

Fernhill Cave Wednesday 3rd January

Clive, Alex and Dave.

Cement dust replenished on surface.

Gazebo assessed - four corner connectors and legs require repair/replacement. Dave took some parts off site to sort for re-erecting Saturday.

A couple of skips of rocks sent down plus two skips of mortar mix.

Another couple of courses of rocks added to the wall, as we go up the mud between the left-hand end of the wall and the bedrock/calcite slope would be best advised dug out and filled with rock/cement to bond in the left-hand end of wall. This may need to be done after the wall has progressed higher to prevent undermining the infill below the earlier wall.

Arrived at the Oakhill to find curtains drawn and staff donning coats - early closing.

Gav arrived and kindly invited us back to Rock Farm instead - would have been rude not to.

Dave.

Ps. I'm not available next Wednesday or the following Saturday (10th and 13th).

Saturday 6th January Fernhill Cave Clive, Geoff, Andy (Vogon) and Dave.

Dave arrived at the quarry a couple of hours early to check out a few entrances in the quarry (see footnote) and to sort gazebo.

Unfortunately the spare gazebo parts were not compatible with the damaged gazebo, and so the complete frame of a new gazebo was erected and the cover that goes with it will follow on Thursday.

A selection of rocks were sent down followed by three skips of cement mortar. Wall building continued and after a fourth skip of cement the wall is fast approaching the bottom of the earlier wall. Another few sessions will probably complete the wall and then an assessment of the pit below can resume.

Another 1/2 bag of cement required on Thursday.

Footnote:-

The West end of the quarry that was a lake after the recent storms had all but drained away leaving small ponds in the vicinity of Hillwithy. A very well defined stream path has been washed out in the quarry floor between Withyhill and Hillwithy, more so than it had been months earlier.

Recently the padlock on Hillier's had been smashed off and a glass bottle broken down the entrance rift. A quick descent to clear the glass and also bring out a bag of rubbish that previous diggers had stashed in the entrance rift. Just inside the entrance a stream could be heard so a quick visit to the T junction reveal a healthy stream flowing through the crawl towards Fairy Cave.

Withyhill entrance pipe had a tide line approx 100mm up the pipe wall and debris on the grill that covers the the padlock access holes in the gate. I assume a large flow would have issued from the relief pipes inserted just below the entrance pipe level.

Dave.

Wednesday 11th January 2024 Fernhill Cave

Clive & Dave.

A few rocks with parallel surfaces were loaded into wheelbarrow on the way to Fernhill with another $\frac{2}{3}$ bag of cement.

Clive set about mixing two skips worth of cement mortar whilst Dave rigged ladder and took down a couple of skips of rocks and offered up rocks to cement in.

Clive soon followed down with the cement skips. Another couple of courses of rocks added to the wall to pick up the previous wall above. Clive mixed a 3rd skip of cement to complete the wall bar some flat slabs to cap the wall off. These are not too urgent and more for aesthetics than structural.

A quick assessment of the bottom of the pit before heading off to the Three Horseshoes, Bowlish to join the Friends of Windsor Hill Tunnels for a pint.

Digging with caution at the bottom of the the pit can now resume, mainly to clear out the gloopy mud that has slumped in. Further shoring will probably be required in the near future.

Dave.

Ps. A reminder that digging this weekend is Sunday. Chris - one of the Friends of Windsor Hill Tunnels volunteers - will join us on Sunday.

Fernhill Cave Sunday 14 January Clive, Dave, Andy, Chris Scully, Geoff

With the lower West Wall now complete, the time had come to remove the mud and boulders that had fallen into the dig whilst the said wall was being finished off.

A relatively late start was made up for by the size of the team. For the bulk of the session it was Andy on winch, Dave on the Naughty Step and Clive hauling out of the pit. Geoff and Chris took turns at digging out the spoil which was mostly very sticky mud.

Sixty bags of spoil were sent to the surface and emptied at the end of the session. The boulders were added to the wall building store. The bags are mostly caked in mud but washing them will be difficult as there currently is very little standing water in the quarry.

As understood this was Chris's introduction to caving and digging, arranged by Dave (with a quick visit to Curtain Chamber). He did well but it remains to be seen if he returns

There is general agreement as to the direction the dig should take, but decisions now have to be made as to how this can be done safely.

Geoff

This year will obviously be crucial for the Fernhill dig.

1. Hopefully "The Pit" will still yield results after all the effort put into it, particularly by Clive, Dave and Geoff. What remains a puzzle is the description of the aural connection between Fernhill and the Duck's Pot aven. Phil Davies locates it in "the central part of the floor of the main chamber", and says that on the second, and last, link-up, he could hear Fred Davies approaching in Duck's Pot and could even hear him breathing! The

connection appears to be amongst small open spaces between large boulders, and Phil thought the separation to be no more than 10'.

I suspect that the large mud and rock slump in the main chamber now unfortunately conceals these large boulders. Our dig in the western side of the chamber soon after the re-opening quickly became very squalid (like The Pit) and disclosed no open spaces. Where can the Duck's Pot even be? It must be between The Pit and the earlier main chamber dig, a relatively small area. Something which could be done is to try a voice connection between the bottom of these two excavations. In any event, a breakthrough point is more likely to be on the east side of The Pit than the west side.

2. Before the team leaves Fernhill, after The Pit dig has been resolved one way or another, I feel that we should turn our attention to the draughty passages of the South Passage series. The squeeze preventing average-sized cavers from reaching the further reaches should be surgically removed, and then all options should be examined. Tiny passages may be stal-choked larger passages. Notwithstanding the presence of the eastern quarry face, there is still room for a significant amount of passage, some of which could be well decorated.

Hope to be at Fernhill on Sat 20th Jan.

Rich

Wednesday 17th January Fernhill Cave Clive and Dave

Subzero temperature meant it was too cold to even consider washing the muddy spoil bags from the weekend.

Dave with wheelbarrow headed to the East of the quarry to collect a selection of flat rocks suitable for capping off the West wall, whilst Clive managed to find a puddle with enough water that wasn't frozen for a small cement mix.

Reconvened at Fernhill entrance where 3 skips of possible capping rocks and one skip of cement mix were sent down. With a small adjustment to a couple of the rocks, the final course on the West wall was declared completed.

An assessment of what shoring up could be done beneath/behind the left-hand wall, measurements were taken for another angle iron beam.

Dave has possibly sourced a secondhand stainless steel chain for the climb above the pit towards Main Chamber, a quick measure to ensure a 3m length will be long enough. A single lesser horseshoe was noted roosting near the top of the climb. Probably the same one that has occasionally been spotted in various locations.

Due to the lesser horseshoe and shoring required, popping the 'L' shaped boulder at the bottom and to the North of the pit will have to wait. The enticing possible parallel rift behind the 'L' shaped boulder will have to wait. Further clearing of the spoil that has dropped in at the bottom of the pit to make it a less muddy and claggy place to work can continue provided nothing is undermined or the floor is dug out. It may be worth putting in a couple or three planks of wood in the bottom of the pit to enable working out of the mud.

Defrosting in the Oakhill was most welcome, after which the temperature dropped to - 4 deg C.

By Sat afternoon the spoil bags should have thawed out and possible to clean them.

Dave.

Fernhill Cave Saturday 20 January Dave, Clive, Rich, Chris Scully, Geoff

When Dave went to pick up the key to the cave it was not in its usual place in his car. Clive also has a key but was going to be late as he and Rich were visiting a sick acquaintance. So while we waited for Clive and Rich the rest of us filled in the time removing excess mud from the spoil bags. Some of the sticky mud had frozen and flaked off easily. The bags at the bottom of the heap had not frozen and it was necessary to break the ice on the one remaining puddle in the quarry to wash the worst of the mud off these.

Once entry had been gained to the cave the process of removing mud (20+ bags) from the bottom of the pit and taking it to the surface continued until we ran out of time. Several boulders of varying size were also removed and stacked for possible future wall building use.

The dig face is now mostly composed of large rocks with mud filled cracks in between. Its difficult to tell what is a large boulder and what is a solid wall. Behind the L-shaped boulder is a small area of gravel and cobbles with blackness (i.e. no mud) which is interesting. The way on appears to be either behind the L-shaped boulder or into the "cross-rift" where there is more air space and the boulders are smaller..

The next step is for our resident engineers to make the area of the face safe for future digging.

Geoff

Wednesday 24th January Fernhill Cave Clive and Dave.

A short trip to make a template for the next support beam to be fitted under the East wall where the fill behind the wall had previously collapsed out. A length of 2" x 2" timber, a couple of piece of tin plate and a few cable ties, a template beam with suitably profiled ends had been fashioned (see photos).

On the way to the Oakhill Dave and Clive blocked the road to clear a tree that was laying across the comms cable in Limekiln Lane that was low enough to be hit by a large vehicle.

Two lengths of about 6' long were soon strapped to Dave's car for logging and burning in a year or two's time.

Dave.

Ps. I'm away for the next couple of weeks. Probably back during the week ending 9th Feb. May or may not be available Saturday 10th Feb. Will update in due course.

Oops! Can you spot the obvious mistake in the beam template. Clue - the plan is to cut a length of 3" angle iron. Dave.

Saturday 12th February

Fernhill Cave Geoff, Rich, Clive and Dave.

Rich and Geoff headed into South Passage to prospect for any other possible dig sites.

Clive and Dave drilled and fitted the angle iron beam and measured up for additional cross members and a stemple and then joined Rich and Geoff in South Passage.

Clive supported Geoff in the tight squeeze - Geoff's report to follow.

Rich and Dave cleared a number of skips worth of rocks and gravel, the result of quarry blasting, from the floor. Only to find that the whole of the South Passage floor before the squeeze appears to be calcite. Amongst the cleared debris, a rather nice stalagmite was found. Approx 25cm in length, a very small 'root'/roof attachment point, and a virtually undamaged bottom tip. This was cleaned and relocated into the Main Chamber on the left-hand side before reaching Curtain Chamber.

