

Forest of Dean Caving Club

Newsletter 134 October 2008

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Editorial – Dave Tuffley

At the end of last year I was chided by someone who thought the newsletter was anti-women and sexist. There was only the one person despite me asking around as to what people generally thought. I personally will take the piss out of all subjects whether they are male or female. So, if you don't like what is in the newsletter then please come along and vote me out at this next AGM as its not going to change this year!

So where is everyone on a Wednesday night at the Rising Sun, Moseley Green? There are only 2 or 3 people who now attend this watering hole. Are you still caving out there? If so, then why aren't you meeting at the pub any more? My excuse is a reasonable one as I have to get up at 5 am in order to beat the traffic going into Gloucester. As soon as the road works are finished then I shall come to the pub again.

If you can't make the pub on a Wednesday then please be at the Club AGM to be held as usual at the Rising Sun on Monday 3rd November at 7.30 pm prompt.

Committee for 2008/2009 (Soon to changed on November 3rd 2008)

Chairman	Greg Jones
Secretary	Sue Corston
Treasurer	Andy Clark
Librarian	Nicola Bayley
Tackle Office	Seb Hall
Newsletter Editor	Dave Tuffley
Meets Secretary	Greg Jones
Other member	Nick Negus

Co-opted Positions

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

RFDCC Web Page

www@rfdcc.org.uk

FOREST NEWS

Retro Christmas trip

On the 19th December 2007 the club had its annual retro trip where all manner of modern electric lighting is banned and only carbide and candle power is used. About 30 people attended and enjoyed a slow trip down Old Ham to Railway Churn due to the large numbers who attended. Some of the home made methods of illumination were a wonder to behold. Jan Karvic's modern version of a "nelly" was worthy of a lot of comment. Nice to see another institution and tradition being formed in the club.



Ladder sections at the Cave Resue Depot

Recently Nick Negus has managed to acquire some sections of aerial mast ladder, which are very handy for the entrances to our digs. These are not light, flimsy sections and will be a strain on any roof racks so please be careful. Anyway, they are up at the depot for anyone's use but a small donation to cave rescue funds will not go amiss if you wish to help yourself to some.

Meerbrook Level

In late November 2007 a gang of club members namely, Dave (I'm a mine deputy) Tuffley, Seb (the photographer) Hall, George (I get sexually excited at the word 'Pennant') Price, Sue (Whose stupid idea was this!) Corston and John (the laddie with the lamp) Hine, all had an officially sanctioned trip up a coal level called the Meerbrook Level. For those who do not know it, it is a very old drainage level for the Lightmoor Colliery, and is situated near to Ruspidge football pitch and the Cinderford Brook. It was initially driven as a separate mine into the house coal seams, and on the introduction of the Dean Forest Mines Acts in about 1840 was amalgamated into the Lightmoor Colliery.

Brain James, the gale owner, agreed to our photographic trip but he said that he thought that there was a fall near to the entrance, so could we also give him a short report afterwards? Answer – Yes. We put his mind at rest when I mentioned that several were qualified small mine deputies and could use a flame safety lamp and were also covered by the BCA third party liability insurance.

The entrance to the level is screened by a wire mesh, which was tacked across a wooden frame set into the ground. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, it was loose in the ground and fairly easy to get by it. Whilst I had the forethought to wear a furry suit, the others did not and were soon up to their thighs in cold, ochreous water. The description of the level is that it is driven in sandstone (Oops, I nearly said Pennant then!) with areas of stone arching where the coal seams intersect the level. There is a continuous flow of water coming out this is full of rusty foam from the iron pyrites in the coal seams. This is very staining and you will certainly need a good bath in clean water afterwards.

