

Excursions [and notes] in Wookey Hole 2015-2020

A personal account by Vince Simmonds

10th December 2015

With Tom Chapman, Graham 'Jake' Johnson, Nick Hawkes, Robin 'Tav' Taviner and Alex Gee.

The Hallowe'en Team beyond the show cave in Wookey Hole Chamber 20 (*pictured below*).



The decorations caught us by surprise somewhat and were the subject of some amusement.

Geologically Wookey 20 is interesting being formed mostly along the unconformity between Carboniferous limestone and Triassic dolomitic conglomerate. There are several fine rock formations including rillen-karren (*pictured below*).



We spent a while exploring the main chamber beyond the scaffold walkway looking at the sump pools where the divers exited, up to the unconformity and other formations.



You'll have to excuse the additional lighting of the image above.

We headed off to explore the rest of the cave accessible from Wookey 20 and we were pleasantly surprised by its quality and how much there was to it. A climb through an inclined passage of fine proportions with some good speleothems and interesting rock formations i.e. more rills, flutes, and scalloping. At the end there is some considerable potential to extend the known cave and some side passages that would require some further attention. Another trip to assess some of the potential is planned in, the not too distant future. An excellent couple of hours caving!

22nd December 2015

With Tom Chapman, Keith Savory, Nick and Nicole Hawkes and Alex Gee.

A trip into Wookey 20 to assess the prospects of Tom and Keith's old dig there. Quite impressed by the initial size of the rift and it is well-decorated in places. The rift then drops down to a narrow slot where progress becomes a little more constricted, but it looks good. We will return to carry out some rock engineering to ease further passage to whatever lies beyond.

29th December 2015

With Tom Chapman, Pete Bolt, Nick and Tav.

The start of the new mid-week project to extend Tom and Keith's old dig.

No lights and music this week but we managed to find our way in and out okay. The purpose of this evenings jaunt was to apply some rock engineering to the constricted top of a slot down into the dig. This will ease spoil removal and, of course access up and down the slot. 4no. holes were drilled, charged and completion of task was from the top of the stal' slope - all was good!

Back next week to clear and drill.

5th January 2016

With Tom Chapman and Duncan Price. Tav and the ATLAS team went on tour of the main passages.

The rock engineering applied last week had the required effect and access down through the slot was more comfortable. Before proceeding downwards, a stainless-steel hanger was inserted for a ladder and duly rigged. At the bottom of the slot I was pleasantly surprised by the continuing passage ahead but entry to this is somewhat constricted. The required engineering was carried out, kit and equipment packed away, we made our way out to meet some of the touring team who had come to see how we were getting on. Completed the task from the main passage and all was good.

Made our way out of the cave to get changed and discuss prospects ahead at the Hunter's Lodge Inn.

12th January 2016

With Nick Hawkes, later joined by Duncan Price. Tav and the ATLAS team (part 2) went on a tour of the main passages off Chamber 20. Tom was kept busy dismantling the Christmas decorations.

Last week's effort had the desired effect and passage along the rift was much easier. There is quite a bit of debris that requires shifting so a team will need to be organised. At the next narrowing of the rift some more rock engineering technology was applied and hopefully passage will again be more comfortable.

With the drop-in temperatures the draught was good this evening.

19th January 2016

With Nick and Tav. Tom took the 'Vanderplanks' on a tour around the main passages off Chamber 20, etc.

Last week's pop had done the job and the passage has been suitably widened although there is quite a lot of debris to be shifted. I passed some of the larger lumps back to Nick who, in turn handed them up to Tav at the top of the ladder. We really need to get some spoil removal system in place. Anyway, while Nick and Tav continued to move rocks around I moved ahead to deal with the next constriction at the top of a c.4m drop, some widening here will enable better spoil removal. There was already quite a bit of rubble at the bottom of the drop and I suspect there will be even more when tonight's task was completed. Still passage is dropping down quite sharply which is what we want.

26th January 2016

With Tom Chapman, Nick Hawkes, Duncan Price and Paul Brock.

Good to see Bocker's digging somewhere other than Home Close. Decided not to apply any rock engineering technology this evening and to concentrate on spoil removal instead. I had made-up a couple of skips yesterday afternoon ready for the clearing task. While TC and PB

went for a quick tour around the rest of us headed down to the dig and set about getting a hauling system into place. There is only limited space available to stack spoil in so DP spent some time sorting this out while Nick and I got the skip into action and started clearing the debris from the sloping passage floor. When TC and PB joined us, the clearance progressed well and most of the loose stuff was tidied away, still a bit left for the next session to be cleared while I engineer the next constriction. A good session!

4th February 2016

With 'Jake' Johnson, Nick Hawkes, 'Tav' Taviner, 'Brockers', Tom Chapman, Les Williams and Sam Batstone.

While Tom took Les and Sam for a tour around the rest of the team headed on to the dig off the top of Chamber 20. I proceeded to the end with the drill to go about my task at the bottom of a c.3m narrow rift, Nick followed me down to start removing the accumulation of debris there, the others were placed along the passage to haul the spoil out. The requisite holes were drilled, a considerable amount of spoil removed, it was time to complete the evening's work from a safe distance. A loud bang, then 'kerplunk'. something moved, the wire could not be retrieved so had to leave it in place until the next session. Nick and I then hurried along to catch up with the others and all out of the cave.

Most of us made it up to the Hunter's for the usual debriefing.

11th February 2016

With Jake, Tav, Duncan P, Keith Savory and Rich (Warmbac) aka Kermit.

While Keith and Rich went for a tour around the rest of us went to the dig site. Last week's effort had the desired effect and there was plenty of debris that required shifting. I cleared away the loose rock and hammered off a few flakes to enable drilling while DP cleared the spoil into the skip for Jake, then Tav to dispose of in the small chamber. I slid through the next constriction to drill a hole in a boulder jammed in the rift and then another 3no. holes in the constriction, again the aim is to make spoil clearance easier. All done it was time to wire up and move out to complete the evenings work from a safe distance and a satisfactory conclusion.

Hunter's Lodge Inn for the usual de-brief session.

18th February 2016

With Jake, Tav and Duncan P.

As usual a steady trip up through Chamber 20 to continue the good works at the bottom of the rift. Last week's effort had done as required and the jammed rock was gone, unfortunately it's remains were lying at the top of the next climb down, a drop of c.4m, and will need clearing away, a job for next session. Back at the now wider constriction Tav set about loading skips while I drilled a few more hole to make the access and movement of debris/skips even more easy. Job done we made our way out for debriefing session at the Hunter's Lodge Inn. Not going to apply any rock engineering technology next week and will concentrate on clearing and dropping the next climb to assess our next moves.

25th February 2016

With Tav Taviner, Tom Chapman, Keith Savory, Paul Brock and Duncan Price.

A strong team tonight concentrated on the clearance of spoil and precariously balanced boulders from various points along the rift. While the others were hauling out skip loads of debris I hammered away at some fractured rock before getting another skip and clearing the debris accumulated at the top of the next climb down. When the debris was cleared, I climbed down the rift, tidied away some loose rock at the bottom and slid over a mud bank to reach the furthest point attained 20 odd years ago by Tom and Keith when they were lithe and keen young things! Straight ahead along the rift progress is barred by substantial flowstone but down to the right is a low muddy slot that with some engineering offers a potential way on, I could hear a trickle of water that might indicate more open passage ahead. Worked out a strategy for progressing next session and by then it was time to exit the cave.

As usual a debrief at the Hunter's Lodge Inn.

3rd March 2016

With Tav, Jake, Nick, Duncan P, Brockers, Pete Bolt, Sam Batstone and Pete Hellier.

A big turn-out tonight so a good strong team for rock and debris clearance. I made my way to the bottom with the drill and other 'gubbins' with the aid of Pete B while the rest of the team set about their task. At the bottom spent a little time clearing some of the sediment from the way ahead and making the drilling more comfortable, we utilised the 20+ year old digging kit that had been left behind. 5no. holes drilled into a roof flake to ease forward progress and digging before making our way out to a safe distance to complete the task. Then debrief at the Hunters Lodge Inn, bloody marvellous!

10th March 2016

With Nick Hawkes, Tav, Brockers and Duncan Price.

DP wanted to shoot some more video sequences on the way in so the rest of us headed off to the dig. Nick and Tav went to the end to clear away the debris from last week while Brockers and me installed some stainless-steel hangers on a couple of the climbs. Put a handline down the 2nd climb and a handline and ladder on the 3rd climb. By now DP had joined us and the events were captured for posterity. Meanwhile Tav and Nick had shifted a considerable pile of rock and things were almost ready for me to do my bit. After everyone had inspected the prospects ahead, I got on with the drilling and prepping ready to create some more debris for next week. The trip out is becoming a bit of classic Mendip caving and when we reach the streamway it's going to be a good trip.

The evening's work concluded we made our way out and up to the Hunter's Lodge Inn for the usual de-brief.

17th March 2016

With Jake, Brockers and Duncan P.

Got to the dig to find that a rather large boulder had slid into an unfavourable position and we spent a while trying to manoeuvre it to one side where it wouldn't cause too much of an obstruction. After much grunting and groaning, beating with a hammer and then, deliberation, it was decided that the best approach was to drill a hole into it and apply a more destructive technology. While Jake, Brockers and DP cleared away the rock debris I got out of the way to sort out the wire and tidied around the bottom of the ladder area, where some spoil could be stashed if required. It was then time to drill some holes including the boulder, that task complete we made our way out. The climbs are beginning to get muddy and require some thought to get up, this is a good caving trip. At the 'stal' slope the evening's work was brought to a satisfactory conclusion; all the while DP was adding to his video clip collection and making a record of events.

To the Hunter's Lodge Inn for debrief and welcome refreshments.

24th March 2016

With the regular team of Jake, Tav, Nick, Duncan P, Brockers, and Bean came too.

Only clearing this evening, and there was a lot of debris from last week's effort, plus the obstructing rock was dust! After some time shifting the fractured rock, gravel and some glutinous mud managed to squeeze through [eventually] into the open space beyond. To the left a rising rift c.2m high, c.0.7m wide and 3-4m in length with mud banks, this closes-down with some stal blockage, there is a narrow solution tube on the right. This doesn't appear to be the way forward. To the right of the squeeze there is a continuation of the rift downwards along what appears to be a narrow tube (?) with some air movement; unfortunately, a good sight of what is ahead has been obscured by mud and debris pushed through while passing the squeeze. It is quite muddy. After I had extricated myself Nick came through to give a second opinion, which is always useful. One more session to apply some rock engineering technology will open the squeeze and make digging much easier. What to do with the mud will be our next head scratching moment.

To the Hunter's Lodge in for the usual debrief, even better when you don't have to get up for work tomorrow.

31st March 2016

With Tav, Nick, Brockers and Peter Bolt.

Continuing the exploration of the rift off Chamber 20 in Wookey Hole. This evening's trip was more about the application of some rock engineering technology really. While I was attending to that the rest of the team set about tidying the spoil and ensuring that the available stacking space was being utilised efficiently. When I had done my bit then my bags were whisked away out of the cave for me, all I had to do was to bring the task to a satisfactory conclusion and extract myself from the cave. Should be plenty to clear next session.

7th April 2016

With Jake, Nick, Brockers, Duncan P, also Sam Batstone, Roz Simmonds, Jeremy and Luke Hawkes.

Duncan has a sore back so took Roz, Jeremy and Luke on a tour around while the rest of us headed down the rift to dig. Nick, Jake and Brockers went to the bottom, Sam stayed at the top of the ladder to haul the skip and pass it up to myself where I was stashing the rock debris at the base of one of the climbs. There was a lot of rock coming up and eventually the available space, that was limited anyway, was just about used up. More of the spoil had been stacked below the ladder and there's still plenty of sediment, some quite sloppy, to remove. There's plenty to keep the team busy for a couple of weeks or so. By the time the tour party reached us we were just about ready to leave the cave and head up to the pub. With all the rock stacked at the base and part way up the rift the climb, that had been a tad awkward, was now much easier.

A good session.

14th April 2016

With Nick, Brockers and Dunc.

I had amassed a pile of kit to go underground including 2no. BDH's filled with cement, drill with assorted bits and hangers, new skip and a 1-ton dumpy bag, all to deal with the sloppy sediment issue. I was glad to see a good team to carry it.

On inspection at the end there wasn't quite enough space to fix the dumpy bag in the side-rift, so a rapid rethink of strategy was needed. A wall was constructed in the larger rift, this meant a rearrangement of the rock-pile that was already there, mixing the cement with the sloppy sediment dried it and the mixture used as mortar in the wall, hopefully it will harden.

While this was going on Brockers had been digging away at the end, in a largely solo effort, he then called back "I can see open passage" the question came, how much? "nearly 10 metres". I went down to have a look and there was passage beyond although it, initially, didn't appear too big and there was a lot of spoil in the way. Got to work with the spade, passing the sticky mud back to Brockers, then got to work with the feet pushing the spoil ahead, "he's like a human bulldozer" Brockers exclaimed. The mud went, and I went with it squeezing through into the passage ahead, 'that's going to be interesting on the return' I thought to myself. I had entered c.10 metres of steeply inclined bedding with a vertical drop of c. 5 metres, it was relatively comfortable progress and there were a few formations. There is a continuation at the bottom that will require a bit more digging - encouraging though. After wriggling back up through the squeeze I suggested that someone else should have a look, second opinion and all that. Nick took up the challenge and he too was equally impressed.

Satisfied with our evenings effort we made our way out of the cave and, of course, up to the Hunter's Lodge Inn.

28th April 2016

I'm out of action for a while following some surgery on a dodgy elbow. However, the quest off Chamber 20 continues and thanks go to Nick Hawkes for penning the latest instalment, as follows:

"Duncan, Brockers, Sam, Nick and Gavin Newman

7pm start, with a trophy tourist/film maker, Gavin who occupied himself trying to recreate photo scenes from the past, identifying the precise locations from where the old shots had been captured.

Fortunately, the rest of us had better things to do and quickly headed straight to the end. With the way remaining clear after last week's efforts we all slid down through. Sam took up the task of heading forwards at the very base of the rift while the rest of us further cleaned out the 'slot' above. After a full session digging the muddy slot was much bigger with steps carved for ease of exit, meanwhile Sam had headed on headfirst to a slightly bigger area with a boulder blocking the way on, a long-inclined rift was visible. Nick gave assistance and the boulder was removed. Sam was duly despatched to investigate the rift. He quickly reached a point near the end, perhaps 15 to 20m on, where the gently inclined rift turns sharply to a vertical inclined rift. Nick then came to look on beyond and it was quickly agreed that it was time for the pub and not wise to try and progress any more as it looked bloody tight.

It was significantly more knackered coming out than going in and it didn't help that Gavin was gleefully waiting to film and question us as we emerged from the dig...."

28th July 2016

With Tav, Nick Hawkes and Matt Tuck.

After about a three month lay-off it was good to return to the explorations beyond Chamber 20. This was a relatively quick in and out trip to get things going.

We had followed the lead first pushed by divers, Tom Chapman and Keith Savory, and this had ended at another sump that Duncan Price is planning to dive in a few days.

From the muddy squeeze to the newly discovered sump we have added about 80m to the length of the known cave.

The plan is to follow another potential lead at a higher level, unfortunately this is a little constricted, hence the purpose of this evening's jaunt.

Drilling wasn't good as there was a bit too much calcite to get through and some alterations were called for. Perseverance paid off, job done and a satisfying conclusion. We'll see next trip how things worked.

As usual it was rather warm tonight and I was only wearing the lightest of caving gear, Matt, however suffered most in his nice warm fleece and heavy duty 'cordura' oversuit.

To the Hunter's for refreshments and debrief.

4th August 2016

With Tav (Duncan Price and Claire Cohen).

Tav and I made our way quickly up to the high route along the rift that we had started to widen last week. Cleared the debris that had been created and drilled some more holes and charged ready to make some more work for the next session. Made our way along the traverse and didn't have to wait too long for DP and Claire, who had been down the lower route to the sump to

deliver some dive kit ready for the next push. Completed my task successfully and we all exited the cave.

11th August 2016

With Roz Simmonds. Duncan Price and Tom Chapman were in the also cave surveying from Chambers 9 to 20.

Tried out the new camera - Olympus TG-4 - but only quick point and shoots, it really requires a dedicated photo trip to try it out properly.

At the dig with Roz we cleared enough of last week's effort to enable more holes to be drilled. The rock is not good - there is too much calcite including flowstone, it's fractured, there are voids and mud filled cracks. It was difficult to get 4 holes drilled and those weren't brilliant, there were some failed attempts too. Charged the holes, the evenings task was completed from a safe distance.

Exited the cave and met up with DP and TC who were just leaving Chamber 9.

25th August 2016

With Nick and Peter 'Snablet' MacNab.



Snablet is over from New Zealand to visit for a week before heading onto China to meet up with Mad Phil Rowsell to go caving there, so I gave him a call at his parents to invite on this evening's trip.

We headed up to the top of Chamber 20 and along to the high route in the rift to clear the bang I had placed a fortnight ago. As we intend to put this dig on hold, at least in the short term, I wanted to retrieve the wire as well. Snablet and Nick cleared the debris while I sorted out the wire, a good pile of rock was shifted and there is a decent face to continue the widening process when we return in the future.

That job done we headed back up to Chamber 20 and on to the area where the UBSS had been looking some while ago and there we did some 'furtling' about.

Before deciding to have a poke at a different site in the same area. We cleared a large pile of loose rock from the spot until we were left with several much larger boulders that will require capping to reduce them into more manageable pieces.



We then had reached a natural pause and it was time to depart. A steady trip out of the cave, got changed and headed up to the Hunter's Lodge Inn.

A fine way to spend my 60th birthday - caving with my friends!

27th August 2016

With Duncan Price, Rick Stanton and Karen Dealy.

Trip to assist Duncan who was going to dive the sump at the end of the dig [not quite] to Wookey 24.

I hadn't seen the passage beyond the inclined bedding as this had been opened while I was recovering from surgery on elbow. It is very Eastwater like, reminds of the West End but with a liberal coating of mud ending in a deep clear pool of water.

Duncan kitted up while balancing on some precariously wedged boulders and was soon in the water. Rick had come down to the sump while Karen waited at the top of Wookey 20, when DP had gone Rick went back up to join Karen. I waited for DP who wasn't too long. De-briefed and de-kitted, it was time for us to head out, then you realise how steep the climb back up is and just how slippery, it is not a journey that can be rushed, and slow progress was made. Then there is still the climb back up the rift I was glad when I had reached the top of Wookey 20.

There is still more to do in the sump, but fresh bottles are required.

1st September 2106

With Jake, Tav and Nick.



Capping boulders at the top of Chamber 20 new dig site. Some went, some needed more than one hole, some didn't go at all. We shifted a lot of rock and more requires removing before a proper look can be had.

8th September 2016

With Jake and Nick.

More of the same at the end of Chamber 20. Drill hole, place cap and whack, result big boulder reduced to manageable pieces, repeat several times. Shifted a lot of rock and some sediment. Looks better but not deep enough yet. Work will continue next session.

15th September 2016

With Jake, Tav, Duncan P and Pete Hall.

While Duncan and Pete headed off to look at '19' before joining up with the rest of us later. Jake, Tav and Vince carried on to the dig at the end of '20'.

A mixed bag of bucketing out sediment interspersed with the occasional capping of a rock obstruction. Downward progress was made but we still need to go deeper. We might have to consider removing the fractured rock on the right-hand wall, there is a lot of it, as we go deeper the fractured rock might be a problem.

All too soon time ran out and it was time to exit the cave and head up to the Hunter's for the usual debriefing.

22nd September 2016

With Jake, Tav, Duncan P and Gary Jones.



Slight adjustment to the position of our dig in Chamber 20 away from the fractured rocks. A couple of the more unstable boulders were capped and cleared. With a bit of clearing, mostly cobbles, gravel and finer sediment a promising looking gap could be seen. Capped another boulder to uncover flowstone and an enticing small gap under what appears to be a solid roof. There are some boulders that require some more attention but that is a task for the next session.

29th September 2016

With Roz, Tav and Nick.

On arrival at the Wookey Hole car park we were greeted by Tom Chapman who presented me with a small box of animal bones and a single pot sherd recovered from a site within the cave. The bones, at first glance mainly rodent, will need to be cleaned and sorted and a visit to the site will be carried out soon (*see entry 26th November 2016*).

At the top of Chamber 20 capped more rock and a better look at the prospects was possible. After some discussion and scrutiny of the area we decided to dig in the area that UBSS had previously been scratching around. We did some general tidying of the area mostly removing a dump of rocks to a safe place before exiting the cave. We will return to the site next week to continue the dig.