Dave.

Geoff's addition to above.

The squeeze was removed with chisel, hammer and crowbar. Battery powered chisels were not used. This involved removing alternate layers of calcite flow stone and mud. As always the cavity left by said removal then filled with muddy water.

Beyond the squeeze the passage stayed low. To the left the passage carried on bearing left over a floor of boulders and flowstone. After 5 or 6 metres the floor rose rapidly and narrowed and pinched out completely. No obvious draught was noticed.

To the right the passage became very low and wide and appeared to be silted up after 3 metres. To me it appears to be the same passage as that approaching the squeeze but separated from the latter by a rib of rock in the ceiling.

I get the impression that South passage was once very much higher and wider than now but has been filled up near to the roof with successive fills of mud, flowstone and boulders.

Geoff .

Thursday 15th February Fernhill Cave

Clive and Dave

Fitted stemple between bedrock and boulder.

Bolted in one of three angle irons between beam and wall. The other two require a small amount of fettling to fit.

Templates cut for a pair of steel sheets to lay on top of angle iron supports.

Joined Friends of Windsor Hill Tunnels (Gav + 2) in the The Horseshoe Inn - Bowlsh for Rehydration Therapy despite the roads being awash due to the sodden landscape and the additional rain.

NB. This weekend's digging session will be Sunday.

Dave.

Fernhill - Sunday 18th Feb Dave, Geoff and Clive

Well, what a surprise – Fernhill flooded!

We had no inkling of a problem until we got to The Pit and found it flooded to within about 8ft or so from the top!

Dave and Geoff rounded off the afternoon with a look into Fairy and were surprised to find the duck into Hilliers still

Just a duck and no sign of the high water levels everywhere else.

Next Wed Dave and Clive plan to check the water level in Fernhill and fix the handline chain into position.

ps Dave checked TLS and found there had been extremely high water levels and both TLS and Hobnail were blocked again.....

Clive

Fernhill Wednesday 21st February Clive and Dave

On arrival at the quarry car park, despite all the rain during the morning there was no water flowing down the Limekiln lane which was the first surprise. The second surprise was a landslide from the bank on the SE of the car park. Mainly rocks/boulders which appear to be what was a wall supporting the bank. Note that more of the bank may collapse so probably best to park nearer the road or at the far end within the car park.

A short visit to Fernhill to instal the stainless steel chain which was attached to one of the anchors in the roof of the crawl towards Main Chamber. A second shorter length of chain attached to the second anchor as a back up will be added in due course along with securing the lower end of the chain to the West side of the pit.

Update re water levels:-

The level in the pit had dropped by approx 5 - 6ft as had the level in the old dig in Main Chamber. The water below the curtains in Curtain Chamber had all but gone apart from a small puddle.

The water level in the pit has dropped below the bottom of the West wall and its beam and this all remains secure. The lower wall on the East side should remain secure but more slumping of mud and rocks from behind it may be evident once the water has drained away.

An early finish and the customary visit to The Oakhill where we had been missed.

Forgot to add, we also visited TLS and Ferret Shed.

Water levels were still up due to TLS entrance still blocked.

Ferret Shed:-

Paraffin heater was laying on its side again as it was on Sunday, plus stuff stuck behind the door so had to force door open to push stuff away.

Further investigation revealed that the water was approx 30cm deep in the Ferret Shed. Buckets and containers full of water, thin film of mud across the floor, visible tideline. The paraffin heater had obviously floated and then being top heavy, toppled over. Since I stood it upright after Sunday's flooding and it was laying down again last night, the Ferret Shed had obviously flooded twice. However the surrounding ground outside didn't seem to show signs of water having flooded over or washed over.

Once we get a dry spell the Ferret Shed will require a good clear and sort out.

Dave.

Sunday 3rd March Fernhill

Clive, Geoff, Dave, plus a couple of MNRC members James Abbott and Jenny Abbott.

Expecting to find the pit in Fernhill either still water logged or with very gloopy slumped in mud at the bottom, a Shatter Cave trip was plan B since Geoff hasn't been there before.

The water had all drained away in the pit, the old dig in Main Chamber and below the Curtains in Curtain Chamber. Surprisingly mud hadn't slumped in and no further collapse had occurred from behind the East wall. So much to the delight of Geoff some actual digging could take place.

Geoff digging and filling bags, Clive hauling and passing spoil bags to Jenny, Jenny loading skips at the bottom of the entrance rift, James on the ledge and Dave on surface operating the winch. In total 21 bags and one rock were hauled to the surface. All bags emptied and washed along with ladder, skip etc in one of the puddles in the quarry floor.

The next couple of tasks will be to plug-n-feather the 'L' shaped boulder and finish fitting the angle iron beneath the East wall.

For info:-

Clive is unavailable Wed 6th and Sat 9th.

Dave is unavailable Sat 9th, Sat 16th and Sat 30th. But will solo on Wed 6th unless anyone else about to finish the steel work beneath the East wall. Unsure as yet re Wed 13th.

Dave.

Fernhill Wednesday 6th March

Alex and Dave.

Fettled and bolted in the angle irons between the beam under the East wall and the bed rock/very large boulder. Also fettled and fitted the galvanised sheet on top of the angle iron. Rocks etc can now be stacked on the steel sheet to begin filling as best we can the void behind the East wall. A second sheet steel required to be fitted.

Four bags of mud were shovelled up to clean up the working area. These were hauled to the surface but not emptied.

Red bucket of cement deposited on surface for future use.

Finished off with a pint at the Oakhill.

Dave.

Fernhill -Saturday 16th March Geoff and Clive

This session was devoted to the long outstanding task of breaking up the large L-shaped boulder preventing access to the main dig face.

Due to the need for engineering work in the immediate area the job had been on hold for a while....

Repeated plug'n feather holes (eight?) resulted in a similar number of large lumps, which were hauled up into the main rift. A few flat slabs were retained at the bottom to possibly go into the roof reinforcements above the recently installed steelwork.

About 2/3 of the boulder was removed before the two drill batteries gave up the ghost. The extra space allowed Geoff to easily access the back of the dig to check out the tantalising gap we've been looking at for weeks.

He reported that the hole continues to the right and down - so that's good news then!

On Wednesday night we need no doubt to do some more engineering and also finish demolishing the boulder.

On Saturday, with what promises to be a full team, we can haul the remaining large rocks to surface, along with bags of clay from the dig.

Clive

March 20th Phil Hendy RIP

Wednesday 20th March Fernhill Cave Clive and Dave.

On arrival it was evident that some scrote had tried to break in to Fernhill. A short length of angle iron that was under the winch was lying by the entrance lid. The cement mixing saucer had been upturned revealing the shovel and skyhook. The trowel was slightly bent indicating it having been used as a lever and the skyhook was left by the entrance lid. The padlock plastic outer cover had slight damage.

Underground Clive set about drilling and plug-n-feathering the remaining half of the 'L' shaped boulder. Dave sorted water to clean some rocks to fill in the gap above the steel shelf behind the East

wall. Two skips of rocks lowered down. Whilst waiting for Clive to finish reducing the 'L' shaped boulder Dave cleaned the mud from the steps.

Various rocks were then stacked in on the shelf and a quick look at the gap ahead, plus a few rocks pulled out from the mud in the East wall revealing what might be either bedrock or a very large boulder above. The infill on the East side appears to have less mud between the rocks. A lot of mud and rocks still to dig out but great care will be needed not to disturb too much to the East until the stability of that area is better understood.

Due to scrote activity no tools were left on the surface and any metal work such as angle iron has been tucked away behind the entrance.

Plenty to do on Saturday inc - One large rock to reduce, digging rocks and mud out from the pit and hauling to the surface along with a number of rocks sitting at the bottom of the entrance rift.

A quick dash to join Gav at the Oakhill.

Dave.

Fernhill Cave Saturday 23 March Clive, Dave, Rich , Chris Scully, Geoff

First a large number of boulders (mostly needing the boulder net) were taken to the surface from the main chamber.

Then 25-30 bags of mud and small rocks were dug out of the face "cross rift". These were initially taken to the naughty step. When digging had ceased they were taken from there to the surface and emptied. Clive demolished a boulder by plug and feather and then joined the team taking the bags to the surface.

The recent floods have made mud, which was formerly dry, turn claggy. Still at least it proved a connection of sorts with Duck's Pot. Given that the voice connection was made between cracks or crevices between large blocks, finding the Duck's Pot Aven may not be straightforward.

Ahead in the cross rift, the air space broadens and heads north under what might be a massive boulder or might be a roof. Time will tell.

Cheers

Geoff

Fernhill- Wednesday 27th March Dave, Meg and Clive

The intrepid trio met up in heavy rain in the car park, and on checking the evenings forecast, found extreme rain due for around 9pm.

All agreed that an early decamp to the pub was called for hence no underground progress was made.

As it turned out, it was a wise decision, judging by the rain, which turned up more or less on time.

Dave is not around this weekend but some more mud clearing could be done (if you're up for that Geoff?) We don't want to plug and feather the 'chock stone' ahead just yet until we are sure of the stability of the right hand wall. We may put in a short stemple or two if needed.

Engineering work is planned for this coming Wednesday.

Clive

Chris Richards RIP April

Wednesday April 3rd Fernhill Cave Clive & Dave

The previously broken up rocks hauled up and stacked in the bottom of entrance rift.

Floor of the pit cleared of mud and the rock/slab that was sat on the ledge above placed in the floor to alleviate standing in the sticky mud. Cleared a lot of mud and small rocks from around the couple of boulders in the floor ahead. 17 bags of spoil removed and hauled up to the entrance rift ledge.

This revealed:-

Small clean open gaps beneath the boulders in the floor (advise covering with perhaps empty bags to prevent filling the gaps with mud) water will drain rather than puddling in the floor.

The nearest thin slab/rock with pointed top is 'L' shaped with its foot pointing back towards us and is securely wedged in. The upstand of the 'L' can be broken off to improve access to the boulder behind it.

