

**THE ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN  
CAVING CLUB**



**DECEMBER 2004**

**NEWSLETTER No 130**

# *Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club*

## *Newsletter 130* December 2004

- Page 1** Editorial
- Page 2** Committee 2005, Xmas party, Trips list.
- Page 3** Library, Caver's paradise.
- Page 5** First aid report.
- Page 6** Sardinia trip.
- Page 8** GCRG Depot, Hare splint.
- Page 9** Wet Sink reports.
- Page 10** FODCCAG news.
- Page 11** Robin Hood shaft, Slade Brook.
- Page 12** Reporter's caving trip.
- Page 13** Westbury Brook Mine.
- Page 14** Multi agency rescue practice.

### Editorial

Well it only seems twelve months since I was doing this before, doesn't time just fly by. Many things have come and gone in the time since Newsletter 129. We have had the Club's 40<sup>th</sup> Birthday and its associated event at Clearwell Caves. Club members appeared on t.v. and featured on the programme 'Extreme Archaeology'. More like 'Wimpish Archaeology' if you asked me. Miss Graces Lane Cave has grown and grown, so Jan Karvic and his merry band of diggers must be patted on their collective backs. The A.G.M. came and went again without a Club Secretary. I know its not much

point pleading for someone to come forward but I know there many members who moan quite a bit but have never taken one committee position.  
Dave Tuffley

### **Committee for 2004/2005**

Chairman	Ladi Broadman
Secretary	No one elected
Treasurer	Andy Clark
Librarian	Cliff Seymour
Tackle Office	Greg Jones
Newletter Editor	Dave Tuffley
Meets Secretary	John Elliot
Other member	Seb Hall

### **Co-opted Positions**

Club FODCCAG Rep	Dave Tuffley
Wet Sink Secretary	Andy Clark
Otter Hole Secretary	John Hutchinson (of Hades CC)

### **RFDC Web Page**

[www@rfdcc.org.uk](http://www@rfdcc.org.uk)

***Don't forget the Christmas Social at the Rising Sun, Moseley Green on Wednesday December 22nd.*** The usual events will take place and ***please bring a prize for the draw to raise money for Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group.*** Please bring along something sweet for the post savory sweetmeats.

John Hine (Mole) has offered to lead a trip to OFD over Christmas holidays and will take another trip down the Box Stone Mines on the last Sunday in January, which should be 30th January. Finally he is taking a visit to Nenthead on week end starting Friday 25<sup>th</sup> March.

So if you are interested in any of the above trips then contact Mole direct for info.

Trip Secretary, John Elliot, asked at the recent AGM for members to give him a wish list of places they would like him to arrange trips to and the following have all been mentioned:-

Miss Graces lane Cave, GB Cave (Mendips), North Wales Slate Mines and Parys Mountain Mines, Slaughter Stream Cave, Ogof Draenan Cave, Ogof Govon (Pembrokeshire), Lake District Mines and Caves, Otter Hole Cave.

Please pester John for that trip of your dreams now you have list to choose from.

**A new message from your friendly Librarian** Cliff Seymour

The following are books that have been obtained from Jim Hay during his recent cleanout and are new additions to the Club library:-

The Caves of Derbyshire  
Pennine Underground  
Caves and caving  
Limestone and caves of the Mendip Hills  
Beneath the mountains  
Caves of mendip  
Surveying caves  
Wilderness under the earth.

There will soon be a Club cabinet at the Rising Sun, Moseley Green, for the recent additions to the library. Carl Bamford has recently got possession of the cupboard and donated it to the club. Jenny and Kevin of the pub have agreed that it can go somewhere downstairs. So now you will not have to travel far to have a read.

**Majorca – A Caver’s Paradise? Greg Jones**

In December 2002 Johns Crowsley and Cliffe, Andy Clark, Tony Smith and myself went to Majorca for ten days. Majorca has a lot going for it as a venue for winter caving; it is warm and dry; it doesn’t cost much to get there; accommodation can be found easily at cheap rates; lots of people speak English; and food and beer is cheap. Most of the caves in Majorca are warm and dry, so you can cave in shorts, tee shirt and a cotton boiler suit. Walking boots can double as caving footwear.

Almost the entire island is made of limestone, and there are caves in the north, east and west, but the best area to stay is in the north. This was our second visit to Majorca, and we returned to Puerta Pollensa because we found that it was an ideal base on our first trip.

Most of the caves are remnants of large phreatic systems, the bulk of which have long been eroded away. Because of this, many of the entrances can be very difficult to find, due to the fact that the surface features that you would normally look for (limestone/sandstone boundaries, truncated valleys, swallow holes etc) have all disappeared. To paraphrase an old saying, “the caves really are where you find em”.

All of the caves that were visited required ropework in some form or another, so if you're not confident on rope then Majorca probably isn't for you.

### **Cova de C'al PESSO**

As on our first trip to Majorca, we visited this cave on our first day. It is within easy walking distance of Puerta Pollensa. Also as on our first trip, the entrance was very hard to find. We spread out across the hillside and did a grid type search, eventually finding it just as it was getting dark.

This cave must have been one of the most fantastically decorated caves in the world when it was first discovered, but now most of it is sadly vandalised. Unfortunately there are no vertical pitches to prevent the uncouth morons gaining access, so every object of beauty has been smashed beyond recognition. Notwithstanding the terrible destruction that has taken place here, this cave is still worth a visit, if only to try to imagine how beautiful it must have once been.

### **Covota de sa Penya Rotja**

This cave is on the southern side of the bay of Pollensa, just to the north of Alcudia. The walk to the cave entrance is an adventure in itself, involving rock scrambling, chain traverses, vertical cliffs and an old cannon.

