



# Hampshire Scout Caving Club



Newsletter January 2008



*photo – David Chadwick*

**Formations in Ogof Daren Cilau**

**HSCC web site URL : [www.scouts-hants.org.uk/hsc](http://www.scouts-hants.org.uk/hsc)**

Hampshire Scout Caving Club Newsletter produced by Ros White.

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## Notes on Cave Access

### **Little Crapnell Swallet and Honeymead Hole at Maesbury**

These are no longer locked and the farmer has told us there is no need to ask permission. However it is essential that you do not park on the farm lane (access is needed at all times for milk tankers), but find somewhere to park off the road on Crapnell Lane. Presumably other access requirements remain unchanged.

### **Reservoir Hole**

Access is no longer controlled by Willie Stanton but by Martin Grass.

### **Longwood August / Rhino Rift**

The owner of Lower Farm (also called Longwood Grange Farm) has (politely) asked that cavers do not park on the 'triangle' of grass just at the top of her drive, on the right hand side of the lane. Apparently her Father in law is buried there and she finds it distressing when people park on the grass. She also mentioned that she regularly picks up litter and sees people having a pee on the grass or in the hedge. Some of the crosses to mark the grave had also been removed. She was very pleasant and has no problem with cavers at all, save the few who park on the grass triangle, which is her land.

You may park by the waterworks or she has said that anyone caving there were more than welcome to park in the farmyard if they were concerned about security of vehicles and all they have to do is go into the farm (the dogs bark but are very friendly) and knock on the door of the cottage on the LEFT - NOT the house on the RIGHT. You will then be welcome to leave cars there.

Relations with this landowner seem good and although the caves are not on her land, it is handy to have a secure place to park off the beaten track - the alternative is to park on the lane, leaving cars open to vandalism / theft etc

## HSCC Officials

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## HSCC Programme

Date	Time	Activity	Venue	Contact
2/3.2.08		Birthday caving trips	Mendip - MNRC	Sue Chase
6.2.08	20:00	Meeting - AGM	12 <sup>th</sup> Eastleigh - Bishopstoke	Sue Chase
5.3.08	20:00	Meeting - rigging practice	12 <sup>th</sup> Eastleigh - Bishopstoke	Phil Candy
12.3.08		Taffy Memorial Curry		Sue Chase
15/16.3.08		Caving days	Mendip	Andy Watson
21-25.3.08		Derbyshire	Orpheus	Sue Chase
29.3.08	20.00	SALLIE Night Hike	Wilverley	David Chadwick
2.4.08		Treasure Hunt		Darrel Instrell
7.5.08		SRT practice	Lyons Copse	Phil Candy
24-26.5.08		Wales	Brecon Scout Hut	David Chadwick
4.6.08		Climbing		
14-15.6.08		Training weekend	MNRC?	
28.6.08		Christmas Meal		Sue
2.7.08		BBQ		

## HSCC News

**HSCC trips 2007:** These include : SRT practice at Sandleheath Scout Centre, Alum pot, Aveline's Hole, Bar Pot, Bath Swallet, Bixhead Stone Quarry, Black Head caves, Bridge Cave, Calf Holes & Browgill, Coolagh River Cave, County Pot, Craig y Ffynnon, Cullaun 2, Cwm Dwr, Dan yr Ogof, Diccan, Doolion River Cave, Eastwater Cavern, Eldon Hole, Fairy Quarry Cave, Fermoy East Cave, Fergus River Cave, GB, Goatchurch Cavern, Great Douk Cave, Heale Farm Cave, Giants Hole, Hilliers, Honeymead, Hunters Hole, Jackpot, Juniper Gulf, Kilcorney, Lancaster Hole, Little Crapnell Swallet, Longwood August, Lost John, Manor Farm, Marble Steps, Maskhill Mine, Miss Graces Lane, Noxon Iron Mine, Odin Mine, OFD II, Ogof Carno, Ogof Daren Cilau, Oxlow, Pant Mawr Pot, Pierre's Pot, Pillar Holes, Poldonough, Poulmagollum, Poulelva, Rod's Pot, Sell Gill, Sidcot Swallet, Singing River Mine, Slaughter Stream Cave, Swildons Hole, Town Drain, Tynings Barrow Swallet, White Lady, White Pit, Wigpool Iron Mine, Yordas Pot & Cave. - Tell me what I've missed off. I took this list from the Club Log - so if its not on the list, its probably because you didn't put it in the log.

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Sue & Andy Watson celebrated their first wedding anniversary with a trip down GB. Only Andy could get away with that! David was nearly as bad, taking Ros down Hilliers on her birthday.

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Sally is now back in Bristol and is UBSS Tackle Warden.

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Sue (Chase) is due to be "Granny Sue" this summer - Tom & Jo are expecting

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**Thanks to everyone who has contributed articles and photos for the Newsletter**

## CHECC

by Sally White

Each year, hundreds of student cavers from throughout the UK head to CHECC (Council of Higher Education Caving Clubs) weekend. We were finally off for the weekend of the Year! Or where we? Not quite, because four people, their kit and some food does not fit in my car / ambulance / van / Uglia / badger / thing (delete as appropriate). After moving to a friend's larger car, we really were off.



