



MULU EXPEDITION

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Editorial

The AGM is nearly upon us and there are a few of the committee who would like to stand down (myself included). So please come along and think about supporting your club by standing for one of the available posts.

I would like to thank everyone who has written (and who will write) for the newsletter. As you can see from this edition we have loads of different things going on and lots of interesting and very

different articles.

Due to the ineptitude of my record keeping I have lost the details of whoever sent me the survey of Piccadilly Pot, it must have been either Rhys, Phil or Ian. My apologies.

Due to time and space constraints I have had to slightly edit some articles. If you feel that what I've done is too severe then let me

know and I'll reissue the article.

The Dropper

We have mothballed the Dropper, cleared away all the detritus of 20 years of digging, with the help of Greg and his trailer, The useful stuff to the Cave Rescue Depot, the rest to the tip, Anyone is welcome to have look at what we have done in the last twenty years, but be aware a large rock, has dropped out of the roof and is partially blocking one shaft, a wee bit dodgy, Just ask any of the Dropper diggers for the key.

Barrie Hemming

Ghostly Goings On

Clearwell Caves and the Bell Hotel in Coleford have featured in the TV series Great British Ghosts on the freeview Yesterday channel. Appearing on screen were our very own John Elliot and Jonathan Wright, recounting tales of TV crews with not enough cable and ghostly drilling directions. It will almost certainly be repeated frequently if you missed it the first time.

Malcolm White

Nenthead Dates

OCTOBER:- 19th to 28th.

Bunkhouse self-catering accommodation at £14 per night, bookings to mole@grottage.fsworld.co.uk.

Diary Dates

September 29th Saturday day. Dan-yr-Ogof. Meet at cave at 10ish. Please let me know if you want to come. Places are limited! (Can a club leader also confirm they are ok for this date!)

October 1st AGM!!!

October 10th – Wednesday night. Old Ham mine. It is open again. Just need to sort out key! Meet usual place

October 27th - Saturday day. Wet Sink / Slaughter Stream Cave. Not sure of where in cave yet – will depend on who's going, and where they want to go!

November 7th - Wednesday night. Cowshill Cave. The diggers were on a verge of a (hopeful) breakthrough until Jan's untimely accident involving a saw and a thumb. Hopefully he will have recovered by then, and we will have entered the large chamber we can see, but not quite get to, without some chemical encouragement.

November 24th –Saturday. Woolaston Wood Cave. We had to cancel club trip back in August – so we will try again now. There is lots of new stuff to see – but it is tight, wet and cold in places. Not for the faint hearted!

Dan Sandford

FODCCAG News

VEHICLE ID BADGES.

Due to a couple of incidents earlier in the year with the Police (1 vehicle had ' Police Aware ' tape all over it), FoDCCAG / FC vehicle ID badges are available for placing on your dashboard. This is to save hassle from / to the Police, FC employees, and hopefully in the end, members of the public.

They are available to RFDC members from Jan, or myself, must be signed for (they are person specific), and does NOT give you the right to drive at will over FC land, Only places previously agreed with the FC are permitted, i.e. traditional parking spots, normally outside a barrier e.g. Wigpool, Noxon Park.

These badges are renewable each year.

Please remember the parking of a vehicle on FC land is a privilege, NOT a right.

Members will receive further notification in the near future

Devil's Chapel and Wigpool

The agreements are more or less in place. FoDCCAG are finalising details. RFDC and GSS Members have access to Wigpool (NOT Devil's Chapel) under existing arrangements, although these are being revisited.

