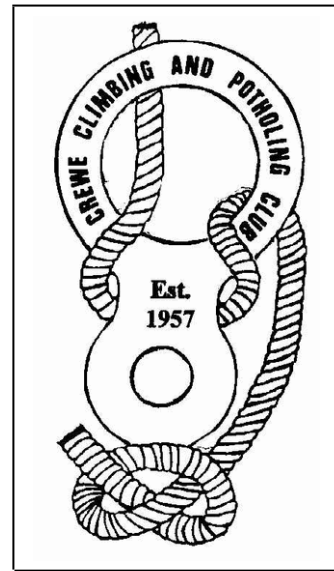


C.C.P.C. Newsletter 115 September 2018

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David Michael Knox 2nd September 1947 – 2nd July 2016



My brother David was a member of C.C.P.C. during the first half of the 1970s, before SRT had been invented, and even before the widespread use of neoprene wet-suits underground, never mind oversuits and ‘furries’. I had been caving with C.C.P.C. since January 1967, and after listening to many exaggerated tales of our adventures, David was finally persuaded to come with us on his first caving trip, on Sunday, 20th September 1970, to Easegill Caverns in Yorkshire. The full story of that memorable trip has already appeared in Newsletter No. 108 (March 2013), but a few brief details are repeated here.

Three Club Members had caved through Saturday, and had slept underground by choice, before emerging damp and cold in the early morning, just as the rest of our group were arriving – cavers were tough in those days !

Ralph Johnson, and his brother, Peter, set off down Lancaster Hole, intending to complete the ‘through trip’ to County Pot, in Easegill, meeting up with the remaining four Club Members at Stop Pot, after they had entered through County Pot. Someone had to go in through County so the pitches would be rigged for Ralph and Peter’s exit.

David Knox, Garlands Pitch, Giants Hole. 21st August 2013.

All went to plan – at first. I was with Pete Steadman, Dave Mason, and David, and our entry was

straightforward, although there was a surprising amount of water in the system.

We reached Stop Pot without difficulty and, as Ralph had not arrived by then, we headed off upstream to visit Easter Grotto and the passages around Nagasaki.

Some time later Ralph and Peter arrived at the top of Stop Pot and abseiled down into the chamber, pulling their rope down after them. After a long wait (for them) my group returned, and we all set off together towards the County Pot exit.

Unfortunately, and of course unknown to us, on the surface it was raining steadily, and we found that the water level in the narrow Lower Pierce’s Passage was rising at a frightening rate. After various frights and drenchings we turned back and managed to reach Stop Pot again, where we could climb high up the boulders, clear of the water. We reached the upper part of the chamber but then, despite all our efforts (many Newsletter No. 115

and varied) we were unable to climb back up the pitch that Ralph and Peter had abseiled down only a few hours earlier. We were stuck – very cold, and very wet – and there we remained for many hours. Meanwhile, on the surface, a third C.C.P.C. group had called out Cave Rescue, after being unable to follow us in through County Pot due to the rising water. In Stop Pot we waited and shivered, then we discovered that the water levels were dropping, and we started on our way out, only to meet the first rescuers on their way in as the route from the surface became passable. Later, a different group of rescuers were found to be stuck underground, as we had de-rigged our gear from the County Pot pitches as we left the cave. All ended well, with everyone back safely on the surface.

David didn't cave for six months after that, but during the period from 1971 to 1974 he joined us for Club trips in Derbyshire and Yorkshire, including our unskilled, but successful trips to bolt up a previously unclimbed aven in Giants Hole during November of 1973. It was before battery powered drills were available, and installing 'spits', just using a hammer, in hard limestone was a considerable task, especially as there was a constant shower of cold water onto the driller. David acted as lifeliner, standing under the falling water until he was too frozen to speak – that was taken as the signal to pack up until the following weekend. The aven is still there, waiting for someone to clear the brilliant little passage at the top, leading into a blank area on the Giant's survey – much less likely or obvious leads have been worked on, by others, with great reward. We were just too cold, and tired, and fed-up, to continue at the site.

David moved away to Lincolnshire, and then emigrated to Sydney in Australia, and caving became part of his past. During a couple of his visits to the UK we caved together in the Peak District – simple stuff like Carlswark, but then his health began to deteriorate significantly.

David was in the UK during 2013, and on 21st August, John Preston and I took him for a short trip into Giants Hole. There were other Club Members in the system that evening, but we three just had a gentle wander down to the top of Garlands Pot, which was enough. He enjoyed being underground, and perhaps he remembered some of the happier times from forty years before, when he caved with the Club and enjoyed a pint in the pub afterwards. I can clearly remember four of us being squeezed into David's bright orange (hand-painted) Ford Anglia, with wet caving gear piled on our knees (not David – he was driving) as we rattled down the track from Calf Holes, with the suspension practically collapsing at every bump.

We rounded our 2013 trip off with a couple of pints in the Wanted Inn – more memories from long ago. I think David and I both knew it would be his last trip, but it was worthwhile.

David has been struggling with multiple cancers for the past seven years, after being given, at most, two years. He wasn't the sort of person to give up while there was any hope of beating his illness, but eventually the struggle was too much, and he finally passed away in Sydney, aged 68 years, in the early hours of 2nd July 2016. He was cremated there, but his ashes have been returned to the UK.