New Members for 2007 - 2008

The club would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new members:-

Steve McCabe
Graham Allathan
Mark Thrift plus two sons, Alexander and Benjamin
Mike Burtinshaw plus Sue and sons Adam and Richard.
Timothy White, son of Malcolm White
Heather Elliot
Rebecca Collins
Sharon Powell
George Cheshire
Kevin Tuffley

The Club kitty

Unless Andy Clark has run off with all the club's money, we have the following dated from June 2008:

£632 in the current account
£2876 in the Savings Account

Otter Hole Access Procedure

Since its discovery in 1974, the Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club (RFDCC) has controlled access to Otter Hole on behalf of, and at the request of, the landowner. Parties visiting the cave must be accompanied by a warden, partly to minimise the danger of the cave's infamous "tidal sump"; and partly to help protect/conservate the beautiful formations that adorn the further reaches of Otter Hole.

Over the past couple of years RFDCC has come in for a bit of stick from some quarters over shortage of information and poor communication with regard to the system for booking a trip. In an effort to address these concerns RFDCC have put more information about the booking procedure on their website, together with an online calendar showing which dates are available and, where a date is booked, who has booked it. The website is excellently maintained by Andy Harp and Nicky Bayley, and Nicky has also agreed to take on the role of Otter Hole Secretary; replacing John Hutchinson who has stood down after doing the job for more years than I (and maybe John) can remember. Many thanks are due to John, who is still going to be involved in the management of the cave.

Applications for trips for a maximum of 4 persons should be made to the Otter Hole Secretary:

Email: otterhole@rfdcc.org.uk

Post: Nicky Bayley, 67 Templeway West, Lydney, Glos. GL15 5JD

Telephone: 01594 840481

Access is available to anyone with third party caving insurance.

More information about Otter Hole can be found on the RFDCC website;
<http://www.rfdcc.org.uk/> Follow the links to Otter Hole.

Greg Jones, Chairman RFDCC.

CLUB A.G.M.

This year's A.G.M. will be held at the Rising Sun, Moseley Green at 7.30 pm . It is important that you attend this once a year event to find out just what is going on in the club. Most important of all is that you elect the new committee, a thing without which the club cannot function. So be there!

Noxon Park accident – Dave Tuffley

I went to a talk in April, given by historian Brian Johns at the local history society meeting. Brian's subject was Noxon Park and its history. He mentioned that whilst he was at Bream Primary School in the 1940's, the teachers used to take the school children on nature walks into the park to study the wildlife. Part of the walk was to look at a deep cleft in the ground near to the Bream side of the park. One day, on a repeat trip, the teacher stood all the children near to the edge of the cleft and the children listen attentively whilst the teacher talked about the iron ore and its extraction by the local miners. Suddenly, a young boy pitched forward and fell headlong down to the bottom of the hole some 50 feet below. Brian ran with the teacher to the end of the hole and then ran along the bottom to the lad's prostrate body lying on the floor. Brian was told by the teacher to run to the nearest house and get adult help immediately. This he did, and brought back a man from the house, but things got a lot worse because the man was an uncle to the poor lad that had fallen to the bottom of the hole.

Unfortunately, their efforts were all in vain as the lad had already died from his injuries. The teacher never recovered from the accident and never taught the school children again. Brian showed a projector image upon a screen and it showed the site of the accident as exactly where RFDCC goes abseil and ladder practicing regularly. So, if you feel a creepy presence near the next time you go down there, then just give a careful thought to the young lad who finished up at the bottom of the hole.

Derek's story

It is important for men to remember that, as women grow older, it becomes harder for them to maintain the same quality of housekeeping as when they were younger. When you notice this, try not to yell at them. Some are oversensitive, and there's nothing worse than an oversensitive woman.

