

Wednesday 4th January 2023 Fernhill Cave

Paul Quinton & Dave

A short session to finally install the tie rod to help support the pipe beneath the undercut wall. A little tweaking of it will be required with a couple of ring spanners rather than the cumbersome adjustable spanner. Whilst Dave installed the tie rod Paul inspected the way on down and selected a few more suitable walling rocks.

Back on the surface four sacks were filled with gravel and carried up to the entrance along with the four pressure washed hauling skips.

With the evening's tasks completed and it being Paul's first visit to the quarry there was time for a quick tour of the quarry and its cave entrances before ending the evening in the Oakhill joined by Gavin.

On Saturday cementing, grouting and wall building is on the agenda to permanently support the undercut wall.

Dave.

Thursday 5th Jan 2023 Carrion Slocker solo (2hrs)

Not raining today but the Heale stream sink was flowing well but surprisingly Carrion Slocker feeder stream was not flowing at all in the field or down our 4 inch drain. I only found a small flow at the bottom of Two Penny Rift, where a small squirt flow came from behind the large flowstone boulder. I drilled, P&F the rest of the two large boulders and cleared these rocks back to the bedding before the rift. I started to loosen two more that will need breaking up, and another one slipped down from the back wall along with some mud revealing a 3 inch hole in the roof space with a small space/passage above. The water sinking on the floor in the small space still flows to the south.

Notes: Heale Farm Cave water and most likely Heale Sink water both flow North and are known to feed towards Seven Springs in Asham Wood and the Westdown Quarry borehole. So unless Carrion's water is interrupted by the Downhead Fault (a possible rift?) and flows back towards Heale Farm Cave currently it seems to flow away to the South towards All Hallows School and the A361 direction, perhaps along a fault line in the southerly direction or it may be interrupted somewhere and drain into the Merehead Quarry Torr Works area. Only time will tell.

Take care, Vagon.

FERNHILL CAVE Saturday 7 January 2023

Dave, Geoff, Rich and Clive

A large amount of walling kit and materials were transported over to the cave using Clive's wheelbarrow. Dave and Rich went to the bottom, Geoff moved up and down "mid shaft", and Clive stayed on the surface on concrete production duties.

After Dave had fettled his far end wall support, he and Rich set to building the stone/stal and concrete wall on the south side of the rift. Getting buckets of cement to the bottom was a bit of a trial, but by the end of the session, the right-hand section of new wall had met and picked up the old wall.

A short break had been taken underground for all except Clive who was in quarantine on the surface (ensconced in a folding chair).

Work will continue on Wednesday and next Saturday.

Rich

His Lordship's Hole Saturday 7 January Geoff Newton Solo

The plan was to test the feasibility of chiselling with the Bosch as opposed to drilling and banging.

I took the kit in. However a sensible person would have looked more closely at the Bosch beforehand. Alas the Bosch has drilling and hammer/drilling settings but no hammer only setting and so cannot be used to chisel!!

I am still optimistic that the rock is soft enough to yield to battery powered chiselling but it wont be with my drill.

I took a second look at the face (with helmet off) and am more optimistic than on my last visit. I will be returning to attempt to drill more holes near the sharp end and if this proves to be practical they will be filled and banged in due course.

There was a stream flowing into the entrance depression, resulting in a waterfall down the pitch and making the crawls rather damp and sporting, so I exited with a reasonably clean oversuit.

Cheers

Geoff

His Lordship's Hole Saturday 7 January 2023 am

Hi Geoff,

I was at MCRA meeting on Sunday morning with Paul Stillman and on the way back popped into the entrance pipe to sort the chains/krabs arrangement with the ladder extension and swap these for screwup mailons it hangs better and is neater now, these should bed in okay, just check next time if they are still done up okay on the screw threads, if okay they will eventually rust up okay. exited with wet coat & jeans.

Andy

Wednesday 11th January 2023

Fernhill.

Alex and Dave.

Five bags of gravel and container of water carried up to the entrance before descending Fernhill. Plug and feather kit deployed on a few of the larger slabs of calcite at the East end from beneath the huge secure boulder. A few of the calcite slabs were stacked to create a platform for Rich to stand on whilst walling which in theory negated the need to lower the old steel ladder down the cave.

With a little time to spare thoughts turned to what else could be usefully done. It was decided to clear some of the small gravel/mud infill on top of the walkway/ledge between the west end spoil retaining wall and where the new walling is progressing. The idea being to be able to better assess the size and stability of the large rocks to assist in formulating the future plan of action after the east end wall building is finished. After scooping out a couple of skips worth of gravel and mud that we have previously been walking on, the large inclined (approx 45 deg) slab measuring 1m + decided to shift, although it only moved a few inches this was still significant. It became apparent that the only reason it hadn't slipped previously was probably a combination of 'it didn't know it could move' and the stiction properties of the small amount of infill clinging to it from above. Quite how or why it hadn't previously moved with it being used as a walkway is a bit of a mystery. On balance it's probably fortuitous that it moved last night rather than when someone stood on it.

Thoughts then turned to what to do with it. A few large slabs were positioned below and near the spoil retaining wall as a partial attempt to prevent it slipping further. The rocks that were sitting on the steeply inclined south wall were relocated and will be useful for the wall building and infill behind. The steel ladder was then lowered down and positioned bridging across the rift sitting on a ledge on the north wall and leaning on the south wall. The ladder offers a good solid step across and avoids the need to step on the unstable inclined slab.

Gavin then joined us in the Oakhill for the usual well earned beverages.

Dave.

His Lordship's Hole Saturday 14 January Geoff N Solo

With the roads awash it was not surprising that this was my wettest trip in this hole yet. In the absence of battery powered chisel I drilled two small holes in preparation for the removal of offending bits of rock.

Following observations:

There was a definite inward draught at the dig "face" taking away powder produced by drilling.

There are couple of flakes in the roof of the squeeze into the mini-chamber which may be easily removed to ease access. As I was a bit damp and an early start in Fernhill was planned, this was left for later.

I will bring in small bags for spoil on my next visit (week after next). Currently the spoil tends to accumulate in the above squeeze making it smaller.

Under wet conditions it pays to take extra care on the climbs, and go feet first in the crawl at the foot of the pitch on the way in. A waterproof oversuit is essential.

Geoff

Saturday 14th January 2023 Fernhill Cave

Rich, Geoff, Clive & Dave

An earlier start than usual.

Dave drilled and installed an anchor (12mm Rawlbolt) in the concrete slab back from the entrance for the ladder to enable easier access than when ladder is attached inside the entrance pipe. Two ladders now required to reach the bottom of the entrance pipe if using the new anchor.

Rich continued with the wall building supported by Dave whilst Geoff climbed between the bottom of entrance pipe and ledge to relay the skips of mortar that Clive was busy mixing on the surface. Good progress was made on the wall building and after approx 10 - 12 skips of mortar and a large quantity of rocks, the current section of wall was soon completed and supporting the old original wall.

The wall will need to continue a little further to the East as and when the approach to the Main Chamber is graded back.

In addition a rock wedge was cemented between the huge boulder and North wall as added security.

Between sourcing rocks and assisting Rich, Dave installed a couple of wooden stemples to help prevent further movement of the large slab that had been unsettled during the previous session.

Early start meant an early finish.

Dave.

Fernhill - Wednesday 18th January Dave, Alex and Clive

Due reverence was paid to the quality of Rich's walling work at the east end of the rift which has now picked up the undercut wall which he built some years ago!

Dave and Alex carried on preparing for some future concreting work adjacent to the recent efforts i.e. across to the left-hand wall to stabilise the start of the crawl to the main chamber.

Clive meanwhile set to with the plug-in feathers to deal with the big slab which had recently slipped and had been prevented from falling into the dig by a critically positioned baulk of timber.

This having been dealt with several other boulders were similarly dispatched up onto the tipping area. The "temporary" stone steps which had been installed up against the tip wall were removed as they were becoming increasingly unstable meaning that the steel ladder has to be used to climb down into the pit now.

It's been decided that now its the time to thoroughly stabilise the tip wall on the western side of the pit. This is to be accomplished by placing a steel beam across the rift onto a ledge on either side and concreted and grouted rocks will be used to build up the wall. This operation may well have to be repeated as we dig deeper. Doing this will also use up a lot of the rock which we have recently moved on to the tip.

Looking further ahead as the pit deepens we can raise the tip area another couple of feet but then we will be into hauling to the surface. (Cue winch). I think it may well also need a hauling mechanism of some sort or maybe a winch fitting above the pit food for thought!

A busy digging season ahead!

Clive

Friday, 20 January 2023 Carrion Slocker solo

A late afternoon trip, Heale Sink stream flowing well but nothing flowing into Carrion, although it clearly had been overflowing the 4" drain in the last two weeks as the drainage channel and the drain mesh was very blocked with leaves, sticks and mud and there were good signs that it had overflowed down the path and pothole at some point. In the cave a different story, pretty dry. I took a bag of Postcrete to put behind some of the mesh in Bethlehem Pot, this was made by Aggregate Industries and they used to own the land that Carrion Swallet is on! So rather a full circle of life and appropriate use I thought. After this exercise I went down to the bottom of Two Penny Rift to see what had happened recently, and to see if it had taken some water. Minimal signs of water flow, although the pretty flowstone had a good flow emerging at the top and disappearing into the bottom of the dig, there had been some mud slumping from one side at the bottom, this was rather expected and this had allowed some more headroom from the last time with a restricted view above one side of the dig. I pulled some large rocks out of the floor (likely the way on), and drilled, P & F a couple of large boulders too. Two trips were made up the Rift taking rocks and manageable boulders to the stacking space into a shelf area that will need clearing (Note: M & M). The small digging chamber is quite muddy and rather cramped, the obvious but small way on is lowdown following the water flow. The way on is actually blocked by large boulders and we will need to see if we can find a way through. On the way out I noted there was a very strong draft in Bethlehem Pot again. Take care, Vogon.

FERNHILL CAVE Saturday 28 January 2023

Geoff, Clive and Rich

All three underground to assess prospects and the digging challenges that lie ahead. The boulder-choked rift in the floor (probably over the 25' high Duck's Pot terminal aven) is potentially 10 - 12' long by 4 - 6' wide, representing a huge volume of spoil to shift. It was decided that we need to reduce this task by choosing a more targeted approach, but without curtailing other options later in the day. Selecting the eastern end as the marginally more promising, and more protected, end, we embarked on building a third drystone retaining wall at the western end, a few feet in front of the last one. Careful digging then ensued to clear the floor debris from around the significant large boulders in the floor. There are three:

1. Boulder A - the very large rock at the eastern threshold to the Main Chamber. This is leaning against the northern wall, where it has also been grouted, and is secured to the southern wall by the big grouted "cliff" built over the last couple of weeks.
2. Boulder B - this is a smaller slab beneath and touching Boulder A. It looked to be a potential problem, as digging in the area might have caused it to drop away. Luckily, however, careful clearing around its left-hand edge showed that it is resting on a bulge in the eastern stal wall which marks the eastern extent of the rift.
3. Boulder C - this fridge-sized cube sits in the middle of the rift, again leaning against the northern wall. It appeared to be simply resting on spoil at the southern end, but again luck seems to be with us. Clearing showed that the southern stal wall slopes steeply inwards and meets the far right-hand tip of the block. For the time being, therefore, it can stay where it is. If further digging destabilises it too much, it can always be chemically reduced.

A fair amount of spoil was cleared from the new point of focus, revealing the eastern stal wall disappearing almost vertically into the fill. There is also a significant undercut here in the northern rock face.

After a satisfying underground session, we concluded by collecting half a dozen bags of gravel from the quarry and carrying them up to the cave.

Rich

His Lordship's Hole Saturday 28 January 2023 (am) Geoff N Solo

Battery powered chiselling was used for the first time, mostly to enlarge the squeeze into the mini-chamber which is now hopefully Vagon sized.. If this works on the rock at the sharp end we will be in business. Also took in a few bags to make transport of spoil easier.

Water levels back to normal so I emerged drier than last week but muddier.