6th October 2016

With Jake. Tav took some members of the Axbridge Caving Group (ACG) on a tour.

Tom Chapman briefly appeared to show where the small mammal bones had been found and led us up to the main entrance. Jake and I climbed up to the proposed adventure caving route while Tav and the ACG reverted to the more usual route into 20. The area where the bones were found has largely been cleaned and I suggest that they were either deposited by a predator

(owl or other raptor?) some of the bones might have been carried in by nesting jackdaws, I have seen similar occurrences in caves in Yorkshire.

Anyway, we continued through the show cave and up to the top of 20 where we put Tav's new mattock quickly to work. We started excavating a trench in the area where the UBSS had shown some scant attention. The digging is mostly of fine sediment, silt and sand. Tav and Pete Flanagan (ACG) made a brief appearance giving Jake the opportunity to clear a skip run for later use.

It will require a few more digging sessions before we have a clearer idea of what lies ahead, although both Jake and I detected a very faint air movement low down at the current end of the dig.

As ever it was very warm, sweaty work and a thirst was coming on, we called it to an end and headed out of the cave to get some refreshment at the Hunter's Lodge Inn.

13th October 2016

With Jake and Tav.

Tav headed to the rift to retrieve a skip and rope while Jake and I went on to the dig at the end of 20. There we continued where we left off last week just using the mattock to loosen the fine sediment, silty sand with some interesting colour bands but no large rocks. When Tav arrived with the skip and rope I set about removing boulders along the skip run using the capping gear. At the end of the session the skip run was clear, just requires a few skips of sediment to smooth it over, and there was a very large hole where Jake and Tav had been active.

As ever it was very warm, thirsty work!

20th October 2016

With Jake and Tav.

Well what do you know! Should have brought the camera as all the Hallowe'en decorations were out, there were 'ghosties, ghoulies, skellies', coffins and things floating in the sump pool. What can you say!

Up at the dig the skip was trimmed to shape, the rope was attached, the slope smoothed over and ready to go. It's very warm work swinging the mattock, then shovelling the sediment into the skip for removal, keep going until you start to overheat and then swap around. A lot of spoil was shifted and there's a whole lot more to shift!

The Hunter's is a welcome stop on the way home.

25th October 2016

With Jake, Nick, Tav and Duncan P.

All went in through the 'adventure caving route' near the main entrance where I stayed behind to take some photographs, the rest of the team went on up to the dig at the top of 20. After

taking the photographs, I then headed into 20 to join up with the others, but I was distracted along the way and stopped to take even more photographs.



Then I got side-tracked by a passage that I thought might by-pass the climb, it didn't, and I was glad to get back out as it was rather too snug in places and I was not convinced it was entirely stable among the rocks.

Eventually arrived at the dig and joined in with the team shifting spoil back and dumping it in various gaps in the floor of the chamber.



All too soon it was time to depart the dig and we made our way out of the cave exiting by the more traditional route along the tunnel.

3rd November 2016

With Jake, Tav and Nick. Duncan P. went to DW to check his dig there.



The 'top of 20' team had another warm trip up to the dig. Tav and Nick began the proceedings, Jake and Vince hauling and dumping the spoil. When Tav and Nick overheated we swapped roles.

It's a big hole filled with silt and sand and it isn't clear why there are no rocks as there are plenty on the approach and on both sides, perhaps they are lower down. There is some interesting banding ranging through yellow and red with alternating thinner bands of yellow and brown, probably signifying past flooding/filling events.

When we were all suitably warmed and thirsty, we exited the cave and finished the evening at the usual local hostelry to discuss the dig and other plans for the future.

10th November 2016

With Nick, Tav and Jake.

Putting our excitement aside we had a steady jaunt up to the dig. Arrived quite warm and straight into digging so no chance to cool down. Nick was clearing back the skips as I filled them, Tav and Jake hauling and dumping. When I had suitably overheated, I swapped places with Nick until he too, overheated, we swapped places with Tav and Jake. Dug out lots of sediment and at 21:20 we left for the pub!



The bears are back - Ursus fibra classicus!

17th November 2016

With Jake.

With hindsight, perhaps it shouldn't have come with too much of a surprise to find the dig under a considerable depth of water. We didn't really think there had been that much rain lately, but we knew that this area had flooded before.



There had been plenty of signs along the way to the dig, where there were drips before now was a trickle, it was noisier, the cascade was once again rippling with the flow of water, and a pool of water with a stream had appeared in the chamber just before the dig, the result of an overflow of water from a tiny flooded side passage.

As I approached the dig, I could see the water, it's probably 1.5m deep and there's a small stream flowing in being fed, we suspect, by the tiny overflowing side passage previously mentioned.



We collected the tools together and stashed them up in the higher chamber. We will return when it dries up sometime in the future. Meanwhile we will have to find somewhere drier to dig!

A summary of an assemblage of bones and a pot sherd found in Wookey Hole cave, Mendip Hills, Somerset.



Introduction

An assemblage containing an assortment of animal and bird bones and including a single pot sherd was found during clearance works to enable an adventure caving route in Wookey Hole cave. The location where the bones were collected is to the right of, and above the main entrance into the show cave in a narrow passage that eventually widens and leads into Wookey Hole cave.



It should be noted that the assemblage was not recovered during a systematic and controlled excavation but were received by the author as a random collection of bones and sediment.

The assemblage was contained within sediment consisting dry and friable reddish-brown sandy silt with occasional sub-angular fine and medium gravel of limestone and fragments of calcite; there was some organic matter content, mostly of fine roots.

Method

The assemblage was initially sorted as received and the larger bones were separated from the assemblage, this process included the pot sherd. Where possible smaller bones such as small mammal skulls and mandibles were also separated, any coarse granular material removed. The remaining sediment and bone were wet sieved over a 63-micron mesh sieve to remove the silt and clay fraction, the sample was then air dried. The larger bones, small mammal skulls and mandibles were washed and dried separately. The dried sample was then dry sieved using a 710-micron wire mesh sieve to separate the bones from the sand fraction. Small mammal skulls and mandibles (lower jaws) were the selected for basis of this summary analysis as they were easier to identify, there are a lot of very small bones in a shrew.

Results

The small mammal bone assemblage contained numerous skull and mandibles of smaller rodent species mostly mouse, vole and shrews, as seen in the photograph below, along with a myriad of tiny bones that were not identified as part of this analysis.



These bones were then separated into two groups comprising shrews and mouse/vole.



The 9 skulls and 22 mandibles of shrew species include both common shrew, *Sorex araneus*, and pygmy shrew, *Sorex minutus*. Common shrews are the more abundant species in the shrew bone assemblage, but pygmy shrews are represented.



There are numerous skull and mandible bone specimens from both mouse species, *Mus* or *Apodemus*; and vole species, *Microtus* or *Myodes*; these appear to make up a large part of the bone assemblage. There were also numerous fragmented remains that were not identified.



The larger bones included bovid (sheep/goat) three metacarpals and a phalanx with other unidentified fragments. There is more than one animal. None of the bones showed any sign of

butchery although one bone, a metacarpal, did have some evidence of gnawing probably by rodent. The damage to the bones occurred post-mortem most likely during excavation.

The three metacarpals, with varying completeness, have an undulating surface at the distal end that is typical of an unfused epiphyseal junction, the phalange is also unfused. This indicates these specimens originated from immature animals less than 18 months old (O'Connor, 2000).



The assemblage also contained a small number of bones from an unidentified bird species, but probably corvidae (perhaps jackdaw).



The pot sherd has been identified as Black Burnished Ware perhaps originating from Dorset during the Roman period.

Conclusion

The small mammal bone assemblage is interpreted as an accumulation of bones deposited by a predator in a favoured rest spot after hunting and feeding. The species that are identified in the assemblage suggest a raptor, most likely a barn owl. Barn owls are creatures of habit taking prey to a preferred perch to consume and digest their catch. Pellets containing fur, claws and bone are regurgitated and if these are undisturbed quickly become incorporated into a forming sediment, the more robust constituents, such as bones, might survive as a closely packed clump of material (O'Connor, 2000). It is possible that this accumulation later becomes incorporated into material taken into the cave for nest building.

There are no butchery marks or significant evidence for gnawing identified on the larger bovid bones, these are unlikely to have been transported into the cave by a scavenger, such as fox. It is suggested that these might have been picked up by jackdaws, perhaps as nest material and carried into the cave.

The pot sherd has been identified as Black Burnished Ware, this is one of the major types of coarse pottery used for the dating of Roman sites (Gibson, 2002). The sherd was not a diagnostic piece, i.e. part of a rim or base, hence a wider date range of 1st to 4th century AD. It is likely to be a residual find, as with the bovid bones, perhaps carried to the location by corvid species. There is documented evidence for Romano-British occupation at Wookey Hole beginning around the early second century and continuing into the late fourth century AD. This phase of occupation appears to be domestic as the pottery includes cooking and eating vessels (HER 24355).

However, the assemblage was not recovered during a systematic and controlled excavation; therefore, any potential relationships cannot be established or suggested with any certainty.

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1st December 2016

With Tav and Nick.

The plan was to go up and check the water level in the dig at the top of Chamber 20 and then to search for Rob Harper's passage.

The dig is still flooded, although the water has been much deeper it is at the level noted by Jake and me a fortnight ago. There is not any sign of water flowing in, so it may be receding slowly. There has been some slumping of material into the dig.

We went then, in search of Rob's passage and after some rummaging around looking at, other potential leads we located the passage. A low, wide phreatic arch requiring some flat out crawling through puddles, strewn with boulders, plenty of calcification and some small formations, about 20m in length. We need to see a survey to see where it's heading and then decide if it is a viable dig. A pleasant evening's stroll around though!

8th December 2016

With Roz, Nick and Tav.

At the dig the water has all but receded, just a small puddle and some slop remain. We began the task of clearing spoil so that a retaining wall can be built to try and prevent any further slumping in should the dig flood in the future.

The plan is to build a series of stepped dry-stone walls as we dig deeper, first though we will consolidate the depth we have already gained. Several large rocks, and some medium sized ones, were moved into location and by the end of the session the first stage was almost completed.

As ever it was warm and thirsty work and soon time for some refreshment.

13th December 2016

With Nick and Tav.

The dig at the end of Chamber 20 has dried up, it's a bit claggy on the top but underneath it is relatively dry, at least it was where we reduced the level for the drystone wall. Nick decided to roll some rather large boulders down the slope for use in the next stepped wall and some of them took quite a lot of effort to position. It was very warm work indeed.

We plan to return on Thursday evening to continue the project.

15th December 2016

With Nick.

Just the two of us this evening.

A steady jaunt to the end of Chamber 20 where we continued the construction of the stepped wall. First lowering the sediment, then I collected rocks for Nick to build up the wall.

By the end of the session the retaining wall was just about completed, now we are ready to resume digging.

29th December 2016

With Nick, Tav and Duncan.

A steady trip up through Chamber 20, stopping for a while to point out the entry to 'Attila the Hun's Sardine Cannery' to DP so that he can add it to his survey in the future.

At the dig, it was rather disappointing to find that it was full of water again. I can't remember when it rained but Tav seemed sure it was around the 23rd. On the way-out we noted that the pool in the chamber was deeper and a trickle of water was coming from the solutional slot in the roof, filling the small side tube that was overflowing and trickling into the pool.

Hopefully, the weather will remain dry and the water will drain away so that we can resume digging next week.

14th March 2017

With Jake and Nick.

The plan was to go up to the end of Chamber 20 in Wookey Hole to check the water levels in our dig there. Optimism, mostly on my part, began to waiver when a strong drip of water was noted in the show cave, further on, the calcite cascade was flowing, approaching the dig, the small side passage was overflowing into the pond in the chamber just before the dig. The dig, was of course, flooded, the water had been deeper, but for now, had receded to its perched level. A little while yet before the digging effort can re-commence.



To pass some time we made our way over to the rift to retrieve some kit left part way down, the equipment will be of use in the future. Then, we left the cave to go to the pub.

11th April 2017

With Nick.

The main purpose of the trip was to have another look at the water level in the dig, so that we can get work there underway. It was noticeably drier on the approach through the cave passage.

At the top of 20 we paused to investigate a curious gurgling sound being created by a trickle of water through a tiny fissure in the rock. We, then collected the digging kit we had stashed about a month ago and took it down to the dig, some of it will be useful I'm sure. The small side passage, that overflows into the dig was dry. I was optimistic that the dig would be dry. It was!

After sorting-out the digging kit, Nick suggested that we remove the clay film that had settled as the water had receded. So, that we did, taking turns to fill the bucket with the claggy sediment and load the skip. Hauling the skip wasn't so easy either, the haul rope could do with replacing, then there was the thixotropic slop to be removed from the skip. But, we managed to get most of the slumped and settled material out and the digging should be easier next session. Hopefully, more of the team will be available and that will make the task a whole lot better.

Time for refreshment, another warm, thirst inducing digging session.

13th April 2017

With Roz, Nick, Tav and Paul Brock.

Happy days! Back to digging and a good team assembled. The usual steady, warm trip up to the end of 20.

Tav and Brocker's took it in turns to dig, me and Nick did the hauling - a joint effort, while Roz emptied the skip and managed the spoil heap. Hauling was made considerably better with the replacement rope donated to the cause by Brockers.

No-one counted the number of bucket loads removed, but there was a good-sized hole at the end the session. The digger's reported that the sediment was becoming more compact and it's not easy to work-out just where the water has gone.

As ever, we'll just keep digging on.

4th May 2017

With Jake, Tav and Duncan P.

The usual warm trip up through 20, even though we kept a relaxed pace. Ma and Jake took it in turns to dig, Tav and Duncan hauled and emptied the skip. The new digging buckets were put to good use and spoil was removed at a steady rate. The hole got deeper, it won't be too long before a ladder will be needed to get in and out.

There is some interesting layering within the sediments, evidence of successive flooding/drying events. Some of the laminations are compact, some less so.

11th May 2017

With Jake, Nick, Tav, Duncan, Roz, Roger Haskett, Dave King and Ray Deasy.

Roz took Roger up to chamber 20, Tav took Dave and Ray for a tour around, the rest of us headed up to the dig at the top of 20.



At the dig, Nick and Duncan rotated the digging effort, Jake and me hauled the spoil away. We were joined later by Tav and co., Ray and Dave went up to the end to assist with the digging, Tav helped-out with spoil dispersal.



All too soon, it was time for the pub, it had been another enjoyable session.

18th May 2017

With Jake, Tav, Jonathon, Dunc P, Matt and Mandy Voysey.

Me and Jake made our way to the dig, the rest of the team tarried awhile to admire the scenery. At the dig, Jake and I started to dig, it wasn't too long before we were joined by the others. Jonathon and Matt assisted Jake with the digging, Tav did the hauling aided by Mandy, Dunc

and I were on spoil management. It was a very mellow digging session with plenty of banter. All too soon it was time for refreshment at the Hunter's Lodge Inn.



15th June 2017:

With Jake, Tav, Duncan P, Pete Bolt and Max Fisher.

Continuation of the slope engineering. Tav, Pete and Max with a combined effort in spoil removal, Duncan and myself were hauling it away.



Jake was in control of spoil dispersal management. And building a retaining wall (below).



Another fine evening in this mellow spot.

6th July 2017

With Jake, Jonathon, Tav, and that stalwart of the Grampian, Goon.

The usual warm trip up to the dig, the difference was the trail of blood left by Goon.

At the end, Jake and Jonathon, quickly got on with the digging, continuing to engineer the slope. Tav and I were on hauling duty and occasionally re-arranging some lumpy pieces of limestone, Goon was assigned to spoil dispersal. A good steady session. I will need to bring the capping kit next session to split a few hefty boulders.

To the Hunter's Lodge Inn to quaff a few glasses of fine ale.

13th July 2017:

With Jake, Tav and Nick, back from his travels, just!

Continued with the slope engineering, progress is being made. Nick and Tav took-up the digging duties, I was on hauling, Jake, also hauling, but attended to spoil dispersal as well. We will get back to digging at the bottom soon.

5th August 2017

Duncan Price visited Wookey Hole yesterday and reports that, after recent rain, the dig has flooded again.

21st September 2017

Back in the day, there may have been more of us, but many of the team fell by the wayside, just me and Tav made the journey.

Along the route, up through Chamber 20 to the dig, there is plenty of evidence for some recent high-energy water flow, many of the mud banks have been washed-out. The water appears to

have issued from above, so fast surface run-off likely, it has been rather wet recently. Maybe there's a higher network of passages.

We were not surprised to arrive at the dig and find it underwater. Spent a bit of time tidying away the tools and other equipment, before making our way back out of the cave, taking some stuff out with us. It is still a warm trip, even when a gentle pace, taking time to look around.

7th November 2017

Solo.

The main purpose of the trip was to check-out the current state of the dig in Chamber 20. After the recent rain, I wasn't surprised to find that the dig was still underwater.



But I did take the opportunity to spend some time admiring some of the fine formations that can be seen in this cave passage



These formations are formed by the precipitation of carbonate that is in solution in water, the energy of water can also lead to natural sculpting of the rock.





15th February 2018

With Jake, Jonathon, Tav, Roz, Duncan and Mike M.

Good to have a project in mind and make a return to the quest in Wookey 20. Duncan and Max Fisher, on a diving trip into 24, have followed a dry rift passage for c.10m to a constriction, beyond, the rift appears to continue. They plan to return with caving kit and pursue the rift further.

On the way-up through Wookey 20, it was noticeable that there was plenty of water after the recent wet weather. We were not surprised to find that the 'sand dig' was occupied by a deep pool of water. We collected the tools and equipment required for the mission and made our way to the descending rift that leads to Sump twenty-three and three-quarters, passing a group from Cheddar Caving Group for a second time.

A short drop down the rift, we arrived at the site of interest, a small alcove we had previously backfilled while widening the rift to the sump, we had commented at the time that, "we will probably be digging this all-out in a couple of years", and so we are. We made a small dimple in the spoil stash but, all too soon, it was time to vacate the cave. We shall return.

22nd February 2018

With Jake, Jonathon, Brockers, Duncan and Mike M.

Mike M and me dropped further down the route to Sump 23.75 to have a quick look at another potential lead, where a feint air current could be felt. This will be left on the backburner for the while. We returned, up the climbs, to re-join the rest of the team clearing the alcove. Beyond the alcove is a narrow 'draughting' rift, it is this we are trying to regain access to.

8th March 2018

With Jake, Jonathon, Duncan and Mike.

It was good to get underground again after a two week lay-off, due to snow and other things.

We continued with clearing-out the alcove and narrow rift beyond. I thought I sensed some air movement now the gaps between the fill are opening up. The drips through Chamber 20 were active, water flowing down the cascades strongly. It was an enjoyable evening.

Should remember to bring the camera.

15th March 2018

With Duncan, Jonathon, Max Fisher, Tav, Mike M and Leonie (MCG). Alex came too!

While us headed-off to the digs, Alex did his own thing, mooching around 20, etc. I went with Leonie to look at the 'Sand Dig', the others slid down the rift to go digging.

At the Sand Dig, water levels were higher than the last visit, a consequence of recent heavy rain. It could be a while before it dries enough for digging.



We left the Sand Dig and joined the rest of the team to help with the digging. At the end of the session, the dumped spoil had been removed from the alcove and the narrow rift beyond could be seen. Progress forward will require the application of some induced rapid speleogenesis (IRS). That will have to wait until next week after I return from the Peak District.

It was a fine evening's activity!

21st March 2018

With Roz.

A trip to apply some IRS. As usual, a pleasant trip though Chamber 20, a fine section of Mendip cave passage. There is still a good trickle of water in places.

At the dig face, 4no. awkward holes, 500mm x 12mm, drilled and filled, a loud retort and all was well.

Passing the Hunter's Lodge Inn, it would be churlish not to stop!

29th March 2018

With Jonathon, Nick, Brockers, Jake, Tav and Alex.

Alex did his own thing while the rest of us headed up to the dig to clear the bang. The IRS had been quite effective and there was plenty of debris to shift, kept the team busy. Most of the fractured rock was removed, however, a large flake remains in-situ and will require some further attention.

I'm not convinced of the viability of this lead it appears to be going downwards towards known passage. The removal of the large flake will allow a better view and getting someone to investigate lower down the known passage below will probably throw some light on the prospects for the future.

A steady trip out of the cave followed.

3rd April 2018

With Roz.

