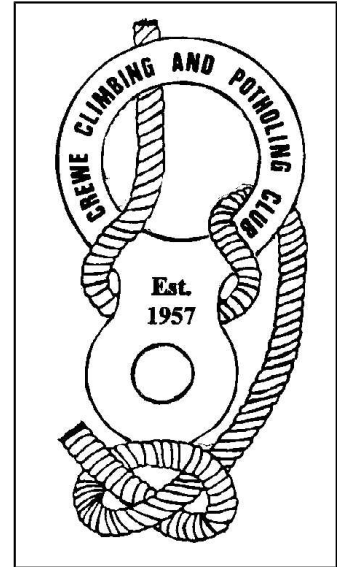


C.C.P.C.

Newsletter 114

March 2016

Log on to www.ccpc.org.uk



February 2016 SRT Training Event.

CCPC is made up of a busy and active group of cavers, enjoying trips of all standards, and frequently requiring SRT skills to enable us to move safely and independently through our underground route of choice. It is a vital part of Club-caving that we look out for each other during every trip, and the newer, or less experienced club members will always benefit from the experience and practised skills of the more established members of the party. Despite the confidence that we have in our existing methods of passing on practical tips and help to those still perfecting their techniques, we are aware that there is a huge benefit in accessing the knowledge and skills of qualified professional instructors. In order to maintain our standards, and to ensure that we are up to date with changes in equipment and techniques, we have chosen to try to include at least one formal training event in our crowded programme each year.

This year, in response to requests from members, we opted to arrange a course which aimed to give newer members a good grounding in standard SRT techniques, and to reinforce good practice and improve SRT skills for any of our more experienced members who wanted to review their current practices.

Clearly, in order to have an effective session for all those involved, we need to use a non-cave teaching environment, preferably indoors, with toilet facilities, and with heating and lighting as a bonus. Inevitably this has meant using a climbing wall, as we benefit from

having a range of pseudo-natural vertical surfaces, including overhangs, with safe high-level anchors, so that numerous pitch and rigging situations can be simulated. Finding such a location, that can be hired for exclusive use for a day, has not always been easy or financially possible. This year our Club Training Officer, Alan Brentnall, found a superb venue in the indoor climbing wall at White Hall Outdoor Education Centre [www.whitehall.derbyshire-outdoors.org], owned and operated by Derbyshire County Council, on the northern outskirts of Buxton.

Our instructor for the day had to be a skilled professional, and we were fortunate that Alan secured the services of Jules Barrett, C.I.C.. With twelve C.C.P.C. members attending (we limited the numbers to ensure that all participants had a quality experience), and supported by Alan Brentnall, it was clear that Jules would have his hands full. He proved to be more than up to the task, and the day ran like clock-work, with everyone fully engaged in the discussions and practice, and the room frequently filled with dangling bodies and helpful comments. Being able to have plenty of space to rig sufficient ropes for everyone to be active was particularly useful.

Without going into fine detail, it is worth looking at the day's programme. We all took our own SRT rigs and Jules started off by leading a discussion based on 'what, why, and where' ! It is surprising how many variations in kit choice and placement you can find when you put twelve cavers together in one room. It was interesting to see that some of the slightly unusual arrangements ('though all completely safe) were based on how individuals had been taught years before, and they had seen no reason to change their set up. The first thing to be clear about is that there is no 'perfect' way for everyone to set up an SRT rig. People are different (height, reach, weight, strength, etc.), and what works for one person may not be as good for someone else. It comes down to personal choice. Jules made his own recommendations, including:

- Long cows-tail with HMS screw-gate karabiner and short cows-tail with HMS snap-gate karabiner, both cows-tails tied with a barrel-knot to the karabiner (leaving long ends), and with an overhand knot to attach them to the main harness maillon. The knot at the karabiner end of the long cows-tail should just reach the bridge of your nose, and the end of the karabiner on the short cows-tail should just reach your chin when it is down on your chest.