Cheers

Geoff

Friday 27th of January 2023 Carrion Slocker Cave solo

Heale Sink stream was flowing but with lower flow than the last visit and there was no water flowing into our Carrion drain pipe. The PostCrete used last visit had gone off behind the mesh in Bethlehem Pot, so I will use this process for some more concreting next visit. At Two Penny Rift no water flow in the main channel but a trickle down the pretty flowstone. I successfully drilled, P+F two large boulders into manageable bits and put these up in Two Penny Rift for shifting later. After my struggles and comments back in December about not 'nice digging' and perhaps this dig is finished, today upon removing the last boulder lump of rock I discovered a 2 inch hole with a slight draft and a clear view of about 1 m down into more narrow rift which is washed clean; So hey ho, here we go again.

Some support from Voysey's is needed soon to clear several rocks and small boulders back to the large bedding plane space. Take care, Vagon.

Fernhill - Thursday February 2nd Dave, Meg from CPC (surname unknown) and Clive

The aim of the evening was to principally excavate further around the big block at the east end of the day to see just how well it was supported on the flowstone slope below. (a brief phot session first – see attachment)

With Meg carefully building up the walled tip area Clive and Dave dug under and behind the big block ultimately exposing several large slabs. Whilst the big block was dependent on a slab immediately underneath and to one side of it, that slab was also dependent on several stacked in a concertina style behind and below.

By the end of the session all of the small and loose material had been removed giving us a view into the continuation of the rift feature in the north wall. This had decreased in size to a few inches wide and maybe a foot high with possibly a flowstone floor. Dave said he could feel a slight draft.

It looks like the next step will be to slowly remove the concertina pile of rocks one by one from the back forwards towards the big block. It may well be that this destabilises the block and it will have to be removed, something which was a distinct possibility in any case. By taking out the slabs behind the big block we will be able to see whether the flowstone floor actually crosses over and reaches the northern wall which at the moment looks likely.

One thing which is going to hold us up though is the presence of a black moth, which I noticed just before leaving, sleeping quietly just a couple of feet away from where we would need to plug and feather the slabs! There is another (Pippistrelle) hanging a couple of feet to one side halfway down the lower ladder.

Looking ahead there is a distinct possibility that our way down will have to be below the big block (as originally planned) unless there is something behind the block after all.

In the short term (i.e. on Saturday 4th) I suspect it's unreasonable to try and plug and feather the rocks close to the sleeping bat. The options are we can either have a go (P'nF) at the rocks close to the big block, which will probably destabilise it, unless it settles into a more stable position or we could look at grouting up the adjacent tip wall (which is now around 6 feet top to bottom) and stabilising the floor below it with concrete as this is where we will be working if the far end of the rift doesn't work out.

Comments please!

Clive

His Lordship's Hole Saturday 4 February Geoff N Solo

Arrived to find a half erected electric fence around the perimeter of the field containing the cave. Presumably there will be cattle in the field shortly which may eventually effect air quality in the cave in the medium term. Water levels currently low.

Set off two small charges on the S-Bend to further improve access to the sharp end.

Geoff

Fernhill Cave: Saturday 4 February Clive, Rich, Geoff. Paul Stillman called by while on a bimbles.

After a brief inspection and discussion it was decided to dig the floor on both sides of the bridging boulder [(C) Rich's naming system], the spoil being stacked behind or incorporated into the latest retaining wall by Rich.

Eventually it appeared that on the E side of the said boulder, the calcited slope of the South Wall was crossing to approach the solid North Wall. However there were also a number of large boulders on the E side which were obscuring the situation, Clive plug and feathered some of these reducing them to kit form..

Whilst Clive was P & F ing boulders, Geoff transferred to the West side of the boulder C and carried on digging the floor. As the session approached its end he exposed some blackness a significant way down the rift on this west side of boulder C as well as a bank of mud. It has now been proposed to backfill behind the East side of boulder C and follow the blackness. This is directly adjacent to the latest retaining wall and care will be necessary not to undermine this wall which has now attained an impressive height.

As the work has progressed we have first concentrated on the West of the rift, then the East of the rift and now at the centre. Is this the last change of plan? Watch this space. Better still, come and help.

Geoff

Carrion U/D Wednesday, 8th Feb 2023 Carrion Slocker with friends

It was lovely to have Matt and Mandy Voysey helping me clear some of rocks at the bottom above the digging point in the small chamber at the bottom of Two Penny Rift. I was beginning to get to the stage where I was going to be bricking myself in or would do shortly. The swallet itself was dry and there was a little trick of water over the pretty flowstone in the bottom of the T'Penny Rift. While Matt and Mandy set about clearing and stacking lots of rocks up to the far end of the sloping bedding chamber, I continued drilling P&F trying to enlarge the 2 inch drafting hole over the two and half hours; this was eventually successful by breaking up the very large boulder and clearing most of the smaller parts of it up to Matt & Mandy and they cleared these back up to the bedding plane without complaining. Matt took a few photos and we now have a hole at the end that is around 12" across and you can see past some boulders into an open but small passage going forward in the southerly direction again. All to play for, but it is quite a long way back out to the surface now. Take care regards Vagon.

Fernhill - Saturday 11th February Geoff and Clive

A simple task this time – to carry on moving the contents of the spoil heap to behind the big block.

Over just 1 ½ hours the majority of the heap was successfully relocated. Enough of the smaller fill was left at the back of the pile in a slope to back up the retaining wall of the previous tip....

The next step is for Richard to have a good look at it and work out how he would like to proceed. There are big rocks to come out from the base of the pit but not before we have thoroughly consolidated the western side of the pit, presumably with a good strong concreted rock wall which can be built from the bottom upwards.

Until Rich has a look, hopefully next Saturday, there is little that can be done mid week (shorter going to the pub that is!)

Clive

His Lordship's Hole Saturday 11 February 2023 (am) Geoff N Solo

Three bags of spoil from last week's mini-bang were taken out from the sharp end to the Screaming Lord Sutch Memorial Chamber. The way on looks passable and bearing slightly right, but there are a few constrictions to remove first. A start was made on this using the battery powered chisel but its going to be slow difficult work. Frustrating and encouraging.

There was no sound of a stream ahead in the dig. Water levels in the cave were normal. Sheep have appeared in the field but kept their distance.

Cheers

Geoff

Thursday 16th of February 2023 Carrion solo

Down to the bottom of T'Penny Rift after a slow journey in traffic and after picking up a new Warmbac oversuit from Rachel at Downhead large+, you note not XL yet J, at £100.

Slight rain on surface some but limited flow into Heale Sink stream and some water for Carrion in the field and sinking but none flowing down our 4 inch drain, but the cave inside was drippy. Some water flowing out from under the pretty flowstone near the bottom of T'Penny Rift. I took the drill, P&F to the bottom to drill P&F the two large boulder parts left last visit. After breaking these into manageable bits I stacked these in the rift for M and M to move later. I checked the view down to see what had moved, if anything; a lowdown long boulder did wobble slightly so I pulled the far end of it with a long sling (that Matt & Mandy had buried in the rocks at the top of T'Penny Rift, it was very heavy. Then I managed to move the sling up further the large lump and managed to pull it up into the small chamber to break this up with P&F. Once broken up, I also stacked this in the T'P Rift and both the view down the hole and the access has improved and we can see about 3m. I used a Toolstation smoke match for the first time upon exit and after the smoke hovered for a bit, none of it followed me out of T'Penny Rift; I wonder where it all went? All to play for in East Mendip. Take care Vogon

ps back rather achy this morning (Sat)

FERNHILL CAVE Saturday 18 February 2023

Clive, Geoff and Rich (Martin Grass and a party of WSG were in the car park and Duncan P visited to collect some limestone for a school talk)

The trio went underground to assess where the western retaining wall could be sited. After moving many large slabs and P & F ing one, it was decided to use jammed rocks to create a bridge across the rift close beneath the surviving western wall. This was achieved despite minor setbacks and frequent rock collapses. A second layer of rocks was placed on top, and two buckets of cement were used to grout them in.

Mid-week it would be useful to fill in the void at the threshold to the Main Chamber (in the right-hand wall) with stone and concrete and perhaps grout the rocks linking boulder C (the one in the middle) to the southern wall.

Rich

PS Paul S would be very welcome to assist on Sat 25 Feb.

His Lordship's Hole Saturday 18 February 2023 (am) Geoff Newton solo

Heavy overnight rain left the roads awash and a fair size stream entering the cave. It is impossible to avoid the water as you negotiate the head of the pitch, so I was soaked before I reached the dig face. I carried on the process of enlarging the way on by battery assisted chiselling, but I called it a day prematurely, being too cold and uncomfortable. When the weather is this wet I would be better off in Viaduct Sink!

I got soaked again on the way out and retreated to Upper Pitts to warm up and take lunch before heading on the Fernhill Cave.

Geoff

Fernhill - Tuesday 21st February Dave and Clive

The evening was spent filling in a leftover gap below the right hand wall of the approach to the east passage. This was accomplished by Dave as deputy wall builder and Clive as assistant and surface grout mixer.

Four skips of grout and associated rocks were needed and a fair job was finished by the end of evening before adjourning to the Oakhill Inn for a refreshment with Gav and, as it turned out, a chat with Graham Price.

More wall building antics on Saturday!

Clive

FERNHILL CAVE Saturday 25 February 2023

Geoff, Clive, Rich and the very welcome addition of Tony Littler and Paul Stillman.

Clive on the surface cement mixing, the rest underground to continue raising the western wall. After several courses had been laid, some judicious digging took place in the chosen pit. Several large slabs prevent further progress and will need to be P & F'd in the next session.

As we go below the somewhat makeshift base layer of the wall, it will need to be treated with care as it may require further grouting to keep it in place.

Rich

PS No Clive or Rich next Saturday 4 March.

Thursday 23rd of February 2023 Carrion Slocker solo

I took some water down to Bethlehem Pot for the next batch of Postcrete to go behind the netting. Having already noticed on the surface the someone had been to the cave and opened the door/gate. Inside the cave it was drippy, with none flowing on the surface into Carrion drain pipe, but Heale Sink stream was flowing well. At the bottom, in Two Penny Rift some people have stolen the rocks I left, stacked them and tidied them away, how kind and thoughtful. Then there was a bunch of flowers in a flower pot in the little final chamber (for now) with a 'Daren is missing you' card, I was quite moved and this was also very kind and considerate. After crying quietly for a period, I then got on with drilling the boulders, widening the sloping floor slot slightly and then tackling the largest mixed material boulder over the slot (PS. some more of that hard red stuff Paul if you recall). I use one and a half batteries and broke various bits of the boulder off but it still does not move. This activity is to be continued next visit, removing this boulder next time may mean some mud slumping which will need clearing, once the boulder is cleared it will allow access into more sloping bedding passage which we can already see into. Take care Vagon

Fernhill - Wednesday 1st March 2023 Alex and Clive

A very good session P & F'ing the pile of boulders at the base of the dig. This was accomplished and the broken slabs placed above the newly concreted wall up against the unstable earth and rubble slope on the left.

A short digging session then ensued with Alex clearing a useful area away from the base of the concreted wall where there are a number of rocks which need grouting in place.

The way on down is open for about a yard, then filled with the rubble again. In the roof there is a 6inch or so thick band of semi-hardened cave earth and pebbles which will be removed eventually and will help with the headroom. The flowstone floor appears to be carrying on down at the same angle whilst the rock roof seems to be gaining a bit of height – a fairly comfortable working area in prospect.

On the right the cave fill seems to be featureless dry, sandy clay while to the left the wall is composed of pebbly conglomerate similar to that we found early on in the dig at the 'western' end.

No session this weekend as the 'arch-waller' is unavailable or next Wednesday as concreting is needed again to stabilise the area below the recently cemented wall. Clive is not around next Sat (12th) but presumably Rich, Dave and Geoff may be. All the necessary requirements for concrete mixing are on site although more sand is needed ideally (the shovel and trowel are in an empty yellow cement bag). There is about half a red box of cement there – some more would be an idea....

The previously resident black moth which had moved on from its roost, half way down the lower pitch, had returned by Wednesday but had disappeared we noticed as we left.....

Clive

Alex, Dave, Spike and Kat (MNRC)

A new Dave did intend to come along, but on arrival at the car park was concerned that Lime Kiln lane would freeze and didn't want to risk being stuck.

