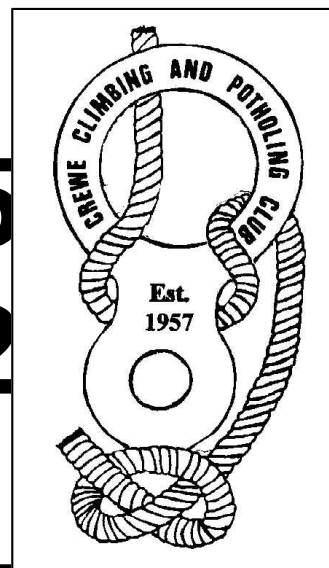


C.C.P.C. Newsletter 105 Winter 2011/12

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Titan: “Last of the summer wine.”

There was a very good turn-out of Crewe cavers in Castleton on Sunday 23rd. October. More than twenty club members went underground. Whereas most cavers visited Peak Cavern, five of the older club members went down Titan and out via Speedwell. Someone jokingly remarked that it was just like an episode of *‘The Last of the Summer Wine’*, with no points for identifying *‘Compo’*, *‘Cleggie’* or *‘Foggy’*!

As usual, the club rendezvous was at the TSG ‘Chapel’ in Castleton at 0900 hrs. Adrian had rigged Titan on the Saturday and Jenny had agreed to de-rig it Sunday in the wake of the oldies. Ralph arrived first to organise things. John and Sharon arrived shortly afterwards, and Jenny arrived later. Once the logistics, gear and clothing had been sorted, Ralph drove John and Sharon up the lane to near the entrance shaft. Steve and Paul arrived just as they were leaving Castleton, but decided to drive to Rowter Farm and walk over to the entrance from there. The plan was to descend Titan and exit via Speedwell.

A cold wind blew across the tops and so everyone wanted to get underground as soon as possible. After a few photos, Sharon went down first, followed by Ralph, who wanted to video, and then John, who found the thick rope in his rack slowed his descent. Steve was next and finally Paul, glad to get out of the cold wind. Once Ralph had videoed us in the connecting tunnel, Sharon descended the topmost rope on Titan. John sat on the edge of the pitch, admiring the vast dome and huge shaft of Titan with Sharon’s tiny spark of light far below. The window ledge was beautifully decorated with stalagmites and flowstone, comfortable to sit on and providing useful handholds. Once Sharon was at *‘The Event Horizon’*, John clipped his rack into the rope and launched himself into space. The second rope was thinner than the first one and ran smoothly through his rack to enable a fairly rapid descent through the emptiness of the huge shaft. Sharon was waiting on the ledge, having descended a short section of rope that ran down to the bolts holding the lowermost Titan rope. Securely clipped in, they chatted quietly in the numinous of the surrounding vastness. It seemed quite cosy! Eventually, Sharon crossed the free-hanging bolt-change and descended the last pitch. Just as she disappeared, Ralph arrived at the ledge to join John. Once Sharon was at the bottom, John took his time changing on to the last rope. Lots of unfortunate cavers had become stuck or had major difficulties here! However, all went well and his rack ran smoothly on the final dark blue rope. At the bottom, there was some spray to cool the rack, lubricate the rope and get inside overalls. Once down, we sat well back to watch Ralph’s descent, performed with no problems. Ralph then videoed Steve’s and Paul’s descents using very powerful headlights. Then it was time for the hard work!

Steve and Sharon led the way on down into a large boulder ruckle. The start was through a lozenge shaped, flat out, crawl with a smooth floor. Lots of wriggling between boulders followed until there was some scaffolding, so we knew we were on the right route. At one point there was a vertical squeeze through the bed-rock. John could only just pass this by exhaling and scraping his chest hard against the rock! A short spell of upright movement led to the small stream in the *Far Peak Extension* then branched into a muddy crawl with a deep muddy pool in it that we had to pass on our stomachs, followed by a few climbs up steel ladders. Steve was leading and pointed out the stemples in '*Stemple Highway*'. There were more muddy crawls and some traversing above a rift, luckily with hand-lines to clip into. The final gritty low crawl, with two U-bends a third full of muddy water, led into the chamber at the base of the '*Leviathan*'. Here we paused for a breather before climbing down through the *Boulder Pile* to the Speedwell Stream-way. What a pleasure it was to clean off the mud and de-grit ourselves!

