Plymouth Caving Group

Newsletter and Journal
January 2017



Swan Bath Stone Mine

Issue Number 163

Editorial

This Newsletter contains articles that demonstrate the range of activities that the club undertakes. Held over from the last Newsletter is a piece by Alex Noot on a trip into Reeds Cave. Last November a number of us went to North Wales and Keith Coventry has contributed an article on one of the places we visited. Finally, Richard Vooght has written an article on a recent visit to one of the Bath Stone Mines.

The last Newsletter was a tribute to Ali Neill and on the 23rd December a number of us gathered at Wheal Coates on the north Cornish coast to scatter Ali's ashes. Some were scattered in the mine itself where there is a discrete memorial plaque. Ali's mother and elderly aunt attended on a blustery day so Ali's sister Brigid scattered some at the site of the mine ruins. A portion of Ali's ashes will be taken to Matienzo and scattered there.



Up until now there has been a serious lack of articles from members attending trips. We go on a wide range of trips on Tuesday evenings, at weekends and sometimes for longer periods of time and yet no-one writes anything up any more. It is good to see many photographs appearing on Facebook and other internet locations but this isn't very helpful in producing a Newsletter. A number of the Committee Members are aware that I was looking to give up producing this Newsletter but the sudden spate of articles I received has made me reconsider this decision. I therefore hope that a number of you have made a New Year's Resolution to write up your trips for your Newsletter.

There is a lot planned for 2017. We have already been to Cligga and the Tuesday evening trips continue. There are also plans to go to Nenthead along with, I'm sure, a number of other places. Julian was speaking of organising a trip to the Maginot Line and the Paris Catacombs. So there is a lot to look forward to but remember, without articles there will not be another Newsletter. So start writing and make sure this isn't the last one.

You have an opportunity to replace me as Editor anyway because our AGM is coming up in February so come along and have an input into how your club is run.

Anyway, do continue to enjoy your trips underground.

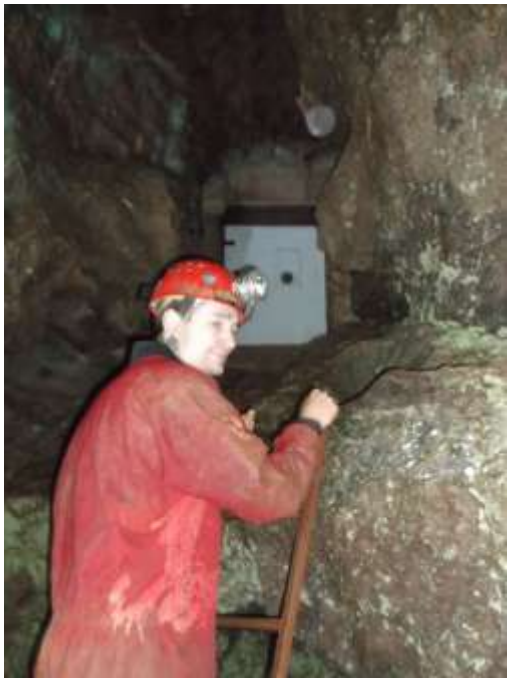
David Jean

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Reeds Cave

I had been to Reeds a few times before, but this was the first time I was 'Leading the trip' An opportunity had arisen and I decided to follow up on it. Myself, Alex, Richard and Tara ventured towards the entrance of the cave and did the usual fif faf with the ladder and unlocking of the new bomb proof door.



We golum'd along the initial miserable passages until Easter chamber was reached! Hurray, I hadn't got lost yet. With a bit of scrambling I managed to find our way to the most notable feature of Reeds, The Little Man.



This is where I realised how badly I could recall the story of Squire Richard Cabell (Thanks Tara). My story was perhaps a little.. off. After Tara did a very impressive recollection of the story (Giving me a bench mark to work towards), the squad ventured back towards Easter chamber. However; Richard and I decided to take a different route. Sunbury crawl; what can only be described as a tight commando crawl type of route. The next adventure was the upper series... a part of the cave that isn't usually done on a Reeds trip. With lots of grunting we made it. It was nice to see the less ventured part of the cave, with some impressive curtains! Richard then took us to the part of the upper series known as 'Micron squeeze' Alex shot through like a racing snake...the boy had had his Weetabix. Richard wasn't feeling it and Tara got hindered by her natural assets. My turn. Being quite a slim lad I thought I'd fly through ... nope. This was perhaps the tightest squeeze I had experienced. I really had to breathe out and hold my breath to decompress my ribs enough to shimmy through. I think this caused a bruised rib, shhhh. Alex and I had a little poke around whilst the others waited. We misheard Richard saying it was a round trip, not a through trip, so we headed back disgruntled upon realising! Back through the micron squeeze we continued toward the lower series; however Alex found the 'exhaust shoot' exit. Naturally he shot down it and quoted 'it's quite easy really', Richard and Tara went back the way we initially came up, I accepted the Reeds challenge.