The boulder behind it can now be wiggled with crowbar so is not key in holding back the right hand wall and therefore can be reduced/extracted.

The right hand wall appears to be a huge slab/boulder with dimensions of perhaps 1.5m long, 0.3m thick and 0.7m high, laying on a 30deg off vertically sloped bedrock wall, but vertically cracked into two parts. A clean gap between the slab and wall of approx 70mm in which the short crowbar can be fully slid in. The mud on the bedrock wall just in front of this gap will improve assessment of the slab and the gap behind it. Care required not to disturb this slab until we can better assess it since it appears to sit on the 30deg off vertical bedrock wall. The slab may require securing in place since it may be holding up loose rocks above.

Dave.

Ps. I'm very unlikely to be about Sat due to MNRC Hut working weekend.

Fernhill Cave Saturday 6 April 2024 (pm) Clive, Rich, Geoff

It was noted that the FCQ car park was surrounded by ash trees which might be vulnerable to a storm and we did what we could to reduce the risk of our cars being flattened. Fortunately the forecast storm did not come our way and the wind although strong was not exceptional.

First we washed about 25 spoil bags in a quarry puddle to remove excess mud.

Then we relocated the full spoil bags from the Wednesday session from naughty step to the surface. Where they were emptied.

About 20 of the washed bags were then filled with mud to more completely expose the boulders at the bottom of the pit and the bags stacked at the foot of the shaft. Enjoy them on Wednesday!

Geoff

Fernhill - Tuesday (!) 9th April A change of digging night this week....

Dave and Clive

To the end to check out the results of the mud-clearing exercise next to the big boulder on the right of the dig.

Surprisingly half of the big rock had taken advantage of the lack of supporting mud and had slid away from its other half by a couple of inches. It only took a waggle with the crowbar to settle it neatly in the way of further progress!

Some further gentle gardening of the mud and rocks in the immediate roof area then followed. The blocks in the roof seem fairly well calcited up which is a relief. One large block could do with a stemple support if only as a confidence booster and this has been put on the action list.

The slipped boulder is too chunky for P & F attack so will need some of Dr Nobel's linctus applying as will no doubt some others visible ahead.

All of the nearly 30 bags from last Saturday were hauled to the surface for emptying and were then taken to the puddle in the quarry, along with the other empties on the tip, for a good rinse out.

Underground the next step digging-wise is to clear more mud from around the boulder prior to banging. If Dave is available next Thursday then I should be able to do this (can't do Wed) provided I have collected supplies by then.

Neither Clive or Dave is available this weekend.....

All best

Clive

Fernhill - Thursday 18th April Dave & Clive

After Dave cleared the accumulated mud from on and around the boulder, which we had previously allowed to slide into the dig, Clive drilled four holes in it and one in the even bigger boulder behind it.

These were duly fired on exiting.

For Saturday we will have around eight bags of mud and quite a pile of rocks to come up from the main rift plus the results of the bang etc from the end.

Another bang might be on the cards as well on the other big boulder....

Clive

Saturday 20th April Fernhill Cave

Rich, Geoff, Clive, Dave (Angus) Bell, Dave.

Dave B on surface duties operating the winch whilst the rest of the team headed underground. The 15 or so bags from Wednesday's session were soon hauled to the surface and the pit pulley greased.

Wednesday's bang had done its job on the large boulder but had also brought down another large boulder from above that now sits on the back half of the slab/boulder that was on the right-hand wall.

Mud spoil was bagged and sent up to the bottom of the entrance rift, whilst a large number of rocks and bang debris were stacked on the left-hand side in South Passage on an earlier spoil slope. After digging had finished an unsuccessful attempt was made to dislodge and bring down the large boulder such that it would make it easier to drill and pop later.

Mud spoil was then hauled out to surface and bags emptied.

Dave.

Ps. No digging next Saturday (27th)

Monday 25th of March 2024 Carrion Slocker solo

I took in two 3 foot angle bars, some 2 inch mesh (2 sheets), drill in peli box, nuts and bolts to sort out the bottom section by installing a square framework backed up by the mesh on two sides to enable a safe space to progress into the ongoing rift at floor level. 3 hours to install. Cave pretty wet still. Will need Post-Crete and possibly some cement to stabilize these further. Looking to install 4" diameter drain pipe to guide the water down one side of the slope and to fix this to the framework with large tie wraps or rope.

Monday 8th of April 2024 Carrion Slocker solo

I took in 20kg of Post-Crete, 2 meters of 4" pipe (ex FQ) and some fittings and other tools all from the surface, this resulted in a very slow trip to the bottom. I fitted the new drain pipe, used up the Post-Crete and installed pipe fittings for drainage and tied these to the previously installed angle iron framework. Hopefully, this will divert water and allow some cementing followed by drilling/P&F to improve the access to the visible rift. 3 hours.

Tuesday 16th of April 2024 Carrion Slocker solo

I took in about 10kg of Readymix and Post-Crete to use them up on the sloping mesh at the furthest point of the cave. This done I pulled out the large crystalline boulder, using a double sling, that had previously blocked the way on, and then drilled/P&F this into two neat halves and stashed these safely. The way on is open, but pretty low and you can see into the low rift passage down which the stream flows. The pipe and drain installed previously is working OK, albeit needing some more cementing to ensure 100% of the water is captured in the fitting. The cave was drippy throughout, slightly more damp than usual. I left the cave with a wet woolly bear, pants and socks after three hours and very dirty. The next trip requires some more cementing under the mesh and around the drain pipe catcher point. Then a decision is required on how to progress into the rift. Perhaps drill/P&F the roof block to make it a higher space to enter. However, this is not without the risk of slumping in from the mud above this main rock that is acting as a ceiling to the initial 'way on' for about 1m. This drill/P&F work can be done from a safe position now. The view on is about 3m, the low rift is bearing to the left slightly preventing a good clear view. I also installed a 'tell-tale' short scaffold bar onto the upright angle attached to the main frame to ensure that any left wall/roof movement occurring between visits can be noted easily.

Monday 22nd of April 2024 Carrion Slocker solo

I took in 10 kilos of Post-Crete in a large Daren drum along with the drill/P&F. I used the Post-Crete to stabilize the rocks behind the mesh at the end and drilled the large rock in the low section going forward; but this is not straightforward so I think I will need to dig around it and drop it, before breaking it up for removal. The smoke-test I carried out was a bit inconclusive, but 50% seemed to continue down the ongoing low rift but 50% had risen through Two Penny Rift and dispersed above,

but it was all clear above the 'Trapdoor'. Subsequently, I have decided to try and dig around the way on rift ceiling big boulder and see if I can drop-it down, then clear it away after this. 3 hours.

take care, Vagon

Tuesday 23rd April Fernhill Cave

Alex and Dave

Armed with a mega bar, Alex was able to jiggle the large boulder to a lower and more accessible position. Dave then drilled and charged both the large boulder and the slab to the back and right of the boulder. Three holes in boulder and two holes in the slab. Successfully fired from the surface. There should be plenty to clear for the next session but care required incase any more boulders/rocks above have been shaken and destabilized.

Dave.

Ps. No digging this coming Saturday.

Saturday 27th April.

Fernhill Cave Rich, Geoff and Dave

There wasn't going to be a digging session today, but last minute change of plans meant a session was on the cards.

Tuesday's bang had created quite a lot of spoil to clear. Geoff set about bagging and loading, Dave hauled and Rich transfered and stacked spoil at the bottom of the entrance rift. A large pile now awaits hauling to the surface. A very productive session despite a team of only three.

At the bottom of the pit a few larger rocks that will require reducing remain, probably with plug-n-feathers. A reasonable size space at the bottom with the left and right walls closing in above which may mean that less shoring will be required. Plenty more spoil to be dug out with the way on probably being down in the floor.

Wednesday evening Dave will probably reduce the remaining large rocks.

No digging session next Saturday (May 4th).

Dave.

Tuesday 30th April Fernhill Cave Dave (solo)

Armed with two SDS drills and plug-n-feathers Dave reduced the larger rocks to more manageable sizes.

Whilst there had a poke with the mega wrecking bar. The boulder in the floor to the back and left can be rocked relatively easily, but the one on the right showed no sign of movement.

Dave.

Tuesday 30th of April 2024 Carrion Slocker Cave solo

I took in a 10kg drum of Postcrete, a mattock with a short handle, a crowbar, my drill and P&F, and a modified garden hoe; All in a caving bag that was now very heavy, resulting in a slow trip in. The cave continues to be drippy with some water flowing through the drain pipe and down the bottom of Two Penny Rift and into the new side pipe drain. I use the hoe to drag out some of the small rubble back

from the final hole [not yet entered] and cement this lumpy gravel behind the new section of drain pipe which is catching about 60% of the flow in the small chamber with the rest of the flow sinking below the floor and reappearing down near the final hole. Using the short mattock I loosened mud and rocks around the top boulder above the hole and P&F'd this successfully removing the lower part of it by levering it out of the facing wall. It was very heavy and some 6-8" thick, so while resting it part on the shelf location and part on both my thighs I P&F'd it again to break it into two movable lumps, that were still pretty heavy. I relocated the smaller one above the drain securely wedged into a corner shelf and on another boulder. The larger piece I relocated upwards to the previous chamber and located it on the floor using a double sling lift. I left the cave to settle any mud where I had removed most of the main block, allowing time for much of the mud now on the floor to hopefully be washed away in the water flow and I left the other slice of this boulder in place to easily remove next trip.

take care

regards Andy/Vogon

Tuesday the 7th of May 2024 Carrion Slocker solo

I took 5kg of dry mortar mix to the bottom with my drill, P&F etc. The large boulder had settled well as I expected and was now on the floor blocking the way on. The smaller section of the upper rock split and left last week was relocated as a flooring stone as it was good and flat. I strapped the drain pipe more firmly to the left-hand side angle too. The main boulder, now safely on the floor, was drilled, P&F'd and some parts were removed. I tried to move the rest with a sling, to no avail, but will look at next time to break it up and make it more manageable. At the bottom there was a noticeable good draft blowing inwards; on the surface it was a warm sunny day. The right-hand angle and mesh moved slightly as I was moving rocks and it will need slight repositioning and refixing to the wall and at low level an Acro to hold the frame angles apart again. 2.5 hours

take care regards Andy Vogon

Fernhill - Sunday 12th May Geoff, Richard, Dave and Clive

With Dave wrestling with upgrading the gazebo Geoff headed to the bottom to load the skips, Richard to the 'Naughty Ledge' to guide the skips and Clive set to wielding the winch.