John Hine

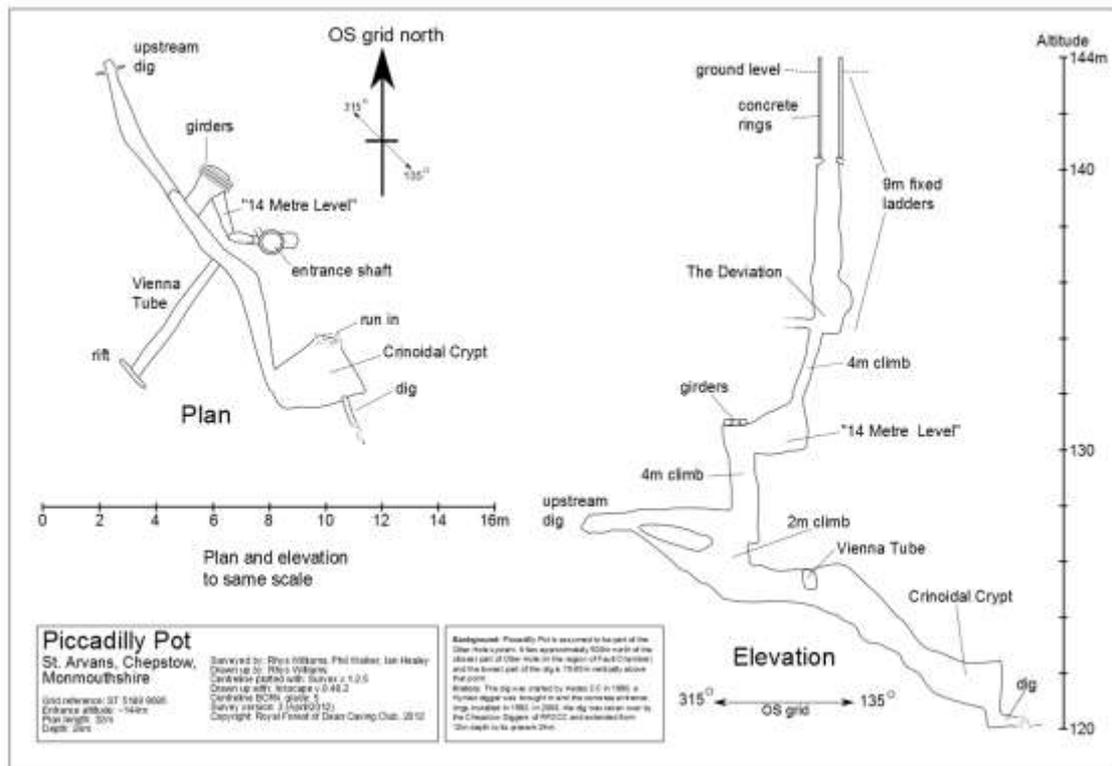
Postal Newsletters

Due to the cost and time involved in printing out newsletters I have proposed that we move to an all email system. The other options being professional printing (very costly) or the club buying its own printer (not felt to be practical by the committee). So this will probably be the last newsletter in both paper and email format.

If you feel strongly that this is not the right thing to do then please attend the AGM and make your feelings known.

Malcolm White

Piccadilly Pot Survey



Update on the Crochan Sion Hopkins dig

Since the last report (see Descent number 221 for August/September 2011) we have continued to dig downwards from the bottom of the 17 metre shaft. We are now 12 metres below the bottom of the 17 metre fixed ladder. So we are more than 50 metres below the gate and approximately 60 metres below moor level. We go most weeks and usually do about 6 hour's actual digging. We have now done more than 150 trips. The average number of diggers per trip is 2.9 and we estimate that we have spent over 2500 man hours actually digging!

Once we had bottomed the 17m shaft there was no obvious way on. The only clue being that the water sank in the boulder floor. After a few aborted digs we managed to dig under one wall for a few metres, and then commence digging down again. Some comfort was provided by a loosely 'solid' wall but back within the huge collapse. This was better than digging in the bottom of the main shaft where we had to put up with debris and impossible amounts of water from above especially when it's raining (often). This new shaft is now over 10m deep. The endless boulder choke continues but is now very muddy, wet and consequently even more difficult to dig. We have therefore started horizontal tunnelling to try and see where the water goes (apart from down our necks), whilst avoiding some of the worst mud. The instability continues and significant shoring is being used between long distance rock excavation activities.

