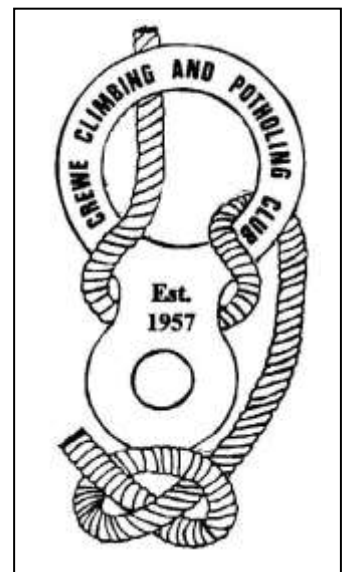


# C.C.P.C. Newsletter 106. Summer 2012

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## Underpinning King Shaft.



Looking up the Shaft

Ralph what the Shaft was like, he simply shuddered and muttered something about it being “a big bugger”!

On the back road out to the north west from Stanton stands Thorswood House, and in the hills behind the house is the Thorswood Nature Reserve, home to all kinds of plants, such as knapweed, devil’s-bit scabious, ox-eye daisy, betony, wild thyme, salad burnett, cowslip and purple orchid. Thorswood is also home to quite a few iron-age barrows, as well as some spectacular views, and all these interesting features attract many visitors to the area.

However, in addition to the plants and views and the barrows, Thorswood has a rich mining history because, between 1729 and 1860 when it was part of the Earl of Shrewsbury’s estate, several shafts were sunk in these hills to facilitate the mining of lead, copper and zinc (calamine). These were deep shafts, up to 640ft deep in fact, and were naturally drained, but, because of the large amount of topsoil in the vicinity, the ginging at the top of each shaft needed to be quite big too.

As you may imagine, it is the presence of these pits which worries the managers of the Nature Reserve, the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, and that is why we were trundling over the pastures. The ginging on one of the large shafts, King Shaft, was resting on an old oak crib where the bedrock starts, some 50ft or so below the surface, and, this crib being almost 300 years of age, the support was waning, and

Some time in the warm middle months of 2011, I got a phone call from Len Kirkham, asking if I’d like to help with some work on the ginging of an engine shaft down near Ashbourne. Well, the nearest caving that I could recollect doing in that area was at Waterways Swallet. Anything else around there would be entirely new to me, so I naturally said yes.

A few weeks later saw me, Peter, Len and John trundling over the Weaver Hills towards a high point in a cabless 1955 Landrover. Armed to the gunwails with scaff, rope, drills and the like, we seemed to be prepared for anything, and prepared we needed to be because, when I asked

some of the stones were starting to “belly”. As can be seen on at least one other shaft in the area, if the ginging does eventually go, then the result will be a huge and unstable conical pit 50ft deep (and at least that in diameter). Far better for all concerned that it should be underpinned while it still resembled the double-kibble shaft it originally was.



Opening up the shaft and erecting the tripod over it, it didn't look too wide, but it certainly was deep. Originally reaching down over 600ft, it had been back-filled to a lesser depth but, as this was still over the 300ft mark, I thought the difference somewhat academic.

The first job was to inspect the crib, and the ginging above it, to see how bad the bulge was, and whether the existing stonework would take scaffolding easily. Abseiling down to the 50ft level, the crib was pretty obvious and, although the central wooden parts still seemed quite solid, the outer skin was quite mushy. Len soon joined me for, as a mining engineer of many year's experience, he would be directing the job ... I was only there as a labourer, and to make sure that the ropework was safe.

The next job was to erect a scaffold platform just below the crib, and, to enable this to happen, Len had brought along one of his famous inventions which magically combined some rebar, some scaffolding and some bolted clamps to produce two adjustable stemples which we eventually managed to set in parallel across the long axis of the shaft. These two main supports were then steadied by another two pieces of shorter scaff, clamped at right angles, and producing a metal “noughts and crosses” framework.



A week later we returned and boarded the frame with wooden planking to enable us to do the remedial work in comfort - i.e. without having to stare into the black abyss below!



For several weeks, ably assisted by John, who supplied us with compo, wood, stone, gravel and other essentials via the hand-operated winch on the tripod, we laboured down the hole applying mortar to the stones above and around the rotting crib, which originally looked like this. The crib is the black gnarly-looking layer just below the stone ginging and above the bedrock.



And eventually looked like this.



And in what seemed like no time at all, the pointing and underpinning was finished and we were left simply with the job of removing our platform, our boards and ourselves back to the surface.

A week later, we met again at Thorswood with some additional members to the team, with the intention of filming a full descent of the shaft. To accomplish this, we had brought a generator and an electrical winch which we set over the hole ready for a descent. The filming was to be done by Dave Webb, and the first pair down the shaft was to be me (abseiling) and Len (on the winch) and we would be later followed by a second pair (Dave and Darren).

Using PMR45 radios for communications, Len and I started down the hole. I descended very slowly, trying to match the speed of the winch which was lowering Len just above me - Len was backed up by a Petzl shunt, which he slid down my rope as he travelled down the shaft.

At roughly the 150ft level, I spotted a second rope in the shaft which was attached to an 8mm bolt anchor on the shaft wall, and redirected back into the middle of the shaft by a deviation cord lower down. I stopped abseiling and prepared to sort this rope out, so that it would not interfere with our descent.

But first I made a radio call to the surface and asked them to stop the winch. This resulted in ... nothing whatsoever. Len simply carried on descending! More radio, then a whistled signal. Again nothing - so we reverted to shouting, "Stop!!!". By this time, Len was sitting on my knee, with the winch wire yarding down the shaft at an alarming rate.