During a hot afternoon 47 skips of mud etc were hauled up followed by perhaps 20 of rocks - phew!

The gazebo is now fully functioning again thanks to Dave (who also valiantly emptied the bags) so we can now keep out of the sun/rain/snow again.

There are yet more rocks etc to come upon from the bottom of The Pit I gather. The base of the main rift is now clear and ready for filling cup again!

On Wed this week we aim to work at the very bottom again depending on digger availability.....

Clive

Fernhill Cave Fernhill - Wednesday 22nd May Clive and Dave

Dave tested negative for covid so normal service resumed.

Dave filled bags and skip loaded bags and rocks at the bottom of the pit and Clive hauled and stacked at the bottom of the entrance rift.

Three large boulders remain in the floor at the back of the dig. All three can be jiggled with mega bar so are not structural and will probably require popping after the roof has been made safe.

Plenty of spoil to haul to surface for the next session, but it may take more than one session to clear.

On the way out a very inactive frog was spotted beneath the scaffold bar at the bottom of the entrance pipe. Fairly sure it was dead but carefully placed in a skip and hauled to surface, and placed in the edge of the pond on the quarry floor.

Dave.

Ps. I'm not about this weekend and probably not back in time for Wednesday 29th either.

Perhaps Andy Watson might be able to assist on Saturday :-)

Fernhill - Saturday 25th May Richard, Geoff, John Gisborne & Clive

An extremely useful session where we managed to clear the major pile of rocks and mud-filled bags from the bottom of the entrance rift.

We began with Rich loading at the bottom, John on the 'naughty ledge', Geoff on skip emptying duty and Clive on the winch.

At roughly half time John came up and took over the hauling while Geoff took over on the ledge.

John also managed a look at the dig face and appeared suitably impressed!

Dave and Clive hope to have a session later in the week to assess what engineering is needed next.

Clive

Tuesday the 7th of May 2024 Carrion Slocker solo

I took 5kg of dry mortar mix to the bottom with my drill, P&F etc. The large boulder had settled well as I expected and was now on the floor blocking the way on. The smaller section of the upper rock split and left last week was relocated as a flooring stone as it was good and flat. I strapped the drain pipe more firmly to the left-hand side angle too. The main boulder, now safely on the floor, was drilled, P&F'd and some parts were removed. I tried to move the rest with a sling, to no avail, but will look at next time to break it up and make it more manageable. At the bottom there was a noticeable good draft blowing inwards; on the surface it was a warm sunny day. The right-hand angle and mesh moved slightly as I was moving rocks and it will need slight repositioning and refixing to the wall and at low level an Acro to hold the frame angles apart again. 2.5 hours

I met Dave Roberts (Agg Ind) as he was passing and showed him the Carrion Slocker flow and entrance and the Heale stream Sink point. Daniel Britten (Green Farm) rang me later and we talked about Dave's recent e-mail, things Dave had said, what I had shown Dave. Meeting to be scheduled with AI and the consultants.

Tuesday the 7th of May 2024 Carrion Slocker solo

I took 5 kg of dry mortar mix to the bottom with my drill, P&F etc. The large boulder had settled well as I expected and was now on the floor blocking the way on. The smaller section of the upper rock left last week was relocated as a flooring stone, as it was good and flat. I re-strapped the drain pipe more firmly to the left-hand side frame angle as well. With the main boulder now safely on the floor, it was drilled, P&F'd and some parts were removed. I tried to physically move the rest with a sling to no avail, but will look at again next visit to break it up and make it more manageable. A good inward blowing draft noted on a warm day. The right-hand angle and mesh did move slightly and will need refixing with a wall chain and perhaps a trench prop (~2 ft) to reset the angles apart again. 2.5 hours. Note: I met Dave Roberts the Environmental Coordinator from Aggregate Industries at Merehead and showed him Carrion Slocker sing point and Heale Stream sink point. I later spoke to Daniel Britton at Green Farm to update him.

Tuesday 14th of May 2024 exploring round Ham Woods Valley

I went for a walk in Ham Woods to take some entrance photos for Paul S and the MCRA database. Ham Hole had no external changes at ST 6022 4503, however I noted that the MCRA description is incorrect stating it is 12m long and 3m deep, it is a lot deeper and longer after Chris from Shepton Mallet dug the cave some years back. The cave is still just accessible at the back of the entrance passage down the side of a boulder choke that has moved slightly. The cave is probably, 12 metres deep now, down a very dodgy climb and perhaps 35m long overall. Chris had dug out the entrance chamber without permission that upset Natural England and the land owners as this had archaeological remains outside and he was nearly prosecuted; He also built a Bender (gypsy tent) and a wood framework outside the entrance. Please avoid this cave or check with MCRA and others before going here to avoid further issues.

Other holes photographed in Ham Woods Valley were:

Ham Woods Creep No.1 at ST 60193 44988

Ham Woods Creep No.2 ST 60189 44994

Smoky Shelter [Ham Woods) ST 60165 45087 - this one looks like an occasional youth 'party spot' due to the rubbish present and the scorch/smoke marks on the cliff above.

Note none of these have any caving interest.

Friday 24th of May Carrion Slocker solo

I took drill, P&F and two four-foot scaffold tubes and some fittings to the bottom of the cave, very slowly. I could have used a Sherpa or two as the kit was all pretty heavy. I set about re-securing the right-hand wall mesh and framework that had moved slightly. I rawl bolted the chain to a solid rock and reset the frame after clearing the rocks from behind the old mesh; This secured, I used more sturdy mesh to the right-hand side and re back-filled and this is much better now. I started to tackle the large dolomitic boulder blocking the way on by several drill holes and using wedges and

eventually succeeded to break it up into more manageable bits. These were moved to form a slight step and for some backfilling. Next trip I will decide how to progress with some cementing and perhaps scaffold tubes if required, as I have not used these yet. Mud left to settle. 4 hours.

Note: I dropped in to look at Downhead Swallet where the water is now sinking 3 metres further upstream under some big tree roots, and also at Dairy House Slocker where the water is now sinking 20m upstream into a 1m deep round muddy hole in the stream bed. Neither are very interesting.

take care, Vagon

Fernhill - Saturday 1st June Rich, Geoff and Clive

Clive and Geoff to the bottom of the Pit first to assess the situation finding some more mud and a largish rock or two had come down. This seems to have cleared most the immediate 'aven' above (6-8 ft high maybe) to a narrowing at the top with a couple of potentially dodgy looking rocks still sitting there.

The rest of it looks pretty solid although one side may still be very large boulders rather than solid.

Some steelwork needd to go in under the threshold of the even at the limit of our previous work as here there are some dodgy rocks which we need to be sure won't come down.

Dave and I will recce this on Wednesday and work out a plan of action.

Clive then dug for a while followed by Geoff, with Rich dealing with the stacking at the bottom of the main shaft.

By the end of play approx 30 bags and rocks were hauled to the surface and emptied. The bags are in terrible state and short of lots of rain filling the 'washing area' in the quarry we are pinning our hopes on the sun drying them out sufficiently for the miss to crack off them....

Clive

Fernhill Cave Wednesday 5th June Clive and Dave.

Shook out and turned spoil bags inside out to dry out the mud that was on the inside before heading underground.

Spent quite a bit of time thoroughly inspecting and very gently tapping the various rocks/boulders in the roof. Three rocks/boulders didn't appear to be that secure, one of which appeared to only be held in place by a 5cm thick layer of mud on the left-hand wall and on the right leaning against another rock. Working beneath them wasn't considered a viable safe option.

Thoughts about how they could be made secure were discussed, grouting options were dismissed and options to install steelwork to support them was considered but that would involve working beneath them with no protection, so that too was dismissed.

Finally it was agreed the best solution was to bring the two or three rocks/boulders down. The best outcome would then be a safe roof or at least one that could be easily made safe. The worst outcome might be a catastrophic collapse - Hmm!

A very gentle poke with the mega bar from a safe distance although moving a key rock a little didn't have the desired effect. Due to the length of the bar and the orientation of the rocks it wasn't possible to lever the rocks apart. Attention was then directed towards the 5cm mud infill between the left-hand wall and one of the rocks. A few pokes with the bar to dig out a little of the mud had

the desired effect and raised the heartbeat significantly as the remaining mud let go of its grip on the rock. Lots of rumbling as the three rocks/boulder collapsed to the floor. As they came down they bent the stemple that was offering possible security to the right-hand wall/huge boulder. Fortunately it shows no sign of movement. The main boulder from the roof turned out to be an awful lot bigger than first thought measuring probably 80cm x 80cm x 60cm. Due to its size it was the right decision to bring it down since it would not have been possible to safely secure it in situ. The main boulder now virtually fills the access to the far side of the bottom of the pit and will need significant reduction. Hopefully what is left up in the roof can then be made safe.

Since there is a possibility of more settling and of smaller loose rocks dropping from the roof it was agreed that no digging session should take place this coming weekend and work on reducing the large boulder can commence on Wednesday next week.

On exiting the dig site two bars and boulder net were placed across the top of the two walls as a barrier to discourage any visiting cavers from descending the ladder.

The hauling rope and the ladder from the entrance rift have also been temporarily removed for cleaning and inspecting.

It was suggested that on Saturday afternoon the team could instead visit His Lordships Hole to assist Geoff in clearing and removing from the cave redundant digging paraphrenalia and rubbish.

A pint in the Oakhill was definitely required and much appreciated after the heart rate rising boulder rumbling.

