

The Dodger's Dispatch

New Year news and stories from
the Derbyshire Caving Club

(established 1960)



June 2011

www.DerbysCC.org.uk

About Number 104 including all
past newsletters and Dodger's.

EDITORIAL

I can hardly believe that we are half way through 2011 already and no one has been screaming for a newsletter. (I wonder if they've read the last one yet?) Just for the record, here though is the June 2011 edition complete with revised meets list, reports on trips (at least, the ones the editor went on). Allan and Ed have done a good job getting meets together on a regular basis which has enabled new and old members to get out much more regularly. All of this is good for encouraging novices to become effective cavers/miners and also for getting the older members fitter for summer expeditions. There are some trip reports later in this newsletter and the full reports with pictures are available on the website.

While on that topic, we must not forget that the Club has members with or without the following: any internet access, email, access to the Yahoo group, and access to Facebook. Therefore, if you are putting the word out about a trip or a digging opportunity, don't forget to include all of the membership, not just your Facebook friends or people with email. For some, text or phone messages are about the only option.

NEWS

ANNUAL DINNER

The last one is history but we are on the verge of arranging the next and Sue has found a suitable venue in Stockport for 26th November. Keep the date clear! It may not be as big an event as last year but let's try to keep attendance above 50-60 as it used to be. It's always a great occasion and opportunity to meet other members and members' partners socially. And Tony has promised to keep the price reasonable again (but not free, please: Treasurer).

CONSTITUTION

The constitution has been changed and under-18s can now join if their parent/guardian signs a declaration and a full member in the Club acts on their behalf as "chaperone" for the new member. Through this means, two new young members have joined recently.

NEW MEMBERS

Since the last newsletter, there have been several new members including:

Damian Skrzelowski, Oliver King, Bennet Gargoles, Terry Stockton, Jack Stockton, Paul D Sheeran, Ben Jackson, Jason Halligan, Daniel Butler, Robert M Brown, Colin F Shepherd, Michael Scholes, Alan Nugent, Trevor Robinson, Paul Whittingham, Isha Lorraine Newman, Simon McClean, Karen Pfeiffer, Philip Brammer, Stephen Hullamby, Nick J Longley, Jo L Crowther, Glenn Costin, Derrick A Emptage, Steve Martin, John Smith. Yes, that many! They include Alderley diggers (10), Standon Bowers leaders (9) and cavers/miners from other clubs. Welcome to you all. Make sure you know what is going on and do try to do some caving if you are Alderley diggers, go to Alderley if you are cavers and all come to the dinner in November.

ALDERLEY EDGE

Digging has carried on at the shaft at Engine Vein. The April open day involved trips into Engine Vein against the views of some members but the outcome was a record number of public attending. Many people have "done" Wood Mine and were keen to try Engine Vein instead. September will see Wood Mine open again so trips will be more adventurous than historical. Hopefully, there will be more leaders available than in April. There has been discussion about the insurance at Alderley and the need to ensure that we comply with all the terms. If an accident occurred, the insurers would almost certainly try their best to find a reason to blame the Club and the members which could lead to them declining to cover the event. To avoid this, we are having a close look at all the terms (and the terms of the National Trust lease as well) and making a few changes to the way trips are organised to make sure cover stays in place. It will all seem like more red tape but please try to make the system work when it is rolled out.

Talking about rolling out, just before Easter, the red carpet (or was it just a muddy carpet) was rolled out for a VIP visitor to Wood Mine. I'm told he was fairly senior in the government and that Paul and team had the rare privilege of seeing this person literally on his knees – in the Wiggly Worm. Not many caving Clubs have the honour of hosting not just one local MP but now two on underground trips.

I've heard rumours that a new dumper may be on the cards. Let's hope it's a bit quieter than the last and that the loading plank that Pete's getting will fit this one and keep the diggers a bit safer. (Anyone who doesn't know what this is about should speak to Paul!)

MINING AND CAVING CONFERENCES

The NAMHO conference this year is in Shropshire, hosted by the Shropshire Caving and Mining Club. Details are at <http://www.namhoconference.org.uk> and there are underground trips available over the weekend and into the following week. The conference is from 29th July to 1st August. In September, Hidden Earth is being held at Monmouth. Details are at <http://hidden-earth.org.uk>. Both of these events are great opportunities to meet up with others in our sport.

PRACTICE RESCUE AT ALDERLEY EDGE

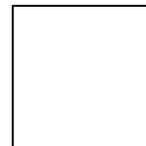
We need to have a couple more sessions at Alderley to sort out detail. I'll try to organise something before the end of July.

ANNIVERSARY JOURNAL

Errrr

SUBSCRIPTIONS

These have stayed the same for 2011. If there is a big red cross here (for people getting printed copies) or you get a special email from me, then you still owe subs for 2011. The membership list on-line at http://www.derbysgc.org.uk/club/members_list.php shows the twelve people who will get special reminders!



NAMHO AGM AT ALDERLEY EDGE

As Secretary of NAMHO, Nigel felt obliged to host a meeting at Alderley Edge and, in mid-March, the Festival Hall in the town was taken over for one Saturday morning. Liz, with sterling help from Bill and Paul, provided tea and coffee at the start and a meal at the end which kept the delegates together where normally the meeting breaks up after the formal stuff is over. In the afternoon, most of the delegates had a trip into Engine Vein, some going out through the Hough Level. Kevin Baker, NAMHO Chairman, was very appreciative of the effort the Club put into hosting NAMHO. Thanks Liz, Bill and Paul.

