PCG Newsletter No. 153, May 2011



Read all about Bob Cawthorne, Matienzo, the Mendip Hills, Hooe Lake Quarry, and much more!

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Editorial



Welcome, readers and fellow cavers, to a new edition of The PCG newsletter! Those who have been around long enough to have received the previous issue will have noticed a lot has changed.

One of the changes, and the cause for all other changes, is that this is the first newsletter by the new editor. I will briefly introduce myself, though I hope most readers will recognise me from underground trips. My name is Margot Saher, and I joined the PCG in November 2009. It didn't take long for me to get properly hooked on caving and mine exploration. And as I happen to be a blogger as well, this immediately resulted in me writing about underground exploits a lot.

When Chris Popham, the previous editor, indicated he wished to lay down this task, I was a somewhat obvious choice as a successor, and during the AGM in February 2011 I accepted this verbose position.

As a new kid on the block I trust my efforts will display room for improvement. So if you have any suggestions: do not hesitate to contact me! I try to be around for many caving trips, and I can also be contacted be e-mail (see colophon). And if you happen to experience something worth sharing: do write it down and send it to me! Newsletter editors are always hungry for input.

I would like to use this space to thank Chris for his work as my predecessor, and the committee for having faith in me as his successor. I would also like to thank those that have provided material for this issue.

I hope this newsletter will serve its purpose of both providing useful information, and allowing people to re-live the trips! And I hope this will be the first in a whole succession of newsletters, of which the quality displays a continuous rise.

Yours sincerely,

Margot Saher
Editor

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Mandy in Shatter Cave. See page 2. Picture: DaveWarne

PCG trip to the Mendip Hills, June 2010

Call the newspaper, the PCG actually went caving! That does not happen very often. But Dave Jean had an idea in winter, and organised a weekend stay in the Shepton Mallet. Plenty of possibilities there near Cheddar Gorge to keep a bunch of Devonian moles busy for two days.

There had been 13 people able and eager to participate in this subterranean indulgence; when the author and Ali reached the designated cavers' lair we found Sarah, Daniel and Lionel already having made themselves at home, and Neil, Rebecca, Lee and Jo, our quartet of lawyers, scurrying around. It was time to manoeuvre everybody to the Hunters' Lodge Inn and wait there for Dave, Dave and Rupert while enjoying the local brews.

To the author's surprise, everybody was up fresh and early the next morning, in spite of Dave's sonorous sleeping habits. And a proper fry-up had been neatly devoured by the time Richard, our lucky nr.13, showed up.

The plan was to have Ali faf around with the lawyers for a while; do some basic training, and then take them to Swildon's Hole, while the other cavers would divide into a group going into Shatter Cave and one going to Fairy Cave. So we drove Fairy Cave Quarry, and met our leader for the day. Dave, Dave, Rupert, Sarah and me followed Mandy, a local caver, while Lionel and the brothers Richard and Dan went into Fairy Cave.

Upon reaching Canopy Room we went ballistic with cameras and flash guns. No caving party may have proceeded so slowly through it before.

Besides taking pictures we also enjoyed the luminescence of the speleothems, triggered by our flashes. Hardly stopping taking pictures we moved on through Diesel Chamber and Tor Chamber, losing Dave Jean on the way as he did not feel up to clambering further, and on, to Porridge Basin. By that time we decided to turn back; due to our photography -reduced speed, going all the way would have meant both Dave and the Fairy Cavers would have been bored and/or starved to death waiting for us.

We found Dave who had started to get cold, but that was quickly solved once we got outside. The weather outside was such that we found Lionel back sunbathing on a rock, being quite in touch with his inner lizard. They had had a good time too; they had encountered some challenging climbs and some cold water. And now they were hungry.

"BESIDES TAKING PICTURES WE ALSO ENJOYED THE LUMINESCENCE OF THE SPELEOTHEMS, TRIGGERED BY OUR FLASHES."



