Plymouth Caving Group

Newsletter and Journal
November 2017



Halloween at Devon United

Issue Number 166

Editorial

Despite the odds here is another Newsletter although, as I say every time, getting people to contribute is difficult.

Therefore I have to say a big thank you to those of you who have made contributions. A while ago a few PCG members spent a long weekend in North Wales organised by Alex Heath. Thankfully this has resulted in a couple of articles by Lionel Ford and Dave Warne. It was an eventful weekend as two of us ended up with trips we didn't expect to Bangor Hospital. On the Saturday Dave gave up a trip to Pary's Mountain to take Keith Coventry to hospital as he had broken his foot after coming out of Cwmorthin and on Sunday Richard sacrificed a trip to take me suffering from gastro enteritis. Bernard held a survey of members and has provided some feedback on that. So many thanks to all those contributors for keeping the Newsletter going.

There is also news of the forthcoming PCG Christmas meal, notice of our forthcoming AGM and of course, being this time of the year, information about renewing your subscription to the club.

Trips continue, sometimes with just two or three of you going and sometimes more. A list of some of the planned trips is also provided but these can change so look out for your weekly email update. All these are opportunities to provide articles so find your keyboard and get tapping.

Anyway, do continue to enjoy your trips underground and have a good Christmas and New Year.

David Jean

Contents

Editorial		2
Ystrad Iron Mine	Lionel Ford	3
Halloween at Devon United	Hazel Clifton/Dave Jean	5
Member Survey Results	Bernard Page	7
Cwmorthin Photo Trip	Dave Warne	9
Club Information		14
Two New Books		15

Ystrad Iron Mine (GR SH540574)

Whilst the majority of our group visited Pary's Mountain, I chose to explore the slate quarries between Cefn-Du and Llanberis before heading on to the iron mines on the lower slopes to the west of Moel Ellio.

The walk from the Karabiner hut to Llanberis never ceases to be a feast to those who appreciate the finer things of abandoned industrial landscapes. Many buildings remain partly standing on the way down but most notably the powder houses, winding houses and the impressive incline itself. The singular whiff of a herd of resident goats preceded their sighting and they seemed unperturbed by my intrusion. We stood there for a while staring at each other before the novelty wore off and I carried on down eventually reaching the old Dinorwig Quarry Hospital and then on through the Museum grounds and across Llyn Padarn.

From Llanberis, I proceeded along a small lane running north and parallel to the A road to Caernarfon. After a Km, I turned left and made my way along a footpath through the slate quarry. Disappointingly, little is left of its industrial infrastructure apart from some fine ruins of industrial buildings higher up at Pen-Y-Bwlch.

Soon after, I came across the first of two huge deep mining craters. I continued on to the second which was even bigger and contained the remnants of a crib house with a fine rusted iron boiler next to it. There was a tunnel entrance at the western end, half way down the slate face but blocked from the other side where a lane from Waunfawr ends. Perhaps we could access it by SRT at a later date.



Onwards through the pine plantations of Donen Las and Garreg Fawr where I arrived at the upper reaches of Ystrad Iron Mine which is quite different from the majority of mines we usually visit. One could describe it as an open gunnice spread down the lower western slope of Moel Elio for 700 yards. There are many chambers of various sizes, some impressively big and supported by huge pillars of stone. The gunnice allows daylight to penetrate many of the chambers as well as surface water and I would say this mine is a must for the artistic photographers amongst us. The

combination of light, water, greens and oxidised metal deposits makes this site one of the most visually pleasing I can think of. There are also many underground passages linking these chambers where, occasionally, rails remain in situ.
I wasn't able to explore this mine comprehensively because it soon became apparent that safety ropes and SRT would be necessary to access the majority of the chambers. There are a number of grassy holes on the upper parts of the Gunnice one should be mindful of. The slope on which the mine lies is very steep which explains why, in its day, it had an incline with many platforms being served by an aerial ropeway all the way to Llanberis, 4.7km away via Bwlch-y-groes. The site was exploited on surface from 1840 sporadically and then underground from 1909 until 1919.



