for emptying Clive headed to the end to drill and bang.

Three 1 m holes plus a little one in an obstinate boulder protruding from the left-hand wall were drilled and subsequently fired.

Meanwhile Dave and Geoff returned from the surface and removed the remaining pile of large rocks down to the end of the main rift.

Interestingly the inward draught had returned and could be felt all the way to the final bedding. Drilling dust was being sucked away rapidly down the open bedding.

Due to staff shortages this Wednesdays' session will be moved Thursday when I expect it will be just Dave and I attending.

Similarly on Saturday Dave is not available so hopefully Richard and Simon will be about.

On the following Saturday (19th) Geoff won't be available and Clive won't be on Saturday 25th.....

Clive

Apologies but a very brief report thus time....

Rock Farm Cave - Thursday 9th June Dave and Clive

The evening was spent moving much blasted rock from the bedding plane area after the last time.

This was all bagged up as usual at the bottom of the Waterslide ready for the weekend, the larger rocks finding their way down to the main rift courtesy of Dave.

We now have a fairly clear view down into the higher part of the descending bedding. This is the area we have seen previously via Cave Cam. Some extra blocking of the bedding will be needed before the next bank to prevent debris blocking it.

Next to no noticeable draft this time unlike the previous session.

Geoff and Clive will be there on Saturday afternoon - grateful for any help as usual!

Clive

Viaduct Sink Saturday 11 June 2022

Geoff Newton Solo

Water levels were very low but it's still not possible to keep dry due to the grovelling involved in doing what needs to done.

The terminal sump pool was nice and clear revealing a lot more spoil to shift. Popped the boulder which was too big to take out last week. Back to Rock Farm for lunch.

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 11th June Geoff, Rich, Simon & Clive

A relatively easy session this time - just bringing up the 33 odd bags from the base of the Waterslide up to daylight.

Geoff loading and Clive hauling the Waterslide and then ditto on the pitch. Rich and Simon from there along with the other two to the surface with a tea break in between.

Cave 'breathing', noticeably near the entrance.

On Wednesday the plan is to instigate 'Operation Flood Pulse' to see whether the water movement heard at the end of the main rift is coming from the bedding plane we are working in at the moment.

Clive

Carrion Update Sun 12th June 2022 Solo trip

I took some more scaffolding clips down to Two Penny Rift to fit a short scaffold bar. Its quite a long way down now.

I cleared a few rocks and fitted a second scaffold bar to make the way on safe. It is very dry in East Mendip and in the Two Penny Rift entrance a surprising outward draft.

On the way out I drilled and P&F the top of an irritating boulder. After doing this I was 14 mins past my ETO call out and Paul Stillman was about to get

a phone call, whoops. 2.5 hours.

Take care, Andy Vogon W

Rock Farm Cave - Tuesday 15th June Dave, Clive and Paul Q

Operation Flood Pulse.

Clive and Paul arrived at RFC to find Dave at the bottom of the water slide where he had rigged up a dam behind the board two thirds of the way down the water slide and was filling 5 gallon containers with the diverted stream.

The intention was to flood the bedding plane to see if the water could be heard through the letterbox.

Dave and Clive cleared the gravel and smaller stones from the top of the bedding plane to avoid washing it down.

Paul proceed down to the the letter box to listen for water and confirmed nothing could be heard.

Clive and Dave emptied 25 gallons of water down the bedding plane.

The water could be clearly heard flooding down past the letterbox. (Audio attached).

The rest of the evening was spent moving some of the rocks from the end of the rift to make access easier before work continues to widen the letter box.

Rocks moved into the top of the bedding plane stacked upright across the opening to prevent any debris falling down.

All containers, piping and two bags of spoil removed from cave, exited cave by about 2100.

Dave, Clive fill in any gaps I've missed!

Paul Q

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 18th June Dave, Pawel, Clive with Rich on surface support.

Good to see Pawel back again after a considerable absence.....

A light session was in store for Saturday as there was no spoil to bring out.

Pawel took the opportunity to update the survey by adding the leg down the main rift to the end and also the bedding plane extension. A shot was also taken down the now hidden bedding plane as it was partially covered by boulders during the last Wednesday session.

All in all the main rift added another 15m to the length of the cave and another 5m metres depth apparently.

After Pawel had finished his survey work I extended the firing cable back down the main rift. I then started on drilling at the end to provide a more comfortable working space and to open up the face above the little horizontal slot which leads off to the right at floor level. This we assume will take us into the lower level of the bedding plane when we heard so clearly the flood pulse test last Wednesday.

I won't be available for the coming Wednesday, Saturday and following Wednesday sessions (I thought I could do the 2nd Wednesday Dave but not so).

There should be plenty of rock to be removed plus chisel work etc for the next couple of sessions at least. The larger bits of spoil at least can be parked in the bedding plane (the new underground dumping area!)

Clive

Sat 18th June Viaduct Sink

Pawel & Dave.

Viaduct Sink entered by Pawel armed with Disto etc and Dave with repaired spoil dragging hoe and 12v battery for pump.

Pawel cleared most of the rock and shrapnel from the large rock that Geoff popped the previous weekend. Dave then set the pump up and as the water level dropped bagged up a few more bags as the spoil was revealed whilst Pawel aimed his Disto to collect new data to update the survey. After pumping both Pawel and Dave both took a stint at chiselling and levering out a few more bags worth of spoil. Several bags and a number of rocks stacked near the Toolshed awaiting a hauling session before heading out for lunch at Rock Farm.

The water level still resumes to the same level at the dig face between sessions but as we progress the volume of water that requires pumping out increases. No sign of the end of the 'sump', perhaps worth probing again with drain rods after the next pumping session.

No prospect of a drill and bang next Saturday since Clive is away so no need to pump out, but a session's worth of spoil to shift back to Downside Aven.

Dave.

Wednesday 22nd June Rock Farm Cave

Dave solo

The stream above Bucket Pitch was a mere trickle and below Bucket Pitch the flow was very low although perhaps tad more than above.

Saturday's bang had done a good job of producing a quantity of large lumps of rock and nicely fractured wall above the letterbox slot. The bang had also destabilised some of the stacked rock wall climb and loosened mud deposits in the upward continuation of the rift in the roof on the right-hand side. Rocks were tossed up slope to the aerial skip loading area creating a bit of space to carry out some reworking of the rock wall climb, this may require further attention. The fractured wall was attacked with crowbar and chisel, dropping some very large slabs that required significant reduction before being dispatched up slope. Approx a dozen bags filled some of which were deposited at each end of the aerial skip way and few were left at the bottom of the rift. More rocks and gravel etc still remain at the dig face but both time and stacking space were running out.

Probably due to the very low flow of water no sound of running water and no draft detected from the letterbox.

Most of the spoil/rocks can be stacked in the bedding plane dig so not too far to shift it. More smaller spoil to be bagged at the bottom of the rift along with a few more rocks to pull out.

Dave.

Viaduct Sink Saturday 25 June 2022 Dave King, Geoff Newton

Water levels in the cave and surface stream were very low. First Dave took a quick look at the end and sent up another bag of spoil to the Toolshed. The accumulated bags of spoil and large rocks in the Toolshed were taken out to Downside Aven. Where the passages were low this was achieved by DK loading and GN hauling the trays. Elsewhere the bags were chained. The trays did sometimes stick a bit in the approach to the S-bend, where the floor had been eroded away exposing rock projections.

Whilst Geoff stacked the spoil in the aven and packed the empty bags, Dave attempted to remove the rock projections. Dave then used the large rocks taken from the Toolshed to build up the retaining wall. Exit was then made for an early lunch, enabling an early start to the Rock Farm Cave session.

Geoff

Saturday 25th June Rock Farm Cave

Geoff & Dave.

The early finish in Viaduct Sink meant an early lunch and early start down Rock Farm Cave.

Stream levels low and no detectable sound of stream through the letter box.

The bags and rocks at the end of the rift were hauled up the aerial skip way. Rocks stacked at the back of the now abandoned bedding plane and the 18 bags of spoil hauled all the way up and stacked on the Landing.

Early finish and cuppa before departing.

Dave.

Wednesday 29th June

Rock Farm Cave Dave - solo

Stream flow below the Staircase unsurprisingly had increased since Saturday.

At the dig face mud had fallen out of the rift above, this was bagged up along more unstable mud that easily fell out when poked.

Chiselling above and adjacent to the letter box created more bags of spoil and rocks, in total eight bags including the mud from above were stacked at the bottom and the rocks thrown up towards the aerial skipway. Adjacent and upslope from the letter box another slot was opened up which is just a continuation of the same bedding plane as the letter box.

The sound of water flowing beyond the letter box could be heard.

A little more fettling of the stacked rocks before exiting.

Dave.

Viaduct Sink Sunday 3 July 2022 Dave King, Geoff Newton

Dave went in early to pump out the sump and I followed later with the kit for drill & bang after collecting the chemicals. Dave found the initial water level in the sump same as usual. However it despite pumping for the best part of an hour and changing batteries the water level would not go right down. This made working conditions less comfortable. Given that the dry conditions meant that seepage into the sump was negligible, it is not clear if the pumping difficulty was due to an increase in the volume of water to be shifted as we enlarge the passage or if it is due to the pump needing some TLC. After all the pump is not designed for use in a gritty cave environment. Whilst pumping was in progress Dave found the time to assist in carrying the drill & bang kit from Downside Aven to the Toolshed.

There was a minor problem with the drilling. One of the holes declined to accept the full length of cord. When an attempt was made to clear the hole again the drill bit jammed and could not be removed. A replacement hole was drilled nearby and the rest of session went without incident.

The pump was taken out for fettling before the next session and despite the pfaff we were only slightly late for lunch at Rock Farm.

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 2nd July Geoff, Dave, Duncan and Clive. Rich on surface support.

A pile of 20 odd bags were removed from The Landing to the surface as our first job. At the end of the main rift Clive added another two bags to the eight that Dave had left during the last session. Geoff moved these up to the Aerial Skipway position and then hauled them up for tipping in the now abandon bedding extension.

Duncan came down for a look at the end before Clive drilled three holes for firing above the horizontal slot at floor level.

An early tea break and finish and chat with Rich on the surface.

Due to staff shortages there will be no digging this weekend.....

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 6th July Tav, Alex, Dave and Clive

Tav and Alex were volunteered for rock clearing and skip loading respectively while Clive operated the aerial skipway and Dave looked after stacking the larger rocks in the bedding plane plus hauling bags of smaller material up the Waterslide.

The bags total 22 and all were emptied on the surface before end of play.

A large amount of rock, including some previously stacked at the end of the main rift (!), was stacked in the bedding plane.

