

Home Close Hole/Wigmore Swallet. Personal logbook of Vince Simmonds

7th June 2015: With Paul Brock

Got an invite to go over and look at the very recent discoveries in this cave. the entrance is a descent by fixed ladder through concrete pipes and into a largely blasted passage with several fixed aids in the drops. The breakthrough point is a fine 80-foot pitch, rigged for SRT (single rope technique), in dolomitic conglomerate - it's colourful. From the bottom of the pitch there follows a good deal of walking/stooping/crawling passage. At the upstream end of an inlet I spent a while digging through a low, wet grovel in gravel and silt to enter a small chamber (c. 3m long x 2m high x 2m wide) that ended in another low grovel that I didn't follow. We then proceeded to look at a couple of leads in a massive boulder collapse (has some similarities to a talus cone), I suggested that an accurate survey of the area would give a better idea of how to approach exploration here. We made our way back towards the pitch stopping on route to follow a longish gnarly passage where the quite considerable sound of falling water can be heard but not seen through a currently impenetrable slot, needs some chemical persuasion. We returned to the pitch and made our way out to the surface.

At the surface we were greeted by Tony Audsley, Chris Batstone, Slug, Alice, and Caroline who had prepared tea and scones with jam and cream - very civilized. Tangent arrived on his bike, he was supposed to be joining us underground but was looking somewhat worse for wear. After getting changed and finishing tea we all made our way to the Queen Vic for more refreshment.

An enjoyable Sunday afternoon.

30th August 2015: With Nick Hawkes, Paul Brock and Tony Audsley at the surface.

My second visit to this cave. Today's plan was to start opening-up the slot beyond which can be glimpsed space and the sound of falling water can be heard. Usual struggle through narrow passages with the bags, just seem to have gotten out of the habit over the last few years, still it will come back. Down the 80-foot pitch using SRT and with bags dangling. It is a fine pitch although damper today. Nick took the drill bag along the crawl for me, Paul had gone ahead with a new skip and hauling rope, I followed with my second bag. The crawl was more squalid than last time and by the time we got to the end we were suitably coated with mud. While I took a little time to formulate a plan of action and clean mud from the rock surface, Nick and Paul set up the skip and cleared digging spoil to a chamber up beyond. I drilled 6no. holes and managed to keep my drill relatively clean and dry. Just as I completed my task the others returned and took my bags out through the crawl while I reversed out laying the wire as I progressed, there was just enough wire to get to the end of the crawl. The morning was brought to a very satisfying conclusion with a resounding and reverberating echo. Paul and Nick had made their way up the pitch and I followed soon after.

At the surface de-kitted and a chinwag with others who had appeared before walking back to the van to change and then head off to the Queen Vic for refreshments - too late for the Hunter's.

6th September 2015: Underground with Nick Hawkes and Paul Brock. We were joined later by Claire Cohen and Matt Clarke, while Chris Batstone was at the top of the pitch waiting to de-rig.

Cleared the debris from last week's 'little effort' with Nick and Paul dragging the rocks [and gloop] up into the sizeable chamber at the end of the crawl. The chemical persuasion had the desired effect and there is still some fractured rock to remove although some of that will need splitting. Another strategically placed effort might well reveal what lies ahead after clearing. Marvellous stuff!

At the surface we enjoyed the sunshine with Tony, Caroline and Alice drinking tea and eating cake before retiring to the Queen Vic for more refreshment.



Paul Brock photographed by Tony Audsley after a digging trip in Home Close Hole.

20th September 2015: With Paul Brock. Also, Caroline Allen, Dave Fear and Duncan Simey.

After a trip down to Draycott, then return home to deliver eggs and do some prep for today's trip made my way up to Wigmore Farm. The others were already there so quickly changed and headed over the fields to the cave entrance.

Paul set off to rig the pitch while I followed on, Duncan helped to carry a bag into the cave for me. While Paul and I went on to the dig site the others went for a tour around the rest of the cave.