Like Ralph, and Peter, from that 1970 Easegill adventure, David also is gone too soon.

Steve Knox. 01.08.2016

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EDITORIAL

I make no apology for starting this Newsletter with the preceding item. I wrote it for the CCPC Newsletter, during August 2016, soon after David's death, but as we haven't had a Newsletter in the period since then it has been put on one side, but is no less relevant today.

As Club Members we play our part in the activities of the Club; for some that involvement lasts for years, but for others it is a fleeting association, soon past. We all bring something, according to our abilities, enthusiasm, and inclination, and there can be no doubt that we all gain enormously from the shared adventures that are the key features of any activity Club, such as ours. David enjoyed being a Member of CCPC. He enjoyed the physical challenges, and the camaraderie, that were an inevitable part of every trip. Nearly half a century on, David still spoke warmly of individuals who few of us in the Club can now easily recall.

Despite changes in our Club Membership over recent years, it has been heartening to see that the same sense of adventure is still as strong today as it has ever been, even with the reduced numbers of active cavers in our ranks. It is always a pleasure to see the continuing support of Members for our regular official Meets, and particularly good to see the excellent photographs 'posted on-line' for the rest of us to enjoy. Thank you all for your involvement and for all you do to keep CCPC viable.

Finally - any mistakes in this Newsletter are my own. Feel free to point them out ! Steve Knox

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Caving in China:

Towards the end of 2015, Grace Chu caved in the large system of **Er Wang Dong** in Wulong County, Chongqing Municipality, in China. She caved with fellow CCPC member Matt Ryan, and UK cavers Duncan Collis and Roger, who are based in China, along with Chinese caver, Da Ge. Grace flew from her home in Hong Kong to Chengdu to meet up with Matt. Here is her account of the trip, taken from her diary:

Er Wang Dong Caving Journal - 27/28 November 2015 (day 1 of 3)

I took a taxi from my youth hostel to our meeting place which was also Matt's office. It was only about 15 mins taxi journey. All four of us met up; we had Matt, Duncan, Roger and Da Ge. It was 6 pm, everyone had just finished work (except me). They all had a quick bite of take away burger in the office before going on a 7 hours long journey to the caving hut. Matt did all the driving, the rest of us were sleeping towards the second half of the journey.

We arrived at our hut in Tungzhi village around 1 am and spent the night there. Next morning Matt and Duncan packed some caving ropes and gear. Matt and Duncan were very skilful at pushing stuff into the back of the car! Still, couldn't put everything in, so we had to put some bags on our knees inside the car.

We went for brunch before setting off. The mutton soup with rice was the best! Very, very spicy and tasty. After eating, Duncan said he forgot to bring a bottle of nail varnish. I said, "What for? Oh, I see, for surveying". It would be difficult to get nail varnish in a simple humble rural town I thought, but Duncan managed to buy a bottle.

The next journey was from the hut to the cave which was about 1 hour. This route was scenic, up and down the hills. Some parts were very rural and the path was very narrow, right at the edge of the hill for miles! Matt was very familiar with these conditions. We arrived at the farmhouse after lunch time. The village was very rural. Some new concrete blocks were built next to their old traditional Chinese farmhouses - quite a big contrast. Each house keeps a pig or two. They buy the piglets and fatten them up for feasts to celebrate Chinese New Year which is around February time. Matt and Duncan gave us a tour of **Er Wang Dong** cave (without caving gear). The entrance is just about 20 m away from our farmhouse. **San Wong Dong**'s entrance is about 10 mins walk from our farmhouse, not far from **Er Wang Dong**.

In the Chinese writing, 'Wang' means king, 'er' means two or the second, 'san' means three or the third. Dong means cave. So **Er Wang Dong** literally means The Second King's Cave, and **San Wang Dong** means The Third King's Cave.

Er Wang Dong was massive! Beautiful limestone formations, lots of them and very huge! Pity that its so difficult to take good photos without good lighting and a good camera. Have to commit to memory!

There was a disused nitrate mine; Duncan and Matt said people used to work there a long time ago. Matt and Duncan led us past the nitrate mine, then a huge chamber with lots of tall and huge columns of formations. Somewhere there is a big pit leading to the surface, but we were still in the

cave. We could see the sky and lots of vegetation around us and a little waterfall. It is called **Niubizi Tian Keng**. Tian in Chinese means 'sky'. Keng means 'pit'. I have seen pictures of this place on the internet, and was so excited that I was actually there. It's just awesome.