At the end of the rift Tav reported the air to be fresh but he could see no sign of the 'letterbox' we were following, due no doubt to it being buried below bang debris. It did subsequently reappear although, it has to be said, it does look fairly insignificant at this stage!

The cave was all but completely dry.

No digging this weekend, return planned for Wednesday to drill and bang etc....

Clive

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

A fairly light evenings work this time – Alex and Tav fettled the unstable slope of rocks near the end of the main rift with Dave hauling the many un-needed rocks back up to the old bedding plane dig, using the arial skipway, while Clive found suitable places to house them.

It then just need 1 x 1m and 2 x 0.5m holes drilling and firing at the end in our attempt to reach the lower continuation of the bedding plane.

A return on Saturday is planned....

Clive

Viaduct Sink Saturday 16 July 2022 (am) Dave King, Geoff Newton

The sump was not pumped out, so most of the spoil from the last bang was extracted by fishing with the draw hoe. Most of the spoil was back filled into the abandoned "New Dig". One bag was taken out to Downside Aven. Back to Rock Farm for an early lunch.

Geoff

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 16th July 2022 (belated) and Wednesday 20th July 2022 16th July

Dave, Geoff, Rich and Clive

Cave very dry – Alex and Dave clearing at the end of the rift, Clive hauling on the aerial skipway and Rich carefully stacking the larger stuff at the back of the bedding-plane.

A number of bags of small stuff removed to the surface after tea while Clive drilled two holes (1 x 1m and 1 x 0.5m) at the end – duly fired.

20th July

Dave and Clive

Even drier in the cave this time!

An early start by Dave heralded the sound of much hammering and chiselling when Clive arrived in the main rift.

Clive bag filling while Dave worked – just about enough room for the two of us at the end!

A good number of bags hauled up to the base of the Waterslide. Most will go to the surface I guess. Some rocks deposited in the bedding awaiting stacking.

While Clive drilled three holes (x 0.5m) Dave fettled the collapsing slope of rocks just up-rift.

On Thursday morning Gav was apparently awake and around 4 am via loud crashing noise but she took to maybe being a collapse in the quarry or maybe something under the house!

He checked the quarry but nothing was out of the ordinary and it's subsequently turned out to be a massive branch coming down from an ash tree above the dig! Ash die-back presumably.....

The plan for this weekend continues to be Saturday rather than Sunday but I will need to confirm on Friday morning. This is due to Janet being ill and our juggling some family commitments.....

Apologies for any confusion!

Clive

Friday 22nd July Viaduct Sink

Dave (solo)

After a previous visit the pump was taken out to fettle since it's performance had dropped off a little either due to grit or perhaps just battery voltage dropping to soon because of the amount of water to pump and therefore longer pump running time. With pump suitably fettled and only a small piece of grit removed, indicating that the filter has been doing a good job of filtering out virtually all grit that won't pass through pump.

Since it takes a while to lower the water to a reasonable level for working Dave had been going in an hour ahead of Geoff to set up and pump etc. Recently an hour hasn't been long enough but the hope is that with the pump fettled and a bigger capacity battery the time required to pump out will be reduced.

In preparation for Saturday's session Dave visited Viaduct Sink on Fri afternoon with pump and an ex mobility scooter battery (total weight 31kg). Setting up the pump etc didn't take long since the filter, hoses and priming hand pump were left in situ at the end of the previous session. With the pump switched on and primed water began gushing from one of the hose connectors rather than flowing up the hose pipe to The Somme. The fitting was found to be broken, most likely due to the aggressive environment and the need to coil up the hose after every pumping session due to the restricted working space. No spare fittings available but not wishing to abandon the session, a reconfiguring of the plumbing and the use of a snoopy loop soon had the kit back in operation. Despite the amount of water to shift it only took approximately 45mins before the level was dropped exposing the pickup pipe to the air.

With plenty of time in hand before ETO some large rocks were pulled out from ahead and below the now very low water level that couldn't previously be hooked with the large ended garden hoe. A fair bit of chiselling brought down more spoil from the roof that was then dragged out of the water along with a lot of silts and gravel.

By the end of play a good quantity of spoil awaits hauling up the passage, the option of a bit more chiselling (long chisel required), and now that the onward tube is clear of rocks and the filter can be pushed further in, a short pumping session will be able to further lower the water level. The garden hoe was left in such a position as to indicate the water level at the end of the session and make it possible to assess any change in level overnight.

Tools, replacement fitting and spare battery assembled for Saturday's session.

Dave.

Viaduct Sink - Saturday 23rd July Geoff & Dave.

Only a small trickle of a stream on the surface which didn't even make it to the entrance before sinking in a small hole in the stream bed. The entrance passages were therefore very dry.

At the sump the water level had risen by approximately 100mm. With the replacement connector and tools left in the car - oops, Dave set the pump working in its bodged configuration. With the water level lower that it has ever been it appeared that the ongoing silted 'passage' may be tending a little to the right.

With the pump etc packed away Geoff loaded several bags worth of spoil plus a number of rocks to be hauled up to the Toolshed area before starting drilling operations. Three holes of 600mm drilled and charged leaving approx 200mm of surplus HE, a fourth hole soon rectified this. Drilling took a little longer than expected due to the clay like soft layers in the limestone causing the drill bit to clog and jam more easily, added to this the time to pump out and haul spoil, not surprisingly made for a later than usual bang and exit.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 23rd July Rich, Simon, Clive, Geoff & Dave.

The whole team headed down to the bottom of the Water Slide. Surprisingly the stream was flowing below the Staircase and hence on down the Water Slide which has recently been very dry.

Clive set about digging at the sharp end, Dave loaded the aerial skip, Geoff hauled, Rich stacked the larger spoil into the bedding plane dig and Simon relayed the surface bound spoil to the bottom of the Water Slide.

Whilst Clive continued to chisel, a large number of bags were hauled up the Water Slide. Most of the team exited for tea break whilst Dave set about chiselling a few more bags worth of spoil out and then joined the team on the surface.

The plan was then to drill and bang, but the time soon disappeared and before long an executive decision was made to call it a day and leave drill and bang for Wednesday evening along with some more chiselling.

The reason for the stream flowing below ground was established. Gavin had been carrying out some earthworks on the surface stream and increased the flow into the large yard drain.

Dave.

Saturday evening after digging I dropped by Thrupe Lane.

Entrance gate to TLS is still clear as is the grill at the end of the Hobnail Channel.

Tony's oak sapling was looking a little restricted in the tree guard and possibly suffering where the leaves were in contact with the guard. In the Ferret shed were a couple of large traffic cone, one of which I cut approx 4 inches off the top to increase the hole diameter and used it as a larger tree guard. It will need to be removed before the sapling becomes too large to fit through the hole in the tip of the or the cone will need to be cut to remove.

The ground was found to be very dry and cracked around the sapling, this was rectified with copious amounts of stream water that very quickly drained down the cracks before being able to moisten the surrounding soil.

Hopefully the cone will give the sapling more room to flourish whilst still protecting it from the local wildlife.

I might in the near future replace the cone guard (which is a tad visible to say the least) with a tube of wire mesh. This will be more discrete, offer protection from wildlife whilst not restricting sunlight and will also expose the sapling to the elements which will help it to grow stronger.

Dave.

Wednesday 27th July Rock Farm Cave

Clive & Dave

Room for both Clive and Dave to chisel out and bag up spoil at the sharp end. Spoil hauled up aerial skip way, some of which was stacked in the abandoned bedding plane dig whilst the remaining bags stacked at the bottom of the Water Slide.

An attempt to detect a draft at both the old bedding plane dig and the current dig by blowing soap bubbles failed miserably due to the bubbles being too heavy and just going straight down.

Finally two 1m holes drilled, charged and popped.

A small stack of bags at the bottom of the Water Slide plus a pile of bags below the Bucket Pitch await hauling to the surface.

Dave.

PS. This weekend Gavin's daughter will be camping/partying in the quarry with about 40 guests. Parking might be limited although the guests might drive into the quarry so don't park too close to the gate between open the barn and Gavin's barn conversion.

PPS. Clive is not available on Wednesday 3rd or Saturday 6th Aug.

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 30th July Geoff, Dave, Simon and Clive

The Rock Farm yard turned out to be very quiet as it turned out Matilda's birthday party in the quarry wasn't due to happen until the evening.....

In the cave everyone headed straight to the end rift where Geoff started clearing the bang debris from last Wednesday session while Clive and Dave removed it up to the bedding plane where a happily ensconced Simon emulated Richards recent example of neat rock stacking.

A productive hammer and chisel session followed for Clive. The mud filled very low bedding ahead became very wet and hammering and chiselling of the rock at that point sounded very hollow – both indications of possible open space ahead.

This indeed proved to be the case as blackness ahead soon appeared – presumably the long fought for continuation of the upper bedding plane.....

It was very difficult to make out the dimensions of the bedding ahead. Whilst it would be feasible to put Cave Cam through the hole it was felt that it was better to open up the approaches properly beforehand. It looks like another couple of feet of roof will need to be removed in that case. Luckily there are numerous cracks plus one major one across the roof so it shouldn't be too difficult to open it up. Both Clive and Dave noticed a very slight draft emanating from the bedding. (there was also an obvious outward draught at the entrance this time).

After the tea break Dave was seconded to drill and blast the continuation while Geoff, Clive and Simon lifted approx. 20 odd bags of spoil (last Wednesdays) up the bucket pitch and then onto the surface. Two one metre holes were drilled and subsequently fired before finally packing up for the day.

Dave will be in attendance this coming Wednesday (no Clive) plus I gather Alex.

Clive

Viaduct Sink - Saturday 30th July Geoff & Dave

Once again an earlier start for Dave to set up and pump out sump. Replacement fitting, spare 12v battery, mole grips and drain rods taken in. A few rocks dragged out of sump pool to allow room for pick up pipe and filter. Unfortunately the new fitting although looked like a 'Hozelock' fitting wasn't compatible with 'Hozelock'. Reverted to bodged configuration and pumping commenced. Pumping took about 45 mins, requiring a battery change. It wasn't possible to lower water level right down due to a couple of large rocks from the previous bang impeding filter placement.

Geoff arrived in plenty of time to haul up the kit after pumping finished. The previously jammed drill bit was easily removed with the mole grips before pulling a couple of large rocks out that became accessible with the lower water level. A swap around, Geoff dug and loaded skip whilst Dave hauled, adding to the pile of bagged spoil and rocks from a previous session stacked at the Tool Shed. The bags were hauled out and emptied at Downside Aven, but the rocks were only taken part way to the Waterfall due to time constraints. The drain rods weren't deployed this time, this will be done on a subsequent trip.