THE FRIDAY NIGHT DIGGING TEAM

The inaugural meet of the DCC Friday digging team went ahead yesterday [26th June], and apart from being on a Sunday all went well, with five participants. We even managed to get some new passage in the Dales, although sadly only about two metres before hitting a stream which runs back under the entrance. Undeterred we then found a better dig site, with better draught, twenty five metres or so downstream, so it looks like we're going back.

The new dig site also has the advantage that it isn't full of dead animals. The smell yesterday was something else!

Anyone wishing to join us will be more than welcome, we may even get out this Friday! Tony

[Editor's note: Tony has carefully omitted to say where. Very sensible!]

EARBY STUNT BACKFIRES

Members are reminded that whilst practical jokes always seem a good idea at the time and are of course highly entertaining it is always best to check that your intended victim does not have any of your gear in his possession before the joke is launched. Failure to observe this simple rule can result in all kinds of avoidable problems. In this instance the theft of a much loved item from one of our members and subsequent threat to list it on eBay led to swift and satisfying retaliation by the DCC member.

The attached photograph [*not included in the interests of decency – Ed*] perfectly demonstrates the perils of not thinking a perfectly good stunt through in full prior to execution and once again demonstrates when it comes to a windup the Earby Pothole Club really are beginners.

Tony

DON'T GO DOWN THE MINES DADDY THERE'S PLENTY OF COAL ON TOP!

The following is a guest contribution from an 'old' Alderley visitor who contacted the Chairman by email.

Aged fourteen we both left school at Easter 1944 and one weekend Alf and I decided to check out the copper mines we'd been told about at Alderley Edge and it turned out to be an experience the memory of which has remained with me ever since. Somehow we managed to find our way to Alderley using the public bus services and having finally arrived slowly wound our way up the twisting winding never ending Wizard. I think we then past through either one or two fields before reaching our objective and was surprised to find we were not the only visitors to the mines, indeed there were perhaps ten or twelve others who had arrived there before us and we quickly made friends with this group of young teenagers the leader of which seemed to be a short stocky self assured young lad called Geoff Seed.

Before very long I had formed a good relationship with one of the group called Raymond Taylor, a nice friendly kid of a similar age to myself and we chatted away as we entered the mines huge entrance hall. As strangers to the mine we just sort of tagged along with everybody else winding our way down the dark and foreboding passages. Only the regular visitors to the mine seemed to have any form of lighting and from memory these were a sort of improvised Carbide lamps, in other words tins with holes in to allow the gasses out, the smell of which pervaded throughout the whole mine, even so they did seem to provide a good light source. It was during our first visit inside the mine we were introduced to the terrifying Plank Shaft which we negotiated with extreme caution holding on to the wall face for support. After exploring the interior for a time we returned to the outside world and settled down in a secondary very short and obviously abandoned cave near to the copper mines main entrance.

It was now Saturday evening and as darkness closed in on us we spent much of the time chattering away among ourselves before settling down for the night on the icy cold stone floor of the cave. I don't think sleeping bags had been invented in those early days however we had each taken a blanket with us. Even so it wasn't long before I woke up shivering and my new friend Raymond suggested we share both our blankets thus benefitting from our combined body heat. A close bond had already been

established between Raymond, myself, Alf, and an attractive young red head aptly called Rusty. Throughout the weekend we were all three competing for her affections but sadly at the end of the day neither of us were very successful in winning her affections. But we were all good friends anyway and I have often wondered what became of sweet little Rusty?

Sunday morning we woke up to a frosty start. For some reason nobody thought to make a camp fire and for breakfast Alf and I each ate a tin of cold beans in tomato sauce, that's all we had taken with us. quite crazy when I think about it. It wasn't long before we set off down the mine again and I confess to having a sense of excitement throughout the whole weekend, we were really just a load of stupid kids enjoying a weekends freedom after a weeks hard work. There was a lot of chattering going on as we once again walked down those dark passages, laughing, joking and generally having a great time. Once again we arrived at the Plank Shaft which some of the leaders and myself crossed carefully and was about to continue further along the tunnel when the air was filled with a girls loud screaming. We turned back to find out what all the noise was about and were told one of the boys had fallen down the shaft. I was struck with horror at the thought of it and didn't at first realize it was my friend Raymond was the one who had fallen. Those with lights were trying to shine them down the shaft but we couldn't see the bottom.

A rope suddenly appeared from nowhere and taking charge of the situation stocky Geoff Seed scrambled over the edge and lowered himself into the shaft. Several minutes past and being worried we shouted down into the blackness trying to learn what was the situation, but there was no reply, nothing. We continued to shout but still there was no response, we were all worried and confused, why wasn't he answering? Finally I offered to go down and scrambling down the rope I found Geoff Seed sitting at the bottom with his back to the wall of the Shaft, seemingly in a state of shock. I shouted asking where Raymond was and he simply pointed to a narrow gap on the opposite side of the shaft. It seemed as though below the base of the shaft there was another cavern and at some time the ceiling of this cavern had collapsed causing a huge mound of stone and sand the top of which reached up to the base of the shaft and Raymond had slid down into this gap. I shouted at Geoff Seed to get off his bum and help me pull Raymond back up the mound. I could see Raymond was in a bad way as he was bleeding from both his nose and mouth. We quickly secured Raymond onto the rope and those waiting above pulled him up then all went quiet.

