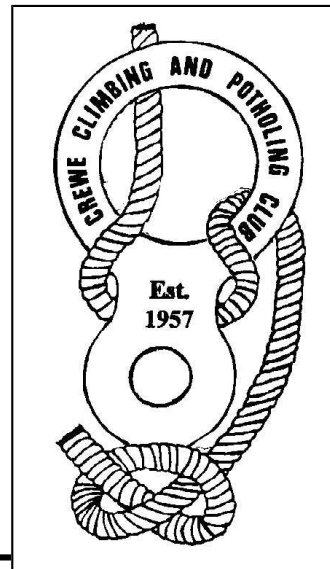


C.C.P.C. Newsletter 109. October 2013

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RALPH'S REVENGE!

Every September, DCRO holds a special exercise on a Saturday, usually somewhere in the Castleton area and which is followed by a team social gathering, which takes the form of an informal discussion about team matters, followed by a meal. This year's September exercise was something different, however, as Mick Earle, whose job it was to organise it, decided to dedicate the day to Ralph, and the exercise became "Ralph's Revenge"!

I had very little pre-knowledge of the event, and turned up at the Speedwell overflow car park at 9am not knowing what to expect. The actual start time of the exercise was spread over an hour or so, to allow some parties to enter the Peak-Speedwell system by boat, kindly provided by John Harrison, while later teams would go in via the main Peak Cavern entrance.

At the briefing, we were told that the exercise was to be a search of most of the Peak-Speedwell system, with teams looking at the various sumps, including Cohesion, White River, Pilkington's Series, the Assault Course and the lower Speedwell Streamway. The accent was on search and familiarisation, the latter being something Ralph was keen to improve within the team, and the "casualties" were coloured balloons. And, of course, it was competitive - points being given for finding the balloons, and more points given if the balloons were evacuated intact - i.e. unburst, still alive!!

On the back of the exercise was a series of tests which were being performed on the prototype Nicola III radio which will eventually replace the aging

Hayphones which we currently use. These tests were to be performed by Pete Allwright from CRO, supported by DCRO personnel. In addition to this, we were joined by a group from the Irish Cave Rescue Organisation who had come over specially to see how the teams over here operate.

I was leading one of three teams which went into Speedwell on the boat. Our task was to search the Pit Props passages, Whirlpool Inlet, Troubled Waters, the Assault Course and Pilkington's Series as far as the foot of the first pitch. The boat in was pretty full, with around 20 rescuers and one Speedwell helmsman, and it took quite a while to get everybody through the Far Canal to the gate, which I unlocked, and left unlocked, to cater for any contingencies that arose - I notified Bjorn, the Speedwell Manager, that I would be doing this so that he could arrange for it to be locked on the next cavers trip in.

My team comprised Jenny Drake, Heather Simpson, Christine Wilson, Steve PA and Dave Ottewell, so CCPC was well represented, and we diligently searched our area, finding four out of the six balloons, and taking in a large area of Speedwell which was quite new to some of us.

To make our impact on the day-to-day running of the Speedwell Show Cave as small as possible, we were instructed to exit the system via Egnaro Aven, Colostomy Crawl, Liam's Way, the Trenches and Treasury Chamber. Not the horror show it once was, this route is still an excellent all-round body exercise, with mud still featuring prominently on its list of attributes, and, strangely, two of our casualties (mine and Jenny's) decided to "expire" simultaneously somewhere towards the drop from Colostomy into Liam's, with very loud bangs!

There was also an amusing incident as we exited the main entrance of Peak Cavern, when a group of tourists looked questioningly at Christine, who was dressed in full caver's gear and carrying a blue and a yellow balloon. They were told that she was "getting married - this is a local custom"!

The evening's social session was partly a debrief of the callout to JH on 07/09 and partly a discussion on current DCRO issues, with SARCALL featuring quite highly in the list of topics. But it was also dedicated to Ralph, with films and pictures being shown throughout the evening, and Bill giving a brief talk on the work which Ralph has done for DCRO over many years.