We still feel that the potential is good but we are desperately hoping to find some larger voids so that we do not have to lift any more rock up the 10 metre shaft. We don't mind if we eventually connect with Blaen Onneu quarry caves, Remembrance Series in Agen Allwedd or Ogof Gisfaen as long as we are in open passage (preferably walking size)!

The most persistent diggers are Paul Hartwright, Phil Checketts, Nick Negus and Adam Hartwright. Grant Hartwright says he will come back from the USA when we are about to break through! What a superb team! With a couple of others that come less frequently, we have somewhere near 300 years of experience and expertise to call upon!

As this is an active shake hole with many loose boulders, great care is needed throughout, particularly after high water flow.

Nick Negus.

UK Grid Reference Finder

If you are one of the pecuniary embarrassed, tight or just don't have the need for a satellite navigation system in the car, like me, then here is a brilliant little site on the Internet which is very useful when using such old reference books, i.e. "Sibly's", or have somewhere new to visit. If you have a "cheaper" GPS unit that does not give altitude readings then the height can be found for the location noted. It is also great fun to play with.

Type in <http://gridreferencefinder.com/#> and up pops an Ordnance Survey site in which you can fill in with a choice of references i.e. The Post Code, Location (Road, Town), SO number, OS eastings and northings or the Latitude and Longitude. There is a problem with the last information as it will only accept a decimal figure. Google has the answer again and typing in "Latitude and Longitude conversion", will give pages of sites which will decimalise. BUT there is another snag! Sibley etc. gives a positive longitude figure when what is needed in this part of the world is a negative input. All that is needed is to put a – in front of the decimal longitude entry and all is OK. Otherwise an angry white screen appears and tells you that what asked for is not in the UK.

As soon as one set of these entries is made and entered you are presented with a satellite view complete with road names or numbers and a pointer on the location you gave. The view can be zoomed in or out and panned around. All information missing from the input boxes is given below the view, although if the Post Code was not entered originally then that result that is rather "iffy"; sometimes it is spot on and sometimes not so. There is a button to tick bringing up a separate screen and this can help. The height above sea level is also available on a separate screen.

Other goodies are available, some need permission from Google.

Examples: - Tufton Iron Mine shaft. Decimalised and the negative added to longitude. Lat 51.786944 Long -2.614722. This shows a property near Coleford with something 'orrible at the bottom of the garden. I hope it really is filled in, or they don't have kids.

2 Cullis Lane Mile End. The occupant must have been burning Forest Coal or dried essence of sheep as the picture is fuzzy and is the worst one I have seen.

NP16 7LD at a height of 19.69 ft. above sea level a moderate Tsunami would change that address to Hereford.

SO67174 23244 or E367174 N223244 shows a perfect garden, not the soggy slug infested mass of weeds it really is. However, at an altitude of 370.73 ft. global warming or tidal waves will not affect me, so sod you lot.

Enjoy!

Roger Bailey

Mulu 2012 Expedition

The 'Mulu 2012' expedition took place over the entire month of April this year and comprised a dozen cavers from the UK, three from Australia, plus others from Singapore and Malaysia (**photo 1**). During the planning of the trip, I suggested we approach Saga for insurance in view of the age of the majority of the group, but this would have excluded Zak Williams, the youngest member of our party, aged 12.

Working from a base at Park HQ, the intention was to undertake searches for new entrances around the southern end of Api and the Deer Cave massifs and continue the exploration of a number of leads from the Spring 2011 expedition. We also intended to examine potential leads near the entrance series of Lubang Nasib Bagus and perhaps find continuations from Sarawak Chamber.

Gavin Newman joined us for the second half of the trip to make a cavers' film based on the original exploration of Sarawak Chamber, capitalising on the presence of the three original explorers together in Mulu for the first time since 1984, namely Dave Checkley, Andy Eavis (leader) and Tony White.