I started decent of the chimney style exhaust shoot, with my back firmly against the rock and legs stretched out to the wet muddy rock in front; I began the one way decent. I did a number two.. Reiterating Alex's quote It's quite easy really' one slip of my feet or back against the wet muddy rocks I would have broken bones. That day I broke both legs.



Using all upper body strength to crawl towards the exit and accommodate for my lack of leg function....

We all made it out of the cave in perfect health; as expected a war cry from Tara commenced 'pub', we obliged.

I was then honoured with a Reeds leadership letter from Richard, I couldn't contain my smile. Much to the amusement of others I then whacked out my Diary to take notes of things I need to know and scribblings about Squire Richard Cabell!

I'll strive to take future groups down to Reeds cave competently, offering them a rewarding experience into Devon's most beautiful cave.

Alex Noot

Moel Fferna

On Saturday 12 November 2016 the scene was set. Several of us were to venture to Moel Fferna, a mine that I discovered information about from a very friendly North Wales Caving club secretary last year. Unfortunately, we never got around to seeing it last year. However, I was told that it was in very good nick; as you need a ladder to get in it was off the radar for people to just get in to and trash. I felt it was in even better condition than Cwmorthin Mine…

So, after breakfast we start to drive off towards Betws-y-Coed with a set of instructions in hand- “we park on a lay-by on the A5 – take 2 cars up a track with parking for 2 – walk up to the Mine – 50ft pitch in on a ladder and that’s it”, I said.

Well, we found the lay-by easily enough but this is where the fun started – I had a map showing 2 roads up to the car park (using the term loosely) With the cars full to bursting, Big Dave was driving. “Turn Right”, I said.
“Are you sure?” Says Dave, not entirely sure of my navigational skills.
“Well, it says on the map”.
“Ok”.
Well, the hill must have been at least 30 degrees and covered in mud – Dave’s car started to make a very bad smell and we were never going to make it (struggling clutch).
“Are you sure???” Dave says again.
“Yep”.
“Well, the car is never going to make it”.
“Oh – well, there might be another path up on the other side”.
With that, a man from one of the houses pops out.
“You will never get that up there (Dave’s car is a large estate with 5 people and caving gear), you want to use the other road the other side to get to the mine, and it’s much easier”.

So, after a very slow and tight reverse back down the hill, we managed to find the other road up to the mine.
“How much further”, Dave asks?
“We need to go through a few gates and there is a bit to park 2 cars on, that’s what my instructions tell me”.

“Well, I hope we can turn around up there because I’m never going to reverse this car back, no ****ing way!!!!! Whose idea was this anyway????
At this point I thought it was best to say nothing. Not really knowing how long this road (track would be a better word for it) would be, I just kept looking forward.

At last, we came to a gate with no way of moving any further. We parked the cars as best we could (The other car, Dave J – managed to turn around ready for the adventure back down) and we started to get the gear ready.

As you can see, even getting to this mine proved to be a challenge. I was secretly hoping that all this effort would be worth it. So, with everyone loaded up we started to walk up to the mine but with that, a saw 2 more cars coming up the track!

When the cars stopped, one of our party recognised the other party as North Wales Caving Club so all was good.

After about an hour’s walk up to the mine, we got to the top of shaft which was already rigged with electron ladder by Richard. Getting down wasn’t too bad

considering it was my very first time on a ladder, about a 25ft pitch with a fixed ladder at the bottom it was quite fun!

After everyone was in we started to walk down the passage, a small climb through a hole in a wall to find our selves at the bottom of an incline – I couldn't get over how big the place was; even with my 3000 lumen head lamp, the walls just swallowed the light, it was huge. We all scampered off in different directions to find pumps, wheelbarrows, chains and doors. I was told that there was a "Bridge of Death" somewhere down here and we managed to find it; it even looked like people had walked over it before us, it must have been a good 40ft down.





After an hour or so of looking around I still couldn't get the sheer size of this place – from the surface you would never have guessed on how big this place

was, the pictures really don't do this place justice. The ceiling was cut of perfectly / so straight, it was incredible.