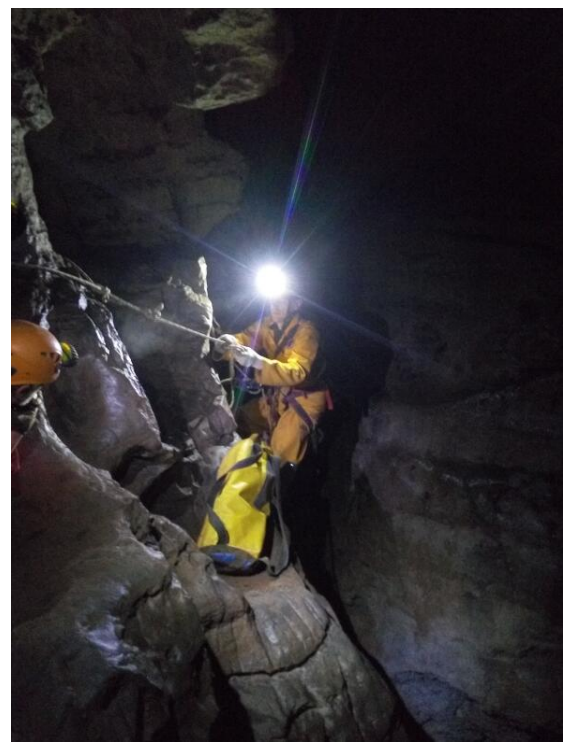


Grace in Er Wang Dong. Photo: Roger

29 November 2015 (day 2 of 3) - Er Wang Dong.

This morning we woke up and had breakfast around 9.15am. The farmhouse old lady was cooking marrow and rice so I didn't think she was cooking for our breakfast, so I started doing scrambled eggs and some bacon. In the end we had her marrow and rice as well as bacon and eggs for breakfast, and it all seemed to work out fine. I remember the 'caver's breakfast' at Ingleton café - both are just as nice!

We packed our kit and walked to **Er Wang Dong**. We got to the hole where we wanted to explore. Matt used the drill and made a



Y-hang. Matt told me to show Roger how to do a re-belay. I think I was doing ok. Duncan was there also.

When Matt was down Duncan started teaching me and Roger how to survey. We had to choose one point and shine a light, and shout, 'light on station'. Then the other one had to use the compass, point it towards the light and record the angle. Then we used the other gadget, a clinometer to check the elevation. Then we moved to the next section and had to find another point and shout, 'light on station', and repeat the same process again. The person has to be able to see the two points.

I got down to the bottom, thinking 'It's a new pitch, no one has been down before'. Matt made a deviation and another rebelay before the bottom. Matt found that someone had been there because he saw a small green mark which looked like a survey station mark. They came from a different route by walking. *Matt Ryan rigging a pitch. Photo: Da Ge*

Roger and Matt prussiked up. Duncan, Da Ga and I went the walking way. It was amazing. We saw a rat family in their nest (Duncan said they had been there since they started caving there a long time ago) and a small bat hanging on the roof peacefully. He didn't care about us being around. Matt and Duncan made Roger find the way out. He was quite good. Sometimes there were white arrows inside to follow. We don't know who painted the arrows there. It was good that I wasn't being tested to find the way out or we would have been there all night! On the way out we saw a group of locals; about 12 people with their dim torches and non-caving/hiking clothing entering. Roger asked if there was supposed to be only one set of keys. Matt said, "Yes", and Roger said, "It's easy to make copies I suppose". The group passed us and no-one made any comments. Matt told the group we had left our gear inside for the next day.

When we got back to the farmhouse Duncan mentioned **Feng Dong** - literally translated as 'Wind Cave'. We went there along the road opposite the farmhouse. It was about 10 minutes up the path then turn right and right again. It was a small hole. Only I went inside. There was a small crawl, then on the right there was a hole. I felt the wind blowing in that hole and I saw a bolt that Duncan had put in previously. Duncan said the passage led to a very big place.

30 Nov 2015 (day 3 of 3) - Er Wang Dong.

We had breakfast. The old lady cooked us rice, fat belly pork, cabbage and scrambled eggs. (We had asked for eggs for breakfast).

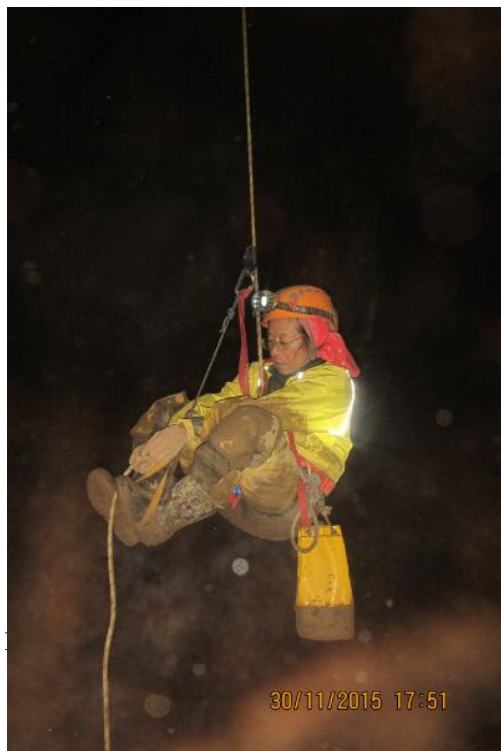
After caving for an hour we found the gear we had left yesterday. We picked it up and continued through more squeezes. We went further down the cave today. There were really tight squeezes – interesting ! Duncan went first at every tight squeeze so I thought we would all be fine. There were lots of climbs and crawls and slides, then eventually we reached another hole. Matt rigged and abseiled down, then Duncan, followed, then Roger. When it was my turn I asked Da Ge to take a photo of me. We went down and took off our gear and spent lots of time exploring, and later doing lots of surveying.

There were lots of white bean-shoot-like thin plants. They were like very long bean shoots growing in the dark. Duncan said the seeds got washed in the cave by rain water and the seeds grow into plants there.