- Footloop and safety link from one length of 8mm static rope, tied with an overhand knot at a 7mm, long-maillon (to attach to the main harness maillon – not a karabiner, as there is a risk of loading across the gate), tied with a bowline-on-a-bight to an oval screw-gate karabiner (to attach to the hand-jammer), and tied with a bowline to create the foot loop.
- Use an oval screw-gate karabiner to attach the descender to the main harness maillon, and use a steel braking karabiner (there are some specially designed for this).
- Extra kit worth carrying: a knife on an oval karabiner, and a mini (or micro) traxion – good when hauling kit, and can be used to replace a lost or damaged jammer.

I think we all learned a few minor tweaks which might make our rigs more efficient in the future, but everyone was found to be safe to proceed.

Jules wanted to give everyone the opportunity to practise and deal with the basic scenarios experienced on a 'normal' trip, leading to less usual situations which can catch out the unprepared caver. Personal safety was emphasised throughout.

My notes were made during the course (not always easy, as things are going on all the time) to help me to remember the advice given, and to enable me to practise some of the techniques later. I believe these notes are accurate, but the reader should check all information independently, and ensure their own personal safety at all times. Practising any SRT techniques should be done in company, in a safe environment.

The morning practical sessions:

- Traverse lines: rigging choices, knots, and use to approach and leave the pitch head. – traverse lines should always start with two anchors (more about this below).
- Getting on the pitch rope and descent from the pitch head – ascenders should be attached to the harness and ready for use in case you need to change to ascent..
- Ascending the pitch and getting off the pitch rope safely – keep the descender 'in place' and ready to use if there is the slightest chance you might have to change to descent.
- Changing direction on the pitch rope: from ascent to descent (this way first, as we were using the climbing wall, starting at floor level), and then from descent to ascent. Jules emphasised the

importance of learning these skills. The length of the foot-loop safety-link should allow there to be some slack in the link when standing up in the foot-loop. Changing from ascent to descent seemed to be the most awkward – hanging on the Croll on the pitch-rope, with the hand-jammer in place, and the foot-loop in use; thread up the descender (Stop) on the rope below the Croll and put a hard-lock on; slide the hand-jammer down the rope as far as possible while still making it possible to stand up in the foot-loop, to allow the pitch-rope to be released from the Croll; then sit back carefully to allow the descender to align correctly and take the caver's weight; reach up to the hand-jammer and use a finger to depress the cam, allowing the jammer to slide down the rope, but don't remove it yet; undo the hard lock on the descender, and make a very short test descent; if everything is O.K., remove the hand-jammer, and continue the descent.

- Passing a re-belay during ascent – clip the karabiner on the long cows-tail into the knot loop, or karabiner at the re-belay anchor; push the foot-jammer up the lower rope towards the anchor knot (not too close); step up in the foot loop, and in one smooth movement, remove the Croll from the lower rope, and transfer to the upper rope; transfer the hand-jammer to the upper rope; check all is OK, then remove cows-tail and continue ascent.
- Passing a re-belay during descent – descend until level with the rebelay anchors; clip the short cows-tail karabiner into the anchor knot loops, and the long cows-tail karabiner into the hanging loop formed by the bottom of the upper-rope; continue to descend until the short cows-tail becomes tight through supporting the caver's weight; remove the descender from the bottom of the upper-rope, and re-thread onto the lower rope, adjusting it to just below the anchor knot, and apply a hard-lock; step up, using the hanging loop of the upper-rope to stand in (or natural foot-holds, or even a foot loop clipped directly into the anchor-knot loops) to gain sufficient height to unclip the short cows-tail; lower yourself until your full weight is taken by the descender; make a very short test descent, and if all is OK, remove the long cows-tail and continue descent.
- Down-prussiking is often useful or necessary during some of these manoeuvres – while suspended from the Croll the hand-jammer should be moved down by using a finger to depress the cam, allowing the jammer to slide down the rope a short distance to a lower position; stand up in the foot-loop, and while using a finger to depress the cam, move the Croll down the rope a short distance to a lower position; then repeat whole sequence as many times as necessary.