On the surface, there are still the remains of winding houses, powder stores and other buildings which are well worth further exploration before next year's crop of bracken and other vegetation camouflages the site again. There is further information and pictures of this mine on line at Adit Now, Mindat and other sites. I would say it's definitely one to explore fully when we are back in the area and perhaps we ought to consider a mid-winter return trip.

On the way back, I visited a relative in nearby Waunfawr and then returned to Llanberis for a couple of decent pints at The Heights; it would have been churlish not to. Finally, as I was making my way back to the hut past the deserted Slate Museum, I heard a collection of sounds I couldn't readily identify. On closer inspection from the

path overlooking the car park, it turned out to be a coach load of devout Muslim worshippers conducting their evening prayers, kneeling towards Mecca. A most surreal end to most interesting day, I thought.

Lionel Ford

Halloween at Devon United

On the last Tuesday in October, which this year coincided with Halloween, a number of witches, black eyed ghouls, devils (one very jolly) and even a grumpy Count Dracula gathered for an SRT trip at Devon United Mine. This is a photographic record of the evening with photos by Hazel Clifton and Dave Jean.









Member Survey Results

Background
A survey was sent out to all members by email link on 12th September. The aim of the survey was to ascertain members' views on club activities following a fall in interest over the summer period. Two months later following emailed reminders 20 replies had been received, a 37% response rate.

The Results

Q1 - During the summer I have not participated in many/any club activities because:

Answers
- I have other priorities during the summer - 5 responses
- The trips on offer are not of interest to me - 3 responses
- It is too far for me to travel - 2 responses
- I am not confident that I have the skills to take part - 1 response
- The times and dates are not convenient to me - 4 responses

Comments
- I've had a period of increased work commitments
- Having done all the trips many times, I am only interested in reconnoitring new mines and doing SRT trips.
- Impending major operation
- Have been on Trips, but too many visits to the same places making new members lose interest.
- I have an abdominal problem which makes participating difficult at the moment. As soon as my issue is resolved I'll be back as often as possible.
- Unfortunately, Tuesday eves not good time for me. Have done one weekend trip and would prefer to do more, especially summer
- I've been on most of the trips and found them all of interest
- Recovering from injury (b) Too few "new" venues]

Total responders 10 (some with multiple responses)

Q2 – Do you prefer:

Answers
- Cave trips - 3 responses
- Mines trips - 9 responses
- Cave & mine trips - 8 responses
- Industrial archaeology trips - 0 responses

Total responders 20

Q3 – I have not participated in many trips because:

Answers
- They are not challenging enough - 3 responses
- I have been there before - 10 responses
- I am not able to get there by 7.30 on Tuesday - 3 responses

Comments
- Have attended
- Uni commitment
- I have been away and I don't always know what I'm doing.
- I have had a period of increased work commitments.
- I'm not sure of what's entailed and whether I have the skills /am fit enough for a trip as I don't know most of the locations
- As previous

Total responders 19

Q5 - My ideas for future trips are:

Answers

- More Caves - 1 response
- More Mines - 7 responses
- More SRT - 1 response
- More Training trips - 3 responses

Comments

- Go to some mines which we haven't been for a long time
- A good mixture including Cave, Mine and SRT. Need to make sure we have a balance of all - and hopefully try to get to more sites.
- More SRT. Searching new mines which means digging through adits. More training trips. More interesting weekends away.
- all of above
- Visiting more sites PCG have access to. ie, Wheal Franco, Crowndale etc and liaising with other clubs and groups to access new sites

Total responders 20

Q6 - My ideas for future trips are: (Places)

- Any new venue where access can be agreed
- Penrecca Phoenix Coombesend to finish my bloody survey Mines up the Teign valley Utilise Chris Proctors books Berry Head
- New caves and mines. Interesting trips
- Penrecca
- Mid Wales, Forest Of Dean, South Devon, North Devon, Exmoor, Lake District, Peak District, Dartmoor, Mid Wales, South Wales
- To try and find access to mines we have not done before, I appreciate it is not easy
- Plenty of ideas but must be pre organised and advertised and not run with other trips on same night
- Drakewalls Any Caradon Mines
- Mixed SRT/walk-in
- Not too sure as a newbie....However I have an inflatable that can take 6 people and would be interested to explore some sea caves (we did a little trip to explore the ones on the Hoe)
- Constitution change (now need formal permission from land/mineral rights owner) means 90% of mines in the West Country are out of bounds so I don't try and organise any trips anymore
- Major dig project
- Kitley