On arrival at the SWCC, the location of this year's event, we got changed and put the final touches to our fancy dress costumes. Friday night at CHECC is traditionally fancy dress. Our club's theme? Beauty pageants wearing sashes bearing "Miss World" or whatever we each chose. Only we opted for a slight twist on this. A selection include Miss Ing-Presumed-dead (myself as Madeleine McCann), Miss Taken-Identity" (Jean Charles de Menezes) and my favourite Miss Understood (Hitler!!!). I think a gathering of cavers is about the only place we could have got away with these costumes, but we still got a few shocked looks. We did, however, win the fancy dress competition so it was all worth it.

Saturday 'morning' we actually got round to some caving. I had a lovely trip in Cwm Dwr entrance of OFD and learnt my way around. In the boulder choke, a fellow caver managed to get somewhat stuck head first down a small, sloping hole which wasn't even the way on. I later found out this part was named "Graham's Hole" since he had got stuck in the exact same spot some years previously. This time, however, there was the

added "fun" of my friends light going out and him getting leg cramp whilst stuck in the hole and listening to my useless "advice".

On the previous night, one of our club members had gone up to a random girl and asked her if she wanted to get naked with him. She replied with a dismissive "no!" and then added, "... that's not until tomorrow night". His reply was "I'm a fresher, I didn't know". We thought it an excellent chat up line/excuse. Anyway, that's Saturday nights tradition at CHECC: topless (bras on) dancing. The marquee this took place in became a bit of a mud pit, so mud wrestling had to take place too.

On Sunday we helped clean up and then some of us went to the Clydach gorge. We walked up a pretty (but slippery) stream until we met the entrance of Ogof Clogwyn. The phreatic passages in this little cave were extremely beautiful. We then visited a distinctly grimmer cave called Elm Hole. I was less impressed and we all suddenly seemed to feel the lack of sleep we had endured over the weekend, so we returned home.



*Ogof Clogwyn*

CHECC may just sound like a week long party fueled by alcohol, and indeed it is, but it is also the gathering of an upcoming generation of cavers. I think this event is an important part of uniting young cavers and helping ensure the sport of caving is kept alive for many generations to come.

## Digging Caves - Andy Watson

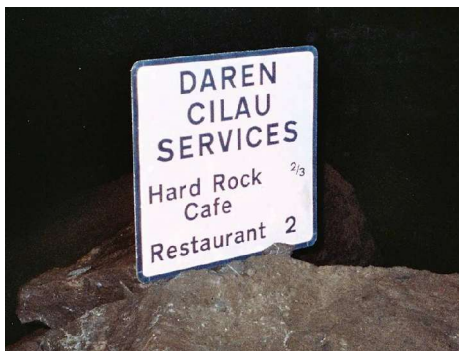


I have a cave in my back garden, we dug it with a mini digger.

Digging caves to find passage extensions is a fairly unpleasant pastime but it keeps you fit. The cave digging activity is a minority sport, although it is amazing how many cavers you meet have done a bit of digging. Occasionally you come across determined diggers and dig for several years in the same place. Digging tools are basic, trenching shovels, trowels, crowbars and cut down 25 litre chemical drums. Digging has just joined Bath Swallet and Rods Pot near Goatchurch Cave in Burrington Coombe where we often take Scouts caving.

## Ogof y Daren Cilau - Andy Watson

Having done about five trips in this cave system I thought it might be good to share some of the



interesting bits. It was first entered in 1957 with some major extensions discovered in the mid 1980's, the overall length is now about 15 miles, plenty of passage to get lost in. There is the entrance series which is about 500 metres of 'bag wrestling' that incorporates the 'Vice' and the playschool windows. By the time you get to the main pitch, the two drinking bottles are very welcome. After about three hours you reach the Time Machine which is a chamber is too big to photograph well, then down to the Bonsai Streamway past the 'Services' (photo) and the cave gets prettier. At Hard Rock Café you

can camp, eat and sleep. Further on through the Hard Rock extensions you can crawl and wriggle along a flat out bedding plane popping out into some pleasant cave passage. To the left a way through to Higher Places and the



lovely formations in 'Where the Sun don't Shine' (photo). The Ankle Grinder passage is a lovely water washed passage going up stream (photo). Downstream the Borrowed Boots Streamway is stunning and breath taking with flakes of black rock from floor to ceiling. The far end of the



*Ankle Grinder Passage*

cave at present is Spaderunner about 12 hours from the entrance. The most peculiar place is the Gloom Room sump which seems to sap your light and the most interesting place is Psychatronic Strangeways where we found a fantastic fossilized coral formation.

## YSS Trip to PSM August 2007 by Gemma Jones

The trip started off with a flight from Stansted. I was driving from my mum's house in Skipton to pick up a friend near Pontefract and then we were driving down to the airport together. Within the space of 2 months I have become utterly attached to my Tomtom and am now not seen without this essential item. I was not worried that I had never been to Pontefract before as Tim (the softly spoken English male voice) would guide me there. However, I hadn't anticipated a road closure. Despite shouting at Tim that the road was closed, he still led me down the road and past the bollards. I felt relieved when I saw a vehicle coming up the road. Maybe it wasn't really closed. Four miles in I saw that no - actually it really was closed and there were workmen in the middle of the road. They all got out of their vehicles and folded their arms. "Now, now, then, young girl where do you think you are going?" "I have a flight to catch and it's not my fault. The Tomtom led me down here. I thought the road was probably open as I saw a car coming back up the road." "That'll be the car we told to go back, then." Now I was worried. I'd end up missing my flight and had no alternative route to go down. However, thankfully, my female charm came through as I frantically batted my eyelids and they decided to move their vehicles and let me through in the end!