Got to the end of the crawl (it has not got any less squalid) and drilled 6no. holes, charged and retired laying out the wire. Back at the pitch there were still people on the rope so went for a tour around the cave with Paul to pass the time. Eventually we returned to the pitch Paul went up the rope and I completed the task in hand - a fine resounding echo! Up the pitch and out of the cave. After securing the entrance we left for refreshments and a natter at the Queen Vic.

October-November 2015: Connecting Home Close with Wigmore Swallet

With Nick Hawkes, Paul Brock, Sam Batstone, Claire Cohen, Pete Hellier, et. al.

Went back to clear the debris from the rock engineering work carried out on 20th September to find that it had worked rather well. Cleared away the loose debris much of which fell through the slot into the space below. Eventually was left with a massive loose flake that was teetering above the way forward, it took a while to persuade the flake to move and it crashed down into the space beyond. A c.3m climb down into a small chamber with a boulder floor and stream flowing over a cascade, hence "Roaring Waters".

Upstream the stream has been explored, continuing as hands and knees crawling before becoming too low. Downstream the way on was constricted by a lowering roof to almost stream level but there appeared to be more space beyond where Nick said he could see "something blue". Surprisingly, the

stream was flowing along vertical bedding comprising a large slab of limestone between marl and conglomerate.

A return was made to enlarge the constriction and on the subsequent trip after clearing the debris this had created the "something blue" was seen to be a diver's reel that had been left at the furthest extent reached of an inlet explored from Young Bloods passage in Wigmore Swallet. Rather frustratingly the reel could not be reached, and the further use of chemical persuasion was required. During this phase of exploration surveying work was being carried out by the rest of the team.

On the next trip set about clearing the debris from the bang, then a gravel bank was encountered and removed, the dive reel was reached and the connection into Wigmore was made. The rest of the team were busy surveying the upstream passage and when they returned, we made the first trip from HCH into Wigmore and Young Bloods passage, the first non-divers to see it and it was good! Progress was somewhat thwarted by rotten ladders and some dodgy hangers, there was some re-rigging required and that would have to be a job for another day.

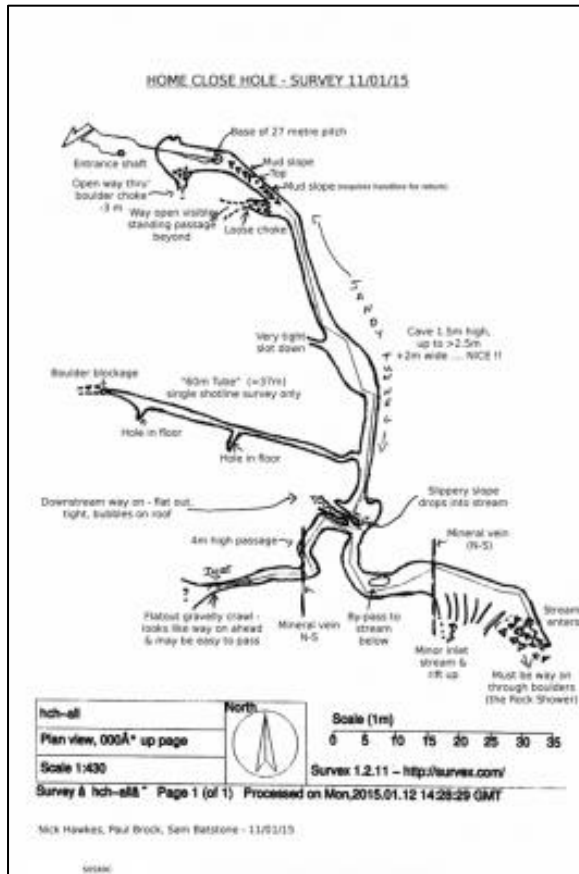
The following trip was to carry out more surveying work and some gardening work to make the connection a little more comfortable. The connection passage is wet and low in places with a couple of squeezes thrown in, there is some easier passage as well.

The team returned to Young Bloods armed with drill and hangers, ladders, and ropes ready to attempt the climb up into the Generation Game and the link to Vindication Streamway.