We ate our snacks and then set off along the stream-way. The water level was mostly below the tops of our wellies except in one or two refreshingly deep places. Soon we were at the '*Whirlpool*'. We balanced on the ropes, placed in situ to avoid a wetting, but, at the far end, there was no avoiding an immersion to above the waist in icy water. Wading steadily past '*Pit-prop*' passage and '*The Bung*' passage, we were soon at the gate to the show cave. Ralph had the key to this and opened it for us to continue to end of the far canal. We emerged at the chamber above '*The Bottomless Pit*' where there was a large group of tourists, waiting for a boat to take them out. Their guide made capital out of our sudden arrival and kindly made space for three of us in the boat. It was 'Age and Beauty first!' Steve and Paul hung on behind the boat as it slowly ploughed its way along the final canal. At one point, Steve and Paul had to walk as the propeller came out of the water! The draught in the tunnel was very cold, so we were all glad when the boat landed at the base of the Speedwell steps and discharged its passengers. With our wellies full of water and all of our clothes and gear sodden with water, the 105 steps to daylight were hard work! Then it was a mile to Castleton, or uphill to Rowter! The walks warmed us up in spite of the icy wind. The TSG Chapel was heaving with cavers changing from their caving gear into their outdoor clothes. What a pleasure to be in dry clothes again! The pints of celebratory beer at 'The Castle' pub never tasted so good! It was a convivial end to an exciting and interesting traverse!

John Gillett 25-10-2011

Thought for the day: You don't stop looking for excitement when you get old, you get old when you stop looking. You can be old at any age.

OFD 1 Trip Report

8/10/11

John duly arrived at the bunk house (Absolute Adventure) at 9:30. We had just finished a delicious fry up, prepped and cooked by yours truly while Mick laboured over the complexities of making a brew. As the 3 of us kitted up John was in reminiscent mood, recalling previous trips into OFD1, Cwm Dwr, OFD2 to OFD1 through trip. 'I hope I can remember the route? I haven't been down there in ages.' Mick and I looked at each other, we needn't have worried.

Leaving the bunk house and our good ladies behind we proceeded down the lane in search of the entrance. Along the way the usual general chitchat ensued with Viagra oddly finding its way into our conversation. Not sure if this was Johns subtle way of suggesting that what lay ahead of us would turn out to be a 'long, stiff arduous trip'. (Apologies from the author, I meant 'hard' I think?) Iain Miller (S.W.C.C.) caving companion to John, adopted welsh dragon, action man as Mick likes to call him, strong caver and all round proper chap was holding station, dragging heavily on the obligatory Marlboro as we arrived at the entrance.

John took the lead bounding over the railing like a spring chicken (okay perhaps that is a slight exaggeration), down the 2 fixed ladders to the hatch as Iain, Mick and I followed behind. Beyond the short but roomy entrance chamber a stooping passage is met but soon opens out into a walking section.