Dave and I arrived 30 minutes early, so headed up to the cave to escape the cold. The snow had collapsed the buddleia onto the gazebo breaking two of the poles. Much of the snow was cleared off the gazebo and offending plants removed, but a full repair will have to wait for daylight and the snow to be gone.

After a quick look underground to check the scope of concreting required Dave headed back to surface to mix up the supplies. In total 4 skips of concrete were used to grout the walling to the right of the large boulder (facing toward main chamber), and the wall on the right as you crawl toward main chamber. The remainder was used to fill a few gaps in the wall just above the dig face and poured on top this wall to provide a flatter surface and stabilisation for the next round of wall building.

Part way through this Spike and Kat arrived 40 minutes late due to mobile phone problems, and assisted with the transport of concrete.

A quick visit to the rest of the cave followed, as Spike had not been there before. Two black moths spotted in main chamber.

Back at the car park Spike's car had moved itself about 5ft downslope in the snow, and had some difficulty exiting but we all made it to the Oakhill in good time.

Alex

Friday, 10 March 2023 Carrion Slocker solo

On the way in I did some basic cementing in Bethlehem Pot behind the mesh. The cave and the field were quite wet with water flowing down into Carrion's drainpipe and in the field the stream down to Heale Farm Sink hole was also flowing well. Therefore the cave was wet and drippy right to the bottom. Down at the bottom I drilled, P&F the large boulder overhanging the promising hole. The bottom of this large boulder eventually broke away and dropped to the floor and I used a sling to un wedge it and pull it nearer and up slightly so that I could drill, P&F some more holes to break it up into manageable rocks, which I then moved up Two Penny Rift for M*M to clear next visit. With the way on now open I went down slope feet first into about 3.5 m of sloping passage with the water running down on one side. The average height of this part was about 1 m and the sloping floor dropped in height about 1 m top to bottom. Unfortunately, it has a slightly dodgy looking bouldery roof, but it seemed fairly stable similar to that in Two Penny Rift. I noticed a small frog hop to one side of the floor, which I later rescued and put in the surface stream; he seemed much happier then. The flow of water disappeared down a 6 inch diameter hole at the lowest point and with a light you could see that it dropped down another metre in height to a small space. With some hammering, a crowbar and by pulling out some rocks and pushing in others (not optimal) I managed to make it body sized and went in feet first for about 2 metres but it is not very roomy and it was a rather hard wriggle up and out on the wet gritty slope so I left it to explore and enlarge next visit. So about 4.5 to 5 m of cave length gained. Take care regards Vagon.

Saturday 11th March Fernhill Cave

Richard, Geoff, Meg Stark & Dave.

Whilst Rich and Geoff set off down Fernhill Meg and Dave carried out repairs to the gazebo that had collapsed under the weight of snow pushing the buddleia down onto the gazebo.

Cement mix was requested from below but due to a cement shortage Meg and Dave were only able to send down one skip load of cement down. A pity Dave hadn't noted the cement stock level on Wednesday evening since he could've brought another bag with him.

Meg and Dave then joined Rich and Geoff where turns were taken to further dig down passing spoil back to be tipped at the West end of the entrance rift. Great care taken not undermine the new wall. By the end of play the floor of the dig had been lowered by approximately 1m .

Dave will bring along a new bag of cement on Wednesday (15th).

Dave.

Wednesday 15th March

Fernhill Cave Clive, Kat, Spike, Meg & Dave.

Replenished sand and cement supplies.

The ladder/ramp from Rock Farm minus the ally sheet has now been redeployed to ease access to the dig pit.

With cement mixed by Clive on the surface and relayed down by the rest of the team, Dave continued cementing/grouting the bottom of Rich's wall. In addition the mud infill between the lowest course and South wall was dug out and a suitably large rock cemented in its place. The wooden wedge beneath it can be removed on Saturday. In addition to the cement, rocks were suitably sourced and supplied to Dave by the team.

On leaving, the newt pond was found to contain a guestimate of around 30 - 40 toads.

Dave.

Viaduct Sink Saturday 18 March 2023 (am) Geoff N solo

The recent rain meant that His Lordship's Hole would guarantee a soaking so I opted instead or Viaduct Sink where I would just get damp. And indeed the surface stream flowing past the Viaduct entrance could be heard from the top of the hill before I descended into the valley. So there was plenty of water falling down the avens in the cave and a good size stream flowing along the crawl between Downside Aven and Bridge Junction..

I had hoped that the dig in The Somme would have drained during my prolonged absence but this was not the case. I moved the bags of spoil further up passage from the dig face and drilled a couple of 600mm holes for future use before I made my damp exit for lunch.

Geoff

Fernhill Cave Saturday 18 March 2023 (pm) Clive, Rich, Tony Littler, Geoff

First Rich continued with wall building with assistance from Geoff, using concrete mixed by Clive on the surface, with Tony going up and down the 2nd pitch between the foot of the first ladder and the Naughty Step to assist the concrete's progress down the shaft. Four mixes in all before Rich decided that we could use the rest of the session for digging.

Geoff digging, Clive hauling and Tony carrying the spoil to Rich for stacking.

The spoil was very mixed. There were areas of dry cobbles (original ?) and also plenty of sticky mud with rubble and boulders (quarry infill?). Voids were slight and rare; so breakthrough does not appear imminent. It does appear that we are gaining a solid East Wall to complement the solid South wall and North wall. The North wall is still undercutting, with South and East walls becoming vertical.

Progress was steady to start with due to the builders ladder getting in the way but once this was removed, digging became progressively easier and by the time we called it a day, we had a shaft which has become difficult to climb out of. It is suggested that the builders ladder is replaced by a caving ladder which will be easier to raise and lower as required.

Apologies to anyone who wanted a go at the sharp end - time flies when you are enjoying yourself!

There will soon be plenty of opportunity as I will be away the next two Saturdays.

Geoff

Fernhill - Wednesday 22nd March Spike, Dave, Alex and Clive

A full barrow load of quarry gravel plus a couple of extra bags-worth were collected by Clive with Spike dramatically pushing the heavily laden barrow right up to the cave entrance!

Dave and Alex, using Clive's Hilti drilled an access hole in the top of the padlock cover to allow easier locking. It does require some filing down of rough edges on Saturday.....

In the cave Dave's 8ft aluminium ladder was lowered to the end and Clive had first go at the dig face. It was felt that the 'western wall' at the base of the pit was stable enough to continue the dig down without immediate concreting. There appear to be two large rocks about two feet below the lowest concreted portion which no doubt are helping to stabilise things. It may be that some form of shuttering might be the best way to stabilise that side as it is no longer rocky.

The digging itself continues to be easy if very claggy. Next to the southern wall it is very loose, wet stream pebbles easily shovelled out. The rest of the fill is claggy mud interspersed with pebbles and the occasional large block of stal or rock.

Alex continued the digging lowering the floor and widening the space to the east against what is probably a solid wall. Dave and Spike were tasked with handling and emptying the skips at the west end, the emptying being a chore due to the sticky mud. When tipping space is exhausted it will need the spoil bagged up and stock piled for dedicated hauling to the surface sessions maybe with the help of Dave's winch.

On finishing the aluminium ladder was somewhat lower down than when we started and it maybe too low for Richard to use for his walling work. We might well have to reinstate the longer ladder for that task.

Returning to the surface we found heavy rain and wind battering the gazebo. Changing by the cars was swift as a result!

On Saturday more cementing and wall building – maybe digging too.....

Clive

Friday, 24 March 2023 Carrion Slocker Cave solo

My first visit for a couple of weeks with lots of showers/rain so water running into our 4 inch drain very well from the field stream and the adjacent Heale stream running fast too. I did a bit more cementing in Bethlehem pot on the way in, then down to the bottom with water all the way and flowing down two Penny rift and into the new section, so I got very wet through. After looking in the newest part I decided some drilling/P and F would enlarge this and make it safer. It carries on down rift by the look of it, however the restricted view suggests it is low and the roof looks like mud and small rocks rather than a decent secure roof, though the squeeze into the section has a solid bit of roof initially by the look of it, it is rather hard to tell. So after prodding around and after some drilling/P&F to enlarge the access an adjacent boulder was loosened and I managed to break this up and remove the parts back up into the new area. I now have quite a few rocks here that would be good to move back and up and out of Two Penny rift but this would take a small team. More clearing is required to improve the low access to the low tunnel and ensure that it is safe before entering. Take care, Vagon

Fernhill - Saturday 25th March Clive, Rich, Tony and John (plus a surface hello from Mike M)

An afternoon's walling, digging and ladder arranging...

The session began with the team lowering the new, extendable, ladder. Rich then used it to achieve optimal positioning above the Pit, and continued the upward walling process. Mixes were supplied at a fast rate by Clive on the surface, with Tony and John on lowering and rock delivery duties, respectively. A number of the larger boulders in the spoil heap were successfully incorporated into the wall and more stacking space was also created below the ladder climb towards Curtain Chamber, ahead of part 2 below...

After a quick regroup, Clive then joined the underground team for a further attack on the Pit, with the smaller ladder positioned at its base for access. Multiple buckets of claggy fill, interspersed with some impressive, shattered, stal were lifted, before a large rock was detached from the northerly-facing wall, effectively concluding the afternoon. This will require plug and feathering next time. The way onwards is clearly down and it was possible to insert the large bar some way into the floor to prove the point.

Before retiring to the car park for tea, the heavier, iron ladder was retrieved to the surface for storage.

Thanks to all for welcoming me back after a hiatus and a very enjoyable time.

John G (writing from Emma's computer).

Just standing in for Spike who was due to write the report but I believe he may be battling the mountains of Arran about now!

Fernhill - Wednesday 29th March Kat, Spike and Clive

Despite the periods of heavy rain we were lucky that there were gaps coinciding with our two changing sessions in the car park!

In the cave Clive first P & F'd the large slab of flowstone left from the previous session and handed over to Kat for the first clearing session. Spoil was added to the heap on the top of the big boulder. This is coping well with the additional material but will need its retaining wall grouted on Sunday (the next session).

Spike took over later and managed to lever the second large flowstone slab out of the floor (needs similar treatment as before) and significantly uncovered either a very large boulder or a large protrusion of bedrock close to, or part of the southern wall. More excavation needed around it to see what we have. It might just carry on under the loose western face and could be the base of a much needed retaining wall. (Shuttering here might be an option otherwise)

On Sunday we need first to barrow a load of gravel over to the cave. If Dave was able to bring some more sand that would be a great help too....

Clive

Fernhill Cave Saturday 8 April Clive, Rich, Tony Littler, Geoff

I suppose as I was hogging the sharp end of the digging I had better report on what I saw.

The first half of the session was taken up by Rich wall building, with occasional assistance from Geoff, supplied with concrete mixed by Clive and conveyed to Geoff and Rich with assistance from Tony at the foot of the top pitch and the Naughty Step. Both the main retaining wall and the wall at the back of Boulder C were worked on and the results are already looking impressive. A total of four mixes (or was it 5?) were used before walling was called to a halt

As the walling drew to a close we were paid a visit by a trumpet blowing (!) Duncan Price and a party of Yorkshire tourists led by Martin Grass. It was suggested to them that they might postpone their visit to the Curtain Chamber until the new concrete in the walling had set off and they eventually retired to W/L Cave and other destinations.

After that distraction Clive and Tony joined Geoff and Rich for the digging. Clive and Tony sharing the strenuous work of hauling spoil up the deepening shaft. On this occasion I concentrated on the North side of the shaft, lured on by a small airspace in the NE corner. This airspace initially got significantly larger but alas almost disappeared again by the end of the session. Initially spoil was dominated by sticky mud with occasional large boulders, one of which was too large for the boulder net and will need plug and feathering. Towards the end of the session the spoil became dominated by boulders with relatively little mud,

You may remember there was a small cross rift a little way East of Boulder C which draughted, (now back filled) and that the roof of the Duck's Pot aven was said to be blocked by boulders. The dig on the North side seems to be headed towards the draught and is becoming boulder-rich which I think is encouraging.

The rock separating the North dig from the South undercut is proving to be massive. Its too early to say if its a rock bridge, a rock prow, an enormous boulder or the start of a parting of the ways. So the cobble filled undercut may be a dig heading towards an unknown destination?