After much shouting and whistling, the winch stopped, and a very stilted conversation was had up and down the shaft which resulted in the vast amount of slack in the winch wire finally being wound back onto its drum.

At this point, we made a decision to return to the surface and try to improve our communications system before we descended any further down the shaft. However, all means of actually communicating this to the the team above seemed not to work, as Len stayed dangling in his spot, just above my knee, for what seemed like an age.

Eventually, Len started to inch his way up the shaft - very, very slowly - and I followed, SRT-fashion, and, equally slowly (but surely) we made it to the surface, where we found that the communication problem had been further compounded by the fact that the winch had somehow lost a lot of its power, and was found to be incapable of lifting Len.

Fortunately, it was also blessed with a manual winch handle and it was only through a combination of Pete's muscle power and the electric motor that we didn't have to revert to some of the mid-rope rescue tactics which we had been practising the previous winter!

Well! - All's well that ends well ... but King Shaft still remains undescended (by me and Len, at any rate) and unfiled. Watch this space!

*Alan Brentnall*

### Postscript from Len:-

Since our stabilising operation at the bottom of the ginging, the shaft has been descended and photographs taken of the numerous artefacts. There is no general access for caving on Wildlife Trust land, however, limited access may be considered for historical purposes.

*Len Kirkham*

## The Ogof Llyn Parc Round Trip

Ogof Llyn Parc or Pool Park as it is often called is a great round trip in North Wales on the World's End Road, Minera. Lead miners broke through into a natural stream passage in the 1800s but it took North Wales Caving Club a long time to stabilise the connection. It was definitely worth it as it is one of the best trips in North Wales.

Getting on to one of the winch trips which are held during summer months can be a bit hit and miss due to weather, NWCC availability and someone with a 4x4 being available to drive the winch up to the head of the shaft. The first job is getting the winch and the frame into place.



Then it is quick change and on to the winch for the 300ft ride down. A short walk and crawl through this level brings you to four long ladders down to the level that meets the stream passage, for plenty of wading through crotch-deep water.

At this point you can admire the handy work of NWCC as you climb through the scaffolded boulder-choke into the streamway. The stream passage roof sports some of the miner's signatures. Walking down stream, you eventually come to a roped climb up and leave the stream behind. Very little is actually named in Pool Park but the first part is called B-Block Passage as it has a massive block with a 'B' scrawled on it and it becomes a lovely phreatic passage.

Although this is mainly a walking trip, there are plenty of crawls, scrambles and climbs as the cave continually changes. I can just imagine the faces of NWCC when they realized what they had discovered.

There are many routes off the main drag where the more energetic can do more exploring whilst the others rest. There is one really well decorated section and a couple of large mud slopes, one negotiated by way of a knotted rope. The master chamber can be fun, particularly early in the season after it has been flooded. At one stage you have to just slide down on your bum and hope that it is your feet hit the far wall first.

If you are not tired after the round trip you can go up stream to The Quarry, a massive chamber with layers and layers of old roof collapses.

We tend to go through in small groups of about 6 due to the wait for people to be delivered by the winch and then we try to stagger our return as waiting to go up can be cold. Warm drinks and SRT kits are left at the bottom of the winch. To do the trip you should technically be able to prussic 300ft and we wear full SRT kit to attach to the winch and for 'just in case'. That said, I have never known the winch break down. NWCC do a great job of checking that everyone gets safely onto the winch, winching them down and winching them back up after a few hours.

See Brendan Maris's photos of the cave at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dudley-bug/sets/72157606271718407> to whet your appetite and maybe we can plead with NWCC to invite us for one of the 2012 winch trips!



## High Peak Marathon – Tales from the Bog



The Dubliners, when they introduced so many of us to folk music back in the '60s with "*Maids, When You're Young, Never Wed an Old Man*", must have considered that the advice in the song might have been better directed at the prospective groom, rather than the bride. And, perhaps, I should have considered similar words of wisdom when I foolishly accepted the invitation by three very young lads to join their High Peak Marathon team late last year.

Even the team name caused me some embarrassment. There are fifty teams in a High Peak Marathon, each with a team name, and these names vary between plain descriptive (*Team Accelerate*) and downright weird (*3 Blind Mice and a Farmer's Wife*). Our team name was *The Eldon*.

Eldon may not mean much to you; it is a hill behind Peak Forest, much ravaged and plundered for the good of our motorways, and which contains within its heights the deepest and most impressive natural open shaft in the Peak – so deep and wide, in fact, that heavy snowfalls often leave it with an enormous snowplug at its base for months into the following summer.

But, when the definite article is added, *The Eldon* is a caving club, with a reputation for being the naughty boy of Derbyshire caving. A reputation gained by members of The Eldon, I might add, while using the facilities of the Chapel (the base for my own club in Castleton) and which entails the misuse of fire extinguishers and pink paint!

But enough of that. It is sufficient to realise that even the name was a source of discomfort. Something along the lines of "*Three Proper Runners and an Old Fart*" would have caused me much less concern.

As some of you will have realised, I've been missing from some of the Thursday night sessions recently, occasionally turning up at the Royal at a late hour, mud spattered and dazed after some session on Marjory Hill or Swains Head. These forays into the black wilderness of The Blacks, always done in darkness and usually in bad weather, should have provided me with a wake-up call. However bad an evening's jog from Fiddler's Green to Bleaklow Head and back might be, a full-on night of it, with armies of contenders, to concern and confuse, was bound to be worse.