We arrived at Stansted at three in the morning, as the flight was at six. There were a few of us going from Stansted and it was obvious who we were. I guess caving attire just isn't that common amongst non-cavers! Ryanair's new tight baggage allowance meant that my pockets were filled with batteries (the heaviest things) and Mars bars and I even considered wearing my helmet through customs! Thankfully I managed to fit it into my hand luggage bag at the last minute, though.

When we arrived in Pau we had a short drive of about an hour to the campsite where people had been arriving from all directions. I managed to go on a walk to "Les gorges de kakuetta;" a walk in a gorge with a tunnel and a pretty waterfall and a small show cave at the end. It really was a very impressive gorge with imposing cliffs on both sides. The elite members of the YSS had gone and rigged the PSM during the day, but decided after the rigging to carry on straight through the cave, like you do?!? The next morning the elite cavers recounted how they had never done a cave quite so hard before and how tired they were after their 18 hours underground. I did reflect upon this, thinking, these are people who probably do Quaking in their lunch break and they seem to think it was hard, how is it going to be for me? I reassured myself that it couldn't be that bad as it was a through trip and, after all that meant you didn't have to go back up. I had a little think about all the nice easy through trips I have done, like Calf Holes and Yordas and decided that they must be

exaggerating. I listened a bit more and was surprised to learn that there were several hundred metres of abseiling at the beginning and 9km of passage. I had meant to get round to reading about the cave before I went on the trip but just seemed to have been too busy.

We set off in the back of a van up the slopes towards PSM laden with items I had nabbed that morning. I had no idea I was supposed to have a bivvy bag in case we needed to stop on the trip, or a sleeping bag, or a stove. Clearly the "be prepared" motto had bypassed me. The road was so bad we ended up getting out and pushing the van quite a bit of the way. Not really brilliant for preserving the much needed energy for the trip ahead. It was a forty minute walk up to the cave where we had photos and got our SRT kits on. There was a re-jig of teams at this point as two of our team decided it wasn't for them after all and set off back.

I got on the rope and started abseiling. Although it was several hundred metres, you couldn't really see the drop until quite near the end so it wasn't totally frightening. I was really enjoying the swinging about over the pitches and the sense of excitement you get at the start of an adventure. At the end of all the abseiling, which had taken about two hours, I got off the rope and sort of expected congratulations. I mean, I had never abseiled that far before and I didn't have any wobblers at all. However, Stuart was there, saying how because we (i.e. me) had been so slow the rest of them had gone on ahead. Oh! Not put off I enthused about how great the abseiling was and how amazing the feeling was to have abseiled that far and secretly thought about how great I was to have done it. Stuart was keen to press on when the other two from our team got to the end of the abseiling section.

We set off and I was loving every minute of it. We didn't want to get lost so were following the survey very closely. After a couple of hours we stopped for a Mars bar and Chris pointed out that that section was only supposed to take us five minutes. Still feeling like I was the world's greatest caving hero for abseiling that far I excitedly pointed out that it was five minutes further from our goal though and went on about how well we were doing. We carried on and it was lots of smaller stuff at the beginning and then started getting bigger and bigger.

We got lost for 2 or 3 hours in the Grand Canyon. The words didn't match the survey. I pointed out that it was a large passage with a deepish stream in so must be the Grand Canyon, but they didn't think so, so we went back to look for a turn off, over and over again. After realising there was no turn off they decided to carry on and low and behold, it was the Grand Canyon. I refrained from saying "I told you so!" though, as it was obvious I was the weakest link in the team and

probably needed them more than they needed me!! We had a break of soup and pain au chocolat before doing the very wet stuff. By this point we were well into the night-time. We had a problem finding the inflatable boat at the Tunnel de Vent. We found the lake but there were a few places you could approach the lake from and none had a boat in view. Eventually the water was braved to locate the boat and we paired up to cross the lake. You had to pull yourself along the lake on a bit of rope in the boat. It was very novel.



*The inflatable boat in the Tunnel de Vent*

We'd now been caving for about 18 hours. Unfortunately this was only half way though. However, I kept focusing on the "wow" aspect of how many kilometres we'd done rather than how many more we had to do.

The next section was really big passage and massive chambers and a seemingly non-ending array of boulder piles to go up and then down. The chambers were so big your light did not reach the other side at all. Helpful red and white markers guided the way though. For some reason unbeknown to me I had kept my harness on for the whole trip and remember that the last few hours of the trip were really difficult as every step caused immense pain in my groins. There were still bits where abseiling and prussicking were required every so often with fixed ropes. We were exhausted by this point and found that we were nodding off at tops of pitches whilst waiting for someone to abseil down. Not a good place for a catnap really! We had another break of soup and pain au

chocolat and passed the grave of Marc Louvrens who had been involved in the cave's initial discovery.