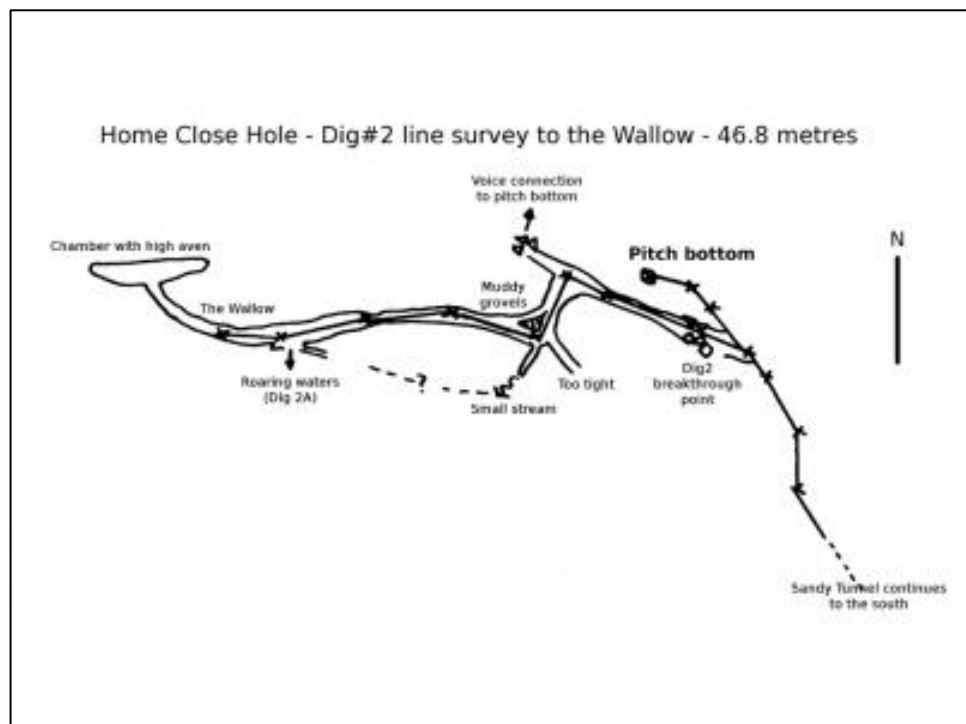
The climb up into Generation Game was not pleasant. I climbed onto a large slab of rock wedged diagonally across the passage, held up by not very much. Everything was coated in thick mud, and it was all rather committing. I attached a ladder to a jammer and pushed it up as far as I could reach and using the ladder I completed the climb-up, I was mighty relieved to make it. I then re-hung the ladder on one of the better but still dodgy hangers for Paul to climb up and we then set about installing new stainless-steel hangers and a new rope. We were then joined by the rest of the team, and we all went through the Generation Game to the climb down into Vindication Streamway. While Paul and I put in some more hangers Nick went back to retrieve the ladder from the climb up from Young Bloods so that we could access the stream below. Vindication is a fine streamway of sizeable proportions and plenty of water and cascades including a deep section where a swim is possible if you feel so inclined. The trip ended at this point when another ladder was required to make the climb down Slime Rift. This section of stream passage is one of the finest on Mendip.

The following week we returned to complete the rigging, adding more hangers and stainless maillions, cutting away the old ropes and generally tidying up. While Paul and I were doing this Nick, Pete, Claire, and Sam went ahead to tackle Slime Rift.

When we arrived at Slime Rift there was some confusion as Sam had seen Nick and Pete rig the ladder from a boulder only to find the ladder was no longer there. I climbed down the wet c.5m rift to enter a bigger rift where I could see the ladder had been hung down to re-enter the stream passage below, apparently Nick and Pete had returned to retrieve the ladder from its initial position. Paul joined me, and new hangers were soon in place, and we descended to the stream below. It was easier to use the ladder as a handline halfway down the rift and avoid the water. We met Nick and Pete on their way back from the end saying that more kit was needed as there were some slippery mud-covered climbs ahead. Paul and I went to have a first tentative look at the boulder choke but didn't really scrutinise it too much at this stage. That will be the next phase in this adventure - watch this space!