Dave.

Ps. Dave is unavailable for the next three weekends for both VS & RFC.

Rock Farm Cave Wednesday 3rd August

Alex & Dave

Saturday's bang had produced a large amount of spoil which was soon bagged clearing the way for chiselling. More bags filled making a total of 30 bags which were all hauled up the aerial skipway. Bags with larger rocks stacked in the 'rock store' abandoned bedding plane dig ready for emptying and stacking whilst the smaller spoil destined for the surface awaits hauling at the bottom of the Water Slide along with the previous stash. Ran out of time to haul up the Water Slide since Alex had an early morning start for work.

No draft detected, possibly because mud and small spoil partially blocking the slot.

Further chiselling/crowbaring particularly in the left and right-hand walls will help to increase the working space that is getting a little restricted.

Surface hauling skip replaced with new one.

Still to do - carry out minor repair to lower end of ladder skipway. Possibly just requires a couple of holes drilling in the ally sheet and a cable tie or two to secure it to bottom rung, may be a little panel beating to the lower edge of ally sheet.

Staircase handline attached to stemple and left in situ. If entrance handline required, this is ready to go tied to scaffold pole, it reaches as far as the Landing and can be put in when required and removed at the end of session.

A reminder that Clive is not around on Saturday (6th Aug) and Dave is unavailable for the next three Saturdays (6th, 13th & 20th Aug), but is available next Wednesday (10th).

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 10th August Dave & Clive

We arrived to find the surface stream completely dry apart from a few puddles. Surprisingly, inside the cave, the little stream was flowing again which is extraordinary as not long ago when the surface stream was healthy the cave was bone dry!

The cave was nice and cool (unlike the surface). At the Waterslide Clive loaded the skip and Dave hauled 54 bags up to below the Bucket Pitch.

At the end, in the 'new' bedding plane dig there was still plenty of hammer and chisel work for us both to do the last bang having been very effective.

As we worked the rock sounded more and more hollow as the working space became more cramped! After filling the last few available bags we had to stockpile the remaining spoil on one side.

We now have an open hole big enough for Cave Cam to go through fairly easily. The surprising news is that we thought we were heading for a continuation of the main bedding plane we were following further up, whereas what we seem to be able to see at the moment could well be another parallel rift! There is an obvious waterworn wall ahead which drops down out of sight. The one small rock we threw through the hole, not unsurprisingly, didn't clatter away into the depths!

So on Saturday the idea is to do the Cave Cam thing and to move the accumulated pile of bags up the Bucket Pitch towards the surface. Its due to be very hot so no surface work at all!

No Dave for the next three sessions....

Clive

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 13th August Rich, Geoff, Simon and Clive

Geoff and Clive initially headed for the end to probe the possible extension into the parallel bedding/rift area with Cave Cam.

Immediately after this a comprehensive clearing session of the 54 bags stacked at the foot of the Bucket Pitch up to the surface took place, interrupted only by the tea-break being taken in the relatively cool confines of the barn!

At the end of a very hot afternoon Gav took pity on us by asking if he could use some of the bags of small broken rock as infilling in his new wall around the stream – no need to empty them then!

At the entrance the cool cave air was noticeable and made hauling from there quite comfortable. At the end of the cave Geoff and I both noticed the slight inward draught into the new, possible extension. We could also hear the trickling of the tiny stream ahead somewhere (it was still running through the cave despite the surface stream being dry).

There are four views of the rift in succession – straight ahead; the view to the right, down and up; the view to the left and up and then the view to the left and up again.

The most telling image is around 11:43:59 looking down-dip along the rift. Going by past experience with CaveCam I'd guess the rift is about 6inches wide and we can see along it for around 4ft. Interestingly there doesn't seem to be any sign of the trickling stream we can hear.

So, as we feared this doesn't seem to be a contender for the future and there seems little point in pursuing it.

Before finally abandoning the dig and decamping to Fernhill I think it would be worth just a bit more of a poke at the end main rift on the right hand side where there is a very narrow riftette. Spoil can obviously go into the defunct dig on the right now.

Clive

Back to Carrion Slocker after a summer break Solo 20/07/2022

The area is very dry still with no water in the Carrion feeder stream or more interestingly Heale farm sink feeder surface stream which is very unusual and very dry. I have a mesh cover for Heale farm sink in place and I have formally asked for permission to dig here from Daniel and this will need a permanent lid cover before starting, if I am allowed. In Carrion I replaced the Fiat 500 electron old digging ladder with some rawl bolts from Sue's school to make this short lower pitch free climbable by just using the digger's rope and the new footholds. I also took in some mesh in for Twopenny Rift to fit next time to prevent it back filling during the wetter winter wet season.

25th of July 2020 to Carrion solo. I finished the pegs for the ladder climb and removed electron ladder on exiting. I then took the mesh to Twopenny rift and fitted this in place.

Weds 16th of August Carrion solo after summer holidays etc I was back in Twopenny rift digging after the previous successful stabilising. I shifted several skips of rocks and small stones to make more space and found a small dribble of water on the left when the rest of the cave was completely dry, this was surprising as the field and the cave were still very dry after the very hot spell and even some pretty heavy rain earlier in the day, I half expected some water in the cave, but it is probably still percolating through the soil. I use my very manual cave-cam holding it takes photos of potential ways on at the bottom. Nothing like the recent potential of Rock Farm by the look of Clive's video.

take care
Andy W

Rock Farm Cave Saturday 20 August Clive North, Rich Witcombe, Simon Meade-King, Geoff Newton

Despite some recent rain the cave was bone dry - driest we have ever seen (?).

Work was confined to manually enlarging the entry to the "cross rift" and taking the spoil up to to the formerly wet bedding to be stacked. Clive & Geoff removing the cracked and loose rock at the junction and Simon hauling and Rich stacking.

Geoff first went into the face head first and was eventually able to open the junction up sufficiently so that he could insert head and shoulders into the "rift" and get a good look and also remove a number of loose rocks partially blocking the "rift". Clive then took over feet first using a long crowbar and hammer and chisel. When Clive had done what he could Geoff was then able to get a good look more comfortably without taking off his helmet.

Clive declined the opportunity to stick his head into the cross passage. Geoff proceeded to further enlarge access whilst the others went off for tea, filling another 2 or 3 bags of spoil in the process, before joining the others for tea. Work ceased after tea.

The cross passage is of course not actually a rift. Its a low tube with a slot in the floor giving access to a very low bedding which would carry the water under "normal" conditions. The cross section is variable but a bit like a cross section of a length of railway line. **There was a strong draught coming out of the cross passage.** The cross passage appears to be converging with or set to pass under the main rift. It is alas not passable but there is hope that this might change if it merges with a continuation of the main rift.

Geoff was heard to remark "It's not dead yet". Rich suggested this could be a name for the cross passage. Perhaps appropriate given the average age of the diggers at over 75!

Geoff

Wednesday 24th August Rock Farm Cave

Alex, Tav, Clive, Dave + a flying visit by Duncan

Surface stream has dried up although a small flow was still evident in the culvert which would be the source of the trickle below the staircase.

Gavin had made good use of the previous bags of spoil left on the surface as infill in the almost completed wall by the end of his barn conversion.

Down at the dig Dave tried to slide in to get a view of the new 'extension' but the roof was too low. Alex was able to take a look with helmet removed and reported that the slight trench enlargement down the line of the bedding plane measured approximately 30cm down and 30cm up. The bedding plane continued beyond the trench at the usual 5cm or so. Down slope a view of approximately 2m at which point it may appear to veer away from the main rift. No detectable draught.

Despite the lack of optimism it was felt worth pursuing the main rift whilst digging was relatively easy. A number of large rock were pulled out and reduced plus approx 25 bags of mud/silt were bagged up. All hauled up the aerial skipway where the rocks were diverted to the old bedding plane dig and the bags hauled eventually to the landing.

During the digging phase a flying visit from Duncan (not that there is room to swing a cat let alone fly) armed with Disto. Bearings were taken both down the line of the trench in the bedding plane and also up the line of the main rift. The data confirmed that the two are as near as damn it parallel and hence convergence in the next few metres seems unlikely particularly if the trench does veer to the right away from the main rift.

Whilst spoil was making it's way to the Landing, Clive drilled and charged 4 holes split between 20g/m and 40g/m - two in the large central rock and two in the right-hand wall/roof.

Dave.

Carrion - a brief visit to try to do some tricky cementing in Bethlehem Pot while it is dry, but this did not work very well, trying to get some cement behind the strong 50mm square mesh & backfilling with smallish stones? Any Atlas suggestions welcome.

Cave was more drippy than usual due no doubt the recent rains but no surface water in Carrion feeder or Heale feeder. Down to the bottom to dig in Twopenny Rift and clear some spoil. This went okay, then moved one largish rock that will need drilling & P&F to split and pull up the rather constricted rift to the spoil stacking corner. As I had not brought my drill in this rather delayed this to the next visit. The bottom is muddy & rocky but the dig site has good air and some possible sightline options and there was a noticeable draft at the entrance pot today. A short session but useful.

Andy W

Rock Farm Cave - Saturday 28th August Rich, Geoff, Dave Everett and Clive

The accumulated pile of bags on The Landing were soon despatched to the surface by Geoff to be dealt with by the others.

At the end of the Main Rift Geoff cleared the debris from Wednesday's bang along with plenty of sandy mud etc which Clive loaded onto the skip for Dave E to haul up to Rich ensconced in the upper bedding.

Several large rocks went this way but not the final 'rock of the day' - a large slab which was eventually prised out of the right hand wall at floor level. This was parked in the lower bedding alcove while we probed the little mud-choked bedding plane that had been revealed.

It was around 2inches high and took the mega bar for perhaps a foot. The mud was very wet like the mud in the bedding leading to 'Not Dead Yet'.

A very narrow rift/cleft on the right hand side of the central rib in the floor was also revealed.

No obvious draught at the end apart from maybe the slightest inward flow. A moderate inward draught at the entrance.

I suggest that Dave K and I have another look on Wednesday to decide whether we continue work or not. If it's a no then we can start bringing out tools etc. Clive

Viaduct Sink Saturday 3rd September

Dave - solo trip

The tiny trickle of a stream on the surface not surprisingly was sinking a few metres upstream of the entrance.

Fully charged battery in ammo can carried in for pump.

Not entirely a solo trip, whilst passing below Red Aven a bat appeared, thought about trying to pass, but soon flew off towards Downside Aven. There it flew around until it was clear to head back towards Red Aven. Unlikely it has entered the cave via the entrance gate, most likely another small hole either at the top of Red Aven or nearer the entrance. The usually wet/damp crawl between Downside Aven and Bridge Junction had all but dried out.