A few minutes later the rope was lowered again and Geoff Seed tied it round his waist and called out to be pulled up, but he had only got to about eight or nine feet when the rope snapped and he landed in a heap on the Shaft floor where he lay for a few moments holding his back and writhing in agony. But when another rope appeared he was quickly on his feet and tying himself on was pulled back up to the top. I was now left in complete darkness and not a sound was coming from above. I began to get worried, I thought perhaps in the confusion they had forgotten about me being down there, but to my relief a few minutes later the rope came down again and I was hauled to safety. Those were the longest few seconds imaginable as I was being pulled upwards and thinking I hope to God this second rope doesn't snap! By the time I had returned to the entrance both Raymond Taylor and Geoff Seed had been taken away by ambulance.

Alf and I returned home and in Monday's evening news, there was an interesting article explaining how this young hero Geoff Seed had saved Raymond Taylor's life during which time he had himself sustained minor injuries but was allowed home after treatment. Ah well, such is life! A year or two later I met up with one of the gang who told me Raymond had fortunately survived the actual fall but had not fully recovered from his head injuries. As for Geoff Seed, I never saw or heard of him ever again, wonder if he's still alive and perhaps telling the story to his grandchildren?

Mr Alan R. Hewitt.

Alan followed this with a further note:

I am not aware of any of any other incidents at the mine, except I seem to remember a newspaper report of another similar accident later at the mine and that may well have been either the Jean Rigby or Kenneth Brown incident. I think it would more likely be that of Kenneth Brown as the date would fit the bill so to speak and also it would have had a bigger impact on my memory had the accident been that of a girl. As I explained I left school at the age of 14 and I think it would be possible but unlikely that we visited the mine at that time (1944) and was more likely to have been 1945 as this fits in with the Kenneth Brown's reported incident one year later. But it was so long ago now I cannot be 100% sure of any of the dates, it may even have been 1946 when we visited? As I said in my earlier email I did visit there again a little while later and the opening had been bricked up, and also must have called there again even later still to find the authorities had dumped tons of sludge leading up to the entrance of the mine, which as I pointed out hadn't worked as the sludge had formed a hard crust capable of being walked on.

And yes Tony you may well be right, Geoff Seed did receive a little praise in the newspaper for his part in the Raymond Taylor accident but then we both knew the truth of the matter, it's of little importance now of course. I actually live in Cheadle Hulme Tony but lived in Wythenshawe during those early years. Perhaps you would be kind enough to remind me about your next 'open day' in April and if I feel up to it I may well take you up on your offer, could prove to be very interesting after all these years. How are the parking facilities there, don't think I could manage to walk up the Wizard these days! Incidentally, a friend of my brother was killed on the Wizard also most likely in the late 1940's but perhaps early 1950's, apparently he was driving a farming tractor down the steep hill when it overturned, can't remember his name but I think it was Whitaker (Brian?) or something like that. That was also in the newspaper, I believe?

Alan Hewitt.

ALDERLEY INSURANCE AND LEASE TERMS

A review is being carried out to ensure that we meet all the conditions laid down by our insurers and lessors. Please be prepared for some new requirements later this summer and make sure that, if you are a trip leader, you know what to do to see that our insurance is not invalidated.

TRIP REPORTS

There are over 90 trip reports on-line now so only a summary of recent ones is provided below. Please send in trip reports as they provide the only long-term record of the Club's activities. You can send them to me (webmaster) on paper or by email but

the website allows you to put them on yourself, along with pictures. There is also an album feature now which mimics Flickr and the Yahoo album but (I think) is easier to navigate around. As Tom and I seem to be the only members who use it, perhaps I am wrong and it is too complicated or slow. Please let the webmaster have your views! If you want to see the trips below with pictures, then you will need to go on-line to http://www.derbysc.org.uk/club/dcc_log_view-ed.php. Reports below are by the editor (ND), Tony (TB), Allan (AB) and Tom (TH).

White Scar Cave - 9 January 2011 (ND)

After an abortive attempt to go into White Scar towards the end of 2010 when the heavens opened, a fresh attempt was made in January. The first signs were not good as the weather was cold, wet and slushy but the cave had not been adversely affected to the trip went ahead. In all, there were 18 DCC members and friends plus Sue who came to the end of the show cave to see us off.

Stepping back a bit, the first challenge was changing in the snowy car park followed by getting Bill out of bed in time to make the numbers up to 18. Bill made the mistake of changing in range of Colin's snowballs but survived. At about 11, we were able to go in en masse through the show cave and into the cold water of the swimming section. This kept most people quiet and made them cold before we warmed up again going through Big Bertha. The last time I went through here was 35 years ago and I don't even remember the squeezes - this time my ribs were still remembering them two weeks later!

After the boulder choke, we had a bit of a breather and then on towards the end of the stream cave. Some turned back at around Carrot Hall and others carried on a bit further.

We were a bit more spread out as we came out but most people surfaced quite close together and we soon got changed in the fresh cold air. Somehow, it didn't seem so cold by now! Anyway, this was enough of discomfort so we all headed down to the Marton Arms to relive the best bits of the trip and to plan the next.

There were a number of potential new members on the trip as well as at least one miner who had very rarely been in a natural cave before. All in all, it was a good trip in good company and made a good start to the year underground.