Rupert in the Pillar Room of Shatter Cave. Picture: DaveWarne



The Angel's Wing in Shatter Cave. Picture: Dave Warne

"HE HAD RECEIVED A PROPER SWILDON'S BAPTISM, TO GREAT AMUSEMENT OF HIS MOTHER"

We changed, thanked our guide, and went back to the hut, where we found four oversuits drying in the sun, and an abandoned Ali. It turned out the lawyers had gone! They had gone into Swildon's hole, and already at the entrance had had difficulty with negotiating the rocks and slopes. They had decided to give up, pack their stuff, visit the much more comfortable show cave in Cheddar, and then bugger off, back to Plymouth.

After a cup of tea we proceeded in a slightly disorganised manner to caveclimb, where we made the owner's day by unleashing a veritable shopping spree. There was some hesitation to leave, as this was a typical children-in-a-toy-shop atmosphere, but we ripped ourselves away from all these gadgets and went back.

Some of the new kit immediately came in handy for our visit to Swildon's Hole. The author at least felt like a million dollars in the cleanest suit in the world and snazzy neoprene socks. Ali, who had been in the day before, had warned us things had changed near the entrance in recent times, and those with previous experience in this void confirmed that. Besides that, the cave was dryer than normal.

We made our way through the Jacob's ladder and on, fairly soon reaching 20 ft drop. It was quickly rigged, but not so quickly Sarah and Dave had no time for some unexpected interaction. After the drop the proximity of the double pots was announced by a splash and roaring laughter. Inquiry revealed that Dan's grip had slipped, and he had received a proper Swildon's baptism, to great amusement of his mother.

Scurrying on we came to sump 1, which killed the so far apparent determination of the group. To go through, or not to go through? Richard was our first man, and he lay down in the water, and decided against it. Lionel was still dry and wanted to keep it that way. Dave might not even fit through. I thought that may mean the end of our exploration, but I had evidently not reckoned with Ali. He did not hesitate, grabbed the rope, and vanished. And I'm not a fan of having other people have all the fun without me, so I took a deep breath and followed. A good baptism for the suit, and for myself, as I had so far been a sump virgin.

Ali decided we could make it to sump 2, and on return reconvene with the rest even before they'd reach 20 ft drop. That turned out to be a tad optimistic, and we met the rest of the party at the wire ladder. Richard and Sarah were up already; Richard was manning the safety rope. Dan was next, and showed us how youthful enthusiasm can get in the way of a calm and tidy ascent. Dave next showed a proper dislike of ladders

does not necessarily hinder, after which I fortunately illustrated boots with hooks for the laces do not have to be a problem either.

Once up I found Dave catching his breath. Rupert was right behind me and with the three of us we went on. Rupert managed to extend the trip a bit by being convinced we needed to take the high road somewhere where there was no high road, something that did not please Dave who was tired, but the delay was modest, and not much later we came out again, into the nice weather.

By that time it was already nearly 8 o'clock, and the pubs there don't serve food to very late, so we had to get out of our wet stuff and into civilian clothes quickly, and make a dash for it. Sarah, who was out as one of the first, brought Richard back to his car as he had to get to work, and picked up the Dave Jean, who hadn't joined us. Big Dave worried us by not being hungry. To our relief he did feel like a beer afterwards. That night I was not the only one going to bed immediately after getting back to the hut from the pub; most of us were knackered.

This night the noise levels were down, as Dave volunteered for sleeping downstairs, and I slept so well I was already up before the Brits started their fry-up. Sarah and Dan would leave, and the rest of us, except for Dave Jean, would visit GB Cave. We parked the two remaining cars near a farm, helped Big Dave into his knee pads, and went to the entrance. This involved some stepping over fences, and at the second fence Dave halted. He reconsidered; he'd worn himself out too much the day before and felt crap. This is a state in which doing demanding caving is not a good idea. So we wished him a good kip and continued with the four of us. We had started out with 13!

We clambered and crawled our way to the Gorge, and soon after, to the Bridge in the Main Chamber. We chose to first cross it, and thus make our way in the direction of Bertie's Pot, and eventually return the other way, coming out underneath the Bridge. Soon after the bridge there was a corridor where Ali announced he wanted to take some pictures, upon which Lionel immediately began to undress; however, both facts soon turned out to be unrelated. Unfortunately, the picture taking was not as successful as Lionel's sartorial rearrangement; the one flash gun refused again, and even though we had tested this configuration above ground, the camera did not work with a borrowed flash gun either, due to timing issues. So we packed our gadgets away and stored what we saw in our own memory...