One thing Ralph did, of course, was to maintain a very strong and positive presence within DCRO from the ranks of Crewe CPC, and it is reassuring that this presence was so still prominent on this exercise. Hopefully the link

will be sustained in the future, because, as Ralph often told us, cave rescue isn't a service for cavers, it is a service BY cavers, and Crewe have a great deal to contribute.

Lathkill-Head Top Entrance Sunday, 1st September 2013

After being unable to take part in the Scottish 'bivi' trip, or the Club trip to Ireby cavern, Paul Nixon, John Preston and I managed to find time for a visit to Lathkill Head Top Entrance (opened in 1991). Our three became four when we met Peter Dell in Monyash, but a crowded café meant we had to go caving without stocking up with bacon butties first !

For those who don't know the location, there is a pleasant walk down the dale from the parking spot, then a track up to the edge of the fields overlooking the limestone gorge below. We passed by the locked lid in the cap above 'Garden Path Entrance' and soon afterwards arrived at the obscure lid of 'Top Entrance', almost hidden in the long grass in the field corner.

There is a stainless-steel belay stake a metre or so back from the lid (Paul and I fitted it, with Steve Evans and Rob Farmer, way back on 12th March, 2000 – sadly we lost Rob to cancer, some time later) and the whole route can be rigged from that stake with a single 35 metre rope. After my previous visit, struggling to get out through a modest, uphill squeeze in the lower part of the entrance shaft, I had brought an 8 metre electron ladder to make the exit easier.

Paul rigged; dropping the rope down the initial 'ginged' shaft for the first three metres, to a ledge, then down through the sideways squeeze for the final couple of metres drop to the head of the main pitch.

A 'Y'-hang is normally rigged there from a stal column and a jammed chisel (this was the highest point reached when the original explorers climbed up the natural shaft from the huge chamber below). I was glad we had a back-up to the stake above, as there is no way of knowing how far the chisel is driven into the wall !

The first part of the main drop is down a stal-covered wall, for about 7 metres to a sloping ledge, where there are two bolts for a rebelay ('Y'-hang) next to a piece of 'hammered-in' metal tube. A couple of metres below, an in-situ sling from a drilled thread on the opposite wall can be clipped as a deviation for the final 13 metre drop through the roof of an enormous chamber – 'The Waiting Room'.

We were soon all down, without incident, landing near the top of a steep boulder slope. The chamber is superbly decorated, and we spent some time just taking photos and enjoying the view, before heading off down the taped trail which led across the base of the chamber towards a jumble of huge boulders on the far side. During my first visit to the chamber, on 5th April 1992, there was no tape and no path, and we found the way on by squirming down each likely looking hole until we discovered the correct way. I know that conservation is important, and there is probably no better way, but the obvious taped route we followed had taken something away from the experience.

The obvious route was steeply down through the narrow gaps between the boulders and the chamber wall, then a low crawl led into a flat-out slither between stal features on a smooth clay floor. Immediately ahead was the brink of a 2 metre drop into the river channel, which, at this point is the base of another large chamber: 'Lathkiller Hall'.

There were more opportunities for photos, with straw stalactites high above in roof pockets, but the River Lathkill was absent, due to the dry summer resulting no water flowing through the main underground route accessible by cavers.