This cave is one of the best on the island. It has the longest and largest helictites I have ever seen, and probably ever will. Some of them are nearly half a metre long. There is a large shaft, every surface of which is coated with flowstone. There is a chamber where the roof is covered in razor-sharp ridges of stal. The cave is extremely warm. The view from the entrance, looking out across the bay of Pollensa, is spectacular.

### **Cova de Cornavaques**

The two Johns and Tony spent several hours searching for this cave, but failed to find it. On the same afternoon, Clarky and myself went for a walk on the same mountain (though we approached from a different direction). We looked at an interesting old gun emplacement on our route up the hill, and on near the summit met the other three. A great day, but no caving.

### **Forat 502**

There is a guidebook available on Majorca, written by local cavers, called "501 Grutas".

As is so often the case, this cave was discovered just after the book was published, hence it's name.

The entrance was quite easy to find (by Majorcan standards), and we rigged off spits for the twenty odd metre descent. The second half of the pitch is spectacular, because you actually abseil down an enormous stalagmite that is leaning at an angle of about 60°.

The cave has decorations of every description, as well as some that defy description. I can't adequately describe them, so I won't try. Go here if you can.

### **Avenc del Pla de les Basses**

This is the nearest thing there is on Majorca to a “Yorkshire type” pothole. Clean washed limestone, not many pretties, and very flood prone.

Quite an interesting descent, but not somewhere you would want to be if it started to rain.

### **Avenc de Fra Rafel**

According to Dave Elliot, this is the best cave on Majorca.

We found the entrance, but despite our best efforts at rigging we could not get into the eyehole in the shaft that would give us access to the wonders beyond. The route we were attempting, which we all agreed was the best way, meant swinging on the rope, on a single bolt, to try to get into the eyehole. Unfortunately the rope was sawing back and forth across a sharp edge, and there was a drop below of about forty metres! Our courage was not up to it.

We shall return with a bolting kit!

### **Cova de les Rodes**

I did not go to this cave, which was a good choice, because those that did almost succumbed to CO2 poisoning. Take a candle.

As well as caving, we also went birdwatching at a reserve near Alcudia, where there were Ospreys among others. We walked along the Cavall Bernat Ridge, which is superb so long as you have a head for heights. We scrambled down the Torrent de Pareis, one of the most spectacular gorges you will find. We hired bicycles, swam in the sea (brrrr), drank, ate and laughed till we cried.

What more can you ask for in a holiday?

### **Report on Advanced First Aid for Cave Rescue course.** Greg Jones,

Craig Cameron and myself attended this course. We had to get Ystradgynlais Hospital by 7.30 on a Friday evening, which was a bit of a struggle. Other people had a harder time getting there; two lads coming from Ireland and Germany.

The course was very intensive, but very “hands-on”. We covered just about every type of injury that we are likely to encounter underground, and the methods used to treat them. Pain relief was covered in great detail, with instruction in the use of oral and intramuscular drugs and gases.

We did not cover basic life support techniques because we had to be competent in these before we could attend the course. It is a requirement that you have a basic first aid qualification before you attend the course.

The practical exam was held underground in OFD on the Sunday afternoon. Like they always are it was a nerve racking experience but, due to the excellent instruction and vast amount of practice we had done, everyone passed.

This was the best first aid course that I have ever done (and I’ve done a few). I feel very much more confident in my ability as a cave rescue first aider as a result of attending the course, and I look forward to our next incident when I can put these skills to practical use.

I would recommend anyone who wants to be involved in casualty management underground to get themselves on this course.

## **Sardinia 2003– A Climber’s Paradise?** Greg Jones

In December 2003 Johns Crowsley and Cliffe, Andy Clark, Tony Smith, Jan Karvik, Steve Tomalin and myself went to Sardinia for a week. We flew from Stansted to Alghero for the princely sum of £21 return, hired two cars, and stayed in a rather posh apartment in a small town called Irgoli. Irgoli is on the western side of the island, about eight kilometres inland, and was probably just a bit too quiet for our liking.

Getting information regarding caving on Sardinia is not very easy. There have been a few articles in *Descent* over the years (the indexes are invaluable for finding these articles), there is a bit of stuff on the Web, and we had some information from friends. We knew that there were three major caves on the island (Su Bentu, Su Palu and Su Spiria), plus a lot of smaller ones. We had found out that all the large caves were gated and locked, with access being controlled by some sort of local committee, and we knew that some cavers from the Craven Pothole Club had spent a week in Sardinia and had failed to get access to any of them (though they were there mainly to climb, so they may not have tried very hard). Undaunted by all of this we set off, convinced that if all else failed, we could probably buy a hacksaw or bolt cropper!

Unlike Majorca, the caves on Sardinia are mainly wet, and a wetsuit is essential if you want to get very far. The combination of a heavy wetsuit and wellies, SRT gear, climbing gear, and Ryanair’s draconian fifteen kilo baggage allowance, made for some interesting attempts at packing. Wetsuits went on in hand luggage. Walking boots were worn on the plane. Somehow we made it on with no surcharges.

Sardinia is at about the same latitude as Majorca, and we were expecting a similar sort of climate. We were going to be strolling around in shorts and tee shirts, having a quick dip in the sea, and sipping pinocoladas on the terrace. **WRONG!** As we flew into Alghero we saw **SNOW** on the hilltops. It was cold and grey. It had been raining. What had we done?