Each element was discussed, and demonstrated to the group before individuals moved off to practise, with constant supervision throughout. Some ropes were rigged with more challenging situations to ensure that everyone had a chance to 'struggle and overcome'. After a sandwich break, taken in the superb dining room, as there were no residential courses at the weekend, we resumed activities with a few more problematic situations.

Passing deviations: many are straightforward with short deviation slings, or natural ledges or foot-holds to support the caver while he transfers the deviation karabiner to the pitch rope on the 'other' side of his descender or ascenders, but there can be some real horrors – dangling in space, two metres away from the wall, with a sharp angle change on the rope – enough to bring a few curses !

Jules gave us a full selection of nasties to attempt.

- Passing a long, awkward deviation during ascent – having two karabiners on the 'rope-end' of the deviation sling is a real bonus, as the caver can leave one clipped to the pitch rope, supporting the caver's weight; then pull up a bight of the slack rope from below (up the outside of the caver's thigh can work well), and clip it into the 'spare' karabiner; next simply requires muscle power (or a push against the wall), using the deviation the caver must pull himself towards the anchor until it is possible to unclip the original karabiner from the upper section of the pitch rope, leaving the karabiner on the sling; continue ascent.
- Passing a deviation during descent – descend normally until level with the deviation, then lock off the descender, and use the deviation sling to pull far enough towards the anchor (or push off the opposing wall) to make it possible to unclip the deviation karabiner from the pitch rope below the descender and re-clip it to the rope above.

Some course members pointed out that they often clip a cows-tail in to the deviation sling if there is any risk of 'losing contact' with the sling during this process, especially if it is one of those long, awkward types ! Two karabiners on the deviation sling should make this unnecessary.

- Adding an extra rope to the bottom of the pitch rope you are hanging on, while well away from a wall, then passing the knot you have made, during descent, and then during ascent – pitch ropes should always be packed for use with a knot already tied in the end; a single figure-of-eight knot (with a long tail) is adequate, but a figure-of-eight on a bight (with a long tail) is better as it provides a clip-in

loop. The problem of descending a pitch rope and finding it too short can be overcome if a second rope is available; stop short of the bottom knot on the pitch rope, and hard-lock the descender; pull up the pitch-rope from below, and back-thread the extra rope through the pitch-rope figure-of-eight knot, leaving a long tail hanging (if a simple back-threaded figure-of-eight knot has been used for the rope join, a clip-in loop will be needed in one, or both, of the long tails left); let the joined rope hang down below; remove the hard-lock from the descender and abseil down towards the knot, removing the braking karabiner just before coming up against the knot; no hard-lock of the descender is required, or possible; clip the long cows-tail karabiner into the clip-in loop formed by the figure-of-eight knot on a bight (or in the rope tails – see above); change from descent to ascent, and move a very short distance up the original pitch rope above the descender; remove the descender from the original pitch rope; back-prussik to just above the rope-join knot, then pull up the rope from below the knot and re-thread the descender, moving it up as close to the knot as possible, clip braking karabiner onto lower rope and lock off; step up in the foot loop and unclip the Croll from the upper rope, and lower back down so that the caver's weight is taken by the descender; reach up and remove the hand jammer from the upper rope; check all is OK and make a very short test descent; remove long cows-tail from loop, and continue descent as normal.

- Passing a knot in the rope while ascending is equally simple ! – prussik to just below the knot (keep the hand jammer a hand's breadth away from the knot, with the Croll close below); clip the long cows-tail into the loop provided at the knot; remove the hand-jammer from the lower rope and install it on the upper rope, leaving room for the Croll between the jammer and the knot; then in one fluid sequence of movements (sounds easy when you say it like that) step up in the foot loop, unclip the Croll from the lower rope, and replace it on the upper rope; check all is OK, and make a move upwards; un-clip the long cows-tail karabiner from the safety loop at the knot, and continue to ascend.