Interesting times.

Geoff

Saturday 1st April.....

Rich, Tony L and Clive (plus Gav on pub support)

Around five skips of cement went down for Rich to use on the next session of the main tip wall with Tony L guiding them through 'the narrows'.

After mixing had concluded Clive had a session at the bottom of the pit plug and feathering the large flowstone slab that had been uncovered by Spike on Wednesday. This split nicely in two and made for an extra course in Richard's wall. Following this Clive uncovered more of what appeared to be a solid rock rib running east-west across the floor parallel to the rift walls.

As digging progressed this appeared to be more and more solid – certainly the 'hammer test' sounded like solid rock.

In the south wall of the rift a fairly major undercut appeared with a distinctly waterworn roof. Filled with wet, loose 'pea-gravel' pebbles there were a few slight spaces under the roof and the longer crowbar went in to almost its full length.

Wednesday 5th April.....

Alex, Dave and Clive

One skips-worth of cement mixed for Dave to grout the extra course of Richard's wall while Alex dug in The Pit. A considerable amount of spoil found its way onto the tip on top of the big boulder (it now needs another course of rock and cement before taking it higher) before tipping moved to the main pile. Dave then took over for another session clearing more space around the big rock rib in the floor and in the new undercut.

The rib apparently has a crack running across it at its eastern end near where it disappears into the mud wall. The feeling is that it must be a very large boulder rather than bedrock. A bit more clearing work around it is needed yet – no doubt a bang will be needed at some point.

Then shovel has developed a split which makes it awkward to use so Dave has bought (yes I know!) two more which will both help digging and also fettling the spoil heaps etc. More cement as well.

More to do on Saturday.....next Wednesday's session has been moved to Thursday

All best

Clive

Amendments -

Saturday 1 April should read Sunday 2 April, and the team was Clive, Dave and Rich rather than Clive, Tony and Rich.

RW

Fernhill Cave Saturday 8 April Clive, Rich, Tony Littler, Geoff

I suppose as I was hogging the sharp end of the digging I had better report on what I saw.

The first half of the session was taken up by Rich wall building, with occasional assistance from Geoff, supplied with concrete mixed by Clive and conveyed to Geoff and Rich with assistance from Tony at the foot of the top pitch and the Naughty Step. Both the main retaining wall and the wall at the back of Boulder C were worked on and the results are already looking impressive. A total of four mixes (or was it 5?) were used before walling was called to a halt

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Interesting times.

Geoff

Fernhill Wednesday 19th April Dave and Clive

A busy evening for the 'engineering' team!

Dave started by repairing the large hole cut some while back in the quarry gate, with a prodigious amount of barbed wire!

At the cave two skips-worth of cement were mixed and sent down along with the drill, angle grinder, ladder, belay, pulley and a new hauling rope.

The rocks left in place on the main tip wall were cemented in by Dave while Clive cut off the long section of gas pipe which had been part of the temporary shoring arrangements above the crawl to the main chamber. A further few rocks were added and partly grouted in as well resulting in an extra course and a half in all. A bit more cement needs to be added on Saturday before other rocks are added.

While Dave grouted, Clive drilled the new anchor point for the ladder and pulley above The Pit. Dave fitted the bolt and Clive had the honour of the first descent. It was going to be a P & F session on the large rock that Geoff had unearthed last week but Dave reckoned, quite rightly as it turned out, that it should be possible to boulder net it out as the pulley was in place and he could haul from the bottom. This was achieved although dealing with it when it landed on the steps was tricky. An application of the P & F reduced it to four very useful chunks for the wall.

At the bottom we were both a bit concerned about the state of the 'roof' above where Geoff had lowered the floor at the eastern end of the dig. Here there are nice flowstone slabs in the mud with some small spaces against the overhanging wall but the roof is of mud and with some rocks loosely stalled-in. Ironically the western wall, directly below the tip where we were concerned about security, has major rocks in place and seems very safe compared with the eastern end!

The mega 'rib' of rock across the floor I am sure is bedrock or at the least an enormous boulder. It is rounded in shape unlike the angular boulders we have become used to. It may prove to be useful to carefully uncover more of it at the eastern end and use it as a base for inclined supports to shore up the roof.....

In the short term I think it best to continue straight down avoiding doing much under the eastern roof to see where the big bit of 'bedrock' goes. While the main tip wall has a little further to go the tipping space there is limited but there is still space to tip on the big block opposite but more rock needs cementing in place there to hold it back.

On exiting both the long and short aluminium ladders were removed from the cave. Rich's telescopic one remains.

On Saturday I suspect it will be Rich, Geoff and Clive on duty.... Clive

Thursday, 20 April 2023 Carrion Slocker Cave – ‘Last Knockings’

On the surface there was no water flowing into Carrion’s drainpipe, but the adjacent Heale stream was flowing quite well on the surface. Arriving at about 17:00 I left my ETO with Sue at 19:45 by text as usual. Down to the bottom of Twopenny Rift to see what any recent rains had moved. One large boulder had moved out from one muddy wall at low-level to partially block the entrance to the latest section from the small ‘flowers’ chamber. So I decided to clear this away using drill, P&F and Clive would be so impressed, the first two goes had little effect, but then the 2nd pair carefully positioned split the large boulder perfectly in two pieces – a textbook drill/P&F technique! One half of the boulder was hauled out and broken up some more and stacked up in Twopenny Rift and the other half fell in forwards into the extension and in due course I wedged this near the bottom of the final extension. What little water there was flowing at the bottom flows under a low arch into a muddy tube about 16 inches in diameter and you can see for a further 10 feet or so. It is probably ‘diggable’ or accessible for a smaller, fitter team of cavers; but it’s the end of this dig for me. So on the way out I pulled out my wife’s washing up bowl, washing-up liquid, plastic cutting board, watering can and nozzle, camping water container, 2 L plastic jug and two garden trowels and a small shovel spade, all of which may have been missed at some point. That said, she was not keen in having them all back due to the state of them! Due to carrying out this clutter I was 5 mins past my ETO and received a call from Sue just as I got into the car. So I have left the cave tidy and I will visit once more to retrieve two unsused scaffold tubes and tidy up the surface swallet hole of any digging support equipment. Although this is the end of my/our (Big thanks to the other diggers for their support (Paul, Matt & Mandy) six and half year dig from the surface with reasonable successes from time to time, I will be seeking to get permission to dig another site shortly. If anyone would like to visit or would like to push it further feel free to give me a ring on 07881 420xxx and leave a message. Take care, Vagon

Fernhill Cave Saturday 22 April PM Clive North, Rich Witcombe, Geoff Newton

The Western Retaining Wall and Steps are now at an advanced stage of construction. Another session or two should see them completed. This time, wall building ceased when Clive ran out of gravel for the concrete and Rich ran out of energy. The results are looking impressive. No work done on the Eastern Retaining wall this session.

Rocks from the old western wall and elsewhere which do not reach Rich’s high standards for wall building were moved to the foot of the entrance pitches prior to removal to the surface at a future date. Where possible mud is being stacked behind the new retaining walls.

The caving ladder installed in the dig is a great improvement on the fixed ladders used previously and can be extended as th shaft deepens. After wall building ceased for the day, digging commenced on the North side of what appears to be a rock wall separating the North side of the shaft from the cobble filled rift on the South side. This could be a parting of the ways. On this session digging was mostly straight down through a fill of very sticky mud containing a number of boulders large enough to require use of the net. Current indications are that this dig is pinching out on the West side and getting larger on the East side, but the latter would require digging under an unstable roof of mud and small rocks, which is why for the moment we are digging straight down whilst there is still sufficient space to work.

Geoff

Fernhill - Wednesday 26th April Alex and Clive

Another barrow load of aggregate found its way to the entrance in time for the next cementing session at the weekend.

In the cave 30 skip loads of rocks were hauled to the surface by Alex after they had made a temporary stop on the Naughty Step where Clive assisted them through to the upper pitch.

There is now a much clearer area for future mud tipping helped along by a couple of very large blocks being reduced to handle-able chunks before being packed off to the surface.

The opportunity was also taken to remove Rich’s telescopic ladder to the surface which, if he agrees, we could market in favour of ATLAS funds.

Saturday should see good progress on the walls with another opportunity at digging too.

Clive

Fernhill Cave Saturday 29 April Clive, Rich, Geoff

Wall and step building continued both at the eastern and western ends of the rift, using 5 mixes of concrete. Ideal wall and step building rocks are starting to run short and it was necessary to source a step rock from the surface spoil heap. Fortunately wall building is now at an advanced stage.

After wall building had ceased for the day we carried on digging the northern rift. This time the spoil was nearly all mud with no rocks of any significant size, so this did not help the stock of wall building rocks.

The same trends noticed as previously i.e. the rift is gradually pinching out at the east end, the spoil is drier and coarser at the east end, whereas fine wet clay predominates at the west end. In between the two the mud is at its stickiest. It would seem that water flowing into the rift has drained away at the west end and at some stage we may well have to follow in that direction

There was a flurry of excitement when somebody thought they detected a draught behind the spoil stacked against the North wall but this was temporary and probably an illusion caused by someone's breath bouncing back off the wall.. The air remains fresh at the bottom of the shaft, but air spaces are too small to allow passage of a decent draught.

Geoff

Fernhill - Wednesday 3rd May Alex and Clive

Another barrowload of gravel delivered to the entrance for continued cementing on Saturday etc.

In the cave the two diggers shared the delights of digging at the bottom of The Pit – the extremely claggy spoil being tipped on the main heap beyond the, still rising, retaining wall.

The hauling rope had become too slippery to grip so it was 'reversed' so we could use the clean end instead – what a change! (although that too soon became greasy too).

At the bottom Clive investigated below the small hole that Geoff had opened under the left hand wall at the eastern end and soon opened another similar hole between muddied jammed rocks. It appears that there is a distinct joint in the left wall at this point – hopefully it extends usefully to the left.

Looking ahead – it will be necessary to remove to the surface a lot of the previously tipped small rocks etc to leave more mud tipping space. We were thinking of trying this on Wed but it needs a team of three at least.

Its rapidly getting to the stage when the winch will be needed on the surface. A team of four (two on the surface, one on the ledge and one loading) will be needed to periodically clear the spoil. As the mud is so sticky (very difficult to get it to come off the shovel for instance) it makes the idea of bags redundant – my thought would be to use the larger blue containers we have on the surface, modified into skips, for the haul to the surface (not from the dig face). Their larger size will make clearing them more practical than the usual smaller size skips. With two on the winch that should make it practical.

The next session is of course in Sunday this week. I won't be able to make Wed this coming week but I believe Mr King should be back on parade....

Clive

Fernhill Cave Sunday 7 May Clive, Rich, Geoff

Wall and step building at both west and east retaining walls. As work progresses it becomes easier on the west but more difficult on the east, with Rich balanced precariously above the drop and supplied by Geoff. Six concrete mixes were used. Gravel has become so coarse that Clive has been sieving it before use. We will be concreting again next week but I dont think Rich will be able to string out the wall building much longer after that. This is as well as sourcing good wall building slabs is becoming more difficult.

Then back digging the northern rift again. Same trends as before. We seem to be headed left into a cross rift with occasional small air pockets. The other walls of the rift also seem to be gradually pushing us that direction. It will soon be necessary to unroll the ladder a bit more to climb out.

Geoff

Fernhill - Wednesday 11th May Dave, Alex, Clive plus Duncan (surface support)

First off Dave and Clive had a look at the options for improving the access to and from the access passage to the Main Chamber and decided that a couple of staples in the right hand wall should do the job.

As it happened Duncan appeared with said ironwork and plans laid for fixing them on Saturday.

Dave also had a look at the options for possible support of the overhanging roof in the dig and hatched a plan to be actioned in the near future.

With Alex on the surface valiantly hauling, Dave on the ledge and Clive loading at the bottom a considerable amount of previously dumped spoil was removed to daylight.

On Saturday - some more gravel needs importing for cement-making, a bit of plug and feathering is needed on a couple of big rocks which would make good wall building blocks and the fitting of the staples plus more walling will be done. (in no particular order). A bit of digging perhaps too!