The chambers got bigger and bigger until we heard voices. I was worried that it was going to be international cave rescue (who charge a fortune) wondering what had happened to us. It was instead the friendly voice of Andy Jackson, BPC and Wessex member. He was taking photos of the chamber and told us the Salle de



*Having a break for food*

Verne was only half an hour away. Phew! There was some dodgy traversing on ropes crossing deep water though, similar to what we had done earlier but now I had very little muscle reserve left. After some cursing (and promising a dance to someone in the Helwith Bridge if they helped me!) I got through and our welcome party met us in the Salle de Verne and we had hugs and congratulations galore. Surely I was a proper hard-core caver now, I thought! The Salle de Verne was absolutely massive and I think they may be turning it into a show cave, so there were lights and it was lit up for us to see how spectacular it was. A short walk through the EDF tunnel and we were out after 26 hours underground!

After food and sleep we spent time recounting our trip to others. Interestingly, not that I am at all competitive, honest, but I did notice that we weren't the slowest as one group had spent 32 hours getting through the cave! I also managed to have the most impressive injuries as the harness had rubbed so badly that it had gouged chunks of flesh out of my groin. Lovely!



*The Team at the end*

The next day was spent going to Le Pont Suspendu d'holzarte - a huge suspension bridge not far away and a nice walk through a village where the Tour De France had gone through! The rest of the YSS went on to explore Cueto in Spain but I left to go to a school friend's wedding in Germany. All in all a fantastic and very memorable trip, which I thoroughly enjoyed!

Thanks to my team mates Stuart Weston, Chris Tate and Lisa Wooton and all at the YSS for helping organise such a superb trip.



*Gemma - in Scotland with HSCC 2006*

February 4<sup>th</sup> 2007 - GB

by Amelia Phillips

In this caving experience, I went with some leaders down the cave GB in Mendip. There were four of us, me, David, Ros and Graham. We were underground for roughly 3-4 hours.

I was nearly 15 but 16! This was because the cave had an age limit of 16. There are two main reasons. So the formations would stay beautiful and preserved. The people who owned the cave thought this was the age at which you would respect the cave and realise how vulnerable it was. The other reason was because it was rather a challenging cave, as I was to find out...

We drove there in the Land Rover on a lovely morning. Little did I know what I was letting myself in for! We got down to the cave entrance and then I realised that I had forgotten my gloves on the bumper of the car. I ran (waddled) back up this grassy hill and then back down again. What a waste of energy. Of course David loved this, watching a child run in a stiff oversuit up a hill.

We entered the cave via the man-made cover. We went down and entered a chamber. There was a large rusty ladder leading into a passageway. Little to my surprise this was where we were going! One by one we climbed up and in. We did this without a lifeline as I felt I did not need one.

One main route through through the cave has several side passages of which the entrance series is one. At the end of the main passage, a beautifully decorated continuation can be accessed up a climb. A short distance along this passage, a large, decorated chamber can be reached through a choke above.

A clear section of the cave remember was rather chilling! We had to crawl through a passage way that was filled with water almost to the roof! This I learnt was called a duck. (Not a sump as there was a slight amount of room to breathe!). I crawled through after David which came out to another small chamber. We were going through to get to a grotto with lots of formations. At the time I was questioning whether it was worth it.

As Graham was volunteering to wait there, I wondered 'Oh God, what have I let myself on to!!!' But then I saw something... it was .. well .. bad. There was a small, tight, awkward squeeze ahead. And not only that, but it was almost totally submerged in water. I felt, a little sick. But, inside I wanted to do it!

I edged on as David was clearing out some water and passing the tub back to me. The adults were all joking as to how it would be lovely and warm and send Amelia through first to soak up all the water! Uh no! I crawled through and goodness knows what my face was like. The worst feeling, cold water leaking down your neck and into your oversuit. (As we went through on our backs). I've never moved so quickly!!! I came out the other side and I was like...argh!!! I couldn't believe I had done it.

Feeling rather cold, the passage eventually widened into a chamber. We waited for the others that were scrambling around trying to fit through. I suppose it was easier for me as I was slightly thinner! We got to the grotto, which admittedly was spectacular and totally amazing. I must admit though at the time, I went rather quiet and scowly! Looking back afterwards though, the stalactites, stalagmites, straws, flowstone, gour pools and more. I will never forget it! I think it was worth it, mind you I didn't think that at the time. We made our way out, going back through the cold dips and into a massive chamber! I've never seen one so big! I could imagine a river flowing through here due to the ice melting from the last ice age.

We also visited a place called 'The Bridge'. This was a rock, which joined over the main passage. It really was like a bridge. We climbed round the side being wary of various formations. We were also walking on flowstone.

Eventually we made our way out of the cave. (To my relief). On the way out, I did go quiet as I was, well a little cold! We got straight in the Land Rover and drove back to MNRC to get changed. Ahhh warmth!



Amelia Phillips *Amelia abseiling on summer camp*  
(1<sup>st</sup> Sandleheath / Avon Valley Explorers)

Ed. - Amelia did this trip as part of her Bronze D of E (Physical Recreation).

**Identify the cave :** Answers: (from last Newsletter)

Which cave (a) : " The entrance crawl opens into a small chamber and a squeeze into a larger boulder floored chamber..... Again carefully descend through the floor choke to the first pitch. This is tight, and a further, tighter boulder squeeze leads to ..... - **we can't remember - can you??**

Which cave (b) : "A partly wet flat-out crawl ends after 45m at a squeeze. The next 55m are a meander maze with up to three possible routes though shelving limestone. After this, the old dry route leaves to the right, following an oxbow for 275m in the shelving layer before rejoining the main stream. - **Doolin River Cave**



**Dan yr Ogof** Leader - Clive Owen + Sue, Pip, Ros & Dave December 22<sup>nd</sup> by Sue Chase

We stayed at MNRC Friday night and drove to Bristol first on Saturday morning to pick Clive up. We arrived at Dan yr Ogof about 10-30. The car park was busy.