- More about anchors, pitch head and traverse rigging, and knot choices – all pitch heads are different, and the arrangement of available anchors will vary enormously, but some basic principles will remain the same: traverse lines should be used to approach a pitch head, starting with two anchors to create a shared-load Y-hang (which is very unlikely to be vertical, but the principle is the same); the initial knot could be a figure-of-eight on a bight (cavers have their own favourite knots, and may not agree with this choice) followed by an Alpine (or Caver's) Butterfly for the second part of the Y-hang (the

Alpine Butterfly is particularly good at handling a three-way loading); subsequent anchors leading to the pitch itself can be Alpine (or Caver's) Butterfly knots; where possible the traverse line should be kept high, and the direction of loading should be considered at each anchor point; while rigging, the caver should be protected by clipping his long cows-tail into the knot-loop formed at each previous anchor, as he sets up the next, and by clipping his short cows-tail into the traverse line; at the pitch head an equally loaded Y-hang should be rigged – two methods were discussed and demonstrated: the first used two Alpine Butterfly knots, with the first being the final anchor of the traverse line, followed by a short length of rope dropping towards the pitch, with a final long-loop Alpine Butterfly to reach up to the last anchor, thus creating the Y; the second method took the traverse line straight to a Bunny Knot (or alternatively to a Bowline-on-a-bight) which creates two rigging loops to attach to the two anchors, thus forming the Y. While rigging the final Y-hang over the pitch, it is often useful to tie an extra Alpine (or Caver's) Butterfly knot into the rope to create a loop (not attached to a fixed anchor) for the rigger to clip into – this can also be very useful when getting on or off the pitch-rope. Incidentally, the Caver's Butterfly knot is a bad choice for use when you have to 'tie out' a damaged section of rope during a trip, as it will change under load.

Most people were pretty tired by this point, and we spent the last thirty minutes sitting around tying and re-tying knots that we had thought we could tie blindfolded, but couldn't ! The Bunny Knot was a new one for me, but looks very useful (although I found it difficult to adjust the length of the 'ears').

Overall this was a superb day. The venue could not have been better, and we would recommend it to any club looking for an indoor training location in the Peak District. No doubt charges will vary, but we felt we had really good value for the exclusive hire, and the additional facilities were excellent. Our instructor was outstanding. He was professional, knowledgeable, and friendly, and the group members found him approachable, encouraging and a generally good mentor. We would definitely employ Jules again.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that the B.C.A. will give financial support to training events of this kind, which should make it feasible for any B.C.A. Member Club to add a formal caver-training session to their annual programme. The funding is there to be used !

Crewe Climbing & Potholing Club course members: Jenny Drake, Steve Knox, Adam Lowndes, April Lowndes, Rob Nevitt, Steve Pearson-Adams, Mick Potts, John Preston, Peter Savill, Dave Skingsley, Roy Rogers, Nicola Wellings.

[CCPC contact: mark@lovatt7468.freemove.co.uk www.CCPC.org.uk]

Instructor: Jules Barrett CIC, - supported and assisted by Alan Brentnall.

[jules@adventure-unlimited.co.uk <http://www.adventure-unlimited.co.uk>]

Colin S. Knox

The End-to-End that nearly Ended at the Start (Continued from CCPC NL No 113 - days 15 to end)

Day 15

Another wet day was forecast, although the rain would come as intermittent heavy showers. Today I would follow three rivers, all heavily swollen with flood waters from the recent rains. I just hoped that I wouldn't meet any floods myself!

I started by cycling up the Dovey and through Machynlleth and around to Carno where the road would lead me over to the Severn valley which I would then follow as far as Llanidloes and thence over to the Wye which would take me down to Builth Wells. The original intention was to cut through to Hay-on-Wye and then take the Gospel Pass to Llanthony where there is a small but primitive campsite. However, I was running out of dry clothes, and washing facilities and electricity were needed to keep the show on the road, so I had to compromise and take a different route over the top to yet another river - the Usk, and a campsite near Brecon.