I've never done the High Peak Marathon before. Although I've tried to enter on a couple of occasions, the perverse lottery used by the HPM to keep the numbers down, and where the prize is as life-changing as the fortunes doled out in the National Lotto, has always skipped over me. Until this year.

So, having always managed to avoid actually having to do the event, it was a little disconcerting to receive a text from one of my prospective team mates saying "We're in! Cool! Recce next Thursday?" followed by a collection of punctuation marks known, apparently, as a Smiley! And that was that. I

was now a member of a small group of Sheffield-based cavers, who appeared to be just as happy in the mud above or below ground ... and who liked running.

Inevitably, the day of the race rolled up, with an ambiguous weather forecast following two days of near perfect conditions, and Alison drove me over to Edale, beneath a starry sky, to meet the three Js (Jules, James and Jon) in the village hall.

I also met up with lots of friends from Dark Peak and Glossopdale – and two teams from Pennine – and spent an hour or so chatting while we all tried in vain to reduce the size of the mountain of sandwiches which the HPM team had laid on.

It's not a race, it's a time trial. Each team starts at a given time. There were three walking teams which would start at 10:00, 10:01, 10:02 (PM, you understand, none of this daylight stuff), and the running teams would start an hour later at 11pm in handicap fashion, with the estimated slowest first and quickest last. *The Eldon* was to start first, such was their faith in our capabilities, and, as the hour slowly approached, so did our apprehension.

Thus it was with no small amount of relief that we were given the nod so that I could dib and we could all exit the hall to thunderous applause from all the other teams. Out into the black night we ran, miles too fast but we were keen to get under way, and, despite the miry, cowshit-ridden path up to Hollins Cross, we dibbed checkpoint number one after just 15 minutes of running. "Come on, guys," I thought, "Slow down ... please!"

By now, of course, the starry sky had vanished and we had been in very thick mist since we passed Hollins Farm. Taking the track through Brockett Booth Plantation, we missed the left turn for Lose Hill and had to hop a fence for the directissima, landing us at the summit checkpoint dead on. On the way down into Hope, the first (of many) teams overtook us, and, by Townhead, we were running beneath the cloud and could finally see again.

And so it continued through the night with these three youngsters haring along in front of me while I tried to keep them in sight, catching them up when, every so oft, they would stop to consult the map, chug a gel or otherwise grab a short but well-earned rest. Checkpoints came and went, each adorned with young students from Sheffield, dressed up in all kinds of outfits, always cheerful and full of an enthusiasm which no amount of my Victor Meldrew state could quash.

I think the pace finally became something approaching sensible and comfortable somewhere along the track on the far side of the Salt Cellar, heading north towards Dovestone Tor. The clag was as thick as ever (it never let up until just below Hollins Cross the following day) and the first of the overnight showers was upon us. We donned our overtrousers, and made a decision to reduce the speed and concentrate on navigation. We knew that if we got the nav. wrong, it would lose us much more time than we would ever be able to claw back by fast running.

The section from Berristers Tor to Howden Edge was as testing as ever, and we traversed a little low but realised what was happening and corrected before following the boggy edge path round to Cut Gate. Lots of other teams were around us now, including Pennine's *Young and Old* (Adam and Kevin Perry, Muir Morton and Ian Philips), and the extra lights and teams, while helping somewhat, also added to the confusion on the dark and misty night.

The defining stretch of the Derwent Watershed has to be the four miles between Cut Gate and Swains Head. In daylight and good visibility, there is a wide, black, slarty trail to follow – more a linear bog than a path. But in the dark, with mist obscuring even the near distances, it is difficult to keep on track, especially when it is between 4am and 5am and everybody on the team is feeling tired. The route is not a straight line either, as it starts on a northerly heading before swinging north west and then south west,



so no dead reckoning is going to help and most teams rely on receiving prior to the event so that they will recognise the major turning points, such as the large cairn to the south of Round Hill.

In contrast, the section from Swains Head to Bleaklow Stones is ... well, Bleaklow! Wave after wave of peat hags offer little to ease either the navigation or the running, although a slippery path along the banks of Far Black Clough goes a long way towards easing the pain.

Between Bleaklow Stones and Wainstones, where we had more of the same territory, dawn slowly showed us some daylight and the welcome view of the big, staked cairn at Bleaklow Head told us that the worst was behind us and we were approaching familiar ground. Unfortunately, this also meant that we could up the pace and run – and I for one wasn't too sure how much running was left in my legs.



But we managed a creditable running shuffle along the flags and, at the Snake Summit checkpoint, I had the best cup of tea that I will ever taste! Amazingly, I also bumped into Pennine's fast team, *Young and Old*, again. What they were doing so far down the field will, I'm sure, be revealed if either Muir or Adam dare to put pen to paper and submit their adventures to the Blog.



A long, long yellow brick road led us from Snake Summit, over the second Featherbed of the race, to Mill Hill where we were met by Andy Howie, Mel Cranmer and Phil Wheatcroft. Unfortunately for us it was here that the wheels on James' bus started to fall off. Hours and hours of bog jumping had finally left their mark and James had some badly pulled muscles in his leg which no sensible amount of ibuprofen was going to relieve. But the lad was still keen to finish and so we did what we could to keep a reasonable trot/walk over Kinder to the Edale Road checkpoint, where Carl Bedson was taking photos.

As instructed by the organisers, we obediently skirted Brown Knoll on the left, and took the left bank of the old ditch south east. Unfortunately, the mist here was as thick as ever, and tiredness and over-

familiarity led to an unnecessary detour around Horsehill Tor (I won't make that mistake again) before finally picking up the Skyline trod over to Chapel Gate and the checkpoint on Lord's Seat. From there to Hollins Cross was easy but painful, especially for James, but we were soon descending through the cowmuck and into Edale for yet another well-earned cup of tea.