My name is Derek. Let me relate how I handled the situation with my wife, Julie. When I took "early retirement" last year, it became necessary for Julie to get a full-time job, both for extra income and for the health benefits that we needed. Shortly after she started working, I noticed she was beginning to show her age. I usually get home from the golf course about the same time she gets home from work. Although she knows how hungry I am, she almost always says she has to rest for half an hour or so before she starts dinner. I don't yell at her. Instead, I tell her to take her time and just wake me when she gets dinner on the table. I generally have lunch in the Men's Grill at the club so eating out is not reasonable. I'm ready for some home cooked grub when I hit that door. She used to do the dishes as soon as we finished eating. But now it's not unusual for them to sit on the table for several hours after dinner. Do what I can by diplomatically reminding her several times each evening that they won't clean themselves. I know she really appreciates this, as it does seem to motivate her to get them done before she goes to bed.

Another symptom of aging is complaining, I think. For example she will say that it is difficult for her to find time to pay the monthly bills during her lunch hour. But, boys, we take 'em for better or worse, so I just smile and offer encouragement. I tell her to stretch it out over two or even three days. That way she won't have to rush so much. I also remind

her that missing lunch completely now and then wouldn't hurt her any (if you know what I mean). I like to think tact is one of my strong points.

When doing simple jobs, she seems to think she needs more rest periods. She had to take a break when she was only half finished mowing the yard. I try not to make a scene. I'm a fair man. I tell her to fix herself a nice, big, cold glass of freshly squeezed lemonade and just sit for a while. And, as long as she is making one for herself, she may as well make one for me too.

I know that I probably look like a saint in the way I support Julie. I'm not saying that showing this much consideration is easy. Many men will find it difficult. Some will find it impossible! Nobody knows better than I do how frustrating women get as they get older. However, guys, even if you just use a little more tact and less criticism of your aging wife because of this article, I will consider that writing it was well worthwhile. After all, we are put on this earth to help each other.....

Signed,
Derek

EDITOR'S NOTE: Derek died suddenly on May 27th.

The police report says that he was found with a Calloway extra long 50-inch Big Bertha Driver II golf club rammed up his ass, with only 2 inches of grip showing. His wife Julie was arrested and charged with murder; however, the all-woman jury found her Not Guilty, accepting her defence that he accidentally sat down on it very suddenly!

All you feminists happy now !!

Testo Draught Meter – Dave Tuffley

The Club, having bought a super-doooper Testo draught detecting machine, needed to have it checked out somewhere in order to justify it's purchase. Seb and I decided to take it down out dig at the Brinchcombe Iron Ore Level and test to see where the draught is coming from. This should give us a clue to where to restart digging in a productive direction. We sat at the T junction at the far end and got the wonder machine out of its wrapping and set it going only to find that there was no draught being detected what so ever. This was odd, as we had all felt a draught coming out of the dig face on previous occasions. It suddenly dawned on us that the Temperature inside the mine must be the same as the ambient temperature outside the mine entrance. The machine registered 13.6 deg C at the dig. Back at the entrance we found no draught emitting from the mine and the temperature outside was practically the same as that inside. There being no temperature differential then there would be no draught – bugger !!!
Please bear this in mind when using the Testo wonder draught detector. Anyway, we intend to go back on a very cold day later on in the year and repeat the exercise

Treasure Hunt 2008 Sue Corston

Well done to all those who braved the wet on a Monday night in June at the Rising Sun! Despite the rain, we had a good turn out and a good time was had by all (I think!).

Thanks to Craig, Fiona and family, we enjoyed tramping through the undergrowth looking for requested items, and then when we returned, were rewarded with tasty hot dogs and a very delicious fruitcake.

A few teams entered, but the winners by a huge majority were the Wright Family, in their favour with a very long daisy chain! They of course are the lucky organisers of next year's treasure hunt!

As the midges gathered, the crowd dwindled, either off home or inside the pub! Thanks to all who participated.

CHANGES AT MISS GRACES LANE. – JAN KARVIC

All but a few small clusters of trees in The Park woods around Miss Graces Lane Cave have been felled, one of which surrounds the cave entrance.

The remaining brush wood and vegetation has been scraped back, to allow the relatively rare 'acid heath land' habitat to develop. This should encourage the growth of heathers and gorse, which in turn should attract a variety of fauna.