Dave.

Ps. For Tav's benefit:-

Clive and Dave poked the boulders in the roof.

Caused them to drop.

His Lordship's Hole Saturday 8 June Clive, Dave, Rich, Geoff

In the morning Geoff had a solo trip to use a drill on a chisel setting to further enlarge the approach to the constriction and the constriction itself. This works very well on Red Marl / Mercia Mudstone and on some conglomerate although not on limestone. Decent progress was made. Working conditions are not pleasant. There was however no problem with bad air in the morning

The immediate aim is just to get a look past the constriction and to enlarge enough to get through if the way on looks worth it. Work was limited a bit due to a late start. Geoff's alarm clock which was synchronised with his watch on lights out, was 95 minutes behind the watch when the alarm went off!

After lunch Dave was given a tour of the cave and Geoff and Dave carried on clearing rubbish out of the cave and moving bags of spoil from the terminal chamber to the designated stacking area, Dave as usual doing the greater amount. Both finding it harder work than usual due to bad air. Dave however felt the air was bad in Monster Raving Loony Passage which has never been a problem for me in the years I was working there, (the aven at the end creates a draught.)

Bad air is a complex subject, low oxygen, high CO₂, other nasties. One can acclimatise to some extent, both physically and psychologically. State of health and fitness also important. No time to go into details here.

Clive and Rich spent much of the time litter picking from the nearby road verges, setting us an example. Dave also joined in a carted most of the rubbish away..

A pheasant had chosen the vicinity of the entrance to expire and was moved a discreet distance away for the wildlife to dispose of. No obvious cause of death but a road accident is suspected.

Geoff

Fernhill Cave Wednesday 12th June Clive and Dave

At the bottom of the pit there appears to have been no further movement after dropping the large boulder last week. Reassuringly this includes the right-hand wall that is either bedrock or a huge boulder whose stemple bent when the boulder was brought down.

The plan was to replace the stemple before reducing the fallen boulder, however a smallish rock (40cm x 40cm x 12cm) was sitting on the bent stemple preventing its removal. So instead this rock, which turned out be a slab of calcite, was drilled a popped with a small charge that should allow replacement of the stemple next session before dealing with the large fallen boulder.

Another small task carried out was putting in a second ladder in the entrance rift from the East end of the ledge to make the lower section of the climb easier.

Back on the surface to fire the charge and also clean out most of the remaining spoil bags that had since dried out.

Photos attached:-

Large fallen boulder, boot included for scale.

Calcite slab sitting on top of bent stemple.

Dave.

Tuesday 18th June Fernhill Cave Clive and Dave

The calcite block that was popped last week had broken into a few large pieces. These were hauled up along with other rocks, some requiring the boulder net. Approx 20 bags of claggy mud bagged, hauled and stacked along with the rocks at the bottom of the entrance rift.

The replacement stemple was installed and the two largest rocks were reduced with a small pop at the bottom of the entrance rift.

It's now possible to get a view of the roof ahead at the bottom of the pit. It is looking more stable with huge boulder down, although it will still require careful inspection when better access available.

Now the stemple is in place to ensure that the right-hand wall stays put, the huge boulder can be reduced.

Dave.

Ps. Due to various team members being unavailable for the next couple of weeks, normal service will resume Saturday 6th July.

Just for the record in case anyone thinks they may have missed any dig reports. Due to various diggers being unavailable during the last few weeks no digging had taken place since Tuesday 18th June. Normal service now resumed.

Sunday 7th July

Fernhill Cave

John Gisborne, Chris Scully, Clive and Dave.

John and Chris on surface duties winching and empty spoil bag.

Dave on the naughty ledge guiding skips up.

Clive loading at the bottom of the entrance rift.

Although the previous report guesstimated about 20 bags of spoil waiting to be hauled up, in reality it was approximately 30 bags. These were hauled to surface along with the disassembled rocks from June 18th.

Three holes were drilled in the large boulder that had previously been dropped at the bottom of the pit and subsequently popped.

Dave.

Ps. Next weekend's digging session will again be on Sunday (14th)

Wednesday 10th July

Fernhill Cave Clive and Dave

Last Sunday's bang had done a good job of reducing the large boulder.

Dave hauling up from the pit, Clive loading and plug n feathering a couple of the larger rocks at the bottom of the pit.

By end of play approximately 20 loads hauled and stacked at the bottom of the entrance rift. A mix of rocks either hauled in boulder net or in skip both loose and bagged.

There still remains a reasonable amount of mud and small rocks to clear and some larger rocks that will require further reduction either plug n feather or Dr Nobel's. Plenty to do on Sunday, depending on numbers hauling to surface and/or continued digging/hauling from the pit..

Re-hydrated in the Oakhill joined by Gavin.

Dave.

Ps. A reminder that digging this weekend will be Sunday and meeting at 12 O'clock instead of 1pm.

Fernhill - Sunday 14th July 2024 Geoff, Dave & Meg, Richard, Chris, John and Clive

Geoff at the bottom of The Pit, Clive hauling with Meg passing bags to Rich to load up for the haul to the surface, Dave on the Naughty Ledge and John and Chris sharing the winch and bag emptying duties on the surface - a large team - fully employed!

The previous sessions-worth of bags and rocks made their way to the surface in between those coming up from The Pit.

By the end of Geoff's session at the bottom he had dutifully cleared the loose rocks and clag leaving it clear for a serious Plug 'n Feather session on four large rocks.

This was achieved by Clive who then took the opportunity to stand-up (!) in the space from where the initial rock fall had come from. On first inspection the roof appears far better than what we had previously although it remains for Dave and I to carefully assess it during our mid-week session this week. There may be a need for some steelwork.

Looking beyond the 'collapse' area we can see a descending rock filled area coated with black mud - obviously left by the retreating floodwater after the cave was inundated a while back.

The next active session involves carefully banging the very large boulder sitting immediately ahead of us. This needs to be removed before we tackle any steelwork etc.

Meg (noted for her keen sense of hearing compared with the rest of the team!) had a go at listening at the end for the sound of the stream below. She reported hearing nothing although I could faintly still hear something there. Elsewhere in the cave I can hear nothing (not even Tinnitus Tav!)

Clive

Fernhill - Thursday 18th July Dave and Clive

A detailed inspection took place of the roof and surrounds of our little chamber at the base of The Pit.

A position was found for a back up stemple to the one already in place against the major block on the right hand side. The possibility of building a stone and concrete wall above it to pick up the roof was discussed.

Around eight bags of mud were removed from around the big block we were to bang and these were hauled to the surface by the end of the evening. Two large rocks were brought to the bottom of the second pitch and may come in handy for walling in the future.

Three holes were drilled and fired in the big rock just ahead in the little chamber. Immediately after firing there was a strange noise which we hope was not a major collapse (!) but is more likely to have been fly rock from the blast hitting the rigid ladder at the bottom, or rocks which were leaning against the blasted one falling down the slope. We shall see!

I don't think Geoff is available on Sunday so we are planning on Saturday as usual around 1pm although Dave will be late as he's taking part in the S&D 150th celebration walk in Shelton Mallet earlier in the day.

If Chris and John should happen to be free that would be a great help as we expect to be plug and feathering more rock to bring to the surface.

Clive

Fernhill - Saturday 20th July Geoff, Rich, Dave and Clive

The mysterious noise we had heard on Wednesday night immediately after the bang turned out to be fly rock hitting the rigid ladder, much as we had thought (and hoped!).

The bang had done an excellent job of demolishing the big boulder and there was plenty of handable sized rocks for Geoff to load up as a result with one large piece just needing hammering into submission.

With Clive hauling up The Pit, Rich loading the skip for Dave to pull up to the Naughty Ledge before changing over into surface hauling mode, there were around 15 bags and half a dozen skips of rock to go up by the end of play.

In the dig itself the large block on the right which has the stemple bracing it was found to have a new 2mm gap between it and the presumably bedrock behind it.

The need for the planned substantial new stemple is therefore now our priority and it's hoped to fit this on Wednesday.

When this is completed the idea is to build a stone and concrete abutment above it to stabilise this corner fully.

Ahead there are a few large but probably plug 'n featherable rocks to deal with, but we must be sure of general stability before dealing with them.

Clive

Wednesday 24th July Fernhill Cave Clive and Dave

Dave had modified an acro prop into stemple to further support what is possibly a large boulder on the right hand side of the bottom of the pit. A locating hole to receive the stemple drilled in the left hand wall and stemple fitted.

Clive the set about plug n feathering three large rocks.

A few photos attached of stemple and plug n feathering.

Dave.

Fernhill - Saturday 27th July Rich, Geoff and Clive

Geoff spent a useful session at the bottom clearing the Plug 'n Feather debris from Wednesday's session which resulted in a good pile of rock and 22 (I think) bags of mud.

The bags made it to the surface but the rocks remain at the base of the main rift for another time.

Three more rocks had the P & F treatment before the end of play - they too await removal from The Pit.

It's getting quite roomy at the face now - soon it will need a loader as well as a digger as the progresses.

We need to press ahead with the supporting wall on top of the boulder which forms the right hand wall at the start of the little chamber.

A large flat slab is needed to start it off - we may well need to import one!

Clive

Fernhill Cave Saturday 3 August Dave, Rich, Geoff

First the rocks removed from the dig last Saturday were taken out from the foot of the shaft to the surface.

Then Dave went to the face to measure up for the construction of a retaining wall near to the dig face.

Then the product from last week's plug and feathering was taken out to the foot of the shaft where the rocks were small enough to allow this. Work carried on with removal of mud from the dig. This was a slow process as the mud was mostly in crevices between boulders. Towards the end of the session a slab was freed up from the mud and taken out. Under the slab digging was much easier. A small void was found. However digging had to cease as time was marching on. The bags of mud and rocks removed from the dig were then taken out to the surface from the foot of the shaft.