We had expected the show cave to be shut, but Father Christmas was in residence, in his Grotto!

We got changed and headed through the Show cave, past all the reindeer, polar bears and Father Christmas himself.



The first obstacle was the lakes which we waded through. They ranged from knee to chest deep, but weren't too arduous. Then through Straw Chamber and into the Long Crawl. This turned out to be not particularly long and not really tight either. There was a section at the start, the Cattle Trough, which had water in, which got you fairly wet,



*Ros in the Cattle trough*

but most of it was hands and knees crawling, with only a couple of sections really flat out. We carried on through Gerard Platten Hall, went down an

interesting short descent down a muddy slope, where we all fell over, Ros most spectacularly by taking out Clive and Phil. We failed to find the way on, so went back up the climb, found the right way on and Bakerloo Straight, a really impressive phreatic tube, walking size. We then came to the Camel's Hump. It was a big climb up a huge smooth lump of rock, with a rift in it - so it was a sort of thrutching traverse, climbby thing! Clive went first and I followed. I didn't think I would manage. but by wedging and slithereing and general effort I got up to the top. Ros tried to climb, like a proper climber, but it was too steep and smooth and she came unstuck and slipped back down, not doing her ankle any good at all. Pip and David managed with thrutching, wedging the same way as me (but more efficiently and with less wingeing!). We then looked for a climb up to the Abyss. Clive got the wrong climb to start with, and we ended up in Dali's Delight, a really weird area of strange moonscape rock formations. When we failed to find the way on at the top, we re-traced our steps, abseiled back down and found the right climb, which was a lot easier than the wrong one.

We carried on round to the Green Canal. This is a long flooded passage, quite deep in places, that we had to swim down. We had either a buoyancy aid or a rubber

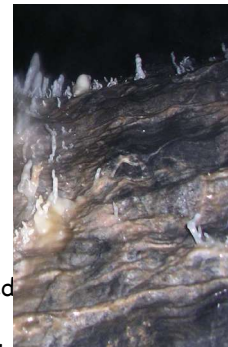
ring from the start of the canal, and we swam down. The water was very cold and I swam slowly so as not to create too much wave to go down my front! Out at the other end we emptied our wellies and carried on.

The next passages and chambers were very beautiful. We passed formations like candle wax dripping down, Cloud Chamber, totally covered in long



straws and whole forests of helictites growing up from passage walls. It was really stunning. At the end of Flabbergasm there was a straw that reached from floor to ceiling.

We then completed the round trip, back through the long crawl, through



the lakes and back into the Show Cave. Father Christmas had finished for the evening, and the place was deserted. The Christmas lights and music were still on though and we all posed for photos with the reindeer and the polar bears.



*Clive admiring some reindeer*

When we got to the entrance, the key we had wouldn't open the door, so we went out the side entrance, through the river cave. Some other cavers came out after us, and their key worked perfectly. They tried our key as well, but they couldn't get that one to work either. We got changed, and had tea and chocolate, biscuits, mince pies etc in the car, then headed back to Bristol to drop Clive off. We had supper with Sally in the Prince of Wales, in Bristol, then back to MNRC. A very good day's trip.

## "To Fit or not to Fit?" - an experience in Daren Cilau

by Ros White

When I first started caving regularly, about 12 years ago, people talked about Daren Cilau with awe. It was a legend - the entrance series thutch. I bought caving books and with friends from HSCC read the description - and we all laughed. Who would be stupid enough to do that - certainly none of us. It was way beyond what any of us would consider possible. A few years later, on a visit to Llangattock, we wandered along the bottom of the cliff and took a look at the entrance - which merely



Sally in the entrance to Daren Cilau

confirmed our thoughts - a gravel in a muddy puddle leading to a wet, confined crawl, that continues unabated for about 600m - no thank you!

I suppose over the years you take on more serious caves without really

taking in how much your ability has improved. On our HSCC visit to County Clare this summer, we were astonished that a trip in Coolagh River Cave, which we thought we had stormed through in 5 hours on our visit 7 years ago (because it was in imminent danger of flooding), we did comfortably in 3 hours this time. I'm certainly not as fit as I was then - just a better caver I suppose.

When my daughter Sally announced she was going into Daren with UBSS I was interested to find out what she thought of it. She is small, agile and quite fit, so suited to that sort of cave. She reported back - "it's no-where near as bad as everyone says - its not tight - just awkward. You would fit through no problem - so would Dave". Oh dear! I feel a challenge here. David had kept joking about doing Daren - but was he joking? I had always assumed he would not fit. Now it seemed we had no excuse. Better get on and do it before I'm even older, fatter and more decrepit!

Club nut-case, Andy Watson, had already been into Daren several times and offered to take a group on a day trip - go through the entrance series and on a bit, then come back. I won't repeat David's response to this idea - but he felt that if he struggled through the entrance series he wanted to do a bit more than just come out again. Thus Andy was consigned to do another trip into Daren to take me and David - but with an overnight stay so we could get to the Hard Rock Cafe camp. The planned trip turned out to be 2 nights, so we could go on beyond Hard Rock on the middle day.