After having put the wire ladder we had brought to use we proceeded in the direction of Ladder Dig, where we encountered an almost-sump; bailing out the water made it a passage. And as this water, quite unlike that of sump 1 of Swildon's, was foul, it had several advantages to get rid of as much of it as practically feasible. Af-

"WE CLAMBERED AND CRAWLED OUR WAY TO THE GORGE, AND SOON AFTER, TO THE BRIDGE IN THE MAIN CHAMBER."



Dave and Ali in Swildon's Hole. Picture: Margot Saher

ter having a look at bat-devoid Bat passage we went looking for the squeeze to the Great Chamber; Ali found it, but did not manage to get through. The other three did, and were rewarded with the chamber's majestic sight.

We squeezed back to Ali, and made our way back to the entrance, taking the alternative route, which involved clambering over nicely frictionally eroded limestone, with pretty bivalves and other fossils in it. At the bridge we heard and saw some other cavers; perhaps surprising that only in the last half hour of the last trip we found out we were not alone, as the Mendip Caves are not the most obscure underground places one could think of.

We found the two Daves back at the cars. They had visited a boot sale, and acquired a roll of the finest biscuits. We eagerly helped them finishing these; Ali included, even though we did not tire reminding him of his incapacity to squirm through the last squeeze.

All that was left to do then was have a cup of tea with some coffee cake, reflect on this nice weekend while slouching on couches, and then pack our stuff and our last energy to drive home. It had been a dark, damp, and exhausting but lovely weekend!

Margot Saher

"WHICH INVOLVED CLAMBERING OVER NICELY FRICTIONALLY ERODED LIMESTONE, WITH PRETTY BIVALVES AND OTHER FOSSILS IN IT. "



Rupert coming through a squeeze in GB Cave. Picture: Margot Saher

In memoriam: Bob Cawthorne (1948-2010)

I first got to know Bob when a few of us from school went caving together in the mid sixties. Bob was always far more serious about caving than I was and far more adventurous too. Bob helped to get the Plymouth Caving Group started and we spent some time helping out at Kitley Caves at Yealmpton near Plymouth. This eventually had the advantage that we gained free admission to a nightclub called Tiffs in Town, though we were a little too young initially!

"THIS EVENTUALLY HAD THE ADVANTAGE THAT WE GAINED FREE ADMISSION TO A NIGHTCLUB CALLED TIFFS IN TOWN, THOUGH WE WERE A LITTLE TOO YOUNG INITIALLY!"

His propensity for exploring every small nook and cranny in and around Plymouth, and later much further afield, is demonstrated in that one of the caves in Kitley Quarry, Robert's Cave, was named after Bob who first entered its narrow confines. This was something that made him immensely proud and he went back to have a look at it just a couple of years ago.

Bob was well known and hugely thought of in Devon caving. There was little he didn't know and he was always ready and willing to pass his knowledge on and provide whatever help he could.

Many young people were introduced to caving by Bob in his years of teaching at Plymstock, Honicknowle and Ivybridge Schools. This provided a stock of members for the Plymouth Caving Group many of who are still caving or on the periphery of caving today. Bob eventually became President of the Club in recognition of all that he did for it.

He was also involved further afield joining the William Pengelly Cave Studies Trust when it was still in its infancy and doing much to develop the Buckfastleigh Centre into what it is today. The Trust was another of his passions and he called in at the Buckfastleigh Centre on his last visit to Devon.

Bob worked tirelessly to further caving in Devon and, with others, helped to set up the Devon Cave Rescue Organisation and the Devon and Cornwall Underground Council which meant that we didn't have to look to the Mendips to represent us at the National Caving Association. Indeed, Bob eventually became the local representative on this body and I can remember occasionally accompanying him to the meetings at Stafford stopping off with his brother, Ted, on the way.

I also remember a meeting we both attended at Honiton where, with the great and the good, we were presented with two shiny new blue Mountain Rescue Post signs for DCRO, one for Buckfastleigh and one for Plymouth.