Geoff

Wednesday 7th August Fernhill Cave Dave (solo)

Three large slabs were collected from Clive that might have been suitable for the wall foundation slab bridging between the right-hand boulder and left-hand wall. The most likely contender was taken underground whilst the remaining two left in the car park with the collapsed rocks from the bank (might be useful wall building rocks later on).

The slab was offered up but proved too small and it became apparent that any rock large enough to bridge the gap would prove too heavy to lift into position. The option of bridging two rocks to form an arch was also dismissed due to the boulder profile and the vertical nature of the left-hand wall along with only a small ledge to support any rocks.

The upper stemple was found to be doing nothing and so was tucked out of the way for possible future use.

Over to plan C - The edge of the left-hand rock wall just above the slot was plug n feathered to increase the size of the ledge available. Measurements taken for two heavy duty angle irons to bridge across, one end to be seated on the ledge, the other end sitting on and bolted to the right-hand boulder.

Before exiting a few large rocks reduced with club hammer ready for hauling on Saturday.

See also attached photos showing the gap to be bridged and the enlarged plug n feathered ledge.

Dave.

Saturday 10th August Fernhill Cave Rich, Geoff And Dave

Geoff digging at the bottom, Dave hauling and Rich transferring spoil to the bottom of entrance rift.

25 bags of spoil and about 1/2 doz rocks hauled and emptied on the surface with Dave on winch, Geoff on the ledge and Rich loading skips.

Dave then offered up the first of two angle iron beams to check fit for length etc.

Dave.

Ps. Not sure yet whether any digging session this coming Wednesday.

Saturday Rich is not available, but if Clive is back in circulation and we dig can I suggest an earlier start so I can be home by about 3pm? Perhaps digging in the morning instead of the afternoon?

Tuesday 13th August Fernhill Cave Dave (solo)

Cleaned out the mud from the ledge and installed two angle irons, one end sitting on the ledge on left-hand wall and other end bolted into the large boulder/wall on the right-hand side. Both ends of angle iron to be cemented in in due course.

Plug n feathered a large boulder, some parts of which may be useful for walling on to the angle irons.

Positioned a couple of rocks on to the angle irons.

Dave.

Saturday 17th August.

Fernhill Cave. Rich, Geoff, Clive, Darrel Instrell, Mike Moxon & Dave.

Mike Moxon assisting with surface duties.

Clive mixed two skips worth of cement/mortar, these were sent down to Dave in the pit by the rest of the team. The two angle iron beams were grouted in for added security. First course of large rocks cemented into position on top of the angle irons. Not made easy by not having a floor to stand on, but instead some acrobatic balancing on the 45 deg Acro stemple and bracing against the vertical wall. Will be much easier when a rigid ladder installed to improve access for wall building.

Geoff then joined Dave to continue digging. 26 bags of spoil hauled out of the pit by Darrel and transferred to the bottom of the entrance rift by Rich. The team then repositioned and all bags hauled and emptied on the surface.

Gravel run from quarry floor required and sand to be brought over.

Should we dig straight down through the mud and rocks or dig ahead and down following what may be a solid roof ;-)? Discuss!

Dave.

Ps. I'm probably not available for the next two Wednesday evenings (21st & 28th) or next Saturday (24th). Rich is also unavailable Sat 24th.

Fernhill Saturday Aug 31st Rich, Geoff and Clive

Today's mission – to attempt to plug and feather the next big boulder sitting at the end of the dig.

Normally, I would be tempted to bang such a large rock but discretion being the better part of valour I thought it best to try splitting it by hand this time. Part of the task was to try and get as much usable flat slabs as possible from the rock to use in the wall building exercise.

Half a dozen holes and three hammering sessions produced a very satisfying set of large slabs, thin enough for the wall building if a little on the large size - a bit of hammer work will be needed to make them handleable.

Geoff used his drill for a couple of holes as well until the batteries expired - it was good to have some extra drill power on hand as one of my batteries was starting to feel its age.

By the end of play 2/3 of the boulder had been dealt with successfully and a very useful amount of wall building stone produced.

On Wednesday, we need to move some bags of gravel across for cementing operations and carry on with work at the face breaking up the slabs to a size suitable for lifting up onto the wall etc....

I won't be about for this coming Saturday for Wednesday the 11th.....

Clive

Wednesday 4th September Fernhill Cave Clive & Dave

Gravel collected from quarry floor, a few few bags of sand from Dave's emporium all barrowed up to the entrance. A 7ft ladder was taken down the pit to enable better access for wall building.

Two skip loads of cement mortar mixed and taken down. Ladder works well for access for wall building and also makes it easier to raise heavier rocks onto the wall. A couple of large blocks cemented in along with a few smaller ones.

Dave.

Ps. This coming Saturday, no Clive but I am available.

Wall building and possibly plug n feathering can continue on Sat if at least two of us available.

Saturday 8th September Fernhill Cave.

Rich, Geoff & Dave.

Total of three skip loads of cement mixed and sent down. A productive wall building session, with a coarse of rocks cemented in leveling off the foundations of the wall.

Dave.

Ps. I should be available for Wed 11th, Sat 14th & possibly Wed 18th.

Note Hidden Earth is 20th to 22nd.

Wednesday 11th September

Fernhill Cave John Gisborne & Dave Wednesday 11th September

One skip of cement mixed and taken down along with drill and Plug-n-feathers.

A few rocks and mud had collapsed out from roof and landed on the shelf that the wall is being built on. Four bags of mud, one football size rock and a number of smaller rocks were cleared from the shelf. It didn't look as though any more were imminently about drop although there is no guarantee that more won't drop as the mud creeps and shifts, particularly as the temperature and humidity changes.

A few more suitable wall building rocks were lowered down and wall building continued using just the one skip of cement mortar.

The very large rock on the floor was rotated/repositioned for better access to drill and plug-n-feather. Unfortunately Dave's drill failed to work despite three fully charged batteries. Plug-n-feathering deferred to Saturday.

The four bags of spoil were hauled and emptied on the surface.

Dave.

Tony Littler RIP

Saturday 14th September Fernhill Cave Clive, Geoff and Dave

Clive and Geoff went down first and confirmed that no further collapsing had occurred above the area of the wall. Since no clearing was required a message sent back to Dave on the surface to mix some mortar. Clive then set about drilling, plug-n-feathering the large boulder in the floor.

Two skips of mortar mix sent down.

Whilst waiting for Clive to finish rock reducing, the rock washing bucket was emptied, cleaned and refilled, and the pit hauling rope also cleaned.

Wall building continued after clearing two bags of mud from the back of the walling area.

Two bags of spoil hauled and emptied on the surface. A few more wall building rocks assembled ready to go down on the next session. More cement required, more gravel and sand will soon be required along with more flat parallel faced rocks. A few suitable rocks were identified in the collapse in the car park.

Suggested that either Wednesday or Saturday's session, gravel and rocks sourced from car park and quarry floor and the rocks taken down Fernhill, in addition to more sand and cement brought to site.

Dave.

Fernhill - Wednesday 18th September Dave, Meg and Clive

Not content with taking rock back down the cave for walling work ATLAS surpassed itself by not only gathering rocks in the quarry and hauling them up to the entrance - we also picked rock from the car park and imported that into the quarry too!

Ten bags of gravel were collected and they joined the rocks at the entrance.

On Saturday we can take all the rocks down the cave and stockpile them at the back of the little chamber, handy for the wall building.

An early visit to the Oakhill where we were joined by Gav and also Alex, suitably mud splattered after a session at Gibbets Brow.

Clive

Fernhill - Saturday 21st Sept Geoff, Rich and Clive

The large pile of rocks deposited outside the entrance on Wednesday evening were lowered right to the bottom and stacked up in the dig chamber.

All now ready for a resumption of wall building this week- probably Tuesday or Thursday evening (watch this space) and Saturday afternoon.

Clive

Thursday 26th September Fernhill Cave

Clive and Dave

Dave restocked the sand up at the entrance.

Just in case the pit was flooded due to the current weather Clive started just one skip of cement mortar whilst Dave went down to check on conditions. Unfortunately there has been another collapse. A large boulder (guesstimated at 1m x 0.5m x 0.5m) has fallen out of the roof of the pit skimming the far side of the wall access ladder. Clive joined Dave in the pit to assess and discuss options. There is another boulder (approx 0.6m x 0.6m x 0.3m) horizontally orientated in the roof above the above the wall access ladder with a gap between it and the roof.

It's felt that the sensible option is to suspend digging/walling for at least a month or two to allow things to settle and then reassess.

Clive and Dave removed most of the tools from Fernhill and repurposed the skip load of cement mortar.

Suggested plan for Saturday session is for the rest of team to view and if concur:-

Housekeeping and clearing any no longer required kit.

Remove electron ladders and ropes for cleaning/inspection.

Stash required kit on shelf near top of the pit.

Tidy surface kit and remove no longer required kit from site.

Place a 'No Entry' sign/board at top of the pit.

Dave.

Ps. Assuming the team agree that Fernhill is put on hold. Efforts can be redirected towards finding a new sink for the viaduct stream in Shepton Community Woods.

Fernhill Cave Saturday 28 September Clive, Dave, Rich , Geoff

Given the delicate state of the "roof" it has been decided to put the building of Dave's wall on hold until things have stabilised.

Meanwhile we are digging the floor out between the shaft ladder and the wall builder's ladder. However first it was necessary to remove the rocks, mud and rubble which had slumped into this space. This occupied most of the session. While this was going on, the bags of mud produced were taken up to the Naughty Step. When the step was fairly full the digging ceased and the team hauled

the bags of mud to the surface where the bags were emptied with difficulty as the mud was very sticky. The rocks were left in the chamber as potential wall building material.

The session finished with a bag washing session. As the stickiest mud has now been removed its hoped that more rain will not create more sticky mud.

Its too early to see if we are digging in the best place. In many ways the Fernhill dig is the opposite to His Lordship's dig. In the latter the way on is obvious, working conditions are atrocious, and you come out quite clean. At Fernhill the best place to dig is not obvious, working conditions are good but you come away plastered in mud. FUN, fun, fun all round!