Amazing !

We used a hand line to go further down (4m) - fairly easy, then lots of crawls. Duncan had been there before. He remembered putting markers for survey stations. We explored some parts where no one had been. There were some beautiful whirls made by running water at some point. It looks like canyons, but this time its underground canyons. I have only seen photos of canyons but have never seen real ones. It's like in a dream. We were walking over yellowish, orangy, round, concave rocks... SO SO beautiful !!! It is so hard to take reasonable photos - what a pity ! I just had to commit it to my memory !

We came to a place where we stayed a long time looking for Duncan's previous station marking which was a tiny green dot, but no one could find it. There was a passage so we moved on. We started surveying and eventually reached a long muddy tunnel that



led to another chamber. I think we spent 3 to 4 hours surveying. I enjoyed it because I took part as well, and learned something new. We went out the same way, then prussiked back up the rope. Then we passed all the tight squeezes again.
Grace Chu prussiking in Er Wang Dong. Photo: Da Ge

The three times we went into the cave we passed the beginning part, the huge and tall chambers and all those huge formations. I can never see enough of them. It's a pity this was the last day!

When we went back to the village, the old man about three houses away invited us in for dinner (he was Matt and Duncan's friend). It was quite a nice meal and the old man was very friendly. He kept offering us his local rice wine. There were two bottles, one white and one yellow. I tried a little but really couldn't manage it. Only Duncan managed the white and the yellow. The fire place we sat round



was Matt Ryan surveying a new passage. Photo: Da Ge.

actually a disused car wheel with wood burning

in the metal part. It must be their only fire place. I find it fascinating and clever really. When dinner was ready the old man's son just put a small table over the car wheel fire place so we got warm feet while eating. They were both very hospitable. After dinner we walked back to our farmhouse. The next morning, we packed up, passed through the scenic mountains again and back to the caving hut, where Matt and Da Ge washed the ropes. Then we headed back to Chengdu, and arrived at around 8pm. I got out of Matt's car and within 5 mins I got into a taxi and went back to the youth hostel.

Grace Chu

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Standedge Tunnel : 5 June 2017 - Jenny Drake
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Jenny's narrowboat: 'Iron Snail', outside the Marsden portal of the Standedge tunnel.

Photo: Jenny Drake.

Some History

There were three canal routes built over the Pennines during the early days of the industrial revolution. They were built to move coal, raw materials and finished products between mines, factories, ports and the growing towns and cities of the area as well as other parts of England on the inland waterway network.

The first and most northerly of the crossings was the Leeds and Liverpool canal, begun in 1770, that uses the valley of the river Aire to Skipton and Gargrave, before heading south west in to Lancashire. This rises to a maximum altitude of 487' above sea level.

The second route was the Rochdale Canal, connecting Manchester with the area around Halifax. Started in 1794 and completed in 1804 it averages nearly three locks per mile in its 32 mile length and rises to a peak of 600' to cross the hills in between.

The final, steepest and highest route is the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. The other two routes were built for boats 14' wide, common in the North. To save money, the narrow was built to take narrowboats 70' long, but only 7' wide. The canal connected to the midland narrow canal network near Ashton under Lyme. From there boats could reach Manchester, Stoke, Birmingham and London. At its eastern end it connected at Huddersfield to the Huddersfield Broad canal, where goods for onward destinations had to be transferred to boats 57' long and 14' wide for the wide and short locks of the Yorkshire waterways.

The Huddersfield Narrow was also started in 1794. It is only 19½ miles long, but has 74 deep locks to climb to a height of 645' above sea level and descend the other side. The major engineering feature is a tunnel 3.24 miles long under Saddleworth Moor. This is double the length of Harecastle Tunnel near the Bleeding Wolf pub. Standedge tunnel is the longest on any canal in Britain and is at the highest altitude of any canal in the country. It is also the deepest underground as the moors rise to a considerable height above. The engineer originally responsible was Benjamin Outram. His competence was questionable and much of the work was poor. In the end he resigned and Thomas Telford was bought in to consult on completing the canal. It eventually opened in 1811 with the completion of the tunnel.

Once the railways arrived the Huddersfield Narrow, like many canals suffered a loss of trade. A line was built parallel to the route in 1841 and the canal tunnel was used to ease construction of the adjacent railway tunnel. Cross adits were cut so spoil from the tunnel could be loaded directly in to narrow boats. A further two railway tunnels were built over the years as traffic increased, again using the canal in their construction. One of them is still in use today. Trade on the canal declined till it was abandoned in 1944. The last traverse of the entire canal was in 1948 by the boat Ailsa Craig and members of the newly formed Inland Waterways Association.

For the second half of the twentieth century the canal was derelict. Sections were built over and lost. Rock falls blocked the tunnel and bridges were lowered or removed for modern road traffic. Most people assumed that restoration and reopening would be impossible. The Huddersfield Canal Society thought otherwise and from the 1970's on campaigned for and carried out a slow restoration. In the late 90's funding and support from local councils, British Waterways and the National Lottery bought about the complete restoration and the through route was reopened in 2001.