A bit of a mare really. While drilling the holes in the large flake to further the IRS, it decided, rather disconcertingly, to move towards me. Hastily, I jammed a bar across the fissure, an effort to keep it in place. I managed to get the required number of holes drilled but, they were shallower than intended. Then, the 20g cord was a different brand the usual and it was a slightly larger diameter, I struggled to get the pre-prepared charges into the holes. In the end, I did what I could, it all went bang anyway. Hopefully the flake has been reduced and there will be something to shift on the next visit.

12th April 2018

With Tav, Jonathon, Brockers and Duncan.

Five go digging! I couldn't make the trip last week, but others did and had cleared some of the resulting bang debris, the flake had been successfully fragmented. This evening, we continued to clear the accumulation of spoil from the slowly expanding alcove/rift. The digging is the easy bit, the removal of spoil along the rift is awkward and quite technical, five people is the minimum number required to make digging effective. The spoil mostly comprises gravel and cobbles of conglomerate and limestone with the occasional boulder, these were soon reduced to a more manageable size with the small sledgehammer. At the end of the session, I could stand-up in the rift and turn-around. There remains, plenty of spoil for another digging session, maybe we will be able to make a better assessment of the prospects then.

Some drier, warm weather is forecast, we might consider going to have a look at the sand dig soon.

19th April 2018

With Nick, Duncan, Brockers, Jonathon, Mike, Claire Cohen and Ray Deasy.

A good assembled for this evening's foray. As there were plenty of people to carry-on with the dig down the rift, I decided to go along and check the current state of the Sand Dig, Nick came

along too. We've had a spell of drier weather recently, and surface temperatures are rising. It had been noticeable on the trip through Chamber 20 that water flows had decreased, it was not a surprise to find that the Sand Dig was now, dry. There had been quite a slump of sediment into the end of the dig, as we were there, Nick and I started to clear-out some of the rocks. A skip and hauling rope will need to be organised ready for the digging activities to resume next week.

It was soon time to re-join the rest of the team, they had continued clearing the spoil from the fissure leading-off the rift. When they had emptied the last few bags and climbed the slope, we exited the cave.

26th April 2018

With Brockers, Nick, Jake, Jonathon, Roz, Duncan, Mike and Alex.

A big team assembled this evening, keen to get the Sand Dig re-started, it might have been bigger had others been able to attend. Roz and I had arrived a little late, the rest of the team were ready, so off they went with the skip and ropes, Brockers had brought along some ropes as well.

At the dig, Jake, Nick and Brockers were digging and emptying the filled buckets into the skip. Hauling was carried-out by Jonathon and Mike; the rest of the team were assigned the task of spoil dispersal. Water was poured down the slope, an effort to ease the passage of the skip, it worked for a while, on the downside, it also had the effect of muddying the rope making it difficult to grip. One of the spare ropes was knotted-up and replaced the slippery rope, making the haul a bit easier.

At the end of the session, a lot of spoil had been shifted. The sediment comprises mostly silty, fine to medium grained sand with the occasional cobble of limestone. There's plenty more of it to shift too!

1st May 2018

With Jake, Tav, Jonathon, Duncan and Mike.

A bigger turn-out than expected for this digging session.

At the Sand Dig, Mike digging, Tav shifting the filled buckets back up to Jonathon, who was loading the skip and, in between time, dismantling some of the old spoil heaps at the top of the dig. I was on the slope, helping to haul the skip, Jake and Duncan, sharing the hauling and spoil dispersal tasks.

We need plenty of room at the top to slope down, allowing the digging to go deeper, hence, the moving of some of the old spoil heaps. The rocks will be useful for building walls later.

By the end of the session, a large quantity of spoil had been removed but, there's plenty more to shift.

3rd May 2018: with Jonathon, Alex, Tav, Brockers, Mike and Ray Deasy.

Another fine assemblage of willing diggers gathered, destined for the Sand Dig.

Alex digging, aided by Brockers, I was loading the skip, Ray on the slope, leaving Tav, Jonathon and Mike to manage spoil dispersal.

To say it was a jovial evening with plenty of banter uttered would be an understatement, Ray was prompted to suggest that the dig be named “Windrush”, very topical too!

However, at the end of the session, a significant quantity of spoil, had again, been removed from the dig, more good progress achieved.

10th May 2108

With Jake, Tav, Brockers, Mike, Jonathon and Duncan.

While Tav took Jon and Mike on a quick detour to 19, Duncan tagged along as well, Brockers, Jake and I carried on to Sand Dig.

Brockers digging, Jake passed the filled buckets up to me and I emptied them into the skip. The others soon arrived. Duncan positioned himself on the slope, Jon hauling up-slope to the top, Tav and Mike were on spoil dispersal.

A lot of sand was shifted, a large boulder re-positioned, and there’s still more sand to remove. As the session progressed the sand became wetter, whether that is of any significance, who knows?

15th May 2018:

With Jake, Tav and Duncan.

We did what we set out to do. The loose rocks, plus a few others, were removed from the top of the dig, we also cleared a quantity of fine sediment as well. This should enable us to angle the slope down, allowing the digging to go deeper. Peering down from the top, it’s a big hole.

17th May 2018

With Roz, Jake, Jonathon, Alex and Tav.

Jon and Tav digging, Alex loading the skip, Jake and me hauling the loaded skip, Roz emptied it, adding the spoil to the burgeoning heap.

24th May 2018

With Jake, Jonathon, Alex, Duncan, Nick and Mike.

Nick, after a longish stint working away, was keen to get back to digging, so we let him, Mike clearing away the filled buckets to Jake, who was loading the skip. I was at the first stage of the haul with Jonathon and Duncan pulling the skip up the slope to Alex on spoil dispersal. The sediment was added to the ever-increasing spoil heap, there weren’t many stones, mostly silty sand.

When the time reached ‘ten past beer o’clock’ we finished digging and headed out of the cave.

31st May 2018

With Brockers, Alex, Mike, Nick, Jake and Duncan.

Called in at the farm to collect the mattock retrieved from Hallowe'en last Saturday before meeting the rest of the team in the Wookey Hole car park.

Usual warm trip through Chamber 20 to the dig. There was a little bit more moisture in the cave following some recent rain. At the dig, Brockers digging, Alex and Mike shifting the filled buckets and occasional rocks up to me loading the skip. Nick and Jake hauled the skip up the slope to Duncan, who was managing the spoil dispersal.

The dig is getting ever deeper and a good-sized team, as tonight, is becoming a necessity for removal of spoil from the bottom. A long bar and a sledgehammer would be useful for dealing with larger rocks, most of the tools we had here were taken to the dig along the rift and haven't been returned.

We moved lots of spoil then, we went to the Hunter's.

7th June 2018

With Jake, Mike, Jonathon, Brockers and Alex.

Jake digging, Mike passing the filled buckets up to Jon who was loading the skip. Brockers did the brunt of the hauling up the slope and I was emptying the skips for Alex to shovel the sediment up onto the spoil heap. Some large boulders were shifted but they were retained for use for wall building in the future. There was lots of sand and lots of banter, at our end anyway.

Time passed, it reached beer o'clock, we left the cave, got changed in the car park and headed up to the Hunter's for well-earned refreshments.

14th June 2018

with Mike, Jonathon, Tav, Alex, Brockers and Jake.

Mike was upfront filling the buckets, Jonathon and Tav were passing the filled buckets up to Alex who emptied the contents into the skip. Brockers did the brunt of the hauling up the slope, I passed the skip to Jake who dispersed the spoil to the heap.

Sediment was shifted at a steady rate but there are some irksome boulders impeding more rapid progress. These will need looking at and a plan formulated as to how best to deal with them.

There was, of course, plenty of banter throughout the evening session.

21st June 2018

With Brockers, Nick, Jake, Tav, Jonathon and Mike.

I went to the dig-face to look at a potential boulder blockage, Brockers and Nick were behind me. While I concentrated on cleaning around the boulders and into an alcove, they continued to expand the working space at the bottom of the pit. Filled buckets and the occasional were removed from the dig at a good, steady rate.

By the end of the session, the boulders don't appear to be too much of a problem at the present, they can be worked around and dug out, if necessary.

Another fine digging session, thirsty work, time for refreshments.

28th June 2018

Tav, Jon, Mike, Jake and Nick.

Tav's account, I finished work too late. "Removed the usual steady stream of sand and clay which further exposed the group of large boulders in the floor of the pot. With the aid of the full team, two of these were later physically manhandled up on to the upper ledge."

5th July 2018

Jake, Jonathon, Nick, Brockers, Duncan and Tav.

The spoil removal team: Jake, Jonathon, Nick and Brockers, got on with digging out the sediment, breaking up boulders with the new sledge hammer, and loading the resulting debris into the skip. The spoil dispersal team: Duncan, me and Tav, hauled the skip up the slope and emptied its contents on to the ever-growing spoil heap. This procedure repeated over and over, until the clock passed beer o'clock when we left the cave. Plenty of spoil shifted, plenty more to shift!

12th July 2018

Report by Tav:

"President Trump digging passing buckets to Jonathon, who passed them to Jake and Tav to remove. Lots more out including big boulders. Noticeable inward draught going where?"

2nd August 2018

I haven't managed to dig in Wookey Hole for a while due to one thing or another, in the meantime, the rest of the team have continued with the task. Good to get back and see the progress made.

With Mike, Alex, Jonathon, Duncan, Claire, Tav took some Wessex members for a tour around Chamber 20, etc., he joined us later.

Mike and me digging, the others clearing the spoil away. The digging was not speedy, some big boulders impeding progress, scratched around them and managed to shift a couple of them. The way forward is not entirely clear, so keep digging and see what happens. It was warm, as ever.

9th August 2018

With Brockers, Tav, Nick, Jon, Duncan and Alex.

Jon, Nick and Tav playing in the sand pit with their buckets and spades, Duncan took away their buckets, while the rest of us hauled-away and emptied the buckets and then, sent the buckets back. Some rocks were broken-up too, until Jon broke the hammer. A good time was had by all!

16th August 2018

With Roz, Jonathon, Duncan, Tav, Nick and Mike.

Nick, Tav and Mike down in the sand pit; Duncan, Jon and Roz were on hauling duties; after taking a few photographs, I was emptying the buckets. The sediment removed varied from sand to boulders and there was plenty of it, plenty more to come too!

It was a pleasant evening with lots of friendly banter.

23rd August 2018

With Duncan, Mike, Jonathon, Nick and Tav

Duncan and Mike down in the sand pit digging, Jonathon and myself shifting the filled buckets up to Nick and Tav who were hauling and emptying the buckets. Plenty of talk about speleogenesis and looking at scalloping to determine flow direction, seems recent events in Hallowe'en Rift have got us thinking and talking. Just don't mention paragenesis!

30th August 2018

A depleted team, Roz, Duncan, Jonathon and Mike, sallied forth and kept the effort going. On arrival at the dig a puddle was bailed away and digging commenced. With a small team it requires more effort to shift the spoil., but they stuck at it and progress was made.

25th September 2018

With Snablet, Roz and Tav

An impromptu trip after Snablet's enquiry "are we doing anything tonight?" following up some beer fuelled conversation we'd had on Saturday evening at the Hidden Earth conference in Churchill.

We sort-of expected the sand dig to be under water or, at least, wet following the heavy rain that fell over the last weekend, it was neither, so we set to work. Snablet and Tav rotated the digging and filling buckets, as one overheated the other took over, Roz was taking the filled buckets and loading the skip, I was hauling the skip up the slope and emptying the contents. It was a pleasant, evenly paced session with plenty of banter.

After the digging session the evening was rounded off with a trip to the Hunter's. Snablet is returning to New Zealand on Thursday. A fine time was had by all.

27th September 2018

Duncan, Mike, Jonathon and Alex kept up the effort. Buckets were filled, and emptied, rocks were removed.

4th October 2018

With Roz, Jonathon, Duncan and Mike

A mellow evening. Jon and Mike rotated the digging, Roz transferred the filled buckets to the skip, Duncan hauled the skip up the slope and I emptied the filled buckets. The procedure was repeated at a regular rate. A large rock was reduced in size, the pieces were added to the wall retaining the spoil.

The evening was concluded at the Hunter's Lodge Inn in time honoured fashion.

11th October 2018

With Nick, Mike, Jonathon, Tav, Alex and Duncan

Nick, Mike and Jonathon at the sharp end, digging and filling buckets, then moving the filled buckets and occasional rocks to Tav who then facilitated dispatch. Alex hauling the loaded skip and passing buckets and rocks to Duncan. The buckets were emptied onto the spoil heap where I was on spoil management duties. It was a pleasant evening with the usual banter and a lot of sediment was shifted. The dig goes on!

We were joined, for a while by a large [queen] wasp. It was noted too, that the cave was slowly becoming wetter, previously dry pools now have water in them.

18th October 2018

With Mike, Duncan, Nick and Tav

After persistent rain last weekend, it was not a surprise to find that the trip through Chamber 20 was wetter, the calcite cascade had water flowing down it. As suspected the sand dig was had about a metre of water at the bottom and there was still a trickle of water flowing into it, as such, it was undiggable. There were a few rocks in a vulnerable position, if a slump-in occurred they might end up at the bottom of the dig. So, these were moved and the spoil retaining wall was extended.

We were in the Hunter's a bit earlier than usual. At least the forecast is for dry weather for the next few days, so the dig might drain. Unfortunately, it will not take much rain to refill it though.

25th October 2018

With Alex, Nick, Jonathon, Mike, Duncan and David Walker (curator at the Wells & Mendip Museum and MCRA)

At the sand dig we were relieved to see it had dried-up and quite quickly after the fill event by the look of it. I started to dig in the [dry] alcove, because I got there first, Alex reduced a limestone boulder in size and removed the slop from the lowest point of the dig. The spoil management team were not impressed with the slop and were experiencing some difficulty in extricating it from the bucket. The solution, they decided, was to put a couple of handfuls of drier sediment into the bucket first, the diggers, of course, complied with this instruction.

Nick was on the steps passing the filled buckets to David, loading the skip to the spoil management team comprising Jon, Mike and Duncan.

When Alex had removed the slop, he turned his attention to clearing the loose sediment that I was creating in the alcove. The buckets started to move freely at a good constant rate. There are some very interesting layers of deposition to look at in the sediment bank, these can become, somewhat, of a distraction. Flood events and subsequent drying periods can be clearly distinguished.

All too soon it was time to stop digging, clear the loose, stash the tools at a safe height and make our way out of the cave. Changed in the car park and up to the Hunter's for well-earned refreshments.

1st November 2018

A summary of the night's activities from Jonathon

“Three intrepid diggers (Tav, Nick and Jon) were joined by a tour guide (Duncan) with a party of seven from the SBSS. While the tourists travelled wide and far, the diggers went straight to the face, where they found a completely dry dig. Taking turns to haul, they dug in random directions, clearing many buckets of spoil before the tourists arrived and offered a willing hand.

Eventually, the arid conditions took their toll and the party were forced to retire to a local hostel for liquid refreshment.”

8th November 2018

With Alex, Mike, Jonathon and Roz

It's been raining recently and all the way up through Chamber 20 the results of this were clear; the drips were stronger, pools were filling-up and water was flowing down the calcite cascade. However, on arrival at the sand dig, we were pleasantly surprised to find it bone dry and no signs of water having flowed into it, this despite the small tube being full and overflowing.

Alex climbed down into the pit and began digging in the alcove, I was moving the filled buckets and passing them up to Mike, who then placed the filled buckets into the skip, hauled by Jonathon, Roz was in control of spoil dispersal. The empty buckets were returned, the process repeated, many times.

In between moving buckets, I spent a little bit of time tidying-up a section of the sediment bank where evidence of flooding and subsequent draining events is clear. It really needs more time spent on it and a full section cleaned and recorded.

All too soon it was time to move the tools to higher ground, just in case, and depart the cave.

15th November 2018

Surprisingly, the sand dig was dry and didn't appear to have backed-up at all after the very heavy rain last weekend. However. A seepage of water through the sediments in the alcove had caused some slumping and work was concentrated there to tidy-up and consolidate. The trickle of water that enters from the chamber was constant, making the steps slippery so these were tidied up too, very sloppy spoil. The water from the trickle is draining freely through the sandy sediment at the bottom of the dig.

Alex and Nick shared the digging, Mike loaded the filled buckets into the skip, Jon hauled the skip up the slope, I emptied the buckets. The process was, of course, repeated many times.

29th November 2018

Last week's digging session was abandoned for the pub when only three of us turned up at Wookey Hole.

Better turn-out this week, with Nick, Tav, Jonathon, Duncan, Mike and, course yours truly, all keen and raring to go, unfortunately Roz got left behind and wasn't happy about it!

After some persistent wet weather recently, we weren't all that hopeful about this evening's prospects but, we headed off anyway. The cave was active, the sound and sight of dripping, running water all the way up through Chamber 20. At the sand dig, the anticipated puddle of water but, rather surprisingly, not as deep as expected.

The excavation had become self-digging as more had slumped from the roof to reveal a space overhead, which was encouraging, and potential lead(s). Some digging was possible but continual slumping and a large, suspect slab overhead soon put an end to it. That was, until Nick decided to poke a bar into the bottom of a small pool of water that became a flow of water and a pile of sloppy sediment. After some more interventions, more slumps, and time running out, we decided to leave it to settle down, perhaps continue to self-digging and return next week. hopefully, the water will continue to drain freely, and wet conditions will not impede further progress too much.

To the pub!

6th December 2018

With Duncan, Jonathon, Nick, Tav and Alex

The trip through Chamber 20 didn't appear to be much wetter than last week, despite of the recent rain. At the sand dig, the water level had risen c.150-200mm and was encroaching into the alcove. Everything at the bottom of the dig was slippery, the self-digging hadn't occurred, and the large, precarious slab of rock was still overhead. After some protracted discussion, it was decided that the rock needs to be dealt with before digging can continue [relatively] safely, some chemical persuasion is required, it will be done!

Tav suggested that we might re-locate the retaining wall and so create extra spoil dumping space, this seemed a good idea so, that's what we did for the evening.

I had a less than comfortable trip out of the cave, the sole of my boot had decided to become detached and go solo, one moccasin is not great for caving – or one socked foot either!

13th December 2018

Jon, Roz and Mike gallantly kept up the effort in the absence of others, I was working away in Suffolk, I don't know the other excuses. The sand dig had dried up and the small team were able to remove 25 buckets of slop, with some difficulty. Apparently, the buckets were not easy to empty and required plenty of scraping clean. So engrossed were they that the usual cut-off time, "beer o'clock", was missed and they arrived at the Hunter's, late on parade.

20th December 2018

Couldn't get enough people together for a team this evening, no digging.

27th December 2018

With Roz, Brockers, Nick, Tav and Jon

Had purchased some supplies and a good team assembled to help carry the equipment, including drill bag, sundries bag, drill-bit tube, wire and a 3.5m aluminium ladder, into the cave. There was some debate regarding the length of the ladder, so Brockers carried in a

hacksaw, just in case. A careful trip through Chamber 20 to the sand dig where there was plenty of evidence for recent slumping.

With a bit of jiggling the ladder was installed and I was able to drill 4no. holes into the slab of rock. Brockers passing various bits of kit and stuff as and when required. The rest of the team spent time sorting out the spoil heap and ran-out the wire. The holes were charged, and the evening brought to a satisfactory conclusion from a safe location.

Hunter's!

7th February 2019

Report by Jon Riley

“Four diggers (Jon, Nick, Mike and Tav) braved the mild and dry conditions but were surrounded by a rival group of webbed creatures. Holding their nerve, the diggers chatted amongst themselves, pretending to wait for a fifth member, reputed to be also attending. Their patience paid off and the rivals soon dispersed.

At the sharp end, the pit contained more than a few inches of water. However, carefully laid plans from previous expeditions allowed digging to continue from the top of the heap. The dig continues as before.

The success of the evening was jeopardised by a systems failure which resulted in some data loss. Specifically, the bucket count was not backed up. A hastily convened business continuity meeting, on the walk back, yielded two estimates: 25 and 47, that is, 36 ± 11 .

I took an action to see if we could improve upon this. I have subsequently analysed the data. A least-squares fit to a linear curve confirms the mean value of 36 as the intercept, but the sparsity of the data precludes any estimate of the gradient of the curve.

The lack of a statistically significant sample prevents the testing of any other meaningful hypothesis. I have therefore been forced into making an engineering decision. We can state, to a certainty of 100%, that the previously proposed figure of 36 is fully consistent with all of the known statistics of the bucket count.”

14th February 2019

Report by Tav.