Survey above as Published in the Wessex Cave Club Journal.



Survey of the crawl along to the dig (Roaring Waters) by Nick Hawkes, et. al.

20th December 2015: From Home Close Hole to the terminal choke at the end of Wigmore Swallet.

With Nick Hawkes, Claire Cohen, and Sam Batstone.

Today's mission was to rig some aids to enable better access along the route into the terminal boulders at the end of Wigmore. I set off to rig the pitch while the others sorted out the required kit and followed me down. Had a few lighting problems but eventually managed to sort this out - lack of TLC and maintenance! An uneventful trip through the connection clearing some gravel on the way into Young Bloods, up and over the Generation Game and into the impressive Vindication Streamway. An aqueous climb down through Slime Rift and eventually the terminal boulders.

A clamber up a slippery slope using an in-situ rope, the final manoeuvre through the slot is not easy. Entered a tiny chamber where I sorted out the ladders and rope to aid passage through the slot and down the next section. The route continued as a corkscrew climb down through boulders with a thick coating of mud through some barely body sized slots to regain the stream still in boulders but cleaner. Nick followed on while Claire and Sam waited at the rope climb, there is only room for two at this point. We had a look around and poked our noses into various spots moved some rocks before having a more concerted effort at stream level where a gap amongst boulders was noticed. It was then time to return to the others. Nick led up through the climb, a mistake on my part as he emptied his wellies all over the mud, the return up the corkscrew is a complete twat, but eventually was spat out through the slot at the top head first and sliding down the slippery slope - good job we had put a ladder there to halt progress in the boulders below.

A steady journey out of the cave, stashing the ladder and rope down Slime Rift up onto a ledge out of the water - this is an exhilarating climb! There are several precariously jammed boulders along the way particularly in Young Bloods and it is probably better not to spend too much time thinking about them. At the pitch the usual wait as the team climbed the rope. Pitch de-rigged and out to tea, hot soup, and sausage rolls - very much appreciated. Changed into dry grots and retired to the Queen Vic for the usual de-brief.

10th January 2016: with Nick Hawkes, Pete Hellier and Tom Chapman. Surface team were Tony Audsley and Chris Batstone.

Still too wet to place receptors, TA had been over to Tor Hole yesterday and that was taking an awful lot of water.

We decided to go for it and see what the conditions were like underground. The pitch was damp but not overly so. There was some evidence in the crawl that there had been some increased flow, but the connection seemed no wetter than usual. At Wigs Hall there does not appear to be a doubled line down so there might be some climbing to do there. Went on down to the Sump 7 bypass where a frog was seen on the gravel bank before it jumped into the sump-pool. Then up into the Generation Game and down to Vindication Streamway and on to the aqueous Slime Rift. At the present end of the cave we spent an hour or so moving rocks around trying to manufacture an easier route through the choke before deciding to make our way back out the cave. On the return Slime Rift seemed particularly wet especially the free climb out - energy sapping. A steady trip out, while me and Pete climbed the pitch Nick showed Tom around the rest of Home Close. Tea and snacks at the surface were very welcome and then to the Queen Vic to warm by the fire.

7th February 2016: with Clare Cohen and Sam Batstone.

Trip to replace the activated charcoal receptors as part of the hydrology project to establish the source of the streams in the Home Close system. The pitch was a little damper than usual after some heavy rain, but that was okay as your kit was cleaned on the way back up later. Went upstream first to replace

the 2no. receptors there, one at the ruckle and the other at the gravel choke. Then down to Vindication Streamway just beyond Sump 9. Took some videos on the way using my Nikon Coolpix, most of which have come out rather well, just need to work out how to edit them. The last receptor is just upstream of the connection a little beyond the waterfall. A steady trip out to the surface, as I had rigged the pitch then Sam and Claire re-rigged. Still a good 3 hours or so underground.