So that's it – I've finally managed to do the High Peak Marathon. Many thanks to my young friends James Rhodes, Jules (the navigator) Barrett and Jon 10K Pemberton for their companionship over the recces and through the night of the event itself.

The event was won (predictably) by *Flipper's Gang* (Spyke, Steve Watts, Mark Hartell and John Morgan) and second team (and first mixed) was *High Peak Roller Bladers* featuring Pennine's John Doyle, Glossopdale's Julien Minshull and Mark Ollerenshaw and Carnethy's Jasmine Paris. There were two pure Pennine teams involved: *Young and Old* has already been mentioned, but *Just Popping Out For Some Bread* was none other than Hanno Torn, Dan Sims, Col Wilshaw and Mark Cliff.

*Alan Brentnall*

## First Winter Ascent of Gunnbjørnsfjeld

by Adrian Pedley

It all started back in 2003 on Baffin Island, whilst we were storm-bound in a tent for nearly five days. Cabin-fever was starting to set in and we were already talking about what our next objectives were to be, assuming we got out of our present predicament. At that point Paul Walker of Tangent Expeditions piped up: what about doing the first winter ascent of the Arctic's highest peak, Gunnbjørnsfjeld 3,693m, located in Greenland's Watkin range.

I had already been to Greenland once before so I had a good idea what to expect. Gunnbjørnsfjeld is by no means a technical peak, and is easily skiable except for the final ridge, but of course the remoteness and the extreme low temperatures we expected to encounter all added up to make it a pretty serious objective. Also, being so far north (69°) made the effects of altitude worse than you normally experience for the

same height in the Alps.

Paul Walker made a first winter attempt in 2004, but his team were beaten back by strong winds and poor weather. I did not take part in this expedition, but was a member of the final successful expedition which took place in 2006. Our plan was to approach from the north side; this meant a slightly longer ascent but a shorter ridge to the summit.

From Ísafjörður in northern Iceland, it took two trips in the Twin Otter over two days to get nine of us and all of our equipment onto the glacier which was at about 2,000m. We had pared down the weight as much as possible. Considering the time of year, and being 50 miles inland and so high up, we had all been happy to make a collective decision to leave out the rifle and all ammunition we would normally take for the chance of a polar bear encounter. This turned out to be a serious omission, more of which later!



The Twin Otter departs after drop-off.

Photo Adrian Pedley

The weather on our arrival was, to say the least, spectacular. With no wind, clear blue skies and temperatures at  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ , and a good forecast for the next five days, we all agreed to start hauling gear up to Advanced Base Camp at approx 2,500m the next day. This would take at least two trips hauling pulks, which do not glide over the snow very well at such low temperatures; the snow tends to have the consistency of sand, and does not form the lubricating layer you might normally get. The route to ABC came close to some ugly-looking seracs on the steepest section of the route; you tended to just plod along and not think of the tonnes of frozen unstable ice perched above. After the third day ABC was in good enough shape to move up there with enough food and fuel for eleven days.



Moving gear up to Advanced Base Camp.

Photo Adrian Pedley

I was sharing a tent with Barry (Baz) Roberts, a great guy with whom I had been to Greenland on a previous expedition. Some nights were that cold that Baz suggested 'spooning': I declined and decided that my reputation was worth more! However Baz was a bit surprised when I produced a jar of Vaseline – I'd had the forethought to recognise the difficulty of getting frozen ski-boots on in the confines of a tent at possible temperatures of  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ , so I came up with the idea of Vaseline to lubricate the inners to make things easier. I had practiced this at home and it worked, and soon Baz was sold on the idea; two men and a jar of Vaseline in a tent can work wonders in the Arctic!

Getting moving in the morning in the dark was an unbelievable battle of will-power, everything was just hard work. As you awake you come face to face with a spectacular chandelier of ice formations above your head from your breath. First you have to put everything into stuff-sacks, then knock all the ice from inside the tent and brush it outside, and then you can start your breakfast. The whole procedure could take three hours, and you only dared venture out when you were certain everyone was ready to roll at the same time. Great care was taken with ski-bindings not to kick them too hard for fear of shattering the plastic at the low temperatures. Finally we set off for the long trudge up to the summit ridge, skirting round the immense crevasses and crossing over reassuringly rock-solid snow-bridges. There were some steep sections requiring kick-turns but, all in all, it was straightforward, the worst thing being that the entire route was in the shade. We all had our drinks in Thermos flasks, but after the first drink the lids would freeze shut and there was no way to get at the fluid which you could hear sloshing around inside!



Author on an alpine start.

Photo Baz Roberts

The final summit ridge was fairly broad with a final steep and narrow section with great exposure. It was getting late, too late in fact. Most of the team were not climbers and they were not happy to solo this final section, but there was no time to fix ropes. Rather selfishly I realised that we might not get another chance. Summit-fever kicked in and I was off; ten minutes later I was on the summit. Baz, Paul and John Starbuck followed and the rest headed down with us close behind them after pausing for some summit photos. We arrived back at camp after sixteen hours, virtually all without rehydrating; one of the team was in a bad way with exhaustion and dehydration.



Author on the summit.