Apart from exploration and film, there were also various scientific research programmes:

- studies of bell pits (Julia James)
- sedimentology studies (Jason Lin)
- collection of quartz samples from locations in Clearwater for cosmogenic isotope dating
- collection of speleothem samples for Uranium/Lead dating (Pete Smart and Chris Smith)

My part in the trip got underway with re-surveying and examining a boulder choke at the end of Dream Pool Cave, a large resurgence cave adjacent and connected to Lagans Cave which is probably the nearest cave to Park HQ. A climb down through some delicately poised boulders led to a 10m pitch into a river passage which unfortunately sumped both upstream and downstream. A return visit was made with Les Williams, a drill (generously donated Makita) and bag of bolts to reach a large roof passage at the top of a 15m wall, but despite following strong drafts I was unable to find a way over the top of the choke. Subsequently some very large and well-decorated passages were explored well beyond this choke via another route from Lagans Cave that was discovered by Fran White. This kept some of us busy for several trips which included encounters with a toad, a racer snake and a 32m pitch to another sump.

My attention switched to a climb in another cave, May Day Cave at the foot of the cliffs to the right of Deer Cave. Les and I cut our way through dense forest to eventually find the tiny drafting entrance (**photo 2**) that drops into a 10m pitch into an enormous chamber. A proposed lead suggested by the 2010 trip turned out to be a 20m overhanging wall, the lower part of which was flaky and exfoliating. Fortunately Les found an alternative route which involved only a couple of bolts to reach a very large gallery. A well decorated side-passage led to a low crawl (yes, even in Mulu!) then a couple of pitches which I descended on a subsequent visit, but these turned out to be choked.

After a trip up-river to Camp 5 and steep 1100m ascent to visit The Pinnacles, six of us set off to explore a new cave that bird nesters showed us. They had named it Train Cave which left us wondering what may be in store since the entrance doline was located in tower karst on top the hill between Cobra Cave and Nasib Bagus, en-route to the Hidden Valley. Following a reconnaissance trip to the entrance by Colin and Moose, we packed gear and supplies for several days camp in a cave entrance used by nesters high on the hill (**photos 3 and 4**). This had a young resident caretaker who collected wood, washed dishes, boiled water and tended a permanent camp fire, all of which made life very comfortable so we named it "The Ritz".

Our descent of the cave required some rigging to drop a couple of 30m pitches alongside ropes fixed by the bird nesters which they would climb hand-over-hand. After several short climbs and pitches we entered a large passage not unlike a railway tunnel, so perhaps the cave should have been named "Train Tunnel Cave". At this point (**photo 5**) we split into 2

parties to explore and survey in opposite directions. Another entrance shaft was discovered at the end of the upstream passage whilst an underground nesters' camp was encountered downstream, after which the tunnel-like character (**photo 6**) changed and split into several smaller passages, some of which were drafting. After several more trips into the cave and re-stocking with supplies of rope and food, Colin and Moose eventually found a connection to Bridge Cave which in turn connects with Cobra Cave.

Our next goal was to make camp in Sarawak Chamber to film and further explore Nasib Bagus. A large team assembled at the entrance where a raft was built to carry bivi gear and Gavin's film gear. The entrance canal is about 500m after which it becomes too rocky and the current so strong that you're forced to find traverse routes along the walls. The spectacular Whirlpool (**photo 7**), which is easily negotiated using fixed lines, can be completely bypassed high on the left (or true right) wall.

After a day getting in and establishing camp, the following day was spent filming and further exploring Sarawak Chamber. It was noted that swifts were entering via a large square shaft in the roof against the north-west wall of the chamber. Beneath this were numerous nests amongst the boulder-strewn floor, fortunately in carefully chosen sites as the shaft responded to heavy rainfall that evening which rapidly turned into a deluge. In fact Sarawak Chamber looked much like an inverted colander under a kitchen tap with waterfalls spouting everywhere. Fortunately, water levels dropped sufficiently to make a safe exit next day and provided a good backdrop for more filming on the way out.