The whole area has also been fenced off, except for the main footpaths and tacks running across the newly opened out expanse. The forestry has stated that they will install a gate to facilitate access to the cave entrance, but until it finally materializes cavers will have to continue to gingerly step over the barbed wire fence.

For access all cavers (require third party caving insurance), should continue to contact Jan Karvik, at 1 Elmdale, Chepstow, NP16 7LD, telephone 01291 625741, though please note the **NEW E-MAIL ADDRESS** j.karvik@talktalk.net.

KELLY'S LANE MOTHBALLED

The last Kelly's Lane report in Newsletter 132, reported the team exploring a partly choked chamber 5m by 2m, dropping down 3m. A small draught was detected at the lowest point under the undercut left wall. Subsequent digging and surveying proved a link with a small right hand branch off the lower level, which was also investigated further in a desperate attempt to discover the best way on.

When conditions were dry enough the team continued to dig straight on down at the base of the main shaft, that would remain submerged for several weeks after any prolong rainfall. Pumping attempts proved ineffective, so it was decided only to dig down after the water had finally percolated away. In-between downwards bouts, efforts were resumed forging a way straight ahead along the lower level. After 4m this initially narrow and semi mud choked rift, became fully choked with compacted clay. A way up was carved out breaking up after 3m to a partly clay choked rising roof tube heading back over the lower level. Once cleared the tube broke up into a small decorated grotto off on the right, and to the left another choke was encountered. This choke proved to be only a

2m away and 1m above from the breakthrough point into the partly choked chamber discovered on Level B.

During last summer's floods, evidence was seen that the water level at the base of the main shaft had flooded/flowed into the lower level, with several meters of water remaining sitting for weeks in the shaft base. The team decided to wait for dryer times and took 2 months out, investigating other dig sites at High Wood and near Maggets Farm. Two sessions were spent helping out at Woolaston Wood Cave, passing sacks of spoil along a human chain. Here the contrast in digging styles and conditions was felt by all; with some considering that two sessions were two to many. Forays into Miss Graces Lane cave were also made, dividing the team between several digs mentioned in separate report.

On returning to Kelly's Lane downwards efforts were resumed, between wet spells. At times obvious drafts were experienced flowing along the lower level, which inspired further considerations to be made. The exact source remained illusive, but it was considered that the only feasible place was from the choke above the Level B chamber. The connection with the lower level was opened up just before the chamber, and a sacrificial attempt was made at progressing directly upwards, seeing if we could encounter any leads before it became too unstable. A 5m high void was created, without any inviting leads being encountered. Collapses of liquid mud threatened, if left unchecked, to swamp Level B and possibly start running into the main shaft.

The level connection point below the void was subsequently blocked up with dry stone walling, completely shutting out the void and the inevitable future collapses.

The frequently flooding downwards efforts in the main shaft were also failing to inspire the diggers, so having probed to a maximum depth of a little shy of 40m, it was decided to mothball all efforts at the lower levels of the cave for an indefinite period.

Still remaining on the 'to do' list are a few dig options worthy of further attentions, about 30m above in the upper sections of the cave, these only requiring 2 to 3 diggers to pursue them.

The Chepstow Diggers

Over the past few years the Miss Graces Lane/ Kelly's Lane digging team has metamorphosed various personnel and swelled in numbers, all becoming gainfully employed by the labour intensive demands of Kelly's Lane. Most recently the team has elevated to international status, digging both sides of the English Wales border simultaneously.

Regretfully the main push in the lower levels of Kelly's Lane has now been mothballed for the foreseeable future, having only yielded rather pitiful rewards for all the years of toil. Ceasing team activities Kelly's Lane created quite a quandary, as there were dozens of local digging projects to choose from, but none, at least in the early stages, to gainfully use all the team members. The only solution was to tackle two sites at once, where labour could be interchanged according to supply and demand. The only down side being that the engineering department, trying to ensure the digs are both prepared and safe for the weekly digging operations can become a little over stretched. The availability of the Welsh Piccadilly Pot was ideal as an established dig that required a team of six plus to

work efficiently. This was balanced by an English virgin site at Cowshill Farm, Hewelsfield which presently can be worked by just two.