Irgoli is about a two hour drive from Alghero, and about three hours later (we took a short cut!) we arrived at our apartment. I had booked the whole trip online. Flights, airport parking, car-hire and accommodation, all were arranged without a word being spoken. Keyboards all over the world speak perfect English. Unfortunately people do not. Our gracious hosts could not utter a single word of the worlds most beautiful language, and our attempts at Italian were woefully inadequate. Doh! It transpired that all of my arranging had been with their son, who was at university in Cagliari. However, they knew who we were, and apart from one time when the lady of the house had to get her son to speak to me on the telephone, we got by with smiles and gestures. They were very welcoming.

## **The Caving**

## **Su Palu**

Steve had made contact with a Dutch friend of his, who had arranged that we should meet some local cavers for a trip to Su Palu on our first full day. Off we went on the Sunday morning, all full of hope apart from Jan, who was full of disease. Su Palu is in a long valley that stretches to the sea. After a long drive we found the meeting point very easily, and there were the cavers to meet us. The only problem was that they had been there the day before, and had finished their trip. Two of them had waited for us to arrive though, and showed us to the cave entrance. We all agreed that without their help we would probably not have found the entrance, and would have missed out on a fantastic trip. Thanks are extended to them.

The entrance was gated, but the chain securing it was so long that we easily got in underneath. Apparently it is always like this.

The entrance is mainly one quite long broken pitch that leads eventually to a large chamber, and then to a low streamway. The streamway gets particularly low at one point (flat out), and this section can sump in wet weather, sealing you in the cave. Beyond this the cave is wonderful. Some of it is like the high level route in Lancaster Hole, large dry passages above the streamway, with ways down to the water. The main stream eventually led us to an amazing junction, where there was a pool of about twenty metres diameter. I had a swim around this pool. There was a lot of cave beyond this point, but time was running out, and we were a bit worried about Jan, who had stayed in the car as he was feeling so ill.

## **Su Bentu**

We went find the entrance to this cave on the day before we intended having a trip there, just to make sure that we could get in. There were lots of cavers there, as well as walkers and families. It is very popular spot a day trip. The gate was unlocked, and to ensure that nobody locked it before we returned the next day, we removed and hid the locking bolt!

Su Bentu is the most fun cave I have ever visited. After a couple of entrance pitches you get to the main streamway, which is followed upstream. For seven hundred metres you swim across a lake, climb up a gour dam (up to three metres high), swim another lake, climb another dam, etc. this goes on for thirteen lakes. The water is clear and warm. There are wonderful stal formations. The passage is very tall (up to fifty metres) but never much more than two metres wide at the bottom (though at the top it is much wider). The Lake Gallery ends at a junction. Right goes to an extensive system, but we went left which led, after a considerable distance, to some huge dry passages. The return journey was even better than going in, because we could leap off the gour dams into the pools below.

This is a tremendous cave, though the distances that you have to swim should not be underestimated, and make it a serious endeavor. A wetsuit is essential, both for warmth and for buoyancy (one person has drowned here).

When we got back to the apartment and read the guide, we discovered that the Lake Gallery can be bypassed by a bolted traverse high in the roof of the passage. We returned later in the week and did this trip as well. At the end of the traverses you can free-climb down to the floor of the passage below. Brilliant!

This cave is in my top ten all-time favourites list.

That was all the caving we did. Three trips, but what a three. Members of the party also went canyoning (twice), swimming (in wetsuits), bird-watching, rock-climbing and mountain-walking. As for the weather. It was a bit cool, especially in the evening, but it stayed dry during the day. As is usually the case, on the drive back to the airport it was beautiful sunshine all day.

If you go to Sardinia to cave or climb, the best place to stay is Cala Gonone, near Dorgali, though in December it is a bit of a ghost town.

Sardinia has a lot to offer, and we shall return one day I am sure.

### **Cave Rescue Depot Event**

Saturday September 18<sup>th</sup> 2004 saw Robbie McDougal meeting back up with a good number of the people from GCRG, WBCRT and the MCRO who were involved in bringing him safely back to the surface after his accident in Wet Sink (Slaughter Stream Cave) on June 12<sup>th</sup> 2004. (See Descent No. 179)

Thanks are extended from all that attended to Robbie for covering the cost of a large barrel of the local Forest of Dean Free Miners Ale.

With the vast majority being consumed on the Saturday evening and Sunday morning a very enjoyable time was had by all concerned.

The event provided an opportunity for those involved putting a face to a name and having a good chat with their casualty.

Providing some first hand feed back on how he was looked after during the carry.

Not something that can easily be done during a rescue.

Robbie has progressed very well since the accident and hopes to complete some lightweight backpacking in Scotland by the time this article comes out.

He has also said that he would like to make another trip into the cave when he is fully recovered.

GCRG presented Robbie with a copy of the latest version of the 13km cave survey with the short section that he took suitably marked up.

Robbies comment "I didn't get very far did I".

A secondary function of the day was for those involved with the Depot Exterior Refurbishment to be thanked for their efforts and for those who have not seen the changes to see for themselves the transformation that has taken place.

Thanks go to Rose Taylor & Jo Clarke for the excellent barbecue.

### **New Hare Splint**

GCRG would like to extend a big thank you to the St Johns Ambulance. Paul Taylor recently gave an illustrated presentation on the work of GCRG complete with a short section of video of the Wet Sink and Monument Mine Training exercises. (The latter put together by Nicola Bayley)

At the end of the evening Paul was presented with a “Hare Traction Splint” as a token of their appreciation.

As it was one of the items on the group’s equipment to be purchased list for this year it was most welcome and very much appreciated.

For the Wet Sink Rescue in June the one belonging to the WBCRT was brought over by the police and played a very important part in the rescue.

With one now in the GCRG Equipment stock it has provided another step towards the ongoing inter group compatibility.