The final days of the trip were spent assisting Gavin with filming in the entrance Deer Cave with the aid of a remote controlled helicopter (**photo 8**). Further trips were also made into Clearwater and Cave of the Winds.

In all, about 9.5km of new passage were added to the Survex survey data, with one completely new cave explored and connected, plus significant extensions to Lagans cave. We eagerly await the edited results of Gavin's filming endeavours.

Footnote: It is now almost impossible to get permission to do original exploration in Mulu other than via the Mulu Caves Project through whom this trip was organised (visit www.mulucaves.org). Anyone can visit Mulu to do adventure caving, however, with relatively simple logistics via the Mulu National Park (visit www.mulupark.com). There will be a further exploratory trip in 2013 to the North end of Api and Benarat based at Camp 5. Enquiries should be directed to Mark Brown (email Cavermark35@hotmail.com) however there is likely to be a waiting list!

Mike Bertenshaw



Mulu 2012 team... author on left (Gavin Newman)



Les Williams in entrance to May Day Cave (Mike Bertenshaw)



“The Ritz” high camp (Mike Bertenshaw)



View of Tiger Cave from high camp (Mike Bertenshaw)



Bottom of entrance pitches in Train Cave (Mike Bertenshaw)



Tunnel in Train Cave (Tony White)



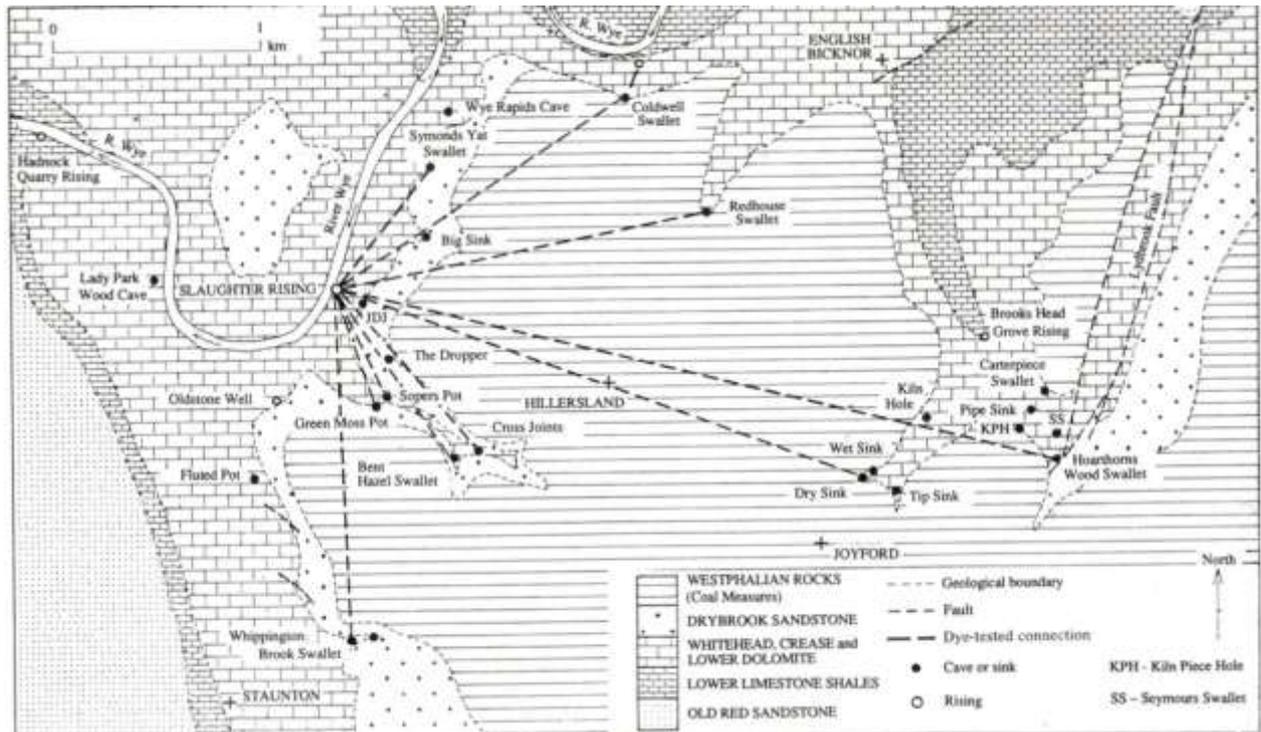
The Whirlpool in Nasib Bagus (Tony White)