The team has been enthusiastically digging both sites for the last three months, with prospects seemingly improving with each week that passes. Primarily the digging team are a Royal Forest of Dean CC digging group, but are also supported by Hades CC, Gloucester SS members also help out when required. All but one of the regular digging team are RFODCC members, as well being from other clubs around the UK. Presently the regular active diggers and their other clubs are David Dickson-Hades CC, George Cheshire-Hades CC & BPC, Chris Stott-BPC, Jan Karvik-BPC, John Mallabone-Orpheous, Mandy Edgeworth-SWCC, Rhys Williams-SWCC, Dan Sandford-SMCC, Marian Challis-SMCC, Adrian & Hazel Thorpe-SMCC. For want of a relevant term to refer to the team the Chepstow Diggers would now seem the most poignant.

MISS GRACE LANE CAVE UPDATES

The long lull in reports has not meant that nothing has been happening in the cave, only that no one thing has spawned a report.

Dan & Elaine Stanford plus Adrian & Hazel Thorpe took on drafting dig off the Phreatic Causeway. The mud floor of a narrow calcited cleft was excavated, but before long Dr Nobel was required on several occasions to ease the way. Surprisingly the fumes hung for days around the nearby passages, with the air at the dig face remaining quite fresh. Unfortunately after progressing only 5m a cross joint was reached, the draft coming from a small rising fissure only a few inches wide.

Flooded out at Kelly's Lane, some of the other Chepstow diggers helped out here and at two other dig sites at The Breach just off the original Canyon Passage. The first site seeks to find a continuation of the main Breach passage opposite, under the main choke, the other pushing through the choke at the end of the NW continuation.

After the team efforts Jan continued to work the later site, using Dr. Nobel to gain access into a subsidiary rift, after 2m this broke into 6m of small passage ending in a diggable drafting choke at floor level and a 4m climb up, which once gardened gained an upper 3m plus chamber with few low priority possible leads off.

A pulse racing project was undertaken by Jan digging up through the choked roof of the Dripping North Passage situated high above the Six Way Junction. Tens of tons of material was sent crashing down into the spacious voids below, eventually gardening out a yarning 8m climb up between spreading walls with hanging death to each side and over head. A very nerve racking squeeze through the balanced rocks above popped out into a large passage running over the Dripping North to a huge choke. About 25m back from the choke the passage swings westwards, possibly over the Phreatic Causeway, continuing 4m high 1.5m wide for a further 25m to another choke. Only one further trip back to this area is planned, to do a brief survey and have a further probing dig at the west choke. That is if Jan can find the courage to do it before the climb collapses, as contemplating shoring the climb, just for the 50m of large passage above, would be out of all proportion to the scale of engineering it would require.

The main hopes for further extensions presently lie in the original southerly Winter Storm section of the cave. Jan has put in dozens of solo trips to The Breeze Dig, located in the

westerly extension at the south end of the main Winter Storm passage. Originally a small 6m narrow rift could just be squeezed along to a choke. Closer inspect through the rocks above revealed the rift to be the lower section of a keyhole passage. Once cleared easier access to the choke was gained but spoil removal was still a problem, so the left side of the lower section was removed, creating an easy stoop/crawl passage. The choke, that contained a few pieces of unusual randomly shaped calcite formations, subsequently yielded within the next few sessions. Initially, gaining a bedding chamber which dropped into a couple of dry pools abound with crystalline deposits. A draft at the end encouraged a couple of additional digs but proved to be coming from an impossibly small rift, leaving the total Breeze extension at about 25m.