The day trip with Sue, Phil, Sue2 and Gavin in tow took place. Sue reported back. David would not fit through "The Vice" (just 80metres in) or "the Square Window" in Play School, towards the end of the entrance crawl. Phil

had found both a real struggle - and had to have 3 goes at The Vice - and was never going back. Sue thought the entrance series not too bad, Gavin had a few problems on various zig-zags because of long legs. Oh well - it's all planned - so we'd better have a go anyway - just be prepared to do something else when David doesn't fit.

Sally had got to the sump of Stoke Lane on Wednesday - the water level was down - so the plan was we could walk up Pen-y-fan on Saturday and do Stoke Lane on Sunday (Sally would join us for this).

We had our e-mailed instructions from the font-of-all-knowledge (in our club at least) about Daren -

"We meet usually at sometime between 5/6 & 8 on Friday. Trip in is 4-5 hours to the camp at hard rock cafe. You will need a long thin bag each with two daren drums in each. Sleeping bag liners are good as the sleeping bags are fairly grim - take your own sleeping bag but that means another bag and they are hard to handle and hard to keep dry. Cowstails for high traverse, but keep these in yr bag till needed. crab on yr bag top is useful for entrance series grind, on your belt it gets in the way. Drag cord is useful for one bit, but i dont bother usually. if you wear gloves then gloves get wet on way in, so a dry pair for later is good, especially if helping with digging. You need a tikka type light and wooley hat for evening camp and dry under clothes(socks, pants, tshirt, perhaps even thin undertrousers for sleeping), there are some grim over clothes and shoes to borrow at camp (I have my own 'old man' vinyl topped slippers in there now). Wash kit, everything as small as possible. Spare charged light battery, you need lots of lights and spare power (I use one in, tikka at camp, one digging and one out - to have enough spares). First aid kits in cave but I take small one with ibru/paracet. Snack bars for journey in/out. There will be a needs / shopping list pre trip but anyhow, big tealights, loo rolls, meths, a tea towel is useful, AA batteries for sound system, small handcream. Camera is good. No No's Glass bottles, Gas canisters.

### Mad Monk

So we set off with a car full of various sets of caving kit, walking stuff and camping equipment. I wasn't too worried, we had no chance of getting past the Vice, and I was quite looking forward to the views from Pen-y-fan and getting beyond the sump in Stoke Lane. So off we went. We met Andy bang on 4pm at Whitewalls on a beautiful, sunny afternoon. Llangattock at its best. Why were we going underground?

The entrance was every bit as bad as I expected, even though the muddy puddle was fairly dry. Crawl, wriggle, squirm, try to keep the bag in front on you so you don't get trapped by it or it trapped under you. All a bit of a fight. It's quite hot in here too - or is that just because of the effort expended? Oh, we're at the Vice, thanks goodness for that, in a few minutes we'll be able to turn round and go out! Andy went through - with a struggle. David made various succinct comment about the likelihood of him getting through, got stuck part way through, jammed tight, and came back. "Relax and have another go" I said helpfully. He did. This time he lined up carefully, and much to his amazement fitted into the

tight bit. It was just a matter of forcing his way along now - he was in, he had to force himself out. A few minutes later he was through. Now it was my turn. I would fit - but it looked awkward and hard work. I let a leg drop into the trench below, could not get it out, so resigned myself to dragging it along behind me and forcing it round the corner - not easy - bit of a bruise - but through. On we went, wriggle, squirm, thrutch, wriggle, David is swearing at his bag again, I've got mine underneath me somehow, and we get past mark number 1 (there are 8 in the entrance crawl!). It just goes on and on - and on. If you find a bit where you can stand up for a couple of steps, it is inevitably followed by a bit where you have to go flat out round a bend. Did I forget to mention - it is all in a small stream bed, so you are soaked from the first minute. Not that anyone is cold - sweating buckets was the polite description. We are approaching Play School (there is a triangular window, a round window and a square window to get through - all squeezes in very solid calcite flowstone). The square window is the difficult one apparently. It is not quite square, there is a bit you can feed a shoulder into - but it makes you the wrong way round for the following bend. (Worry about the bend when we get through the window). David is now quite determined to get through - after 500m of sheer purgatory he wants to get into the cave proper. A shriek of delight as he pops out of the window (well not exactly pop out - more extrude slowly out). Now we can stand up! One and a half hours or so - not too bad for a couple of fat, old codgers. We still have about 4 hours more caving ahead tonight. I think I will be able to sleep anywhere by then.

The next obstacle is Jigsaw Passage, followed by The Wriggle and then Big Chamber Nowhere near the Entrance and the signing in book (you can't miss it - it's under the "bondage woman" who is hung down on a piece of string). On to 5-Ways junction and then the ladder pitch (White Climb) to Higher Things. Its about 70', on a strange ladder, not electron, not rigid, which changes angle part way up. It looks a long way, but there is a belay and a hauling line for bags. David first, me second, bags next, then Andy. I was really glad I had taken Sue's advice and worn my canoeing neoprene gloves. They not only stopped damage to hands from the rough surfaces in the entrance crawl, but kept my hands warm and were good for the ladder climb too. We're all a bit hot again. Glad we've got that over. After a bit more squirming and wriggling we meet the traverse. No problem, with cowstails it's quite simple, but the ropes look a bit grim. As there are 2 ropes (one an old-fashioned laid rope) I feel it best to clip onto both. But the traverse itself is easy. (Apparently this traverse avoids having to do another down and up). We then come to the roped climbs. Again there is no problem - its just that everything requires a fair amount of effort in this cave. Nothing is easy. You stand up and walk a few metres, then meet another obstacle. For the moment however, we have a breather down White Passage, past the Source of Time and into the awesome Time Machine.