Boulby Potash Mine - 18 January 2011 (ND)

Ed had arranged a visit to the North York Moors and Cleveland for DCC members and friends. There was Ed, Bev, John, Heather, John C, Kevin and ?.

On the Monday, the alum quarries near Staithes were visited and an iron mine, Spa Wood Mine, descended in the company of Simon Chapman, local expert on the ironstone mines. Neil Rowley of Cleveland Potash kindly lent an oxygen monitor for the safety of the exploration of the iron mine. They all returned safely!

On Tuesday, Nigel joined the group for the visit to Boulby. Neil gave a very informative introduction to the mine, it's method of working and it's history and then we changed into underground gear: shorts, tee-shirt and hi-vis jerkin. The descent was via the man shaft using the smaller (northern) cage designed for twelve men but a tight fit for seven and two women. At the bottom, it was strangely dark (no, I know what I am saying!) as there were some problems with the main power feed to the mine. We walked to the transit van and started off on the journey to the face. Unfortunately, the power problem meant that work had ceased at the face and we were obliged to turn back and make do with a visit to the workshops and pumps.

All of this was of course still interesting but meant that we stayed in the halite beds all day. Later, we returned to the shaft and took the cage back to day where we added an extra layer of clothing before taking a tour round the surface plant. Without the plant working, we were able to visit the winding house, the treatment plant and the various storage facilities. Then it was back to change, to have a brief word with the mine manager and a final chat with Neil before we set off home.

My personal thanks go to Ed for giving me the chance to join the group and of course to Neil and Cleveland Potash for hosting the visit. I'm now looking forward to the next time when hopefully we will be able to see the 'sharp' end. (I managed this a couple of weeks later accompanying Paul Deakin on a photo trip.)

Moel Fferna Slate Quarry - 5 February 2011 (ND)

Another of Ed's mining trips, this time to Moel Fferna slate quarry (i.e. mine) in North Wales. It was a dark and stormy night ... well, day, actually when we met up by a green tree in a lay-by in darkest North Wales. The group was Ed, John, Tony, Sue, Nigel, Tom, Lauren, Sam and Michael. Transferring to two cars (I'm glad I didn't have to drive up there!) we were soon on the hillside getting much wetter walking to the mine entrance than we were going to get in there.

The entrance is a shaft that looks much like a cave entrance in the Dales until you get to the bottom and into the railway tunnel leading to the main workings. Once in, and after going through an awkward hole in the wall (why didn't someone make this bigger - said Tony), we were soon at the bottom of the incline from level 5 to 6. However, we stayed on level 5 for a while exploring west and then down to levels 4 and 3 including a look at the bridge of death or BOD as Ed called it. The workings are massive but not too difficult to move up and down and of course easy to move from side to side because of the well built levels and lack of any rock collapse. Coming back up from levels 3 and 4, we went on up to level 6 and eventually 7 after stopping for the team photo by one of the brake drums. At level 7, you could see the top end of the last phase of slate workings, as they seemed to be working up hill. At each level, there were tips of waste down to the level below but various walls stopped the railway levels from getting blocked.

After about four hours romping around, we headed back to the entrance and the miserable weather on the surface where the steams seemed to be higher than when we went in. However, downhill and with your back to the wind, the walk wasn't too bad and we soon reached Llangollen for a drink, a meal and a discussion about the trip.

Giant's Hole, Derbyshire - 26th February 2011 (ND)

Giant's Hole in February seemed like a good idea ... but it rained the night before. So the trip turned out to be entertaining but not impossible (except for Steve). We all set off down to Garland's and had a fairly easy trip in (except for Steve) and down to

the vice. Nigel managed to get himself stuck for a while in the stream but got out when he removed his belt. Onwards and ever downwards. Geology was an easy abseil but, below there, the First Cascade was very wet and after Allan and Glyn had gone down and found the Second Cascade very wet too, we backed out and headed for the Eating House. The decision was taken to go up to the Giant's Windpipe to avoid having to do the vice again. However, it turned out to be very wet and Allan reckoned it was as good as sumped. So we turned back and returned up the Crabwalk. Garland's was made interesting by the need to rescue a couple of novices from a university club (it was really much too wet for complete novices) and then it was out to change and warm up. The group was Allan, Nigel, Glyn, Tom, Steve and Tony and everyone went down Geology (except Steve, oh, and Tony). Anyone wanting to know Steve's side of the story should contact him. Good trip. Warmed up in the Wanted before leaving for home.

Croesor Rhosydd Through Trip - 5th March 2011 (ND)

This excellent trip was arranged by Ed. The party was six with Ed, Tom, Tony, Nigel, Steve and John. Liz, Sue and Susie came along as well for a walk as the weather seemed reasonable. The walk up was dry but the tops were misty but it didn't seem to take too long to reach Rhosydd and then Croesor over the top. A few pictures were taken and a lot of speculation was made into how the mines were operated. At Croesor, we prepared at the entrance and were soon in to the top of the flooded incline and up to the first pitch. (Croesor was worked from about 1846 to 1878 and then 1895 to 1930. It was used as an explosives store by ICI between 1949 and about 1977.)

The first and second pitches are ways to get down from the upper levels into the massive worked out areas. As the main level is called the A level, the first might be described as a drop from D-upper down to C-upper and the second pitch from C-upper down to B-upper. From the second pitch, we went down the chamber to the A level where we met the water and crossed the zip wire. Everyone got across safe and dry despite Tony having to go back to take the pulley to Ed.