It was noted that the when the Breeze choke had only a small window through it how minimal the draft was, while a significant air flow could be felt in the much larger key hole passage. The conclusion drawn was that the draft most be going up in to the choke, thus another upwards mining campaign was started. The worryingly fractured wall of loosely bedded Whitehead Limestone was followed upwards for 3m were it has started to curve back over, giving hope of a roof which can be followed horizontally to the theorized caverns beyond.

COWSHILL FARM, HEWELSFIELD

Knowing for months ahead that activities at Kelly's Lane were likely to be concluded, I spent hours pondering the geological maps, then searching the terrain for speleological features while out running or walking the dog. Particular attention was paid to the areas where the lower limestone beds of the Tidenham syncline outcrops just south of Hewelsfield, the head of the basin containing MGL cave. On one such trip a depression was spotted in a field and on closer inspection it was found to be a pond that had developed a sink hole and all but drain itself. Checking the maps it appeared to be on the centre line of the syncline where the base of the lower dolomite or the shales invisibly out crop, a fault line was also not far away. It was also in line with other collapse features nearby, and I learnt from the farmer of a history of collapses and these aligned with the outcrop and the perpendicular fault line. Not unexpectedly he also said there had been some degree of backfilling within the doline that contained the pond. I left the farmer and his wife a copy of the MGL DVD, and contacted them a few days later to find they were quite enthused by the possibly of caverns below. They said we were welcome to have a go, requesting that at some point they would like to see their pond reinstated and have a copy of the DVD if one was made.

On Sunday 27 January 2008, Chris, George, myself and my two children, spend a pleasant sunny afternoon, digging a hole. The plan was to show willing and try hand digging first before giving any serious consideration to the far more disruptive and costly mechanical option. It was decided to make the hole 1.07m square, a very comfortable size to dig, but also large enough to take lorry tyres as a readily available and free permanent lining, if nothing better was sourced by the time we reached around the 6m mark. The shaft was to be temporarily shored with old scaffolding boards that hopefully would not need to survive more than a year or so.

Best judgement was used on the exact sitting of the shaft, but principally a proximity to the sink was deemed wise, close enough to connect with it if we had to, but try to keep it out for as long as possible.

Initial stoney fill soon gave way to consolidated clay that still contained various fragments that indicated that it must still be fill. Despite the tough going we still managed to gain 1.5m in 2.5 hours, with the clay sides looking stable enough to hold themselves up.

Successive Wednesday evening with two or three diggers saw the depth gradually increase to 3m, when one week we found the water from the sink had broken through the north wall. A 10 mm reinforcement bar was driven down in several places to try to find a drainage point, which finally, 2.5m down, drainage was penetrated and the water swirled happily away around the bar. The bar was subsequently left in and treated with reverence, as we could not afford to lose this drain point.

Further excavations to nearly 4m saw a large section of the lower north wall collapse into the shaft revealing the top fractured rock of a vertical solid limestone wall. Once cleared the continuing stability of the shaft was questionable, so the sides were cut back to size, in preparation for the shoring.

The following weekend, George Cheshire and I spend two half days installing the shoring, which was completed the following Wednesday. A scaffolded hauling frame doubling as a stock proof fence was also added.

Presently the shaft is approaching 5m, penetrating hard compacted clay interlaced with slag. Against the solid wall sticky wet clay and rocks prevail. Some large rocks have just been encountered, revealing the wall below to be virtually clay free and continuing to under cut, the clean rock against it meaning that drainage is no longer an issue. Also, a cool outwards draft can now be detected, ticking the final check box for desirable features for speculative digs of this nature.

PICCADILLY POT, ST ARVANS

Piccadilly Pot is an old Hades Caving Club dig, started in 1991, digging a shaft by hand in a collapse feature within a doline. At 5m the diggers had still not found rock, so in 1992 abandoned their efforts in favor of a mechanical excavator installing a new concrete pipe shaft on the rim of the doline, reported in Decent 105. Hades CC managed to raise the necessary £700 and a large crowd assemble for the big dig day including myself, drafted in armed with mixer, generator, gravel, cement, water etc. Over the following years digging continued sporadically, reaching a maximum depth of 14m pinched in by the rock but with various small fissures lead off.