### **Wet Sink Pond Hole Infilling.**

Work has started on the infilling of the large hole in the pond up stream from the Wet Sink entrance into Slaughter Stream Cave. Approximately 50% of the hole has been filled to date.

All the materials for the diversion work at Tip Sink have now been collected together and it is hoped to get this second stage completed prior to the rest of the hole being filled.

(See Descent No.180)

### **Rock Fall in Wet Sink Entrance Series.**

During a recent trip into Wet Sink (Slaughter Stream Cave) by Gareth Jones, Jo Clarke, Paul Taylor & Rachael Limbrick. The latter is a reporter from the local newspaper (See separate report).

A large lump of rock estimated at around 50kg in weight fell down the 14m Pen Pot Pitch. Narrowly missing waiting cavers, the balance of the rope and a large tackle sack containing camera equipment when it crashed into the bottom of the pitch.

The lump had fallen from the underside of an overhanging ledge about 2 m below the top of the pitch. The first person up the pitch had come up under the ledge and hit the underside with their helmet. (Something that had been witnessed many times before. In fact the author can recall at least 2 or 3 occasions when he himself had done the same thing).

The rock did not fall away instantly so no warning could be given from above, as the person had no knowledge of the impending danger until the shouts from below were heard. (Not printable but I’m sure you can guess)

Fortunately the next person to go up the pitch had not moved out to get on the rope otherwise rather than a loud bang and rock fragments dropping down to the lower level of the pitch the consequence would have been extremely serious or more likely fatal.

An examination trip is planned to see if there is any more rock poised to fall off and that needs to be dealt with.

This incident highlights the fact that although the cave has been open for nearly 14 years and quite a large number of people have moved in and out of the cave there is still the potential for loose rocks.

Some of it although looking quite secure can easily part company.

Please take care.

### **Wet Sink Stile**

By the time you read this the old stile down to the Wet Sink entrance will be no more. Farmer Phil Gwilliam has asked for the stile to be removed as it is very wobbly and could cause an accident to members of the general public. A work party has been organized for the still to be removed on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> December. Access will be by the adjoining stile and across the bank to the entrance. The old stile will be replaced by barbed wire.

### **FoDCCAG News**

In filling of quite a large section of the Upper Workings of the Oakwood Mill Deep Iron at Bream in the Forest of Dean took place a number of years ago.

This work was carried out in conjunction with a road-straightening scheme that was being carried out through the village.

The road was found to be positioned right on top of the large voids and so was filled to provide a stable support.

For the work to be carried out the mine was re classified as “Working” and as such an exclusion order was put in place as far as recreational caving was concerned.

It was always planned that when the work and the final inspection had taken place that the site would be re turned to the caving community.

A recent trip by the Deputy Gaveler John Harvey accompanied by Maurice Febry and Paul Taylor of FoDCCAG has seen that final phase completed and the mine downgraded again to “Abandoned”.

There is a small amount of work required to remove a qty of timber props and a walkway that was put in during the working period.

This has become decayed and very fragile.

It is hoped that this work can be completed before Christmas 2004.

Entry to the mine will then be via the normal FoDCCAG Conditions of Access and administered via the FoDCCAG Permit Secretary David Tuffley.

A second area of infilling was carried out when the survey carried out and produced by local cavers indicated a large void directly under the foundations of a house.

Due to the location of the chamber known by local cavers as the “Engine Room” as during the early period of exploration it was possible to hear the sound of the Engine used at the house to generate electricity. To gain access a large diameter shaft was excavated in the garden of the house and then a tunnel driven back to the chamber and in filling carried out via this route.

It is planned to make a further visit to the site to carry out the inspection of this area and if all meets with the approval of the Deputy Gaveler this section of the mine will also be handed back to the cavers.

The existing manhole cover is to be replaced with a hinged lid fitted with a “Inside openable system” so that when cavers are visiting the site the lid can be securely shut.

The shaft is 19m deep.

Access will again be through FoDCCAG

### **Robin Hood Iron Mine Main Shaft and Land Shaft.**

During a recent visit to this site by the Deputy Gaveler and Maurice Febry the lock on the Main Shaft was found to be defective and inoperable. At the direction of the DG a new lock is to be fitted and access administered via the FoDCCAG Permit Secretary. FoDCCAG have been asked to carry out an examination of the top of the shaft (64m deep) to determine what the existing steel sheet that covers the shaft sits on. If necessary it may have to be replaced or strengthened.

This site provides for an excellent abseil with a good area of mine workings to explore at the bottom.

At the present time the 20m deep Land Shaft or "Little John Shaft" is not covered over.

However the DG is proposing a similar steel sheet with grilled access gate.

He has again asked FoDCCAG to visit the site and examine the shaft top so that a suitable sized sheet can be installed.

From the base of this shaft an inclined passage leads into the workings accessed from the main shaft. Unfortunately a collapse has occurred on the incline. However with accurate surveying it should be possible to determine the length of the collapse and dig through it if it is not too long.

New fences are to be installed around both sites and also have gates in them for ease of access. FoDCCAG have proposed that the locks on the gates and the shaft tops are the same for both locations as they are very close together.

This has met with approval.

### **Slade Brook Cave**

Since it's exploration by John Elliott and Jan Karvik a few years back to approximately 250m in length the site has had a gate of sorts in place just in from the entrance.

The entrance is located right along side a Forestry track / footpath and now that the area has been designated as an SSSI (See Descent No. ) Forest Enterprise has requested that a more suitable grill is installed.

Maurice Febry the FoDCCAG Conservation and Access Officer is liaising with both FE & English Nature to ensure that it meets the requirements.