Lathkiller Hall is a strange place, with dark walls and a gloomy, brooding atmosphere. When the river is flowing it enters the chamber from a wide, low, bedding-plane passage at the south-western end, then runs the length of the chamber before disappearing down through the Lathkiller Boulder Choke. Lathkiller Hall was first entered by cavers after a semi-vertical route was engineered up through the choke from the flat out 'Tiger 3' passage about 10 metres below. It is an intimidating place, and there is always the feeling that it is quite normal for these lower passages to fill completely, and then for the water to back up through the choke. In extreme conditions, it seems likely that as the water level rises it will fill the clay-floored crawl and the bouldery climb before creating a pool in the base of 'The Waiting Room' chamber. When we had entered the chamber earlier we had noted that the formations were clean and white on the roof and walls, but were discoloured by silt deposits in the lower part of the chamber

As there was no water flowing it would have been a good opportunity to push on upstream along the flat-out crawl of 'Tiger 4', but we were all nursing old injuries and decided to leave it for another time

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Back in 'The Waiting Room' I wanted to find the small collection of bones I had photographed back in 1992. At that time I had assumed they were the remains of a bat (cave = bat !!). Fortunately the bones are in a slightly out-of-the-way spot, high up in the boulder pile, and we found that they have been left apparently undisturbed in the 21 years since I first saw them. As extra protection, we added a small loop of conservation tape (scavenged from the marked pathway), and Peter took a couple of snaps

Our exit was straightforward, with the first two out being treated to a display by the Red Arrows (actually performing for the crowds at Chatsworth). I was last up, derigging, and was happy to use the electron ladder for extra purchase to get through the entrance squeeze.

This was an excellent trip - don't forget you need to follow the approved access route, and have your BCA Insurance card with you for inspection if requested.

Cavers: Peter Dell, Steve Knox, Paul Nixon, John Preston.

Footnote: When the photographs were examined later, the bat skeleton looked less like a bat. I wanted to claim it as the remains of a previously undiscovered dinosaur (very small), but our Club expert (Dave Skingsley) pointed out that the skull had a large eye orbit and one bone looked suspiciously like a rabbit hip bone. He suggested it was the remains of a lost bunny, but hopefully not Alice's White rabbit (- no watch nearby, so I think we were safe there).

Eventually Dave concluded that the bones probably belonged to a very rare, juvenile specimen of *Doyouthinkiamlostasaurus bunnyus*. Enough said.

Steve Knox. 07-09-2013

a juvenile *Doyouthinkiamlostasaurus bunnyus*

Enough said.

P8 SRT TRAINING SESSION - Thursday 19/09/2013

Many thanks to everybody who came on this trip for all the help - it was a great trip. There were 12 altogether with four beginners and 8 helping, rigging, brushing up on their SRT, washing their oversuits or simply enjoying P8 at its finest.

I was a bit worried when I saw the forecast on Wednesday evening - a depression to the west would be bringing a warm front and then a cold front sweeping across the country, following a fairly wet week. We discussed the prospect of this over an extremely substantial breakfast (many thanks to Grace for this) at the Chapel, but decided to go for P8 anyway, as the heavy rain in the second front looked as though it would be fairly brief and followed immediately by windy drier weather. Just to be on the safe side, we took a polythene exposure bag to "cloak" the entrance stream. Breakfast over, we moved up to join the rest of the party at Perryfoot. The warm front had by now arrived, and kitting up at the little car park was quite wet!!

Well, the bag wasn't really big enough for the stream, so entry was a series of wet showers all round, but I've seen it much worse. A university freshers' trip was already down the cave, but, as they were using ladder and line, I doubted we'd have too many problems. Jenny and Rob had already set off to rig the Waterfall Pitch, the Bad Step Traverse and the Iron Ladder Pitch, and, once everybody was in, I headed down to the little climb just before Idiot's Leap which takes you to the Bony Pitch. Leaving a knotted rope on the up-climb, I rigged Bony and, once all the beginners were at the pitch head, Heather gave a very good demonstration of how to use a stop descender. Then our cavers each had a go on the pitch itself, while we used the "abseiling into the loop" system for safety back-up.

The passage down to Pitch 1 might be a walk in the park to some of our battle-scarred Peak District cavers, but, to somebody at the very start of their caving career, it's a series of quite daunting obstacles which test your climbing skills, your nerve and your perseverance. None-the-less our newcomers managed all this well, and, eventually, we all arrived at the pitch head where we set up the system Ralph used to use, with members of the group at the start, mid-point and ledge, watching each caver down the short abseil and then along the traverse. This took a little time, and once we were all along the ledge, we met the University cavers as they finished derigging their ropes on the Bad Step.