A late start plus feeling a little under the weather and some pump fettling meant pumping didn't begin until 11:55am. 1:00pm with pumping completed the drain rods were deployed. With some pushing and pulling approximately 4m of drain rods disappeared below the low water line before coming to a stop. When withdrawn the rods were coated with fine mud silts, consistent with the feel of the rods pushing through the infill. The continuation seemed to maintain a similar angle of inclination and direction of the enlarged passage. To continue digging would not only require a large volume of rock to be blasted and hauled up, but also a lot more water to pump out each time rendering it impractical to continue this dig.

Due to time constraints the pump/plumbing assembly was left in situ and the filter/strainer pushed into the remaining final pool such that it could be pumped again with no set up time if required. Although this is probably unlikely unless pumped whilst clearing tools etc for one last look.

A few photos attached - Note that at the start of pumping the pump was at the edge of the water line and wasn't moved during pumping. The furthest loop of yellow hose was initially submerged before pumping started.

Dave.

Ps. I'm unavailable at weekends for the rest of September.

Saturday 3rd September Rock Farm Cave

Dave - solo - Rich and Clive surface support

A quick visit to the end of the rift to confirm the thoughts of others.

Very little digable spoil between what appears to be bedrock or perhaps large detached rocks still in situ.

Loose empty bags bagged up and two bags worth brought out to surface. A couple or three more midweek evening sessions required to clear out tools, bags and cable etc. The various hauling ropes to be stashed in the dry rift on the Landing such that they can be redeployed in the unlikely event that winter storms cause significant changes at the end of the rift.

Dave.

Ps. Neither Clive or Dave are available this coming Wednesday, therefore it is suggested to move to Thursday next week.

ATLAS Colleagues

Following a quorate session of the ATLAS politburo this lunchtime, it has been decided to suspend regular digging at Rock Farm Cave. It is however intended to visit the far end again after high water/flood conditions in the autumn/winter to see if any changes take place and also to listen out for any sound of distant streams or falling water. The latter test will of course require a digger with full hearing - a rare commodity amongst the over 70s. The opportunity may also be taken to obtain some photos of the cave in spate - here, a caver prepared to get very wet will be required.

With this in mind, a partial "clear-out" of digging paraphernalia will take place in the near future, but some infrastructure will remain until such time as a complete shut-down is agreed. Next Saturday (10 September), a reconnaissance visit will be made to Fairy Cave Quarry to assess possible dig sites, principally Fernhill Cave. For those wishing to obtain a little background info, I would recommend reading Phil Davies' 1962 article on Fernhill Cave and Duck's Pot, published in WCC Journal No. 83. This is available online.

We are meeting in the FCQ carpark (CSCC key required) at about 1.30 pm. The quarry lock combination is xxxx

Yours fraternally Rich

Thursday 8th September

Rock Farm Cave Thursday 8th September Rock Farm Cave

Alex and Dave, Clive for rehydration therapy.

The end of an era in more ways than one, after so many years a major change.

Final task to do for the season in Rock Farm Cave was to clear all the digging kit. But first Alex poked himself back into the enlarged bedding plane to get a few photos both upstream and down, Dave then took the opportunity to squeeze in far enough to take a look.

The task of clearing then began. As the mountain of tools, bags, rope, skips etc made their way out so the quantity of kit increased eventually making it difficult to scramble past it at times for the next relay stage. Virtually all the kit was removed from the cave inc the 55m of heavy duty cable, the pulley and sling from Bucket Pitch. Leaving behind just the aerial skipway, associated skip & rope, Waterslide scaffold boards and obviously the various stemples.

Since Dave had his trailer on site it was decided to load everything and remove from site for cleaning, sorting and disposing of rubbish etc. The entrance ladder/slide was also cleared from site (perhaps useful at Fernhill/Ducks Pot).

Clive then arrived followed closely by Gavin and so a welcome pint was had whilst Alex headed home.

A few photos attached.

Two showing the down stream view, one of which has the camera pouch for scale.

Dave.

Saturday 10th September

Fernhill Cave, Fairy Cave Quarry

Clive, Geoff, Richard, Simon (surface), Emma, Alex

Purpose of trip to inspect and agree on our new digging location. The session started in a most peculiar way - there were other people in the cave! Never happened at Rock Farm...

The team had a look at the two digging options suggested by Richard, one being to continue the main entrance rift at the bottom of the flowstone directly under the ladder, and the other being the parallel rift through the window on the other side of the ladder. The consensus was that both options were worth investigating as the parallel rift ends in a squeeze too tight for anyone present.

Everyone underground also made the short detour to view Curtain Chamber.

Plan for Wednesday is to remove the fixed ladder in the entrance shaft, and I think I've sourced a small enough caver to visit to take some pictures beyond the squeeze in the parallel rift.

Alex

Fernhill Wednesday 14th Sep 2022

Dave, Alex, Isaac (guest)

Alex and Isaac arrived first and visited curtain chamber as Isaac hadn't been in the cave before. Then we had a look at the side rift squeeze which Isaac fitted through relatively easily. The verdict from the other side was that there are no obvious options to continue digging in that direction from the chamber beyond that squeeze, with the majority of the floor of the chamber being flowstone.

Back at the shaft Dave had arrived so we set about removing the fixed ladder in the shaft. Ladder removed and hauled to surface (left near the entrance to be taken out the quarry at a later date). Next we measured how much rope will be needed to haul from the floor of the entrance rift to surface and lowered a selection of digging tools to the entrance rift.

Three buckets of spoil and a few rocks were cleared out from the bottom of the concrete rings, and the broken eyelet on the shaft collar was cut off and ground smooth.

The Oakhill Inn provided the post digging refreshments.

Alex

Fernhill - Saturday 17th September

Rich, Geoff and Clive plus latterly Dave and several cavers visiting the MNRC for tourist trips in the quarry.

Having installed the ladders and lowered down the new skips, haul-back lines etc Clive took Cave Cam into South Passage to get a look at what Isaac saw last week.

Unfortunately the memory card turned out to be almost full so the complete video survey was uncompleted but enough was recorded to see what was happening on the down-dip, right-hand side. See....

I will have another go to look to the left etc next time.

During this time Geoff had started digging in the floor at the bottom of the entrance rift, passing filled skips and large rocks through to Rich who was installed just inside South Passage. He then passed them onto Clive to stack on the rubble slope just beyond (which we had initiated some years ago).

By tea-break time a sizeable impression had been made in the floor under the overhanging wall. Its all broken rock from the quarry's infilling process mixed with flowstone slabs.

During tea-break on the surface Dave and his team arrived most of whom headed into the cave to admire Curtain Chamber, the deal being in exchange for some skiploads to be dragged to the surface. This was duly done and we achieved a 'bonus' 12 skips as a result.

Plans are afoot to rejig the belays for both upper and lower ladders and maybe to install a tripod at the entrance. Certainly a pulley will be needed to ease the hauling.

The rough plan is for lightly staffed Wednesday night sessions to stack in South Passage and when there is a bigger team (most likely perhaps at weekends) to haul to the surface.

Clive

Fernhill Cave - Wednesday 21st September Dave, Alex and Clive

Dave and Alex had enjoyed a pre-dig trip into W/L so met up with Clive in the quarry at the appointed hour.

At the cave Dave was happy to haul on the surface while Alex positioned himself at the bottom of the entrance tube. Clive initially took himself into South passage to have another go at the CaveCam video which had failed on the previous attempt. Unfortunately (!) the gremlins were at it again and no recording was made! This turned out to be due to the wrong file type being set on the memory card. Maybe third time lucky!

During the evening 40 skips were raised from the bottom of the entrance shaft to the surface, Clive enjoyed digging in a roomy place for a change! Where previously Geoff had been digging against the back overhanging wall I decided to concentrate close by at the western end of the rift and soon uncovered a slanting flowstone wall blocking the westerly continuation of the rift. By the end of the session the floor had been dropped about a foot over about a third of the floor area uncovering some major slabs. One of these exhibited a pair of plug and feather holes which were obviously upside down indicating that they must have been drilled prior to being dropped down the rift.

A very satisfying evenings work all in all, rounded off with a pint at the Oakhill where Gav joined us for a chinwag.

Due to a severe staff shortage there will be no digging on Saturday – a return will be made on Wednesday.....

Clive

28th September Fernhill Cave

Alex, Clive & Dave.

Dave arrived early with scaffold poles and clamps etc and set up a tripod over the entrance of Fernhill. When Alex and Clive arrived they headed down where Alex dug and filled the skips, Clive hauled from the ledge in the rift and guided the skips through to the entrance pipe,

Dave hauled and emptied skips on the surface. By 9:45pm 60 skips had been hauled out, this combined with the previous few digging sessions has made a not insignificant lowering of the floor of the rift.

The tripod with pulley mounted just above the entrance worked well and with no need to dismantle the tripod at the end of play, it was a relatively easy task to lift it away and store behind the entrance leaving Fernhill accessible to other cavers between digging sessions.

Finally a visit to The Oakhill where the trio were joined by the 'legendary' Duncan Price.

Further improvements:-

The addition of a winch mounted back from the entrance will aid surface hauling.

It's recommended that whoever is hauling/guiding skips from the ledge below the entrance pipe that they be attached to one of the in situ stemples.

The haul down rope (blue polyprop) be attached to the top of the skip on the same krab as hauling line. This will ease skip changing above and below.

A garden trowel or similar to scrap out residual mud from skips.

Dave.

Saturday 1st October Fernhill Cave

Clive, Rich, Emma, Geoff & Dave.

Tea and cakes were had before the start of the first session in Fernhill.

An unknown number of skips were hauled and emptied by Emma and Dave on surface, Rich guiding skips from the ledge whilst Geoff and Clive dug and loaded skips at the bottom. Before surfacing for tea Rich descended and broke up some of the calcite floor at the West end of the entrance rift revealing fine cave mud beneath.

Clive drilled, plug and feathered to reduce some larger rocks before joining the rest of the team on the surface for more tea and cake.

After tea Dave and Emma dug, filled and sent up skips whilst Clive guided from the ledge and Geoff and Rich hauled and emptied on the surface.

The spoil being dug out from the floor is still loosely packed with cavities between the rocks and rubble. A small wooden block came out from the floor measuring approx 60 x 60 x 60mm. We are therefore still digging through what has fallen in to Fernhill after the cave was first uncovered by quarrying. The continuation of the rift to the West is not without interest.

Dave.