During periods of high rainfall a substantial flow of water comes out of the cave as the lower resurgence is unable to take the full amount. Therefore what is fitted must not impede the flow of water or have any influence on the Tuffa Dams that lie further on down the valley.

Again access will be via the FoDCCAG Permit Secretary.

### **Gloucester Speleological Society 50 Years Old in 2006**

Although still quite a way off plans are already being prepared by the GSS Committee to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formation of the society in 1956.

Maurice Febry has been working away making up a collection of old photographs and a variety of other items from those early years.

He plans to make this into a significant presentation for the celebrations.

He gave the members a short taster of some of what he has already put together at the recent GSS AGM.

If you are a past GSS member and you feel that you may have any pictures or items from the past GSS History please contact the GSS Hon Secretary Joe Duxbury at the following. [Secretary@gloucesterspelo.org](mailto:Secretary@gloucesterspelo.org)  
Also watch this space for further details of the GSS celebrations.

### **Newspaper Reporter Taken on Caving Trip.**

The “Forester” as the name implies is one of two that have their circulation centered on the Forest of Dean and like the “Revue” are a weekly rather than a daily.

Over the years both have carried numerous articles related to the activities of cavers in the area.

Recently the Revue carried a front page article promoting a talk being given by Paul Taylor on 50 years of Cave Exploration the Wye Valley and included within it reference to the latest discoveries at Miss Grace’s Lane. Now over 4km long and still growing slowly.

For the most part these articles have been put together from interviews and discussions either on the surface or via the telephone. With the reporter taking notes and preparing his or her article from them.

Recently however the opportunity arose to take a reporter underground on a reasonable significant caving trip to provide some first hand experience.

Something I am sure many other people in the caving world have done but other than Film and TV people this was a first for Wet Sink (Slaughter Stream Cave).

Being right on the doorstep the Forester was quick to send a reporter down to Otter Hole to cover the rescue in July 2003.

Good coverage was given to this incident and it led into a follow up feature article on the GCRG. In fact the week of the rescue the paper had carried a similar article on SARA (Severn Area Rescue Association) and as both groups had been involved with the rescue it was nice to see the coverage.

Since that date further articles have been published to cover the Westbury Brook Iron Mine Project (See Descent No. ) The combined rescue exercise held in Monument Coal Mine (see Descent No.) and although 12 months ago in September 2003 the combined GCRG, WBCRT and MCRO rescue exercise in Wet Sink. All have been very good articles and portrayed the events in a very good light and been factually correct. Which is very good for those involved. Nothing worse than seeing an article go out that in reality is not that good.

It was while she was at this exercise that Paul jokingly suggested “Well all you need now Rachael is a trip underground to complete the picture”. Paul was slightly taken aback when the reply “I would love to” was made.

12 months later and all the insurance problems sorted out and a trip was finally arranged for October 16<sup>th</sup> 2004.

One problem with the Forest of Dean Caves is that there are a lot of short ones like the ones at Symonds Yat, perfect for beginners. And although it must be said that Rachael fell exactly into that field as she had not been caving before they are not the ideal when you wish to try and link the article to other events such as rescues or the broader concept. To move up to the next stage and the caves take on a very different light giving a very different type of trip.

Of all the Forest Caves it has to be said that Wet Sink (Slaughter Stream Cave) is really the only choice. Would a First Time Caver be happy crawling into the delights of Redhouse Lane Swallet with it's Ducks and Creeps, Big Sink with it's 200m Rift, Otter Hole which although full of formations has the disadvantage of just a bit of mud. Miss Grace's Lane comes in a good second but with no disrespect to the site does not hold the variety of passage that Wet Sink has to offer.

And of course at the end of the day you do not want to put the person off completely as of course they are going to be writing about the experience and are likely to meet you again at some time in the future. A bad event here could take years to put right.

For those that know Wet Sink at around 13km in length it is a cave that is very spread out with long sections of passage leading out like the fingers on a hand. To reach the ends of these passages although excellent caving trips they do involve many hours to get there and back and primarily give only one type of passage.

A bit of a generalization but I hope you get the gist of what is being put forward.

Fortunately within the central section or palm relating back to the hand analogy is a very good round trip know as the "Coal Seam Round Trip" (no coal seam by the way).

Although it is still necessary to negotiate the entrance series pitches as there is presently only one route in and out of the cave. Once this has been completed and Cross Stream Junction reached the rest of the trip does not involve any more major pitches, contains sections of streamway going upstream, before climbing the Zuree Aven Cascades to gain the Upper Dry Series, then into the much larger Chunnel. Here is the opportunity to see the start of the Deserts before taking the meandering dry Coal Seam Passage that descends back down to the lower Dry Slade Passage.

Heading back along this passage and the stream is reached again at the junction where it turns off to Sump 1.

Going upstream the passage is well sized and very eroded with the water not too deep but enough is flowing to bring the passage alive compared to the very static drier sections. Back at Cross Stream Junction the circle has been completed and it is back out via the pitches.

For somebody who had never been caving before here was somebody who took to it like a duck to water and enjoyed every minute of the trip even though the trip was a bit longer than planned. For anybody who knows Paul you will know he can't stop talking and with a female as well.

For anybody who has seen the TV Film made in the cave for the Extreme Archaeology Series this person could run rings around those three girls and still come back for more.

Thanks are extended to Jo Clarke and Gareth Jones from the GSS for sorting out all the gear and for doing an excellent job in getting Rachael down and back up the Pitches.