Total responders 13

Q7 - I would be happy to support the club by:

Answers

- Running trips - 8 responses
- Helping run trips - 8 responses
- Running training sessions - 3 responses
- Helping to run training sessions - 8 responses
- Organising social events - 4 responses

Comments

- Anything I can help with if I have the time
- I'm not really capable of any of the above.
- Subject to getting fit enough.
- It would be useful if there was a meeting so I could understand what help is needed
- Any sort of stand-in support helping run trips, social etc
- Can't organise trips due to formal permission issues in most local mines

Total responders 17

Committee Response
Thank you to all members that have taken part especially those that have offered to help the club with its activities. If any other members are able to help please contact Dave Warne with any offers of help. We will be in touch those that have volunteered to take up their offers of help.

In the meantime you may notice in the format of our trip notices that there is more information about the level of difficulty.

In the future we hope to be able to visit some new venues both on Tuesdays and at weekend and increase the number of training sessions. Subject to support offered in the survey we may be able to organise a club dig.

The committee discussed the timing of Tuesdays nigh trips but felt that a late start would mean we would finish too late.

Cwmorthin Photo Trip

After a late start and a brief shopping trip to Bewts-Y-Coed, Keith and I called in to get the key for the mine, good excuse for coffee and cake in the cafe. Then it was a drive down to Tanygrisaiu where we parked up below Llyn Cwmorthin.

We took our time changing and then it was the walk up the steep hill and along the lake until we arrived at the entrance to the mine. The entrance being a steel reinforced tunnel propped up with railway sleepers leading to a gate, and then on into the mountain side. After a little way the level split two ways, we choose the left which lead on past some holes in the hanging wall leading down into large caverns where slate had been removed in the past by the old miners. One of the holes having slate steps supported on steel pins in the footwall leading down into the darkness, but this would not be on today's trip agenda as we had decided to push this level on through and drop to the lower levels of the mine further on in.

The next stop a little way further in and we came to a chamber with the remains of slate loadings. Leading off down to the left was a long incline down into the lower levels of the mine where, when we last visited was the remains of one of the slate carts that was hung up in a precarious position had now disappeared. We speculated whether it had fallen or had been pushed down the incline, against the possibility of it being removed from the mine. It was clear that the loadings once supported the large winding drum which was used to winch the carts up and down the double tracked incline where the cut slate was raised from the lower levels before being trammed out to surface at lake level. Consulting a plan we determined that this was the Back Vein incline leading down to Floor "E" at which level the mine is flooded to.

We pushed on along the level and soon found ourselves walking through a cavern with lots of relics from previous times. At the back of the cavern there was a level leading back behind the winch loadings and the other side the level led on through the hill into the Old Vein where we passed through more caverns and more adjoining short tunnels between them.

We reached another set of loadings for a winch above an incline. This was the Old Vein Incline, where the area in front had been propped with electricity poles to prevent the slate roof from delaminating and falling away. This was a good place to pause for a short photo shoot as water falling down onto the loadings from the rock above made for some good atmospheric photos. There were the remains of an airline leading down onto the loadings; however there was evidence of electric used in the mine. Was the winch air operated, or was it more than likely driven by electric motor with the air used for drilling. Who knows?



Loadings for winding drum above incline.



Loadings for winding drum rear shot.

We pushed on further into the mine on this level where we encountered several rock falls which we managed to cross until we came to a crosscut tunnel; this seemed to lead through the hanging wall into a parallel set of caverns. Where we back on the Back Vein again? From here the only way was to climb down over waste rock to reach the lower levels. We knew that there were at least two lower levels that could

be reached above the water line. We first made our way down through a path down through a chamber where steps had been dug out through the spoil and then down over a spoil tip which ended abruptly in a vertical drop down through a chamber. However, we could still travel across the chamber where the levels went on. To the right, there was a suspended bridge of death, the remains of a timber bridge suspended on old iron tie rods anchored to the chamber roof.