Ps. I'm not available Sat 8th Oct but should be about the following Sat (15th)

Saturday 1st October Viaduct Sink

Geoff & Dave

With the decision made to call time on the current dig location and shift our activity to The Somme, it was time to relocate or bring out the kit. First task was to pack away the pump and plumbing etc that was previously left in case it was decided to pump out one last time. With pumping packed up and the lower reaches of the dig cleared a couple of 'tell tale' rocks were placed, one just breaching the water surface and the second just out of the water to indicate the current level. It will be interesting to see how the water level changes if at all after the diverted stream flow is returned to its original course.

Everything was cleared back to the entrance to The Somme where potentially useful kit was left whilst the rest was relayed out towards the surface. The Blue stream diverting pipe was repositioned towards the abandoned dig site so as to allow The Somme to drain out and perhaps dry out a little.

Geoff did a quick inspection at the far end of The Somme and reported shingle on the surface, just below which was mud silts.

A few items that could be carried across the fields back to Rock Farm were carried out to the surface with the balance stashed at the entrance to Dismal Series to await subsequent trips to bring out.

A relatively short trip leaving plenty of time to head over to Fernhill for lunch before the rest of the afternoon shift arrived.

Dave.

Weds 24/08/2022 Carrion Solo

A brief visit to try to do some tricky cementing in Bethlehem Pot while it is dry, but this did not work very well, trying to get some cement behind the strong 50mm square mesh & backfilling with smallish stones? Any Atlas suggestions welcome.

Cave was more drippy than usual due no doubt the recent rains but no surface water in Carrion feeder or Heale feeder. Down to the bottom to dig in Twopenny Rift and clear some spoil. This went okay, then moved one largish rock that will need drilling & P&F to split and pull up the rather constricted rift to the spoil stacking corner. As I had not brought my drill in this rather delayed this to the next visit. The bottom is muddy & rocky but the dig site has good air and some possible sightline options and there was a noticeable draft at the entrance pot today. A short session but useful. 1.75 hours

Monday, 3 October Carrion Slocker solo

I took the drill in etc to break up a large rock from the previous visit in Two penny rift. Below the pothole entrance on the first set steps was a lot of lumpy black mud (like lumps of dried compost) that must've fallen in from somewhere, I could not work out where from, but there were no rocks with it. So I cleared this to one side of the main access route. The surface of the field was very dry and even the stream all the way down to Heale sink was dry too, clearly not much rain on this area of Mendip. However, the cave was slightly drippy, so it must have taken some water at some time over the last two weeks. Otherwise, no changes or movements apparent in the cave. At the bottom of the cave I successfully plugged and feathered the large boulder and pulled the bits out, followed by another broken up in a similar drill/P&F fashion and another two. Then I deliberately dropped a boulder embedded in the roof by levering it out with a crowbar (from a safe distance Clive) to make more digging space. This was quite large and very heavy and due to its weird make-up and nature it was very hard to break up, so I did some more P&F and used up the drill battery leaving more to do next visit (Richard I used to think it was a good idea to start a dig in the Downhead Fault Line but some of the geology is pretty odd and even unpleasant). All the rock parts removed out above Two penny rift and a couple are skip loads of spoil too. Visually, I can now see down to the next level about 4 feet below; so more work to achieve safe access to this level (Oh, what would I give for a bit of stream passage...). A draft smoke test had most of the smoke being drawn into the lower level. Who knows?

Take care, regards Vagon

Fernhill - Wednesday 5th October Dave and Clive

There were two jobs for the evening – one was to improve the safety of the ledge between the two pitches by removing some of the sloping rock ledge. The other was to provide a new belay point for the lower ladder, on the opposite side of the concrete ring to the existing.

Dave soon fixed the new anchor and we can confirm the ladder hangs nice and freely now down the lower pitch avoiding the annoying left cleft on the side where intended to get caught up.

On the ledge, having secured ourselves to the ladder and the stemple, Clive started drilling plug and feather holes in the obvious bulge in the middle of the ledge. Dave attacked a large loose slab just above it and in doing so we produced a useful alcove. Some of the resulting rock is considered be a bit loose and it might need grouting.

Plug and feather wise Clive soon regretted having brought only his smaller set of P&Fs which proved to not being up to the job. Several more holes are drilled by both of us and much just chiselling ensued but at the end of the day it was agreed it really does need a small bang finish the job.

There is quite a bit of white rock dust on the rockface below the ledge now which we ought to try and wash off before it gets carried into the cave by visitors.

We have no Dave this Saturday but Geoff is around, who else??

For safety's sake it will be good to improve the ledge as soon as we can – maybe we can buy it this weekend as well as/instead of digging (depending on numbers)

Clive

Saturday 8 October 2022 His Lordship's Hole Andy Watson, Geoff Newton

Water levels were a little higher than last time but still not a problem. The air was good. The current limit of the dig for me is a mini-chamber accessed from the Screaming Lord Sutch Memorial Chamber by a choice of nasty squeezes. Alas Andy was unable to pass the

squeezes. First job of the day was to clear the spoil from two bangs from the mini-chamber to the Memorial Chamber. The hauling system already there was not up to the job, so we had to improvise. When this was complete, drilling and banging took place. Working conditions at the sharp end were atrocious so this took longer than expected.

I am provisionally calling the passage Monster Raving Loony Passage to continue the theme of Screaming Lord Sutch. Andy coped well and remained in good humour throughout.

When I get to where Mike Kushy got to (hopefully next visit) a decision will be made. If work continues beyond that we will put in a new hauling system and ease the squeezes into the mini-chamber. The advantage of higher water levels is that the mud you acquire at the dig gets partially washed off you during exit.

Cheers

Geoff

Viaduct Sink Friday 7 October Geoff Newton solo

With other plans falling through I ended up in Viaduct instead. The surface stream was very low. What little there was, was sinking in the stream bed well before the cave entrance. However, despite that there was still a slight trickle entering The Somme in two places.

Although there was no ponding up when I started digging, water soon filled up the cavity created by digging. This is going to mean that as we proceed with digging out The Somme it will once again become worthy of the name.

I filled a dozen or so bags with spoil and moved them with difficulty a little way along the passage. The spoil is a mixture of grey mud and assorted rubble. It would seem that once the spoil is dug out the passage will probably be passable without the need to bang.

I also redistributed some of the rubble in the early part of The Somme to make it a little less uncomfortable to crawl over and took out a couple of items no longer required.

I did not venture back to the old dig to examine water levels at the now terminal sump.

Geoff

Fernhill - Saturday 8th October Emma, Geoff, Rich and Clive

The first job of the day was to wash away the snowdrift of white rock dust left over from Wednesday nights session of chiselling – this was all over the face below the 'Naughty Step' ledge on the lower pitch and the fear was it would get transferred around the cave by the passing traffic.

Two large plastic containers borrowed from the MNRC, each half filled from the now returned pools in the quarry floor near the cave were lowered to Geoff on the ledge who poured them liberally over the offending patch and also the slippery, muddy ledge. The water smelled strongly of stagnant ponds apparently! Safety on the ledge has been much improved now but some more rock will need a small bang on Wednesday to finish the job.

Following this Rich and Emma dug at the bottom of the rift leaving Geoff on the ledge to guide the skips up to Clive hauling on the surface.

After the customary break for tea Emma and Rich took over the hauling while Geoff worked at the bottom with Clive on the ledge.

During the afternoon around 40 skips made their way to the surface.

The day ended with a lengthy battle with the cave lock to get it to close in the very confined space it occupies on the gate!

Clive

Fernhill - Wednesday 12th October Alex, Dave and Clive

A solid digging session with Alex at the face, Clive on the lower ledge and Dave hauling.

Efforts were concentrated on the cave-earth filled continuation of the rift towards the west. A really dry deposit which was easy to shovel out and by the end of the session 60 skips had made the way to the surface. Alex reported that the rift was narrowing at the top and the way 'on' appears to be at 45° down to the west.

After digging Clive drilled two short holes on the halfway ledge for a bang to provide a safer platform to work from. During the hauling session the ledge had become increasingly slippery due to the mud dropping out of the skip. A quick rinse with water from the pond cleaned it up considerably before the bang.

More fun on Saturday!

Sadly, at 9:45 we seemed to have been too late for the Oakhill. They seem to lock the doors about that time as we've noticed when we've been inside. The moral of the story no doubt - less digging more drinking!

Clive

Saturday 15th October Viaduct Sink

Dave (solo)

Despite the recent rain the stream was very low and sinking before it reached as far as the entrance.

At the now abandoned dig which is now taking the small stream flow from the waterfall via the blue plastic pipe, the water level had risen by approx 50mm above the level it always reverted to between pumping/digging sessions. It will be interesting to see how much the level rises as and when the flow increases.

At The Somme the dam of spoil filled bags had done an excellent job of creating a lake. Further in just before the dig face a 200mm deep pool of water had formed where the spoil had been dug from. Using the garden hoe it was possible to dig a trench ahead into the ongoing small streamway allowing the water from the pool to flow away. The mud/silt spoil pulled out with the hoe turned into gloop and soon filled the pool. With no prospect of digging the gloop until it settles and the water drains out attention was shifted to the dam of spoil filled bags. The bags were progressed in a couple of stages towards the low crawl near the start of The Somme. This allowed the lake behind the dam to drain away.

With it being too difficult to move the spoil any further out single handedly the available time was usefully spent improving access with skip hauling in mind. The floor consists of bang/digging debris from the early days. The floor was lowered and on a particularly awkward corner some of the shattered rock was easily chiselled off straightening out the corner slightly. This corner would benefit the attention from a small pop or plug-n-feathers. A few large rocks protruding from the floor were also removed. The displaced spoil and rocks were squirreled to the sides so as not to impede future skip hauling. Skip hauling will benefit from further lowering and grading of the floor plus removal of the bulge on the corner.

Exited bringing out the last of the redundant kit - drain rods, long filter assembly & priming pump.

Dave.

Ps. I'm not about for the probably the next three Saturdays, however I would be available for next Sunday (23rd) if that were an option.

Saturday 15th October

Fernhill Cave Dave (solo)

A visit to the ledge revealed that Wednesday's bang had done a good job. However this had left a lot of debris sitting precariously on the ledge. All four skips were filled with the smaller debris and stacked on the wooden platform/shelf to the East of the ledge ready for hauling out on Wednesday. Most of the larger rocks were relocated to the bottom of the entrance pipe leaving just one football size rock safely positioned on the ledge.

On the surface a quick measure up with thoughts of a shelter to protect the surface crew from the weather as winter approaches.

If short on numbers on this coming Wednesday two can still haul out the bang debris, drill hole in padlock box to ease locking and possibly work on surface shelter.

Dave.