After the wobbly metal bridge, recently repaired by Ed and friends, we had a lunch break and then set off on the walking section to the first real tramway bridge. Things seemed to be going well when we had a nice wide timber to cross and we were soon on the other side. However, the next bridge was completely absent and required a tyrolean traverse. All right until your bag catches on the middle support and you lose momentum, as Nigel found out. Then there was a reasonable walk until an even worse one with a rail to get halfway across and then a zip wire for the rest. Interesting stuff!!

The next Terror was the lake, an abseil onto a very unstable raft (as was proved) and then to be pulled across to the other side, some 100 feet away. It would have been quite spectacular when the bridge was in place but it was still quite impressive. One slight problem showed itself in that if someone gets into difficulties at the bottom of the abseil, then there is virtually no way of helping them. Perhaps there should be a dinghy for a 'marshall' to wait at the bottom of the rope. After the lake, we prusiked up a short pitch and were soon on level 6 of Rhosydd. A bit of time was spent looking at the impressive inclines in Rhosydd before we headed, by an up and down route, to level 9 and the adit. The obligatory team photo was taken at the start of the journey out.

Back on the surface, it was mistier than before but still dry so we got back to the cars in a pretty good dry clean state. The trip is a superb sporting one and we did a bit of sight-seeing on the way but it does make me want to go back into Rhosydd and explore a bit more. I'm not so sure about all the bridges in Croesor although I admit it was a great experience, one to remember. Thanks again Ed and all the people who have helped in previous trips to set up the traverses and safety lines.

Alum Pot - 20th March 2011 (TB)

An excellent turnout, for a trip of diminishing numbers. Twelve DCC members (subject to confirmation in Tom's case) met at various times in Inglesport Cafe, and I do mean various times. Allan brings a new dimension to the word "organisation". As we (Tom Howard, Sue Morton and myself) arrived Allan, Glyn, Nick and Joanne were just leaving. Pete, Ally, Lauren and Gareth were milling aimlessly around Main Street and Neil was nursing a hangover somewhere on the M1. Allan, undeterred, pressed on. I ordered a breakfast. Neil got closer. Pete, Ally, Gareth and Lauren sensibly came back in for another brew. It was raining. Pete left with a car full of keen tea drinkers and eventually Neil arrived. Neil ordered some breakfast. Sue confirmed she was not coming underground and Neil announced he was taking his hangover for a walk. Down to ten and still in the cafe. In true crack o' noon style Tom and I wandered over to Selside and kitted up. Leaving Sue with the car we headed up the lane and into Lower Long Churn, probably a couple of hours behind our enthusiastic leader. We caught Pete and Co. a few yards in (Tom - told you we would!) and Pete and I spent quite a while watching the Alum newcomers try and avoid a good soaking. Not all were successful. We caught Allan on the first pitch (Tom - told you we would!). Leaving Nick to do a bit of rerigging we went to wait on the ledge above the bridge for a while. Quite a long time really as Allan hadn't brought any more rope. Still, the ledge was warm and dry and we had a full bag of chocolates. Nick arrived to save the day with a very heavy rope bag but by this time people were leaving faster than they were arriving. Not to worry, Nick, Allan, Tom and I headed off for the bottom but Nick decided to wait on the ledge for us, he seems to like that ledge. At this point Allan explained he'd never actually made it to the bottom of Alum Pot before as he'd always run out of rope first. Who would have believed it? Heading out we collected Nick off one ledge, Jo off another. Had a good chat with a couple of Bradford Pothole Club chaps and spread some rumours whilst I pretended to be Colin Davison, and waved a lot at Pete and the others who by now were watching from the top of the Open Pot. Met Dingle 3 and the future Mrs Dingle 3 to spread some more rumours in what's left of the Marton Arms following its recent closure and reopening. The Marton Arms is now off both Dingle and my lists of acceptable drinking establishments, bet this lot don't last six months, not having any lager didn't help. All in all an entertaining and enjoyable trip superbly organised (given the new definition of the word) by Mr Berry! Thanks Allan!

Cambrian Slate Mine, Glyn Ceiriog - 14th May 2011 (TH)

A nice easy trip into Cambrian Slate Mine was organised by Ed this weekend where a good turnout was seen. Although said to be a bone dry mine Tom and Ed managed to find waist deep water and almost everybody found their feet wet. Ed found a dig at a collapse at the very end, turning his overalls from orange to grey whilst Pete C tried his new camera out. An interesting trip had by all and then a quick picture share was had down at the pub (forgetting the name). Thanks everybody.

NDI adds: We revisited the mine on 25th June and tried to see as much as possible following the old plans. Unfortunately, a quarter is flooded and about half is beyond the blockage that Ed was digging. However, we managed to get a few half-decent photos which are shown on the website.

Lancaster Hole - 23 April 2011 (ND)

Allan's monthly caving trip was to Lancaster Hole, part of Ease Gill system. Four turned up, Allan, Nigel, Tom and Glyn and met (before noon) in Inglesport. We changed in the dry at Bull Pot Farm and soon got down Lancaster Hole. With the help of maps and Allan's compass, the fearless team found its way to Fall Pot and on from there to Stake Pot. Time was limited so we turned back and started out. Nigel visited the Colonnades and took some pics while the others waited and wondered where he had gone. The entrance was near and Allan was soon out on the surface. The others followed fairly quickly and the pitch was detackled. It was still dry and warm enough when we got back to Bull Pot Farm - quite a change from previous Dales trips in 2010 and 2011. Down to the Marton Arms to debrief and meet up with Sarah and Callum who were going on to the Lakes with Allan. Good trip and ideal number on it.