The Trip

In the summer of 2017 I decided to take my narrowboat Iron Snail over the Huddersfield Narrow canal. For the Standedge Tunnel traverse I asked if anyone from CCPC would be interested in accompanying me on a through trip with a difference. Mark Lovatt, Christine Moore and Roy Rodgers quickly replied. The numbers were governed by the small size of the boats bow and stern decks.

There are only limited passages allowed through the tunnel. This is due to the amount of water available to work the locks on each side without dropping the water level within the tunnel and potentially stranding boats inside. There are also air quality issues with fumes from boat diesel engines and from trains in the connected working railway tunnel. Three boats a day are allowed in each direction on only three days a week, so the trip has to be booked well in advance. I took my boat up to the tunnels eastern portal at Marsden for the evening before June 5th. Mark and Chris met me at lock 32 and operated paddles and gates to get the boat through lock 42 and on to the summit level. All went well till we came across lock 40 where the paddles had been left open, draining the following pound to lock 41. Water was run down from above lock 41 to give just enough depth to float across.

The following morning everyone arrived bright and early at 8am. The weather forecast for the day was very poor with heavy rain and increasing wind. A day to be underground. The tunnel is cut through solid rock and is only wide enough to take a single narrowboat, so one way traffic is used in each direction. It is low and a bit twisty in places due to the relatively primitive nature of Georgian surveying techniques. There are strict height limits for boats and mine needed the water tank at the bow topping up to bring the height of the cabin within specification. We were the third of three boats, with a gap of around 45 minutes between boats. We had a Canal and River Trust chaperone accompany each boat to guide us through the low and more difficult sections. Helmets were required for everyone and we used our caving helmets, giving us lights too. As the steerer I was

required to wear high vis and a life jacket. Our guide had an oxygen meter with him and other safety equipment.



The tunnel was originally going to be lined with stone blocks throughout its length. Lack of money prevented this and a lot of the tunnel is still unlined through millstone grit. You can see the remains of black powder shot holes in the walls and roof. While under railway ownership the railway companies lined parts of the tunnel in brick and other sections were reinforced with brick jack arches every ten feet or so.

*Shot-holes in the Millstone Grit roof.
Photo: Jenny Drake*

When the tunnel was restored at the turn of this century a lot of fallen rock had to be removed. Some sections of unlined tunnel were reinforced with rock bolts and additionally sprayed with concrete. There are cross cuts connecting with both the disused and the in-use railway tunnels. One of the disused tunnels can be used as an emergency exit if required. Our chaperone had to check in by telephone at four of these cross cuts to report our progress and find out how the other two boats in the convoy were doing.



The tunnel was remarkably dry, with water only coming in from the air shafts to the moor above. Steering required considerable concentration to keep the boat undamaged as the tunnel kinked, the sides bulged in and out and the roof rose and fell. The boat needs speed to give good steering response from the tiller, but not so fast that you can't react in time to changing conditions.

*One of the brick-lined sections.
Photo: Jenny Drake*

Solar collectors and navigation lights were removed before the trip to save them from being destroyed, but a bit of paint was inevitably lost. It took around two hours, but felt longer. We could sometimes hear trains passing close by and see clouds of diesel smoke from them. What the tunnel must have been like when the railways were busy with steam trains can only be imagined. In those days the boats were legged through and the tow horses taken over the moor to meet the boat on the other side. The leggers took around four hours to make the trip in the smoke filled atmosphere.

The last section of the tunnel is an extension, built to allow the railway line to pass over the top. We could start to see the exit at Diggle as a small dot of light about twenty minutes before arriving. We emerged in to the rain to see the three boats waiting for us before they could begin their journey to Marsden. Roy, Mark and Chris helped me bolt the solar hot water collector back on the roof of the boat in the downpour. Their initial plan to walk over the top back to Marsden and their cars was abandoned and they returned by bus. I decided not to start descending the locks to Ashton till the following day as the weather was so grim. Flaming June indeed.

This is a trip that has been on my boating "to do" list for a considerable time. It fully lived up to expectations and I enjoyed sharing it with club members who could appreciate the challenge faced by the builders of this tunnel. If you would like a look yourself there are regular trips on electric boats available from the visitor centre in Marsden.

Further Reading

If you are interested in finding out more about the canal and tunnel take a look at:

<http://www.penninewaterways.co.uk/huddersfield/standedge.htm>

<http://www2.huddersfieldcanal.com/>

20th March 2016: Happy Memories of Water Icicle, and more !

Water Icicle Close Cavern was always one of those trips where you were glad to get what you got, but always thought you should get more!

For years the system comprised three similar sized, natural, phreatic passages radiating from a small chamber at the foot of the entrance shaft. That was really the start of the puzzle – the old miners had dropped their 32 metre vertical shaft exactly into the middle of the chamber. They were either amazingly lucky, or else they knew where they were going – in other words, they had another way in, before the current entrance shaft was created.

Obviously, the really simple thing to do was for modern cavers to find and re-open the miners' original access, but unfortunately the three passages all ended with blockages of one kind or another. Despite this, just about every man, and his dog, spent hours, weeks, even years, poking and prodding every possible crack and cranny, and scratching, scraping, and shovelling acres, tons, whole battle-fields of mud to find the way on, without success !