Tests were done on the control receptors which proved negative for any fluorescence. The fluorescein will be placed into Tor Hole either later Sunday afternoon or on Monday. The receptors placed in the cave will need to be retrieved next weekend.

14th February 2016: with Nick Hawkes, Pete Hellier, Tony Audsley, and Chris Batstone.

Continuing the Home Close hydrology project. An earlier 10:30 start as I wanted to get back to see the rugby - Italy v England - and Nick was also on a limited pass as he just returned from working in Serbia and was off again to foreign lands in a couple of days. I grabbed the rope from Chris and headed underground to rig the 80-foot pitch. At the bottom of the pitch, we split into two teams, I went to the end of Sandy Passage to collect/replace the two detectors there while Nick and Pete headed off for northern stream and into Wigmore to Sump 9. I did not need to de-kit so quickly managed to complete my task and made my way out of the cave. On the way out, I met up with Chris who was going to remove the 110v cable from the 80' pitch. At the entrance I met up with Tony who was about to go and look at another potential project, we both made our way out to test the samples I had retrieved. Initially the results were negative, but I got a message later to say that all 4no. samples had proved positive, this might indicate that Tor Hole is a potential feeder into the Home Close system.

Addendum: It would seem there is some uncertainty regarding the results, so more testing will be required.

21st February 2016: with Claire Cohen. Tony Audsley was at the surface, later joined by Alice, organising the on-site testing facilities.

Our aim was to collect the detectors placed in the cave, there are no plans to replace them at this time.

Grabbed the rope and we set off to rig the 80' pitch and make our way into the cave system below. Headed straight down to Wigmore Sump 9 to collect the detector placed there, then on the way back up the Home Close inlet picked up the detector just upstream of the waterfall. The last two detectors were placed in the inlets at the upstream end of Sandy Passage, one at the boulder ruckle and one near the gravel choke. That part of the task complete, we made our way back to the surface. For some unknown reason I really enjoyed the prussic back up the 80' pitch. Although it was just a steady in and out the trip still took the best part of three hours.

The initial tests revealed nothing positive and subsequent results suggest there might be some contamination at source probably due to the high-water levels recently. We will try more testing when the water conditions become more settled.

29th August 2016: Beyond the “terminal” choke.

With Nick Hawkes, Pete Bolt and Snablet.

A great trip ably summed up by Nick in his report below:

"The trip was arranged amidst a birthday drinking session, partly as it was long overdue, but also as a one-off opportunity to get Snablet back into Wigmore during his brief visit 'home' to Mendip from his new abode in New Zealand. Apologies were received from Pete, Claire, Brockers and Duncan all of whom were unable to join in.

A jovial reunion crew of 4, Vince, Pete Bolt, Pete MacNab (Snablet) and Myself met at 11am'ish with Tony coming along to the entrance as official gate master. Vince brought the Hilti capping kit and drill which was shared between us for carrying down. Its inaugural run into HCH/Wigmore to prove its worth!

An uneventful trip straight to the Terminal Boulder Choke was interspersed with occasional grunts of appreciation of the 'fine' passages from both Snablet and Pete Bolt.

Once in the choke, debris from the previous 'snapper' set by Chris Jewel and me, several moons back, was quickly cleared before unleashing the capping tool. Approximately 6 caps were set off over a period of 30 minutes to one hour or so with rocks being passed back gingerly. With each capping the boulders had a tendency to shake more than felt comfortable so a tick box list of risk assessment was undertaken by those waiting at the back....The overwhelming conclusion being that there was no better way to spend a sunny bank holiday weekend than sitting underground inside a funnel of large loose muddy boulders with a group of old friends, a couple of crowbars, hammers and small explosive devices....this therefore equated to full mitigation of all risks to irrelevant status.



L to R: Pete, Nick, Vince and Snablet almost ready to venture underground.