With time not on our side at this point, we started to find our way back to the shaft. NWCC has left a flashing light at the right level to leave at so we all walked back towards the light. Back through the wall and a quick up and out of the ladder (It was easier getting up then down!), we talked to NWCC about coming back up on our gear and we would carry theirs down to the car and then swap gear back down at the car park.

With a nice walk back down the hill it was then the reverse with Dave's car back down the hill. We managed to turn around and headed back to the main road with the PCG evening meal in sight. Despite the length we took to get there, it was a very good trip and one I would love to do again.

Keith Coventry

Some more pictures from our weekend in North Wales









Swan Mine

The day before New Years Eve Dave W, Dave J and myself headed for one of the smaller mines of the Bath Stone group, Swan Mine which is beneath Kingsdown Hill in the Avon valley.

The entrance to the mine is not gated and is right opposite a pub called The Swan, where in front of a log fire we enjoyed a pint and obtained permission to leave Dave's car in the car park. The landlord told us that the pub used to be the quarry masters house.

We got changed, crossed the road and entered the mine. The passage was quite straightforward with just a small collapse to negotiate. There was some shattering of the rock near the entrance but this disappeared beyond the first collapse. This was a photographic trip for me and Dave W so we both had our cameras and tripods. Dave, though, forgot his Sim card.

We went at a steady pace, exploring all the side passages as we went and stopping to take photos as we went along. There were a number of interesting features such as figures on the wall showing the amount of stone extracted along with dates and items such as files and saws carefully left on benches around the mine.

In other places features on the floor such as the hoof prints of the ponies who hauled the wagons full of stone out of the mine, the boot prints of the men who worked here and natural features such as pearls, were protected by a ring of stones on the floor.

Most of the floor is compacted clay and in some places the grooves left by the cart wheels can clearly be seen. In places where the passage goes around a bend the depth of the outside rut is greater than the inside one due to the weight of the load being carried.





One of the features of the mine is an abandoned crane still in a reasonable condition. We all crowded around for the group photo.









Near the preserved crane was another that had been flattened by a roof collapse. After a couple of hours that went very quickly we exited the mine. I left through a tight squeeze up to the left and just as I Got outside heard brakes squeal and an almighty bang as a car on the road hit an animal that Dave later discovered was a deer. But we didn't have venison for our New Year meal.

We headed for the M4/M5 on our return which was extremely busy so I went to sleep in the back while the two Dave's nattered at the front.

Richard Vooght

Club Information

Advance notice of the AGM which will be held on Wednesday 15th February 2017 at Moorcroft starting at 19.30. It will be followed by a presentation of the club's activities in 2016 by Keith Coventry and, maybe, Steve Coombs who both recorded activities on Go-Pro.

This is a chance for all members to come along and see the sort of things we have been doing and, if they want to, stand for one of the posts and help in the running of the club. It is no good complaining if the things you want don't happen so this is an opportunity for you to come along and make sure that what you want does happen.

Plymouth Caving Group

Annual General Meeting
To be held at Moorcroft
Wednesday 15th February 2017 at 19.30

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Minutes of the last AGM, 17th February 2016
   These minutes have been previously circulated
3. Officers Reports
   a) Chairman
   b) Secretary
   c) Treasurer
4. Other Committee Reports
   This is an opportunity for officers to present a brief resume of their work in 2016, if they so wish
5. Election of Officers
6. Election of Other Committee Posts
7. Any Other Business
   This for exceptional items only

Membership is now due. The Committee has decided this will remain the same for 2017 as it was this year. This is £9 plus the BCA insurance element of £17 making a total of £26 unless you pay your insurance direct to BCA. Students are half price at £4.50 and £8.00 respectively giving a total of £12.50.

You can pay this by cheque or by BACS straight into the club's account at the HSBC. The sort code is 40-36-23 and account number 71222791.

Please use your surname on the transaction and email both Tara (membership secretary) at tara.beacroft@plymouthcavinggroup.org.uk and Rupert (treasurer) at Rupert.goddard@plymouthcavinggroup.org.uk to the let them know that you have paid your subscription along with the amount paid.

Please renew, if you are going to, as soon as you can otherwise you will not be insured to attend meets and you will no longer receive club emails or information. Over 30 of you have renewed to date.

Finally, at the end of 2016 a number of us gathered at the Dartmoor Lodge, Ashburton for our traditional Christmas Meal joining many friends from the South Devon Railway. Some of us took advantage of the nearby Pengelly Centre to sleep off a few drinks!