Dan-yr-Ogof and Bridge Cave - 28-29 May 2011 (ND)

The trip to South Wales was one of the weekends organised early in the year by Allan. We had accommodation at the Croydon Caving Club Hut, Godre Pentre at Ystradfellte. Our host was Chris Crowley who also led the trip on Saturday and we found the atmosphere very friendly. The New Inn, just down the road, served evening meals which were not cheap but were certainly substantial. Allan, Nigel and Tom travelled down together on Friday and we were able to get well prepared for the Saturday trip.

Saturday started with a bit of drizzle and there had been rain in the week so we were a bit concerned about Dan-yr-Ogof but went there anyway, arriving mid-morning. After changing and going down to Lake 1, Chris decided to check with another leader who was just coming in as the level seemed high but had been higher recently. After a bit of deliberation, we decided to go ahead and went through the partial swims into the cave proper.

The Long Crawl didn't seem too bad and we had a round trip visiting Flabbergasm Chasm, the Green Canal, the Abyss, the Washing Machine and back to Gerrard Platten Hall where we went back up into the Long Crawl again. Near the lakes, the river seemed a bit wetter and sure enough, the lakes themselves had risen by some 5 inches or more. At this point, Allan revealed that he really did not like swimming at all! However, we were soon through and on our way out through the show cave. After this, and taking a few pictures of dinosaurs (for Allan's Callum), we walked up to Tunnel/Cathedral Cave which is also a show cave and went to the end of the public section and back again. Chris and Allan were seen being photographed with two kids, clearly the member of the public thought they were representative examples of cavers!!

After changing and going back to Ystradfellte, we had some time to kill so walked over the hill into the Little Neath River valley, a pleasant walk over dryish moors. Little Neath River Cave looked fairly wet (water nearly over the dam) so we knew we might need to change Sunday plans. After that it was pub, meal, sleep, listen to the rain.

Sunday saw a damp start but it dried up later. Neil had arrived the night before and we explained the situation to him. Plans were to go to Little Neath River and see how it was - if too high then we would go in Bridge Cave and take some photos. Sure enough, it was flowing well under the bridge so we started with Bridge Cave which was fun but wet. All of us were nearly swept off our feet at different points in the cave. When we came out, we carried on down the river checking Cwm Pwll y Rhyd and White Lady Cave, all very wet. Then back to Little Neath River Cave entrance and the water was now higher than 24 hours before. So it was change and back to the hut when we decided to head home. Two good trips (one longer, one short) and good company made up for the damp weather although we never got any really heavy rain.

Thanks Allan for making all the arrangements.

Carlswark digging - 4th June (AB)

Myself and Tom Howard went to Carlswark to continue a dig that was started by me, Simon and Neil back in the good old days (when the cafe was open in Stoney). The last time we dug there was probably a couple of years ago.

We went in through the Eyam dale shaft entrance to save time - as usual the ladder didn't reach the floor but we could get off at the last rung and free climb the last 3m (ish). We then hot footed it to the dig (20 mins max). I tried to put a rope across the dodgy rift traverse but unfortunately the old spit bolts that we put in were rusted up - so we just had to be brave and go for it.

On reaching the dig we found our drag tray and rope still there. So we got to work digging. We dug out around 13 drag trays of spoil and found no real issues with stacking space. It is now very obvious indeed that the dig is turning left well away from the known sumps and into a blank area on the map. In fact it has turned so much left that the person stacking can no longer see the person digging as he is "round a corner". The digging remains easy but the passage is widening and generally increasing in size - you can turn around at the end of dig now.

The passage itself is classic Carlswark passage with the scalloped walls and heavily fossilized roof. The floor is sandy but I dug down to around a foot without finding the floor. This means that the real passage dimensions are quite large - easily crawling size. We are keeping at roof level with our dig to maintain a safe solid roof above us at all times.

Really this must be the easiest dig in Derbyshire with only one downside - it is also the muddiest. When we came out we were covered head to toe in mud and had to get washed in the river (sorry - town water supply!).

I still think this is a very worthwhile dig and will certainly be going back if I can find volunteers. The dig can be done with either 2 or three people. Watch this space.

Thanks to Tom for his help - never complained once - even when mud got in his eyeballs!

Hillocks Mine and Bagshawe Caverns - 11-12 June 2011 (ND)

A weekend in Derbyshire was arranged at fairly short notice (about two weeks ago) with camping at the Bull i' th' Thorn outside Buxton. Liz, Tom and I arrived Friday night and as no one else was coming until later on Saturday, Tom and I set off for a trip down Hillocks. This is an easy walk from the pub so saved moving the 'bus. We took three ladders and one rope (35m) which reached from top to bottom of the pitches and also acted as a handline in places – quite useful. Taking a few pictures on the way in, we were soon at the bottom of the pitches and exploring the main workings. The place hasn't changed much so there is not much more to say about it! The exit was easy and after the (unnecessary – surely) soaking in the entrance to the coffin level, we were back on the surface and walked back up to the pub in full kit.

On Saturday night, Pete arrived and Allan, Sarah, Callum, Mary and Séan joined for the evening.