Clive

Fernhill Cave Saturday 13 May Clive, Rich, Dave King, Dangerous Dave, Geoff

A rather chaotic session. First Geoff lined Rich down the entrance shaft whilst Clive started collecting and sieving gravel. Rich started preparations for wall building and Geoff joined Clive to assist with bagging and transport of gravel.

When Dave K arrived there was on-site discussion with Rich, Clive and Geoff regarding the climb up leading to Curtain Chamber. Rich's proposal for a fixed chain prevailed. As suitable rocks for wall building were in short supply some were sent down from the surface spoil heap before wall building commenced. and Dave K went off for a late lunch break. Wall building was assisted by Dangerous Dave who was semi-attached to a visiting group of tourist cavers including Matt & Mandy Voysey, a female cave photographer and two other men who I did not recognise. The tourists duly visited Curtain Chamber .which caused a certain amount of delay and confusion to the wall and step building. Wall building ceased when gravel ran short after 5.5 mixes of concrete.

With plenty of manpower available it was decided to forego digging and shift the accumulated heap of mud at the foot of the entrance shaft out to the surface. After an intensive session most of the mud had been cleared. This provided more working space, which had become at a premium. My suspicion is that Rich will keep on raising the West retaining wall until it reaches the level of the foot of the entrance shaft.

Geoff

Wednesday 17th May Fernhill Cave

Clive & Dave

Dave dug whilst Clive hauled and deposited the spoil above and clear of the retaining wall.

At the bottom of the pit the lower edge of the huge boulder was reached, below which is another huge boulder that encroaches out in to the working space with a mud filled gap of approx 70 - 100mm between the two. The upper surface of this newly exposed boulder slopes down to the North at about 45 deg. Yet another large boulder was then exposed, this time in the NE corner of the pit. The upper surface of this boulder is horizontal and its exposed surface measures approx 600mm NS and 300mm EW with only two edges exposed. The two newly exposed boulders combined occupy about 3/4 of the floor of the pit. The remaining quarter is still easy digging if a little awkward to access.

In the NE corner of the pit above the latest boulder the small undercut/pocket/cavity that has previously been noted is 'not without interest' since a crowbar pushed can move small rocks within the cavity.

Clive & Dave joined Gavin and Charles (Gav's brother) at The Oakhill.

Dave.

Ps. we couldn't find Richard's trowel for tool and bucket cleaning.

Tiny correction - Gav's brother is Giles

Saturday 20th May. Fernhill Cave.

Rich, Clive, Darrel Instrell, Nick Powel & Dave.

With five in attendance it was possible to dig and haul all the way to the surface

Nick on surface hauling, Rich on skip transfer at bottom of Entrance Rift, whilst Clive, Darrel & Dave Swapped between digging, hauling from pit and ledge duties. A few rocks and plenty of sticky mud dug and hauled out, some rocks placed by Rich at the bottom of Entrance Rift, the smaller rocks and mud out to the surface.

The large boulder in the NE corner of the pit was further exposed revealing its top edges and also its depth. Approximate boulder dimensions - top/upper face 500mm x 300mm, depth 600mm narrowing at the bottom. With the application of a crowbar it was possible to move the boulder about 10mm indicating that it's not bedrock, neither is it supporting anything and not too large too reduce with probably one shot hole and then extract.

Drill and pop the boulder is next on the agenda.

No digging on Wednesday 24th or Saturday 27th.

Dave.

Saturday 27th May Viaduct Sink.

Geoff & Dave.

After lunch in the sunshine at Rock Farm, Geoff & Dave headed off to Viaduct Sink.

The stream was found dammed by the entrance and very apparent by the silt on Viaduct Sink's lid that during higher stream levels the flow had been diverted down through the entrance lid. The plywood cover was missing but located either washed down the stream a short distance or perhaps discarded by the dam builders. With the now lower stream level the whole stream was sinking in the bank by the entrance and therefore down the entrance shaft. First task was to dismantle the dam and relocate the rocks, silts, mud & moss etc that made up the dam to where the stream was sinking and potentially undermining the bank by the shaft.

A drinks can and some fresh wild plants ie wild garlic were found below the entrance shaft.

On the way in the cave was found to be relatively dry inc Downside Aven and the S Bend.

Before heading to The Somme Dave visited the now abandoned dig, and not surprisingly found the water level to be about at its usual level. Plenty of silt had been washed into the pool either from up stream of the waterfall since the water is still piped from there to the top of the abandoned dig or perhaps from the passage below the waterfall if the pipe was overwhelmed and the flow over topped the waterfall.

Down at The Somme nothing much had changed, the continuation being small, silted up and full of water. 25 - 30 bags were hauled & relayed in various stages to Bridge Junction. At Bridge Junction a good size stream was now flowing out from the S Bends which made for a very wet hauling session in two stages and two shifts out to Downside Aven. The conclusion was that since the surface dam had been dismantled and the stream sent on down the valley, it was now sinking elsewhere down stream. Due to the volume of water descending Downside Aven It was declared too wet to empty the bags so they were left stacked for emptying on another occasion.

Exiting from Downside Aven, water was also found to be entering the passage from various places including down from Red Rift which were dry on the way in.

On the surface a walk down stream revealed various blockages to the flow from fallen branches and debris naturally damming the stream, at one point causing a pool of a few feet deep in the stream. This was probably the cause of the water suddenly appearing in Downside Aven and on through the S Bends after the flow was sent on past the entrance. A brief time spent clearing some of the debris to allow the stream to flow more freely and lower the ponding water levels.

A dry trip in and all the bags of spoil shifted back to Downside Aven, and a wet trip out from Bridge Junction to passing below Red Rift.

Rock Farm Cave.

Geoff and Dave.

Gavin had warned us that a couple of large rocks had been dislodged and sitting on the steps at the approach to the entrance, but were stable and were not at risk of causing any issues.

At the bottom of the staircase a voluminous stream was flowing, undeterred Dave followed by Geoff continued down. The stream was overwhelming the Mud Ole that had been previously used as rock stacking space and flowing on straight over the lip of Bucket Pitch. Dave decided to try and descend Bucket Pitch, but only got as far as the ledge where the wooden pit prop sits, although possible to descend further by bridging out along the rift away from the main flow, the return journey would have been more 'interesting' and so Bucket Pitch wasn't descended on this occasion. With suitable 'wet' caving kit it would be possible and interesting to descend and check out the further reaches of the cave.

A further conversation with Gavin established that the reason for the large stream below the Staircase is that the plugged drain he has installed in the surface stream bed for flood relief in severe weather is allowing water through the cemented brickwork surround of the plug.

Dave.

Fernhill Cave Saturday 27th May 2023 (am) Dave and Geoff

The boulder which had been preventing further progress was drilled and banded. Another boulder which may be a problem in the future was also drilled. Then to Rock Farm and lunch.

Geoff

Fernhill Cave Saturday 3 June 2023 (pm) Dave, Rich, Geoff

The boulder which was popped last Saturday was now found to be in kit form. The bits were cleared to the surface in two stages. Two bits were large enough to require a boulder net although one was hammered into submission at the intermediate stage. There was time enough to remove some of the sticky mud which had been under the boulder but this was stacked behind the western retaining wall.

The dig face and vicinity appears to be mainly composed of very large boulders embedded in very sticky mud. No draught here. I never thought I would say it but His Lordship's Hole is starting to look attractive!

The ropes were taken out to be cleaned by Dave at the MNRS and the buckets left on the surface to dry out so that the mud will crack off.

Geoff

Fernhill - Wednesday 7th June 2023 (the winch arrives!)

After a bit of juggling, Dave and Clive managed to fit the disassembled winch and drum into the back of Clive's Nissan for the journey across to Fernhill.

With the aid of a sack truck and some bulging muscles the whole kit and caboodle, including the hauling rope and pulley et cetera, were dragged up to the entrance.

After assembly and the winding on of the now very clean hauling rope attention turned to the repositioning of the scaffold tubes. Their original position made for a very difficult single man operation when both hauling and then retrieving the skip from the entrance.

After a certain amount of experimentation, we found the sweet spot for the scaffold tripod where the skip would swing free of the entrance and drop neatly onto the concrete pad.

It just remains now for the winch base to be bolted down and a scaffold clamp to be provided for the pulley attachment on the tripod.

Staffing levels for the weekend are uncertain at the moment – Dave is unsure whether he will be around or not (partly due to continuing car troubles, Rich is not available, I assume Geoff is ok as am I. I wonder if Sunday would work better (Rich??) especially as thunderstorms and extreme heat is forecast for Saturday.

The idea now is to try filling bags at the bottom prior to stacking and eventually hauling to the surface.....

Clive

Fernhill Cave Saturday 11 June 2023 (pm) Dave, Clive, Geoff

Three bags of bags were taken in. The aim was to continue digging East and North at the bottom of the pit. All but one of the first bagfull were filled with rubble and mud and the bags stacked at the foot of the entrance pitches. The session was brought to an abrupt end when a boulder jumped out of the East face and pinned Geoff to the South wall by his right leg.

Dave to the rescue. He was able to take much of the pressure off, using the long crowbar already at the face. However it was necessary for both of us to dig away some mud and rubble from behind the East side of the boulder before the boulder could be moved sufficiently for Geoff to extract his foot, and then subsequently recover his wellie.

Dave & Clive then made a quick reccie of Curtain Chamber area to look for alternative dig sites but reluctantly decided that the current plan was still the best hope but that a certain amount of shoring will be necessary as we progress.

Geoff was able to exit the cave without assistance but lifelined as a precaution. Although sore bruised and bloodied, everything seemed to be in working order, so he resisted pressure to visit A&E and drove home.

Geoff

Wed 14th June Fernhill Cave

Clive, Duncan & Dave

Duncan & Dave entered Fernhill and carried out a survey to establish the relative locations of the current pit and the furthest points visible just down to the left within the Main Chamber. The survey also included the dig at the bottom left of Main Chamber, Main Chamber itself plus out to surface. This should enable matching to the earlier survey Duncan carried out after rediscovery of Curtain Chamber.

Meanwhile Clive drilled the surface concrete slab for the winch mounting bolts. Bolts fitted but since no spanner these will require finishing off with a 17mm spanner next session.

Retired as usual to the Oakhill joined by Gav.

Dave.

For info - since I was out and about on Mendip yesterday evening I dropped by FCQ.

I've finished bolting down the winch and fitted a clamp with a krab/pulley attachment point on the scaffold jib.

Dave.

Fernhill - Thursday 29th June Meg, Dave and Clive

After Dave regreased The Pit Pulley (it had previously been screechingly deafening during hauling) Meg loaded around 15 bags of crud from the bottom, Clive fitted them into the skip and Dave hauled them up into the main part of the rift. Clive added another half dozen before pub time.

The little hole at the bottom of the Pit was still very, very gently draughting. Hardly discernible in fact but definitely there as proved by wetting ones hand and inserting it into the hole and feeling the far side of one fingers getting cold very quickly. The cave entrance was draughting, outwards again unlike last time.

Dave measured up for the yet to be fitted steel work. We now have a large number of bags ready to come to the surface, but we need to wait until the winch bearing is replaced on the before attempting that. Duncan has kindly delivered a large number of extra bags which we can work on in the meantime.

A return is planned for Saturday 1st....(usual times)

Clive

FERNHILL CAVE Saturday 1 July 2023

Geoff, Clive and Rich

Wednesday's routine was repeated - Rich and Geoff down The Pit, alternately digging, and Clive hauling up and dumping the bags as close to the bottom of the entrance shaft as possible. The floor was lowered a little and some cautious excavation took place around the rather dodgy east wall. The slightly draughting hole in the northern "rift" was slightly enlarged, revealing small, clean-washed rocks. At the end of the session, during which about thirty bags of spoil were sent up, Geoff managed to free the large slab at the threshold to the "rift" and move it into a position for plug and feathering.

Shoring and winch repair are next on the agenda.

Rich

PS The entrenching tool with the loose head was taken away for fettling by RW.

Cariron Slocker Cave update 4th of July 2023 Carrion Slocker Cave

Goodness 10 weeks without going down a cave! Made redundant at work that resulted in finishing work on 30th of June after a 'good' handover to others.

