

# SOUTH WALES CAVING CLUB



NEWSLETTER No. 99 1985

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FEBRUARY 1985

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The opinions expressed in articles printed in this Newsletter are those expressed by individual contributors and are not necessarily upheld or supported by the Editor or any other Officer of the South Wales Caving Club.

## EDITORIAL

Whereas I had hoped to produce the 100th Newsletter before retiring, it now looks as though that event will be the province of the new Editor. Consequently, the frustrated author in me could not resist this last opportunity to foist a piece of wholly unexpurgated prose (?) onto a luckless, captive audience.

I shall relinquish the post of Editor with a mixture of relief and regret: relief - from the sheer drudgery of typing, duplicating, collating; in fact, all the aspects of 'production': regret - mainly at the lack of sufficient incoming articles to produce a topical, interesting, balanced and informative, regular Newsletter.

This is not a new problem. The pages of many past Newsletters carry exhortations to 'get writing' from the Editor of the day. Why, then, this disinclination to put pen to paper?

Is it the fear of looking foolish? Inferiority complexes have never seemed to be a problem - especially on Saturday nights!

Is it the fear of an inadequate command of the English Language? Since the Club's second major activity is talking - with or without lubrication - this is not one of the most noticeable character defects within the Membership.

Is it the feeling that your activities are not important or exciting enough to write about? That may or may not be true; but funnily enough, many people like to read stories of an ordinary nature - why not give the Editor a chance to decide?

Is it because you're an inactive, armchair-bound ex-patriot? Do you marvel at/deride modern caving techniques and activities? Do you compare them, nostalgically, with the close-knit group who suffered untold miseries in boiler-suits and long-johns, huddled round a carbide lamp? Nostalgia has its place in today's Newsletters - especially in a Club with so many early cavers still paying their subscriptions!

Everyone that I speak to has firm views about something: caving, conservation, SWCC, the Past, the Present, the Future. The kitchen and dining rooms at the HQ abound with conversations on almost every subject - usually far into the night. So how come this wealth of opinion, fun, fact, fiction, history and histrionics, never reaches a wider audience?

I really cannot believe that the Club consists of three hundred fearful, inarticulate, boring, armchair-bound, opinionless, dyslexic, apathetics - so - why not give the new Editor, whoever it is, a really hard time. Bombard him with articles from every angle, on every subject, in every form - typewritten, handwritten, photographic - and then ask him why we don't get four Newsletters a year!

It should work; but, as you are probably aware - a proposition is the wrong thing to end an Editorial with!

Dave Edwards

OGOF Y DARREN CILAU - MYNYDD LLANGATTWG

Those Members of SWCC who take the 'Caves and Caving' magazine may recall an article in the August 1983 issue entitled 'Agen Allwedd, Trident and the Missing Link', written by Clive Gardener of Chelsea Speleological Society. In his article, Clive assessed the caving potential of Mynydd Llangattwg after Bill Gascoine had done his comprehensive dye-testing exercise of the area, and after Trident passage had gone some considerable way into the blank, cave-less parts of the mountain.

Clive's attempts at breaking into the open passageways that are bound to exist between Agen Allwedd and Eglwys Faen have always been thwarted, mainly due to the constrictedness of the passages that he has chosen to push. Clive's recent attention however, has been turned towards Darren Cilau; a somewhat notorious cave, normally only done once in a caver's lifetime on account of the 1,500 - 2,000 feet of constricted, arduous, downright-miserable entrance series.

That some large extension could be made in Darren Cilau has never been doubted, but relatively easier pickings presented themselves at Pwll-y-Gwynt, Northern Stream Passage and Trident Passage, and so, for a long time, Darren Cilau was ignored.

Clive had managed to persuade others of CSS to prod around at the junction of the Entrance Series with the large Rift Passage and, using his intuition gained in discovering Northern Stream Passage in Agen Allwedd, he surmised that the Entrance Series passage crossed under the floor of Rift Passage and continued more or less in a straight line.

A couple of easy digging trips had seen access gained to a loose boulder choke; however, a strong draught and black holes in the choke indicated a way on. A Friday evening digging trip on the 7th September 1984 by Clive, John Cooper and 'Jock' Williams (all of CSS), had seen a lot of the choke moved and disassembled but they decided to wait until Saturday morning, when Martyn Farr and myself would be present, before continuing.

Next day saw a slightly awkward moment when, just as we were getting changed, Steve West, John Lister and his wife suddenly appeared at 'Whitewalls' to do a 'Grand Circle' trip in Agen Allwedd. Their enquiries as to where we were going armed with ladders, crowbars and hammers was met with something vague enough, but we couldn't help feeling that word about the dig had somehow got out - so rare is it these days to see other SWCC Members over at Llangattwg (dig, dig!).

Progress through the entrance series took about an hour and Clive was followed to the junction with Rift Passage. Here it is possible to turn left and see a large crystal pool and frozen waterfall, whilst to the right is the main way on to the known parts of the cave. Martyn and I were astounded when Clive disappeared behind boulders resting against the apparently blank left-hand wall. Martyn remarked to me on how obscure a place it was to have a dig but these words were soon cut short by the presence of a draught and the entry to a small chamber with large, unsupported blocks.

Clive could be seen dismantling the effects of the previous night's 'dig' and he then invited Martyn to push the nitty-gritty bits of the choke. Meanwhile, Jock had managed to gash his hand badly enough to warrant evacuation and just as I was having honourable and noble thoughts of accompanying him out of the cave, Martyn excitedly shouted back that the choke had gone. With that, all noble thoughts on my part evaporated - especially as John volunteered to escort Jock out.





Bidding them farewell, I followed Clive who was being carefully directed through the worst of the choke which, on first inspection, looked loose and horrible. For the final part it was necessary to squeeze (minus cells) through a tight hole which dropped into a large passage. The choke, incidentally, has been considerably enlarged after one CSS Member took an hour and a half to get through.

The passage started at the top of a large pile of calcited boulders with some impressive curtains nearby which unfortunately now look scarred after the 'bangs' required to get through the choke. Flowstone on the left-hand wall provided a pleasant backdrop to a passage which could be seen going off into the darkness.

The ensuing thrill, experienced by all three of us, in setting off down this large, 15ft high by 20ft wide passage will be one we shall savour. It was probably just like the feelings experienced by SWCC when they broke through the Long Crawl in Dan-yr-Ogof, or the Hereford when breaking through into Barons Chamber in Agen Allwedd. Martyn reacted in a strange and noisy way, bashing a crowbar against his ammo box as he walked along the virgin passages - possibly in an exorcism of any Darren Cilau equivalent of 'Smith' - but luckily we didn't seem to encounter any resistance from Choke Spirits as the passage continued large for several hundred feet.

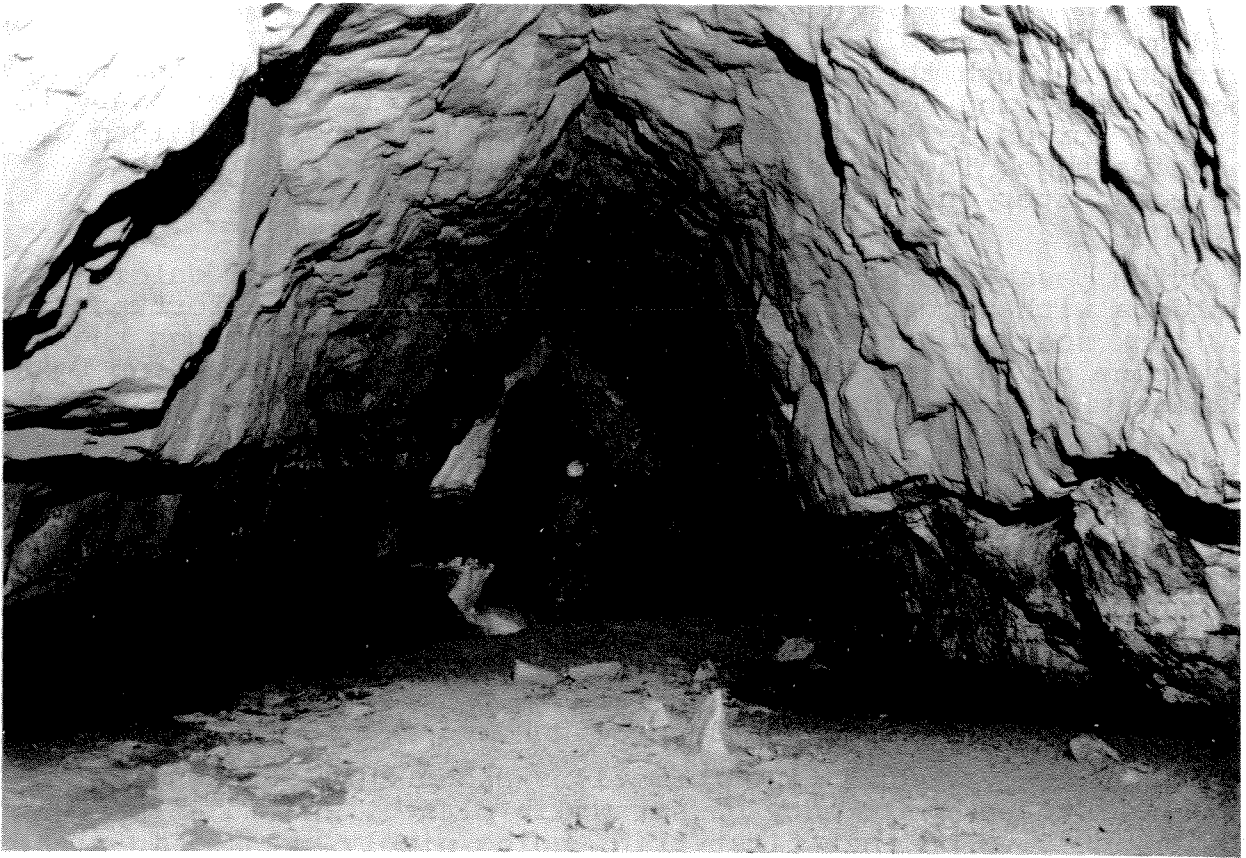
We passed several fine formations along the left-hand wall with some helictites and plenty of straws in places. The mud floor was most attractive on that first trip, being nicely cracked in places and also with small cliffs of layered sands, very reminiscent of the 'Cliffs of Dover' in Agen Allwedd but on a much reduced scale.