Ps. Alex isn't available this Wednesday but will be for the following Wednesday (26th)

Pps. I'm not about for the probably the next three Saturdays, however I would be able to do next Sunday (23rd) if that were an option. Okay for Wednesdays.

Fernhill - Wednesday 19th October Dave and Clive – a 'maintenance' evening this week....

Dave had procured a very nice 3 x 3 m gazebo which we erected over the concrete slab area which will provide great cover for rain etc.

Having done that Clive nipped to the lower ledge to attach the four buckets of rocks and one big rock, left after the recent bang, to the rope for Dave to haul to the surface. The bang has now left a very nice flat, and much safer, surface to stand on.

An early finish and trip to the pub to meet up with Gav for a catch-up.

Dave and Geoff will be about on Sunday – I suspect that I better not as Janet has just tested positive for Covid (I haven't)....

Clive

Tuesday 18th October '22 Carrion Slocker Solo

The field surface was dry with no water flowing, I cleared the drainage channel of leaves and wandered over to Heal Farm Slocker/Sink and pulled out a few small rocks, this had a slight draft out, so a possible dig if I manage to get the farm's permission at some point.

In Carrion I took my drill, P&F down the ladder, Bethlehem Pot and right down to Two Penny Rift where I continued by stacking last week's broken boulders spoil neatly out of the way. Then continued drilling & P+F'ing to clear two more large and heavy boulders so I could see down the next short drop about 1 metre into a small body sized space. The access down to this is almost safe and clear for me to get down, next visit should do it and I will be able to investigate it further. So not quite full of eastern promise but still going down in the rather dodge Downhead Fault. Take care, regards Vogon

Dave King, Geoff Newton

Only a few days ago the surface stream was a trickle sinking upstream of the entrance. Today a powerful stream was flowing on down valley past the entrance and well past the Viaduct. In the cave, water was falling down Red and Downside Avens and the stream along the S-Bend crawl gave us a good washing down before making a waterfall just before the Bridge. Back at the old dig Dave estimated the water has backed up a foot deeper and foam filled the passage.

Dave spent much of the time plug and feathering an obstructive corner in The Somme, whilst Geoff filled bags with spoil at a rather damp dig face. He attempted to rake back spoil (mostly mud) from under the notch in the roof ahead to drain the sump as much as possible.

They then combined to take out the accumulated bags of spoil from the previous visits out to Somme Junction before time ran out. Then back to Rock Farm for lunch.

Geoff

Sunday 23 October (pm) Balch Cave Dave & Geoff

A rather tardy report on Sunday afternoon. With only the two of us present it was decided that working Fernhill Cave would be difficult. Dave decided to attempt to remove tackle and tools from the head of John Walsh's (Welsh's?) Pitch / Passage in Balch Cave. Also, an opportunity to give Geoff a first visit to the cave. The plan was to enter by the top entrance, taking a ladder to descend the pitch, then back up the pitch to then remove the in-situ tackle and tools, finally taking them out of the bottom entrance.

The passage below the pitch was flooded for what Dave assures me is a considerable depth so we did not get to the end. The in-situ tackle was well rusted-in and it was not possible to remove the tackle with the tools already there in the BDH. So, another visit will be necessary with larger tools or even an angle grinder. So, we just took out the ladder, BDH and tools.

The exit through Pool Passage was more aqueous/sporting than usual.

Geoff

Fernhill - Wednesday 26th October Dave, Alex and Clive

As Alex had agreed to an evening on the 'new improved' half-way ledge and Dave was happy hauling Clive availed himself of a chance to have a good look at the bottom and enjoy an evenings muddy digging.

More time spent clearing at the base of the western wall where we were hoping that a diggable continuation of that rift might be possible. Sadly this has turned out to not be the case as there is solid rock, as opposed to flowstone, blocking any way in that direction.

Digging down into the floor at the base of the western wall turned up a rich deposit of very fine grained sand/silt. About a foot down there was a distinct colour change from dark to light coloured sand with a thin band of black staining between. A few inches further down I was surprised to find a lot of small quartz pebbles (up to about 2 cm across) mixed in with the sand along with some lumps of stratified sandstone. Below this was a thick deposit of the blackened pebbles with some loose lumps of what can only be described as a very hard pebble conglomerate. Further digging back towards where we have been previously working at the base of the shaft showed an extensive deposit of these pebbles and conglomerate.

I get the impression that this deposit may well extend well across the floor of the main part of the rift which means the leftover accumulated quarry rubble may not be that thick after all. It might also mean of course that they continuation downwards in the rift may be filled with this pebble and sandstone deposit.

On the left side looking into the 'western wall' dig you can now clearly see the original waterworn rock face with a canopy of flowstone above it where the sand has been removed.

Re digging on Saturday – no Dave, only Geoff and Clive at the moment. Need a third at least to make it work!

Clive

Viaduct Sink Saturday 29 October Geoff N solo

Strangely after the extremely wet conditions the previous weekend and the continuing rain during the week, the surface stream was back to summer levels and not flowing on down valley past the entrance and Red and Downside Avens were dry.

Just pottering about, given the shortage of empty spoil bags. Four bags of spoil taken out to Downside Aven, most of the other full bags moved a little nearer. Six empty bags filled and taken a little way up passage in The Somme.

The streamlet in The Somme was still flowing. Took Dave's long bar to the end and probed about a bit. It would seem that the choked passage ahead is bearing slightly right and still descending slightly. Back to Rock Farm for lunch.

Geoff

Fernhill Cave Saturday 29 October Clive, Rich, Geoff

Clive hauling and emptying, Rich on the Naughty Step, Geoff digging & loading.

What a difference the Wednesday session has made. Last weekend the spoil was rubble embedded in sticky clay. This time the spoil was rounded pebbles in sandy cave earth and occasional rocks under a crust of lightly cemented breccia. The rocks were not taken out but just stacked to one side.

Clive estimated 50 loads were taken out. This leaves a bit of a pit. In the floor of the pit lies something which may be a very large rock - in which case it will need exposing and popping. Alternatively, it could be solid rock in which case we will need to dig a little further east.

At Rich's request a late tea was taken after which we went home. We are beginning to get the hang of the closing the awkward lock on the entrance.

Geoff

Fernhill - gazebo/pseudo Ferret Shed/shelter

No digging activities tonight so not really a digging report.

Dave - solo visit to entrance.

Due to the weather and the need to possibly batten down hatches closer to home, the evening's digging session was cancelled.

Apparently on Saturday the gazebo was a little animated in the wind so Dave visited the quarry to ensure the wind wasn't going to get the better of it.

Initially parked in the car park but then relocated down the lane a little since the trees on the bank above the car park were being buffeted quite a bit in the gusting winds.

The gazebo was secured by tying it down to the various buddleia bushes.

Dave.

Tuesday 1st November 2022 Carrion Slocker Solo

Quite some rain in East Mendip, but not enough to get the surface flowing for the Heale stream or for Carrion swallet. I cleared some leaves out of the surface drainage gully and then went down to Two Penny Rift with my drill and plug & feathers. After clearing last visits boulders away neatly, I went to the bottom of the dig and slithered into the new bit about 1m x 0.5 m x 1 m deep which was not very inspiring, but it has a constant trickle of water, where I have not seen much water before and the upper sections of the cave are usually mostly dry. The air is good and after clearing some mud banks and removing some rocks and drilling/P&F'ing one large boulder into three pieces I could see into the continuing downward sloping rift, but it is very small up to about 1 foot wide and about 1 m long not very high. More clearance and drilling might improve the access. The floor of the rift is of washed clean rocks and I pulled out two reasonable sized grey Carboniferous water worn lumps giving me some hope. This whole cave, which I think is along the line of the Downhead Fault line seems to be a boulder ruckle with occasional small chambers, even though I am now a long way down. I think that 2 to 3 more digging sessions will decide if this is the end of the cave, I suspect. Interestingly, I think the cave is going westward rather than eastward like Heale Farm Cave at its lower reaches.

Take care, Vagon

Fernhill - Saturday 5th November Geoff, Gerek (discovered by Geoff at the Wessex!), Rich and Clive

On arrival we were surprised to find that we couldn't get into the Fernhill car park as there appeared to be a key broken inside the padlock. Changing on the roadside became the order of the day.

Before digging commenced Clive showed Gerek the delights of Curtain Chamber.

Digging began with Clive at the bottom, Rich on the 'Naughty Step' and Geoff and Gerek looking after the surface hauling.

In the dig attention was focused on the eastern side of the little pit we've been digging, working our way across and under the remains of the tipped quarry rubble. Just a few inches under the rubble there is a flowstone layer a couple of inches thick, badly cracked obviously by the quarry rubble being tipped on top of it. Beneath that again is the sand and stream pebble fill.

A fair amount of the compacted clay and rubble was removed before a break for tea and a change of team. Geoff took over at the bottom with Gerek ensconced on the ledge and Clive and Richard hauling on the surface. In all an estimated 40-ish skips were hauled up.

The plan is to continue exposing more of the floor area before pushing downwards through the sand and pebble choke. There is one large tipped rock in particular which will need plug and feathering soon.

A return is planned on Wednesday.

Clive

Viaduct Sink Saturday 5 November Gerik Rhoden, Geoff Newton

The original intention was to do Lordships Hole, but Andy Watson had to cry off with a stinking cold. Gerik is a Wessex member living in Leicestershire. He turned up at the Wessex on spec, only to find it rammed with fresher University groups and me the only other member staying there. With conditions likely to be wet, Viaduct was a marginally better option than Lordships.

Sure enough, the surface stream was flowing on down valley past the entrance and there was a lot of water coming down both Red and Downside Avens and a decent size stream flowing down the S-Bend Crawl. Alas, with hardly any empty bags available to fill with spoil, it was necessary to take the full bags of spoil stashed at Somme Junction out to Downside Aven before any digging could be done. Emptying the bags in the Aven got me soaked to the skin and Gerik was not much drier as we both had to negotiate the stream in the crawl.

Two bags of bags were then taken back through the S-Bend Crawl and one bag of bags taken to the end of the Somme where Gerik filled them with mud using the hoe. He confirmed what I found last time that the ongoing passage is bearing a bit right and has a lot of mud fill. We then started the process of moving bags out, but I called a halt about half an hour time ran out, as we were both very wet and hungry and I for one was verging on hypothermia. Gerik then took a quick look at the old dig and the foam-covered sump pool. Lunch at Rock Farm was taken in our cars as it was raining heavily. Fun, fun, fun. Gerik was then lured to Fernhill Cave with promises of a dry dig and pretties to look at.

Geoff

Wednesday 9th November Fernhill Cave

Alex, Clive & Dave (Tav later in Oakhill)

Fernhill - Wednesday 9th November Dave digging.