Over the years I continued to support the diggers with loans of generators, breakers and scaffolding supplies, but was too busy managing our own digging projects to become directly involved underground. By 1994 enthusiasm had waned and the site was virtually inactive, in fact John Elliott and I considered taking it on when we were searching for a new dig site at that time, but felt the Hades may yet come back for another shot at it. Roger Cornish of Hades CC did continued to maintained an interest, but with years lapsing between various bouts. John and myself, with John Mallabone and Dan Taylor decided to tackle Miss Graces Lane, and I swapped some scaffolding supplies with Hades

for the 4.5m of surplus concrete pipe they had lying around at Piccadilly, that we needed to start the MGL shaft.

In 2007 due to persisting health problems Roger decided he would not be able to cave again and auctioned off his caving gear. Chris Stott, who living in St Arvans was particularly interested in the site, had contacted Roger previously making arrangements to go and look at it some time. A number of us in our digging team said we would come along too. Eventually on January 20th 2008, when all the cider had settled from the previous nights Chepstow Wassail / Mari Lwyd, we called Roger, and collected the key. We spent the first half hour cutting back the bramble cocoon that had completely engulfed the entire entrance including the tripod. Surprisingly the padlock did open, only to fall to bits on reinserting the key. Below all was carefully inspected and the draft meter gainfully employed. At the lowest point drafts were detected in the fissures all around, making it difficult to decide what would be best to dig. I explained to Chris my assessment of the leads, then he went down and explained what he thought to me, which didn't seem to collate. I descended again and turning up side down spotted the lead that I thought he must be taking about. It appeared to lead to a crawl with a solid roof and which contained possibly the best draft, so that was it, we would go for that. It latter transpired that Chris and I had both made the same initial assessments, but had failed to understand each others explanations, which had fortunately lead us to discover the best lead.

Two weeks later having completed the moth balling of Kelly's Lane lower levels, and checking with the farmer that it was okay to renew activities at PP. We also obtained Hades CC blessing, learning that David Dickson was to continue to be their PP custodian, apparently a job that had been bestowed upon him at one of their meetings, but no one had got around to informing him about. Thus our intense attack began.

Simultaneously we began to open up the new lead and completely transform the existing dig to improve safety and efficiency. Protrusions both large and small were removed or trimmed, scaffolding and ladders added, and a direct hauling system from dig base to surface, involving a deviation around a wheelbarrow wheel and sheathed scaffold tube. On close inspection the stability of the existing dig was very questionable, and the diggers were amazed that it has managed to survive so many years. On one Wednesday night the diggers, fearing the place was going to collapse, downed tools in favor of the pub, until the engineering department could work their magic. Additional scaffolding has greatly improved the situation and a program of dry stone walling all the voids with deads is well underway.

We were soon 3m along the new crawl looking down rift into a 3m deep pot, partially choked by rocks. To access the pot the crawl was enlarged, and due to the blocked nature of the rock this 14m level ended up as almost walking size. Over the pot our activities released a mud and rockslide from above, revealing a hanging death aven reaching at least 6m above. Fortunately once the run-in was cleared and a few more boulders popped the aven gave us a few days grace. The engineering team, being myself usually assisted by George Cheshire and or Chris Stott, installed three heavy section galvanized channels below the aven, onto which were laid around a cubic meter of dry stone walling to completely shut out all issues from above. This operation involved me in an 8 hour shift after work on a Tuesday night, George exiting at 11.30 pm, and myself the following morning at 5.00 am.