All the rigging had now been completed, thanks to Rob and Jenny, so it was a straightforward job to keep an eye on each other across the Bad Step, over the hole above the true Pitch 2 and through the little window to the giant boss where the old Iron Ladder used to sit.

Now on their 3rd abseil, the new-comers were getting quite slick at descending using the stop, and, once at the foot of the pitch, Keith demonstrated the method

of ascending the rope, using the tried and tested “frog system”. As is normally the case, ascending a rope was found to be easier, and a little less daunting, than descending, although muscles unaccustomed to the rigours of moving through a cave were probably tiring a little by now. The main problem, however, is usually getting off the rope at the top, and carefully attaching and removing various pieces of kit in the correct order.

Everybody managed OK, and soon we were making our way back to the Waterfall Pitch where Jenny was installed to “mind” folk as they traversed in to the watery, vertical section - where Heather was waiting to ensure safe arrival.

The last pitch (Bony) simply reinforced the technique, and, eventually (and a little wetter and wearier) our group reassembled at the foot of the entrance waterfall, which was now a little bigger and more forceful, and had long-since spat out our puny bag-cloak. but, with a great team effort, we soon had everybody and all the tackle bags back on the surface, safe and sound.

It's fantastic to get such a good response to a training meet, and a good reflection on the club that we can put this sort of thing on efficiently, safely and at fairly short notice. Many thanks to all involved - everybody seemed to enjoy the whole experience, I know I did.

Alan Brentnall

RATCHWOOD FOUNDER MINE, Middleton by Wirksworth

April 2013

CCPC members present: Jenny Drake, Dave G, Dave Skingsley, Brian Edmonds , Mark Lovatt.

About a decade ago, I had a very enjoyable escapade down Bage Mine with the Wirksworth Mines Research Group. I remember being shown around by a 14 year old girl who scampered around like a monkey whilst we puffed and panted to keep up with her, then Darren nearly got his knee-caps removed when he misjudged the width of the manhole during the powered winch ascent.

Brian e-mailed to say that CCPC had been invited by his WMRG contacts to visit Ratchwood Founder Mine' I knew it would be a fun trip so I did a little research. The founding of the mine can be dated very precisely to 28th September 1696. 'Ratchwood' means 'outlaw's wood'. It was worked on and off for more than 170 years, yielding many thousands of tons of ore (much more than the present known workings could have produced) and the area is drained by at least three soughs (Northcliffe, Cromford and Hannage) giving a potential depth of 440ft. I replied to Brian to say 'count me in'.

A tripod and the best of the three Wirksworth winches were assembled above the 260' shaft. I examined the winch whilst the first two local lads descended the shaft – what a

superb piece of kit! Purpose built from Bosch parts, 500' of cable and precision controls. Dave S was just about to clip into the bosons chair when the winchman switched off the engine

“Just had a message from below – there’s been a collapse in the level – trips off”

We stood scratching our chins etc and discussed where else we could go (with just 20' of rope which I had in the car boot) when a second message came up the shaft. The advance party reported that they could clear the collapse and so the trip was back on. Apparently, this sort of thing is quite common in Ratchwood Mine; the wooden stemples which formerly supported the stacked deads in the roof had disappeared a long time ago). I went down second after Dave - what a super shaft! perfectly round and coated in moon-milk. The 60ft or so of ginging which held back the shale layer appeared to be hovering above the rotting remains of a wooden crib which was probably installed whilst William III was on the throne. I made a mental note not to touch anything.



The winch came to a very smooth halt at the 160' level and I followed instructions to swing myself into the passageway.

‘Don’t pull on that ‘fixed’ rope – it’s not attached to anything’

I made another mental note.