The South Passage, the shortest, runs (wait for it) South, to intersect the Great Rift – a big slot, soaring up and narrowing above, and similarly closing down after a short distance to the left and right. Years ago we decided this was the way to go, as the top must surely only be a rabbit hole beneath the surface of the field above. We played happily in the sunshine with compass and tape-measure, working out exactly where the new entrance would be, but it all came to nothing as there were some new saplings growing in just the wrong (right?) place.

The North Passage (O.K., you guessed) runs North, gradually reducing in size to a complete mud choke. We tried that site, as it looked like a definite possibility, but all the easy mud had already been dug, and only the more challenging, sticky, glutinous, brown stuff was left, and we didn't want to tread on any one's toes (or any other part of them) by stealing someone else's dig (or their plastic tubs and shovels) so we left that (quite a few times actually) for another day.

Now, the Northwest Passage definitely had possibilities. Apart from running North-west (lucky choice with the name) it was longer than the other two passages, so it was already in the lead. It used to finish with a squirm under a slab of rock, then up a boulder slope into the bottom of an aven, called 'Northwest Passage Aven'. Anyone could see that the passage would continue somewhere beyond the massive collapse which formed the far wall of the aven, so not much challenge there, and we decided to leave it to the happy band who had made this their regular project. After all, we didn't want to find the way on after they had started the job.

There were still a few possibilities which we investigated, including a squirm underneath Northwest Passage Aven, and a wriggle off the side of South Passage, but in each case we might have had to get seriously muddy, or fatigued, or both, so we generously left those opportunities for others. The best lead was a narrow slot in the floor, close up against the wall, part way along one of the passages (Northwest, I think, or it might have been one of the others). It was definitely the way to go, with huge potential for a breakthrough into caverns measureless to man, but we decided to leave it until the next trip, and then, mysteriously, it was never seen again. I think one of the other digging teams must have found it, and moved it, so they could have it as part of their own dig.

One of our trips into Water Icicle resulted in a story which Ralph repeated countless times over the following years, entertaining groups of novice cavers of all ages, sometimes telling the tale to the same group on several occasions (or even on the same occasion), despite them all knowing the ending.

To be most effective the situation has to be something like this: the novices are gathered together in a quiet chamber (in Treasury in Peak Cavern, or Upper West Passage in Giants Hole, or just about anywhere in Devonshire Cavern). All the lamps are turned off, leaving Ralph alone, illuminated by a single candle, and then, as their eyes adjust to the soft glow, the novices become aware of the pale faces around them.

Ralph begins :- reminding the group of the way 'T'owd Mon' (the old Miners) worked long hours in the dark places underground, using a pick to chip away at the lead ore, with only a candle for illumination. The miners often worked quite alone, with the darkness of the mine all around, beyond the candle's glow.

Ralph moves on to the present day:- explaining how cavers explore the old mine passages underground, often finding traces of the old miners, and sometimes even discovering their footprints left in the mud from times long past.

Ralph describes a trip with two friends into a nearby mine called Water Icicle:- describing the deep, narrow shaft dropping from daylight, over a hundred feet (in old money – how proper caves are measured) into the passages below. After the exploration was over, the friends gathered at the foot of the shaft, and the first began to climb the rope. Eventually the shout of 'Rope free' was heard from above, and the next caver started up. By chance, the remaining caver was the one most nervous about being left alone in the bottom of the mine, with the passages stretching away into the darkness, and the steady drip of water from the crevices in the roof.

The last caver huddled by the wall, waiting for his turn to climb (at this point the novices are usually silent, leaning forward, their mouths partly open, their faces gleaming in the candle-light). Once again the shout comes down from above, 'Rope free', and the caver stands, clips the haul rope from his tackle-bag to his harness, and moves forward to the rope. He is startled by a sudden, strange slithering sound behind him, and he spins round, his lamp making the shadows dance crazily across the passage walls, but there is nothing there. He turns back, and again the shadows dance. Frantically the caver clips himself to the rope and begins his ascent. Immediately the sound comes again, right below him. There is something there, in the darkness. He spins on the rope, desperately trying to see, his light flashing across the walls and far up the dark tunnels, but he can see nothing. Breathless with fear he starts to climb, not daring to look down, and yet knowing that just below, some nameless thing is reaching out for him. He can feel it. Really feel it, pulling him back, trying to drag him down into the dark below. Fear drives him onward and upward towards the small square of daylight visible far above. Exhaustion takes over and he has to stop, dangling on the rope, terrified to look down, and yet he must. There, suspended in the shaft, just a short distance below his feet, is an orange glow (Ralph moves the candle to a new position, capturing the attention of the group), and still that gentle pulling continues, seeming to try to drag him down. It can only be ... 'T'owd Mon', the ghost of an old miner, with his ghostly candle gleaming. Terror gives him new strength and he surges on and up towards safety. The glow follows, the pulling goes on. Finally he is there, at the surface, incoherent with dread, hanging on the rope just inside the frame of the lid. Ralph calmly reaches down past him and pulls up the tackle-bag, dangling from the caver's harness on its haul rope (Ralph's trusty assistant has a yellow tackle sack ready for him to pull across in front of the novices at the end of a long cord).

'This was the ghostly miner pulling at the caver as he climbed', he explains. The dragging, slithering sound is obvious as the bag slides across the cavern floor. Inside the bag is a yellow glow – the ghostly miner's candle – which is revealed to be a spare lamp, accidentally knocked on as the caver started to ascend.