“A Valentine's Day Massacre. Nick, Mike, Dunc, Tav and Jon. 58 counted, sloppy and heavy bags removed, Jon admitted that he couldn't count in numbers, which brings last week's estimation into question! The passage ahead is widening at depth.”

28th February 2019

Work commitments and recovering injuries are affecting the mid-week digging effort lately.

Report by Jon Riley

“Three diggers (Jon, Tav and Duncan) braved the warm and damp conditions to convene at the meeting place at the appointed hour. Finding the team inquorate, they patiently waited for absent friends and discussed the issues of the day. Hot topics included the cost of beer in

Singapore, the recovery time after eye surgery and the minimum price of a decent bottle of red wine.

After that, they went home.”

7th March 2019

Due to work commitments, etc. there were not enough people available to make-up a digging team for this evening.

14th March 2019

Vince, Jonathon and Nick.

The "Fun Boy Three", no "Bananas", went math!

A total of 45 loads were excavated, hauled and emptied; we had 8 buckets and 7 bags; how many times did we fill and empty each?

From the outset we had thought it might be too wet to dig but agreed we would go and check it out anyway. It was noted, that throughout the cave there wasn't as much water as we had anticipated. At the dig, there was a puddle but not deep enough to stop the digging activities.

Jon digging, Nick clearing the filled buckets and bags and taking care not to fall into the puddle. It was amusing watching Nick trying to extract a misplaced stepping stone from the puddle without getting wet. Vince was at the skip station stacking the filled receptacles ready for hauling and emptying.

It turned out to be a productive session and digging is easily done with a team of three, result!

21st March 2019

With Tav, Nick and Jonathon

On arrival at the dig site at the top of Wookey 20, it was noted that, after a dry week, the puddle had drained away.

I was digging, Tav assisted clearing filled bags away, and he filled a few too. Jon was at the skip “station” loading the bags (and a few buckets) to Nick, who was hauling up the slope and emptying the filled receptacles onto the ever-growing spoil heap. There was some discrepancy regarding the total number of loads because no-one took the responsibility of counting. By consensus, we arrived at a figure of somewhere around 40 to 50 loads. Does it matter? Probably not, stuff got moved, that’s the important bit.

Another fun evening in Wookey Hole!

28th March 2019

With Jonathon

Just the two of us turned up this evening, lots of work commitments and other things. We carried on regardless. At the dig we decided that some spoil management would be a good objective for this session. So, we set about shifting the spoil heap, cramming as much as possible into available “nooks and crannies” and made plenty of space for future digging

sessions. As ever with these things there is always more that can be done. At the end of this evening's work the buckets were given a scrape out. Then, to the Hunter's.

4th April 2019

With Jon, Tav and Mike

After some heavy rain we were, sort of, expecting there to be a puddle at the dig. Surprised to find it dry.

Mike digging, Jon clearing away and filling a few bags, then chucking the filled buckets and bags up to me at the top of the pit. The filled receptacles were loaded into the skip, this was hauled up the slope by Tav. The slope was regularly 'lubricated' with the addition of water. Tav also emptied the buckets and bags onto the spoil heap.

The introduction of bags into the spoil removal system has improved productivity. The down side to this, the bags get rather claggy, to try and address this, at the end of the session the bags were hung on the ladder, placed horizontally, to 'dry'. It might work.

At the close of the session: 60 loads had been filled, hauled and emptied. Good effort.

5th April 2019

Forgetting to pick-up my camera when leaving a cave is becoming a regular occurrence. However, there are a lot of things to appreciate while caving solo – more time to look at the caves structure and development, time to enjoy the solitude and peace at the end of the working week and, there is the opportunity to poke into those nooks and crannies that you find along the way. Even though the trip has been made on numerous occasions there is always more to discover, went along a nicely decorated passage just off the cascade, heading towards the dig site. And I remembered to collect the camera too!

11th April 2019

With Nick, Tav, Jon and Mike

Nick, returned from his travels (work-related), was digging, I was clearing away the filled buckets, replacing them with empty ones. The buckets were passed to Tav, at the top of the pit, he was loading them into the skip. The skip is rapidly deteriorating and really needs changing. Jon was at the top of the slope hauling the skip away, every now and then, adding water to the slope to ease the passage of the loaded skip. Mike was diligently, disposing of the spoil onto the heap, ensuring that all available space was, well and truly, filled.

All was well until it came to the final load tally, which turned into an ongoing debate. As nobody seemed to have been counting, a possible compromise was reached; 60 loads (last week's tally) + an extra person + 20%, a total of 72 was arrived at. This was then complicated by the fact that we had used only buckets, this was likely to have been more efficient – a factor that hadn't been applied. We are still debating it is unlikely that we are ready for a meaningful vote or asking the people to have a vote quite yet.

It was, though an enjoyable and productive session.



Nick digging and filling buckets

18th April 2019

With Jon and Mike

I had prepared two skips on Tuesday evening and these were taken into the cave. One was used to replace the old worn-out skip we had been using, the other is a spare for later. While I was fettling the skip Jon went ahead, to the bottom of the pit and started filling bags. Mike followed on and cleared the filled bags and buckets, loading some into the now, renewed skip. I hauled and emptied a few buckets that Mike had filled to clear the runnel where the water flows in wet conditions before moving downslope to the top of the pit. The filled bags and buckets were then stashed at the top of the pit ready to be hauled and emptied. When all the available receptacles were filled and stashed, we all moved back to clear the backlog. The last task was to hang the empty bags along the ladder.

About three dozen loads were removed from the dig and added to the spoil heap. We are now in need of some additional walling work to facilitate further spoil management, and to prevent any potential slumping of stashed material.

A very warm session, I won't wear two layers of thermal tops next session!

25th April 2019

With Roz, Jon, Mike, Nick and Tav

Nick and Tav were at the bottom of the pit, the rate at which the buckets were being filled suggests that it was Nick digging, Tav clearing. Jon was, also clearing and loading the filled

buckets and rocks into the skip at the top of the pit. This was hauled up the slope by Mike. The slope was lubricated, every now and again by the application of a little water. Mike found out later that the bucket of water had a leak and he had a damp bottom and leg.

As we had arrived a little later, Roz and I took on the spoil management role, emptying and cleaning the buckets, distributing the sediment to ensure all available space was being utilised fully. There was a bit of wall building too.



Roz cleans another bucket, in the background, Mike awaits the next load

No-one counted, but a lot of buckets were filled and emptied, rocks moved too. A lot of spoil was shifted.

2nd May 2019

With Jon, Mike and James Begley

A more leisurely stroll up through the cave to allow James time to appreciate the surroundings. At the dig, as guest digger, James was poked to the front, given the mattock, and prompted to get on with it. Mike was clearing away the filled buckets and passing them up to me at the top of the pit. I was loading the filled buckets into the skip which was then hauled up-slope by Jon. Jon emptied (and cleaned) the buckets, returning them back down the line, to be filled again and the whole procedure repeated.

It was a pleasantly busy evening with plenty of chatter. Soon though it was all over, and we made our way out of the cave to change and re-convene in the pub for refreshments.

9th May 2019

With Mike, Jon, James, Duncan and Nick

We have new buckets and, because we are all-inclusive, we have buckets of many colours.

Mike and Jon were both filling buckets, these were cleared away to James at the top of the slope. The filled buckets loaded into the skip to be hauled up-slope by Nick. Duncan took the buckets and emptied them onto the spoil heap, and I dispersed the sediment to fill all available nooks and crannies.

There was, of course, plenty of chatter and time passed quickly by. With two filling the buckets, a considerable quantity of spoil was removed and redeposited onto the spoil heap. It was a busy evening.



Duncan and Jake arriving at the dig

16th May 2019

With Jon, Tav, Duncan, Mike and colleague Naomi Frazier, and a massive welcome back to Jake after 8 months off following knee surgery.

At the dig, Jon and Tav after a brief discussion went ahead to start digging, they were joined, soon after by Jake and Naomi. Mike went to the top of the pit to load the skip, I was hauling up-slope and Duncan was emptying the buckets.

With multiple bucket fillers it was non-stop hauling/emptying action, the slope requiring frequent lubrication. Later, Jake came up to lend a hand with spoil dispersal and management. They say, ‘that time flies when you are enjoying yourself!’ And it did.

All of us expected Tav to keep a tally of loads removed, he didn’t “too busy” he said. Anyway, it was lots!

23rd May 2019

I was away, digging on Gower with John Cooper and Professors Danny McCarroll (Swansea University) and Danielle Schreve (Royal Holloway, London). Jon provided the following account of the evening’s activities:

“Of late, the Wookey Hole and Halloween Rift diggers have shown increased enthusiasm for their activities. Early arrival and a prompt start now appear to be the norm. And so, it was at Wookey Hole this week. Five of the team (Jon, Tav, Jake, Nick and Mike) met before the appointed hour. Even the latecomers were early.

At the dig, Nick assumed digging duties, supported by Mike. Jon loaded the skip, leaving Tav and Jake to haul and empty.

The digging spoil is now dry, easing the task of emptying buckets, and a team of five is a good number for this dig. The bucket count rapidly increased and, unusually, was accurately recorded by those team members at the spoil heap. 135 buckets of spoil were removed.

Mike reported that the floor was lowered by some 12 inches (30cm).

The prompt start resulted in early calls to depart, but the team held out to the end. They then retired to a local hostelry for some well-deserved liquid refreshment.”

30th May 2019

With Jake, Nick and Jon

The usual warm trip to the end of Chamber 20. When I arrived (delayed while I changed a battery) the others had decided it was my turn to dig. Spoil removal is the easiest job, plenty of room to swing the mattock, then scoop the loosened sediment into an empty bucket. The sediment mostly comprises pale yellow silty sand overlain by pink-brown stiff laminated silty clay. A lot more effort is required to dispatch the filled buckets to the spoil heap. Jake cleared the filled buckets up to Nick, who loaded the skip. Jon hauled the skip up the slope, emptied the buckets, cleaned them and returned the empty, clean buckets. Jake, under instruction from Nick, reduced a couple of boulders to more manageable pieces, useful walling material.

Jon also took it on board to record this evening’s tally. It was evident when looking at the count that there had been a “mid-haul” crisis around the “30” mark, when a shaky hand recorded the number. This was put down to Jon getting-up at 04:30hrs this morning to get into work early so that he could leave earlier and have time to get through the chaos of roadworks at Stonehenge and be on time for digging this evening.

At the end of the session: 58 buckets filled and emptied. It’s okay with four but, more is better!

6th June 2019

At long last someone else has got around to posting on the blog:

www.digwookeyhole.mendipgeoarch.net

Report by Jon

“Last minute delays meant that only three diggers (Jon, Mike and Nick) attended this week. Hopes raised by a brief sighting of a fourth (Duncan) were dashed when it was realised, he was taking the wet route.

With the absence of unruly influences, the team members were on their best behaviour. In an auspicious week for the nation, in which presidents visited from Europe and America to remember events of 75 years ago, nobody mentioned the War, nobody mentioned Brexit and the only wall to receive a mention was the one around the spoil heap.

Jon dug out stone from behind St. Vincent’s Rock. Nick hauled 25 skip loads of it up the dry slope. Then work began on the spoil heap. While Nick tended the sharp end, moving spoil high up into the corner, Jon concentrated on building up the wall at the other end.

Mike did the jobs of three people at the bottom. He dug 24 bucket loads from the end, concentrating on the right-hand side. He carried these up the slope and loaded the skip. A Sage Elder recently revealed that he thought that the way on might still be under the right-hand wall. Mike reports evidence of a possible undercut.

49 skips, no-one offended, the spoil heap tended and digging progress made. What good boys we were.”

4th July 2019

With Mike, Jon, Nick and Tav

There’s been a short break between digging sessions as sometimes happens when work and personal commitments all come together. A good number of the team gathered for this evening’s session though.

As usual it was a warm trip through Chamber 20 to the dig. Jon and Nick entered the ‘dig-pit’ to fill the buckets. Tav was at the top of the pit, transferring the loaded buckets and occasional rock into the skip hauled up-slope by Vince. Mike was dealing with the sediment re-distribution. The downside of lubricating the slope with a regular splash of water is that the hauling position becomes quite mucky and overalls become mud plastered, and damp!

It didn’t take long for the diggers to settle into a steady rhythm, there wasn’t much time between loads, a total of 90 loads were dispersed, mostly buckets.

All went rather smoothly, there were no mishaps, nor any character assassination (not much anyway) and it was an enjoyable evening session. But all good things come to an end and it was pub time!

11th July 2019

With Nick and Tav

A smaller team assembled this evening so we decided that spoil heap management would be a good thing to concentrate our efforts on. We built some walls, moved some rock, built some more walls somewhere else, and shovelled a lot of spoil around filling the nooks and crannies. Time passed quickly. At the end of the evenings session we had a lot more space to dump more spoil.

18th July 2019

With Jake, Jon, Nick and Tav

A bigger team tonight and good to see Jake back after his flat maintenance stint.

It was the usual warm trip through Chamber 20 to the dig. The thing is, by the time you arrive at the dig you are warm, very warm, then, straight into swinging the mattock and loading the loosened sediment into the bucket. And you feel the need to work quickly as those team members waiting might become impatient, well that's the perception.

Jake was digging, I cleared away the filled buckets and passed them up to Tav at the top of the sand pit. Tav transferred the buckets into the skip, which was hauled upslope to the spoil dispersal area, this was being managed this evening by Jon and Nick.

As the session progressed Jake got warmer and warmer, so we swapped places, my turn to warm-up, not that I was particularly cool anyway. More buckets filled, rocks battered with the sledgehammer, all removed to the spoil heap.

There was some discrepancy regarding total number of loads removed, but 77 was the figure we stuck to as it has some symmetry to it. A good productive session and we were all ready for the pub for some well-earned refreshments!

25th July 2019

With Jake, Jon and Tav

We assembled in the showcave car park as usual and made our way up to the tradesman [tunnel] entrance. It was warm already.

A smaller team this evening so we utilised one of the alternative spoil disposal areas so that digging was possible. Tav did the brunt of the digging, Jon did all the clearing of the filled buckets and sporadic rock. I was at the top of the sandpit, the "real Chamber 21", passing the receptacles to Jake who was in control of spoil management. To enable maximum utilisation to the available disposal space, rocks were moved, retaining walls constructed, a lot of buckets were emptied.

With all the activities in full swing no-one kept a tally of the buckets filled and emptied so after some discussion, a compromise was reached, 77 is a good number, it has symmetry and we shifted that many last week. We were satisfied, a good productive session, by now everyone of us was warm, time to head out for some refreshment.

It was oppressively warm on exiting the cave and there was some spectacular lightning on the way up to the Hunter's Lodge Inn.

1st August 2019

With Mike and 7 Belgian cavers, members of the Cascade Caving Club.

Good job the Mike had recruited some help as we were a bit thin on the ground otherwise. It was a slower, steadier trip through the Chamber 20 passages. There were plenty of stops to point out some of the interesting features along the way. Photographs and discussions ensued.

When we all arrived at the bottom of the 'sand pit', it was a little bit crowded. I showed the Belgian team where to dig, gave them the mattock and the empty buckets and left them to it. Mike and I did the spoil management, I hauled the skip up the slope, and Mike emptied the buckets.

The Belgian contingent were enthusiastic diggers, there was plenty of banter between them (more chatter than Brockers). They did their bit, we did ours, time passed and soon the pub beckoned. The digging stopped, and we left, no-one was counting the buckets. An enjoyable evening in good company.

8th August 2019

With Jon, Tav, Nick and Estelle Sandford

Another guest digger, Estelle, joined the team for this evening's session. Nick had just returned from working in the 'back of beyond' and was 'chomping at the bit'.

On arrival at the sand pit, Estelle and Nick were dispatched to the dig face and left to get on with it. Jon, at the top of the pit, loaded the filled buckets into the skip hauled up the slope by Tav, who regularly administered water, like some demented bishop blessing the hordes, to lubricate the passage of the skip. Tav also kept the tally because he's the only one who can keep count. My job was to empty the buckets, 102 of them, any rocks were added to the retaining wall. The spoil heap is getting to the stage where it requires some more care and attention, the spoil needs moving to the back wall to give us more dumping space.

At the end of the evening, another productive session.

15th August 2019

With Jon, Tav and Nick.

Jon digging, I was cleared the filled buckets and rocks, passing them up to Tav at the top of the 'sand pit'. Tav forwarded on the receptacles and loose rock to Nick to empty the buckets and use the stones to build a retaining in the intermediate spoil dump on one-side of the slope. There 67 loads of various descriptions.

Jon finished the session with a loud 'crash' when he decided to collapse some quite large and loose-ish boulders from the roof. The boulders had been situated above the position that Jon had been digging away all evening. There's now plenty of sledge-hammer work for the next session now.

There are some interesting sedimentation layers, these were the subject of some discussion, there was of course the usual banter too.

An enjoyable and productive session.

5th September 2019

With Tav, Jake and Mike. Duncan was also present although he had another little project to attend.

Me digging, Tav clearing, Jake and Mike were organising the spoil disposal. Mike also got a side project underway, more space creation. There was a lot chattering and discussion regarding the sediment layers and time passed quickly. Another productive session.

This evenings load number was 42. According to Douglas Adams' Hitch-hikers Guide to the Galaxy: "42 is the answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything."

12th September 2019

With Jake and Tav.

Jake digging, Tav clearing the filled buckets, I was on spoil dispersal. Tav reckoned he "bagged a Munro" with the number of times he had to climb to the top of the pit carrying the filled buckets to load into the skip. The space we had to dump spoil when there is a smaller team is rapidly diminishing too.

We were far too busy for the usual chatter and no-one counted the buckets either, but they kept coming until it was time to leave!

19th September 2019

With Jake, Jon and Tav.

Tav digging, although weary after a day spent trudging around Ebbor Gorge guiding Mendip Cave Rescue to the various cave and mine entrances. It was my turn to 'bag a munro' clearing away the filled buckets from Tav, climbing out of the pit and loading the skip. Jon was hauling the skip, occasionally lubricating the slope with a frugal splash of water, unloading the buckets or rocks, to be carted away by Jake. The filled buckets and infrequent rocks were added to the spoil heap or wall as necessary, the buckets then scraped clean and returned, the process repeated. 54 skip-loads were dispatched and dealt with, there was no discrimination between filled buckets and the occasional rock in the final count.

It was warm work and refreshments later at the Hunter's Lodge Inn were well earned!

26th September 2019

With Jake, Jon, Nick and Tav.

It's been raining, quite hard at times, for the last week or so. There was some discussion as to the consequences of this, Hallowe'en Rift had still been dry and mostly drip free on Tuesday evening. The trip up through the passage off Chamber 20 revealed that water was flowing in several places.

Approaching the dig, it was noted that the aven had water cascading down and the small tube it drains into was overflowing. Generally, this is not a good sign and so it proved to be, the dig was flooded to a considerable depth. Digging was impossible. We managed to rescue the tools and extract a couple of large boulders that had slumped in. we decided to spend the evening on

some spoil space management, we found some rocks and built some walls. We just need the dig to dry so that we can fill the spaces we created.

We did, however, keep ourselves amused for the evening before we went to the pub!

3rd October 2019

With Jake, Jon, Nick and Duncan. Duncan had recruited some guest diggers from the North, Adele Ward and Lee Smith.

Initially, a trip to assess the water level in the dig as it has been raining quite a lot. I had my camera and UV light to take some fluorescence images, just in case. The flow of water in the cave was noticeable, the cascade was especially active.

At the dig, rather surprisingly the water appeared to have receded [slightly]. There had, of course, been some slumping, mostly clay/silt/sand but some boulders too. We decided that, as we were there anyway, we should clear some of the slumped material, and there was enough of us to get the buckets away.

There was an intriguing trickle of water coming down from the roof, this appears to have been the cause of the slumping. A cluster of fractured, loose rock was poked and became dislodged. A bar pushed into the wet, softer allowed an increased flow of water. Pushing the bar in further indicated there was some open space beyond. Some more poking resulted in more slumping, quite a lot of splashing and more space was revealed. It was getting exciting. The ladder was called for to make digging a bit easier, rather than being at arm's length, and to remove a couple of obstinate boulders. Ladder in place the offending rocks were eventually prised free, more splashing and access into space beyond was opening. It looked enticing and there was fresh air movement too. Managed to wriggle up into the small "chamber", sticky clay floor, some pools of water, the source of the trickle, but not quite enough space to see the full extent of what lies ahead. More digging required. Nick and Adele had a look too. Time had moved on quickly as it does when you're enjoying yourselves, there were calls of "pub-time" from other team members, so we left it at that for tonight. Moved the tools and buckets to a safer location and departed. A very good and fun evening.