Bob with Julie in the hills near their home in Alicante Province, Spain

Taking early retirement Bob, Julie and Lloyd moved to Spain living just outside Jalon in Alicante. He loved Spain annually visiting Matienzo in Cantabria where he and Julie bought a property to enable them to spend more time there. He was actively involved in Matienzo being there just this last summer but, at the same time, he never forgot Devon taking an active interest in the happenings of the Plymouth Caving Group.

Bob was always ready to listen, advise and not be judgemental. In Bob I have lost a terrific friend who, over the years, has been inspirational and a great support but our thoughts must go to Julie and Lloyd who have lost a kind, thoughtful, practical and supportive husband and father.

David Jean



A picture kindly provided by Dave Warne of the Hooe Lake Quarry

"I REMEMBER, SOME 50 OR SO YEARS AGO NOW, CATCHING THE FERRY ACROSS TO TURNCHAPEL, FERRETING AROUND IN THE QUARRY"

Talk on Hooe Lake Quarry

A number of members attended the talk on Hooe Lake Quarry by Robin Blythe-Lord at St John's Church Hall, Hooe. Although the main thrust of the talk was Barratt Homes plans to construct houses on the site with the use of illustrations, Robin attempted an overall history of the site from the Iron Age to today. Obviously, for most of its history the site was just a limestone bluff overlooking Plymouth Sound. He went on to talk about the development of Turnchapel with its MOD connections, the timber yard on the opposite side of Hooe Lake from the quarry and the development of the quarry itself. He showed the remnants of the early limekiln as well as the larger concrete limekiln that those of us who have visited the caves here will be more familiar. He also mentioned the development of a railway connection to the site which was of particular interest to me because I remember, some 50 or so years ago now, catching the ferry

across to Turnchapel, ferreting around in the quarry and then walking back to Oreston along the railway track crossing the swing bridge over Hooe Lake.

He mentioned the nearly 30 caves in the quarry and the bat population. The quarry face is a protected site and, apart from the bats, there are a number of protected butterfly and plant species. Robin brought his talk up to the present time by illustrating the destructiveness of the preparation work being carried out by the quarry's current owners who seem to be in the process of making quite a lot of money from the sale to Barratt Homes.

Plymouth City Council is in the process of agreeing the relevant planning permission. It will be interesting to note the conditions that the council may put on any permission and to see how conservationally minded this city really is.

Of course, after the talk we retreated to the nearby Boringdon Arms where Ali questioned the landlord on further caves in the cliff face behind the pub. And yes, there is at least one!

David Jean

Blast from the past

PREPARE FOR A 36 YEARS TIME WARP DEAR READER!

Bob Cawthorne was not only talented at scurrying round underground and founding of caving clubs; he also had the power of words. An old newsletter (1974; your new editor remembers it well!) yielded a brilliant piece of prose from the hand of this illustrious gentleman. In honour of Bob's verbal talents we decided to reproduce it in this issue. Do enjoy, on the next page, a trip report as they are rarely written these days!

The editor



Lacking a good picture of Prid here's a picture of Richard showing a relaxed approach to enjoying Dog Hole

Flash-back to 1974

A dismal day in January saw two intrepid vehicules creeping at exactly fifty miles per hour up the Plympton bypass. We were going caving, I tell you, lad, Jim. It was raining. The wireless whistled jaunty but sad little refrains. There was the steady drone of the tyres and only the gentle crunching of the lay-shaft gears from the engine. The rendezvous was a secret. So I shan't mention where it was, but we had two ploughmans, and two pints of schhhh; after one you'll do anything well! Soon it was closing time (Oh, what a giveaway!), and we returned to the vehicles and set off again. We reached the grey expanses of tar, opposite the ancient farmhouse; yes, it was Proddumsley.

We changed into our caving gear. It only took an hour to persuade five carbide lamps to work in unison. We set off up the lane; paid our "please don't steal our car" tithe, and went on towards the cave.