On Sunday, Steve arrived and we all went to Bradwell to visit Bagshawe Cavern, a LOCKED cave! However, access is easily arranged by contacting the owner and after changing in a bit of drizzle, we were soon warm and dry underground. The old show cave goes quite some distance into the natural cave so makes for an easy trip down. Steve reckoned there were 99 steps on the way. We took a number of photographs experimenting with cameras, lighting and settings. Beyond the show cave, the passage continues a good size and we followed it down to the Hippodrome, a wide open area, and then to the start of the canal approaching Sump 1. Not wanting to get too wet, we turned back and started out. Three routes were taken through the bouldery area on the way. Tom and I had a look at a decorated section of the old mine passage on the way out.

It was now drizzling heavily on the surface which made changing cold and wet but after a brew and a long chat in Dibben's Diner, we were warmer and left for home. We even had a violin recital from Steve on his 'strad'.

A good weekend. We were determined to return as Bagshawe is an ideal cave for beginners and access is quite easy to arrange (see Eldon PC website).

MATIENZO – EASTER 2011

Easter was two weeks of something we don't often get – good weather and breakthrough after breakthrough in lots of digs.

On arrival Regato 1 had been discovered the previous day, and two days pushing and surveying revealed over 200m of new cave, very pretty in places, although there are bits of no hoper side passage we could survey to add to this. As we emerged to daylight a shout came up that another small draughting hole had been found nearby. An hour or so digging and I was able to squeeze through to standing passage which pinched out after a few metres. Turning round revealed a small hole in the floor which was rapidly enlarged a slope into a chamber, passages off in the floor and in three other directions all needed digging, and the following day after three or four hours hard work I was able to get through to a further chamber which Phil Parker, following me in, confirmed he had spotted from Regato I the previous day, we quickly surveyed out and the connection gave an overall length of 279m. There are several draughting leads that could be pushed, my own theory is that there's a lower series waiting to be found, although it's possible it may be very immature.

The next day saw a strong team looking at the area over the end of Encaramada, which had been pushed to directly below site 3170. 3170 was written off as long term dig but I think perhaps we should take another look this Summer. Separately Encaramada itself was extended 600m by various teams to 3372m.

After a day off we headed for 2415, just by the road out of Solazarno. This had been dug for a couple of years by Chris Camm and the Earby and had broken through to three chambers whilst I was on the beach the day before. Armed with new found surveying skills (Nigel is far better at this than me) Dave Milner and I spent most of the day hanging around waiting for the others to make a big breakthrough. Only 79m were found, but there are several leads to push.

After a day in Maze Cave looking at potential digs for the summer and couple of hard nights drinking the weather prevailed and we headed for the beach and markets the next two days, all go this caving lark!

Harry's Cold Store provided the next big dig site, big passage with a draughting sandy dig at the end, the previous day another team another team had added 80m in the same cave, just around the corner, and we were "given" the task of digging through to a passage that would hopefully cross over the top of the obvious big passage on the survey just beyond. A supreme effort, mainly by Dave "JCB" Gledhill, saw us through in just three or four hours. Better still Dave had to leave after doing most of the work and left the glory for me. Hot sweating and thirsty I soon found a small black hole at the far end, and quickly enlarged it and could see biggish passage beyond. Dreams of glory finally fulfilled. Or not. Finally shoving my upper body through I looked for somewhere to put my left hand and found a survey note. Dreams shattered.

Another day and more new passage, this time in El Suto (3450), Pete Clewes a year or two ago was involved in this dig which had gone to a series of shafts and has been partly explored by the Spanish before being blocked. Phil Goodwin and I headed for the traverse in the rift below the second pitch passing the dog leg to the third rift at the start of the traverse (doesn't make sense – you need to go there!). Phil had already started rigging this so he continued down an estimated 15m shaft to a wide clear landing area with a slot in the floor leading to another pitch. I was having problems slowing my Stop down on the muddy ropes (new Stop required?) and Phil was knackered after ending up in some really awkward positions for protracted periods whilst rigging. We estimated the floor slot at another 15m but the good bit is that the hole at the bottom of this seems to have a really big pitch below it. Boulders dropped through it resulted in a long delay and a very big "boom". The web site has it estimated at 20m, my money is on 40m plus. Short of time we left it wide open for the Summer. The rift beyond the dog leg at the start of the traverse also needs pushing as do the possible continuation of both rifts. There's no sign of Spanish exploration at these points.

The last day soon loomed, but just as a finishing touch we went to have a look at Duck Pond Dig (not a duck in sight obviously) and lent the Earby my drill. After a quick look I decided that there are only many people you can fit in one cold store and took Sue out for lunch. Sure enough later that day they broke through into a chamber with draughting digs leading off. This was then pushed again in June (during the Dingle Stag Night Tour) to a corner where more work is needed.

No big breakthroughs perhaps – although El Suto could be yet – but I can't ever remember two weeks where every dig seemed to go so well. Realistically this it's the cumulative efforts of the last twelve months that led to this.

More staff always welcome for the Summer trip, the first of us leave on the 2nd August, and the club are out there in one form or another until around the 24th.

Tony

SOME THOUGHTS ON UNDERGROUND PHOTOGRAPHY

A number of people are trying their hand at underground photography these days with some good results and long-term benefits for the Club in improving our records. These are a few thoughts addressed from one amateur to the others.