The passage eventually closed down, but what at first seemed to be a choke turned out to be a constriction of laminated mud that had dried up, leaving a small hole above to crawl through. Near here, more stals were revealed; one of which had the appearance of a miniature, Northerner's Clog-boot. After traversing this passage for some 1500ft, we lost the small stream under the right-hand wall and the way on, straight ahead, led into a vast, flat-roofed chamber with breakdown boulders in the floor. A large boulder slope went up before us and on climbing to the top of this we were surprised to find a large passage trending west-east in a similar fashion to Rift Passage's junction with the entrance series.

Taking the western leg; that is, the right-hand passage, we discovered that this soon opened out into a chamber with a 60ft high roof and a large talus cone of rubble filling it. The passage continued large, past the chamber, eventually finishing in a large choke which was by-passed low on the left. This gave us access to an equally large passage with many loose boulders and blocks, all ready to crash down at the slightest touch, making this part of the cave both noisy and somewhat frightening to traverse. The chamber that we encountered at the end of this large passage turned out to be our large chamber, having been led in a complete loop.

We explored a sizeable passage leading off the top of the boulder slope in the chamber and this headed in a westerly direction, trending towards Eglwys Faen and Trident Passage in Agen Allwedd. In fact, this passage was reminiscent of Trident in some respects, such as passage shape, colour of the rock and the few tight parts that we had to negotiate.

Our progress was halted after 900ft by a choke which Clive immediately dived into giving Martyn and me a chance for a rest.



We pulled Clive away from the choke with the same degree of difficulty one experiences when pulling a child from a favourite toy, and, ignoring Clive's fevered mutterings of 'Way into Eglwys Faen; let me dig', dragged him away to the other open passages that we were convinced waited in other parts of the cave.

Next, we turned our attention to the junction with the breakthrough entrance passage, carrying on only to find that the cave closed down into miserable proportions; however, this was not endured for long as the passage opened up again after crawling low on the left into a large passage trending south-east. This started, noisily, over large blocks which again moved at the slightest touch, but some climbs over these led to the obvious way on.

Evidence of an old, dead, streambed could be seen on the right-hand side of the passage where it undercut and meandered under the wall revealing a good few hundred feet of pseudo cave passage. Keeping to the main passage, the floor gradually became easier and uniform and soon turned into a pleasant, mud-filled floor with Agen Allwedd type cracks. The banks of mud had been invaded by an old stream, long since dried up, and in the streambed were several fine specimens of selenite crystals. Some of these were five to six inches long and others, stained brown, resembled clusters of cock-tail sticks, sticking out from the mud. Dozens of spherical objects littered the streambed and I think that these are a form of cave pearl as they are so rounded. They are, however, brown and have a cap of white crystal which has formed around all the specimens at about the same place.

More formations were passed as we progressed, a most impressive one being a stalagmite very similar to the 'Pagoda' in Ogof Craig-a-Ffynnon - in fact, when we saw this formation all three of us were beginning to wonder if we were about to connect the two systems.

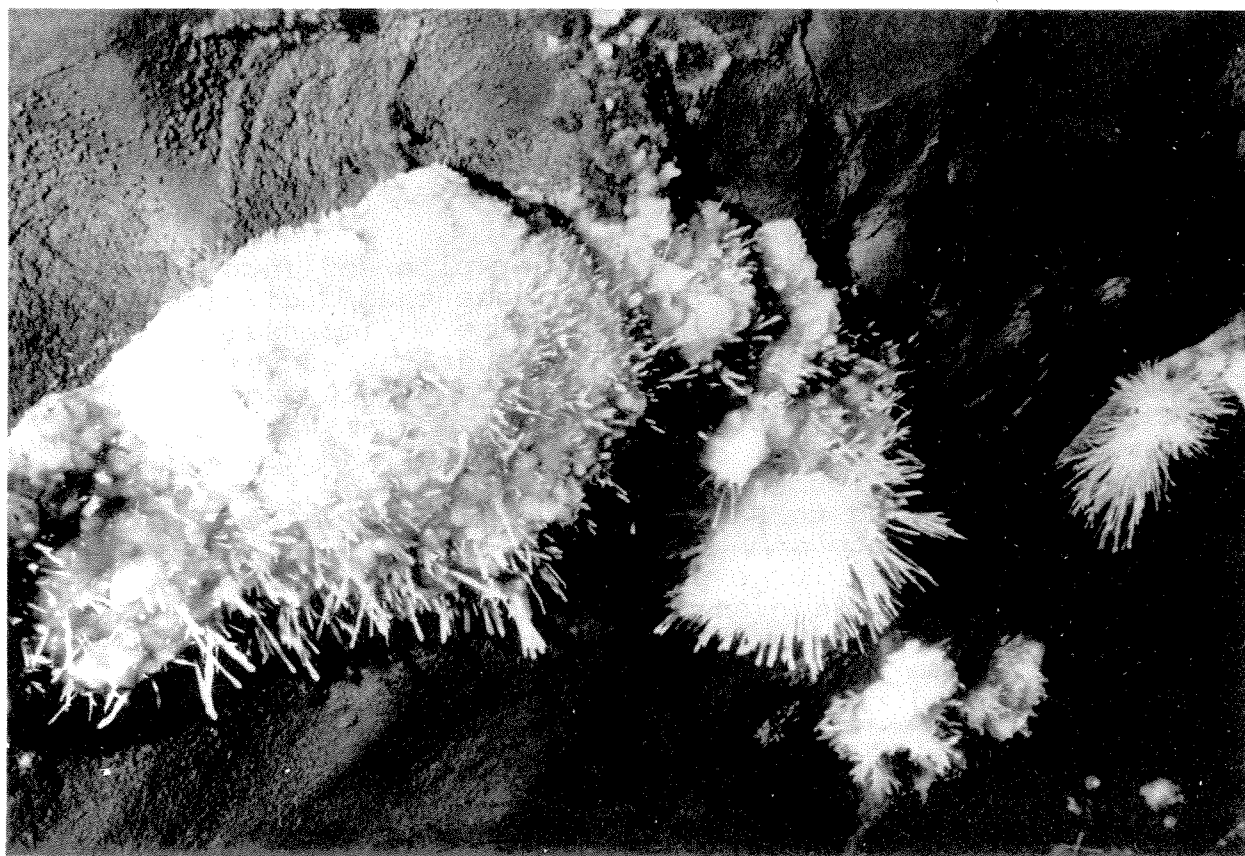
A small stream with good, clean water emerged from the left-hand wall and this provided the only good, clean drinking-water in the whole of the cave. (One should take care not to swallow any of the shrimps scudding around). This place was named the 'Kitchen', mainly on account of the subsequent siting of a limited rescue dump with supplies of food.

From here the route ascended a boulder pile and into a series of crawls, which are more of an inconvenience than a difficulty, and these led into large passage again with quite an impressive bridge of rock lying at an angle across it. A chamber lay at the end of this passage with some features that generated great excitement - such as two forty-foot pots, both with small streams at the bottom, both streams flowing in large, open cave-passage. We had a wee giggle here when Martyn lobbed stones into the passage below with a 'Sorry John' (referring to Parker), so convinced were we that these pots would lead into some unrevealed or unclimbed avens in Ogof Craig-a-Ffynnon. The large passage eventually closed down into an area of choke which left even Clive doubting that a way through could be found. We retraced our steps at this point, Martyn pacing out a distance of some two and a half miles back to the breakthrough choke; a figure proved reasonably accurate by subsequent surveying.

Later trips have seen the two pots descended into 900ft of streamway, choked at both ends. Both chokes are currently receiving attention.

Bill Gascoine has been getting some results with the green stuff and has proved that the Pen Eryr stream (a small cave in the quarries near Darren Cilau) connects with the 'Kitchen' stream and flows below





the two pots. The stream in the entrance series has also been proved to flow into the new breakthrough entrance series passage, since christened 'Jigsaw Passage'.

Much surveying has been done, one trip seeing nine hundred metres surveyed in one go. The only problem is that the existing entrance series needs to be resurveyed due to possible inaccuracies in the old survey. This will take some time.

Radio location tests with the 'Ogofone' have confirmed that the cave is trending mainly south-east and ends just south of the surface depression - Waun Cynr, placing the cave parallel to, and in between, Ogof Craig-a-Ffynnon and the Agen Allwedd mainstream sumps.

So far, £50 worth of tape has been used up laying a path to protect mud and calcite formations, the vast majority of which should stay good and fresh for generations to come.