Didn't get around to taking any photographs either.

10th October 2019

With Jon, Jake, Duncan, Mike's back after injuring himself, Nick and Tav.

We thought the water levels might be interesting this evening after heavy rain over the last few days. Walking to the cave entrance the River Axe was in full spate; a lot of water was coming from the resurgence. Throughout the cave there were drips and trickles where they hadn't been seen before and we had a small stream for company in places.

At the dig we were not surprised to find a considerable depth of water flooding the dig at the bottom of the sand pit. A tentative effort was made by some to get a better look, but the consensus was, not worth getting that wet!

Digging was impossible so we mooched around the cave for a while looking at the water levels before going to the pub earlier than usual.



Duncan tests the depth of water.

24th October 2019

With Jake and Mike.

After a week off due to adverse conditions, a scratch team assembled, numbers depleted by ongoing maladies and work commitments in foreign places. The main purpose of this evenings foray was to check the water levels in the sand pit.

As we progressed through the cave it was noted that many of the drips, trickles and small streams that were present a couple of weeks ago had reduced, receded or stopped completely.

On arrival at the dig we were pleased to find that the dig was dry, just a shiny layer of slop where the last of the water had drained away. There was some material that had slumped from the wall.



Jake digging

Jake climbed the ladder into the space we had entered 03/10/19 and the small bull-nose spade was passed to him and he began to dig. Some boulders were soon removed, and a spoil heap began to accrue in the chamber below. Mike and I made a valiant effort to remove some of the spoil up to the heap, but it wasn't an easy task. It was very sticky and slippery climbing out of the sand pit with full buckets. But progress was made, our refreshments later had been worked for. A positive evening.

29th October 2019

With Jake, Jon, Tav, Roz, Duncan, Mike, Estelle and Chris Dubery.

Lots of people this evening, the flotsam and jetsam of another flooded dig!

We decided to move from the usual Thursday evening slot because we thought there might be some event in the caves on Hallowe'en night, that said, the car park was very busy tonight.

The focus of the session had been to build a retaining wall and a raised platform at the current end of the dig. This, an effort to contain any future flooding. Due to the number of participants the plans were tweaked a little.

Chris, as tonight's guest, was dispatched up the ladder with a spade and a supply of empty buckets, the ladder was then removed. It gets in the way. Jake and I set about retrieving some of the large boulders we knew were buried in the pile of spoil, somewhere. These would be required to construct the retaining wall.

Tav was clearing away the filled buckets, while nursing a sore shoulder, the buckets were passed across the pit to Estelle, then to Jon who was loading them into skip. The loaded skip was hauled away and the contents of the buckets emptied on to the spoil heap by Mike, Duncan and Roz. It was a productive session, everyone was busy. I'm not sure if anyone was really keeping an accurate tally but 66 was mentioned.

There was a bit more water than expected so the evenings tasks were made a little more arduous due to a liberal coating of slippery mud.

Anyway, the boulders were set free from their temporary grave, some proved a little more difficult than others and required a combined effort to coax them free of the muddy grip. These boulders enabled the retainer wall to be built to the perceived required height. All we need to do now is to backfill the space created and raise the platform. Hopefully, this will be achieved before anymore heavy rain comes along!

12th November 2019

I was in Hallowe'en Rift with Alex Gee carrying out the next phase of IRS. However, a team assembled to continue the digging in Wookey Hole. Jon provided the following account:

“Four diggers attended this evening's session (Nick, Tav, Mike and Jon).

The evening was quite uneventful. The team proceeded directly to Sand Dig where they found surprisingly little water. There were no more than a few inches at the lowest point, but more had ponded up on the new platform, beyond the base of the ladder. It was decided that the best course of action was to drain this into the lower level. A narrow trench was dug along the wall on the left-hand side, when looking in, and the water quickly drained.

Mike ascended into the current dig and proceeded to send down 8 or 10 buckets of spoil and threw down many handfuls more. The others levelled off the platform so that it may drain better next time.

The base of the ladder was re-seated on the few rocks that were dug out; smaller rocks were placed along the side of the trench to keep it open.

A random glance of a watch then revealed that the allotted time had been used, so the team departed and retired to a local hostelry for liquid refreshment.”

19th November 2019

While I was beavering away in Hallowe'en Rift applying the next phase of IRS, a team attended to the dig in Wookey Hole. The following summary was provided by Jon:

“Four regulars, Jake, Jon, Mike and Nick, were joined by Estelle for this evening's session.

Water levels were low. The lowest point of the dig was liquid mud rather than water. The raised area was sticky but rather soft underfoot beyond the ladder.

Following common practice, the visitor was given the opportunity to dig. On top of the bank, a shallow trench was dug from the edge across to the far wall. The wall is continuing down; no bottom edge has yet been encountered. A rock, possibly boulder, has been partly uncovered near the far wall.

The team attempted to haul the spoil up the slope, but sticky mud and staff numbers made this a little slower than usual. Some spoil was therefore dumped on the raised platform.

In the absence of the Chief Accountant, the bucket count was somewhat unclear. It was certainly in double figures.”

28th November 2019

I was attending to business in Hallowe'en Rift, continuing the quest for the north-west passage.

Jake, Nick and Mike report that they had a rather aqueous digging session in Wookey Hole. Everyone else, it seems, are saving themselves for Saturday's session at Hallowe'en!

3rd December 2019

Mike and 5no. MCG members

Mike reported “no water at the end of Wookey (or drips coming from ahead). Took a few more inches out.”

5th December 2019

With Nick and Mike

Me and Nick got changed in the car park before walking up to the cave where we met Duncan, Rob Harper and Roo Walters who was scanning the showcave. Mike, who had been helping them, joined us.

Nick, Mike and me set-off to go digging at the top of Chamber 20. Mike went for a solo effort in the sticky sand dig, me and Nick headed down the rift that leads to sump 23 and ‘whatever’. We planned to have a poke about in a possible lead part way down the rift passage. We spent the session moving rocks and gravel and building a wall to retain the shifted spoil. The only conclusion we reached at this stage was – we needed tools! The whole area draughts quite strongly. All too soon it was time to ascend the rift and meet up with Mike. It's a good sporty climb back up the rift. And, we were almost clean!

Mike reported that the pile of spoil below the dig is getting bigger and the water had drained away, mostly.

19th December 2019

With Jon

There's been some heavy rain for the last couple of day's and, as expected the cave was wet. There was plenty of water coming from the resurgence and the trip from Chamber 20 was as wet as I've seen it. The sand pit was flooded, we poked around for a while before heading back out of the cave.

It was noted that a lot of water was flowing into the sand pit, but the water level is quite static – the water is going somewhere!



Jon after negotiating the flood, climbs the ladder to the dig



9th January 2020

With Nick, Jon and Mike. Duncan and Connor Roe did their own thing.

It's been a while, so we thought we'd go and check the water level. There was some torrential rain this afternoon, so we weren't too confident about the prospects of getting some digging

done. However, as we progressed through the cave there were indications that it might not be as wet as expected.

On arrival at the sand pit we were pleased to find that it was dry and we were able to get on with some digging. Nick “the mole” led the way, he’s been out of action for a couple of weeks and was chomping at the bit, Mike was clearing away Nick’s spoil mostly in an effort not to get buried. The spoil was shovelled down onto the accumulating heap. Jon and I spent the evening levelling the spoil and creating a platform. Hopefully, this will enable us to continue digging in wetter conditions, the ladder can be used as a bridge if necessary.

By the end of the session progress had been made and it’s beginning to look rather interesting. A couple more sessions and things might start to become clearer and reveal something positive. We departed, satisfied with a productive evening.

16th January 2020

With Jon, Nick and Mike. Duncan did his own thing again.

Despite the recent heavy rain, the dig wasn’t as wet as expected. There was some water, but we were able to carry on with the digging. Our endeavours to create a platform last week had worked.

Both Jon and I were digging, the loosened spoil put into buckets, the filled receptacles then emptied onto the edges of the platform where it was drier by Nick and Mike. The cleaned buckets were returned. There were trickles of water coming from several locations making the whole excavation process increasingly muddy. As progress was made things became more interesting. That’s the thing with digging, things always look interesting; a small gap opens here and there; what’s happening here? Always something for the inquisitive!

All too soon it was time to finish, a quick tidy-up and we left. On the way up the climb Nick noticed something I’m not certain we’ve looked at, bear it in mind for next time, before we are too muddy.

23rd January 2020

With Tav and Mike.

With a rapidly diminishing digging team due to work commitments, late arrivals and missed trains, the three of us thought we’d better get on with it!

At the dig, Tav digging, Mike clearing the filled buckets away and I was emptying them, consolidating the raised platform. The weather forecast for the coming week is not favourable, more wet weather. Hopefully, the precautions we’ve implemented will enable the digging effort to continue.

Tav developed the small space revealed last session into something far more interesting, with some air movement too. Another digging session (or two) will be productive, the prospects ahead look intriguing.

A satisfying evening.

30th January 2020

With Jon, Jake, Nick, Tav and Mike.

A good turn-out this evening, although we all had to negotiate the car park full of film crew and all the paraphernalia that went with them. “The Spanish Princess” apparently, didn’t sound very gripping. On to more pressing matters...

At the dig, the ‘wall’ was approached on two fronts; Jake, aided by Nick, continued on from Tav’s efforts last session, Jon continued where he had left off a couple of weeks ago, now following a trickle of water, there were some feint mumblings about water dripping into his ear but these were ignored. The rest of us were occupied with spoil dispersal. Nick was also endeavouring to remove a large boulder. With all this digging activity the buckets were being filled and emptied at a steady rate.

Nick’s boulder had been loosened, Tav fetched the sledgehammer, I used it to beat the boulder into submission. Jake called out; things were “looking very good”, he could see space back towards Jon. Meanwhile, Jon had turned the drip into a more sustained flow of mud and water, then announced that he could see into “black space”. As Jon kept on digging the resulting slurry was scraped away down onto the now sticky platform. Eventually, Jon was able to wriggle up through a narrow, slippery slot, with some assistance, into the space beyond. We all followed...

A chamber, guesstimated to be c.12m length, up to 6m width and c.6m high, formed along a line of weakness and likely to be the continuation of the main passage, the floor area, strewn with degraded conglomerate. There is a calcite vein, perhaps evidence of some hydro-thermal activity, and plenty of fractured rock along a fault line. Water dripping from the roof has precipitated calcite flowstone over large areas of the chamber floor, some decent mud formations were noticed too. There is a need for some photographs and surveying to be carried out. A couple of holes were noted at high level that require checking and there are several potential leads to pursue. Some rock removal was around the entry point allowed enlargement of the wriggle. Jake’s dig would have entered the same space a couple of metres away.

Very satisfied with the evening’s outcome, we left and made our way out of the cave.

6th February 2020

With Mike, Jake, Duncan, Nick and Tav.

A jovial gathering in the showcave car park, waited for Jon but, unfortunately, he’d had a breakdown (vehicular) and couldn’t make it.

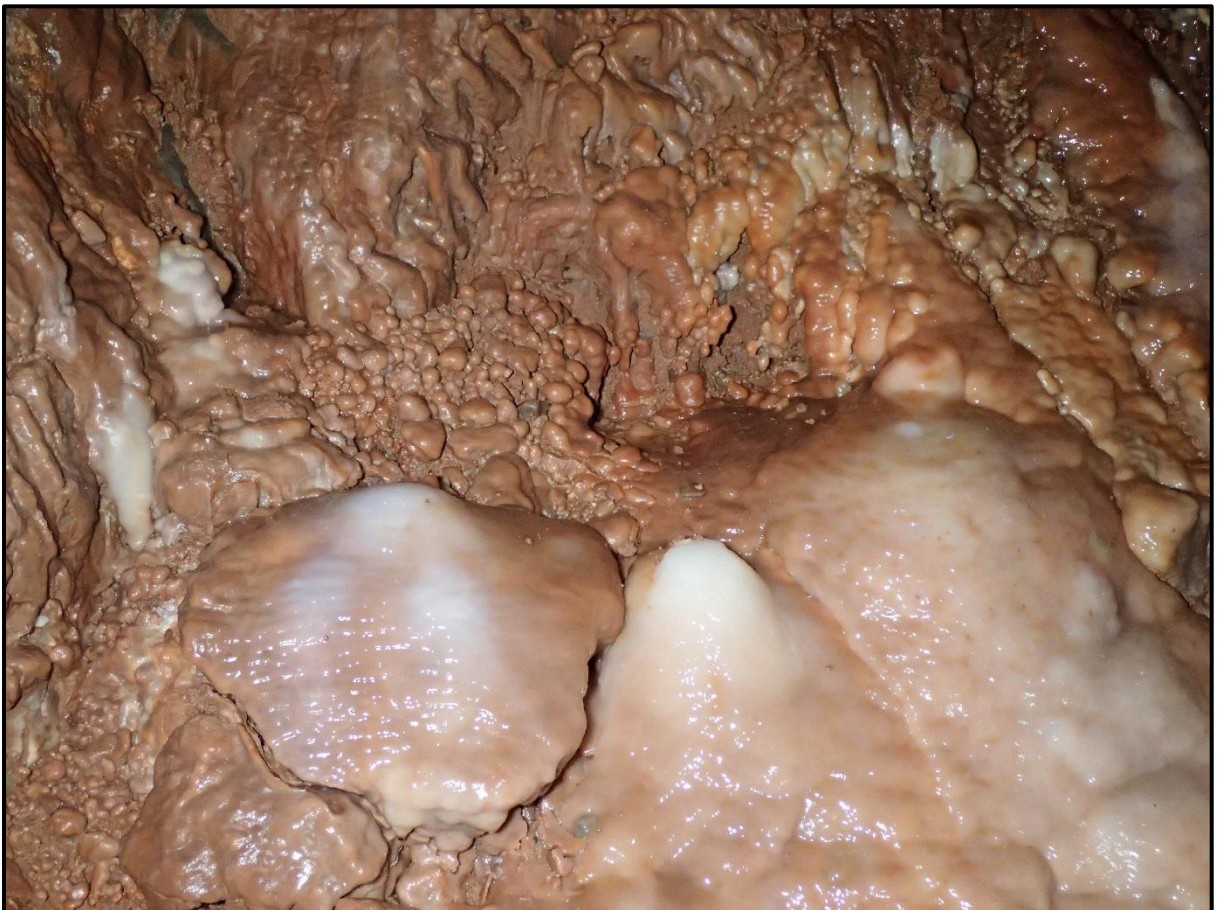
A steady stroll through the cave to the dig. There, a variety of tasks were undertaken before digging commenced. Photographs, survey, pathways sorted, the access tidied and improved, the debris of last week’s fervour cleared, and a spoil dump established. When all this was done, digging began. The filled buckets were passed along a line to be emptied and any rocks were added to the wall. Our initial efforts will be concentrated at the north west extent of the passage as it seems the most obvious place. There are a couple of overhead possibilities, but these will wait until the next session.

It was another pleasant evening of irreverent banter we are so not ‘PC’.











13th February 2020

With Nick, Tav, Jon, Mike and Duncan.

The usual amble up through the cave to the did. As expected, the drips along the passage were quite active.

The access point into the recent extension is slippery especially when trying to move kit up through the slot. All attempts to get the ladder through failed – an alternative solution will be sought!

Nick had bought a new, health and safety compliant, spade, so he was left in the dig to try it out. And because there was water in the hole Nick had started last session. The rest of us moved and emptied filled buckets, cleaned buckets, built walls and managed the spoil heap, tidied away slop and improved access into the extension. Tried to get some photos but there was so much activity going on the passage became very steamy.

There is much enthusiasm for this dig!



20th February 2020

With Jake, Jon, Tav, Nick, Mike, Duncan and Alex.

Quite a turn-out this evening. The potential water levels in the cave was one of the topics of discussion as we were getting changed in the car park. It has been rather wet recently!

At the tunnel entrance, it was noticed that the leat was clear and through the showcave section the sump pools looked quite clear too. Beyond the showcave, the drips and trickles were no stronger than usual, and further on the water flowing down the calcite cascades was normal for this time of year.

Approaching the dig, it was no wetter than it was last week which was unexpected. At the dig there was, however, a deep puddle of water. Tav got in and started bailing, a line was set-up to bucket the water away. It was soon “dry” and Tav started to dig.

Alex provided a shoulder to stand on and I was able to squeeze up into the narrow rift above the dig. It didn't go anywhere and closed to become too tight after a few metres. Another climb above the access point was also pursued, it also soon closed, just small solution tubes.

With a large team present it seemed like a good idea to conserve the spoil dumping space in the extension and move spoil down to the lower platform, so that is what we did. Everyone was kept occupied. The constant trickle of water flowing out of the extension down onto the platform was noted.

No-one was counting the buckets, but it was a ‘goodly’ few, digging conditions weren't ideal, very sticky at times. Progress, though, was made!

27th February 2020

I had been dispatched to deepest Dorset to liberate a Bronze Age bowl barrow from an invasion by aliens – rhododendron. When I arrived, I found that the forces assembled were ill-equipped for the initial foray and the invading aliens had taken the higher ground with the aid of some well-established pine trees and bracken. The assault was long and sustained but ultimately unsuccessful, we shall return better prepared when the birds have finished nesting. As a consequence, I was back too late for this evening's activities in Wookey Hole. The following account of events was provided by Jon:

“Five of the team (*Jon, Tav, Nick, Jake and Mike*) attended this evening's digging session. Following another wet week, the expectation was for wet cave conditions. However, it had also been noted at the previous session that the dig had become sandy with a good chance of draining. One of the team was eager to remind the others about this.

Jon was elected to dig, supported by Jake. The two moved to the front a little quicker than the others and immediately set about bailing the water from the dig face. Jon then commenced digging.

The sandy layer in the floor was not as deep as previously thought and soon became quite rocky. The floor was initially dug back a little from the dig face to create more room, and then to the right for the same reason. A goodly number of buckets of spoil was removed, along with a useful amount of building stone.

While the digging continued, other team members spent some effort improving access by cutting steps into the mud bank at the last breakthrough point. As a final gesture, the worst of the mud was removed from the floor of the dig face to offer hope that it might drain a little before the next session. The team then retired to a local hostelry for liquid refreshment.”

17th March 2020

Due to the corona virus (Covid-19) pandemic and the latest UK Government advice all digging activities are suspended for the foreseeable future. Good luck and hopefully, good health people!

21st May 2020

Nine weeks later and I have cracked, I'm breaking free of 'lockdown' and making a return to digging! Back in Hallowe'en Rift a couple of weeks ago and have been active at Gully Cave in Ebbor Gorge, now a return to Wookey Hole.

Solo

A couple of weeks ago, I had been in contact with Daniel Medley, Wookey Hole Caves Ltd., to ask if it was okay to return to our digging activities. His response was positive and said it was fine to continue. Following that I sent an email to the team regarding a digging trip last Thursday evening and awaited their reply. I was deflated and more than a bit pissed-off by the wholly negative response, suffice to say no-one was prepared to venture out of the safety of their little bubbles. The trip did not happen!

After last week's negative response, I could not be bothered to send out an email to the others to organise another digging trip and no-one else was being active (or pro-active), so I went by myself. I parked discretely, not using the showcave car park and waited around for a while just in case someone decided to show-up, they didn't, so off I went. I had packed my caving kit into a rucksack and got changed inside the cave tunnel. It smelt fousty in the cave, and mould was visible on the wooden platform in Chamber 20.

An easy pace stroll to the dig enjoying the surroundings and the peace, the cave to myself. Trying out a new helmet and lamp, different boots too. The light seems to be okay, not sure about the boots, I've got a sore heel, a blister that doesn't want to get better, it's very irritating, especially when wearing boots.

At the dig, I took the opportunity to have a good poke at the potential way forward. Usually I leave the digging to others in WH as I've been doing the clearing in HR recently. There is an obvious lead at roof level that would be in line with the trend of the rift/mineral vein. Unfortunately, I left quite a pile of loose material, but I did place a rock on the spoil heap as a token gesture. That was the last act before I started to make my way out of the cave.

Exited the cave into the still warm and light evening and went home. No pub visits for the foreseeable future!!!

28th May 2020

With Roz, Nick, Mike, Duncan and Connor Roe.

After parking discretely and getting changed at the cave entrance, a jolly band made their way through the cave to the dig site.

On arrival at the dig, Nick took the first stint upfront loosening the spoil, filling buckets, and passing them back. I moved the filled buckets along to Connor who, in turn, passed the buckets down the line to Roz, Mike and Duncan. The buckets were emptied, scraped clean and returned.