MAIN ISSUES

Two main issues stand out: appropriate lighting and suitable subjects. Lighting is perhaps the most obvious and there are two distinct methods in use (although they can be mixed). Most people will either use light painting or flash guns. Light painting is well-suited to large subjects which are difficult to light such as the slate mines. The advantage is a method that does not require expensive kit (flash guns and ideally slaves) but it is not good at getting images with people or at showing perspective particularly well or, for that matter, where time counts such as in wet caves. For those who have not been underground with Ed recently, a brief explanation is due. In light painting, the camera is set on a tripod with the shutter open for a long period and the subject is lit with a relatively low power light as if it was being painted, hence the name. Subjects must not be allowed to move during this process and caplamps must be turned off but at least the whole picture can be made with a single torch and quite nice lighting effects can be achieved. The other method, with flash, is taken with a quick shutter speed, usually about 1/100th of a second which means that the camera can be hand-held and moving subjects can be photographed and also that subjects' lights do not need to be turned off. Flash on the camera has serious disadvantages: firstly, you will get very little feeling of depth (trying looking at something with one eye closed and only your own headlight on) and secondly, digital cameras tend to be badly affected by spots – drops of water – or steam in the image. Just holding the flash at arm's length away from the camera will get rid of these problems but much better results can be gained by having two, three or more flashes at different points in the view. This usually means using slaves (optical or radio controlled flash guns that fire when the camera flash fires) but can be done with a longer time exposure, say 1 second, and some well-trained operators.

The second issue I referred to was suitable subjects. Whether you think about it or not, every picture is taken for a reason and I guess that you could identify five different uses: 1) as a record of something special such as a new discovery on the day; 2) as a record of a trip, so you will probably want to include people who were on the trip; 3) a record of a feature in a cave or mine; 4) for publication or 5) for fun – such as someone emerging from a muddy crawl. The record picture or the fun picture don't call for high quality, the aim is to record something happening. A quick snap may be sufficient. Flash on camera is not a big issue as long as the subject can be clearly understood. For a trip record, you will want to get people on the picture so that looking back in the future, you can identify who was there. For a cave or mine feature, which might be a natural formation, an artefact, a particularly striking passage shape, active water, and so on, probably the most important feature and the one which is so often missing (in my opinion) is a scale. Many mine passages could be two feet high or twenty feet high but without someone in the shot, how do you know? I suggest that before you take each shot, think for a second about why you are taking it and what use will be made of the picture.

CAMERA SETTINGS

Modern digital cameras have made underground photography much easier than it used to be as you can take many many pictures before deciding that the lighting is just right but their automation can work against you. Basic camera options may appear to be easy to set but I have seen too many cases where the camera takes over, even in so-called manual mode. The main features that can be controlled are usually speed (high speed for action shots, slow speed for light painting), focus (both the need to get the subject sharp but also the need to get good depth of focus, that is, having as much of the picture sharp as possible (or as wanted)). Focus is usually done automatically by the camera these days (as long as it can 'see' the subject!) but depth of field is a function of the aperture size. The smaller aperture you use (higher f numbers such as f7 and f8), the sharper the whole picture will be – as long as the subject is in focus too. The third factor is film speed. In the 'good old days', you bought film which was 'fast', such as ASA400, to use in dark pictures because if the film is 'fast', it needs less light to get an image but in doing so, you usually lose clarity. Slow film such as ASA50 or ASA100 will need more light but give sharper pictures. With a digital camera, you can change the speed but I would suggest keeping at ASA100 unless your camera is really struggling in a large dark chamber. The last factor is the size of aperture. This has been mentioned already as it affects focus but if focus is not an issue, large apertures (f2.8) will need less light to illuminate a chamber than small apertures (say f5.6).

IN PRACTICE

Having used digital cameras for a while now, my preference is to use flash off the camera (apart from the flash on the camera that triggers the other flashes) to avoid steam or spots on the picture and to get some perspective. Although the camera and flashes can work together in automatic mode, I prefer to use manual mode and adjust the values myself. Shutter speed is more or less irrelevant with electronic flash (they fire in a couple of thousandths of a second) so the main variable is aperture and number of flashes used. Normally, I'll start with f4 and ASA 100 and then I can go to f2.8 if the picture is too dark and, if really necessary, change to ASA 200 or ASA 400 but this will reduce picture quality. If the picture is too bright, then it is easy to move flashes around or shut down the aperture to f5.6 or f8. As Tom and others know, this will often mean an initial ranging shot to see roughly how it will look and then get the subjects in place and flashes working for maybe two or three shots to get it right.

OTHER THOUGHTS

Maybe, I'll write some more for the next newsletter as there are other factors to consider including: flash guns; carrying the equipment; keeping it dry; arranging lighting (foreground, background, back-lighting, silhouette, etc); colour versus black and white; editing pictures (cropping, lightening, removing spots, etc); and lastly publication, that is, sharing the pictures with others.

Hope this has been interesting.

Nigel

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

July 2011	30-31 – NAMHO conference in Shropshire
August 2011	1-21 – Matienzo expedition
“	30 – General Meeting
September 2011	3-4 – Autumn Open Weekend, Wood Mine
“	24-25 – Hidden Earth at Monmouth
October 2011	17 – General Meeting
November 2011	26 – Annual Dinner
December 2011	12 – Annual General Meeting

Any comments, items for the next edition, volunteers to be editor, etc. to Nigel Dibben š newsletter@DerbysCC.org.uk

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