Steve Tomalin for the loan of an Oversuit. Last but by no means least to Rachael Limbrick for taking on quite a considerable challenge. The picture taken in the Main Stream Passage with a broad smile on her face was certainly says it all and was not put on for the camera. Those involved would be only too pleased to take you again.

### Westbury Brook Iron Mine

Westbury Brook Iron Mine in the Forest of Dean was during its heyday one of the largest Iron Mines in the area producing many thousands of tons of iron ore during the period of

production. However the onset of much cheaper and ease of availability of supplies from other sources saw the decline and eventual closure of the mine along with the rest in the area.

Access to the underground workings was however regained in January 1971 as a result of a considerable digging effort put in by Roger & Lawrence Bailey of the RFDCC.

A new survey was completed by Dave Underhill and the late Roger Solari.

Further digging work over the interim years by the RFDCC has seen access regained to the farthest reaches of the mine although this has been restricted to areas above the present water table. Below this they are all flooded and were only open as a result of pumping.

Since the mine was reopened the presence of bats within the workings was recorded and over the years these numbers have increased dramatically to such a level that it became one of the areas major winter roosting / hibernation sites.

This level of use resulted in English Nature declaring the site as an SSSI and more recently as a cSAC.

This level of significance required that the site was gated and locked with access administration placed in the hands of FoDCCAG.

Persons wishing to visit the site can apply to the FoDCCAG Permit Secretary David Tuffley and as long as they meet the required conditions (primarily suitable Insurance) then a permit and key are issued. [Permits@redhousefod.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:Permits@redhousefod.freeserve.co.uk) or phone Dave on 01594 824343

Unfortunately there are still some people around who consider that the provision of any form of gate or barrier is an infringement to their rights.

As a result of what can only be described as a deliberate act the gate on the mine was severely damaged and the lock smashed off and thrown away.

Repair work and substantial beefing up of the frame around the gate has now been carried out by FoDCCAG and a replacement lock installed.

Thanks are extended to the Forestry Commission and in particular the Deputy Gaveller John Harvey for making funds available for the work and also to English Nature for a speedy agreement to the proposed modifications, which needed to meet, laid down designs.

Thanks also to Maurice Febry (FoDCCAG Conservation & Access Officer) for co-ordinating and helping with the work. Along with David Tuffley and Seb Hall (FoDCCAG / RFDCC) who helped with getting the gear to the site and carrying out the welding. Barrie Hemming and Paul Taylor were roped in during the afternoon with the job of helping to get the Generator / Welder unit back up the slope from the entrance to the surface.

It is a pity that they people who carry out this damage can't do a bit of lateral thinking and consider a few factors.

1. Had cavers not opened up the site they would not be able to go into it anyway.
2. Had Forest Enterprise and English Nature not recently spent £118,000.00 on the work to secure the Funnel Area just inside the entrance it would have collapsed and access would have been lost.
3. Damage to a SSSI or a cSAC is an offence and is something that English Nature will pursue through the courts.

4. All people have to do if they wish to go down the mine, is ask.

However that is all probably too difficult to understand.

### **Multi Agency Rescue Practice**

On Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2004 another multi agency rescue practice took place at Hopewell Colliery, Cannop. The Fire and Rescue Service, Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group, Mines Rescue Team from Dinas, Ambulance Service paramedics, Old Uncle Tom Cobbley and all his mates, got together under the watchful eye of her Majesty's Inspector of Mines, Tony Forster.

The rescue scenario was that a supposed renegade group of cavers had forced several of the mine's locked gates and then made an illegal entry into the colliery workings. The basic idea of this was to replicate a similar instance to where gates of several mines have recently been cut off or forced by an actual renegade group of cavers, thought to be from the Bristol and surrounding area and who have gained entry to the mines.

Several of the practice 'renegade' group then had a series of maladies, i.e. falls, exposure in cold water etc. The Mines Rescue Team in full breathing apparatus, found treated and removed one casualty, whilst GCRG found and brought out another.

The Mines Inspector appeared to be satisfied with the actions of the groups and the outcome of the evenings events and afterwards gave a short address to all those attended.

One point that should have been mentioned and that was the Fire Brigade's fire appliance had its engine merrily running away and blowing its exhaust fumes in the general direction of one of the mine's entrances and the assembly area. Not a good idea methinks.

### **Things to look out for at Club social meetings**

Nicky Bailey is going to give talk on the 2004 Meghalaya Expedition.

Ben Church is going to talk on caving around the world

No dates have been fixed for these but just ask a friendly committee member and watch the notice board in the Rising Sun

## PEBBLE TOOLS FROM THE FOREST OF DEAN

Christopher Bowen

In the Summer of 2000 three members of the Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club explored a shallow iron mine known as Gate Hole, on Wigpool Common, north of Mitcheldean at SO 6552 1971. The strata here is the iron bearing limestone which outcrops on the surface in a band around the outer edge of the common. Much ore has been extracted here and the outcrop is pitted with ancient surface workings, shallow mines known as scowles and occasional open caves. It is also the location of the 19/20th century Wigpool deep iron mine.

About 10m below the surface, the caving club members noticed what appeared to be a rounded pebble amongst the usual angular rock debris (Fig 1).<sup>1</sup> As pebbles had not previously been found in local mines, this one was taken out for scrutiny. Its use as a tool is indicated by surface wear on the flat side and possibly on the ends. Shaped like a typical seashore pebble, it is a fine grained sandstone, hard and very dense. It is light brown in colour with darker brown banding. The rock type is quartzite, which is not found in the Forest of Dean. Quartzite is a quartz sandstone made denser and harder by secondary metamorphism or silicification. The origin of such erratic pebbles is considered to be in the South Midlands. They are occasionally found in the Cotswolds, spread south by glacial drift, but have not been recorded from the Forest. The pebble is now in the possession of the owners of Clearwell Cave who hold the mineral rights on Wigpool Common.