The pot below the girder trio is presently about 4m deep, and we have recently broken through the west wall, gaining 3m depth and passage to drafting from north to south and open for a several meters each way, both begging to be dug. The plan is to continue sinking the shaft for the next few weeks, which should join a more efficient junction, from which to start digging the new leads.

Fairplay Pit

Vandals have been at the top of this old iron mine shaft and have damaged parts of the wire mesh and supporting cables that lie across the very top of the shaft. It was mentioned by Greg Jones at a committee meeting that damage had occurred and a quick e mail to John Harvey, the Deputy Gaveller, has resulted in some pictures being taken and probably FODCCAG being tasked with rectifying the damage. Why the damaged happened is beyond reason as you can still look down the shaft and the mesh is just there to stop you falling down a 250 foot shaft and having a sudden de-acceleration at the bottom.

Joke 1

My wife and I were sitting at a table at my 25th high school reunion, and I kept staring at a drunken woman swigging her drink, as she sat alone at a nearby table.

My wife asked, 'Do you know her?'

'Yes,' I sighed. 'She's my old girlfriend. I understand she started drinking right after we split up those many years ago, and I hear she hasn't been sober since.'

'My God!' says my wife. 'Who would think a person could go on celebrating that long?'

Joke 2

When southern Florida resident Nathan Radlich's house was burglarized recently, thieves ignored his wide screen plasma TV, his VCR, and even left his Rolex watch.

What they did take, however, was "a generic white cardboard box filled with a grayish-white powder." (That, at least, is the way the police report described it.)

A spokesman for the Fort Lauderdale police said, "that it looked similar to high grade cocaine and they'd probably thought they'd hit the big time."

Later, Nathan stood in front of the numerous TV cameras and pleaded with the burglars:

"Please return the cremated remains of my sister, Gertrude.

She died three years ago."

The next morning, the bullet-riddled corpse of a local drug dealer known as Hoochie Pevens was found on Nathan's doorstep.

The cardboard box was there too; about half of Gertrude's ashes remained.

Scotch taped to the box was this note which said : "Hoochie sold us the bogus blow, so we wasted Hoochie.

Sorry we snorted your sister.

No hard feelings.

Have a nice day."

Obituary

Tony Jarrett (aka JRat) of Bat Products, Wells, died from cancer on 31st August of this year. He was a well known caver and seller of caving goodies and will be sorely missed. There are plans for a book of remembrance at the forthcoming Hidden Earth meeting at the end of September. There is also a planned get together at Priddy on the 15th November

Mike Breakspear

News has come in on an old club member called Mike Breakspaer who has contracted a disease of the nervous system, which has left him totally incapacitated and virtually a prisoner in his own house. He was a long standing member of RFDCC and our thoughts go to him at this time.

Brilliantbliss

August's social meeting was an unusual talk given by Toni Hunt, a spiritualist medium, and Adam Heath who gave a us a talk about the paranormal and their investigations of ghosts underground at Clearwell Caves show mine and down Old Ham Mine. Toni and Adam went down Old Ham about a year ago and said that there is the spirit of an old miner at Pillar Chamber (not far from Pop Rock) where he follows us cavers everywhere to ensure that we come to no harm. She said that he was involved in a mining accident at that spot and when he died he did not pass over to the other side but decided that his duty was to safeguard others underground.

The show mine is supposed to have a load of children's spirits who were killed or died somehow in the place and they can be mischievous if they wish – as children do.

Now I have experienced things underground whereby the place gives off a real creepy feeling and feels like someone is on your shoulder all the time – Westbury Brook and Yew Tree Pit are two that spring to mind, and I am not the only one to have said that about either place either.

If you wish to know more about Toni & Adam's investigations then go on the brilliantbliss web site and have a look around it.

Our next social will be on Monday the 6th of October at the Rising Sun Inn at 8p.m. a talk by Mrs Averil Kear from the local Historical Society, she will be talking to us about 'The History of The Forest of Dean Police Force'.

I hope to see you there.

Sue