The five CCPC members assembled in the passageway before proceeding, mostly on hands and knees under some very dodgy looking packs of deads and over various roof falls. I took my mind off the condition of the place by marvelling at the ghostly outline of a long rotted wooden railtrack in the clay floor and noting that the passage was hand-picked and apparently of great age. Heaps of deads hung from the ceiling supported by sturdy but invisible wooden stemples (at least that’s what I told myself!)

60ft of ginging through the shale layer (photo – Brian Edmonds)

We came to a clay floored ore shoot (“Just lie on your back and slide down feet first”) which landed in a slightly less ancient passage, and then entered a really curious section where the passage closed down, not really a squeeze, but a hole just larger than body size and one body length long which opening out again into stooping, slightly more modern looking passage. I can only think that it was a ventilation hole, punched through the rock to air the newer workings a couple of centuries previously. This time, the floor had iron rail tracks (I saw at least four different gauges of rail throughout the mine from different periods of activity; the mine must have been so profitable that it was not even worthwhile messing around reclaiming old ‘scrap; track).



The roof was supported by the ghosts of long dead stemples
(photo – Brian Edmonds)

We crossed another vertical winze (protected by a piece of washing line strung between two ancient pitons) and came to the ‘corkscrew oreshoot’. I made note of the instructions (“Don’t let go of the rope and don’t fall”) and set off. It was like a fairground ride with near vertical sections which constantly changed direction. Just when I thought it was never going to end, I landed in a passage behind Jenny. The shoot (again protected by washing line) was 70’ deep.

One more oreshoot (our guide suddenly remembered that “this bit is ‘orrible”). He appeared to be right – it looked vertical and was ‘protected’ with yet more washing line tied to a single piton which pointed in the same direction as the rope.

‘You must be joking’ chorused three of our party (including me) but after a demonstration of the necessary technique which involved setting off by chimneying down the shoot, we regained our nerve and followed. This dropped into the lowest dry level where the WMRG members were busy in a very muddy dig. This part of the mine is believed to date from 1839 and extraction records show this to be a year of great productivity and so potentially this could be the site of vast workings, We were now 400’ below surface and the passage was draughting strongly.

We all peered down a hole in the floor. This has been descended down to water and is believed to be on the line of the re-routed Cromford Sough, well beyond the present limit of access from the 'Bear Pit' tail.

Return to surface was not as difficult as I had expected – just very thrutchy in places and I was pleased to see that the 'string' over the vertical oreshoot had been backed up with a proper rope and belays. The winchman was probably the most professional operator I have ever seen. Many thanks to our hosts, the Wirksworth Mines Research Group for an excellent trip.

PS A few weeks later, whilst camping in Middleton, I got into conversation with a local who guided me into the Tarmac quarry (private property) to view a ginged climbing shaft. It had appeared overnight a few months previously (I guess that the flimsy wooden 'cap' had collapsed) and it was about 30' deep to rubble. It was directly above where the Middlepeak vein should meet the shale cover and approximately in the direction of the WMRG dig.

Mark Lovatt

The Curious Incident in Slinter Woods.

Alan Brentnall

Those of you interested in the colourful mining history of the Peak District will, no doubt, have come across the name Paul Chandler in your travels. I too keep bumping into Paul, one way or another, whether it's introducing me to Wad Mining in Borrowdale or secret gritstone caves on Kinder Scout, we often seem to converse either by phone or email. And so it was, in May 2012, that I received the following email:

Hi Alan,

A mining colleague of mine, asked if I could identify a mine level & shaft, they came across whilst exploring in Slingtor Wood near Cromford. Having taken some pictures, I asked if he could send them to me to identify, which I couldn't. On one of the pictures at the bottom of a shaft (approx 20ft), there was some clothing?, which if you rotate the photo through 90 degrees, looks suspicious. Your thoughts? I would be available, either Saturday or Sunday to undertake a reccy, if required and I know, my mining colleague would be interested in exploring them also and could take us directly to location.