Photo Baz Roberts

The successful summit for four of us left the remaining team members feeling somewhat bitter and cheated at being so close but then being abandoned by the more experienced members of the team; and I guess they were right. This resulted in a heated debate outside in freezing temperatures. Luckily this limited the arguing to thirty minutes, but before things turned ugly it was decided to make another summit attempt. This would involve fixing ropes along the final ridge for those who hadn't made it the first time. This would also give Baz another opportunity to fly from the summit on his paraglider.



Second summit day.

Photo Adrian Pedley

We went through the early morning procedures again and set off into the darkness, with four of us definitely not wanting to be there! We had spied a different route up through a wide gully, which later provided excellent skiing on the descent. All went well and the rest (bar one) summited. I got the task of de-rigging the ropes so couldn't resist a second summit on my own. The view was amazing: 360 degrees of mostly unclimbed mountains. Across the massive glacier to the south-west were the Lindbergh Mountains where I had climbed in 2000 and I could pick out some of the peaks I had climbed and named. Further south I could make out the Lemon Mountains,



View to the west of the Greenland Ice Cap.

Photo Adrian Pedley

to the west was the immense Greenland Ice Cap. I snapped out of my daze and started down, de-rigging as I went. Baz had decided that it was too windy to fly from the summit, and decided to take off from the shoulder lower down. I helped him get set up, conscious of the time. Baz set off down the slope, but it took him an awfully long time to get airborne on his skis and he dropped like a stone due to the cold air. However he finally got some lift and gained height, landing safely back at camp fifteen minute later, narrowly missing the loo! We all trudged in about three hours later after a great ski down, to find that the seracs that we had passed under on our way up to ABC had all collapsed.

During the night, a storm battered our tents; you could hear the wind hammering down from the glacier. It shook the tent violently then carried on down the glacier, then as if changing its mind you could hear it coming back up the glacier again. This went on all night and completely buried all the pulks.



Advanced Base Camp.

Photo Adrian Pedley

Two days later we were back at Base Camp with all the gear and the plane was picking us up in another two days. Paul was forty that day so we had a party in the dome tent. Our only sponsor ‘Ardbeg Whisky’ had donated some bottles of 50%-proof whisky, which were consumed with great caution and respect! The next day we were all content to vegetate in our tents.

It was about 11am on our final night; Baz and I were asleep in our tents, ‘spooning!’ Paul and his mates were doing the same (don’t know about the spooning), Doug and Lucy being married had pitched their tent some way off the rest of ours and were next door playing cards. This may have saved their lives.

I was awoken as the tent shook. I lay there, eyes open, and it happened again. A short time went by and then I heard Doug and Lucy’s tent getting shaken about a hell of a lot; was it someone shaking the ice off the tents, I wondered? This didn’t seem right. Then Paul said, ‘GUYS THERE’S A BEAR IN THE CAMP; I AIN’T JOKING!’ At this point our tent was ripped open – Baz sat up and zipped open the inner tent to see the polar bear with its head in the porch going for the cheese and chives Pringles we had inside. I am not sure what Baz picked up but he hurled it at the bear and hit it on the nose. It paused... My reaction was to make as much noise as I could and wave my arms, and I shouted for everyone else to do the same. The bear stood there shifting its weight from side to side, wondering what to do. Meanwhile Paul made a dash for the dome tent where he knew we had flares; but which f\*\*\*\*\*g box? Meanwhile we were all screaming for our lives. He found them just as the bear decided it was going to have the Pringles and drag one of us off in our sleeping bag for its main course. At this point I really thought one of us was done for, but who would he go for?

Paul let the flare off, the bear turned and started off into the darkness. Then he stopped, turned and started back towards me and Baz. Paul let off another flare which



passed between the bear's front and back legs; this time it worked and he sped off into the darkness, pausing casually to sniff at the toilet area.

We didn't bother with the Vaseline on this occasion; it was on with the boots and out of the tent, grabbing my axe on the way. We quickly huddled together armed with axes and skis and hastily decided on a plan of action. Making plenty of noise was the first and obvious thing to do. This thing was out there in the darkness: hungry, desperate, and most likely as scared as we were. It probably couldn't believe its good fortune; out of all the glaciers in Greenland it came across one with nine meaty explorers and a shed-load of food, what luck!

We decided to douse socks with Coleman fuel, keeping lighted stoves at the ready. We guessed that the bear might charge into the middle of us, grab the fattest one and head off. Our plan was to throw Baz's open paraglider on it to entangle it; dazzle it with a big flash gun; set it on fire; and stab it to death with ice-axes! That should have done it I reckon, but someone would certainly have got hurt or worse in the process. We spent the entire night on edge: clattering snow-stakes against axes and whatever else we could find; fortifying our position by standing the skis in the snow and turning the pulks on their sides, not that we expected that these would stop him, but figuring that anything that made us look bigger and more intimidating would help. I started to feel very cold, as I had not had time to dress properly, so I took time out to get my duvet suit on. Going back inside the tent felt very nerve-racking as that was the last place I wanted to be if it returned.

He came back a couple of times during the night, getting pretty close, so we let off some more flares to warn him off. We didn't want to waste any flares in case we had to spend another night there if the plane couldn't pick us up due to the weather.

'I wish we had brought the rifle', I thought, as I banged my axe with a snow-peg and peered into the darkness. It was about 4am and a while since he had been back; the moon was up but there was some low cloud around. I started to see some strange shapes, glowing and glittering but kind of waving their way towards me in the most beautiful colours and patterns. I didn't say anything as I thought I was hallucinating, but as it turns out some of the others had seen them too; all very strange. The only explanation was that they were caused by ice crystals in the air and the moonlight.