Alex and Clive hauling from ledge and on surface, Swapping round at half time.

Total of 65 skips hauled, mix of rocks and mud.

The hole in the floor of approx 1m in diameter and 0.75m depth (in addition to the already lowered floor) appears to have a floor of either bedrock or a very large boulder. Plus a large rock filling approx 1/4 of the floor that sounds less connected when tapping with lump hammer. The very large boulder that used to be part of the ledge may need reducing unless useful as a foundation for shoring/wall building as we progress North towards the rift wall and East towards the Main Chamber.

Re-hydration in the Oakhill followed, joined by Tav.

In other news, new bearings purchased for the old Thrupe Swallet winch and rebuilding will follow shortly. The winch frame that was stored behind the Ferret Shed is currently now in Midsomer Norton waiting for the winch drum assembly to be rebuilt and attached.

Dave.

Tuesday 10th of November Carrion Slocker solo

1.5 hours, very rushed trip to the bottom of the cave and back. The cave was slightly wet with a small amount of flowing water right among the pebbles at the bottom of the new section at the end of Two Penny Rift. Back to very muddy slopes at the bottom, some mud banks, the roof is okay in the new section but there's not very much room. With some big boulders to break up to access the small ongoing stream passage at floor level. These boulders are a strange mixture of Carboniferous one side with a wide scrappy facing rock of some 6 inch depth on one side with both sections being strongly joined together. After P & F one of these breaking off four large lumps the Carboniferous surface inside has some Asham Wood type quartz flowers inside which suggests some volcanic activity at some point. Not very nice digging now being rather muddy in a small space with no friends, but a good work de-stressor activity after a tough work week and on the bright side, the air in the cave is still very good. I rush to get out as I set my ETO too early and I was only five minutes over, so Sue had not called others yet! Very slight surface stream flow in field after the recent heavy showers.

Andy W

Saturday 12th of November 2022 at His Lordship's Hole with Geoff and again on Saturday 19th of November when took a short ladder extension and added this to the entrance ladder, this needs a smaller carabiner to fit better (next visit).

Andy W

Saturday 12 November Fernhill Cave Clive, Richard, DaveK, TonyL, Dave Tuffery

Richard met a father and his two sons out walking and kindly gave them a guided tour of the quarry. While we were changing a couple of climbers drove into the car park and DaveK had to explain that it was only for cavers and would shortly be locked. They were fine and went off to park in a nearby layby.

And so to the Digging

Before tea DaveK Digging, DaveT Loading, Richard Ledge, Clive & Tony Hauling on the surface. After tea and stickie's enjoyed in the late afternoon sun watching the climbers, Clive digging, Tony Ledge and the remainder hauling.

An estimated 60 skips of mixed load were hauled out and the large rock mentioned in previous reports was relocated to higher in the cave. I will leave the description of the face and the new location of said rock to someone who was at the front.

An observation from an occasional digger, i.e. Tony. Before anyone takes on the hauling role it would be good for them to do a stint on the ledge to understand the intricacies of the haul. Today Tony nearly cost Richard a trip to the dentist when he failed to control the downward skip and Clive received a painful blow to the knee from a fortunately small falling rock. The rock was tipped from the skip along with some of its friends when the skip flew past Tony on the ledge and caught on the scaffolding at the bottom of the entrance pipe. Someone had their Weetabix this morning.

Tony

Alex, Dave and Clive

Fernhill - Wednesday 16th November A very wet evening but the dynamic trio were undeterred!

Clive digging, Dave on ledge duty and Alex hauling before a half time changeover of Dave and Alex.

At the bottom more progress was made in pushing back to the east through the rubble and clag pile whilst favouring the back wall and leaving the route to the rest of the cave untouched. More of the sloping original flowstone floor was uncovered and followed back to its junction with the back wall. Various controlled collapses of the pile occurred and another really large rock uncovered – again with a couple of plug and feather holes visible.

Its quite interesting to see that immediately on top of the flowstone 'floor' is a 6-8in layer of clean shattered stal fragments which are presumably the result of the original quarry blast which opened the cave. On top of that is the mass of broken rock and clag later tipped into the hole.

We are making good progress although the further to the east we go the deeper the pile of material to shift. There may well come a time when we will need to stabilise the route to the rest of the cave by grading the slope with rock and grout for security.

A total of 60 skips were taken out again despite the slippery hauling rope. We are looking forward to the arrival of the winch which Dave is working on!

Clive

Rich, Clive, Geoff

Fernhill Cave Saturday 19 November Clive hauling, Rich on Naughty Step, Geoff Digging & Loading

Approx. 40 (?) skip loads sent out before the rope became too slippery to grip. A winch would be much appreciated. A slightly early tea was taken before we left.

Rather than continuing to dig deeper, most of the spoil removed was taken from the floor, digging in the direction of the faint alcove in the North wall. This exposed a false stal. floor extending up to the wall. I think it unlikely that an audible voice connection was made through a thick calcite floor.

If you stand in the dig and look East along the wall a gap of 6 between 6 and 10 inches can be seen between the wall and the heap of quarry infill. The wall is seen to be severely undercut looking ahead. All this is consistent with the alleged connection with Duck's Pot being further East.

There are grounds for cautious optimism, but we will I think have to remove a mountain of quarry infill before we can start to dig down.

Geoff

His Lordship's Hole Saturday 19 November Andy Watson, Geoff Newton

Andy brought along 2 short lengths of builders' ladder and his plug & feather kit. Andy connected the shorter of the ladders to the existing ladder in the entrance tube to improve access. Geoff brought along a long-handled draw hoe.

Whilst Geoff started to clear the spoil from the last bang, Andy started to enlarge the squeeze into the mini-chamber by plug and feather. The spoil was then taken into the Screaming Lord Such Memorial Chamber with the help of the draw hoe and stacked.

Geoff was then able to get closer to where Mike Kushy got 4 years ago. The way on could be seen to be an immature tube in solid rock. Digging out the floor is unfortunately not on. This means an extensive banging campaign will be needed to progress further.

Given the atrocious conditions for banging and the finite stacking space in the main chamber it is unlikely that we will pursue this further.

Probably the next step is to carry out a survey of sorts of the cave and further enlarge the squeeze into the mini-chamber so that Andy can take a look.

Assuming we cease digging, there is a massive clearance needed of the accumulated digging equipment and detritus left by the previous diggers. This will require a large team and someone with a trailer and would be best carried out in a relatively dry spell of weather.

Geoff

Wednesday 23rd November Fernhill Cave

Clive and Dave

A small team of just two meant hauling spoil to the surface wasn't an option, so tripod and rope not required.

As suggested in an earlier email digging continued along the north wall above the calcite floor stacking the spoil in the west end of the rift. A wall of approx 1.2m was built to hold back the spoil that will subsequently be buried as we advance eastwards repeating the process. A large quantity of spoil has been shifted further exposing the north wall and the calcite floor which has is now dipping more steeply down. When a larger team available freshly dug spoil can be hauled out to the surface.

The spoil being dug out consists of distinctly different types of infill. At the bottom laying on the calcite floor are large blocks of limestone and calcite flowstone with smaller clean infill between. Above and between the blocks and north wall the infill is very sticky/claggy mud with fist size rocks. A narrow layer between the mud and the north wall consists of clean rocks ranging in size between 100 - 200mm.

The large blocks including 300mm thick calcite blocks are probably as a result of quarry blasting. The next layer of claggy mud is probably the overburden muds from when the quarry was extended to the east, and the final clean rocks fallen in after.

The large blocks are too big to easily move but may be undermined as the dig progresses - caution required. They could be useful foundation blocks to hold back the remaining un-dug infill towards the south wall, or they may need to be reduced if all the floor towards the Main Chamber requires digging out.

As usual to finish a Wednesday evening a visit to the Oakhill joined by Gavin, where even though we were the last to leave we hadn't outstayed our welcome and no keys were jangled.

Dave.

Ps. No digging this Saturday 26th Nov.

Fernhill - Wednesday 30th November Dave and Clive (plus Tav & Gav in pub)

Another very productive session involving no hauling to the surface. The initial tip area at the western end of the rift was soon filled and a new wall built for the next tipping area about a metre towards the east.

With Dave digging and Clive on spoil tipping duty very good progress was made despite the incredible sticking quality of clag! Various run ins from the increasingly high talus slow enlivened proceedings as the evening wore on.

After a change over of digger Clive soon opened up an open hole against the overhanging solid left-hand wall where one could see down for around 6 feet with a gap of around 6 to 8 inches. Clean broken slabs of rock and flowstone with no sign of clag could be seen.

For safety's sake we are removing the overburden of clag and quarry scalplings first to give us clear and safe access to the pile of large boulders and rocks below. Luckily these are all completely clean and will be a delight to work on compared with the clag we are shifting at the moment!

When all the loose mud and rocks are cleared I will obviously be a considerable depth of broken rock to be removed bearing in mind we can already see down for another 6 feet.

On Saturday when we expect only Dave, Clive and Rich we can all work at the bottom without resorting to surface hauling.

Dave aims to bring some fresh clean skips as, despite all our efforts cleaning the existing ones with a trowel, they tend to resemble heavy muddy lumps! A round nosed trowel is needed as well rather than the pointy one we have been using.

It has to be said that we have very welcoming bar staff at the Oakhill who now seem very happy to lock the door after the other customers have left but leave us in peace. Some 'table service' was even enjoyed last night! So ATLAS members who fancy a drink but not a dig (can't imagine there's many like that!) would find it's a very agreeable place to join us.

Clive

FERNHILL CAVE Saturday 3 December 2022

Dave, Clive and Rich

After RW had planted a small oak sapling on the plateau adjacent to the cave, all three descended to the dig face. The inviting depths were left alone in favour of removing more of the overburden which was relocated to the western end behind stone retaining walls. The bottom of the pitch is now back to its pre-2022 level. The digging has reached a point where it may undermine the stone and concrete wall on the right of the approach to the main chamber. Thought will have to be given to temporarily shoring this area. It also means that the main chamber is currently out of bounds for fear of precipitating a significant collapse of the fill, although in any event the probable presence of black moths precludes winter visits.

A tea break was taken underground in conditions more clement than the cold of the surface. Before leaving, RW peered into the holes in the floor and thought that he detected a slight outward draught.

Another session next Wednesday I imagine.

Rich

Fernhill - Wednesday 7th December Alex, Dave, Clive

A good session spent in the relative warmth of the cave. Before any digging we installed some support to the spoil wall being undermined on the right heading toward main chamber. This was done by drilling 2 holes under the wall, and hammering in 10mm steel bar to support the wall above, the same technique successfully deployed at Rock Farm. Small rocks were used as wedges between the bar and stacked wall for now, to be replaced with proper wooden ones.