With regards, Paul.

He had attached a picture. The mine level is about 20ft lower down and may connect to shaft pictured. My colleague didn't explore underground on this occasion. The approx location is NGR SK2840 5710



My curiosity aroused, I looked at the attached pictures and saw, or at least thought I saw, something which might possibly be ... a body!!

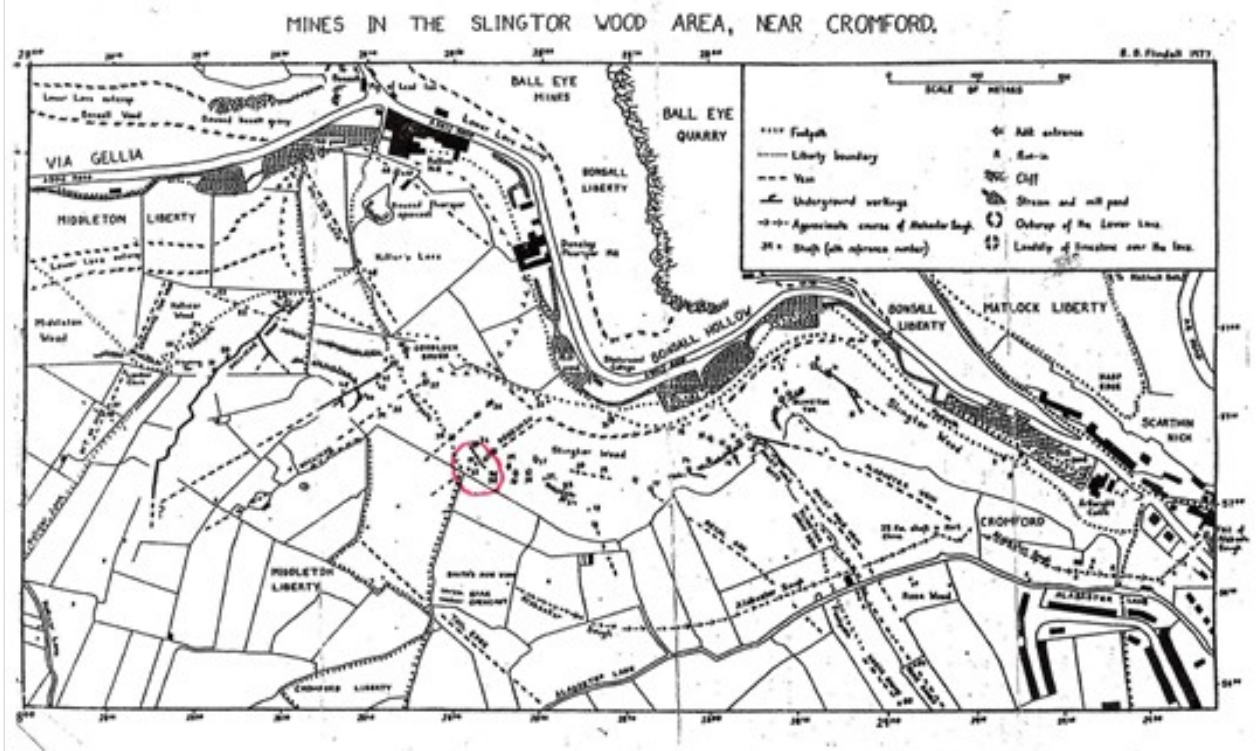
Well, what do you do? In 2011, May was my month for being DCRO Duty Controller, which basically meant that I was "IT" when it came down to deciding whether to deploy the team. Of course, it might not be a body, in which case I'd look a bit silly ... but, if it was, and we ignored it, and it was discovered by some oddball caver from Eldon PC in a year's time ... it didn't bear thinking about

So ... I picked up the phone, and called the Police. Told them what I'd seen, arranged to get the pictures emailed to their HQ and set up a meet to go and find out what the mystery object was.