Paul had managed to raise the pilot of the Twin Otter on the satellite phone and asked for immediate rescue at first light. They would load extra fuel in case they had to circle waiting for the cloud to lift. Come daylight and the cloud kept lifting and then settling in. We were all very anxious and didn't want to spend an extra night there and had marked out a runway with rucksacks to give the pilot some depth of field. Then we could hear him circling overhead; we gave him a GPS position but he could not make out the ground. He flew off down the glacier looking for a gap in the clouds through which he then dropped and flew back up the glacier under the cloud level appearing dramatically over us between two peaks. He made a couple of circuits and Paul told him to land on the right-hand side of the line of sacks. He started the

approach on the wrong side, coming straight towards us and the great pile of gear we were to leave behind for the next expedition in a couple of months, and the toilet pit we had dug! Paul realised the error as we all started to run in the deep snow: 'YOUR right side!' he shouted into the radio, the pilot corrected at the last minute and touched down to a snowstorm of spindrift and of course our great relief!

When you consider the conditions that the pilot landed in, with no proper ground level to focus on because of the flat light and deep snow slightly uphill, he probably broke every aviation rule there is going! We owe him a lot.

Two hours later we were back in Iceland, and the day after we were on the beer in Reykjavik: at up to seven pounds a pint, but we didn't care as we all considered ourselves lucky to have all our bits still attached!

And what of the polar bear? Well we never did get to know what happened to him but in the daylight we could see his tracks heading up the glacier towards the coast. Hopefully he made it; we were all so relieved that we didn't have to kill him, as it would have been a horrible way to go. Paul spoke to some leading polar bear experts on our return, none of whom could explain why a bear should be so high up, fifty miles from the coast in winter. It was amazing that he had found a way through the crevasse field. We can only conclude that he was well and truly lost. It was a great but scary pleasure to meet him and I wish him well...

Oh – the mountain; that was easy!

## **Lanzarote Lava Tube Caves II:**

Lanzarote was formed by volcanic action about three thousand years ago with the last eruptions about two hundred years ago. There are many extinct volcanoes on Lanzarote and several miles of lava tube caves that were formed during the early volcanic period. Carmen Smith of The Wessex Cave Club, with the help of her friends, has written a very good guide to the caves of Lanzarote as a PDF from [www.cavesoflanzarote.co.uk](http://www.cavesoflanzarote.co.uk) Knowing that several CCPC members are going to Lanzarote this year, I have added details to locate the entrances.

In 2011, I caved with Javier Trujillo Gutierrez and Alexandre Perez Perdoma, of the '*Grupo de Espeleologia de Canarias*'. We explored *Jameo de la Puerto Falsa*, one of the entrances into the extensive *Montana Corona* system and *La Cueva de Las Naturalistas*, called *Las Palomas* by the locals due to the pigeons that nest in the entrances.

This year I again caved with Javier, Alexandre and Brahim, another club member, to complete the rest of the *Montana Corona* system. We also re-visited *Las Naturalistas* with Carmen, Chris, Aubrey and Noel from the Wessex Cave Club, who came out for a week's caving. They went caving every day and suggested several future trips that I would enjoy. We were particularly grateful to Chris for driving us back to recover my hire car, parked by the *Jameo de La Gente* entrance some kilometres away, after we had completed the traverse and emerged from *Jameo de Prendes*. A brief record of this year's trips follows:

The *Puerta Falsa* to *Jameo de la Gente* traverse takes about an hour and is in large passages with lots of boulder hopping and a single constriction in a boulder choke. For the first time ever, I successfully used a walking pole underground to assist my arthritic knees! The final exit is into *Jameo de la Gente*, a large crater that is most impressive. There is an easy climb up to the surface just before the up-flow entrance to the rest of the system that leads to *Jameo de Prendes*. The best way back to the car is to take the road. We took a 'short cut' over the 'badlands', but it was awfully rugged, hard going and not recommended!

The *Puerta Falsa* entrance is reached along a small footpath that is to the left of the road (LZ204) past the tourist cave *Cueva de los Verdes*, near a bend where the car can be parked. *Cueva de los Verdes* is well signposted from Arrieta. There is a right turn on to LZ1 signed 'Orzola/Jameo del Agua' after the roundabout. Go past Manrique's 'Lobster Island' and turn left at the crossroads near *Jameos del Agua*. Go past the turn to *Cuevas de los Verdes* on the right. Follow the straight road as far as a left-hand bend. Park on the bend, in a passing place on the left. Then cross the road to find the tiny footpath that leads to the large cave entrance.

The *Jameo de la Gente* entrance is reached by keeping left on to the LZ201 avoiding the turn to Orzola after the Arrieta roundabout. Keep going for about a mile and pass a right turn that is the road to *Cuevas de los Verdes* (The best way back to the car after the traverse from *Puerta Falsa*). Keep going uphill until there is a wall with high gates in it on the right. A rough track runs right along this wall and there is a car park by the second high gate. The *Jameo de la Gente* entrance is along a short, obvious footpath along the wall from the car park. There is an easy climb down into the crater. (*If you get to the left turn to Maguez then you have gone too far and must turn round!*)