“Are we there yet?” no Mick not yet. Following the main passage we arrived at the Toast Rack, a stepped series of still water pools set in flowstone. Soon the main stream is reached at a point called the Step! At this juncture Iain explained the Steps significance in as much as if the water level is above ones ankle when stepping into the stream way then be advised, don’t attempt the through trip, avoid the whirlpools, turn back - unless you’re wanting to meet your maker. What a difference 3 inches can make. Viagra, this must be what John was referring to after all. Safe in the knowledge that the Steam way was in benign mood our leader urged us on. Several deep pools were negotiated with the aid of fixed scaffolding poles traversing the murky depths. Was I hallucinating? Is John walking on water? How can that be?, it was only when I caught a glint of steel in the beam of my Duo did I realise. ‘This is good, this is alright and impressive’, was Micks offering as we forged on. Upstream a junction is met on the right; Iain pointing out that this was the through route. Alas the group pressed on leaving the thoughts of a through trip for another day. Upon leaving the Main Stream we entered a rift with high walls flanking us on route to Boulder Chamber. Passing Lowes Chain on the right as we went, Iain was quick to inform us that we would be going that way later. Boulder Chamber is of generous proportions with a sizable boulder pile at the far end. Iain now took the lead as we climbed. A 40m scramble saw us all safely to the top. A pit stop was the order of the day and it here that John emitted a worrying groan. Mick being of a caring nature asked if he was ok. “What’s up my mate, that didn’t sound good” Oh it’s my blasted knees; they really do play me up these days. Undeterred and stalwartly John would see the trip out. This was clearly evident for all to see when John chimneyed his way up Lowes Chain (now a fixed rope) refusing any assistance. Mick was at the top of Lowes having gone up first and was now looking down towards John ready to pluck him off the wall and to a safe position. I should add that Mick was very pleased with himself having taken only 2 moves to negotiate Lowes. The animated cries of “did you see that, DID YOU SEE THAT!!” filled the emptiness of the passage. Sadly I missed his exhibition of finesse on account that Iain and I were concentrating on finding natural holds as we attempted to gain some height before taking hold of the rope - sorry Mick. Once again Iain took the helm guiding us to Roundabout Chamber and the Bees Knees. A well decorated section festooned with fine hanging calcite straws and miniature boss’s. Leaving Bees Knees and Roundabout behind us we soon arrived at a low inclined bedding plain, undaunted Mick aka the gentle giant pressed on. Once on the other side the sizable PI Chamber is joined. You can just make out on the right hand wall the symbol for PI formed by the colour variation in the rock, hence its name. Our way on was down and to the left. Iain disappeared backwards through a narrowing gap under a hanging boulder while beckoning us to follow. Words can’t express how keen we all were to take him up on his invitation. Iain was now the other side standing by to help guide us onto an unsighted foot hold only to find we were now staring down the Elephants Posterior, a fairly snug slippery near vertical tube. For those reading this who knows Mick would agree it wouldn’t be unreasonable to think that he might not be overflowing with eagerness at this point? To the contrary, he took it all in his stride or given the immediate environment perhaps it was slither. Was he nervous? Outwardly he wasn’t giving anything away. I recall telling Mick later how proud I was of him for getting through it. Emerging out the other end unscathed and still smelling sweetly we reached the start of the Climb Down high above the Main Steam. Iain reminded us it was 50m to the bottom, so best clip into the safety line which traverses the left hand wall.

The Climb Down terminates at a traverse some 10m above the main stream. Our way on is right via Hairy Fairy, a bolted traverse with steel safety line for some 20m. Iain treated it like a walk in the park, while the three of us, clipped in negotiating Hairy Fairy without incident. I do believe Mick was truly enjoying himself. Fifteen minutes later we were back at the entrance and upon reaching the surface greeted with the obligatory Brecon drizzle and mist. A superb 3 ½ hours was had by all. Back at the bunkhouse John offered round the usual tinny of Heinekin. Cheers.

That evening was the Og Fest BBQ, a fitting finale to a good days caving.

“ Steve PA ”

Now the important part: Meets.

April 7th Lancaster/Cow Pot Yorks, 22nd JH Derbyshire

May 5th Penyghent Pot, Yorks, 20th Swildons Hole, Mendip, Somerset

June 2nd Otter Hole, S Wales, 17th Ibeth Peril, Yorks, 30th Nenthead, Cumbria

July 15th Shuttleworth Pot, Yorks, 28th Ogof Draenen, S Wales,

August 12th Miss Graces Lane. Forest of Dean, 25th Pasture Gill, Yorks

September 9th Whitescar Cave, Yorks, 22nd Notts 2, Yorks

October 7th Juniper Gulf, Yorks, 20th Giants Hole, Derbyshire

November 4th Death's Head/Big Meanie, Yorks, 17th Alum Pot/LLC Yorks

December 2nd Peak Cavern Derbyshire, Bull Pot, Yorks.

Many thanks to Darren as usual.