Bridge of Death

Crossing back over to the left we encountered some more chambers, at the bottom of which one had a small side cutting which contained the remains of a wooden machine structure. As there was a sump dug out below, we deduced that it as an old pump bed with the pump long gone.

Further on across this level we encountered another old bridge which had totally collapsed, and the only way across would be to traverse a fixed line installed, but this wasn't for today as we had not brought any kit for rope work.

Checking the time we decided we had better make our way back out as we had a 19:00 call out time, so we started to retrace our steps back up the through the chambers, and back through the levels into the Old Vein.

After working our way back through the Old Vein we then crossed back into the Back Vein again by the first incline, this time we took the tunnel behind the loadings, which turned out to be cavity that had been left when the old miners built the structure to support the winch machinery, leaving the roof of slate supported on huge timbers. This made for some good photos before we made it back the short distance to the entrance.



Pump foundations with sump in background.

We exited the mine with about 40 minutes to go before the call out. Keith decided that he wanted to have a look and see if he could fine the second entrance to the mine that was located behind some of the old building beside the lake.

We walked up through an avenue of arched trees before taking in the remains of the old miner building now decaying in the very exposed landscape. Above these there was what resembled a small leat leading into a gate that resembled a dry slate constructed chimney breast. As Keith approached the entrance his feet gave away and he slipped down into the leat landing on his feet still in the standing position. After a few expletives, it was clear that he had damaged his foot.

After composing himself and using his tripod as a crotch, we made our way back around the side of the lake and down to the car just in time to clear the call out.



Keith in the Level underneath the winch loadings.

We made our way back to Llanberis where we stopped for a meal in the Indian before returning to the hut.

Once back at the hut Keith showed the others his war wounds with his ankle well and truly swollen. The following morning started the theme for the rest of the weekend with the first visit to A&E in Bangor, for Keith had broken his foot, and that was the last of his underground adventures for this trip.

Club Information

Christmas Meal

This year our Christmas Meal will, as usual, be on the Saturday before Christmas, 23rd December at 19.00 for 19.30. The venue will be the Abbey Inn, Buckfastleigh which has the added advantage that after a few pints we can easily walk to the Pengelly Centre which has been booked for that evening. Places this year are limited so let me know by emailing davidjean1@btinternet.com as soon as possible if you wish to join us for what has always been a good evening.

STARTERS

Carrot, Orange & Coriander Soup
Chilli Seafood Cakes with a Sweet Chilli Dipping Sauce
Smoked Salmon & Prawn Platter with Marie Rose Sauce
Deep Fried Breaded Brie with Cranberry Sauce

MAINS

Roast Turkey, Stuffing, Pigs in Blanket, Roast Potatoes & Seasonal Vegetables served with Gravy & Cranberry Sauce
Duck Breast with an Orange & Cinnamon Sauce, Dauphinoise Potatoes and Seasonal Vegetables
Salmon Fillet with a Lemon, Dill & Chilli Sauce, Savoury Rice and Salad
Nut Roast with Stuffing, Roast Potatoes & Seasonal Vegetables served with Veggie Gravy

DESSERTS

Traditional Christmas Pudding with Brandy Sauce
Festive Rocky Road with Vanilla Ice Cream
Chocolate Coronet Pavlova with Clotted Cream
Cheese & Biscuits

TWO COURSES £15.95 THREE COURSES £19.95

Trips

The following list takes us to January. These Tuesday night trips will be confirmed by an email and the meeting time is, as usual, 19.30.