Digging then proceeded toward main chamber with the spoil being stacked at the other end of the rift, so quick progress was made. Two more support bars were installed as the dig face progressed toward main chamber. The dig is exposing a lot of large clean boulders with space between, but the clag above still needs removing as it keeps collapsing onto the digger.

We were joined in the Oakhill by Tav, Gavin and Duncan.

Alex

Fernhill - Saturday 10th December Geoff, Dave and Clive

A very productive session.....

Pre-teabreak – Dave and Geoff excavating carefully around the eastern end of 'the pit' removing loose clag and rocks and exposing much more of the extremely large boulder which is, luckily, securely jammed across the rift against the two walls. As worked progressed it became clear that below and just beyond this rock is what we are pretty confident is a flowstone encrusted solid wall running roughly at right angles to the rift. It is also angled towards us indicating that we may have hit the 'back' of a pit rather than the rift continuing on towards the main chamber.

The third tip wall soon gained greatly in height and Clive could barely keep up with the stream of filled skips.

Post-teabreak (underground!) – as as much material that could be safely removed from around the mega rock had been removed Clive enjoyed clearing some of the clean, shattered flowstone blocks etc from against the overhanging main wall. There is a very significant rift cut into this wall with just loose rocks filling it and we have high hopes that this could be a significant lead.

A lot of big slabs were removed and will be saved for possible steps etc in the future. Plans were laid for a stemple to be fixed next Wednesday from a very handy ledge on the overhanging side across to pick up the edge of the now seriously undercut concreted wall on the opposite side.

Looking good!

Clive

Viaduct Sink Saturday 10 December Geoff (plus Dave on surface only)

Water levels on the surface and in the cave were quite high despite the spell of dry freezing weather, Geoff filled a bag of bags with spoil from the face. Couldnt be bothered to count them. The dig had not drained much in the three weeks since he was last there. So did not try to push further forward but concentrated on making the working area more user friendly. Also moved a couple of large rocks to improve access. The passage ahead does seem to be getting lower and wider which is not good news.

Finally on the way out incorporated the few rocks lying on the floor of Downside Aven into the retaining wall. The intention is soon to raise the retaining wall by 6-9 inches as it is in danger of being overwhelmed. Next job?

Met Dave on the surface as I emerged. He came armed with blow lamp and gear oil to fettle the padlock which had become extremely difficult to close. This has done the trick for now..

Then on to Fairy Cave Quarry for lunch.

Geoff

Fernhill - Wed 14th December

Clive & Dave

Dave headed in a little early and took some photos joined shortly after by Clive.

First task after photos was to support further the cemented rock supporting wall. This was achieved by pulling out a bit more spoil to find that the rock wall at that end is not attached/cemented to the South wall but instead a void filled with mud and rock chippings. Due to the distance away from the wall of the rift a rod only inserted into a drilled hole would not offer enough support, so instead a 2m long 22mm pipe was used. A pocket hole drilled in the rift wall beneath the cemented rock wall and the pipe inserted, the other end of which ran across the rift to sit on a ledge on the opposite (North) wall - see photo. An additional slab of rock wedged between pipe and floor to help prevent flexing. A plan to install a steel rod/tie bar from the roof to support the pipe and render the ledge and slab redundant.

A number of skip loads of spoil were then removed and tipped behind the 3rd retaining wall before exiting to a very chilly night followed by the usual visit to the Oakhill with no addition guest appearances.

Photo info:-

Latest support - the red line indicates where a long 22mm diameter tube has been installed to help support the old cemented rock wall, the left-hand end is supported on the opposite (North) wall and an additional slab added between tube and floor.

In situ calcite flow is in it's original near vertical position when formed and will hopefully mean progress can be made down between it and the East calcite slope in front of the 3rd spoil retaining wall.

Huge boulder - originally fell from roof long before overburden closed the cave in the 60's, very secure and will provide a roof to dig beneath and to build upon to re-support the old cemented rock support wall.

Down the North wall - A cleft in the North wall heading down at approx 45 deg for at least 1.5m between the East and West calcite slopes.

Cemented wall underpinned - 10mm rods drilled into wall, stone wedges now replaced with wooden wedges.

3rd West spoil retaining wall - at the the foot of which is where the calcite floor deeps more steeply.

Looking East - Huge boulder circled red, supported cemented rock wall circled green.

Dave.

Ps. I'm not available this Saturday, but will endeavour to fabricate tie rod for pipe support that can then be installed on Saturday.

An addendum to Dave's report - we also fitted a timber 'prop', braced from a convenient ledge on the north wall, picking up the edge of the undercut cemented wall opposite to reinforce the steel rods previously fitted.

Clive

Dec 15th Atlas Christmas dinner was held at the Hunter's

Fernhill Wednesday 21st December Alex and Clive (Tav on pub support)

A very useful evening spent plug n feathering some of the larger rocks that had been accumulating and getting in the way. As a result the retaining wall of the tip gained some height and a set of 'steps' were constructed to enable us to get in and out of the dig area more easily.

A plan to install a bit of extra support for the overhanging cemented wall had to be abandoned when we found the bracket that Dave had so carefully made up was a few inches too short. This I suspect was due to mix-up in measuring technology (ie length of a drill rod!) Moral - invest in a tape measure!

Clive is away next Wed – I don't know if Dave or Alex plan a visit. I should be around on Saturday 31st as far as I know.....

Merry Christmas to all our readers!

Clive

Friday, 16 December 2022 Carrion Slocker solo

2 hours down to the bottom of Two Penny Rift to dig and drill. Surface has light snow that has settled, no water flow into the swallet but it has had some water at some point as the drainage feeder channel was full of leaves, these I cleared out. Some drips throughout the cave and below the Trap Door in the sloping bedding chamber there was evidence of some slight water flow that had washed a small floor channel clean. Noticeably, a strong cold outward draft in Bethlehem Pot with no wind on the surface just very cold outside at -2°C. Drilled, P & F the large boulder again but lost a feather in the boulder in one of the drilled holes (bring in tools next time to try and retrieve this). Some parts of the boulder had broken off and I stacked near the top of Two Penny Rift. Quite hard digging now is not much space and pretty muddy albeit the air is good. One bat seen roosting at the bottom of Bethlehem Pot in a side crevice.

Andy W

Wednesday 28th of Dec 2022 Carrion Slocker solo

After a short Christmas break from digging I escape for an afternoon to see if I could retrieve the feather lost in a boulder during the last visit (to no avail). So East Mendip is pretty wet now and Heale stream sink point was taking a good surface stream flow.

Carrion's locker was also taking a good flow off the old red sandstone Hill. I cleared the drainpipe grill first as it was blocked with leaves and hazel twigs, this enabled the water to flow through the drainage system into Nazareth rift, rather than overflow down the path and to appear in Bethlehem pot. So I took in the drill and some 'feather' retrieval long nose pliers. The main entrance was drippy, Bethlehem pot was a light shower bath, Tombstone rift was damp, the Fiat 500 Rift climb down was drippy and the Store Room was taking most of the drainage water flow being very wet. This flow also created a heavy shower bath in the number one sitting room and subsequently this resulted in a strong floor flow in the number two sitting room down through and around the trapdoor through the sloping bedding chamber and under what was the old Boulder Bridge (now dropped to the floor) and more water also joined from the southern Inlet passage and all the water went down two Penny rift into my dig at the end/lowest point without backing up. I drilled, P & F, the rest of the large boulder into bits and pulled these up to 2 Penny rift to the spoil stacking area and also dug out smart rock out of the floor any geologist would love. Wave/water/sandstone with grey Carboniferous limestone cemented to it with solution holes in this field with fossilised sediment by the looks of it. It was very hard bringing it out of the cave but it will need a wash to see it's true composition and make up. Out soaked through after 2 ¼ hours.

I have not seen Carrion Slocker Cave this wet for some time; I previously noted some slight water signs (foam) near the end during October 2021 and prior flow noted Dec 2020 and Dec 2019-Jan 2020. Interestingly, the direction of the water in our dig is flowing to the south, whereas the direction of the water in Heale Farm Cave is more easterly. So unless we find an open rift lower down on the Downhead Fault line and the water doubles back on itself there may be two drainage directions here.

Take care, Vogon

Paul apologies re dates/catch-ups please sequence as appropriate with the other dig reports, hope you had a good Christmas

Geoff Newton Solo

Viaduct Sink & Rock Farm Cave 31.12.22 (am)

Surface stream was high but not flooding. The avens in the cave were very wet. A bits & pieces session with transport of spoil from the face not being an option.

First built up the retaining wall in Downside Aven which was in danger of being overwhelmed.. Used slabs from the back fill of Gas Chamber.. Then moved the bang reel from The Toolshed to Somme Junction. There were 4 bags of spoil at Somme Junction. These were taken to Downside Aven and emptied there. Got rather wet there. The empty bags were taken to The Somme face and two were filled before time ran out. Then took out a spare large drag bucket out to the entrance series.

Emerged to find the surface stream turning cloudy and starting to flood.

Rock Farm Cave

The stream entering at the foot of the Staircase was very high. The Bucket Pitch was not for the faint-hearted. The back filled bedding plane could only take about half the water, the rest poured down the Rift. There was indeed a roar emanating from streamway at the end of Rift window. However this was not very informative as the whole cave was roaring! We need to visit when the stream is fairly high but not high enough to overflow down the rift.

Then off for lunch at the Fairy Cave Quarry Car Park

Geoff

Fernhill Cave Saturday 31 December 2022

Geoff, Dave, Richard ? (MNRC) and Rich

A wet day which only got wetter. Everyone to the floor of the rift where an assessment of prospects and stability took place. Dave intended to install his ironwork but discovered that he had left it in the car. He nobly made his way out of the cave and back to the car park but failed to locate it in the car - bugger!

Back in the cave, Rich laid the first few foundation stones of the new wall which is intended to pick up the old wall, now hanging on a few rebars. These rocks will be grouted and a concrete and rock structure built on top. Judicious digging and debris tidying took place, with walling rocks stockpiled. Work came to a halt when Geoff started to undermine himself, and by extension, the rest of us. We must not forget that the Duck's Pot aven is probably somewhere beneath our feet!

The entrance shaft was full of very heavy drip on our exit, and the approach lane was almost a river. Incidentally, contractors (presumably on Hobbs orders) have been working and fencing in the woods on the western side of the lane. There is now a new entry track and gateway. Perhaps forestry work is going to take place.

Happy New Year to all our readers.

Rich