Nick had cleared around a large boulder until it was almost loose then relinquished his effort to Connor to remove the boulder. With a combined effort and a rope, the boulder was cajoled and dragged into a position where it could be reduced in size with the sledgehammer. I then took over at the dig face and filled the last few buckets before a halt was called to proceedings for the evening. We packed up and left the cave.

4th June 2020

With Jake, Duncan and Mike.

A mellow evening's digging with chums, plenty of banter and enough going on to keep us interested. Jake and Mike took it in turns to dig and fill buckets, Duncan and me, emptied them. Also, buckets were cleaned, a large boulder was broken-up and added to the spoil heap wall, and a small wall was constructed to try and conserve an area of calcite dripstone deposits that's in danger of being trampled over.

It's odd, we still decided to pack it in when 'pub-time' was called, even though the pub is still closed, a victim of the times. To counteract this Mike had brought along refreshments and left some bottles at the entrance (*I had brought along alcohol-free beer for me*). On arrival at the entrance, it was surprising to find that it was raining, quite hard too. Got wet returning to the vehicles.

11th June 2020

With Roz, Tav, Jake, Mike, and Nick.

A chance for Roz to try out the new Petzl Panga helmet with Fenix HM65R (1400 lumens) light, a birthday present.

Despite an earlier statement, I ended up at the dig face filling the buckets, Tav clearing back to Roz who was shuttling back and forth to the spoil management team, Jake, Mike, and Nick. The buckets were being emptied onto the lower spoil heap where some landscaping activities were being undertaken (mostly by Nick I assume). It was another chilled and mellow session just digging away and chattering, it was Tav's first outing in a couple of months and, I suspect, he needed it. No-one bothered counting the number of loads moved.

We enjoyed some refreshments at the entrance while getting changed at the end of the session.

Given the latest bandwagon that everyone is jumped on, protesting about racism and ending up with the defacing of historical monuments in Bristol and other places, I did like Jake's suggestion that we should name the recent discovery in Wookey Hole – "Colston Hall". Very aptly incorrect!

18th June 2020

With Mike, Nick, and Tom Chapman.

Good to see Tom underground with us in Wookey Hole again. The initial email responses indicated with were going to have a bigger team this evening but, for one reason or another, the numbers of participants had diminished.

It's been wet all day and is still raining. However, it was surprisingly dry throughout the cave and not much water in the resurgence either. And, more importantly, the dig was dry. Nick,

who had been at the front, got straight into filling buckets, I was busy chatting to Tom about the digging exploits that resulted in the breakthrough to the 'chamber', Mike was clearing buckets and, eventually, Tom and I shuttled the buckets back and forth to the spoil heap where they were emptied and scraped clean. Nick swapped places with Mike and all in all it was another mellow, productive session. Operations ceased at the usual time and refreshments were taken just inside the cave entrance. It was still raining outside.

Author's Note:

I had been reading through a paper in a Geological Society Special Publication (**No.165**) and came across this term, it fits well with the deposition of sediments in the Wookey Hole dig.

Rhythmites: consisting of layers of sediment (or sedimentary rock) having been laid down with an obvious periodicity and regularity. They may be created by annual processes such as seasonally varying deposits reflecting variation in the run-off cycle, by short term processes such as tides, or by longer term processes such as periodic floods. For example, proglacial rhythmites (glacial dam bursts, etc.); glacial epicycle rhythmites (waxing/waning of glaciers); and varves.

Reference:

Latham, A.G., Herries, A., Quinney, P., Sinclair, A. & Kuykendall, K. 1999. The Makapansgat Australopithecine site from a speleological perspective. *From:* Pollard, A.M. (ed.) 1999. *Geoarchaeology; exploration, environments, resources*. Geological Society, London, Special Publications. **165**, 61-77



Après dig refreshment (l to r) Tav, Jake, Nick, Jon, Duncan, Mike. Photo 25th June 2020

25th June 2020

With Jake, Jon, Duncan, Nick, Mike and Tav.

Jon and Jake alternated the digging duties, it was warm work, Tav and I cleared away the filled buckets, I took some photographs too. Nick sort of did his own thing (not sure of the point of it but...), Mike shuttled buckets and Duncan emptied them onto the lower intermediate spoil heap and built a retaining wall. Everyone seemed happy and good downward progress was achieved. We'll soon be needing the ladder to get in to and out of the dig.

At the end of the session, refreshments were taken at the cave entrance. It had been a very warm day and it was still so.



Jon digging, Jake looks on, bucket filled ready to go! Photo 25th June 2020

2nd July 2020

With Tav, Nick, Jake, Jon and Mike.

Tav, me and Nick alternated the digging (Tav had supplied a new mattock so he went first); Jake, Jon and Mike busied themselves with spoil management and ladder logistics. The aim was to get the ladder through the too small opening into the chamber beyond. After some modification to the aperture, the mission was accomplished and Mike used the ladder to scrutinise some of the roof level solution holes, none of which appear to be big enough to enter.

It was another pleasant and mellow evening's activity and productive too. All too soon it was time to leave the dig behind.

Après refreshments on the "patio" at the cave entrance were enjoyed. The leat is a useful beer cooler.

9th July 2020

With Roz, Jake, Nick, Duncan, Tav and Mike.

As has become the norm we met in the village and got changed at the cave.

It was the usual warm trip through the cave to the dig. Jake was first to arrive, so he was elected to dig (by me, no-one else was there yet anyway). I started to clear the filled buckets away when Nick turned up to help followed by Roz. Nick came forward and was delegated 'step digger' and a bucket platform was required. Unfortunately, Jake was digging down faster than the steps were being cut. It is a deep hole and it is getting noticeably deeper every digging session. Some interesting sediment layers were the subject of discussion and speculation.

All too soon it was time to leave, the last bucket filled, tools stashed out of harm's way and off we went. Comments were made on the fine spoil retaining wall as we passed.

At the entrance, we changed, refreshments retrieved from cooling in the leat and some chill-out time ensued. It is very peaceful in the Wookey Hole ravine in the late evening.

16th July 2020

With Jake, Jon, Tav, Nick and Duncan.

Duncan went off to '23 and whatever' to do his own thing. The rest of us went digging.

Jon, Tav and Nick rotated the digging and shuttling of filled buckets across the chamber. Jake and me, were on spoil management duties. The filled buckets were transferred, by me, from the chamber to the lower intermediate spoil stashing location where Jake emptied the buckets and stuffed the sediment into all available nooks and crannies. Basically, backfilling the spot he had been digging before Jon dug into the chamber above. We need as much spoil disposal space as can be utilised.

It was a busy session and good progress made in a downward direction. It was reported that there are some encouraging signs beginning to develop, or so it is hoped.

Après dig drinks and debrief were enjoyed in the Wookey Hole ravine. It was a pleasantly warm evening.

21st July 2020

With Jake, Mike, Tav, Jon, Nick, and Duncan.

We're 'making hay while the sun shines' and following up on Nick's suggestion by having a Tuesday evening digging session. Duncan went off to 23¾ to check out something while the rest of us went digging.

As usual we arrived at the dig warm and no time to cool down, I was straight into digging. I was going to get very warm swinging the mattock and filling buckets with the loosened sediment. After 20 minutes or so it was time to cool down and Jake took over digging duties. Jake continued where I had left off until he too became overheated and it was Mike's turn for a while, then it was Tav before I returned for the final stint. Down in the lower, intermediate spoil dump, Jon and Nick were coping admirably with spoil management.

The majority of spoil removed was a varying mixture of clay, silt, and sand ranging in colour from light red to brown becoming light creamy brown and bright yellow. There are distinct layers throughout where the sediment has settled, presumably following flood events. Good progress was made in a downwards direction. In the later stage of the session some sub angular to subrounded cobbles and boulders were encountered, these showed signs of continuing erosion by aggressive water/moisture. A few rocks were removed but others remain in situ until Thursday evening's session. It is certainly looking interesting at present.

As ever when all are busy time seems to pass quickly and the session came to an end. We moved the tools out of the way and made our way out of the cave.

It had been warm work and refreshments at the entrance were welcome. We took the opportunity to discuss the evening's activities and to plan for Thursday. Happy days!

23rd July 2020

With Nick, Jon, Duncan, Jake, Mike and Tav.

Nick, Jon, and Duncan rotated the digging duties, I was shuttling the filled buckets through the chamber to be emptied in the lower intermediate spoil dump where Mike and Tav were attending to spoil management. Jake was busy cleaning the ladder, in case it is required later, when done he joined the spoil disposal activities.

At the dig, downwards progress was slowed due to a rock encounter. Some, potentially, large blocks of rock were being exposed. The way forward appears to be diminishing, which is disappointing. More sediment needs clearing away to be certain, but time ran out this session. A downwards direction still seems to remain the best option. We will have to deal with the rocks as and when necessary, there are a number of methods that can be employed, including plug and feathers, capping, or the application of IRS. We will have a better idea after the next couple of sessions.

It was a bit damp during the après dig refreshments in the ravine.

28th July 2020

With Jake, Tav, Mike, Jon, Nick, and Duncan.

We are Six!

Jake, Tav and Mike alternated the digging activities while the rest of us were largely responsible for spoil management to varying degrees.

Jake removed some of the protruding limestone blocks with some vigorous swings of the large sledgehammer, this resulted in more space for digging and some decent rock for wall-building in the spoil disposal area. Unfortunately, as the evening progressed the dig began to appear less promising as more and more solid rock was encountered. As the filling of buckets was slower there were a number of alternative digging locations looked at including an interesting tube quite close to the point of entry into the chamber. However, there is still plenty to do and there are other developments that might require some serious attention.

30th July 2020

With Jake, Jon, Nick, Tav and Mike.

Nick and Jon rotated the digging in the “deep pit”, Mike had a tentative poke around in an alternative location. Tav poked and prodded the spoil into every ‘nook and cranny’ with, mostly, Jake supplying the filled buckets to him. I was helping with bucket removal but got too easily side-tracked into building another spoil retaining wall and squashed a finger into the bargain!

In the deep pit, Nick located a possible way ahead, but it appears solidly choked at present, Mike’s ‘alternative’ is still worth pursuing to get a better look, it might develop into something, especially after the effort expended in removing a rather large boulder that Jon eventually was able to reduce to manageable lumps, some fine wall-building material. It turned out to be another satisfying evening’s work.

4th August 2020

With Duncan, Tav, Nick and Luke (?).

“23 and a bit”. A trip to the other side, part of the way to sump 23¾, to look at potential connections into 24. This following Duncan, Connor, and Max’s recent breakthrough into c.70m of passage leading from the streamway in 24. The survey suggests the distance is not great, about 5m or so. Of course, the most likely spot, at the bottom of the climbs in the muddy rift chamber, is where we stacked the spoil during excavations to reach the sump beyond. Luckily, there is room enough over the top of the spoil heap and a plan has come together.

Tav, of course, wants to dig somewhere else, probably because it involves less caving to get too. We had a look to humour him and there is, admittedly, some potential, but for now, the effort will be concentrated lower down in the muddy rift chamber. In my opinion, the best option.

I had almost forgotten what a fine caving trip it is, an enjoyable evening’s jaunt!

6th August 2020

With Duncan, Jon, Mike, Nick and Tav.

Back to the main dig!

Various activities were undertaken; Nick and Jon raced ahead to get to work in the “pit”, Duncan paid some attention to the alternative “phreatic tube”, Mike performed ladder antics

while investigating roof tubes, Tav was ferrying filled buckets “hither and thither”. I was wall-building and attending to spoil disposal before being distracted and going to look at the “phreatic tube” which is beginning to appear more interesting. Space can be seen. Nick came to have a dig too.

Unfortunately, progress downwards in the “pit” seems to have pinched-out and probably not worth pursuing any further (at present). Never mind, it will make a nice water feature later in the year! A rethink will be needed here. In the meantime, we have the “phreatic tube” to follow and see how that develops.

Refreshments, and discussions, were taken in the ravine although the light was fading. We were a bit later than usual. Another jovial session.

13th August 2020

With Jake, Jon, Duncan, Mike, and Nick.



Duncan (l) and Jake (r) digging into the phreatic “tube”. Photo 13th August 2020



Nick investigates a potential lead near the top of the “pit”. Photo 13th August 2020

18th August 2020

With Duncan, Jake, and Nick.

“23 and a bit”. Duncan started to clear the debris then swapped places with me. The bang had been effective, limestone shatters more freely than conglomerate, and there was plenty of fractured rock and gravel to shift. As expected really the clearing took quite some time. Once cleared it was possible to get a glimpse of what lies beyond the now reduced flake. A calcited flowstone slope can be seen, at the top of this there is space ahead, a couple more bangs should get us there. Duncan reckons he recognised the “space” and does not think we are too far away from connecting into 24. We will see!

It was getting late when I started to drill the holes. 5no. holes, c. 150mm x 14mm pilot holes extended to c.400-450mm x 12mm, 1no. hole into a remaining lump of the flake and 4no. holes into the right-hand wall. Holes filled and wired, retired to a safe distance to finish the job, this requires quite a bit of climbing. At the top of the rope climbs, connected the “exploder”, circuit indicator lit up, charge ready, pressed the “fire” button – nothing! Had to go back down to it. I wasn’t happy and a little bit apprehensive. There were a few wisps of fumes, so something had happened. On inspection, the detonator had “fizzed” and had not initiated the det. Cord. Disconnected the wire, wrapped up the det. and started the climb back out of 23¾. I will need to sort another det. (or two) with the supplier but that is a job for another day ASAP.

By the time I got home, bathed and bed it was gone mid-night – going to be tired in the morning!

20th August 2020

With Jake, Jon, Duncan, Nick, Tav and Mike.

Met up with Jake at 18:15 and we headed off to “23 and a bit” to deal with Tuesday’s “dud” detonator. Quickly down the climbs to the dig, wired another det, taped the wire joints, retired to a safe distance at the top of the roped climbs and fired – all good! Same wire, same exploder, different det.

We got to the main dig before the others arrived. Jake wrestled the obstructing large boulder out of the way after a bit of a fight then we swapped places just as the team started to turn up.



Jake wrestles with an obstructing boulder. Photo 20th August 2020

Dug out some mud, some cobble- and boulder-sized lumps of rock and calcite then wriggled through into a small chamber, c.2m (h) x 3m (max. l) x c.1m (max. w), at first it appeared to be formed within a calcite vein but, more likely, it is part of a Neptunian dyke. A Carboniferous limestone fissure filled with Triassic [dolomitic] conglomerate that has degraded leaving the void that I was now standing in. Remnants of the conglomerate infill can be seen in the roof. A quick look around revealed no obvious way forwards, but low down at floor level a small hole from which emanated an incredible draught, this is the way ahead. A bit of digging followed to open up the access into the small chamber and I swapped places with Jake, he too was enthused with the prospects of the small draughting hole and started digging. He soon reported back that he had found a small parallel rift, even more encouraging.

Eventually, everyone had a look at the small annexe chamber and the “new” way ahead!

Meanwhile, others (Nick and Duncan) had been digging in the phreatic “tube”, unfortunately, that appears to have “fizzled” out. Too constricted.

We left the cave with a satisfied feeling and enjoyed our refreshments in the ravine.

25th August 2020, and it is my 64th birthday!

With Roz, Duncan, Nick, Jake and Tav.

As expected, Tav did not want to venture down to “23 and a bit” suggesting that some could dig at the top of the “pit”. Not a problem, we split into two units, Tav and Jake went to dig the “top o’ pit”, the rest of us headed to “23 and a bit” to clear the bang.

The recent wet weather has had a dramatic affect both in and out of the cave, the resurgence was flowing strongly. Throughout the cave there were plenty of drips, the trickling stream was flowing through Chamber 20 and water pouring down the calcite cascades. Very impressive. The climbs down through “23 and a bit” to the dig were wet too.

The bang had been effective and there was plenty of rock and gravel to shift, it had also shaken-up the degrading calcite flowstone slope so that could be more easily removed too. A strong draught emanating from the space beyond kept minds focused on the task. The way forward leads upwards over the continuing flowstone slope to an opening, perhaps 2m ahead, blocked by a large detached slab of rock. Getting there will require some effort and another bang, or three, will improve things. We cleared and dug as much as we could, packed up and started up the climbs. At the top we met with Jake and Tav, we all exited the cave.



Yours truly at the top of the climbs, Chamber 20. Photo by Roz 25th August 2020

Refreshments in the ravine with the background sound of vigorously flowing water. We discussed the evening's digging activities. It appears the "pit" dig is becoming quite wet but, still draughting. Some large boulders need further attention, plug and feathers might suffice.

27th August 2020

With Roz, Duncan, Jake, Jon, Nick and Tav.

Collected materials from Demrock's earlier in the day, all prepped, packed, and ready to go.

Jake, Jon, Nick and Tav went to the dig at the "top o'pit", armed with Nick's drill and my set of plug and feathers, just in case. Me, Roz, and Duncan headed off to "23 and a bit" to drill some holes and blow-up some rock in the effort to get a connection into 24. After today's rain the trip through the cave was not any drier!

At the dig behind the spoil-heap, 4no. holes drilled to final depth between 450mm and 500mm with diameter 12mm were filled, wired, and fired. The holes were placed in the right-side of the narrow rift as far forward into the constriction as I could reach with the drill. Hopefully, will open-up access into a short section of "caveable" passage to the next visible obstruction – a detached slab of rock. We will find out next session! I managed to snap another drill bit (450mm x 14mm) too, you do not pay just a few pounds for quality.

The team congregated in the ravine for refreshments and a chinwag about the evening's various activities and findings.

1st September 2020

With Duncan, Jake, Nick and Tav.

Down to "23 and a bit" to clear the bang. Frustratingly, still too constricted to make much forward progress, need some more chemical persuasion.

After clearing the loose debris, a bit closer to the detached slab of rock (c.2m) beyond which it looks more spacious that, of course, may be deceptive. Try and arrange some supplies for Thursday evening.

Refreshments in the ravine, very pleasant.

3rd September 2020

With Roz, Duncan, Jake, Jon, Nick, Mike and Tav.

Two teams this evening, I went with Roz and Duncan to "23 and a bit" to drill, fill, wire, and fire some more holes; the others went to the "Top o'Pit".

Four holes, c.500mm x 12mm were drilled, concentrated on the right-side of the constriction just before the detached flake of rock. Hopefully, will be able to get to the obstruction next session and remove it, ever the optimist, it looks more spacious beyond, some loose(?) cobble-size rocks might need to be shifted. We will see on Tuesday.

I lent my set of plug and feathers to the other team. I'll check to see if they looked after them. They were used with some success to break-up a large slab of rock.

As is the norm, refreshments in the ravine.

8th September 2020

With Roz, Duncan, Nick, Jake and Tav.

“23 and a bit”, a bang to clear. Quickly down to the dig, reeling in the wire on the way and, once there, set about clearing the debris. Could just about reach the flake only to find it was solidly calcified into the flowstone floor. It refused to budge! Bang had not removed as much as hoped for but, that is the way it goes sometimes. Try again on Thursday!

I am enjoying the caving trip though, it is a good climb back up through the little rifts, I am feeling quite fit, must be the physical jerks in the mornings!

10th September 2020

With Duncan, Mike, Jake, Jon, Nick and Tav.

“23 and a bit”, drilled 4no. holes, c.450-500mm x 12mm, in the right-side wall of the constricted passage and 2no. short holes, c.150mm x 12mm, into the detached flake, hopefully, this will break it and shake it! A strong, cold draught this evening. Might get a better look at what lies beyond next clearing session. Assisted by Duncan and Mike.

The rest of the team went digging at the “Top o’Pit” and the reports back were encouraging, seems a breakthrough might not be far away.

Refreshments in the ravine to finish the session.

15th September 2020. Digging, it is all about what lies beyond!!!

With Tav, Jake, Jon, Nick, and Duncan.

Clearing the bang in “23 and a bit” was side-lined in favour of digging into the “black hole” reported to be beyond in the Chamber 20 dig.

There certainly was a “black hole” emitting a strong draught, unfortunately, an easy route into it was blocked by mud and rocks. However, following a sustained digging effort a way through was found and I wriggled through. I turned around and enlarged the squeeze so the rest of the team could pass through.