Geoff

Fernhill - Tuesday 1st October Dave and Clive

A couple of the "bags of bags" were sent down from the surface to the end in preparation for a digging session.

The aim of the evening was to carry on lowering the floor at the base of The Pit.

Geoff's Saturday session had provided a good hole to stand/sit in while attacking the fill immediately below the ladder.

Before digging started Clive moved the visible walling rocks that we had previously stacked at the end to beyond the recent collapse pile. The rest are unfortunately below the big fallen block!

The mud was pleasantly dry and diggable compared to what we are used to - this wasn't to last though, as it returned to wet conditions about a foot down.

We are just about down through the previously dug and compacted spoil and by the end of the evening had produced 36 bags and eight rocks which were all stacked at the bottom of the main rift ready for hauling to the surface on Saturday.

No sign of any further roof collapses in the adjacent chamber.

Clive

Just to add a couple of points:

Note that the wall building access ladder is not wedged by the boulder that fell. Worth checking that it has not become wedged on subsequent visits. If it is found to be wedged it will indicate that either the boulder has moved or more spoil has collapsed and landed on the boulder and against the ladder. Either way great caution required in particular to not undermine the boulder.

The two section builders ladder used to descend the pit has been separated into its two sections. The upper section sits on the ledge halfway down whilst the lower section is sitting on the bottom of the pit. To make digging easier the lower section can be hauled up and stashed above the pit.

Dave.

Ps. Meg and I should be about on Saturday and a small possibility of a new potential digger.

Carrion updates for the ATLAS digging log:

Wed 14th of August 2024 Carrion Slocker Cave solo

Down to the bottom of the cave with the drill and one scaffold tube. Having not been down for five weeks, the swallet appears to have taken a significant amount of water over these last weeks as many areas were washed clean and the air was very good, as usual, with a noticeable draft inward at several points and at the bottom of the dig. I sorted out some of the meshes that had slumped in slightly and installed 3 more scaffold tubes. I was rather short of time, so I exited leaving the drill bag at the bottom to be collected in a couple of days; Further scaffolding is required and a 2 foot 6 inch pole is required and a swivel clip to secure the new framework even further.

Fri 16th of August 2024 Carrion Slocker Cave solo

I took in two more short scaffold poles and two swivel joints and successfully placed these securely, and repositioned the meshes. I drilled and P+F three large boulders and stacked the spoil safely. Looking at the ongoing passage roof and I prodded the muddy sections; this will need clearing carefully with a longer crowbar and a small drag tray to improve safe access to the ongoing rift. It was dry on the surface and the cave had a good draft inward again.

RIP Tony Littler

Tues 1st of October 2024 Carrion Slocker Cave solo

A rather slow drive down to Mendip led to a late start ≈1400 hours. I took in a small shovel, a slightly longer crowbar a small drag tray and my drill/P+F. I drilled a hole below one of the upright scaffold bars in my latest scaffold framework to install a supporting piece of metal and a wedge to ensure a scaffold pole cannot drop down or move; This worked well. I installed another mesh on one side of the passage and back filled this side with spoil, about 8 to 10 skips worth from the dig. Further mesh will be added and back-filled next time. A good draft and cool fresh air still. The view onwards is promising, albeit low (perhaps to be called 'limbo passage' when it is fully open and safe). My last visit was some six weeks ago and the cave has again taken a fair amount of water again from the field, I guess during the recent heavy Mendip storms. The water levels now are pretty low into Carrion and I cleaned out our filter mesh at the start of our surface to underground pipe drainage system. I noted the Heale stream that flows into Heale Farm Cave sink point was still flowing very strongly.

Andy Watson

Fernhill Cave Saturday 5 October Clive, Rich, Dave, Meg, Geoff

Initially Clive, Rich & Geoff started the work of transporting the pile of bags of mud and the rocks dug out by the mid-week team to the surface. When Dave and Meg returned from taking a novice down Hillier's cave, the process of clearing mud from the bottom of the shaft continued and the bags of mud so produced were added to the remnants of the pile and taken out to the surface as well. A productive session. So far this "new" dig is not pinching out, but no signs of imminent breakthrough..

Geoff

Fernhill - Wednesday 9th October Alex and Clive

A productive session with Alex filling approximately 25 bags from around the big boulder in the floor. These were all hauled eventually to the base of the entrance shaft (despite an incredibly muddy rope which made the job quite hard).

The boulder does indeed look like a big one and may well ultimately need a bang or two.

On Sunday this week Geoff and I will need to clear the bags to the surface then uncover some more of the boulder.

Clive

Fernhill - Sunday 13th October Geoff and Clive

The first task of the day was to haul up the 30-odd bags left at the bottom of the entrance pitch on Wednesday - Geoff on winch and Clive loading underground.

Ten bags were filled by Clive at the dig face before a similar amount by Geoff. These remain in the main rift awaiting removal.

In the dig it does indeed look as though the collapsed boulder is sitting on a couple of rocks which in turn are sitting on our big boulder in the floor!

This potentially makes removing the lowest rock problematic although we're still need to dig around if more to be sure what we are up against.

Two possibilities shooting to mind - one is maybe a temporary fix with a short Acro prop to keep the fallen rock in place (there are ideal parallel surfaces for a prop to brace against). The other is to remove the fallen rock and mud and work our way down to the new rock in the floor.

This would obviously need a lot of work although it does seem that the collapsed rock may not be very thick after all.

We may have a better idea of what's needed after the next session....

Clive

Fernhill 19th October Geoff, Rich, John and Clive

A lovely sunny afternoon for a change - ideal for being underground!

After Geoff had checked that the cave was not flooded (after so much rain) the first job was to haul up the approx 20 bags left in the main rift last week (there was no midweek session) along with half a dozen rocks. At the bottom a pool had appeared in one half of the floor area due to the rain.

Clive then filled around 10 bags from the dig before handing over to Geoff for a repeat performance.

The big boulder in the floor was reported to be narrowing and might respond to Plug 'n Feather

treatment. The adjacent rock wall at the base of the shaft is turning into a very nice, smooth rounded feature not unlike half a pothole.

The remaining bags were hauled to the surface - total about 40 plus six loads of rocks. All the bags were spread out on the spoil heap along with the first 20ft of winch rope in the hope that the promised storm next day might clean off some of the mud!

More mid week frolics all being well....

Clive

Geoff Newton His Lordships Oct 19

A good size stream flowing into the entrance of His Lordship's Hole meant that I would not be working there that day.

Visiting other sites in the same field I noted that there was a small stream sinking visibly and audibly in Her Ladyship's Hole. In contrast there was no water sinking in "Eric" or indeed any ponded water at that site.

After the Fernhill session was over I visited Thrupe Lane to see if there were any apples left in the Ferret Shed orchard. Alas no eaters at all. There were cooking apples, but the low hanging fruit of usable size had mostly been picked already and the good sized ones all well out of reach.

There were good sized streams sinking against the cliff adjacent to both TLS and Hobnail. The Hobnail grill was mostly clear of flood debris, but the entrance to TLS was totally blocked with flood debris although a loud roar issued from behind the blockage.

Geoff

Fernhill - Wednesday 23rd October Alex and Clive

Armed to the teeth with Hilti drill and plug and feathers we headed to the bottom to engage with the big rock which we had been digging round for the past few weeks.

Six holes were about the limit of battery power which enabled us to break off probably about a third of the visible rock before heading to the pub.

With some energetic hammering by Alex we reduced some pretty large sections to a more handleable size for hauling to the surface at the weekend.

I feel it would be a good idea to install another short Acrow prop between the bedrock and the big collapsed boulder as a bit of extra security. (Did we take up Vagon's kind offer of some a while back?)

On the surface, the bags which we had placed out on the spoil heap to be washed by the rain were turned over for the same treatment along with the very muddy winch rope.

At the weekend some more plug-in further work and clearing to be done....

Clive

Fernhill- Saturday 26th October Rich, Geoff, John and Clive

It seemed a pity to be going underground on such a sunny Autumn day, but needs must...!

Geoff kicked off proceedings at the dig face by clearing the Plug 'n Feathered rock from Wednesday nights session and adding a dozen or so bags of clag.

These were hauled to the surface while Clive continued to attack the big rock in the floor, drilling six holes and reducing its size by about a quarter.

The rock is about 14 inches deep and is sitting on mud. Having got a section to split off completely it turns out that the underside is very well scalloped.

The other big rocks are indeed piled against it but appear to be solidly wedged elsewhere somehow....

The faint roar/droning sound that I have heard on previous occasions was obvious from halfway down the lower shaft to the bottom. Happily Rich was able to confirm he could hear it too.

The session finished with the traditional ceremony of washing the bags in the quarry.

More midweek

All best

Clive

Thursday 31st October Fernhill Cave Clive and Dave

Clive set about plug-n-feathering the large rocks at the bottom of the dig. Dave hauled up the resultant spoil, a mix of rocks and bags of smaller shrapnel, all stacked at the bottom of the entrance rift.

Before further reduction and digging out of the floor the large boulder beyond the acro prop that had previously fallen requires attention. The boulder was assessed for possible shoring up.

Various options were considered including: acro prop or beam parallel to its front face secured in the left and right-hand walls or an acro prop at 90 deg to the front face ie North/South orientation. However, since the boulder had nothing behind it and was only resting against one wall on the right and sitting on a few flat wall building rocks on the left which in turn were sitting on the 45 deg sloping in situ boulder on the in floor, it was agreed that it was not practical to secure it in its current position. In addition its size was established and found to be not as large as previously thought (a large proportion of its apparent mass was in fact loose mud). The only realistic, practical and safe option was to bring it down.

A gentle wriggle of the flat wall building rocks supporting the left-hand side of the boulder with the long crowbar from a safe position did the trick. The boulder can now be reduced with plug-n-feathers and the accompanying mud bagged up.

Dave.