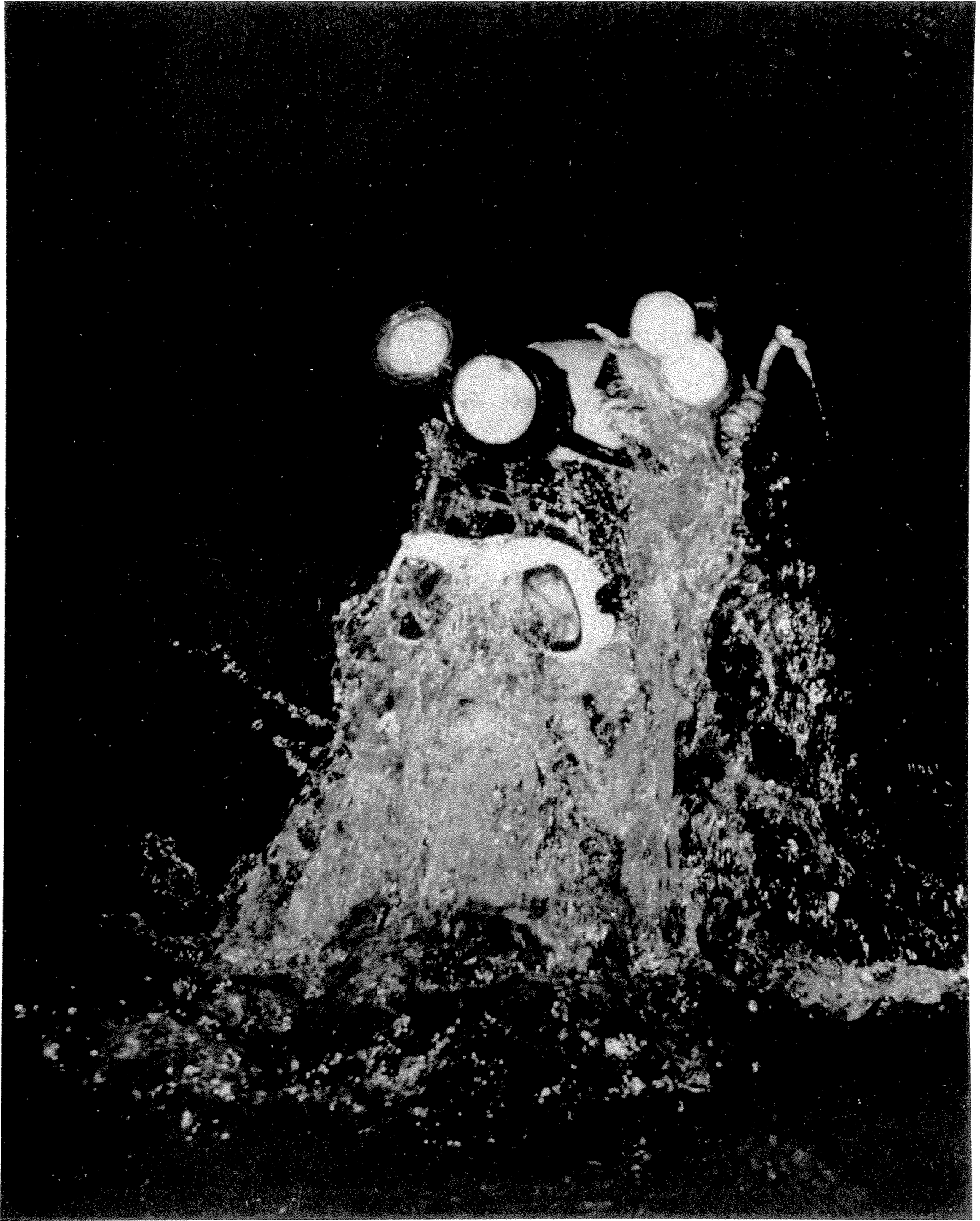
Some really surprising finds in the cave were Antler and Urchin passages - possibly some of the most pretty, and perhaps some of the rarest, passages in Britain. Antler passage has revealed large helictites resembling a stag's headgear among other impressive formations, whilst Urchin passage has many pure-white formations resembling calcite pin-cushions or hedgehogs. Typically, these formations have radiating rods of white needles, some 3 - 4 inches long, and it is my hunch that these formations are Aragonite which, although common in France and the USA, is fairly rare in British caves.

There are no access problems with the cave as yet, but the CSS ask that visitors call in to 'Whitewalls' to confirm where they are going in the extension so as not to blunder into any 'digging' activities that will probably be carried out over the coming months. No doubt the CSS lads will grimly point out that care and caution will need to be exercised within the extension, and then show the toy plastic revolver hanging on the wall which comprises the 'Darren Cilau Rescue Kit'. All other known, tried and tested rescue methods are guaranteed not to succeed in the entrance series for anything serious such as a broken leg.

It is also recommended that wetsuits (full, good ones) be worn, more to protect the body from knocks received than to protect against excessive wetness. The standard Ogof Ffynnon Ddu II exploration kit of short trousers is definitely not recommended, unless you have replacement plastic kneecaps in the car.

What the future months will reveal is mostly open to conjecture but our hopes of achieving a link-up with one of the known systems is fairly high. When things eventually 'go', we may well have a system to rival Lancaster/Easegill and Ogof Ffynnon Ddu under Llangattwg. Time, and much effort, will tell.

Paul Tarrant





## THE GREAT FOREST - A FINAL DECISION?

In SWCC Newsletter No.75, published in 1974, I gave an outline of the Great Forest and its relevance to the Club. In the last two years the matter has come alive again as the Commons Commissioner informed all those who had registered rights that he wished to 'hear' all objections against them.

Briefly, solicitors Jeffries & Powell of Brecon, who act for the Allotment Holders' Association, had objected to all registrations in the Great Forest on the grounds that the Forest was not a Common under the terms of the Commons Registration Act. Their principal objection was a very important one in that if they were right, then the Forest land belonged to the Allotment Holders. This was particularly interesting since Lord Tredegar had claimed the freehold and indeed sold it to Eagle Star Insurance Company and the Welsh Water Authority. Both these bodies showed great interest and employed legal representation. Just before the final hearing, Eagle Star sold out their interest to the National Park who then had a very vested interest in ensuring that the Forest was a Common.

Over the years I have studied the Great Forest in considerable detail. I was of the view that the Forest was indeed an Allotment and joined with the Allotment Holders to support them. I did this in a private capacity and not as a representative of the Club - despite what it says in the Commissioners Report. I was torn by a conflict of interests: one was the fact that it was in the Club's interest that the Forest was a Common (in that it could be properly regulated by its new owner, the National Park, and by allowing our Members relative freedom over it in the future); the other was that having studied the pro's and con's of the case over many years, I felt that natural justice was on the side of the Allotment Holders. These unfortunate people had agreed to an Act of Parliament which reduced their rights of commonage, from 40,000 to some 17,000 acres, on the understanding that they would become freeholders. The King had a half share of the Forest, to sell off freehold unencumbered with common rights, and the balance of acreage was sold to cover the cost of the legal fees involved in the passing of the Act. In the event, the commoners, alarmed at the cost of partitioning the Forest giving each a freehold share, agreed to another Act to allow them to own it in severalty thus saving the expense of partitioning. Unfortunately, the Crown managed to word the second Act in a very obscure way and which the Commissioner (1984) has now judged to be in favour of the Crown of the day. The Commissioner, who has the powers of a High Court Judge in these matters, has ruled that the Act of 1819 can only be interpreted as being in favour of the Crown, so the commoners who once had commonage over 40,000 acres, ended up with the same over 17,000 acres - for nothing!

The Club's interest is in the limestone quarry at Penwyllt and I do not see that our claim can be disputed. My relations with Jeffries & Powell are cordial and I think that they are friendly to us. The objections to rights of common within the quarry should be heard in the coming months, unless they are withdrawn. I would like Members to see the sort of documentation sent from the Commissioners Office, together with the atrocious spelling, but the Editor may censor it as being too long and complex for Members to appreciate. (See introduction to report - Ed.). I suppose that I really ought to write a book on the subject although I doubt whether it would find general interest among Members - or would it? Anyway, I will produce some sort of map of the Forest for the next Newsletter. It is interesting to conjecture what the effect would have been had the Allotment Holders won the case in 1984. They would have become liable

to costs for fencing off all land where it is crossed by public roads. It appears that only common land can remain unfenced these days. The costs would have been astronomic and would have possibly caused severe financial problems to the Association. Perhaps that would have been the price of justice?

Roger Smith

Editor's Note:

The following is my attempt at a precis of the 'Commissioners Decision' document which accompanied Roger's article. I felt that an attempted 'straight copy' (complete with yards of reference numbers and the aforementioned atrocious spelling) would be confusing and difficult to digest without repeated reading, although the content seemed worthy of reproduction. The large content of 'legalese' has been, as far as possible, eliminated; the spelling mistakes may or may not have been corrected - it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between legal wording and spelling mistakes!

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Forest covered an area of about 40,000 acres west of the Brecon Beacons. According to Historians, the Forest had been set aside initially by the Welsh Kings as a reserve in which they could hunt. Such areas were subject to a special Forest Law prohibiting hunting by outsiders. The Forest was taken over shortly after the Norman invasion of Britain, by one of the followers of William the Conqueror. The Forest came into the Crown Ownership by attainder during the reign of Henry the Eighth.

Throughout most of this period there were people who enjoyed rights of common over the Forest but in the later half of the 18th century the rights of the Commoners were challenged by a claim by the Crown. The Crown wished to let cattle from outside the area graze the Forest and to receive payment for such grazing, even though this would leave insufficient pasture for the Commoners' own herds. The opposition of the Commoners led, in 1786, to the filing of a suit against two of them by the Crown to substantiate its claim. The verdict of the Court upheld the Crown's claim.

In 1808, an act known as 'the 1808 Act' was passed to improve the land revenue of the Crown in England and also of His Majesty's Duchy of Lancaster. The chief, if not the only reason for introducing this legislation appears to have been the cost of the Napoleonic Wars. The power to sell Crown Lands conferred by the 1808 Act specifically included the rights and interest of the Crown in the Great Forest.

In the following year, a report commissioned by the Surveyor General recommended the sale of the Crown's interest in the Great Forest. The appearance of this proposal revived the Commoners' claim to exclusive rights of pasturage over the Forest lands and challenged the right of the Crown to let such pasturage to outsiders. The Crown quickly brought proceedings against two Yeomen, Watkin Lloyd and David Jones, who were prominent in the campaign to defend the Commoners' rights. The claim was for 'Intrusion, Trespass, and contriving the Disinheritance of the Lord the King'. The issue of these proceedings united the Commoners and other parties in the same interest. A committee was formed, headed by the Marquis of Camden, and it was resolved to defend the action and to raise funds for that purpose.

The proceedings were ultimately compromised upon terms that the Crown would abandon its proposal of selling the Forest and would proceed instead by way of inclosure by an Inclosure Act.

The terms for inclosure contained in the 1815 Act were briefly as follows: it was proposed to divide the Forest equally between the Crown and the Commoners after selling off a section sufficient to pay for valuations and administrative work. A list of Commoners was drawn up and each was to receive an allotment of land, preferably adjacent to his property, proportionate to the value of his 'dominant tenement' to be fenced by him at his own expense.

For reasons which do not appear to have been contemplated by those who agreed to the provisions of the 1815 Act, the cost of the work to be carried out by the Commissioners and Surveyors and the amount of land which had to be sold to meet those costs, so far exceeded what had been envisaged that the value of the land to be allotted to individual Commoners would not meet the expense of inclosure and cultivation. It was therefore decided to abandon the plans for inclosure and to introduce a scheme whereby the residue of the Forest, after provision for expenses and the Crown's half share, would be allotted to the listed Commoners to be enjoyed by them in common as before, but freed from all Forestal rights.