We had entered a spacious rift chamber, c.50m long x 6m wide x 15m height, from the entry point a climb up led to a continuing passage to a rift. This connected to another more impressive rift chamber (an eroded mineral vein), c.70m (L) x 8m (W) x 20m (H). there are some superb mineral deposits and fossils throughout, all these require at least a photographic record. In the area between (?) the two rift chambers a network of interconnecting passages. The total length is guesstimated to be 250-300m, surveying work will commence on Thursday evening. Also, there will be some further exploration and consolidation, there are some loose boulders in several areas. A photographic record will be made too.

A significant breakthrough!



A Significant Breakthrough! Jon squeezes through “Fuzzy Wuzzy”. Photo 15th September 2020



And it goes....a climb up to the passages beyond. Photo 15th September 2020



Jon looks back towards the climb. Photo 15th September 2020

17th September 2020

With Roz, Tav, Jon, Mike, Jake, Nick, and Duncan.

Due to the number of participants, Duncan and Tav went into the cave earlier to get on with the survey. A bit later, the team assembled, the requisite number of 6. This is in line with the latest Government regulations regarding social gatherings during the COVID pandemic, although we could argue that we are engaging in an “organised” sporting event!

My aim was to take some more photos, but I allowed myself to get side-tracked by a small rift in the floor. I climbed down to gain access into a bedding, I followed this to another rift, so down I climbed, to another rift and so it continued. Eventually, I came to a muddier section, I could see another rift ahead, but I stopped and turned around. Nick then joined me, and he got a couple of metres further on before stopping. We decided not to get plastered in mud as there was a lot of recording to do, we left this lead with a plan to return soon and push ahead.

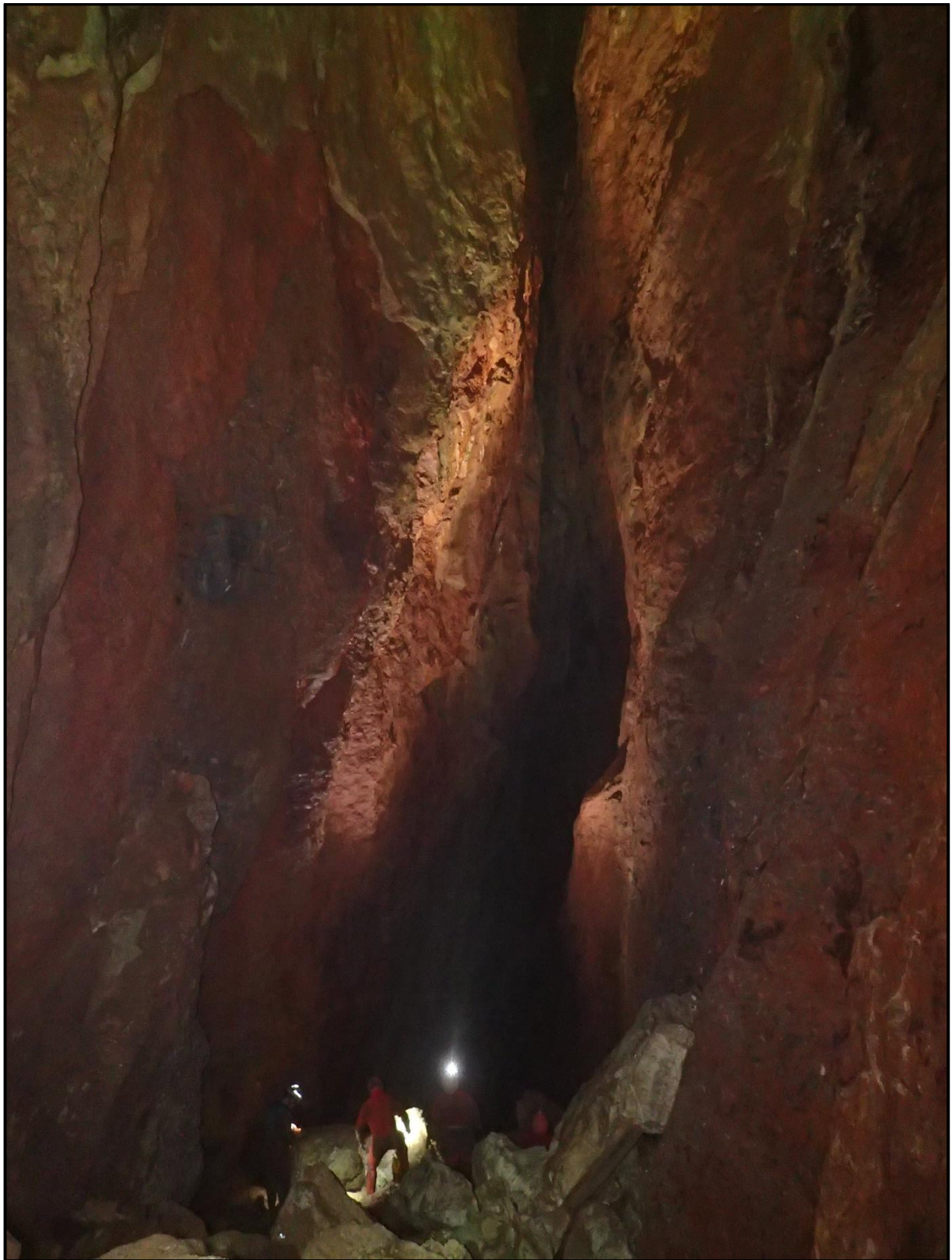
Got back to the job in hand and took photos, mostly in the area of the bigger rift chamber where there are so many interesting deposits. It was really good to have more time for a good look at the cave passages, realising that there is so much to record, it is going to take several trips.

A thoroughly enjoyable evening, a superb bit of cave and a fantastic discovery. Very smug and satisfied.

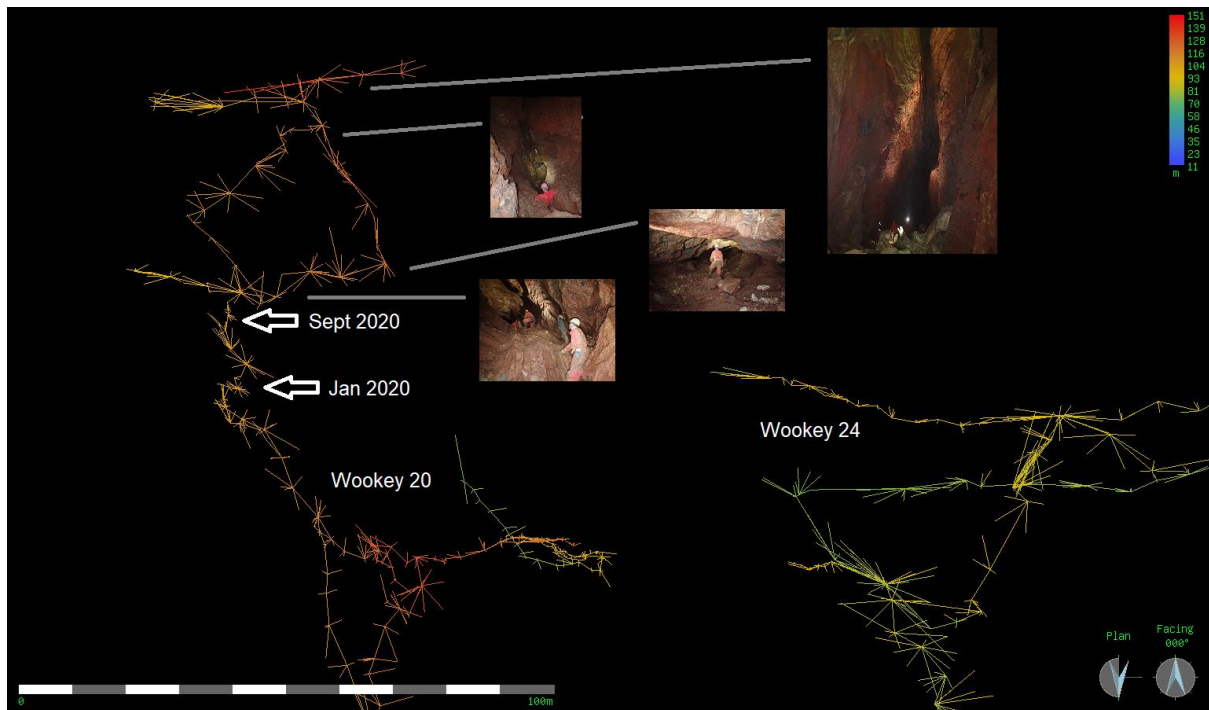
Refreshments in the ravine again!



Along the connecting rift passage. Photo 15th September 2020



To the big, impressive rift chamber. Photo 17th September 2020



Duncan's annotated survey screenshot with some of my photo's added. Some bits have been omitted (18/09/2020).

22nd September 2020

With Roz, Brockers, Jake, Jon, Mike, Duncan, Tav and Nick.

Duncan and Tav started early to continue the survey. The rest of us met up at the usual time and it was good to have Brockers join us.

Due to a reduction in staffing levels in the showcave, a new gate has been installed in the entry to the Chamber 20 tunnel. The lock is the same as used elsewhere so the key fits, so no problem with access.

It has been decided to name the new extensions "Land of Hope and Glory", the discovery on 15th September 2020 was the 80th anniversary of the "Battle of Britain".

While the rest of the team went their various ways, I made a beeline for the 'hole in the floor', armed with a small shovel and a bar. I soon reached last Thursday's limit of exploration and quickly slid through the mud, pushing some of it to the side. Progress stopped at a cross rift, I could just stand up, to right it quickly closed down, to left it continues, unfortunately it is a little too snug for me. Ahead the rift appears to widen and, possibly a continuation of the bedding to the right. I will return with appropriate tools and attempt to widen the pinch point. On the way back I met Roz who had come along to find me, she had a quick look and then together we returned to the main passage. Here we spent some time having another good look around until the others began to congregate. Obviously, it was time to leave.

Nick's attempt to fly a drone in the big rift chamber to get a view of the high aven did not go well. The tiny drone was caught by a gust of "wind" in the aven and crashed into the wall. It did not work after that!

A fine trip. Enjoyed our refreshments in the ravine.

24th September 2020

With Nick, Duncan, Mike, Brockers and Jake.

After all the excitement, back to “23 and a bit”. Quickly down to the dig and cleared the bang debris that has been there for a couple of weeks. It did not take long, plenty of willing hands this evening. The obstructing flake has been obliterated but, it is still too tight to progress further. More bang will be required, this is going to take quite a bit longer than we had hoped! Still, it is draughting and heading in the right direction. I will organise something for next week.

Refreshments in the ravine were disrupted by rain, we took shelter in the tunnel and continued the de-brief at leisure.

27th September 2020

With Duncan, Tav, Mark and Jess Burkey, and Chris Binding.

Mark is one of the best cave photographers around at present, so it was a “no brainer” to invite him into “Land of Hope and Glory” to create a portfolio of images. This will be a photographic record of the cave soon after the discovery. Chris Binding (Wild Wookey) was invited as a political gesture due to his close association with the showcave.



Mark and Jess Burkey sort kit ready for the next set of photographs.

We met at the allotted time (09:30) in the car park, changed into caving kit and made our way to the cave, the aim to be on our way through the showcave section before it was open to tourists.

We were quickly into Land of Hope and Glory and proceeded to the big rift chamber. While MB took some time to look around and set up his equipment to photograph the chamber, Duncan, Tav, and I spent some of this time demarcating some pathways, CB gave some assistance too. We were then asked to help with setting out flashgun positions where directed. When all the required shots were taken, we moved to the next section and repeated the process, including the “lofty” rift and the bedding network.

Eventually, we were done and made our way out of the cave. About 6 hours. It was a mellow trip and look forward with some anticipation to see the images.

29th September 2020

With Duncan, Tav, Jake and Nick.

I went to “23 and a bit” with Duncan to continue the enlargement of the [possible] connection to 24. Another 5no. holes drilled, filled, and fired.

The rest of the team made a beeline for “Land of Hope and Glory” to look for potential dig sites and continuations.

1st October 2020

With lots of people. Too many people really!

Due to the current pandemic restrictions regarding “no groups larger than 6”, we acted with some discretion in the village and smaller groups made their way to the entrance. We congregated inside the cave, a working environment for us!

I went up to “Land of Hope and Glory” with Roz and Barry Weaver (guest), meeting up with Jon, Jake, Nick and Tav on the way. Duncan, Max, Tom, and Mike had entered the cave earlier to start climbing the aven in the big rift chamber.

All, or most, of the tools were taken through to “LoH&G”, out of harm’s way. I attempted to climb into a high level open (?) rift just to the east (right) of the breakthrough but to no avail, just could not get started. Needs a rethink. I decided to head off to “23 and a bit” by myself to clear the bang ready for the next one, so I left the others to it.

It was okay clearing alone, much more relaxed and had time to get to work with hammer and small bar. Cleared a lot of fractured rock. Best of all, I located a draughting hole in the right-hand wall and can see a small gap. The air movement was strong and cool, and there is an echo. It has every possibility as being the way to go. It will, of course, require some rapid development, probably on Tuesday next week. I did as much as I could, and it was a bit of a wriggle to reverse out of the rift over the accumulated debris and make my way up and out of the cave.

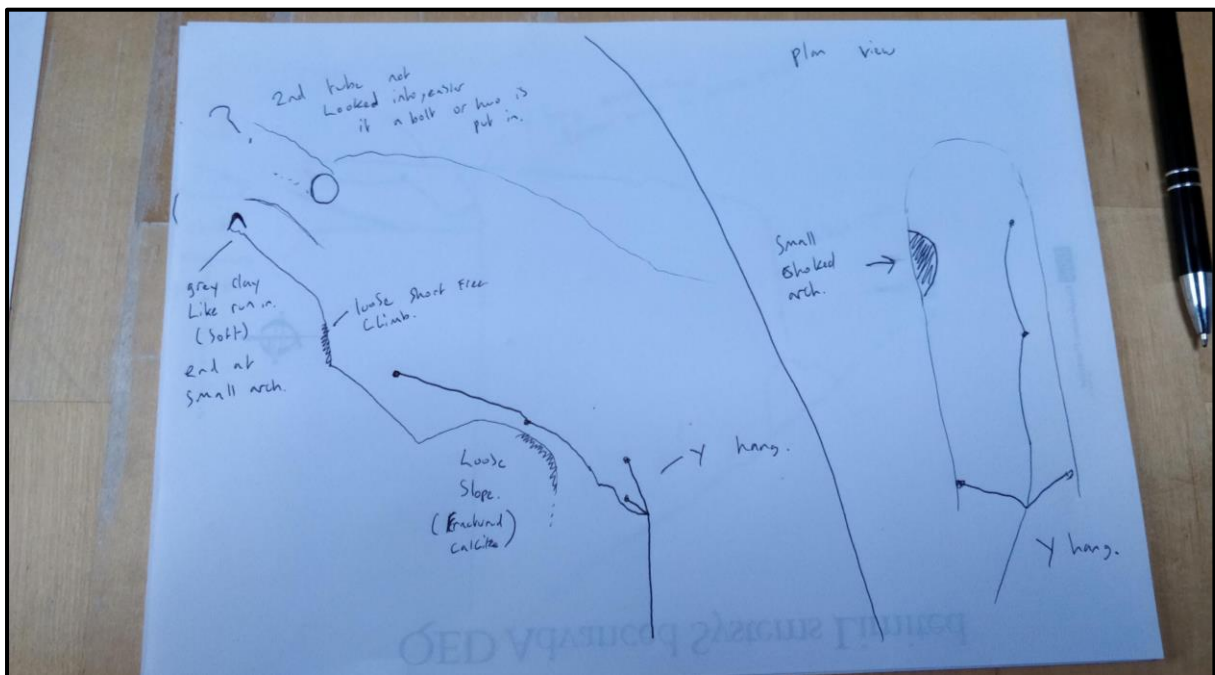
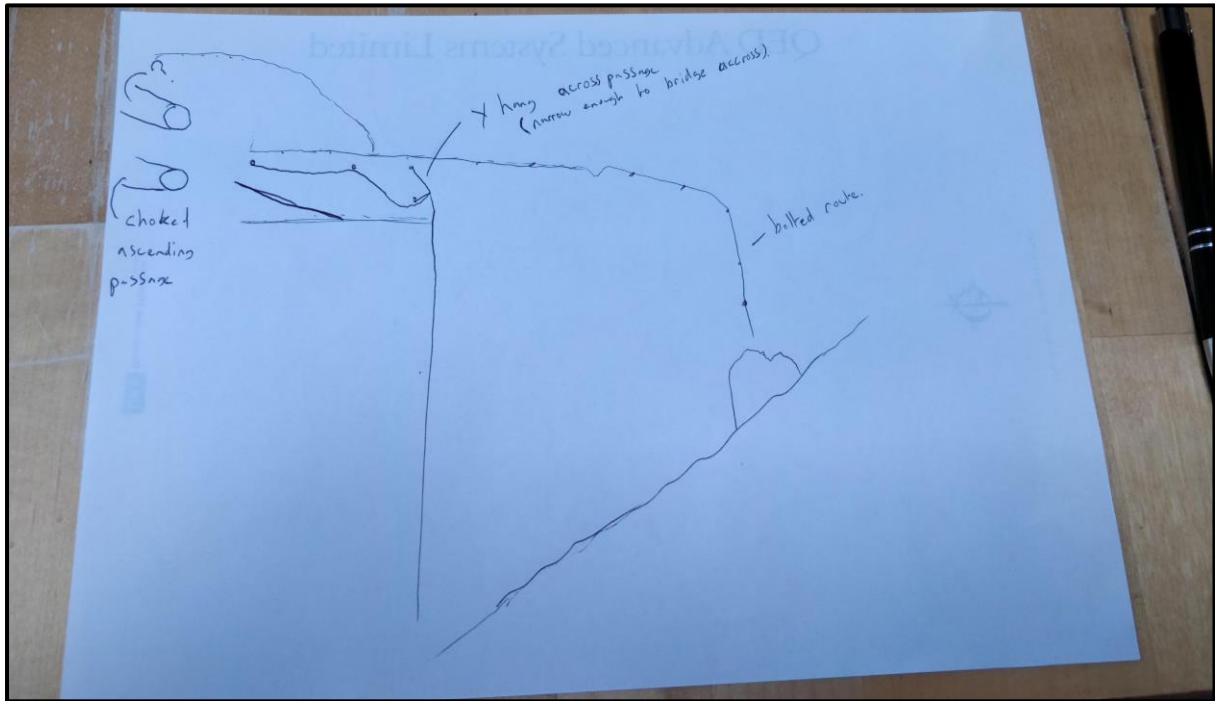
Back at the cave entrance it was a little while before the others started to arrive. They had had some success in locating a dig to the west of the breakthrough point. We waited around for a while but did not see the climbers.

Climbers report by Duncan with illustrations by Max:

“Duncan, Max, Mike (for a while), Tom.

Tom climbed up the top end of the big chamber - the rift drops back down the hole you cannot get up through.

Max started bolting into the top of the big chamber following the right (looking down) wall. Tom took over and completed the climb then was joined by Max. 20-25 m of passage to run in of green-grey marl like the top end of chamber - one phreatic tube needs climbing into. Could be dug. It was left rigged with my dynamic rope. Needs surveying anyway (the bottom of the rope lands conveniently on a survey station) and take a spade. Lots of loose stuff at top. c.5 hrs."



Sketches of the aven climbing route by Max

6th October 2020

With “a cast of thousands!”

23¾ team comprised Me, Duncan, and Roz; a tourist trip led by Jon and Mike included Estelle, James, Leonie, and David Walker; and a digging team of Jake, Nick, and Tav.

Following some very heavy and persistent rain the showcave had been flooded on the weekend, water levels were still high and carrying a heavy sediment load. The passage up from Chamber 20 was the wettest I have seen in the six years we've been actively digging in Wookey Hole. On the plus side some of the muddy prints will get washed away.

A wet trip down to “23 and a bit”, a lot of water flowing in the climbs, glad I put an extra thermal long-sleeve shirt on. Drilled 7no. holes today, c.300-350mm x 12mm, I am going to change direction and enlarge the draughting alcove on the right. Dunc had a look beforehand and agrees with the decision. Hopefully, some of the calcite flowstone will be loosened too. Managed to snap another drill bit, cheap crap! Fired successfully from the top of the narrow climbs and made my way out, I was last in line again.

The route into “Colston Hall” and the new extensions was flooded so wading required, there has been some slumping that will need sorting out when it dries up. The dig was too wet as well, so the digging team had a mooch around looking at things (?).

8th October 2020

Due to unforeseen circumstances I had to put off my intended digging trip this evening and dropped off my set of keys at Nick's. The rest of the team went about their activities and the following reports were sent via email to me.