We've all seen pictures of this stunning chamber - over 30 metres wide in places and 400 metres long, but here, with our LED headlights we just can't see the sides properly - it goes on and up - vast. No point in photos - we haven't got the lighting equipment required to show anything other than the rocks for a few metres ahead of us. It will take about half-an-hour to walk through it. Of course there is no path, just a series of cats-eyes showing the route, and you hop from boulder to boulder, not sure whether to look for the next cat-eye reflecting back at you, or look where you're feet are going next. The thought that if you twist an ankle it's a long way out and no-one can help you in the entrance crawl decides it - look where your feet are going, stop, then look for the next cats-eye. Don't care how slow I am - I just want to get to Hard Rock in one relatively unscathed piece. Short legs don't help in this bit (but they were good in the entrance crawl). It seems strange to be here, actually going down Time Machine, like being in a dream. What next, down into Bonsai Streamway and past Crystal Inlet. There are various formations to admire in this section (the Bonsai tree is the most famous - and its easier to spot in this direction). We'll take more photos on the way out. They are really stunning - and unspoilt. Dazzlingly white, amazingly contorted helictites, huge straws dropping from the ceiling. Perhaps it was worth coming after all. No photo can ever give you that feeling of being somewhere really special.



*Formations in Bonsai Streamway*

Further on we encounter the "Daren Cilau Services" sign indicating : Hard Rock Cafe 2/3 and Restaurant at the End of the Universe 2. That means only 2/3 mile to go, should take about half an hour apparently. There is also a side passage here, Crystal Inlet, where you get water for camp. There are water containers left there ready for us to take to camp. Andy, realising how tired Dave and I are, takes them - thanks.

More streamway - mind the holes in it - take care - don't want to get injured now - just want to go to bed!! Feeling exhausted, I know I'm not really fit enough for this, but I've got to keep going, don't want to be a burden, don't want sympathy, I want to do it on my own, carrying my own kit. We come across Kings Road off to the right. Just the climb up towards camp left - smell the paraffin. Nearly there. We've passed the toilet

and then there are night lights leading us in to camp. It's absolutely surreal! How can a passage in cave, miles underground be so welcoming. Gonzo, Steve and Simon are already there, kettle on, tipples lit. We change into



*Hard Rock Cafe*

our dry clothes, hang up the wet caving gear ready to wear tomorrow (ugh) and with Andy's help, find a couple of extra jumpers from the camp stock (some of which are quite disgusting) to pile on. Keep warm. Polatec canoeing helmet AND balaclava, 2 very thin thermal tops, 2 tops from camp, polatec legs, thermal socks and my flip-flops complete the picture. I'm past caring what sight this results in, I just want to be warm. We unload our stores (all food is communal), have a very welcome mug of coffee, then set up our beds. We are given a couple of roll mats and sleeping bags, and with these and our own silk liners we are shown the sleeping areas and left to choose a bit of levelish (but sandy) floor.

Arriving back in the kitchen area there are two main preoccupations under way. The first is mixing cocktails from the various containers (some labelled, some not) and the second is cooking dinner. It is now about 11pm! We're hungry. Curry is on the menu - so I've got my own sachet-type dinner - just bung sachet in boiling water for 10 minutes and eat - beef & dumplings. Wonderful. We are shown round, told about camp protocol and relax as Gonzo chats and Andy sings!!

I am falling asleep - the benches constructed from rocks with roll-mat cushions are very comfortable, but David and I go off to bed. Remember to keep the headlight near - there will be no welcoming daylight in the morning, no rise in temperature, no traffic noise, no birds singing.

Saturday morning - I think. There is noise - people wandering past to go to the "toilet". The toilet was really quite simple - the stream ran through a gap between some rocks, over a lip and into a pool (the toilet bowl). It had a continuous flush system. Just make sure washing up and water collecting is done upstream! It was about 8am - so we got up and found the kettle already on. The plan was that 5 of us would go to Restaurant at the end of the Universe and beyond on a sightseeing tour, whilst Gonzo did some digging. He was expecting a couple more "diggers" to turn up during the day. We had breakfast, packed lunch and stole ourselves to strip off and put on the wet caving kit! We only needed one bag between us, so I quietly opted out of taking a shift with it whilst the others took turns. The trip started as it meant to go on - hands and knees crawling, flat out

crawling etc. through "Brazil" and on to a squeeze "Miami Vice" followed by an awkward wriggle., which



*Ros in Acupuncture Passage*

David took a while, but got through. We were then promised a 70m crawl - Acupuncture Passage - some flat out, some not quite flat out!

After that

Anklegrinder Streamway. Look up to the formations, pass "Icing on the cake", a short traverse (don't trust the rope or the hangers!) then up to the Restaurant (another camp). We decided to go on to look for the Blue-Greenies (more spectacular formations) before returning for lunch.