Miles = 89, brings total to 892

Day 16

A showery day with an improving forecast woke us, and, because of the roads linking Wales and England, it would be unlikely that I would see anything of Alison and the camper van before I reached the campsite at Priddy, over in Somerset.

The ride down the Usk was showery, but otherwise pleasant as it traversed some very quiet, wooded lanes through small Welsh villages to the tiny town of Usk itself, where I turned for Chepstow, and my crossing point back into England.

Since John O'Groats, I had crossed many bridges of all shapes and sizes, but the experience of cycling across the Severn Bridge is something which I will remember for a long time. It is a long way across and the feeling of vastness and vulnerability has to be experienced to be understood. A definite landmark in the journey.

Bristol was a city I didn't really want to cycle through, so I opted to follow NCR41 down the coast as far as the M5 motorway bridge over the River Avon. Unfortunately, like many of Sustrans cycle ways, NCR41 does a fair bit of off-roading, which is a bit worrying when you are riding on 23c tyres. But, not to worry, I got all the way to Pill without a puncture!

I did, however, get pretty well lost as soon as I left NCR41 and tried to navigate my way towards Priddy, as I had no map! Calling in at a “Resource Centre”, a nice lady printed me a colour copy of the area around Nailsea from Google Maps, and I was soon back on track following a B road through to Chew Magna and out into the Mendip Hills, where I promptly got lost again (very few signposts). A phone call to Alison sorted it all out (she told me how to use the GPS in my phone - I’ve got a GPS in my phone????!!) and we were soon reunited at the campsite near Priddy.

Miles = 93, brings total to 985

Day 17

A dry day forecast!!! But quite a complex route through the small Somerset towns of Wookey, Wells, Glastonbury and so on. The difference between Caithness, where you get to choose from one road, and the West Country is truly a-maze-ing. But at least I had maps today!

Much of the day would be spent following the A378 and the A38, which I hoped would be fairly quiet because of the proximity of the M5. This proved to be a good idea, and the roads weren’t too bad, but I had a couple of detours into the country lanes to make the day a little more interesting.

In particular, I finished the day with a ride out to Tiverton, where I stopped for coffee and cake, before riding out to Bickleigh and over the steep roads to the campsite at Langford.

Miles = 74, brings total to 1059

Day 18

Today was my penultimate day, and these last two days were predicted to be wild and windy. As I still had a fair mileage to do before I got to Land’s End, I was keen to try to leave an easier day for my last day as the hills in Cornwall are notoriously unforgiving for tired legs. So I was looking at putting some tough miles in today.

It was dark and wet when I set out, and, following the back roads round to Crediton, I was all too aware of swollen streams and flooded fields which were the result of last night’s heavy rains. After Crediton, the sun rose as I cut through to Okehampton, and here I stopped for my second breakfast.

I was beginning to get my head round the roads of the south west peninsula. The counties of Devon and Cornwall seem to be almost defined by a seemingly unending series of synclines, folds in the earth’s crust like the waves on the sea. You’re either cruising downhill at 30mph, or you’re dancing on the pedals, trying to keep on the high side of 8mph. There’s nothing in between, and the trick appeared to be to make the most of the downs, while patiently “spinning” the ups. Worked for me, anyway.

From Okehampton, I had to traverse the even hillier road across the western slopes of Dartmoor to Tavistock with a gusty headwind which made even some of the downhills difficult. But, after Tavistock, the fun really began as going westwards meant crossing several major rivers, the Tavy, the Lumburn, the Tamar and the Lynher and others, one after another with very little respite.

Some of the bridges over these rivers were quite old, especially the ancient looking and oddly named “New Bridge” over the Tamar at Gunnislake which I hit at around 35mph, obviously wanting to maintain my speed so it would help me up the steep road on the other side. Too late, I realised that this old bridge was a single tracker - fortunately I had a clear run. Phew!