No ghosts or ghouls, just imagination running riot in the strange underground world. Even so, the novices (adults or teenagers – it made little difference) become much quieter, keeping close to each other for the rest of the trip, and with many a glance backward as the party moves on through the cave. Even the ones who had heard the story before (several times) were as spooked as the rest. Happy days !

As things eventually turned out, in July 2008 the Orpheus Caving Club returned to one of their earlier dig sites at the boulder collapse in the aven at the end of Northwest Passage. Instead of trying to go through, or under the boulders, they went up, and over, and down the other side. Obvious really – I'm sure we could have suggested that, back in the early 1970s, if anyone had asked. We did once have a cunning plan to do something similar, involving Paul Nixon's big extending ladders. We had spotted a possible hole in the roof of the Northwest Passage Aven and thought we might reach it with the ladders and a little gymnastics. On our next trip we worked out that the ladders wouldn't bend round the corner (as it was then) to get it into the bottom of the aven, so we put the plan 'on hold' for another day. The hole (?) is still there, but is a bit redundant as a lead now, as the Orpheus 'up, over and down' route heads in the opposite direction, and eventually, in December 2009, they broke through into a brilliant extension of Northwest Passage (at least it looks brilliant from the photos, but I haven't seen it yet). More work followed, with O.C.C. members following up a range of good leads and extending the cave considerably further – a fantastic effort with well deserved rewards. The Orpheus C.C. are probably very pleased that we left such a good digging site for them, although they haven't actually said so !

Since the initial breakthrough in Northwest Passage, O.C.C. members have made another huge extension, this time at the end of South Passage. The diggers broke through, low down in the base of Great Rift, in February 2012 and discovered superb, walking-size passage heading off

to yet another good dig site. (I knew we should have gone down, not up, in Great Rift, all those years ago. Such is life !)

Darren and Neil Conde decided they fancied a trip into the South Passage extensions, so on Sunday, 20th March 2016, a group of C.C.P.C. Members turned up for a wander around. With plenty of manpower (and womanpower) available to give me a pull back up the shaft this was an opportunity not to be missed.

The breakthrough point, now called 'Welsh Connection', is a short, easy squirm through muddy boulders, breaking out immediately into a beautifully arched, phreatic passage. The mostly walking height passage (named Volcanic Bug Pusher) meanders gently away, with much breakdown littering the floor, and some flowstone deposits visible on roof and walls. After 85 metres the passage closes down to a silt choke ('Oh No ! Choke') which is still being actively dug by O.C.C. members, and hopefully will lead to more of this fascinating system. Wandering back, the obvious aven on the left (Donkey Kong Aven) was investigated, using the two ropes already in place, but this looks to be a dead end, with little hope of extension (haven't we heard that before somewhere ?). A couple of the keener members of the party explored a low-level route near 'Oh No ! Choke'. This was mostly crawling-height bedding passage for 65 metres ('Olympic Stroll'), which has been extended by O.C.C. diggers into a low continuation: 'Dung Beetle Passage'.

We toured the remaining accessible passages in the system, being mostly those known for the past fifty years. In North-west Passage Aven I climbed the fixed ladder and had a quick look at the locked gate blocking casual access to the O.C.C. extensions there ('Cherty Two Passage' and the much longer 'Urchin Passage'). Access is controlled for conservation reasons by agreement with Derbyshire Caving Association and Natural England.

As expected, I found the climb out difficult, but it gave the others the opportunity to practise their 'hauling a dead weight' skills (I didn't want to diminish their fun by actually helping).

Seriously though - Thanks !

It was a brilliant day out in the Peak, enjoying good company and good caving, with a stop at the Bull's Head to finish off.

Steve Knox

For those wanting to follow the story of the excellent work put in by Orpheus Caving Club Members:

- 'Descent' (203) - Aug/Sept 2008 - page 12 - Orpheus in Water Icicle.
 - 'Descent' (209) - Aug/Sept 2009 - page 17 - Orpheus digs continue.
 - 'Descent' (212) - Feb/Mar 2010 - pages 20 & 21 - The Urchin in the Icicle (with survey).
 - 'Descent' (216) - Oct/Nov 2010 - page 9 - Beyond Northwest Passage.
 - 'Descent' (217) - Dec/Jan 2010/11 - page 12 - More Water Icicle extensions.
 - 'Descent' (219) - Apr/May 2011 - page 18 - Research in Water Icicle.
 - 'Descent' (227) - Aug/Sep 2012 - page 17 - Water Icicle breakthrough.
 - 'Descent' (239) - Aug/Sep 2014 - page 12 - More progress in Water Icicle.
 - 'Descent' (244) - Jun/Jul 2015 - page 14 - Digging in Water Icicle.
 - 'Descent' (247) - Dec/Jan 2015/16 - page 9 - Water Icicle dig continues.
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Midweek Caving – The Knox-Nixon Bypass, 11-11-2014 - Alan Brentnall

When the Wharf Engine Shaft was finally capped in the late '90s, it became obvious pretty quickly that a 'one-way exchange' was possible, whereby you could nip into Hillocks and pre-rig the hand-picked shaft, and then everybody could abseil down the Engine Shaft and surface via Hillocks – the lower hillocks pitch being avoided by squeezing through to the parallel shaft and free-climbing this. And this became quite a popular evening exercise – and still is a nice trip for any number of cavers. But a year ago, Steve Knox told me that, after climbing the parallel shaft several times, he found it a bit of a bind, and, on one trip with his partner in crime, Paul Nixon, he got half way up the climb and said to his friend, "Why do I always end up doing this climb?" To which Paul replied, "Well don't bother, just walk round if you don't like it !" And Steve, suddenly realising that Paul's voice was coming from above, looked up and saw Paul grinning down at him from the top of the pitch. And so, the Knox-Nixon bypass came about.