Ps. For Tav - Clive reduced a few more rocks. Dave returned after an absence of nearly a month and filled in the bottom of the dig with a large boulder. ;-)

Pps. No Clive this Saturday, Geoff to advise, Dave and I believe Rich available. Anyone else to make a Saturday team?

Monday the 4th of November 2024 Carrion Slocker solo (3 hours)

I took in 10 kilos of Postcrete and a small pair of bolt croppers to cut the extra mesh required at the bottom. The cave was wetter than I expected and drippy throughout with some running water at the bottom. I re-meshed the left-hand side and after secured this I dugout 4 small skips of spoil from the end and stack the spoil safely. I then worked on building a rock & Postcrete dam thus diverting the flowing water back into the four-inch drain (installed much earlier) as some water flow was escaping making the dig approach rather wet. I finished by digging more of the walls and ceiling at the end and left these to 'settle'. A good draft throughout the session and throughout the cave. Next visit will require some more cementing on the pre-dig steps.

take care, regards Vagon

Wednesday 6th November Fernhill Cave Clive and Dave

20+ bags of spoil dug out, hauled up along with a few rocks and were all added to the existing pile at the bottom of the entrance rift. Probably about 30 bags waiting to be hauled up at the weekend.

Dave.

Ps. Digging on Sat - Clive, Dave and John G available. Rich probably not available. Geoff unavailable. So minimum of three, possibly four if Rich becomes available.

Pps. As previously mentioned, after this weekend my next availability will be Wednesday 20th Nov.

Weds 13 Nov 24 Carrion early morning start 2.5 hours

I took in more cement & a 3 longish pronged alloy digging fork (that I acquired recently at a local junk shop). I cleared and stacked 4 skip loads, re-positioned the right-hand mesh, cementing some blocks at its base, cemented the second step, dug the roof area on the lowest point and left it all to settle and the cement to set. 2.5 hours. A final smoke test was positive with an erratic inward draft at the bottom. Cave was very dry this visit. Also dropped in at the farm and had a quick conversation with Daniel.

Take care all, Vagon

Fernhill Cave Saturday 16 November Clive, Rich, Geoff

Digging continued at the foot of the ladders. About 20 bags of mud and small rocks were removed to reveal a solid rock floor.

The only way on is now is heading into the rift and probably under "bomb alley." The immediate problem is the reduction of a boulder which is blocking the way on. This is small enough to yield to P & F. However it is likely that progress will soon require steelwork and or wall building for safety's sake.

When digging had ceased, Clive went down to check for the sound of the stream. He claimed to hear it although fainter than last time.

The bags of spoil were then taken to surface and emptied. Larger rocks suitable for wall building were left above the dig.

Geoff

Tuesday 19th of Nov Carrion Slocker solo

Mendip had been very wet overnight and is very wet and cold (2°C) again this morning. The water flow in the field to Carrion swallet is significantly higher than previously; the four-inch drain mesh was blocked on the surface and water was overflowing down the path into the pothole. I cleared the four-inch drain grill and this reduced the overflow partly, but this trip was still very wet. I took in a Darren drum off cement, but by the time I reached the dig face I was soaked through. I left the cement at the digging area, tickled the roof and widened the view onwards and left this to 'settle'. The view onwards is about 3 meters of descending passage. I took some photos at the end and on the way out. 1.5 hours. I emerged to snow (1°C) and had a chilly drive home.

Note: The new stream sink point above Dairy House Slocker requiring a grill by the track needs 2 x 8ft angles or scaffold poles and some heavy mesh at least 3 foot by 6 foot or larger. Any suggestions materials or ideas would be helpful please. The local householder has asked Daniel the farmer to make it safe as it is adjacent to the farm track.

Regards Vagon

21st Nov 2024 Carrion Slocker solo 2.5 hours

The cave was slightly drier than earlier in the week, with it had a good steady water flow, but overall was not as wet as it was last visit. I went down to the bottom dig site with a different camera and a small floodlight to get a better look and photograph the way on past the mud and rock roof arch. The 'tickled' arch roof had loosened slightly with some mud and rock that had dropped to the floor on the inside of the 'way forward', which is the direction of the water flow. I cleared these rocks and set about cementing the right-hand side mesh with some rocks along the bottom of it to make it suitable for and safe for some further spoil storage. This completed, I 'tickled' the arch roof some more from a safe distance and left it to 'settle'. I measured the next scaffolding bits required to make the rock/boulder roof safer to progress forward, I will source and bring some scaffolding bits in next trip. I cemented the steps area on the way out, before retreating. Reassuringly, the way on has a significant area of good roof along one side, and the actual viewable forward space is an oblong about 1.5 by 1.5 metres and about one metre high with a potential ongoing small passage. Today there continued to be a cool draft throughout the cave.

Take care, rgds Vagon

Fernhill 24 Nov Dave King

I did pop down Fernhill earlier today just to see whether any water had welled and to see if I could hear a stream from below. A tad drippy but no water welling up and I couldn't hear any stream, and yes I was wearing hearing aids.

The gazabo requires a bit of attention, might try and do either a temporary fettle if not a more permanent repair sometime this week, time permitting.

Dave.

Wednesday, 27th November. Fernhill Cave.

Clive and Dave.

Before entering Fernhill a little fettling/repair of the gazebo was carried out. Note that the added center supporting pole is only a length of plastic waste pipe, and is therefore unsuitable for pole dancing as Clive soon realised.

At the bottom of The Pit Dave stepped off the bottom of the ladder into about 150mm of mud slurry that had the consistency of porridge or freshly poured cement. Dave then dug out approx 25 bags worth of spoil that from between the rocks and boulders ahead. Clive hauled up the bags and stacked them at the bottom of the entrance rift. Whilst digging out the mud the large boulder on the left-hand side gently repositioned itself to a better position for attention with plug-n-feathers.

Dave.

Ps. I'm not about at the weekend, but Meg and I should be available for Wednesday or Thursday next week.

Thursday 28th November 2024 Carrion Slocker solo

A cold morning -1°C with freezing fog on the way to Mendip. I took in (slowly) 2 x 4-foot scaffold poles and 2 x 3-foot scaffold poles and 5kg of mortar mix for cementing. The flowing water was pretty cold off the surface. I fixed three 3 scaffold poles in place, one with a base plate at the dig site. I made-up and cemented a new bottom step which was being undercut by the floor water flow and moved two good boulders to achieve this, and successfully diverted the water flow away to one side. There was a positive draft throughout the cave. I repositioned a large flat rock safely at the climb down point to Two Penny Rift that looked like it had the potential to move and fall at some point. The cave was pretty wet throughout even after I cleared the surface drain grill. 3 hours.

Take care, regards Vagon

Fernhill- Sunday 1st Dec John, Geoff and Clive

With around 25 bags and assorted rocks due to come up and a heavy duty plug 'n feathering session on the cards we were a little concerned when we heard that Martin Grass was leading a Shatter trip for some novices with a side order of Fernhill as well!

As it turned out they arrived after the hauling had been done and when Clive was almost finished with the hammer work on the broken boulders at the bottom.

A very good session at the bottom with the large boulder breaking up into very nice sections. A lot of hammering reduced them to handleable pieces for Geoff and John to haul up, only one needing to be put in the boulder net.

All were stacked in the main rift before the somewhat exhausted team exited!

Still very claggy at the bottom with a muddy soup to stand in. There is mud etc to dig out before maybe attacking the next big boulder on the left. The stream could be heard faintly again this afternoon.

Martin has offered us a couple of boulder nets which I have accepted.

Depending on manpower the next session will be hauling to the surface or lifting more muck up from The Pit to the main rift.

All best

Clive

Fernhill- Wednesday 11th December Alex, Dave and Clive

After rescuing a medium sized frog from the main rift (twice as it turned out as he obviously hadn't left the skip as it was immersed in the pond and a return visit was needed!) attention turned to the big pile of rocks left after the recent P & F session.

Alex and Dave in the rift and Clive hauling on the surface as around 20 odd skips were hauled up, some being on the limit of what both the skip and the haulier could accommodate!

Alex then tried out his re-vamped Hilti drill and a set of P & F's on the big boulder in the floor which had received a lot of attention previously. This was more of an exercise rather than needing to reduce the rock.

Both Dave and Clive had a good look at yet more threatening rocks above our heads just inside the little chamber and just beyond the acro-prop and adjacent and a little above Dave's concreted wall.

Whilst none have apparently moved there is scope there for quite a knock on effect if something does become loose.

As this is the most imminent risk we both felt it wise to leave the dig over the holiday period (we are very short of staff in any case) to see how it behaves. Dave put some bags on the top of his wall so we can see if mud or anything else falls there in the meantime. So no work this weekend until the New Year....

Sorry about that Geoff...

Coming back to the dig with a fresh approach can only be a good thing. Thinking about it there may be scope for some AcroProps with pointed ends fixed across the rift with sections of substantial scaffolding planks forming a platform on top to provide protection while we work underneath. Discuss....

In the meantime next Wednesday is obviously the ATLAS Xmas dinner!

Clive

Thurs the 12th of Dec 2024 Carrion Slocker solo ≈1hr

I took in four scaffold tubes and clips and a joiner tube and some trial mesh and some cement in a small Daren drum. All of which were left above Two Penny Rift as my insides were gurgling too much to carrying on caving! I exited promptly to find a loo.

Friday the 20th of December Carrion Slocker solo

I took in some cement and picked up the 4 scaffold poles and took them to the bottom of the dig

site. After leaving the end area to 'settle' last time, it had 'settled' successfully with some mud from the arch and the roof section beyond falling to the floor; this was mostly mud and small stones. I cleared this spoil away safely about four small skips or so. That completed I fitted one scaffold bar to the current framework and put it going through the arch. This done I went through the arch (this gave me about two metres or so of new cave passage) and I fitted two more scaffold tubes to support the arch from inside the space (1.5m x 2.5m x 1.2m high), thus ensuring a safe escape route. More to do, but there is some good conglomerate roof in the low section going forward. 2.5 hours

take care & have a good Christmas and New Year
Vogon/Andy W