Tried to meet up with Alison at Liskeard, but I couldn’t find her car park, and got quite tired riding round the hilly streets looking for it, so I continued my route and we eventually met in a lay-by on the road to Lostwithiel. From here to St Austell was more of the same, but the last few miles to our campsite at Veryan were very hard

going indeed, and I was relieved to finally get off my bike. However, I'd achieved my objective and reduced the last day's ride to a mere 50 miles.

Miles = 90, brings total to 1149

Day 19

Well, so long Veryan!

Mighty headwinds still forecast for today, but the showers were to be intermittent, with even the promise of some sunshine. The day started pleasantly with a ride through the lanes to the quaint old King Harry Ferry, a chain ferry across the River Fal between the Roseland Peninsula and Trelissick.



A second breakfast in Helston set me up for the ride over to Penzance, where I sat to eat my sandwiches in the warm sunshine (between showers), looking out towards Marazion and St Michael's Mount.

The last few miles were, predictably hard, hilly and against an unforgiving headwind, but I suddenly saw the church at Sennen, and realised that I was really going to make it. It seemed like I'd been riding all my life, and now it was all going to come to an end and, to be honest, I felt incredibly sad. But all that was forgotten when I saw Alison's smiling face where she was standing (in front of the abomination which they have been allowed to build at the very end of our country) and I finally applied my brakes.

Miles = 49, brings total to 1198.

Thoughts

I have always wanted to make this journey, and to see my country from end to end, under my own steam. I didn't know if it would be enjoyable, and was pleasantly surprised to find that it was.

I didn't set out to break any records because I wasn't sure what I was really capable of, and I didn't want to set up a target which I couldn't ever achieve. As it is, I'm convinced that the best way to treat an epic like this is to see it as a journey, rather than a challenge.

I could have done the whole thing self-supporting, either carrying a tent or staying at hostels en route, but this would have been a completely different kind of journey which would have only involved me. Doing it the way I did meant that Alison could share in the journey, and I have to admit that she was a real star, helping me and encouraging me throughout the whole enterprise. I certainly wouldn't have managed to solve the broken bike problem at the start so easily if I had been self supported.

Bikes - I normally tour on a fairly tough Claud Butler touring bike with 35c tyres - quite heavy, but still a nice ride, if you're patient. However, I opted to ride this on the bike I bought from Dave Ward, a ten year old Bianchi Mega Pro L 105 because it is such a nice bike to ride, and with support from Alison, I knew it would be feasible. The Bianchi I bought as a replacement is more a Sportive bike than a racer, and, consequently, a more comfortable ride when doing distances like these day after day.

Kit - Even though I was kind of supported, I still needed to mend punctures, carry tubes, waterproofs, tools, food, drinks and maps. On advice from Mark Williams, I bought a post bag which held much of the equipment, although I also carried a small 15 litre MM rucksack, keeping it as light as I could.

Maintenance - I did carry a more comprehensive set of tools and cleaning/lubricating equipment in the campervan. The bike got quite filthy during the journey, and I had to clean the chain several times. (To make life easier, I use Sainsbury's Value Baby Wipes, which contain degreaser, to clean my chain when on the road).

Food - as the story above indicates, food was prominent in my thoughts throughout the trip. Because of other things I have done this summer, I set off some 8lb lighter than my normal weight, and never lost my appetite during the whole ride. In fact, it felt as though I was eating my way from John O'Groats to Land's End. In the end, I was the same weight as I had been when I started, but I dread to think how much I got through.

For muscle recovery, I drank a single helping of chocolate flavoured Rego after each day's ride, and for rehydration and (successful) cramp avoidance, I had 500ml of my own drink (cold fruit tea + 0.25t/s MyProtein rehydration salts + 2t/s sugar) as well as 750ml plain water. I ate various biscuits and bars regularly on my ride, and snacked on liquorice allsorts.