These new arrangements were set out in the 1818 Act which also included a section which expressly revoked the Commissioners power (under the 1815 Act) to allot land to individual Commoners. The new provisions read:

"And be it further enacted, that all the Rest, Residue and Remainder of the said Lands and grounds by the said Act (the 1815 Act) directed to be divided, allotted and inclosed, shall be and remain open and uninclosed for the benefit of the several other Owners or Proprietors of ancient Messuages, Cottages, inclosed Lands and grounds entitled to Rights of Common in, over and upon the said Lands and grounds, according to their several and respective Rights and Interests therein, freed and discharged from all Forestal Rights, and from all Claims of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and all Persons lawfully claiming under him or them, save and except such Rights and Interests as are hereinafter expressly excepted and reserved to His Majesty, His Heirs and successors."

Section 14 of the 1818 Act, apart from extinguishing all Rights of Common over the King's allotted share of the Forest, specified the excepted Rights and Interests of the King over the Commoners' share; expressed as: 'minor to any Mines of Coal, Lead Ores, or any other minerals whatsoever in or under the same Forest or any part thereof; but that His Majesty, His Heirs and successors, and His or their lessers and grantees, Agents, Servants, and Workmen, may search for, raise and carry away all Coal, Lead Ores, Metals, and all other minerals whatsoever, as if this Act had not been passed.'

The award made pursuant to the 1818 Act was dated 10th June 1819 and contained a schedule setting out the names of 542 claimants whose right to be Commoners had been established and the properties for which the respective claims had been made. The area allotted to the Crown was 13,860 acres and to the Commoners, 17,106 acres.

(The next section of the Decision dealt with the various grounds for objection and the various submissions of the objectors, both for and against the view that the Common was an Allotment. This was followed by the Commissioner's reasoning behind his decision and closes with the statement as follows:)

In my view, the ownership of the soil of the Forest was in the Crown before the allotments directed by the Act of 1818 were made and that ownership continued after the allotments had been made. Neither the allotment made by the Commissioners, nor anything else done by them in pursuance of the 1818 Act had the effect of transferring the

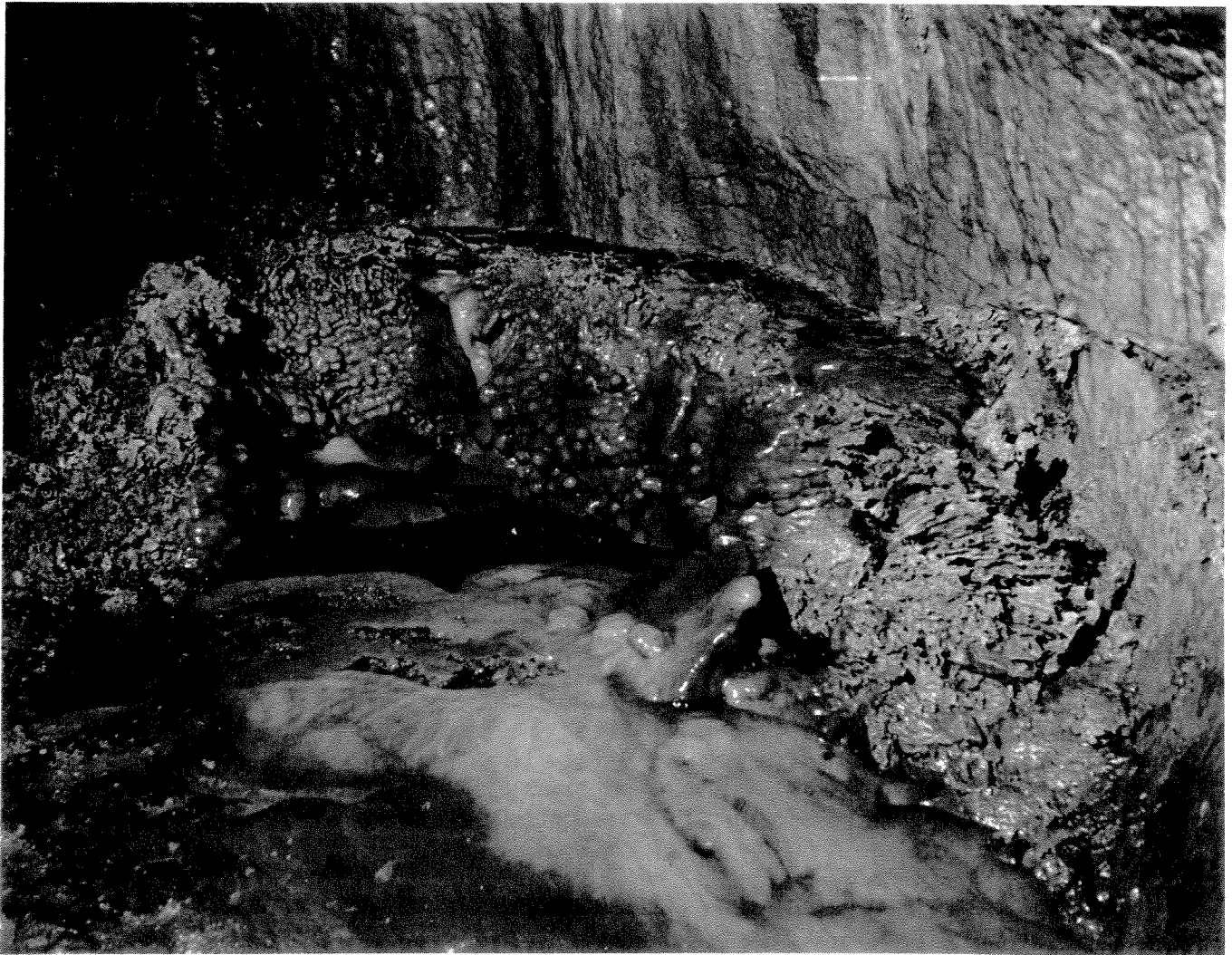
ownership, or any part of the ownership, of the soil of that part of the Forest which was allocated to the Commoners share away from the Crown.

I therefore declare that the award made on 12th June 1819 by Henry de Bruyn and John Cleese did not convey to the persons named in the Schedule thereto any freehold estate in the 17,106 acres of open and uninclosed lands of the Forest therein referred to as 'Residue for Commonage', but merely defined the area of the Forest over which such persons would hereafter enjoy such rights of common as they had previously enjoyed over the whole Forest but free from all Forestal Rights.

I am required by regulation 30(1) of the Commons Commissioners Regulations 1971 to explain that a person aggrieved by this decision as being erroneous in point of law may, within 6 weeks from the date on which notice of the decision is sent to him, require me to state a case for the decision of the High Court.

The Decision is dated 11th(?) July 1984 and is signed by the Commons Commissioner.

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Shakehole behind Llygad Llwchwr (671.178)

Following Bill Gascoine's successful dyetests, it was decided to have an exploratory dig at one of the large shakeholes in the field behind Llygad Llwchwr. The largest shakehole, nearest the cave, was chosen as there is a nice solid cliff at one side. Hereford Caving Club had recently been refused permission to dig here so it was necessary to adopt a surreptitious approach. Three visits were made under cover of darkness and the digging site was hidden using branches and boulders. A small phreatic-tube was exposed trending downwards into a rift on the left. However, after six feet of progress along the tube it was possible to see that the continuing rift soon became impassable. Any further digging here will have to be a concerted effort, following the main cliff-face down - permission from the farmer would obviously have to be obtained first.

Pal-y-Cwrt (674.182)

Five trips were made into this cave during 1981 in an attempt to dig out the mud-choked bedding at the end of the main left-hand passage. Digging was highly unpleasant, the bright-red mud being extremely glutinous. After ten feet a small grotto was entered, but the way on was completely choked.

In March 1983, two trips were undertaken in the space of five days. A small hole to one side of the main, boulder-choked bedding issued a good draught and this prompted the quick return. Some large boulders were removed and entry gained to a lower bedding plane. Unfortunately, this closed down to a mere two inches in height in the down-dip direction, whilst up-dip led back into known passage after ten feet.

Rift East of Ogof Uwch y Corlan (687.184)

A choked rift was dug to a depth of six feet, the passage continuing in a southerly direction for eight feet until it became too tight.

Ogof Dan-yr-Odyn (716.193)

The gravel-filled choke at the end of the cave proved to be a very easy dig. Ten feet of passage led round a bend to an upward-trending rift which was choked with large boulders after a few feet.

Deadend Tube (727.193)

A small hole at the base of a cliff was enlarged sufficiently to enable a cross-rift to be reached. This was too narrow in both directions.

Ogof Fern (730.191)

One hours digging opened up a small phreatic-tube heading south. It became choked with flowstone after six feet.

Redbrick Cave (739.189)

Situated below the eastern end of Herbert's Quarry, this cave was dug out for eight feet to a point where the roof dips down and the walls close in. A stream can be heard beyond this point in wet weather.

Ogof Foel Fawr (735.188)

Two sites in the HCC extension at the end of the cave have





received attention. The first of these is on the left as one enters the extension. A well-developed passage ended after thirty feet, in a sand choke which was dug for six feet to reveal a narrow rift going off to the right. The rift was pushed for ten tortuous feet and continues ahead, just about passable as long as one is not concerned about getting out again. The main sand choke carries on past the start of the rift and should be dug.

The other site is at the end of the extension where the main passage ends in a choked sump. Just left of the sump is another pool, above which is a very narrow rift emitting a slight draught. Twelve banging trips resulted in six to eight feet of incredibly slow progress and the dig has now been abandoned due to the fact that it is almost certain to connect with a shakehole on the surface.

In the Shaky Series, a small find was made in the area of avens which lie off to the right just before the end of this part of the cave. An ascending phreatic-tube ended in a loose choke. This was removed to give access to a further aven, climbed for thirty feet to a horizontal passage leading off. A tight squeeze led to a small chamber, the only way on being a tight bedding. This does draught slightly however, and might be worth another look.

#### Easter Cave (737.189)

Forty feet of passage was found at the top of the climb opposite the ladder pitch. A tube was dug out for ten feet, the passage continuing as a tall, but very narrow, rift. This was eventually pushed to a cross-joint beyond which further digging is needed but is impractical. Should anyone want to go there, it is worth noting that the initial tube tends to fill with water creating a nasty duck which requires baling.