Camera helicopter in front of Deer Cave (Mike Bertenshaw)

The Troublesome Hunt for Bent Hazel Swallet

Over Easter 2012, myself and Andy Goddard (Shepton Mallet CC) decided to have a trip down Cab Sav Cave in the Mailscot Valley, as Andy has had a few digging trips there, but had not seen the extensions to the rising sump (see newsletter 147). However, as it was a nice day, and it soon became apparent that neither of us could really be bothered to get changed and go underground. So, instead we decided to have a cave prospecting walk around the area, armed with a crow bar. We traversed around the side of Mailscot valley from Cab Sav and soon came across Cross Joints Swallet on the bank of the Mailscot Stream [this was left for another day and was subsequently visited by myself, Rhys Williams and Ian Healey on a Wednesday night trip in July – see Rhys’ write-up on www.ukcaving.com].



From Cross Joints we headed up a dry tributary valley into the woods and came across a stream sinking into a small depression filled with rotting leaves and branches. Without further ado, we set about clearing the area to see where the water was going

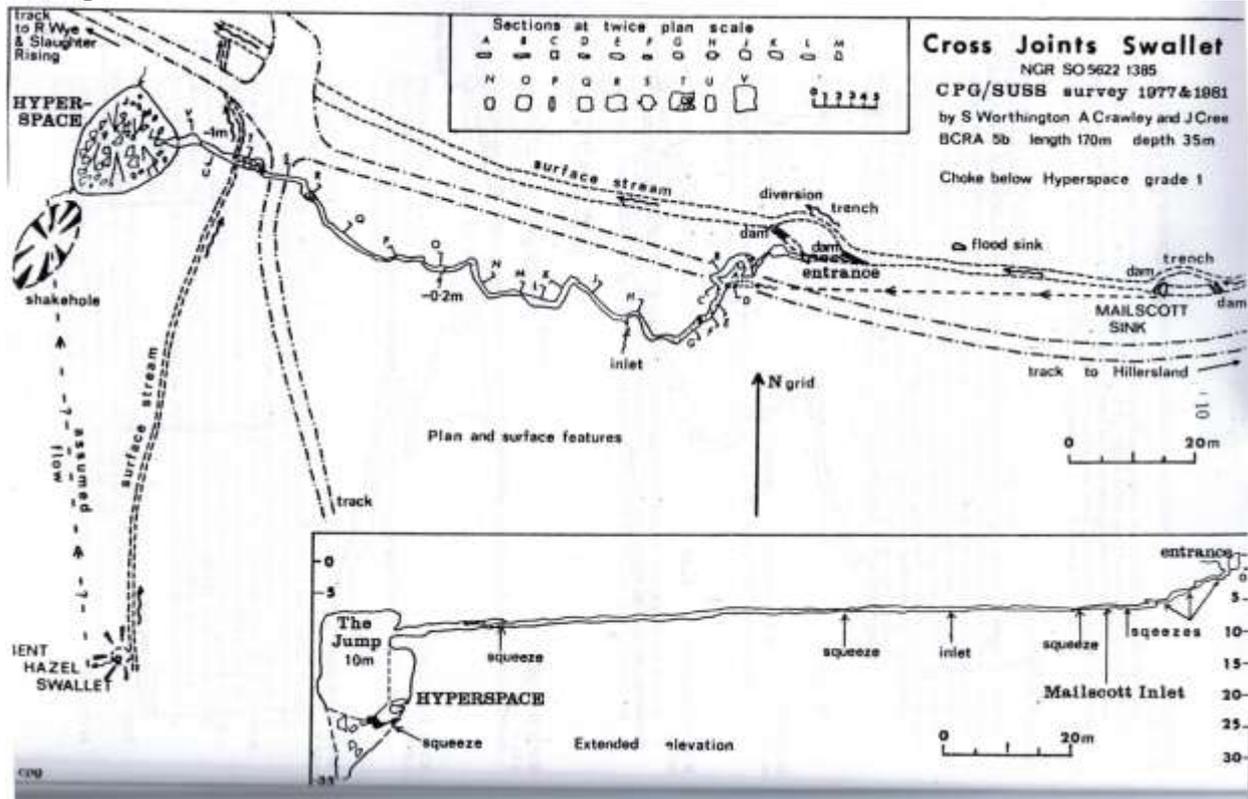


After a few hours we decided it was pub time, and over a pint of Butty Bach and with the aid of 'The Caves of the Forest of Dean' (available in all good caving bookshops), that we realised that

we had accidentally discovered Bent Hazel Swallet.

With the help of old RFDCC newsletters it was apparent that Bent Hazel Swallet was first discovered and dug by Roger Solari in the 1970s, until it was abandoned due to nearby logging.

Our enthusiasm waned a little when we read the description – 8 metres of tight, wet, flat out passage ending in an impassable bend, However, after a few drinks we realised that digging Bent Hazel in the sunshine was a far better way to spend the summer of 2012 than six hour digging trips to Kuwait Passage in Wet Sink. The theory being that if we could pass the ‘impassable’ bend, the passage may open out, and it might provide an easier route into or beyond the large Hyperspace chamber at the end of Cross Joints, into which the stream sinking at Bent Hazel was believed to enter.



So with our spirits high, we set off again the next day, armed with more tools, and set about trying to find the passage.

A dam was soon built that diverted the stream out of the swallet and back down the former dry streambed to re-join the Mailscot Stream. We set about digging with the hope of quickly re-finding the existing cave passage— unfortunately, every hole we dug found solid rock, or loose wet infill and we soon had an open cast dig going nowhere in particular.