The traverse from *Jameo de la Gente* to *Jameo de Prendes* takes about three hours and is the best part of the Montana Corona system in my opinion. The climb down into the up-flow passages Of *Jameo de la Gente* is easy. A scramble over greenish rocks leads to a wooden ladder that has a rung missing at the bottom. From here on up-flow, the passages are very large and impressive, with lots of gypsum powder and decorations on the walls, ceilings and floors. The going is quite strenuous with lots of boulder piles to go over, several traverses along walls and balconies, and a short crawl that leads to tubes on two levels. My walking pole was really useful! Eventually the route leads via an upwards scramble over boulders to a short 7m pitch, with hangers to attach a pull-through rope. The descent is over a bulge and then it is free-hanging to the floor. Knee-pads are helpful if the two hidden footholds below the bulge cannot be located. The way on is then upwards over boulders. The passage continues to a 25m climb. Javier climbed this and fixed a rope for the rest of us to climb using our hand-jammers. At the top, there is a small hole to get through. I had packed my collapsed walking pole into my rucksack with the point sticking up behind me. Needless to say, this jammed in the hole and I had to back out and take the rucksack off before I could get through! At the top, it is only a short distance to the entrance. The route passes across a large hole by a traverse on the right-hand wall using cracks and a good handhold. Then daylight beckons and the exit is into another large crater with a climb up to a metal gate on the surface. If no-one wishes to do the 25m climb it is best to go to *Jameo de Prendes* first and put a rope in place, then return downhill and enter via *Jameo de la Gente*.

The *Jameo de Prendes* entrance is reached by continuing uphill past the track to *Jameo de la Gente*, past the left turn to Maguez and a right-hand bend to a sharp left-hand bend where there is a track on the right that leads to the *Jameo de Prendes* car park.

There are still several caves for me to visit next year. I particularly want to visit *Cueva de los Lagos* and *Cueva del Paso/Eskeleto* and to repeat the *Jameo de La Gente/Jameo de Prendes* traverse.

John Gillett 29<sup>th</sup>. March 2012

### Swainlsey Mine, Manifold Valley

In December 2010 I was contacted by friends who reside at, and own, the extensive property known as Swainsley Hall, situated down river from Ecton Mines.

A discrete group of trial workings for lead etc consisting of three levels, one now lost, on the steep valley side and evidence of old trials dating back to the late 1600s. When mining ceased in the area circa 1870, the topmost adit was dammed up and the water piped down the steep hillside, over the river, and up to the hall to replace the poor quality water supply. If drinking lead mine water was better the original must have been a bit thick.

Today the hall is on mains water and has been for many years. However the water from the mine now works the hall's fountains, via the original static head, until some crackpot who claimed to hold a

government licence to prospect in the mines for gold, no less, cut through the pipe. You couldn't make it up.

The winter of 2010/2011 saw temperatures drop to -25C in the Manifold Valley, that resulted in severe frost damage to the pipeline and valve cluster from the static water lodged in the system. The repair work involved replacing sections of the 2 ½" diameter galvanised steel pipe, requiring the hire of pipe threading equipment-a lot of hard work and expense.

The level is approximately 100yards in length 6' high and 5' wide. A lead work raise 50yards in can be seen, consisting of calcited deads that appear that appear to have run in from a working above supported on timber. It was considered too dangerous to climb.

A most intriguing contraption was brought to my attention by the owner. It consists of a small overshot water wheel almost buried in silt. A double acting piston pump driven from the axle through an adjustable eccentric was also revealed.

A 9" bore pipe is evident, but the point of supply from the river is as yet uncertain. The machine is most intriguing. What was its function when it was installed etc.

At some point, a large church –type organ is known to have been installed at the hall, driven by water pressure. So was the function of these two mechanical marvels directly related? We have to work this one out.

**Please note:** There is no access to the property of the Swainsley Estate.

Len Kirkham.

## Four Bolts and a Colostomy

Having eaten my second breakfast in the Chapel with the old lads from the Eldon, who went on and on about the total bunch of lightweights which they reckon constitutes the modern DCRO, I left them to their Titan trip while I headed up to Speedwell armed to the teeth with tea, snap, rope, tools, drill and a bunch of thunderbolts.

Everybody I had asked was injured, poorly, on holiday or swanning off to the Mendips for a Swillies round trip. But what did I care? Billy-No-Mates Brentnall, that's me. Two right heavy bags, and the last few bolts to tap into the rock above the new pipe to clear it out of the way of passing cavers. What could possibly go wrong?

The boat banged its merry way along the near canal. I was the only passenger on this Stygian voyage. The boatman, didn't need to say a word ... and didn't. Even when I said cheers mate, see you in a few hours, he just grinned in a Hammerish way, like he knew something I didn't - and, as I carried my two loads by the Bottomless Pit, towards the far canal, I'm sure that I heard a low, fiendish chuckle. But, when I looked back, the boat had gone and I was alone.

The far canal was brimming full with deep, cold water and I lowered myself in. The rope bag was on my shoulders, and the bag with the tools and the drill in I held up above the water, and, taking care to walk slowly, so my feet could detect those objects which trip and make you stumble, I made my way along the canal.

Passing roaring overflow dams, and taking care to avoid the sandbag dam which Steve Knox and I built the other summer to try to retain some water for replenishing the other canal, I slowly approached the ominous rumble which I knew was The Bung. Round a subtle corner, past the skeletal ribs of an old miner's boat, I met the gate which was locked as usual. The key was around my neck and I carefully stooped and slid it into the steel padlock before turning it to release the chain which held the gate. Passing through and, knowing it was Saturday, and the Peak Speedwell had many visitors, I carefully re-locked the chain and approached the roaring Bung.

Cold deep water flooded over the new coping stone which Ralph had placed upon the dished walling of the Old Man's dam. The new ladder stood cold and proud dividing the torrent into two heavy cataracts which tumbled into the black of the Lower Bung passageway. "Glad I don't have to go down that," I thought as I turned ... and then I was sure that I heard the same low, fiendish chuckle. But, looking back, there was no one there.