The Slocker (swallet) was very overgrown, although it was raining very hard today, no water was flowing into Carrion or into the Heale Stream sink which was very unusual, so the water levels in East Mendip must be low. I took a slow trip down to the bottom of Carrion probably for the last time (Yes, if you get bored Matt & Mandy) and need some exercise Two Penny Rift still has some rocks and boulders that would be better placed above the small netted scaffold in the sloping bedding chamber). For any visitors where route finding is not obvious, I have secured some thin blue polypropylene rope to make the main route more obvious between the digging ropes. There are various dead-end deviation passages which may be interesting too. If you fancy a visit, the cave is not locked and there is a fence climb over point with some breeze-blocks adjacent to the secured gate (do not try to open the gate please) at the back of the swallet hole that is fenced with barbed wire to prevent animal ingress. Park tidily in the grassy space by the overgrown angled gate on the left when going towards Downhead just past the normal field gate to the field where the Carrion Slocker is located. Take care not to upset the Heale Farm House residents with the large horse barn opposite and keep any noise levels before and after the visit low. They are not too caver friendly and they do not own the land the cave is on. Access in a small group is allowed by the Andover if you ring me first to check 07787 xxxx or ring Green Farm (the field owners) direct Ester or Daniel Britton

The cave is gated by a mesh frame door, you turn the door handle lift it up and lie it back out of the way, as stated it is not currently locked, please ensure the door is closed when you leave the cave. A fixed ladder is secured in the entrance pot hole (for the rest of the route see the rough cave survey). If you get all the way to the bottom of the cave you will find two stainless steel pins tie wrapped together, this is the limit that I got to. The passage at the bottom of this a small sloping chamber does continue at low level and you can see a rift continuing. There is still good air and a slight draft. The water, when it flows from the surface runs down the left of this bottom chamber and continues into the low rift. Take care, regards Vogon

Fernhill - Wednesday 5th July Dave, Paul Gladman (MNRC), and Clive

Dave fettled the winch bearers where the bearings had been fitted and refitted a replacement unit. Then to the bottom of The Pit to assess the shoring needs and to check whether a particular piece of angle line would fit, which it did. Looking at it all again, it was decided that a chunkier piece of angle would be best at the base of the supported wall and roof and this is planned using a section that Dave has "in stock".

The first hauling session using the winch and took place with Dave loading at the bottom, Paul on the naughty step and live on the winch.

The new arrangement worked really well but a teething problem appeared when it was found that the rope would not wind neatly around the drum and was trying to jump off all the time. This made winching harder work as only one arm could be used as a lot of the time the other was being employed repositioning the rope on the drum.

After some head scratching, it was found that we could swivel the whole winch round on the concrete base by just a couple of inches, which made all the difference, and now the rope winds neatly onto the drum – result!

Around 20 odd bags made their way to the surface and remain to be emptied. All this made arriving at the pub a bit later than usual finding the door was locked, but by dint of negotiation and more than a bit of patience entry was gained for a very welcome pint and a chat with Gav until closing.

I'm not around this weekend (back to normal on Wednesday). There is plenty of hauling and bag emptying to do and Dave may possibly start work on the shoring...

Clive

First task was a bit of winch fettling. A little grinding of the frame and a new bearing fitted plus angle iron shims fitted beneath both bearing housings to prevent further stress and potential cracking of the housings. (Longer bolts still to be fitted, may fit on Saturday).

All three then proceeded to the bottom of the Pit to test fit a length of 'I' beam. Length okay but felt that 75mm longer and a larger 75mm angle iron beam would serve better to build a wall upon. Dave thinks he has a suitable length in stock.

The remaining short length of temporary pipe that was used to support the old wall on route to main chamber was cut back whilst the angle grinder was available.

On to hauling duties and first proper test of winch. Clive took the role of winch operator, Paul on the Ledge and Dave loading bags into skip. A guesstimate of 20 bags hauled up using the winch which worked well as nice and controllable both up and down making the ledge-mans task easier as well as the surface haulers job with no slippery rope to grip.

A few tweaks were required to the position of the winch to ensure the rope spooled on to the drum without the need to adjust by hand. A successful test of the winch with just the final addition to add - a wedge shaped block that can be fitted over the ring bolt just inside the entrance pipe to prevent skip snagging. This will be easy to fit for each hauling session and removed at the end of play. Dave will hopefully sort before Sat's session time permitting.

Dave.

Saturday 8th July Fernhill Cave Geoff, Rich & Dave.

Whilst Geoff and Rich emptied the bags that were hauled to the surface on Wednesday, Dave replaced two of the winch bearing bolts with longer bolts (the other two will be done on Wednesday).

A 1.35m of 90mm angle iron was lowered down along with drill and Rawbolts etc. for the Pit shoring.

First below ground task was to haul the remaining bags of spoil - Geoff loading, Rich on the Ledge and Dave winching.

Dave then started to fit angle iron beam whilst Geoff and Rich emptied the 44 bags on the surface. Beam end requires a little modification with angle grinder for better locating so not fitted - will finish install on Wednesday.

Dave.

Dave was due to prepare this report but as he is very busy, preparing the Thrupe site for the weekend I thought I'd send this in the meantime.....

Fernhill - Wednesday 12th July Dave and Clive

Armed with Hilti drill, angle, grinder, nuts and bolts et cetera we headed straight to the bottom where Dave use the grinder to good affect taking off a section at the end of the heavy duty section of angle which he had taken down last Saturday.

Sometime was spent in bolting the angle to the right-hand wall as it was difficult to get the position of the bolts to line up with the pre-drilled holes in the steel. In the end, it was decided that one bolt would be plenty for the job. Some rock was drilled and chiselled away from the left-hand ledge where the steel was due to sit as part of the lining up attempt.

That done Dave headed to the surface to replace some of the winch bearing bolts with longer versions whilst Clive plug and feathered the large block sitting on the floor. Six holes where needed to reduce it to 6 manageable chunks and some gravel. Some of these were flattish sections which could be of use in the forthcoming shoring sessions.

Discussions were had re-the positioning of some rebar with potentially some steel mesh on top as a base for the cemented stone shoring.

Clive

ATLAS 50th + stream clearing Friday to Sunday 14th to 16th July

A few days leading up to the weekend Dave dropped off various bits of kit that would prove useful for stream clearing and BBQ, including wheelbarrows, shovels, spades, large table, BBQ, galvanised bridging plate, scaffold boards, tea brew kit, water.

Friday morning despite the pouring rain Tony Littler and Dave headed over to Thrupe Lane Swallet armed with brush cutters to knock back the overgrown stream banks. It was noted the the Himalayan Balsam was no where near as prolific as it was back in 2021. The path towards TLS entrance was cleared of some of the dead over hanging branches as was access to the Ferret Shed.

Saturday morning Clive Rich and Dave made an early start to erect the gazebos and a bit of Ferret Shed late spring cleaning in preparation for the hoped for masses of volunteers. Whilst Rich began rebuilding the collapsed dry stone wall behind the ash tree by the stile, Clive went to pick up Simon from Frome station and Dave began digging out silts by TLS entrance. As lunchtime approached the numbers were swelled by the arrival Dave Everett, Simon, Geoff (after his morning session in Viaduct Sink) and Emma G with puppy Sweep. It was noted that four of the original ATLAS team were now present and a very pleasant lunch was had with some lively discussions. It wasn't necessary to light the BBQ since everyone had bought a packed lunch as was usual for the current Saturday Fernhill team. Emma unfortunately wasn't able to stay and help in the afternoon due to dog sitting duties at home.

After lunch the numbers were boosted as Duncan arrived for moral support and Tony Littler, Michael and Jenny (MNRC) who got stuck in shoveling and barrowing before Dave K led Michael and Jenny on a through trip from TLS to Hobnail and Tony got stuck in with shoveling silts. Dave first pre-rigged King Cobble Hall ladder/lifeline and noted that despite there being a reasonable stream flowing down the Hobnail Channel, most of this water was now disappearing down to Colditz leaving the climb down to the top of Black Pot dry and Black Pot itself just a little drippy. The caving trip took a little longer to get going since both Jenny and Michael were using borrowed SRT kit that required some fettling/fitting and both needed some training/mentoring particularly since Michael hadn't SRT'd before. The trip went well taking in a bimble down Marble Streamway to Atlas Pot. By the time the three popped up out of Hobnail only Tony remained on surface duties the rest of the team having headed home, Geoff via Frome station to drop Simon off. Before leaving most of the kit had been packed away bar the gazebos which didn't long to bundle up between the four. A good days work had been done with the TLS approach stream bed dug back to the where the stream first reaches the cliff face.

Sunday morning Tony L, Mike Moxon and Dave set off to TLS to erect gazebos, tables, chairs BBQ etc. Tony then departed for a committee meeting and not long after an enthusiastic team of four from Friends of Windsor Hill Tunnels arrived (<https://m.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064696389006>), comprising of Gavin (Rock Farm land owner), Ian, Tom and Jeremy. They usually volunteer on Sunday morning path clearing and dealing with ash die back at Windsor Hill where an amazing amount of work has been carried out in transforming the old railway tracks and viaducts into multi user paths. After a quick tour of the Thrupe stream and cave entrances the team got stuck in to continue clearing the stream bed where the Saturday team left off. The onset of heavy rain proved an ideal time for a late morning tea break before more digging and barrowing. By 1pm the BBQ was ready, the TLS stream had been dug back to the Hobnail Channel, the Hobnail stream diverted down the then cleared TLS stream bed, the Hobnail Channel cleared down to the stone lined stream banks and stream bed, and finally the stream re-diverted back down the Hobnail Channel.

A well deserved BBQ lunch was enjoyed by the team before being joined by Clive and all hands on deck to clean tools and pack everything away. With Clive and Dave's car loaded with most of the kit everyone departed.

All in all a good weekend's work, fortunately the worst of the weather seemed to arrive during tea/lunch breaks. A few locals dropped by during the course of the weekend and were suitably enlightened.

A big thanks to all that braved the weather over the weekend and before.

In no particular order:- Clive, Geoff, Rich, Dave Everett, Simon, Tony Littler, Emma G, Sweep, Mike Moxon, Duncan, Michael, Jenny, Gavin, Tom, Ian, Jeremy and Dave K.

Fernhill - Wednesday 19th July Dave and Clive

The session was devoted to building onto the steel girder we installed last week....

A section of re'bar from Dave approx 2 m long was taken down along with about a square metre section of steel mesh from Clive.

Some horizontal test holes were first tried using a short section of steel rod to work out where any problem boulders might be hiding in the eastern wall at the bottom of the pit. All bar(!) one produced no problems and they became the sites for the re'bar. After cutting the re'bar to the required lengths, they were inserted into the holes in the mud fill and wrestled into their final positions resting on the steel girder.

The mesh was then cut to size using the angle grinder and positioned over the re'bar and girder providing a good base to build the wall on.

Some mud and rocks had to be dislodged during the operation - Dave cleared these up producing about six bags which were hauled up to the main rift.

There are a few flattish rocks at the bottom of the shaft which can be used for the wall base, but we need to search for some more on the surface and take them down on Saturday. We also need to take down the heavy steel ladder from the surface to use at the bottom of the pot. There will also be cementing of course. The forecast for Saturday looks pretty wet!

Clive

Fernhill - Saturday 22nd July Geoff and Clive, Rich on surface support.

On perhaps the wettest day of the year (!) it seemed appropriate to have umbrellas for the walk from the car park to the cave – a strange site indeed of three people fully encased in caving gear sporting big black umbrellas!

Underground Geoff carefully removed about eight bags-worth of mud etc from the area around they ever so slightly drafted hole while Clive hauled them up to the main rift. The bags joined those left from last Wednesday's session and were winched to the surface using the multi ledge as a halfway house.

It has to be said that the winch has completely revolutionised the surface operation it really is so much easier than hand hauling on a muddy rope.

On Wednesday we need to start building the retaining wall on top of the steel drawing. Some extra flattish rocks were brought down from the surface to help with this.

Clive

Wednesday 26th July, Fernhill, Alex, Clive and Dave.