#### Guineas Cave (747.181)

This cave is situated on the eastern side of a large shakehole. Digging under a low arch led into a small, shattered chamber, the way on being down in the floor. Very high up in the limestone so further prospects poor.

#### Llynfell Pot (761.172)

Six trips have resulted in a thirty foot shaft accessible only to midgets. A very narrow rift has been widened by blasting and it is hoped to make it larger in the near future. Boulders block the way on at the bottom and it will be necessary to get more than one person down the shaft in order to move these. The entrance lies just beneath the Honeycomb Sandstone and it is in a good position to meet up with the water from the main sink.

#### Ogofau Blaen Llynfell (768.185)

These three small caves lie in a large depression between Pwll Swnd and Garreg Las. There is a large sink here in wet weather and HCC have dug the cave above the sink. This is not very promising and appears to be just a cavity formed by collapse beneath the sink itself. The other two caves are east of the sink and consist of small tubes. A dig in the northern one continues but is unpleasant due to the black, peaty material one is removing.

#### Carreg yr Ogof Area (778.215)

A lot of work has been done at several sites in this area, with limited success. A separate article will appear in a future Newsletter, by which time it is hoped that something decent will have been found.



## Conclusions

Much ground has been covered over the last three years but little has been found in the way of new cave passage. It is important not to become too downhearted as a result, although this is sometimes easier said than done. The vast potential of the area remains - between the Lluchwr in the west and Frwd Las in the east there are three systems comparable to Ogof Ffynnon Ddu and Dan-yr-Ogof. The hard part is getting into them in the first place; exploration should then be relatively straightforward. We are fortunate in having an almost virgin area within which to work, very like the Swansea Valley in the 1940's. The caves are there to be found and if we do not find them then somebody else will, be it in 20, 30 or 40 years time. Digging is bound to pay dividends eventually and we must persevere despite the numerous setbacks. There are literally hundreds of sites, both on the surface and underground, which have not been properly examined. The next shakehole or boulder-choke could easily prove to be the key to a major breakthrough. Access to the Black Mountain is virtually unrestricted and the only obstacle to further progress is our own apathy. Most of the good digging sites involve walks of two miles or more but this merely increases the attraction rather than acting as a drawback. The area is wild and unspoilt and provides some of the best walking country in southern Britain. Finding the miles of passage which must exist will be a nice bonus but, for myself at least, just being there is enough.

N.J.Rogers

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## UPPER BLACKHOLE - A NEW CAVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE IN GOWER

The cave is situated at about 60m O.D. on the east side of the precipitous dry valley ending in Blackhole Gut on the South Gower coast. The low entrance, originally almost filled with rubble, faces north and is  $1\frac{1}{2}$ m wide,  $\frac{1}{2}$ m high at NGR SS4422.8560. The passage from it runs at 200 degrees, i.e. almost S by W for almost 2m and then curves to the right. In November 1983 some rubble was removed from the floor during an attempt to get inside to determine the cave's potential as a bat hibernation site. Bones were noticed amongst the rubble and when washed, two were seen to be human bones. A brief excavation was then undertaken in the same month to see if this was an archaeological cave. The following human and animal bones were recovered over an area of one square metre, the maximum depth reached being only 20cm:

### HUMAN:

Incisor tooth; first mandibular premolar from the right side with the apex of the crown worn flat, suggesting a young adult.  
Skull fragment being the right mastoid process. None of these items had any trace of stalagmite on them.  
Clavicle fragment; 56mm long, with both articular ends missing, carrying a trace of stalagmite.  
Top rib; 58mm, no stalagmite.  
Tibia fragment; 83mm long but with both ends broken off and missing.  
Metatarsus III right; 62mm long with distal end missing, stalagmited.  
Metatarsus V right; 38mm long with the distal end missing and the proximal end damaged. With so much damage there is some doubt about the precise positioning of this metatarsus. Stalagmite absent.  
Phalange; 31mm long, probably the second phalange position.

### ANIMAL:

Only bones of small mammals were found, all except pig being species

commonly appearing in cave deposits.

Fox - mandible from the left side and of considerable interest; M2 and M3 are absent while M1, P4, P3, P2 and P1 are present but all in a very worn condition; indeed, the P3 and P4 are worn quite flat while the M1 on the labial side is worn down to the base of the crown. Also the canine was lost in life and the alveolus is healed over. This was clearly an old individual when it died. No skull of this animal was seen but other fox bones turned up and have not been kept, except for an atlas.

Pig - a mandibular incisor and a phalange. The incisor was 38mm long while the phalange was from a juvenile as its proximal epiphysis was missing.

Badger - Atlas, left and right radius 106mm long, partners from the same individual. A right tibia of 103mm and a left tibia of 106mm indicating two individuals.

Not assigned to species were a pelvis fragment and other pieces of bone.

In the very small area of cave excavated the matrix was found to be a brown, stony cave-earth much disturbed by animals to 20cm depth, but below this the earth became redder with more clay and this layer was not excavated. With the cave earth were pieces of broken stalagmite  $\frac{1}{2}$ cm thick and up to 15cm across, together with small pieces (1 -  $1\frac{1}{2}$ cm) of a shiny coal. The local coal is a shiny anthracite but the nearest outcrop is about 12km away to the north-east. There is no obvious explanation for the broken stalagmite and coal, but Upper Blackhole is clearly an archaeological cave of some importance. In the interests of its conservation, large stones were piled back in the entrance and a number of timbers fixed across them to deter sheep.

Mel Davies

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#### SANDFILL PASSAGE EXTENSION - OGOF FFYNNON DDU II

Having passed the start of this passage several times whilst on high-level through trips, it was decided to see exactly how it ended. The smaller, left-hand branch, an active inlet, received attention first. Removing a solid rock corner led to a disappointing 15 feet of new passage, the way on being diggable but not very promising. The choke at the end of the main passage was then examined but was found to be solidly calcited and looked a long-term proposition. A very narrow passage was noticed hidden behind a large boulder in the final chamber however, and ten minutes work with a hammer and bar enabled access to be gained to a larger cross-rift. This did not appear too hopeful at first, closing down to the left and ending in a calcited choke to the right. A few rocks were pulled out of the choke and enthusiasm was rekindled by the sound of a stream in the distance. A reasonable draught was also felt heading inwards.

Further digging turned out to be rather difficult and it took two more trips to reach the sound of the water. Once past the choke, a steeply-descending phreatic tube led to a junction. Straight ahead, a short drop entered a small chamber, the stream coming in via a waterfall and flowing away into a tight bedding. The main way on lay to the right at the junction, a short, dry oxbow soon meeting up with the upstream continuation. The passage was walking sized, up to ten feet high, and it was obvious from the unspoilt nature of the mud deposits that we were its first visitors. This was highly encouraging because we had been half expecting to meet up with the recently

surveyed Lower Oxbow Extensions within a short distance. The floor consisted of beautifully scalloped moonmilk and our initial euphoria was tempered by the grim realisation that every step we took was contributing to the destruction of this unique feature. Proceeding as carefully as possible, a further junction was reached; the stream emerging from a passage 6 feet up on the right. A large choke blocked the way on here but succumbed to ten minutes frantic digging. Several hundred feet of quite well-decorated passage led to a point where the stream flowed from a small tube in the right-hand wall. A dry continuation of the main passage soon split in two, both branches ending in chokes after a short distance. Some side passages were examined on the way out, but none of these went very far or looked too promising.

It was only after we had returned to the HQ and drawn up a rough survey that we realised that we had left one 'lead' completely untouched. This was a walking-sized passage leading straight on from the junction below the '10 minute' choke. The thought of an open passage leading to who-knows-where was too much to resist and this was pushed the following day.

Fifty feet of sandy rift led to a wide, sand-filled bedding which had to be dug for fifteen feet or so. At the far side was a deep pool with a crystal floor, the pool continuing round a corner. Floating through the pool in an attempt to preserve the floor, a very wet section was passed before reaching a calcite slope trending upwards. An intimidating-looking squeeze was the next obstacle and this would have been left but for the fact that a stream could be heard somewhere ahead. Passing the squeeze proved relatively easy once one's cell was removed, and a small chamber was entered. The sound of the stream came from the other side of an impassable rift but it was possible to see through this into a 6 to 8 feet high passage. Work continues at this point and it is expected that the rift will be passed within another couple of trips.

Both the upstream and downstream limits of the main passage have now been pushed by anorexic 'thin-men' to points where further progress is impractical. The stream is the same one which one sees on the way to 'Haydn's Dig' from the bottom of the skyhook, the survey showing the furthest point of the extension to be directly under this passage. It is assumed that the water flows into the Mainstream Passage via Splash Inlet, but this has not been proven.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this extension is that it shows just how much more cave can be found in a supposedly worked-out area. Whilst not of supreme significance when viewed in the context of Ffynnon Ddu as a whole, 250 - 300 metres of new passage is nice reward for a few days work. There is still plenty of passage waiting to be found in the system and this find, along with that in Ogof Ffynnon Ddu 1½, certainly provides hope for the future.

The following people were responsible for the discovery and exploration of this extension:- P.Bolt, C.Gardner, J.N.Goodwin, M.Hicks, J.Lister, T.Neatherway, A.Richardson, N.J.Rogers, S.West.

Thanks to N.Geh and friends for undertaking the surveying.

N.B. Anyone visiting the extension in the near future and noticing lengths of wire in place at several points should not be misled into thinking that instantaneously combustible materials were at any time used. The cable was put in for use as a guideline in case our lights failed and we had to find our way out in the dark. Honest!

N.J.Rogers

TWLL CARW COCH

Some years ago, whilst walking with friends, I came upon a hole on the hillside. It had all the signs of a place to dig; good limestone, water markings, a struggling Mountain Ash and a location in an ancient, high dry-valley.

When time and enthusiasm permitted I started to dig, first with family and then, as the need arose, with recruited labour. To start, we removed limestone fragments which had obviously eroded from the sides of the hole and these gave way to two large limestone slabs which had also come from the sides. A small, blind passage at this level was filled with bones; none of which, at this time, were thought to be significant. They were the remains of large dogs.

Timber for shuttering was hauled to the site and the top made safe. The large boulders were by-passed and we worked on the rubble of limestone and old red sandstone which lay under them. It was at this stage that the mystery of Twll Carw Coch began to develop, for lying in the boulders was the first of the human skulls.