Would I do it again? Probably, but differently. More likely to do something else - maybe in a land with less wind and rain!!

Before I embarked upon this journey, I simply wasn't sure what I was capable of, to the extent that I was reluctant to even think about entering a sportive. Riding for so long over so many days has really increased my confidence in this respect, but, more importantly, it has reinforced what a great experience cycling is - even day-to-day cycling!

I would certainly recommend this to anybody who has a fancy to do it. Just remember to treat it as a journey, and make it as enjoyable as you can. It is a zen thing, after all!



Alan Brentnall

CCPC PICTURE QUIZ (Following the successful Xmas Quiz and having a page to fill)

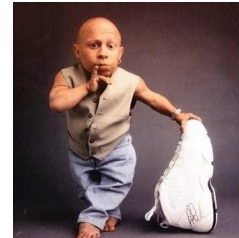
1)



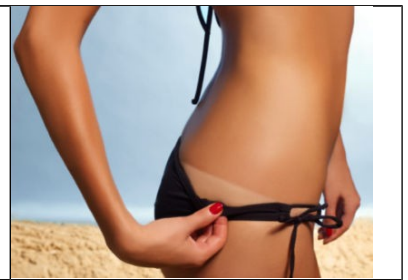
2)



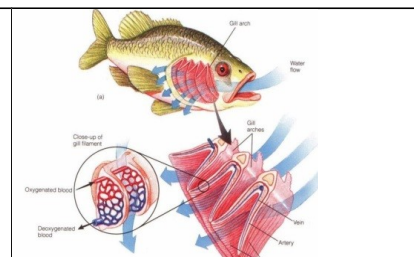
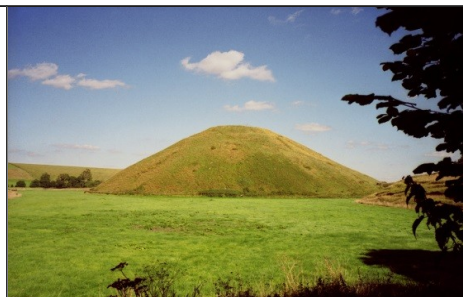
3)



4)



5)



6)



Mark L (Answers at bottom of page 14)

Rhyd Alyn - Saturday 30 January 2016

This was a trip dreamed up on one of the cave leader sessions early in 2015. At some point some ten years ago, I remember joining a CCPC trip into Olwyn Goch. We were led by a chap from Grosvenor Caving Club in North Wales down a series of wooden ladders in a huge (200m) shaft in a quarry near Halkyn Mountain, between Hendre and Rhydymwyn. At the foot of the ladders we visit huge chambers where pure limestone had been quarried for Pilkington's Glassworks at St. Helens, and some old lead mines where the huge amount of lead still in situ told of a very successful mining operation. What we never saw, because it was too wet, was the Milwr Tunnel - a mammoth drainage project which made lead mining at Halkyn possible until the latter part of the twentieth century, and which was on a scale comparable only with the County Adit in Cornwall.

Although Grosvenor still have access to Olwyn Goch, they apparently no longer lead trips, but Heather said that her other club (North Wales CC) had access to the mines through Rhyd Alyn, a different entrance and mining operation, some 2-3 miles away, near Cilcain. Heather put me in touch with Marc, another NWCC member, and a trip for CCPC was organised for late January 2016. Unfortunately, NWCC have a strict limit on numbers, and only six cavers would be able to do the trip.

In the end, because of coughs, colds and other commitments, five of us turned up,

meeting at the usual RV for Poachers Cave between Cilcain and Pantymwyn, before driving along to the Chapel car park where we met Marc and Adam, our NWCC guides.

The fun started when Neil announced that he had forgotten his wellies. Fortunately, Darren takes the same shoe size as Neil and was prepared to lend him the boots he'd driven down in - a decision Darren regretted later, in the pub ... in his stocking feet!