Not wanting to make too much of a fool of myself, I decided that life was probably not under threat (or no longer - the pictures were months old when I received them) and so I didn't call the whole team out, concentrating on a small group made up of people who lived local to the area, and who had a good knowledge of the woods and the mines thereabouts.

And so, on Sunday 20 May 2012 (the day after I broke the Speedwell key while on the inside of the gate, and had to negotiate Colostome Crawl with a bag of rope and a bag of tools, while keeping the Crewe drill out of the water - Duty Controller or what???), I arranged to meet some DCRO members at the little wooden hut cafe, just up from Via Gellia, for breakfast - while waiting for our Police Presence to turn up. The latter turned out to be a female sergeant and a male constable,

both uniform (so, no suspicious circumstances anticipated) and both ready to go.
go.



It was a warm day, and it's a fair old climb up the hill to the top of the woods, but once up aloft, our labours still continued as the "witness" (Paul's PDMHS colleague) had had a very circuitous ramble when he originally took the shots, and finding the specific entrance took quite a long time, involving traversing some very steep and awkward slopes, not to mention most varieties of prickly bush which are native to the depths of the Via Gellia valley.

But eventually, as we know, all good things come to an end, and it was with some relief that Matt and I stumbled across what could only be the shaft and adit we'd seen in the photographs. A flurry of excited radio messages soon brought the now-dispersed group together again, and, with some trepidation, we started to consider examining "the scene".

I looked to the lady sergeant for advice, thinking that, as foul play could well be involved, there should be some kind of standard protocols which we ought to be adopting - putting on paper suits and shoe covers, agreeing on a standard line of approach, snapping on washing-up gloves ... you know the sort of thing. What Dixon of Dock Green used to call Preserving the Scene.

But no ... “Get on with it,” was the curt reply, so I turned to Matt and asked him to do the honours, which he did, approaching the shaft, and peering down. He turned back

to me, face serious and ashen. “You’d better come and have a look,” he said, whereupon I leaned over his shoulder and looked down to see the badly battered visage ... of a **knitted doll!**

So, when the annual figures come out in Descent, showing the statistics for the year - fatalities, injuries, lost souls, stranded farm animals etc, you’ll now see a brand new category - cuddly toys.

But remember, you saw it here first!

- **Meets etc.:**

Date ‘13	Venue	Comments
Mon. 7 Oct.	C.C.P.C. Meeting – 8.30 pm..	‘Bleeding Wolf’, Scholar Green.
Sun. 13 Oct.	Knotlow /Hillocks System, Derbys.	Complex mine system with various routes and straightforward SRT options. Lower levels can be wet.
Sat. 26 Oct.	Out Sleets Beck Pot, Penyghent Gill, Wharfedale, Yorks..	Streamway with 3 short pitches. Can be very wet, (possibly too wet in October):- weather dependent.
Mon. 4 Nov.	C.C.P.C. Meeting – 8.30 pm..	‘Bleeding Wolf’, Scholar Green.
Sun. 10 Nov.	Peak Cavern, Derbys.	Classic cave system. Choice of SRT or no SRT !
Sat. 23 Nov.	Notts Pot II, Leck Fell, Yorks.	Stunning streamway & formations. No SRT needed.
Mon. 2 Dec.	C.C.P.C. Meeting – 8.30 pm..	‘Bleeding Wolf’, Scholar Green.
Sun. 8 Dec.	Sell Gill Holes, Penyghent, Yorks..	Classic SRT system, with various options. Good SRT training site.
Sat. 21 Dec.	Giant’s Hole, Derbys..	Various options. Good SRT training if required.

Finally – everyone says that they enjoy the newsletter but that it is too infrequent – this is because almost no-one contributes! (only three authors in this edition). Tell us your views, stories, grumbles - **GET WRITING!**