Still our enthusiasm still was still high, so we returned the following weekend, with the able help of Tony Howard. Tony had actually seen the cave passage about 15 years ago, but could not quite remember exactly where the entrance was. After more open cast excavations, and at a depth of 2 to 3m, we found some draughting rifts in clean washed and scalloped limestone, but still with no obvious entrance to the missing 8m streamway.



We returned for the third digging session the following weekend, with the help of Rhys Williams. As we had excavated most of the swallet by now there was only one place left to focus our digging effort, so we started digging a shaft. After about 1 ½ metres the bottom of the shaft started to draught and it felt like it was opening out as we broke into bigger voids. We felt sure that we were within a few feet of re-entering the 8m streamway, but the shaft need shoring before we could continue. So, confident that this was the way on, we called it a day and made plans to return, to scaffold and shutter the shaft to make it safe, and back fill the rest of the depression. We agreed to return in two weeks and continue the work.



This is when a series of unfortunate events occurred...

The first unfortunate event occurred when our plans to return in two week were scuppered when I contracted pneumonia, which put me out of action for a month or so. By June I was starting to feel better and Andy and I decided we needed to make a trip ASAP to tidy up the dig site. Unfortunately, we were beaten to it; I got an early Tuesday morning call from Paul Taylor, saying

that there was a problem with the Bent Hazel dig. The forestry contractors had started to work in the Bent Hazel area, and had queried what the big muddy hole was. They called in the Deputy Gaveller, who made a visit to the site to see what was going on.

Then the next unfortunate event occurred...when the Deputy Gaveller arrived at the dig a deer had managed to find it way in to the hole and couldn't get out without help. Unsurprisingly, the Deputy Gaveller took a dim view of our muddy deer trap and contacted FoDCCAG to see if the group knew anything about the dig. Unfortunate event number 3 occurred when it became apparent that the dig registration form was still being processed and had not reached FoDCCAG yet, so the group had no idea there was any recent digging activity at the Bent Hazel site.