There was Edward, gaunt, argumentative, hairy and fat. There was Ann, thinking wistfully of the home fire burning. There was Bob and Gail, thinking wistfully of the pub fire burning. There was Norman Borge, a novice, wondering why cars should not perch in trees, and which alcoholic haze had convinced him he wanted to go caving. Finally there was Shelley, who seemed a little confused by it all.

We reached the impressive entrance, had our last resigned glance at the bright but intermittent heavy rain, hoisted up our pullovers, arranged our last wills and testaments, and sat down for a smoke. Soon we could think of no more excuses, so in we went. The entrance was moderately dry, or wet, and the temperature just about nearly. We swiftly traversed the entrance passage, walking mainly upright, using our legs for support, and trying not to weep at the uninterrupted beauty of the mud-daubed walls. The puddle was the first obstacle, and a goodly ten minutes were wasted here, whilst we prevaricated quite successfully. We entered Crystal Chamber, and marvelled at the broken formations. The struggle to get down the slope and over the stile severely taxed our energies, so we rested in Bishop's Chamber for a few minutes, savouring the delights of, and listening to the gentle drip of mud slurping down the walls.

The mud staircase! How the name fills one with a nameless dread and horror. Girding up our non-existent rope, we set off into the noisome heights. It was a little difficult for the 3' 6'' Shelley, negotiating the 8' muddy, slippery face, but somehow she managed it. Taking care not to exceed fifty miles an hour, we went along the bypass, turning left along the Prid 38 towards Junction Chamber.

The crawl was a bit murky and Jim accidentally trod on a slithy tove, which gimbled in his way. Amazingly we found the man trap. With tooth and nail gripping the rock, we negotiated its awesome depths. The drip of mud was a little more liquid now, as we approached the Lake Chamber. Soon we were not really following a stream. Eventually we did not reach the platform. It had sunk. Quite distinctly the bottom of the cave had sunk six feet, and the lake extended around the corner. Trembling with fear, we discussed how difficult it would be to go for a swim, but insanity prevailed, and we returned whence we had come.

At Junction Chamber, we juncted off towards the slide, which Ted slod down at slow speed. We all slowly followed, landing in a series of crumpled at the bottom. The beauties of the maze were negotiated after not really taking the wrong turning; Bishop's Chamber looked the same, only the other way around, and we had to climb over the stile going out. Only one mishap occurred in Chrystal Chamber when Ann took a gentle plummet.

Enough is enough! No more of this rubbish! I mean to be serious now!

We left the cave, changed and drove away.

Bob Cawthorne

WE SWIFTLY TRAVERSED THE ENTRANCE PASSAGE, WALKING MAINLY UPRIGHT, USING OUR LEGS FOR SUPPORT, AND TRYING NOT TO WEEP AT THE UNINTERRUPTED BEAUTY OF THE MUD-DAUBED WALLS.

Colophon

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Welcome to the PCG

Established 1963

The PCG is a small and friendly caving club. We regularly visit Caves and Mines in Devon & Cornwall, with some weekend trips to Wales, the Mendips, the Yorkshire Dales and the occasional trip to France, Spain and beyond. We are always happy to see new people.

Membership will give you access to places very few people go and see things both weird and wonderful. You'll have access to club kit- light, helmet, caving suit to get you started. Become part of a diverse group of friends enjoying fun social activities. Give it a try, you might even like it!



Lionel and Richard in Wheal Fanny. Picture: DaveWarne

Unfounded rumours

The committee seems to be working on a new letter of welcome for new members. Voices have been heard speaking of the purchase of shiny new rope! And the hills are alive with talk about a new initiative concerning the Caradon Mining District! Stay tuned...

Upcoming trips:

Tue 24 May: obscure parts of DGC

Tue 31 May: Two Brothers (dig)

Tue 07 June: Frementor (SRT & dig)

Tue 14 June: Wheal Benny

Weekend of 18-19 June: South Wales

Tue 21 June : Golitha mine/Radford Cave

Sun 26 June: Golden Dagger mine (SRT)

Tue 28 June: Reeds/ Bakers Pit

Tue 05 July: Haytor Iron mine

Tue 12 July: Pridhamsleigh

Tue 19 July: Wheal Brothers

(but check website and mailbox for possible changes!)