Since getting the story from Steve, I had never had the chance to try the route until this week's midweek caving session, when twelve of us met on a wet and windy night at the Knotlow Triangle. The plan was a Hillocks-Whalf exchange, with six going down Whalf Engine Shaft via the Balcony Route, and six going in through the Hillocks oildrum. I opted to rig the Engine Shaft route, while John Martin rigged the Hillocks pitches.

I've always been impressed with the sheer size of the Whalf Engine Shaft, and had a great 'ab' down the rope, watching for the point where the Balcony Passage breaks off about a third of the way up from the bottom. Clipping the bolt just above the passage, I fed enough rope through my 'Stop' to allow following cavers to abseil straight into and along the passage without needing to do a change-over at the bolt. Popping two butterfly loops onto the traverse line, I shouted "Rope free !", and started rigging the parallel climbing shaft.

Alex soon appeared in the passage, and we chatted as I abseiled down to the rebelay bolt. The deviation below is a bit critical, as you need to get the length just right. Too short and the result makes for a difficult transfer; too long and the people prussiking later will make a bad rub point against the wall. Fortunately I'd been working in this shaft only a fortnight before, and had a sling tailor-made.

Eventually all twelve were reunited at the foot of the Engine Shaft, and after a brief foray to examine the sump, my group started to climb the lower Hillocks pitch. John had rigged the parallel shaft (the one you can free-climb in the one-way exchange) so, after the awkward climb up into the stope, we squeezed through to the foot of this. Jess went first and, at the foot of the rope pitch, dropped through into a lower stope, where it was possible to do a traverse forward to a 'ginged' climb upwards. Pretty soon she was up at the top of the rope pitch looking down on Sigi who was making her way up the rope. So ! – We'd found the legendary Knox-Nixon by-pass !! Well done Jess !

Bernie followed Sigi up the rope, and I dropped into the stope-traverse and followed Jess's route. Excellent alternative, but not exactly a 'walk around'. None the less easy enough, although the finish was a slide over some fairly loose 'deads'. There may have been another climb up which avoided these, and came out of the passage higher than the 'Y-hang', but that alternative will have to wait until another visit.

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EDITOR: Alan posted this account of a Whalf-Hillocks trip, 'on-line', some time ago, but it never appeared in our Newsletter, and so is well worth including here – not least as an example of exactly the kind of contribution which will be welcome from any Members – as are the accounts from Grace and Jenny – thank you !!. Whatever you wish to contribute will be gratefully received !!!

Coming Soon to a Saturday or Sunday near you !

The CCPC Meets List for Autumn 2018 includes the following:

(Dates are intentionally removed – Members will already have the full Meets List, and will be reminded of forthcoming Meets by e-mail.)

Venue	Region	Grid Ref.	Grade	Alternative Venue	Region	Grid Ref
Ibbeth Peril	Yorks	NGR: SD 741 864	3	Ibbeth Peril 2	Yorks	NGR: SD 741 864
Eldon Hole	Derbys	NGR: SK 1161 8089	3	Sidetrack Cave	Derbys	NGR: SK 1168 8152
Lancaster Hole (Permit)	Yorks	NGR: SD 66430 80758	3 / 4	Bull Pot of the Witches	Yorks	NGR: SD 66265 81310
Gautries Hole (Pay £1 at farm)	Derbys	NGR: SK 1015 8145	3	P8 (Jackpot) (Pay £1 at farm)	Derbys	NGR: SK 1079 8179

Penyghent Pot (Permit)	Yorks	NGR: SD 8289 7332	5	Little Hull Pot (Call on Mr Chris Sutcliffe, at Holme Farm, in Horton-in-Ribblesdale, on the day. Alternatively, phone before visiting (any reasonable time) on 01729-860281).	Yorks	NGR: SD 82175 74412
Peak Cavern (Permit)	Derbys	NGR: SK 1486 8259	3 / 4	Winnats Head Cave	Derbys	NGR: SK 1314 8282
Notts Pot (2) (Permit)	Yorks	(SD 671778 - Notts 1)	3			
Giants Hole (pay £3 at farm)	Derbys	NGR: SK 1194 8268	3 / 4	Oxlow (Pay £2 at farm)	Derbys	NGR: SK 1241 8218

There are always additional chances to go caving or walking (..... and ?) with other Club Members, with many trips being arranged at short notice to take advantage of good weather or unexpected opportunities. E-mail is the easiest way to keep in touch, and can be used to let other Members know what you are up to, and to invite them along, where possible.

Remember, to get the most out of Your Club, you have to get out there, and get involved. Have fun !

Steve Knox

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