Examined by experts, the skull was classed as unimportant. The poor soul was too old to be of forensic interest, and too young to enthuse archaeologists. It appears that the skull was the property of a man of some 30 years of age, dwelling in the area some 600 years or so ago. So we dug on down, damming the sides with timber and dumping our boulder spoil on the surface. Bones abounded in the boulders; antlers, ribs and vertebrae - an entire tribe of bits of wildlife bucketed to the surface. They were mainly Red Deer, with a solitary, trespassing ox.

We passed through a layer of lime-like material and commented on the fact that plague victims were buried in lime. We travelled on down through river-washed stones of sandstone and limestone, with the occasional gritstone, but all the time the boneyard remained with us. The stones were salted with bones.

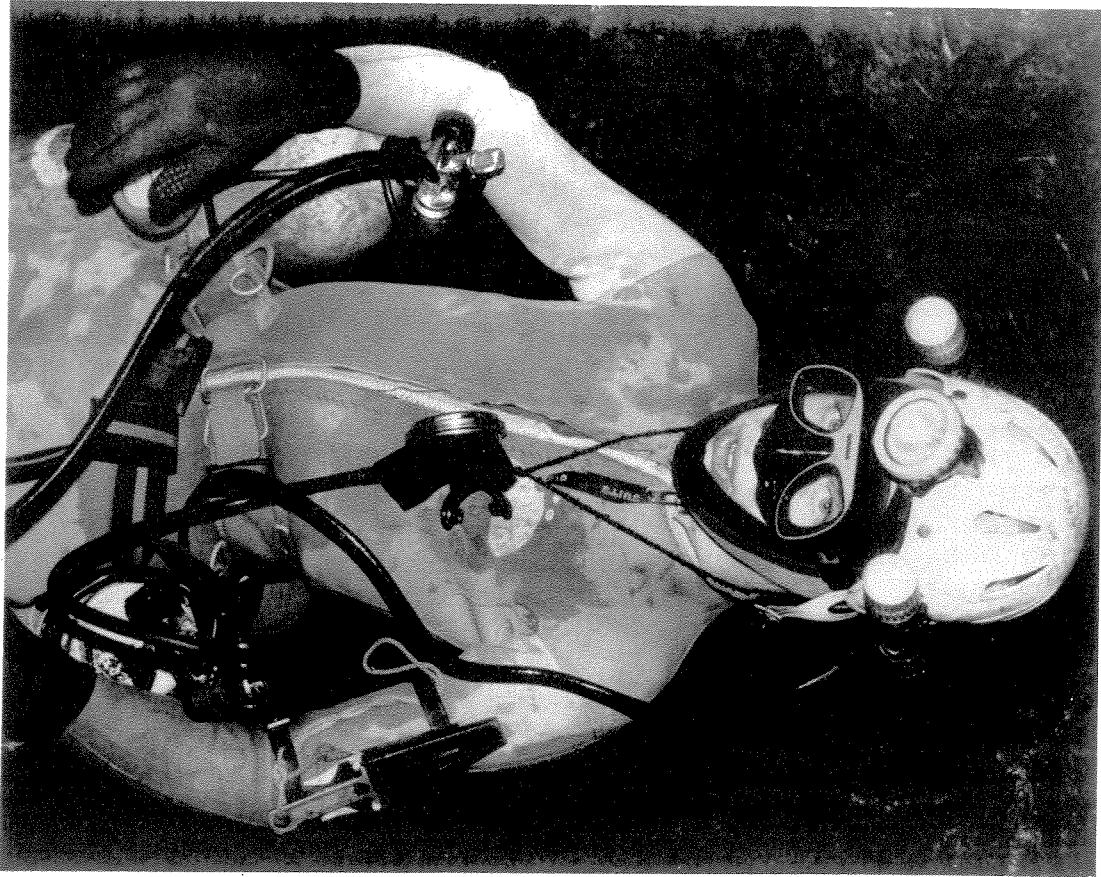
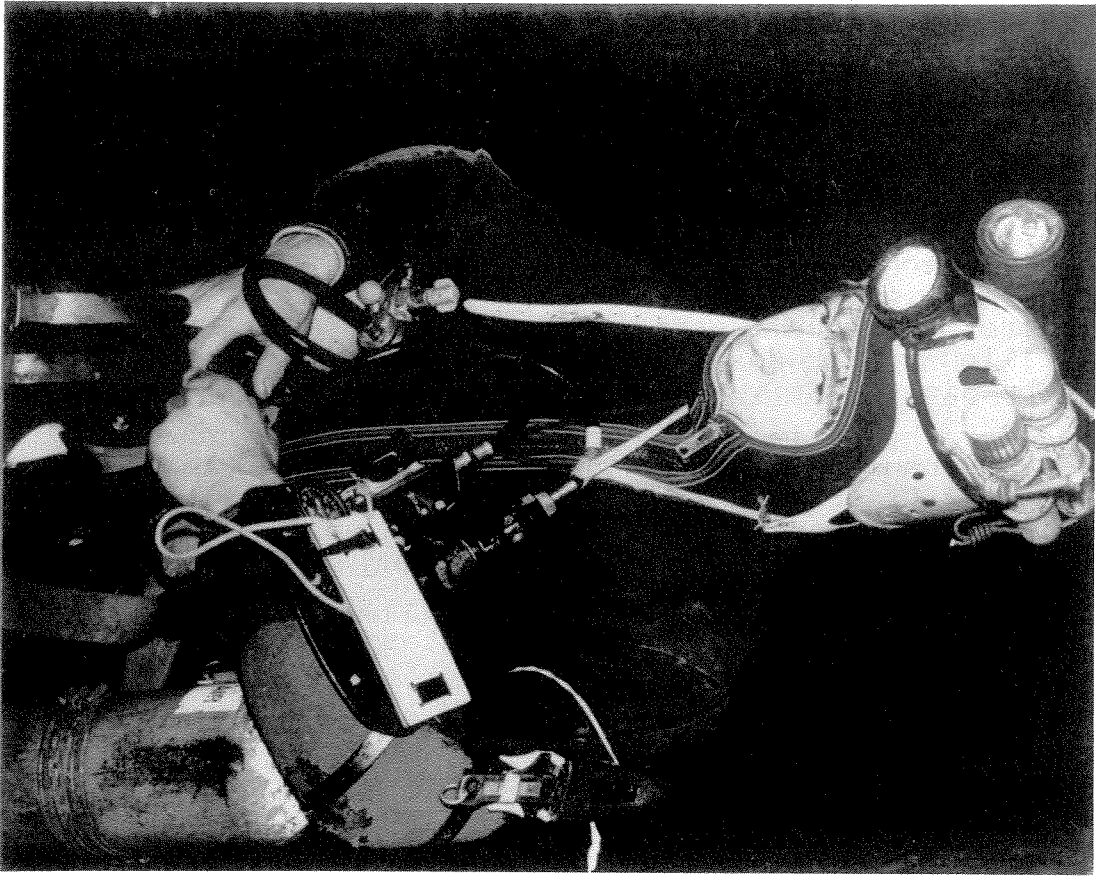
At about 20ft below the surface we could see an easier route down through the fill and decided to halve the cross-sectional area of the shaft. We timbered up and used the redundant part of the hole for stones and bones. We had stal-encrusted walls on two sides, and timber held back the rubble of what was now an almost triangular hole.

The fill became mainly old red sandstone boulders and then a mixture of stones cemented together with calcite. We kept to the walls and the cemented fill and left the looser, bone-filled boulders. A calcite boss then temporarily blocked our way and under this was another lime-like layer, adjacent to which was another human skull. The geology of the fill indicated a lengthy filling process but the bones are consistently distributed and experts tell me that they are of the same age. They look alike and are mainly human and Red Deer so I see no reason to doubt that they belong to the same time, but I find it difficult to accept that this is as recent as 600 years.

The dig is now difficult because there is no obvious way down and those who remain to dig suspect that we have passed the cave and that we will have to tunnel into the ossiferous boulder-fill to find the way on. When back into the bones, will we find artefacts to identify and personalise these anonymous remains (which are now residing in a cardboard box)? Will we see the black of cave; hear the boulders rumble into space; or feel the wind of chance deceiving us into continued digging?

Who knows?

Y Dyn Bodlon



## 3,000 FEET UP - 3,000 FEET DOWN

### A WEEKEND TRIP TO TRAVERSE THE PSM AND BACK

The idea of flying out to traverse the Pierre St.Martin over a weekend was born one evening on the Sornin plateau after a successful trip down the Gouffre Berger. Bill Brooks, Andy Ive and myself, our eyes full of woodsmoke and our wine bottles almost empty, were speculating on the possibilities for a fitting sequel. It transpired that Bill had a friend who owned a light aeroplane and since I had some well-established contacts in the Pyrenees the idea seemed quite feasible. As 1984 unrolled, our plans matured and one Friday afternoon in August we lifted off from Biggin Hill, laden to the limit, en-route for the Pyrenees. The following 52 hours were unforgettable, and must constitute some kind of a record, but suffice to say it was an intense and rare experience.

Our aeroplane was a single-engined, fourseater Rallye Tobago 10 piloted by its owner - Ron Crocker. At a height of just over 3,000ft, the flight out lasted about five hours, including a stop to clear Customs and refuel at Poitiers. Ron's licence was for daylight only so we had cut things a bit fine as it was dusk when we made out the faded sign, 'Oloron-Herrere', on the rusty control huts near our final landfall. Ron landed us safely on the bumpy grass airstrip and we unloaded our caving gear, pared down to the limit to minimise weight. Michel Lauge and his wife, Anni, were waiting for us with two cars to ferry us to their home in Issor. After a pleasant reunion we were whisked quickly away to dinner, to be joined by Michel's brother, Jean-Paul, and several other cavers from the Bayonne Caving Group. With a magnificent view of the Pyrenees beckoning us through the dining room windows, excellent food and plenty of wine to lubricate the conversation, it was a most convivial evening. As well as this splendid hospitality, Michel, with his brother and Gilbert and Jean Gilles, had rigged Tete Sauvage to the bottom two days previously and had also organised transport to and from the entrance from the St.Engrace Youth Hostel and the detackling on Monday by the Carcassone Caving Club. To save weight in the plane, Michel had bought food and carbide for us so, after the Cognac, we all trooped out to the garage to charge our lamps and load our tackle-bags prior to getting a night's sleep.