Report by Nick (edited by me):

“Vince went to the vet with a nasty case of something but gave me his key. John had trouble at work and was not available, Mike was delayed, and Jake was missing.

23 and 3/4 cleared and ready for next bang. I was unaccompanied so not as clean as it would have been but definitely ready for drilling.

The alcove on the right has opened up further and a tantalising hole through which further flowstone can be seen is now visible. Additionally, some soft mud has been removed beneath the flowstone creating a small hole. With some additional hammering this would likely open further, but another bang will be easier and more effective. The whole right-hand side looks like the way to go and the draught is coming from there.

After cleaning the lower dig, I went to see if there were others in the cave....

Leads on the big chamber (*Land of Hope & Glory*) has been pushed and surveyed but led to nowhere. I encouraged Tom to climb the lead to the right of Fuzzy Wuzzy, but it leads to a 100mm wide rift going up. A bat was present in the passage below, perhaps a link to the surface is nearby (?). Top of last survey point is <40m to surface, I expect new surveying by Duncan will indicate that it is now < 30m to surface?

Max climbed lead to left of the ‘hole in the floor’ passage to 24(?), where Brokers had been, he said it was “beautiful” but leads to nowhere.

Water levels have dropped significantly it is below welly level passing through the dig.”

Report by Duncan: *“Duncan, Max & Tom*

Tom went up to the top of the big rift first and swapped out the dynamic rope for static rope. Max, then Duncan, joined him while he bolted into the higher roof tube. This ends in a run in of clay/marl stuff like the lower one (very much like the top of end of the big rift). A survey was done, and the dynamic rope removed. At this point we were joined by some tourists and then Nick who had been to 23 3/4 and came out with us. On the way-out Max climbed up the 1st cross rift above the climb out of the first chamber while Tom did the one on the continuation of the climb there. Both close down though the one Max climbed is 20 m high.

The water level in the sand dig had dropped to the point it was just sludge.

Max is keen to go to 24 next Thursday evening to try for a vocal link to 23 3/4.”

12th October 2020

With Roz.

Supplies collected, ‘prepped’ and packed it was time to go and put them to use.

Quickly down to 23 3/4 to the connection (?) to 24. Seven holes were drilled, c.350-400mm x 12mm, but only six were filled and fired. An interesting-looking hole had been exposed in the right-hand side alcove and the holes were placed to expand this. The draught was blowing the dust into my face as I drilled, and it was awkward drilling, but the objective was achieved. Should be interesting tomorrow evening, hopefully, it will not be too whiffy!

13th October 2020

With, Roz, Duncan, Jake, Tav and Nick.

Nick went off to do his own thing (‘geologising’ in LoH&G), the rest of us headed down to 23 3/4 to clear yesterday’s bang and the other accumulated debris. It was a bit whiffy near the ladder but, curiously, seemed clearer lower in the rift.

I was upfront and the bang had done what it was supposed to but, the expansion into the alcove did not prove fruitful. A lot of effort was spent in digging out mud, rock within degraded calcite flowstone to give more space to wriggle forward, gained about half a body length. The draught was coming from a small hole that was not in the expected direction, disappointing really. Try again Thursday I suppose and see what happens. I did look upwards where the rift continues, cannot see very much but it still remains a possibility.

Max and Chris Jewell are diving through to 24 on Thursday to try a ‘voice’ connection, maybe that will throw some light on the situation. We will see (or hear!).

15th October 2020

With Roz, Duncan, Tom, Tav, Nick, Jon, Jake, and Barry Weaver. The divers were Max Fisher and Chris Jewell.

I was more than a bit irritated; Barry had turned up uninvited, normally this would be fine but in these unprecedented times it cannot happen. We have to act with care and discretion the last thing we want to do is jeopardise access to the cave.

Duncan and Tom had gone in earlier along with the diver's, Max and Chris who were going to dive through to 24 so a 'voice' connection could be attempted. Roz and me, headed off to 23¾ with the bags to meet up with Duncan and Tom. That left the rest to make their way towards *LoH&G* to start clearing some of the slop from the recent flooding.

We met up with D&T at the base of the calcite slope, they had been looking around the high-level passages. A brief discussion, and we continued on our way to the dig. As I was drilling, I thought that I could hear muffled sounds, I put it down to D&T approaching. Then, voices could be heard, first closer to Roz, then above me. Max had arrived in the recent extension above 24. We had a conversation, Max shifted to another position and we pin-pointed the nearest location – just where I was drilling. Max was close, Duncan came forward, he was very excited, Tom came up for a chat too. The voice connection had been a brilliantly successful exercise and there was renewed vigour to the evening.

Eventually, I continued with my task, 6 no. holes, c.350-400mm, drilled filled and fired. Shifted the position of the holes slightly to the left side of the small alcove, hopefully, the degrading calcite flowstone will be shaken or fractured. It had been a good evening!

16th October 2020

With Duncan, Tav, Mad Phil, Andy Farrant, and Jo White.

It was a sedate pace through the cave as Jo was carrying a rib injury and had done much caving recently. When we arrived at the sand dig the effects of the recent flooding were evident and the clean-up by the team yesterday was a big improvement. It was a bit sticky through 'Fuzzy Wuzzy' but all passed through okay. Then an amble through *LoH&G* discussing the geological and geomorphological features in some detail. AF confirmed our view that the big rift is a Neptunian Dyke and probably the finest underground example on Mendip. He suggests later Triassic for the fill, followed by the widespread mineralisation from hydro-thermal activity. The limestone became fractured during uplift (*Variscan Orogeny?*) and subsequently filled with erosion debris that becomes conglomerate. AF suggested some association with the extension of the Somerset Basin (?) having some effect on the limestone fracturing. Contained within the conglomerate are some large limestone clasts, these have eroded leaving etched fossils mostly corals (*Lithostrotion*) and crinoids, the fossils have been silicified. This silicification might have occurred during the Jurassic.

On the way out of *LoH&G* I popped down to the lower dig in the 1st rift to have a look at the progress there. Peering through the 'rabbit' hole, I slid into a small continuation chamber beyond. Looking around, upslope behind it appears mud and rock choked but downslope it goes on, certainly caveable, I kicked some mud and a boulder out of the way. There is an enlargement of the rift, perhaps a metre wide and 2m high x 3m length beyond this it narrows but still continues, good air movement too. There might well be an upward/overhead continuation. I was alone and decided not to venture further down the muddy slope, just in case I could not get back up. I made my way out to catch up with the others.

20th October 2020

With Duncan, Jake, Nick and Tav.

Me and Duncan down to clear the bang debris, the others went to *LoH&G*.

We could smell the bang lower down in 23^{3/4} but there were not any fumes visible. Reeled in the wire, stashed it away ready for next time and proceeded along the passage to the dig. The bang had worked well and there was a lot of debris and fractured rock. Scraped away the loose stuff and got to work with hammer and bar, prosing away the shattered rock and calcite. The draught/air movement picked up, some tiny gaps appeared, but not the “icing on the cake” we had hoped for. It is not giving up easily! Anyway, all cleared ready for the next round tomorrow evening.

The report from the ‘B-team’ – the dig in the lower section of the first chamber had pinched out – no go without bang!

21st October 2020

With Duncan and Connor Roe.

In 23^{3/4}, 6no. holes, drilled, filled, and fired. Placed in the general direction towards last weeks voice connection. It will be interesting to see the results tomorrow evening. Will it, at last, have opened up the gap?

22nd October 2020

With Roz, Duncan, Jake, Nick, Jon, and Mike.

Jon and Mike headed off to *LoH&G*, the rest of us down to 23^{3/4}.

Water levels through the cave had increased since yesterday and there was a noticeable through Wookey 20 passage. On the climb down into 23^{3/4} it was curious to note the lack of fumes, especially at the bottom of the ladder where I expected the fumes to be stronger. I finished reeling the wire and went along to the dig. There was plenty of debris, and a small hole could be seen with good air movement too, it was then obvious why there was a lack of fumes. As the debris was cleared, fractured rock and calcite removed, the small hole grew in size to reveal a big ‘black’ void beyond – *Beginner’s Luck*, I assumed, and the way into Wookey 24! Unfortunately, in spite of my best efforts, access into the ‘void’ was too constricted and, at least, one more bang would be required. I swapped places with Jake so that he could have a look. Duncan had a peek, he returned with a beaming smile and was certain he recognised one of his survey stations. Finally, Nick went along to take a gander before we all made our way back up the climbs to Wookey 20.

Another successful outcome, the gap had opened, unfortunately not quite open enough, but all was good!

26th October 2020

With Roz and Duncan

Here we are again! Connor could not make it, so Roz stepped in to assist with the task for the evening.

Another 6no. holes, c.350-450mm x 12mm, used all the battery power and just about retrieved the 600mm drill bit. Holes were drilled, filled, and fired. Hopefully, that will be enough to get us through into the void beyond. It is so tantalisingly close!

All to play for tomorrow evening, just cannot wait!

27th October 2020

With Roz, Duncan, Nick, and Jake

It was much wetter through the cave this evening after more recent rain.

At the dig, the bang had done quite a bit and there was plenty of debris to clear before a good sight of what was beyond was possible. The void is still tantalisingly close. Removed lots of fractured rock, managed to pry loose some calcite flowstone but, unfortunately, not enough. Access into the void beyond remained unattainable...very frustrating! Back in the day, 20 or 30 years ago, we would have been through. Nick came up to the end, the rest of the team were getting cold and impatient, he tried, but came to the same conclusion. Reluctantly, we decided to leave it, plug and feathers might work but, in the end, I decided another bang would be better.

I am supposed to be attending a BCRA Council zoom meeting tomorrow but will have to send my apologies to attend a Wookey Hole BOOM meeting!

28th October 2020

With Duncan and Nick

Here we go again, another bang!

Six more holes, c.350-400mm x 12mm, drilled, filled, and fired. Placed to expand the too tight squeeze further. Should be enough, but I have noticed a potential tiresome rock pendant just out of reach. I will take along the plug and feathers tomorrow evening, just in case.

Nick managed to find the light he had lost yesterday while climbing the calcite slope, which had then required my assistance to illuminate his way out of the cave!

29th October 2020. Hoorah! The '24' connection is made.

With Duncan, Nick, Jake, and Mike

The bang worked brilliantly, even better than expected. It took me and Nick about 20 minutes to clear the boulder-size lumps of fractured rock out of the way and then all the team passed through into "Beginner's Luck", the "24" connection was made (*see below for description!*).

3rd November 2020

With Jake, Nick, and Duncan

Down to 23¾ again, a clean-up trip and we wanted to get a better look around "Beginner's Luck", it had been rather by-passed in our eagerness to get down to the Wookey 24 stream passage last Thursday. Some tools were taken through to tidy up the 'connection' and some loose, fractured rock was removed.

On the way out we tidied some of the accumulated clutter – old skips and bags, bits of wire, etc. and an aluminium scaffold tube. All of the stuff is now in the back of my van!

A stash of tools was left, these might be required elsewhere in the future. It was a pleasant evening amble.



Jake (above) and Nick (below) passing through the 'blasted' connection into "Beginner's Luck". Photos taken 03/11/2020



Following the connection came the repercussions – ‘poaching’, bollocks and bullshit! Below is the posting made 10th November 2020 on the blog and Facebook:

Wookey 20 to 24, the connection: The expansion of the Wookey Hole showcave by a driven tunnel into Wookey 20 was completed in 2015. The tunnel allowed easy access to the cave passages beyond by ‘dry’ cavers, more specifically to ‘diggers’ eager to check out the potential leads. In late 2015, the regular diggers at Hallowe’en Rift were invited to take a look at a lead on the east side of the far reaches of Wookey 20. This route had been explored by divers, Tom Chapman and Keith Savory, in the 1990s to a low and too tight arch. There followed a period of expansion and induced rapid speleogenesis culminating in about 70m of gnarly passage gained and leading to another sump, named ‘23¾’, linking to the *Sting Corner* area in Wookey 24. Diving continues in this area.

In early August 2020, another project was set in motion by the regular team of Wookey Hole diggers in a small side passage off the route that leads down to sump 23¾. Following a collaboration between divers and diggers to establish a voice connection and pinpoint the best location, an intense digging effort of almost non-stop activity, finally, on the evening of October 29th 2020, a ‘non-diving dry’ route from Wookey 20 to Wookey 24 was completed by Vince Simmonds, Nick Hawkes, Duncan Price, Graham Johnson and Mike Moxon. The route, following the small side passage off the route to sump 23¾, connects to the recently discovered extension, *Beginner’s Luck*, above the streamway found by divers, Connor Roe, Duncan Price and Max Fisher, leads down a steep descent into the Wookey 24 stream passage. The route is physically demanding, especially on the return, and has some difficult, awkward climbs.

A few days later, the English government plunged everyone into a second lockdown and our activities were, somewhat curtailed. This also meant that several of the regular diggers, absent on the breakthrough, had not yet passed the connection to Wookey 24. We are still in lockdown!

Subsequently, a disappointing and blatant “poacher’s” trip to the connection has occurred. Video clips of the trip were posted, then removed, there was some negative feedback posted on various platforms along with a lot of bullshit and bollocks being uttered. It is categorically stated here that none of the participants involved on this “poacher’s” trip were, or have ever, been involved with any of the digging activities to make the connection to Wookey 24 or any of the other recent discoveries in Wookey 20 (*Land of Hope and Glory*) and any inferences of such is just not true!

Update: *There was a rapid response to this post, a dialogue ensued, and an apology has been received. It still rankles, but the clock can’t be turned back, and we need to move on rather than enter an endless cycle of recriminations and finger-wagging. A line has been drawn under it.*

11th November 2020

With Jake, Nick, and Duncan.

Some have fallen by the wayside because of their personal interpretations of the restrictions imposed by the English government. A smaller group of diggers, parked discretely and made our separate ways towards the cave, meeting under the arch to discuss recent events.

At the tunnel entrance we had some difficulty with the padlock, finally, it yielded and in we went. After the excitement and intense effort of the last few weeks in the quest for 24 it was a pleasant change to amble up to LoH&G.

My plan was to record and sample the cryogenic calcite to be sent to Gina/Paul at the University of Innsbruck, hopefully, we will get some dating back. I did spend a little while furtling around with Nick looking at a couple of potential leads before setting off to do my thing. The rest of the team carried on poking and prodding in various holes. Nick, also, took some measurements of faults and slickensides that were associated with rock movements.

On the way out we removed some of the scaffold tubes and deposited them in the backyard of the show caves.

26th November 2020

No digging last week, I was working away in Kent.

With Nick and Duncan.

The Christmas decorations were spread throughout the showcave so they must be planning on re-opening soon – a curious one seeing that the country is coming out of “lockdown” into an imposed “tier” system!

LoH&G: Me and Nick popped down into the “basement” through the hole in the floor and went along to have another look at the too tight rift, the current end of this lead. I tried hammering/chiselling the obstructing flowstone but to no avail, some ‘IRS’ is called for here. It is rather squalid and will be a challenge to keep kit clean and dry!

On our return we located the draught emanating from a couple of the cross-rifts, and after some discussion, we found a potential dig-site. We spent the remainder of the session digging along a narrow rift in an approximately southerly direction. After doing his thing elsewhere, Duncan joined us.

The dig is worth pursuing, there appears to be a lower bedding just a couple of metres away, with a bit of effort we might get a better look.

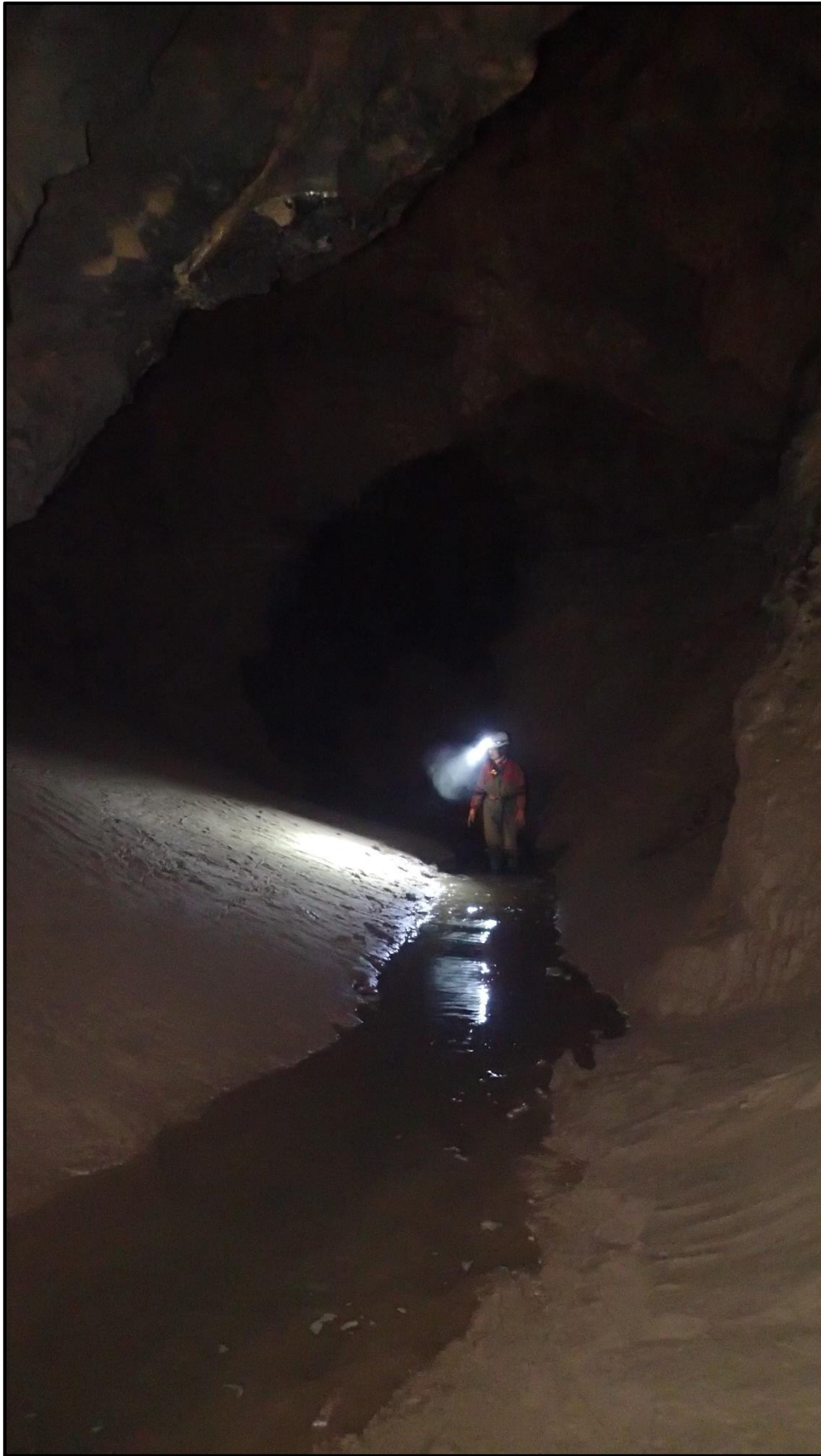
A pleasant evening.

23rd December 2020

With Roz, Tav, Tom, Duncan, Nick, and Mike.

It has been a while since the last visit to Wookey Hole for a variety of reasons including work and pandemic restrictions. There were two objectives for this late afternoon/evening trip: firstly, a chance for Roz and Tav to see the Wookey 24 streamway and, secondly, to rig a ladder up and over a dry route to bypass a swimming section streamway to reach Wookey 24 “camp”. This will enable easier access to more passages and opportunities for exploration beyond.

After recent persistent rain, the water levels in the streamway were much higher than our previous visit (29/10/20) and several metres above our heads the “bubble” ring was evidence that the water had been very much higher. There was plenty of wading and lots of steam generated.



Roz exploring the streamway



Roz 'tests' the depth of water

The ladder rigged and we were up into a fine but short section of phreatic passage with an amazing conglomerate “ceiling”. A bit more rigging and we were able to regain the streamway and climbed up to the camp, where Duncan set about making a “brew”, I later enjoyed a sip of hot chocolate! There is another section of accessible and spectacular ‘active’ streamway formed within clean washed conglomerate.



Wookey 24 'camp'

Objectives achieved, it was time to make our way up and out of the streamway. A steady pace was set and off we went, satisfied with the evenings proceedings.

Our next objective is to access Pleasant Valley Sunday (?) to explore the potential there and Duncan wants to add the section to survey. We will start planning!

Land of Hope & Glory: a selection of Mark Burkey's photographs taken 27/09/2020