Clive collected water and started a mix of cement whilst Alex and Dave rigged the ladder and headed on down in preparation for cementing rocks into position on the heavy duty angle iron beam and mesh. A fair bit of mud had collapsed from above the beam which needed to be cleared first, a lot of which had landed in the abandoned slot behind the large southern boulder as well as on the mesh and in the bottom of the Pit. The mud from the mesh was deposited in the abandoned slot after first recovering tools that had been partially buried. Hopefully all tools recovered although we may be missing the short chisel (tools should all be left above the Pit lest they get buried should further collapses occur). Some of the mud that landed in the bottom of the Pit probably came from the West wall, this too will most likely require further shoring below the existing cement/rock wall. The mud may have collapsed out due in part to the wetter conditions on the surface percolating down through the infill. Before any further digging below the angle iron beam we should shore up the walls as necessary, particularly as it gets a bit wetter lower down as we come out of the summer 'dry period'.

With the mesh cleared of mud a piece of cloth was laid across the mesh before placing and cementing in a few large rocks at the lower end of the angle iron/mesh shelf to prevent the cement from dropping through. Two skips of cement used before it was decided to bag up the mud spoil that had landed on top of the useful wall building rocks at the bottom of the Pit which were hauled out to the surface. Before exiting the Pit the shelf and beginning of wall were covered with empty spoil bags to ease mud clearing should any more collapse before Saturday's session.

Exited to a very wet evening. Alex headed straight off whilst Clive and Dave patronised the local hostelry.

Attached photo of angle iron beam/mesh shelf before rock cementing.

Dave.

Ps. Dave sometimes doesn't receive the Thrupe Group emails (usually Clive's reports) hence why Clive includes Dave as a recipient. It also seems Rich is not always receiving Thrupe Group emails, therefore Rich has been included as a recipient to the above report.

Moving forward, since there is usually a digging session on both Wed's and Sat's it is probably worth always doing a report even if the report says "No digging". Then if a report following either day not received by someone it can be assumed that there has been a Thrupe Group mail fail unless of course some failed to report the digging session. In either case it can be flagged and rectified.

Pps. Reminder for Dave to bring new skips and cement on Saturday.

Saturday 29th July Viaduct Sink

Geoff, Duncan and Dave.

A clearing session of most of the digging kit from Viaduct Sink.

Geoff headed in a little earlier than Duncan and Dave and by the time the pair joined Geoff he had already done a couple of trips beyond the waterfall to ferry a fair bit of kit back towards the entrance. This was Duncan's first trip into Viaduct Sink so a visit to most of the cave was a must. Dismal Series, Red Aven were given a miss but visits to Shale End, the Somme, past The Tool Shed down to the sump at the bottom of inclined blasted passage. It was noted that the sump had backed up further than it had previously, even after the stream was re-routed back down the blasted inclined passage when attention was moved to the Somme. Duncan and Dave then took various tools and hauled the blue stream diverting pipe back towards the entrance. Geoff in the mean time had also pulled more redundant kit back towards the entrance.

With everything piling up below the entrance shaft a bit of consolidation of kit was required to reduce the number of packages and loose tools etc. Everything was pulled out bar the blue pipe and a couple of drag trays which were left just below the entrance for an easy retrieval on a subsequent (possibly solo) visit.

With plenty of time to spare the heavy mud clad bags were rinsed in the stream and repacked to make for much lighter loads to carry across the fields back to Rock Farm.

All of the kit was then loaded into Dave's car for sorting/disposing of later. This in fact Dave did Saturday evening as the sun went down since bin collection day is on Monday. A wheelie bin full of scrap spoil bags, knackered ropes and skips - a washing line full of clean serviceable spoil bags and rope - various tools cleaned.

A good very useful session with very little left to bring out.

Dave.

Saturday 29th July Fernhill

Geoff, Clive, Dave and Duncan on flying visit surface support.

Dave brought along two new skips, a couple of small manageable bags of sand from Dave's emporium plus half of the a bag of cement purchased from Wickes earlier in the week.

Geoff emptied Wednesday night's spoil bags, Dave sought some suitable wall building rocks and a bag of fillers from the spoil heap whilst Clive collected and sieved some more gravel from the quarry floor.

Down in the Pit only a small amount of mud had dropped since Wednesday so it was straight into wall building. Clive on surface duties mixing cement, Geoff up and down like a yo-yo relaying cement and building rocks to Dave so he could continue wall building. Only a small amount of water was needed to be brought up from the quarry floor since the white surface skip had been previously positioned to catch rain run off from the gazebo.

After about five or six skips worth of cement and a fair number of rocks cemented in, the wall is an average of 30cm high and probably 50cm deep front to back. Most of the sand was used so more sand will be brought up on Wednesday evening.

Dave.

Wednesday 2nd August

Fernhill Cave Alex, Clive, Andy Watson and Dave.

More sand taken up to entrance with more to follow on Saturday.

Clive collected and sieved more gravel from the quarry whilst Alex and Dave lowered down the shaft several skip loads of clean rocks suitable for wall building. Clive on surface mixing cement, Alex later joined by Andy supported Dave in wall building by relaying rocks and cement down the Pit.

Before continuing with wall building a couple of bags worth of mud that had collapse from above required clearing. Plus some mud that broke free during wall building. Very damp down the Pit due the general wet surface conditions and added to by the significant downpour earlier in the day.

Judging by the activity in Oakhill it would appear that some houses suffered flooding, plus the road South from Oakhill was closed from Oakhill to the A37 due to a significant amount of debris washed onto the road. Thrupe Lane Swallet had seen the water level rise about 30-50cm above the entrance and the Hobnail gate was completely covered with debris that had swirled and settled on the gate as the overwhelming stream flowed down the entrance gate. In Fairy Cave Quarry around 7:15pm Clive noted that a stream was flowing out from Withyhill entrance pipe, across the quarry floor towards Hillwithy causing a lake to form in the West end of the quarry. After digging Dave took a quick visit over to Withyhill and Hillwithy and noted that the stream had ceased flowing out of Withyhill and the lake was slowly draining away some of which was flowing beneath Hillwithy entrance to emerge as a significant stream just inside the cave.

Dave.

Viaduct Sink Saturday 5 August Dave K, Geoff N

With His Lordship's Hole being almost certainly too wet due to Storm Antoni, Geoff decided instead to continue the tidying up of Viaduct Sink. The intention was to remove ancient det. wire and other small detritus and to see if the formations in The Somme would scrub up., collecting the small skips on the way out.

Geoff arrived at the entrance to find it half buried under silt and other flood debris and the chains totally buried. After this had been cleared away he entered the cave. Alas his light developed an intermittent fault on the way in and discretion was the better part of valour, so he retreated before reaching the thundering Downside Aven. The skips were collected and taken back to Rock Farm, where he found Dave had independently decided to retrieve the blue pipe and the said skips.

So Geoff accompanied Dave back to the cave and hauled the pipe out of the entrance passage. After rinsing the pipe out in the stream Dave coiled and tied the pipe up for transport and storage and they returned to Rock Farm.

Geoff

Saturday 5th August

Fernhill Cave Clive, Geoff and Dave

Geoff and Dave arrived a little early and after a spot of lunch proceeded to lug bags of sand up to the entrance. A few more wall building rocks were gathered and lowered down the entrance shaft before returning to the car park to meet Clive. Further sand was then wheelbarrowed up to the entrance.

Down at the bottom of the Pit a large boulder approx 70cm x 50cm x 40cm and a fair amount of mud had slumped out of the East wall from beneath the new cemented rock wall below the inserted rebar. Despite the ends of the rebar being exposed the wall remains structurally secure and should prevent further slumping from behind the wall. The large boulder will eventually require reducing when digging operations can resume after both the East and West walls above have been shored up.

Dave continued building the cemented rock East wall whilst Clive mixed cement and Geoff relayed the cement and rocks down to Dave. Before exiting Geoff and Clive descended the Pit to view the slumped out boulder and gain a better understanding of the situation.

Dave.

Ps. Dave is available this coming Wednesday evening but then not available for the following Wednesday or the next two Saturdays (ie Dave returns for digging either Wed 23rd or Sat 26th August)

Wednesday 24th August Fernhill

Clive & Dave

No digging but instead a gravel and rock collecting session. Whilst Clive sieved and bagged gravel, Dave sourced rocks from the SE of the quarry. Several barrow loads of rocks were wheeled up to the entrance, and approximately 24 bags of gravel were left lined up at the bottom of the slope. An early finish and a well earned pint was had at the Oakhill.

Dave.

Saturday 28th August Fernhill Cave

Tony Littler, Geoff & Dave

Geoff and Dave headed up to the entrance with more sand and another half bag of cement. A number of bags of Wednesday's gravel were also carried up. Shortly afterwards Tony arrived and a number of skips of rocks were lowered down Fernhill.

Tony on cement mixing, Geoff ferrying skips of cement and rocks for Dave to continue wall building. Between cement mixes Tony fetched the remaining bags of gravel up to the entrance.

Three or four skips of cement and several rocks later time was called. Tony then visited the bottom of the pit and also a quick view of the curtains in Curtain Chamber.

A useful session with the wall building progressing well.

More of the same to follow Wednesday evening.

Dave.

Wednesday 30th August Fernhill Cave

Clive & Dave

More of the same, a couple of wall building rocks taken down and two skips of cement. Both then underground, Dave continued wall building supported by Clive. Becoming more difficult to select rocks that fit well due to a shortage of space below limiting the choice of rocks available to hand.

A late(ish) finish, but just managed to make the Oakhill before door locked.

Dave.

Ps. No digging this Saturday due to lack of digger availability

Wednesday 6th Sept Fernhill Cave

Alex and Dave

A late start underground having got distracted by a rouge cow pat at the quarry gate. We tracked the foot prints all around the quarry to the lane at the other side and into a field containing some cows to the NE of the quarry.

Underground walling was continued by Dave supplied by Alex, with one skip of concrete used and a skip of flat rocks taken underground. Not having time to mix up another batch we headed to the Oakhill and were met by Gavin there.

Alex

Fernhill- Wednesday 13th September Dave, Alex and Clive

A fairly light weight evening this time with the aim of removing the overhanging, partly stalled-up ledge of stream-borne pebbles halfway down the pit directly above the dig area.

This was accomplished by dint of various contortions by Dave, balancing a skip on an upended piece of steel, while Alex hammered and chiselled the offending ledge above him.

Six full bags now, await removal to the surface.

Having rendered the pit much safer than previously attention turned to the opposite, western face where plans were laid to drill, and fix into position against the bedrock using steel pins, one of the embedded boulders.

This rock can then become part of a planned beam upon which we can build a new retaining wall.

Some more wall building is needed on the opposite side to finish the wall there. There is enough space to use up the large rocks that we have standing by for the job.

No digging etc this weekend, due to Hidden Earth.

Clive

Saturday 23rd September Fernhill Cave Rich, Geoff, Clive and Dave.

On arrival at the quarry a lot brash from a fallen tree had been cleared and dumped between the roadside boulders and the main quarry gate. This was soon cleared with bow saw, secateurs and loppers before heading on to Fernhill.

Rich set about selecting suitable wall building rocks from below the spoil heap before following Dave and Geoff underground. Clive operated the winch, Rich at the bottom of the entrance pipe, Geoff on the ledge and Dave at the bottom of the entrance rift. A number of skip and boulder net loads of rocks were sent down whilst the bags of spoil from Wednesday evening were hauled out.

With Clive on cement mixing duties, Rich and Geoff ferried the three skip loads of cement down to Dave where the continued the wall building.

Dave.

Ps. Digging on Wednesday 27th as usual.

Dave then unavailable until end of October.

Clive also unavailable for a few weeks.

Fernhill - Wednesday 27th September Dave and Clive

A short visit this time armed with drill, hacksaw and steel rods.....

No doubt due to the high surface winds there was a 'gale' of a draught going into the cave this time.

The job was to drill a couple of holes in a large rock (turned out to be flowstone again) in the left hand (western) wall of The Pit in order to insert steel pins through into the bedrock beyond. The idea is to prevent the rock from possibly wanting to move when we use it as support for one end of the steel beam which is to be installed prior to walling up that side of The Pit. It may be that we in fact bolt the beam to the solid wall on both sides as well as rest it on the boulder.

Mission accomplished and a relaxed early visit to The Oakhill to team up with Gav.