We were woken to a sunny morning, the mountain air sweet and fresh and the Pyrenean views as magnificent as ever. After a hasty yet nourishing breakfast we set off for the PSM, nine of us in two cars. Half an hour later we reached Arette la Pierre St.Martin and struck off onto two miles of a frightful track, bumping and clanking, to reach the grassy valley near Tete Sauvage. Here we met two of the Carcassone group asleep on the grass and, when they awoke, discussed route-finding with them as they intended to follow us down two hours later. We then changed into our caving gear; Andy and I sweated in our wetsuits while the others wore oversuits and thermal underwear. (I had a light cotton overall and Damarts in my tackle bag to change into after the water.) By now it was nearly 11am and the sun was beating down fiercely, but the scramble over rocks to the Tete Sauvage entrance was mercifully short.

The Tete Sauvage entrance is protected from the winter snows by a fifteen foot high wooden chimney, difficult to scale in summertime and in full SRT gear. This wooden chimney led to a short rift followed by a series of steeply descending pitches rigged with 'mats de perroquets'; fixed tubular iron poles with rungs through them. Safety lines had been rigged so I used my rack for protection and made a rapid descent of 30, 60, 80 and 100ft pitches to the first meander. A further drop of 200ft with four poles in series, the last



obliquely across the shaft, led to an awkward constriction above an 80ft rope pitch. From here onwards the pitches were rigged with ropes of different diameters and after another 150ft I arrived at the second meander. A further pitch via a wet rift over two or three water basins led to the last pitch of 320ft. Altogether there were six bolt changes and a protection belay on this pitch, with the last changeover obscured by a rib of rock jutting out into the shaft and requiring acrobatics to negotiate. We assembled in the large rift below and waited for Bill to don his wetsuit whilst we contemplated the next obstacle - a duck. After the duck the route continued with several climbs and a couple of pitches rigged with 8mm cord, to a point where a large stream flowed through what I think was the Salle Cosyns. The route on was not obvious; a rift to the right led past a calcite slope which we climbed to gain access to a short crawl. Here we had to wait whilst everyone caught up: we had been underground for only an hour and a half so were making good time. A 30ft climb down into a large chamber followed, and then we scrambled up a steep slope to a series of large passages leading eventually to the dry and rather rubbish strewn 'Salle des Anciens'. Here, Michel called a halt so that his compatriots could don their 'pontonieres' for the water ahead and we all took the opportunity to eat some food.

From here, the route became quite complex but I remember a very exposed ledge on the right-hand wall of a deep chamber and a climb up a rather awkward cliff; and then we got lost. We made the mistake of climbing a fixed rope up into a recently explored series of passages and it was over an hour before we sorted out the way on into the Grand Canyon. Reminiscent of 'Go Faster' in Dan-yr-Ogof, the Grand Canyon was a lofty, pebble-bedded streamway of some considerable length, and a joy to walk down. After this distinctive section my memories are vague, but we climbed a forty foot electron ladder and then entered a smallish upper-series where there was a decrepit 20ft length of electron ladder to negotiate. Since most of the rungs were missing, and Andy had to hold the belay in at the top, most of us made this particular descent with some trepidation. A passage of deep, water-filled pots followed (which I recognised from a photo in Minvielle's book of the Hundred Best Caves in France), and then, after several climbs and traverses, we came to the canals.

Michel had been carrying a rubber dinghy in his bag so at this point he decided to inflate it. Andy, Bill and I however, found the canals easy to negotiate in wetsuits and, with the deep areas negotiable by handholds on the wall, could keep dry above the waist. Since the French cavers wore pontonieres to their chests this was good news, enabling us to fill the dinghy with tackle bags and to tow it through until we came to the 'Tunnel of the Wind'. The roof was too low here for all the tackle bags to go in the dinghy, and the bends in the passage were too sharp to allow a pullback on a rope, so Andy, Bill and I ferried the tackle across in two runs, clutching at the traverse wires in the roof to speed our progress as we swam through the icy water with the wind whistling in our ears and our carbide lamps extinguished by the blast. The Frenchmen followed and Gilbert's pontoniere leaked, freezing him to the marrow. Still, dry land was reached on the far side and soon two gas stoves were on the go, warming soup and water for a hot meal. Here I took out the polythene bag containing my dry clothes and removed my wetsuit. After drying myself with the legs of my dry cotton overalls, I put on my Damarts. Such Bliss! Dry and warm I tucked into the copious rations provided by Michel. If there was one thing that I remember about this trip, it was the food! Whilst my 'Bolino' macaroni and mince cooked I ate some cheese followed by pate, biscuits and nuts. The 'Bolino' was superb, washed down with lemonade with 'Milky Way's to follow. Before leaving, I helped Gilbert finish off his soup and thus filled



the energy gap left by ten hours of continuous caving. The brew-up and changing into dry clothes took some time and I felt sorry for Bill and Andy shivering in their wetsuits, but we were soon on our way again.

The passageway now assumed the dimensions associated with the PSM and we wound our way past huge boulders to the Salle Navarre. After climbing up a fixed rope we were soon at the top of the rubble heap under the Lepineux Shaft. I had been here before and as I slid down to Marcel Louben's Tomb the timeless atmosphere seemed eerily familiar. Michel and Gilbert were positioned exactly as I had photographed them four years ago and I had a clear case of Deja Vu. One by one we gingerly descended through the boulder ruckle into Elizabeth Casteret Chamber and continued on into the Loubens Cave. The vast Metro followed and soon we reached the Queffelec Chamber where Michel, Bill and I took a wrong turn and did not catch the others again until we reached the pool guarding the Salle Chevalier. After crawling along the ledge on the left of the pool we climbed up and filed along a narrow ledge high on the right-hand wall of the Salle Chevalier, the black depths on our left hiding the torrent far below. A short constriction and a climb down and we were in the vastness of La Verna, the final monstrous blackness guarding our exit. By now, our packs seemed leaden and our pace was slowing but before long we were at the railed path leading to the EDF tunnel and taking our last look at the largest underground chamber in the West.

Our journey out through the rotten-timbered tunnels hewn by EDF was uneventful and the wind blew us out through the final door into the midnight air of Sunday morning. It may seem unbelievable but, as we approached the cabin outside the tunnel, we could see the flicker of firelight. Two heroes of the Ziloko, man and wife, had lit a fire and cooked some hot soup ready for us. What fantastic hospitality!

After a short rest to drink the soup, we once again hoisted our tackle bags to our shoulders and set off downhill on the hour-long walk to St. Engrace. The final uphill climb to the Gite d'etape seemed interminable but hot showers and comfy beds lured us on and by 2am we were all in bed, our traverse completed in 14 hours.

The next morning, no one moved until about 9 o'clock and then we all gathered for coffee in the bar next door. The rattle of coffee cups and the music of conversation seemed oddly dreamlike. As we talked and reminisced, the whole expedition seemed like a dream and I had to pinch myself for reassurance. A rude awakening however; we had to leave or we would never make it back to Biggin Hill. Our goodbye's took some time but eventually we were back in Michel's car and speeding back to Issor for lunch, taking Jean-Gilles with us. Anni had prepared an excellent lunch for us but before we could eat - out came the bathroom scales. Ron and Bill were rather concerned about the short and bumpy runway at Oloron so Bill weighed himself; Andy, Ron and me and all our gear, and then did lots of calculations on fag packets and chocolate wrappers. The rest of us sat down to lunch, facing the view across the Pyrenees and sad at the imminent departure.

With goodbyes said, Michel drove us down the steep Pyrenean lanes to our waiting aeroplane. Flight checks completed, Ron discovered that the fuel tanks were nearly empty so we should be OK for lift-off provided we could make a fuel stop fairly quickly. Engine racing, our tiny plane clawed its way into the sky and Ron set course for Pau Airport using the navigation beacons on automatic direction finding. After all our physical and emotional exercise - here we were, once more encased in modern technology.

Our landing and refuelling at Pau was trouble free and with a good tail wind we reached Deauville in three hours, Andy and I dozing in the back for most of the way. On the ground we bought our duty frees,

refuelled and had afternoon tea before takeoff. Soon we were airborne again, over the Channel and, in a remarkably short time, landing at Biggin Hill in a welter of Sunday Fliers.

The English Customs were quite meticulous. Our plane was emptied of bags and inspected, and they looked in our tackle bags. My stinking wetsuit was sufficient repellent to prevent a complete unpacking however. Tired and slightly dazed by our activities, we strolled into the bar for a few beers and for Ron to complete his Flight Log.

Our trip to the Pyrenees was over as quickly as it had begun.

John Gillett

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#### OGOF PANT-Y-LLYN: A NEW EXTENSION

This cave lies in the crag known as Craig Derwyddon (The Druids' Crag), one mile NW of Llandybie near Ammanford, at NGR SN 605.167. It may always have been open, but part of it was certainly opened in 1813 by quarrymen blasting for limestone. They found human and animal bones but the event quickly became lost in the mists of time, until a local antiquarian resurrected the tale in 1893 and published an account. Again the cave was left alone for many years until 29th April 1962 when R. Sullivan and I were scouring the local outcrops for caves. The entrance is of walking height, the passage curves to the left and then ends in a clay blockage transmitting a cool draught. A Greater Horseshoe bat hung nearby and we left the cave to get on with pressing explorations in Ogof Cil-yr-Ychen, just down the hill. Clearly the blockage was not complete, but no cavers paid it any attention.

Again the years slipped by until Ivan Rhodes purchased the land around the cave. He was interested in a local commercial development and thought that the cave could be part of the attraction, particularly in view of its historical associations. He delved into what little had been published and decided that the cave, as well as other holes nearby, could be extended. It is entirely due to his efforts that the important extension has come about. Bones began to appear during one of his forays, and an iron implement in another hole, so the National Museum of Wales became involved. A bulldozer was acquired to clear some old quarry debris and to try to reveal one of the old, blocked entrances but all to no avail. Ogof Pant-y-Llyn was unaffected by all this but we can assume that some of the buried ancients were stirring uneasily with all this commotion on top.