Up until now the water had been deep and cold. Passing from the Bung into the passage towards Pit Props, it got deeper still and I waded very carefully with the drill bag held at head height. "Bob Toogood's going to have fun here," I thought.

But it wasn't long before I reached the Whirlpool junction with its Via Ferrata (wire well under the water) and the huge torrent surging out of the side-passage. Interestingly, the Whirlpool Passage was providing the bulk of the water, and the stream up towards the Boulder Piles was quiet and of much more normal proportions.

Reaching the Boulder Piles, I turned right into the connecting passage which leads to the ladderway and up into Leviathan. The pipe was working well, and the whole passage was dry. I climbed the ladders and examined the pipe as I went - looking for leaks (there were none) and points where an extra bolt might pull the ladder away from passing cavers.

Pushing the heavy draught-lid at the top of the ladders, I entered Leviathan itself, and, quickly sorting my equipment, I got out the camera and took some shots of the new hopper which Ade, Lee, Roy and Phil had brought in and set up to merge the two pipe-loads of water into one. I knew that, three weeks ago, Speedwell Cavern had been subjected to a severe flood and was pleased to see that the hopper looked exactly as it should. We seem to have arrived at a solution which works!



Having examined my colleagues' handywork, I set about drilling and placing the thunderbolts, based upon my examination as I climbed the ladder. It's a bit eerie working on your own, and you start talking to yourself, singing (but never whistling) and even having small arguments.

I had just about finished my jobs when, suddenly, I heard voices, and as I pulled back up the ladders,

Phil Burke appeared in front of me followed by Dan Hibberts, Rory Gregory and Bob Toogood. The Eldon lads. We had a brief chat and then they set off to go into White River, while I collected my tackle and started to tidy up and finish off.

After a quick brew and a bite to eat, I descended the Speedwell Stream and passed the Bung making for the Speedwell Gate. The bags were feeling quite heavy by now, but I knew it wouldn't be long before I was on the boat heading out.

Placing the key into the circular steel padlock I tried to turn it ... but it refused. This is a normal occurrence, caused by internal corrosion and grit entering the lock during floods, and the usual remedy is to gently "waggle" the key until it starts to move in the correct direction. This I did, but, to my utter dismay, the key simply snapped in two under very little pressure, leaving me with half a key in my hand, the other half in the locked lock and a distant, low, fiendish chuckle echoing around the passageway somewhere behind me.

So ... after thinking various things which translate to "well I never" and "my word" (but which had much, much more feeling) I thought about my options, of which there were several - but my main concern was the Crewe Drill. Obviously, I could leave the drill here, hung from a high point on the gate, or even down at the foot of Block Hall. But I didn't know when would be the next opportunity for retrieving it and didn't want to risk leaving such a valuable item. I didn't think the sneaky route via Troubled Waters would be the best route for the health of the drill, and, for a minute or two, I considered following the Eldon team up into White River - but they were travelling way too slowly, and I didn't want to risk getting back to Speedwell after closing time. The time factor applied to the Titan route too ... which left Colostomy Crawl.

Colostomy Crawl is now a shadow of its former self. Evil, wet, crawly bits could now be walked (with a bit of a stoop) and it might just work. But could I manage to keep the drill bag out of the water? Well there is only one way to find out!

Carefully descending the Bung ladder, holding the drill at arm's length out of the water, I made my way downstream and called in at Block Hall. Sure enough some of the Eldon lads were still queued up below the ropes - I chatted to Phil for a few minutes, making sure that he knew where I was headed (just in case) and then set off downstream in search of the Short Bypass.

At Egnaro Aven, I removed any dangly bits from my SRT rig- the only reason I was wearing this was so that I could have hands-free while drilling in the Boulder Piles ladderway; I'd also brought a rope, just in case, but this had proved unnecessary. I considered removing my rig totally, but decided to keep it on so that I could drag my rope bag behind me - leaving two free hands to try to protect the drill bag.

And so, in some monstrous parody of a limbo dancer's medicine ball exercise, I slowly made my way through Colostomy Crawl, Liam's Way and the Trenches, and, it was with some relief that I reached the ladder on Fawltly Towers.

The rest of the trip was a bit of an anti-climax really:- stagger and stomp through the Upper Gallery; wash off in the streamway after Victoria Aven; the long grind up the road to Speedwell and John Harrison - "Do you want the good news, or the bad news?"

As I write this, the lock is still locked. But Keith Joule is planning a solo trip to sort the lock out later this week - with ear-plugs ... so he won't have to hear that low, fiendish chuckle ....

*Alan Brentmall*

## **News from Matt Ryan:-**

*Photo shoot going well, back in Chengdu now having averaged two photos a day (but two really good photos!), back again next weekend to hang around on rope for several hours to photograph Cloud Ladder Hall (anything between the eighth and second largest underground chamber depending on who you ask). Sarawak Chamber is bigger, although Robbie's the only person who has seen both and he isn't convinced. We're hoping Kevin Dixon will come out next year with his laser scanner and make a 3D model of it for us.*

*A couple of great photos with Robbie -- 9 hours in chamber with 123 flash bulbs fired and me dangling on the pitch for 7 1/2 hours. Was very glad to get back to the floor at the end of it!  
Matt*

## **Forthcoming meets**

2 June Nenthead  
17 June Ibeth Peril  
30 June Otter, DCRO training  
15 July Shuttleworth Pot  
11/12 August Titan  
12? August Miss Grace's Lane ?  
25 August Pasture Gill, Depart for China.  
8 Sept White Scar