On reaching this conclusion Vince's head disappeared through boulders in the floor. After a while, a message was relayed from the lost head that another opinion was needed as to what to do next. It sounded tight. The way on drops and follows in the stream with a solid roof...but, after ~8m of low wet gravel turned left. A change of water noise levels was noted, as was a fair-sized black hole, but a small rock lip prevented progress. After struggling to pass through and temporarily being stuck I extricated myself and tried hammering past. This failed and another Hilti cap was used which successfully opened-up the way ahead. Vince's head disappeared again but was soon heard making loud happy yelping noises ...something about a pitch. We all followed and looked in awe down a large open Pitch with a stream tumbling down and a walking passage heading off to the left below. We quickly realised we could free-climb down and that now there were no loose boulders!

"Crap" was the next cry...the adrenalin rush suddenly dashed as the first of us reached the passage at the bottom. It's a sump!

Walking into the brown sump to brush away the foam and find an airspace revealed none but did establish that the sump is deeper than a person over 1.5m wide and ~3m long. A fossil coral was noted in in the stream gravel.

Excitement over, we had had a good trip, and returned to surface and to the QVic. We think this may be the turnaround of the stream to head now towards Cheddar....if it wasn't for that bloody sump!

Two glimmers of hope remain...a passage high up possibly bypassing the sump or the possibility that it's just a short duck....

Ready for you Claire..."



Snablet, Pete and Nick washing kit after a fine caving and exploration trip!

16th April 2017: with Nick Hawkes, Paul Brock, and Duncan Price.

This trip had a plan, to go and tickle the choke at the end of the sandy passage in Home Close Hole. I took the capping gear, just in case, but it was not required in the end, Brockers rigged the pitch and led the way, which was curious, as he has always expressed a dislike of pushing chokes.

We followed the inlet stream to where it issues from the boulder choke, then climbed the loose muddy slope to a point where further upward progress was not possible. A small gap was expanded and access to a small chamber was possible. It measured c.5m (l) x 2m (w) x 2m (h) was full of loose boulders and formed along a mineral vein, the floor wasn't too stable either. After a quick look around, Nick and Vince took it in turns to remove cobbles and boulders from an enticing looking space upwards. Nick managed to cause a slump of boulders that left things teetering on the brink. Nothing moved. We needed a rope, so all our belts were tied together, and I got a loop over the chock-stone and pulled. That worked. A bit of gardening, I then accessed c. 7m (l) of horribly loose ascending passage that closed to a very narrow fissure, there is not a way on here. Here, many of the rocks have a black manganese coating, and there is a trickle of water.

Meanwhile, Duncan had spotted another gap leading downwards and needed assistance to open it up further. Eventually, we abandoned this, made our way back down the slope, looked at some potential

options off the slope, but after some discussion we decided the best plan was to dig at stream level where there is, at least one solid wall.

We went downstream a little way and climbed up another slope into the choke. Here, there is an open space beyond a precariously balanced boulder that would require moving if further progress was to be made. Gingerly, I used a small bar to ease the boulder out of the way, luckily, nothing more came with it. A short clamber up gained access to a gnarly, sharp, boulder passage, a couple of squeezes, it closed after about 15m. There were some gaps overhead but, as a digging prospect it looked hopeless. Duncan had noticed another space overhead, estimated c.3m (l) but this was not entered.

By now, it seemed everyone had had enough of playing 'ker-plunk' and Brocker's was already on his way back to the pitch. Although I was last up the pitch, Duncan had waited and de-rigged. On the surface were Tony, Chris, Alice and Caroline, after changing, tea and sausage rolls was welcomed, followed by a de-brief about today's events. Then, we all headed off to a very busy Queen Vic for more refreshment.

14th May 2017: with Brocker's. Also, Ray Deasy and Richard Abbot (MNRC).

Brocker's and me planned to dig the choke at the end of Sandy Tunnel, to which end had bought along the capping gear. The other two went for a tour around and into Young Bloods in Wigmore.

We detoured on the way to the choke along the sixty-metre crawl, which is really 37m to assess the prospects there and, if necessary, formulate a plan. An interesting looking space beyond has cool air emanating from it. The left-hand side is dominated by what appears to be a large, possibly detached flake, a few holes in the more competent right-hand side might be the best option. Anyway, that's a job for another day onto the choke.