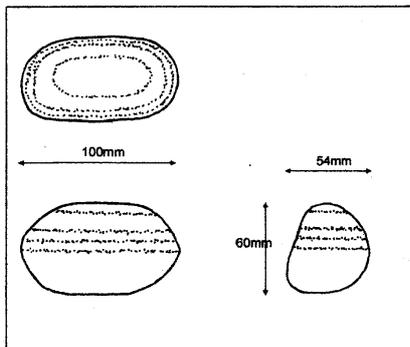


Fig 1 Quartzite pebble from Gate Hole Wigpool Common

The period when the pebble was used is not known. This type of hand tool was used from the Palaeolithic period to the Iron Age. Extraction of iron ore in the Forest of Dean is generally considered to have started in the Iron Age; however, iron minerals such as ochre were used for colouring purposes much earlier. Whether or not the pebble was used underground by an early miner is not clear, since it could have gravitated from the surface, down into the mine by a route now blocked. The chamber in which it was found also contained a few items of more recent debris, indicating a one-time connection to the surface. Assuming that the pebble was taken into the mine for use, as being harder than any local rock, it is good evidence for primitive, albeit undated, mining and processing of iron or indeed of ochre as used in Upper Palaeolithic burials.<sup>2</sup>

In April 2003, a second almost identical quartzite pebble was found underground in the working known as Sway Hole, about 20m below the surface and close to the entrance. Sway Hole at SO 6570 1947, like Gate Hole, is one of several entrances, through old outcrop workings, into the deep Wigpool Mine. It is about 200m south of Gate Hole where the first pebble was found. This pebble is very similar dimensionally and the colour is a uniform grey/brown. Its flattest side shows surface wear and at both ends the texture is coarser as if roughened by hammering. What appear to be brown iron minerals are embedded in some of the small cavities.

Previous to the finding of the first pebble, but unknown at the time, two hammerstones made of local Whitehead limestone and a pebble of unspecified rock type had been found by J Wright, Director of Clearwell Caves.<sup>3,4</sup> They were found on the surface of the limestone outcrop at scowles near Drybrook Quarry 2.5km to the south-west of Wigpool at about SO 636 179. These artifacts were examined on by Simon Timberlake, Director of the Copa Hill Bronze Age mine research project. In his detailed report on them, on their usage context and their significance, he suggests that if the site was prospected / mined for ochre in prehistory, then it is unique in the British Isles and activity would be much earlier than hitherto recorded for a metal mining site.

### References

- 1 BOWEN, C. 'A Prehistoric Implement from Wigpool'. *Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club Newsletter*. 127, 10-12.
- 2 RHODES, J. Personal Communication. 14 May 2003.
- 3 TIMBERLAKE, S. 'Hammerstones from Scowles at Drybrook'. *Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club Newsletter*. 127, 12.
- 4 *Gloucestershire Sites & Monuments Record*, area 20829.

## **Wigpool Iron Mine**

Back in 1999, myself and Malcolm Castle took my son-in-law Andrew Day on his first caving trip, into Wigpool. He was doing quite well, and so we descended to second level and the old timber bridge. I crossed the bridge, but Andrew was a little concerned at the sight of it. "It's quite safe" I said... he took one step onto the bridge and the whole thing collapsed beneath him. Naturally you don't rush just because someone has a fall, and we knew he was standing on the bottom, but he didn't, and was hanging on for grim death, thinking there was a shaft below him. After that event, a good trip was had by all. Sad to say, he has not caved since, (I don't know why?!)

Les Twissell and I discussed the rebuilding of the bridge and keeping it looking as original as possible, by using the old planks with just new poles. And so four 10.0' x 4" diameter poles were purchased and taken down to the site - and easier than you might think as they don't stop once they've started, you have to hang on. Les had the idea of sitting on one pole and riding it down (not one of his better ideas!) This achieved, the project was put on hold as the water was up high the next week. Unfortunately the second level didn't open again for the next two years or so. When it did in October 2002 we commenced to rebuild the bridge, on the completion of the task, with time to spare one Wednesday, Les suggested we look at the back filled tunnel that we had talked about for years... and so digging commenced (nearly opposite trial pit).

It was easy going at first, but then a hole appeared in the roof. This was enlarged a little, and to our horror you could see a funnel shaped hole 10 to 15 feet high with six very large boulders around the top edge sitting on crap. These would have to be removed before we carried on digging through. So the next week, with a 30' rope in hand we returned. The first big block 4' long and 2' wide was undermined, and with heaving and pushing it slid down just right. It was harder to get it to one side, than get it down, but safer, as we didn't want to block our way out. The next was a round one about 20" diameter, the rope was carefully put around it and Les and I pulled. "It's coming" I shouted, and it came, rolling up the rope as well, smashing into the first boulder at our feet which jumped into the air. Fortunately for us it fell back breaking in half. (Now I have two 15' ropes.) Requiring a change of pants, we went for a beer or two.