We found some formations after about 25 minutes, but had been told it was 30 minutes or so to them, so went on. After another 30 minutes the passage closed down to a quite tight rift which David was too fat for, so we turned round and went back to admire the original set of formations with lots of blue clay in the area. The others returned after a while having failed to find anything else. We took photos then went back to the restaurant for a rest and lunch.

David and I were quite tired now, so decided we would go straight back to Hard Rock without deviating to look at more pretties. We let the rest set off ahead of us, but at the climb out of Anklegrinder found they had stopped to chat to Gonzo and look at a formation down a side passage. We were taken (a crawl inevitably) to see this, "the Blockhead", a strange large ball with large, finger-like protuberances on, then set off back. The sightseeing group were to leave the bag at "the Samaritans sign" before going on to 12 o'clock High, and we arranged to leave a rock on top of it as we passed so they knew we had moved ahead of them. This duly done we continued back to Miami Vice and the wriggle. We had been told to look for a left turning up over a bank at about half way, so we started looking to the left (when crawling we couldn't turn head from one side to the other - so you had to decide early on which way you wanted to face). About 10 yards past the wriggle the passage started to close down and David was struggling to make progress. He thought it was because it was slightly uphill and sandy - so he pushed on. He made little progress, so I reversed to see if we had missed the left turn in the 10 yards between David and Miami Vice. There was nothing, so David tried again. Again he made little progress, so I decided I should go back to find the others and see if they could help. I backed up and started to turn round - confined space, but I found an alcove on the right to reverse into. I realised immediately that the "alcove" on the right was actually the passage we should have taken. Because we had

heads to he left, we did not see it!! After informing David of the situation I suggested he back out of the tight bedding plane he was jammed in. All went well for



about 9" - then he jammed - solid. After much pushing, thrutching, scrabbling, etc he was declared to be properly stuck. I knew I did not have the strength to help un lodge him, so I was about to go for help, when I heard help coming to me. Andy appeared and was directed forwards to the stuck David. The bedding plane was tight and narrow - so he couldn't get near him, but tried pulling his feet. The rest of the group soon appeared, and congregated down the passage to the side to decide on a plan of attack. With two Cave Rescue trainers and a Cave Rescue warden present and digging kit only 10 minutes away there was no need to panic. It still took about three quarters of an hour to get him out. The eventual method was simple - send for the digging kit. We then had everyone who could get near pulling on slings round his feet - 1 -2 -3 - pull!!!!- - and again - and again -gradually got him out about 1cm at a time. Just as he emerged the digging kit arrived.

By this stage I had been quietly shivering for well over an hour - probably more like an hour and a half - so was quite pleased to get moving again. David was fed a Mars bar and some water - and we made our way fairly quickly back to Hard Rock, where the welcome sound of the kettle boiling awaited us.

Change out of the wet caving gear (there is a duck in Anklegrinder) and into dry kit, then hot drinks (I had taken some sachets of instant hot chocolate - bliss!). The diggers, Charles and Adrain, were going out that evening, so after a drink and snack and much thanks for their help pulling David out they set off back.

Another evening at Hard Rock. Tilley lights, music in the background and convivial conversation. Andy was adamant we should wander down to see the sump - about 20 minutes walk - all dry - no need to change. It was a relatively easy walk. When we got there the water level was very low. This is one of the divers ways in - much easier than the way we had come. We returned to our comfortable base. There was a wonderful friendly atmosphere, with David and I quizzing Gonzo about Daren Cilau, other places he has dug and caving in general. We listened intently as he poured out amazing amounts of information about the geology of the area, then chatted generally about caving. Much as we were enjoying the company bed beckoned. I was amazed how well I slept - I suppose I was just very tired. David, with badly bruised ribs, slept less well.

Sunday morning - I think! People moving about again (its

difficult to creep about quietly on uneven rocks). The plan was to pack up and set off out, with perhaps a minor diversion. David and I decided straight out was probably the best option as we were still tired. (The thrashing



about in the bedding plane had taken quite a lot out of David). We helped tidy up, then set off with Andy. The other three were to finish tidying, then go look at Half-Mile passage on the way out.

We admired the formations again on the way out and took some photos. I struggled over boulders and complained about being left behind (and refused to



rush), but was more than happy be at the back once we got to the crawling as I knew I could keep up with no problem then. It was still hard work, crawling, rope climbs, ladder pitch etc, but all the time getting closer to the entrance.

Into the entrance crawl - an hour to go. A quite difficult bit then the Square Window. David lined up wrong and had to have a couple of goes - but then went though fine. On and on, an easier bit, then an awkward bit. The others caught us up, so we retreated into little alcoves to let them past. On to the Vice. What would we do if David couldn't get back through? Freeze I think! After a bit of a struggle Andy got through and back far enough for both David and I to pass our bags through to him. David then went though with a fairly minimal amount of struggling, and I followed making sure I didn't let anything drop down into the trench this time! Only 80m to go! Daylight, a wet puddle (it had rained whilst we were in) and out to a beautiful, sunny afternoon., to admire the Llangattock scenery - briefly - before bouncing down the hill to Whitewalls where the inevitable boiling kettle awaited.

What an amazing weekend! Unforgettable memories of amazing places and wonderful people. 18 months ago a trip such as this was something I thought I would never be able to do.

Thanks to Andy for taking us, to Simon and Steve for putting up with us, to Charles and Adrian for helping to rescue David and to Gonzo for sharing his trip with us and being so friendly and kind.

How many people and places can you identify?