Quickly, I got the capping gear into action and reduced a couple of large boulders as required, this enabled more digging. Removing smaller boulders, cobbles and some sticky mud, gaps could be seen at stream level.

Some shoring work might be needed, just to be on the safe side, scaffolding tubes would be a good option.

We were joined by the MNRC contingent briefly before they headed out of the cave. We carried on digging for a while longer before we, too made our way out. Good session.



5th June 2018: with Brockers and Duncan.

Rumours of a significant blockage of the 60m crawl, the result of induced rapid speleogenesis (IRS), turned out to be unfounded. The obstructing flake, that bars further progress along the passage, had come down, bringing other stuff with it, a probability that had already been discussed some time ago. We moved some of the larger flakes/boulders into a position that we could work around and set about removing a quantity of fractured rock. Managed to reach forward and clear much of the debris along the right-hand side, there is more, but that was out of reach. We could almost see the way forward and detected a significant air movement. The way ahead remains promising. Another application of IRS may be all that is required to reduce a couple of obstructing boulders and gain access to the potential passage beyond.

12th June 2018: with Brockers, Jonathon and Duncan.

Straight from work to the suppliers to make a collection of the ingredients necessary for the application of induced rapid speleogenesis (IRS), then up to Wigmore Farm to make the preparations for the evenings task while waiting for the team to arrive.

I got changed and walked over to the entrance with the kit. Brockers and Jonathon arrived, Duncan was almost ready, so we set-off underground.

At the bottom of the 26m pitch, Duncan started to dig a potential lead, Jonathon went off to explore Home Close, later to join Duncan, Brockers and me headed off to the 60m crawl. At the obstruction, drilled 1no. hole, 500mm x 12mm, into the right-hand wall, 2no. holes, 500mm x 12mm, into a fractured flake of rock, and 1no. hole, 350mm x 12mm, into a large boulder. Brockers led out with the drill bag and tube, I followed on with a bag and laid out the wire.

Back at the pitch, got the SRT kit on, and when the last man was on the rope, went back to the 60m crawl to bring the evenings endeavour to a satisfactory conclusion – a low, rumbling echo.

The evening was finished off with refreshments at the Hunter's Lodge Inn. All was good!

19th June 2018: with Nick and Duncan.

Steady trip down to the start of the 60m crawl, reeled in the wire, before getting to work clearing the obstruction barring further progress. The IRS had the desired effect and the blockage had been reduced to fractured rock and gravel. Quickly relocated some boulders, cobbles and gravel and was able to pass over the obstruction into the open passage beyond. Unfortunately, not much of it. The passage, c.2m (h) x 0.75m (w) x 4m (l), heads north-west to a sediment blockage, low-down heading south-west, a body-size tube was followed for c.4m, it continues for another c.4m, where it bends towards south and appears to get a bit bigger. The air is fresh in the tube. Of course, it is all liberally coated with mud. However, with a bit of digging the tube will be more 'comfortable' and the bend ahead reached. Back in the day, might have pushed it a little bit harder. A slightly disappointing outcome, but the obstruction in the 60m crawl has been passed, and that's digging for you, On the way out of the 60m crawl, both Duncan and I had flashbacks to digging in Daren Cilau, emerging from the Rock Steady Cruise into the sandy passage at the end. Happy days!

16th October 2022

Well! It has been quite a while since my last visit to Home Close.

With Callum, Samuel Hill, Alex Hannam, and Duncan

A few weeks ago, I was having a conversation with Callum about Wigmore Swallet. He and his chums from the Shepton Mallet Caving Club (SMCC) had been busy in Wigmore reopening access following a slump in at the entrance and further into the cave the Hernia Pot area. They were keen to find somewhere to dig so I suggested they should have a look at Home Close Hole. I gave Callum my set of keys along with some pointers to some potential dig sites including the "60 metre" crawl and the gravel choke at stream level Nick and me along with others had occasionally scraped at. It was always wet and muddy. After a concentrated digging effort Callum and the SMCC team broke through into a significant section of cave.