Over the next two weeks Les, Chris Bowen and I made all the boulders safe, although one did block the hole with Les on the wrong side. It was Les's round to buy the beer, so we couldn't leave him in there... Chris and I undermined it and released Les in time for last orders. Now we could explore the funnel, and to our surprise we found ourselves looking up a shaft approximately 80 to 100' high, 8' wide at the bottom, narrowing to 6' wide at the top. At the first point, but on the wrong side, there was an iron spike sticking out of the wall, and with the aid of some tile batons, a rope was hooked on to it. A couple of sharp pulls and it was

deemed safe for me to climb. So up I went, showering Les and Chris with mud and rocks. Once at the spike a very difficult traverse was made with more rocks onto Les and Chris cowering at the bottom. To the side out of sight from the bottom, was a large aven formed by compressed mud washing out, hence the boulders below, but no onward tunnel. I spied a small hole about 6" diameter in the scree crap, and enlarging the hole I could see down into a tunnel. More digging and I was in a tunnel 4' wide and 3' high, with railway tracks about 30' long and a collapse at the end. With some digging you could get around, but that would have to wait for another week as I had a horrible climb to do again. Standing at the side of the track at the entrance to the tunnel, on my way out I found a corked bottle with unknown contents. I brought the bottle out and now I'd like to get it analysed.

A wire ladder now replaces the rope and there's a hand line to the tunnel. Digging continues following the tracks and hopefully we'll find a way to the top without having to climb the rest of the shaft. All that we've achieved so far, has been dug with tender loving care, and so we've named the shaft 'T.L.C' (after Terry, Les and Chris)

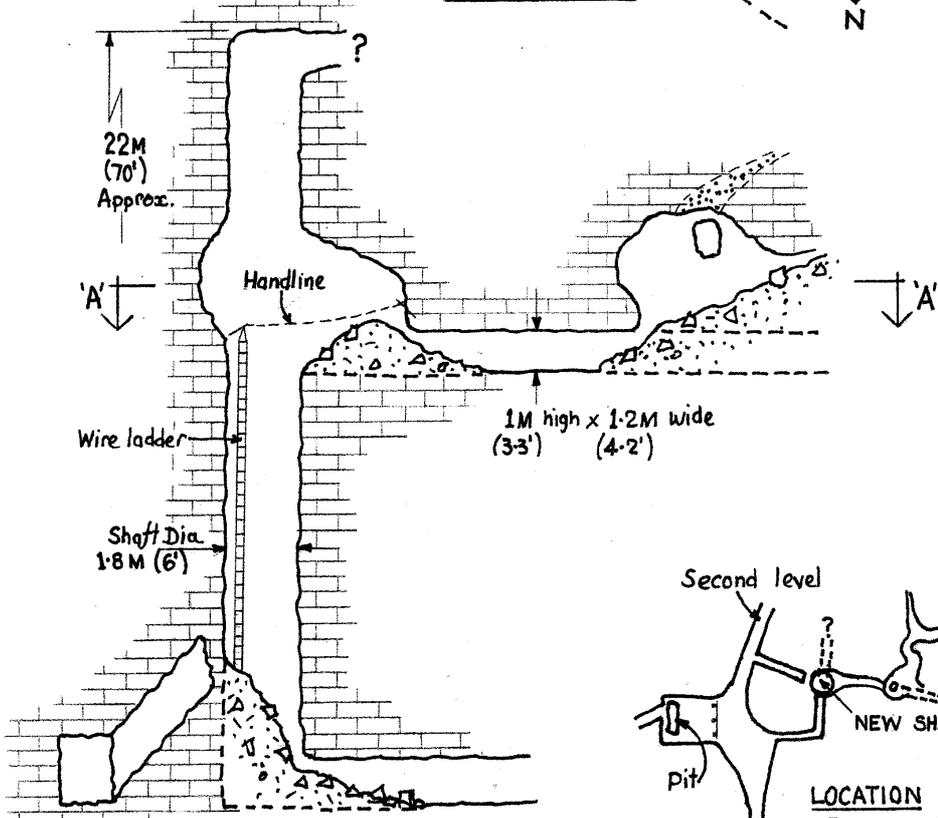
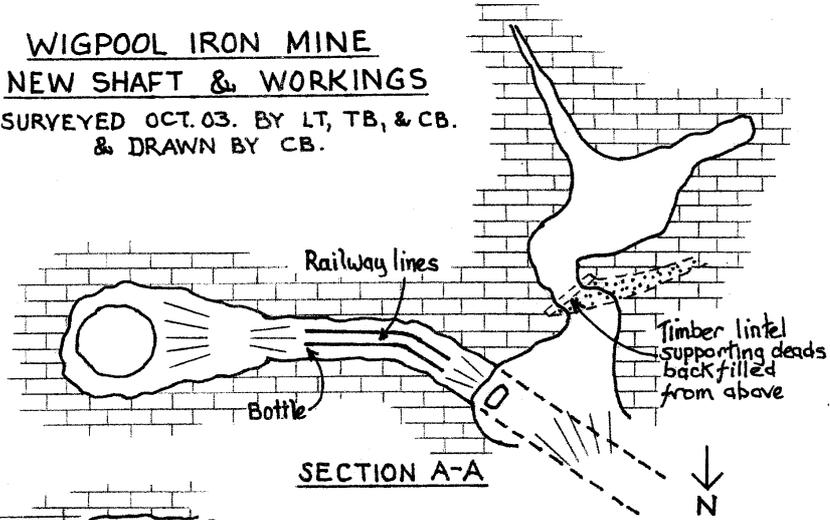
Watch this space.

## **Quarter Mile Churn**

Les and I have rebuilt the Wind Gate and wall at the bottom of quarter mile churn. Please do not try to close it, because we have put it on it's hinges the wrong way on purpose, to preserve the door for as long as possible.

Terry Browning

**WIGPOOL IRON MINE**  
**NEW SHAFT & WORKINGS**  
 SURVEYED OCT. 03. BY LT, TB, & CB.  
 & DRAWN BY CB.



**NEW SHAFT**  
 Side passages are shown out of position for clarity — For true orientation see LOC. PLAN.