November 21	Walkham valley mines	Easy to Moderate
November 28	Kilham Mine	Moderate

December 5	Dog Hole	Moderate to Difficult
December 12	Afton Red Rift	Difficult
December 19	Excelsior Tunnel	Easy
December 23	Club Christmas Meal, The Abbey 19.30	
December 26	No Trip	
January 2	Redmoor Mine	Easy to Moderate
	(This trip can also help with SRT training)	
January 9	Chudleigh Caves	Easy to Difficult
	(This trip can also help with SRT training)	
January 16	Trelawney Consuls	Easy to Moderate
January 23	tbc	
January 30	tbc	
February 21	Annual General Meeting, 19.30 Moorcroft, Billacombe Road	

There may also be some weekend trips so keep an eye out for emails.

In addition Alex Noot is arranging weekends in Mendip and Derbyshire in spring so look out for them. Alex Heath will be arranging the 2018 visit to North Wales next autumn. In between Tara is going to organise a long weekend trip to the Burren in Western Ireland in June. Lots for us to look forward to.

Membership 2018

Your membership of the club ends in December. Your renewal must include insurance provided by BCA. If this is provided by another club that you are a member of you must provide proof of having this when you renew. You can make your payment direct into the PCG account, account number 71222791, sort code 40-36-23. Please ensure your name appears alongside any payment you make. There is no extension for insurance so, if you are going to renew, you must do so straight away.

2018 Subscriptions

Membership Category	Amount	Insurance	Total
Full or Provisional	£10.00	£17.00	£27.00
Full Time Student	£5.00	£8.50	£13.50

Annual General Meeting

This year the AGM will take place on Wednesday 21st February 2018 at 19.30 at Moorcroft. Steve Coombs usually puts together a pictorial reminder of our activities during 2017. This is your chance to get involved with the running of the club and put forward ideas so do come along.

Agenda

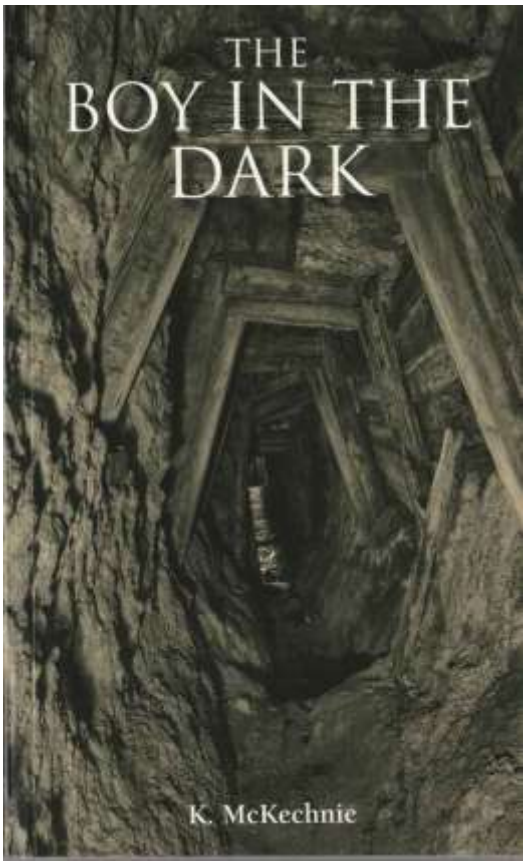
Apologies
Minutes of the Last AGM
Chairman's Address
Secretary's Report

Treasurer's Report
Brief Officers Reports
Elections of
Chairman
Secretary
Treasurer
Officers including Webmaster, Conservation,
Equipment, Librarian, Meets,
Editor and Membership

Two New Books

There have been two recent publications that may well interest club members. The first, by Bob Waterhouse, is The Tavistock Canal – It's History and Archaeology. This magnificent publication took longer to produce than the 14 years it took to build the canal in the first place. It includes a section on the tunnel under Morwellham Down which members have been known to visit on the odd occasion it has been drained for maintenance.

The second is The Boy in the Dark by Ken McKechnie.



Ken graduated from the Camborne School of Mines in the 1960s and worked in mines all over the world but mainly in Canada and Africa. He now writes novels and this one is particularly interesting. It is set in Cornwall in 1858. For the purpose of this novel Wheal Emma, a part of Devon Great Consuls, has been relocated to Cornwall where the young boy enters the copper mine following his father's tragic death.