I decided to take up Callum's offer of a tagging along on a survey trip with some of the team to take a look at the recent extensions to the cave. First, I had to sort out some kit (I had given my neo-fleece to Callum to make his digging trips more comfortable) and I had to search for a lightweight wetsuit. I could not find my old 'surfing' one but, eventually, found something suitable, all I had to do now was to dig out the SRT kit. Then drove up to Wigmore Farm to meet the others. All changed walked over the fields to the cave, gate open, and down the ladder we climbed. Quickly down the pitch, all assembled and off to the former gravel 'choke.' Good effort by the lads to dig through a series of low, wet, grovelling squeezes requiring helmet off and a wet ear. The low section opens into a reasonably lofty rift following a mineral vein with a couple of avens. The avens had some fine clean exposures of conglomerate and several other interesting geological and geomorphological features that might warrant further investigation. At the second aven, a ladder climb leads up into a continuation of the rift (still following the mineral vein, trending approx. north/south) until it appears to close down at a boulder choke. An inspection of the choke plus removal and rearrangement of some rocks revealed a possible

continuation that needs following up at a later date. Duncan and Alex surveyed along a low crawl leading to another aven while Callum and Sam dropped a ladder down into a lower continuation of the rift that soon closed down. It will need to be surveyed. I occupied myself enlarging an awkward wriggle around a bend in the low, meandering crawl before we all headed up to join Duncan and Alex in 'Crown' Aven. So named due an interesting chert/silicified feature at floor level. From the aven, several lengths of scaffold tube were dragged through the crawl to the rift, these might be usefully employed in the end choke. That was it really, so we made our way out of the cave back to the surface. A fine trip and well done to the diggers for the effort.

Surveyed length of passage c.325m, a significant find indeed!

17th November 2022

Back again to look at another discovery by the youngsters, this time down in the Wigmore section.

With Nick, Duncan, and Max [Fisher]

09:00 meet at the farm yard. Various bits of kit were decanted into bags to make a 4-way split. The plan was for Max and Duncan to install staples up the climb to the new stuff above Slime Rift. Nick and I were going up to have a look at BFC (Big Fucking Chamber) and postulate on its origins. Mostly uneventful trip through HCH to the pitch although I did think this section could do with a clear-out of tat and crap. Down the fine pitch and along the crawl to the Wigmore connection. Wet through Young Bloods Inlet (water levels were reasonably high following recent rain), up over the Generation Game and down to the excellent stream passage to Slime Rift. Max and Duncan got on with their mission, me and Nick climbed up to BFC. It was a much longer climb than expected amongst a jumble of large boulders and blocks seemingly held in place by copious amounts of mud. There are several mineral veins present and frequent faulting. We arrived at our destination, and it is indeed a "big fucking chamber", very impressive (dimensions c.40m x 20m).



Nick entering the BFC.

A domed, arched ceiling span criss-crossed by mineral veins, above an expanse of fallen blocks of [mostly] conglomerate with plenty of red fine sediment (silt and clay). There were boulders

of calcite (including dogs tooth spar) here and there too. The large breakdown chamber has been formed along the unconformity between Carboniferous limestone shales and Triassic conglomerate. A small pocket of possible cryogenic calcite was photographed and sampled. My efforts to take photos of the wider chamber were largely unsuccessful. The chamber was filled with steam, and I had insufficient lights to fully illuminate the wide expanse. An excellent find. Nick and I finished looking around climbed back down to join Max and Duncan, who had just completed their task. We tried out the staples and found them to be satisfactory. Time to exit the cave. It had been an exceptionally good trip.



Nick in BFC



Possible cryogenic calcite, BFC

The Passages described above, in total measured 499m and the digging team were judged winners of the J'Rat Diggers Award (all members of the Shepton Mallet Caving Club, SMCC) on the evening of 19th November 2022.



SMCC Diggers (Sam, Alex, Callum, Ollie) receiving the Digging Award 2022!