Ivan Rhodes then came to me for assistance in identifying the bones that he had discovered. I quickly realised which cave he had dug in (I had read the antiquarian reports as well), and on the 18th of January 1984 I drove up to see the site. The clay choke, only 25ft from daylight, had been excavated but the hollow had filled with water. Using a candle I was able to prove that there was a definite inward draught. With snow on the ground outside, and my memory of a summer outward draught in 1962, I explained to Ivan Rhodes that the cave had great potential. He eventually drained the pool and continued to excavate what had become a clay-floored, dome ceilinged, low tunnel. A small chamber was reached and there seemed to be a way on. Events then moved quickly. Ivan phoned me for assistance, I contacted members of Cwmbran Caving Club who were active in the area (with a re-discovery of part of the old Cil-yr-Ychen) and Keith Jones promised to get up a party.

Unknown to us, two local schoolboys equipped with candles and hand torches (no helmets at first!) had noticed the entrance and had explored to a stand-up chamber some 100ft in. There they spotted many bones and pocketed a tooth to take to their teacher in Llandeilo. This was about the 1st of July; meantime, Cwmbran were delayed a week in getting together a party so I told Theo Schuurmans about it as he was working in the area. Theo is also in Cwmbran CC and one evening went into the cave, just after the schoolboys, thinking that he was first in. Ivan followed him but both were quickly stopped by a boulder choke just after 100ft. There were gaps, but it looked very loose (and was!) and certainly no place for only one caver to push through with no experienced back-up. Theo went in on the 5th; on the 6th I had a phone call from Ivan - could I come up and confirm that the tooth discovered by the boys was that of a Bear, or so the teacher claimed. Overflowing with disbelief I drove up immediately and was amazed to find that the tooth was a maxillary molar of bear, probably Ursus arctos! The 8th July was a Sunday so a trip had to be got together. Theo could not be contacted but Keith Jones (of Cwmbran and Isca Clubs), Graham Brian (of Isca and Royal Forest of Dean CC), Ivan and I gathered at the scene. The two schoolboys of course had to be there - again they had got wind of the action! Still one helmet short, we trooped in and I was shown the bones and the site where the bear tooth had been found.

Now we come to the mystery. I examined the bones which were lying along a slope positioned below the boulder choke and too close to it for comfort. There were two complete dog skeletons, further down - a bird skeleton, and in the bouldery clay of the choke I identified another bird, at least one rabbit, one badger and scraps of fox bones. Nothing ancient about them, although they might have knocked up a century between the lot. I calculated that the dogs had got in via Ivan's excavated hole, perhaps following the bird or the rabbit (I've known birds go 200ft into caves before now), and badger bones are often found in caves. So how did the bear tooth get there?

It transpired that the tooth was fairly high in the choke which, at the top, was a massive, stalagmited affair and obviously quite old. We excavated with two trowels amongst the boulders for almost an hour and found not a hair of the bear. Either it is much higher up or it could just be buried under the massive sandy sediments on the floor of the chamber. So what about the exploration?

Graham and one of the schoolboys, named Paul, had already dug at the foot of the choke, and Theo must also have attacked it. There was a hole and we squeezed through. Keith had trouble getting through the initial clay crawl so, leaving him with Ivan, young Paul, Graham and I went on. The choke formed a long, loose slope but at the bottom there was another chamber; then another chamber, and I realised that we were following the Cil-yr-Ychen pattern. No sign of running water but it was clearly much wetter in winter with nice drip formations everywhere. Graham stopped to take photographs (I had left my camera by the bones) and Paul and I came to an awkward climb. With the excuse of my years I pushed Paul up first, then followed. At the top was a nice group of stalactites with a crystal flow below them. Again Graham fired his flash; Paul and I went on to yet another chamber but the only way on was downwards. The ladder had been left further back but I thought I could chimney down the narrow shaft. It was easy, and underneath there was another chamber. Paul didn't fancy the chamber but in rummaging about up above he found another hole and climbed down. Here we seemed to be at the bottom of part, at least, of the drainage system but the drought was still on. A low tunnel at the very bottom looked promising, but too small for one of my girth. Paul got his feet in and immediately splashed about. This was the bottom, and there was no draught; somewhere we had missed the main way on.

Graham appeared and took more shots. I had only one fill of carbide and Paul, using my spare torch, was following what had become a dim yellow halo, so we turned back. Just below the choke we reached Keith, bravely surveying by himself! He said he was doing every part of the cave thrice over. Graham stopped to help him and both were busy for over another hour.

The final length, according to Keith, was about 600ft and that was only the main passage. No off-shoots had been surveyed and there are plenty of sites for pushing. One dog skull was brought outside for daylight examination - nobody believed that it was dog, but I think I convinced them in the end.

There seems to be long-standing planning permission to extend what is now a disused quarry into the Pant-y-Llyn cave from the west, but no one knows if, and when, this will be activated. Meanwhile, the woodland around the cave is largely undisturbed and quite old - with gnarled oaks and high, straight Ash trees. In the district there is apparently a 'Campaign for the Protection of the Gwenlais Valley', and the lake below the cave (now drought dry) and the venerable Druids Crag are part of the complex. If you are visiting the cave - please contact Ivan Rhodes who lives at the foot of the Crag, quite untroubled by those Druids (?) who were disinterred in 1813 by the first men to explore the caves - the Quarrymen of Pant-y-Llyn.

Mel Davies

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  6. The Pant-y-Llyn Bone Caves, by A. Stepney-Gulston, Archaeologia Cambrensis, Fifth Series, 10, 163, 1893.
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NATURE CONSERVANCY COUNCIL - GOWER COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

The Gower Countryside Centre is situated in the old Coastguard Lookout building out at the tip of Rhosili Point, about half a mile from the village. It is used by the Nature Conservancy Council as a visitor centre, but it is only open occasionally when voluntary wardens are available. Apart from a display on Gower birds, and charts etc., which are for sale, there is a geological and speleological exhibit.

Geology: Coupled with aerial photographs of the Gower cliffs is a geological explanation of some of the structures seen and viewable actually from the Centre, and a representative series of rock samples from various parts of Gower.

Speleology: Because of the intense cave interest in the Gower Peninsular, a major part of the display is devoted to caves. There is an exhibit on loan from the British Museum (Natural History), comprising photographs of Minchin Hole, its sequence of deposits, the cave during a storm, and an archaeological section drawn up by Dr A.J. Sutcliffe who has excavated in the cave for several years.

Other photographs are rare examples taken in the last century. One cabinet contains flint, and teeth of the Woolly Rhinoceros, excavated from Paviland Cave in 1912 and now on loan from Swansea Museum. Unfortunately, some of the material excavated from Gower caves in the 19th century has been lost, but exhibits have been set out which come from other caves in Wales but are almost identical. One cabinet contains a boar's tusk from a Caldey cave, Neolithic pottery from a cave near Llandudno, and specialised flint tools from various caves illustrating different uses. None of this material is kept locked up as in museums - anybody showing an interest is invited to handle the exhibits. Children are particularly entranced when invited to hold a canine of hyena, or molar of reindeer. They sometimes take some persuading that the antler fragments really are antlers! The unique sharpness of a 5,000 year old flint knife is easily demonstrated - (First Aid outfits are at hand!). All the archaeological caves of Gower are marked on a map and the public is advised on how to visit them. Care is taken to point out the dangers of descending to some of the caves and of getting trapped by the tide. The caves themselves are quite safe from the public because metal is extremely rare in the deposits so an illicit metal-detector user would have a thin time of it, and the stalagmite or boulder deposits would put off the most ardent 'Fossiker'. The fact that bats may be seen, even at the height of summer, is pointed out and the leaflet 'Focus on Bats' is available at the counter (price 40p). We also have a bat box made by our staff to Bob Stebbings' design, and this can be dismantled to show visitors how it works. The wide protection given to bats by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is fully explained in the leaflet.

During the summer it is hoped to open the Gower Centre every weekend, but to make sure of getting in, cavers are invited to phone the NCC office in Gower before arriving, or at least the day before the intended visit. Our number is Gower 390320 or Gower 390626.

Anyone contemplating a visit to Gower caves as well as the Countryside Centre is advised that not all are of easy access due to the tides and the positions of the entrances. From the author's own experience the following is a useful guide:

ACCESS TO THE MAIN GOWER ARCHAEOLOGICAL CAVES

Footpath (Easy)	Easy scramble anytime	Easy scramble but at low tide only	Difficult
Bacon Hole Prissens Tor Cave Upper Black- hole Deborah's Hole Cathole Longhole Mewslade Caves	Minchin Hole Rockrose Cave	Paviland Cave Porteynon Point Cave Culver Hole (Llangennith) Culver Hole (Porteynon) Red Chamber	Worms Head Cave Leathers Hole

Mel Davies



## THE LOST MINE OF PENY-BRYN

The following story may sound rather an exaggeration, but for anyone who had animals to look after last summer, water was a very valuable substance.

During that long, hot summer a friend of mine told me about a well that was supposed to be on his land - but nobody knew quite where. Later, it appeared that an old man remembered that a garage had been built over where it might have been. Thumping the floor had been tried, but to no avail. I was then asked if I had any ideas.

Water divining was my first thought; but, as was to be expected, this produced no very satisfactory result. It was then suggested that I come up with a better idea. After a little thought I reached the conclusion that if the well had been covered over by a concrete floor then the builders had probably used a lot of old iron to re-inforce the cap. Would a metal detector find it?

The garage where the search was to take place was big enough to house several tractors, a combine and a few old cars. After some time an area was found that looked good and we started to drill in the middle. At about two feet down the drill stopped and refused to go any further. Another hole a few inches away yielded the same result. What had we hit? Some copper wire wound round an iron bar was poked down the hole and connected to a car battery; this gave a strong indication of iron at the bottom of the hole.

Meanwhile, my wife, who is much better at divining than I am, found a good reaction about six feet away so, for something to do, we drilled there. About eighteen inches down we ran into a thick slab of slate - was this the coping of the well?

The next hole was drilled halfway between these two sets of holes and, again at about two feet, we came up against something but this time, with a wrench, it broke through. A weight on a cord went down over thirty feet and twelve feet of it was wet! It only remained to drill a ring of holes and to knock the centre out to reveal all. A shaft cut in solid rock, two pump rods on one side and some ancient machinery deep under the water.

Bill Birchenough