It was swiftly agreed that the deer trap/dig was to be filled in with all the spoil that had been removed as a matter of urgency and the swallet reinstated to the condition it was found in, albeit with the stream continuing to be diverted down the valley to join the Mailscot stream.

So the following Saturday, in monsoon like conditions, Andy and myself set about shoveling all the spoil back in the hole and tidying the site up



As this had to be done without a chance of scaffolding the shaft to allow further digging, the illusive 8m Bent Hazel streamway became lost, again.

The Future

Ideally, when the dust and mud has settled, we would like to recommence the dig, with the purpose of constructing a scaffolded shaft, with a locked lid, that would preserve the open passage of Bent Hazel Swallet, and keep the site safe and secure for future exploration. After all, there is a master cave down there somewhere...

Dan Sandford

Two New DistoX units for RFDC members to get surveying with.

The Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club moves into the future, or at least in terms of its surveying equipment. The club has been fortunate to be able to buy 2 units from a one off production of 100 DistoX boards, after their availability was none existent for several years. The investment also required the acquisition of another Disto A3 laser measuring unit (the club already owned one), from Ebay as they are no longer in production, and also a PDA from the same source.

So what is a DistoX? It is now generally considered the instrument of choice for cave surveying, with few expeditions these days leaving the shores without one to take much of the drudgery out of mapping their finds. Basically, with a single point and click of a laser beam you can accurately capture all three of your required readings for a survey leg, i.e. distance, inclination and compass bearing.

These can be noted down in your note books in the traditional fashion along with your accompanying sketches etc. for you to complete your survey in whatever time honoured fashion you choose.

However the DistoX also incorporates a Bluetooth connection, which can send your data directly to a hand PDA (personal digital assistant) loaded with a program called Pocket Topo, which will not only log all your data for later download into your PC, but will also instantly plot the points on screen allowing the surveyor there and then to sketch in the cave walls etc. to scale.

If you are a very clever computer wizard and surveying fanatic this can all be imported into a very powerful program called Therion, to be drawn up into an ever expandable and editable 3D matrix.

For the rest of us mere mortals, importing it into Survex or similar cave surveying program of choice is more realistic, ideally also converting it into Compass data so it can be incorporated into Paul Taylor's Forest Master survey. Then import into any drawing program of your choice, to produce a finished product for publication.

Once you have used the Disto X you will never want to go back to using tape (or simple laser measurer), compass, inclinometer ever again. As DistoX units are not readily available or fixable, and in view of the fact that the club had available funds, it was deemed prudent to acquire the two units. Theoretically one should always be available to use as new finds are made, regardless if the other is out on a long term surveying project or expedition. Hopefully members will be inspired to loan the units and survey or even resurvey some of the many forest mines/caves/digs etc.

However, the old instruments still have a role to play, both as a backup should the technology fail and for use in areas considered too wet and muddy to risk using the DistoX, remember they are not shockproof or waterproof, and cannot be readily repaired or replaced and cost about £300 each!

A lengthy period of a few years work in progress may one day see a Disto X supplement board produced for the present waterproof and shockproof Leica Disto laser measuring units now being marketed, but until then we needed to take good care of our new little treasures!

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We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.rfdcc.org.uk

All manuals and various software downloads are readily available online. It should be noted that the units require calibration, which apparently is best done in a woods, involving taking multiple readings around an imaginary 3D box, which are in turn computed by the PDA to make the calibration adjustments. This needs to be done if the unit is knocked, and for each new set of batteries used. This can be done for several spare sets of batteries in one calibration session, but the batteries must be clearly marked for the exact same orientation when reinstalled in the Disto X, and wedged in tight with a little bit of card to prevent accidental turning of the batteries while in operation.

Lastly I would like to say a big thank you on behalf of all the members to Dave Appleing of the GSS, who kindly took on the delicate task of assembling the units for us.

Jan Karvik.