Due to staff shortages the next planned visit will be on Sat 7th when we can start removing the accumulated clag from the bottom of The Pit adjacent to the dig face.

Clive

Fernhill Cave Saturday 7 October Clive, Rich, Geoff

As a change from wall building we spent the session relocating the mud that had collapsed into the dig. This now resides in a heap of bags at the foot of the entrance ladders. For those who are interested in this sort of thing, 6 or 7 bags of bags were filled and moved in all - estimated 30-40 bags -in total.

Geoff noted that the air was fresh in the dig. Only small rocks fell on him on this occasion. We will soon have to decide where to dig - along the cross rift or directly East into the mud & boulder choke? We can probably put off this decision for a little while with a bit more wall building and maybe popping the big boulder which fell into the dig during the collapse.

Next Saturday is looking doubtful due a to manpower shortage.

Geoff

Fernhill - Wednesday 11th October Alex and Clive

After an initial hiccup when Clive realised he had left the ladder etc at home (!) we set off to haul last Saturday's bags to the surface.

Clive loading at the bottom for Alex to haul to the 'naughty ledge' before both moved up one place to finish the haul to the surface.

Approx 40 bags hauled up to the rain soaked surface ready for emptying next time.

Staff shortages prevent a session this weekend so next Wed will be the next opportunity (no Dave though).

Clive

Richard, Geoff and Clive

While Richard and Geoff attacked the great pile of mud-filled bags heaped up around the winch Clive used the last remaining bit of cement to make one mix of concrete.

This was lowered down the entrance followed by drill, bang, box and firing cable and the complete team.

Richard gamely volunteered to add the concrete and some rocks to the top of the wall in The Pit. (he said he might as well do it as he would only stand there and criticise, otherwise!)

By the time he'd finished a very smart extra 6 inches had been added to the wall.

Attention then turned to the very large block sitting at the base of the shaft. Two holes were drilled and ultimately fired which hopefully will have reduced the block to handleable chunks....

Next session – remove said chunks and file for probable use in the wall(s).

Clive

Saturday 28th October Fernhill Cave

Rich, Clive, Geoff, Mike Moxon & Dave.

Rich & Geoff went on down to the pit, Clive began mixing cement whilst Dave went back to the car park to find his dropped keys.

Rich continued and finished building the East wall supported by Geoff, Dave (after finding keys) and a little later Mike too. Three or four skips of cement and a number of rocks (inc a couple of boulder netted rocks) and the East wall was declared as finished.

Geoff then went on down to load the manageable sized rocks from the previous bang into skips to be hauled up and stashed by Rich, Mike & Dave. After which Mike & Dave inspected the bottom of the pit. A few rocks were beaten into submission for hauling in either skips or boulder net during the next session, one large rock will require plug-n-feathering. Meanwhile Clive remained on the surface cleaning the cement mixing equipment and perhaps a little thumb twiddling.

Task list for next session on Wednesday evening:-

Remove the heavy, cumbersome steel ladder from the pit and replace with a lighter aluminium ladder from Dave's ladder stock.

Plug-n-feather large rock and haul up along with the other remaining rocks.

Measure up for angle iron/beam for West wall foundation.

Measure for handline chain to aid Main Chamber access.

Install a separate better placed anchor for the pit electron ladder.

Take out the entrance rift ladder for cleaning and inspecting.

Dave.

Wednesday 2nd November Fernhill Cave Alex & Dave

An aluminium ladder was taken down to replace the heavy iron ladder in the pit and the iron ladder hauled out to surface.

Hauled up the various rocks from the pit inc three that required the boulder net.

Drilled two 20mm holes in the remaining large boulder but unfortunately the plug-n-feathers required a larger diameter hole, alternatively smaller plug-n-feathers required.

A length of 2 x 2 was cut with compound angle at each end to act as a template for a suitable foundation beam for the west/left-hand wall.

On exiting the lower/rift ladder was removed for cleaning and inspecting. The spreader was left since the krab sleeve/ferrule wouldn't unscrew, this can be rectified on Saturday.

Dave has acquired a few more bags of cement for when West wall building commences.

Dave.

Fernhill Cave Saturday 4th November Clive, Rich, Dave, Geoff

I suppose someone ought to write this up for the record. Hopefully I have remembered the details right.

Rich and Clive confined to surface duties, the latter due to a nasty cold. Rich collecting wall building rocks and Clive brush cutting and operating the winch.

Dave and Geoff underground.

Dave first plug & feathered the remaining portion of the massive boulder, Geoff hauled the larger bits up for possible wall building. They then swapped places, Geoff filling bags with mud and rubble from the dig whilst Dave drilled holes for new ladder and chain anchors. Once holes were drilled Dave assisted the bags to the surface aided by Clive on the winch. Geoff carried on digging. The available bags (c.a.12 ?) of mud & rubble were filled and sent up. Three or four large rocks were teased out from the cross rift behind the L-shaped boulder, and hauled out of the dig using the boulder net.

Further progress requires dismantling and removal of the large L-shaped boulder. The rift appears to be gaining a solid roof but behind a significant void there appears to be a solid wall ahead, so maybe we will have to moved a bit east to continue. Due to the wet weather the mud has become incredibly sticky and difficult to handle so there is talk of concentrating on finishing the West wall building for now.

Geoff

Wednesday 8th November Fernhill Cave

Clive and Dave

In preparation for a handline chain to assist the climb to and from Main Chamber, a new bolt and bracket was installed in the roof of the crawl and the existing point the current handline is belayed to was replaced with a suitable bracket and new expansion bolt. This will give the chain two belay points (Y-hang).

A few of the larger boulders that had been hauled up from the pit were plug-n-feathered into more manageable sizes.

A quick visit to the bottom of the pit confirmed that it is too wet to realistically dig at present since there are now small puddles developing in the mud.

It's suggested that as well as concentrating on shoring/stabilising the West wall, the spoil heap on the surface requires attention and a general surface tidy up. The entrance rift and steps etc could do with a good clean down of mud.

Gavin at Rock Farm believes he has a length of angle iron suitable for the West wall. Dave plans to collect this over the coming weekend.

Since no progress can be made underground on Saturday, a surface session is proposed.

Dave.

Saturday 11th November

Fernhill Cave Clive, Geoff and Dave

Dave collected a long length of 3" angle iron courtesy of Gavin at Rock Farm. This will in due course be cut and ends adjusted to facilitate bolting to the walls for the West wall to be built upon.

No activity underground except that is for a couple of MNRC members to view the curtains.

Clive and Dave attacked the spoil heap whilst Geoff emptied the previous spoil bags and then washed the bags in one of the winter puddles on the quarry floor.

By end of play Clive and Dave had pretty much levelled the spoil heap.

Dave.

Wednesday 15th November

Fernhill Cave Clive & Dave

Alex would've attended but because there was very little to be done and a short session planned it wasn't worth the journey from Yeovil.

A new hole drilled and pit ladder secured to the South slope/wall making it much easier to climb in and out of the pit.

The wood template for the angle iron beam was then offered up to confirm it's position etc and also identify which orientation and angle the end tabs need to be for bolting into position. Dave can now go ahead with cutting the angle iron.

With plenty of time to spare various tools, pit haul rope, boulder net, a couple of skips were hauled out and washed in one of the temporary puddles in the quarry floor. Two skips of clean kit left at the bottom of the entrance shaft whilst crowbars and boulder net were taken further down. One casualty, the water container took a hit from a crowbar puncturing it near the bottom. This was brought out to the surface.

An early finish followed by re-hydration in the Oakhill.

Dave

Ps. I'm not available this Saturday (18th) but will probably be available Wednesday 22nd when I hope to fit the angle iron. Assuming I've had time to cut and bend fixing tabs. Will update in due course, but until the angle iron is fitted wall building is on hold. With little else to do apart from perhaps a clean up/washdown of the rift and steps etc I suggest a weekend off.

Fernhill - Saturday 18th Nov Clive - solo to clear the Buddleia encroaching on the gazebo....

Clive

Sunday 26th November Fernhill Cave

Dave - solo

With angle iron cut, drilled and end tabs bent to pattern/template, Dave did a solo trip to offer it up. It was a reasonable fit but a few tweaks would improve it. On the way out a skips worth of mud was removed from the ledge in the entrance rift.

Fernhill Wednesday 29th November

Alex and Dave

With the tweaks having been made, Alex and Dave took the angle iron down the pit in Fernhill Cave. Two 20mm holes drilled and angle iron secured with M12 Rawlbolts. A gap between the end tab and the South wall could do with shimming, Dave will cut some slotted shims and fit in due course. The angle iron also sits on the pinned calcite block and has a hole drilled to take a third fixing. This fixing was envisaged to be a length of M12 studding vertically right through both the pinned calcite block and the angle iron. A hole was drilled into the calcite block but unfortunately it hit one of the 12mm rods pinning the calcite block. A suitable through bolt type fixing will be fitted instead. This will help secure both the calcite block and the angle iron.

On the way out Alex and Dave drilled a 20mm drain hole in the lip of the ledge to allow the puddle that develops to drain. In addition a further skip full of mud was dug out from the ledge and deposited on the surface spoil heap.

Dave.

Thursday 7th Dec Fernhill Cave Clive and Dave.

Fitted shims to Rawlbolts at both ends of angle iron. Unable to fit through bolt down into boulder due to previously drilled hole appears to have closed up a tad. Will run a drill down it and fit on Saturday.

Dug and raked out mud infill from between the rock/boulders in the vicinity of angle iron ready for cleaning and grouting. The resulting dozen plus bags stacked below the entrance rift. A couple of suitable rocks and slab were worked into place bridging the gap between angle iron and wall on which the retaining wall can be built upon.

Back at the car park a 4ft x 1ft dia rotten log that had landed on the roadside from a tree trunk that had fallen on the wall at the far end of the car park was relocated clear of the road.

For a change, Clive and Dave headed for The Horseshoe Inn - Bowlsh to join The Friends of Windsor Hill Tunnels ie Gav and Sunday volunteers, some of whom assisted with Thurpe Lane Swallet/ Hobnail Hole stream clearing earlier in the year.

Dave.

Saturday 9th December Fernhill Cave

Rich, Geoff, Clive and Dave

Dave reamed out hole in boulder below angle iron and fitted the through bolt whilst Wednesday's bags of spoil were hauled and emptied on the surface - Geoff loading, Rich on ledge guiding skips and Clive on surface operating the winch.

Clive on cement mixing, Rich guiding skips and Geoff supporting Dave on wall building.

A bucket of water, squeeze bottle and brush taken down to clean off wall building rocks and the surrounding boulders. First skip load of cement used to grout in the in-situ boulders and the first foundation rocks that were placed on Wednesday. Two more skips of cement and various rocks made a good start on the wall.

Rich found it quite chilly on ledge duty due to the draught and only short intermittent activity since only three skips of cement were required. So Clive closed the entrance gate which virtually stopped the through draught, obvious but it wasn't previously thought about.

Dave.

Ps. Clive and Dave will continue wall building the next couple of Wednesday evenings but no further Saturday sessions until after Xmas.

Fernhill Wed Dec 13th Dave and Clive

After premixing two skips worth of concrete some nice clean blocks were sent down to Dave at the bottom of the entrance shaft followed by the mix.

During the evening, much progress was made on the Western wall, including a final third mix, leaving the wall about 18 inches higher than it was previously.

We reckon we are about one third of the way up already so it shouldn't take too long to finish – much less to do on the other wall. Before finishing ropes etc were tidied up in case of visitors over Christmas.

On returning to the surface a clear up of tatty skips etc was done, these being taken away by Dave for disposal.

No more sessions now until after Christmas but Clive may go and do a mega gravel run sometime as we are almost out.

Clive

Fernhill - Sunday 31st Dec 2023 Geoff and Dave dodging the showers whilst washing out the bags and filling them with aggregate from the quarry.

Geoff found a new spot to excavate on the gravel heap which was infinitely less rock-infested than our usual spot. The finer grit also had a good 'sand' content which is a bonus.

18 bags transported up to the cave where, much as expected, the storms had knocked over the gazebo. A brief and unsuccessful attempt to right it followed - it needs attention by the resident site engineer....

If Dave is back in circulation mid-week we can restart wall building. Geoff and Clive are available on Sat 6th....

Clive