Shortly before the trip, Darren had been asked by Marc if we had access to a gas meter, as some of the passages were reputed to have bad air. It was too short notice to get the CCPC meter, so I brought one of DCA's meters along.

Once we'd all kitted up, and I'd fire up my meter, we wandered down the tracks through the woods to an old quarry on the south bank of the Afon Alyn where, under piles of dead leaves, Marc revealed the lid for the entrance to Rhyd Alyn. Once unlocked, we descended a short ladder into a flooded tramming adit which took us to a T junction where Marc signed us in (in a book in the ammo box) and left the padlock.

Turning left, we followed more tramming levels, and passed over and under collapsed wooden ore shoots and stope debris before reaching the first ladders. We had to descend some 150-200 metres, basically in three stages, on a variety of ladders. The iron ladders seemed to be in reasonable condition, but there were several sections which

used ladders with metal rungs spanned between wooden side rails where the wood was getting a bit soft, and fixed ropes had been rigged on some of these sections, allowing us to self-line for safety. One or two of us had brought shunts for this purpose, but there were other solutions - including a Kong "Duck" which Marc was using. This was a very handy looking device, small enough to be carried on any trip. I made a decision to try to get hold of one of these for future use!

Through various stopes, levels and even natural sections, we succeeded in weaving our way downwards, and, eventually, a section of long ladders brought us to another tramming level with ore shoots in various stages of collapse, with a healthy stream gushing along the floor. We were now at Tunnel level. The rails in this section would join up with the main rails in the Milwr Tunnel, and, sure enough, after a few hundred metres, we came to a crazily suspended points junction with deep-looking water below, and a broad adit heading north and south. The Milwr Tunnel.

The size of the tunnel is roughly the same as the main adits you see at the major Welsh slate quarries such as Rhosydd and Croesor; it was built for drainage as well as extraction, and so had a dry (ish) embankment on one side, with the track on top, and a veritable river flowing down the other half of the passage.

Heading South (upstream) we only got between one and two kilometres before

my meter started alarming. As I use this device to measure the air quality in the Peak District, for reasons of sanity and battery preservation, I have set the alarm level for oxygen down from the statutory 19.5% to 17.0%. Consequently, we were aware that we were now in an atmosphere of some four percent carbon dioxide; we were some three hours in, and the general consensus was that we should return to better air before prolonged exposure brought on the usual confusing symptoms of acidosis.

So we turned around and headed out, taking a couple of diversions to view the more modern ore shoots which the drainage by the Milwr Tunnel had enabled in the last century.

Returning to the surface, we all agreed that it had been an interesting and worthwhile trip, and thanked our NWCC colleagues for taking the time to show us around. In the pub later, we discussed wider issues of common interest, and it is likely that some of NWCC cavers may come and join us in the odd Derbyshire trip in the future, and there will also be further trips planned in their part of the country.

As I said before, the Clwyddian Hills is a lovely area and not simply because of its hidden caves and mines. I know it more from a fell runners point of view as I've done quite a few races there, and I can recommend it as a superb area for hiking, with Moel Famau and the Jubilee Tower a fine objective!

Alan Brentnall

Situation Vacant - Training Officer

In December 2009, Ralph Johnson persuaded me to stand as CCPC's Training Officer at the following AGM in January 2010, because the incumbent officer, Tim Campbell, wanted to stand down from the post. Six years later, after organising several training events for SRT and cave leading, I decided that it was time for somebody else to take over the position, preferably somebody who attends meets more often than I do, and somebody who knows the members, especially the newer members, better than I do.



Unfortunately, nobody has come forward to take up the position. When I ask why, the answers I get revolve around lack of experience, on the assumption that the job entails training.

However, this is wrong. The work is simply administrative. Although the BCA insurance covers caver-to-caver training, it is still desirable for techniques such as SRT to be coached by a professional. In the days when Ralph Johnson was around, this was easy as we had our own in-house CIC. Now we have to buy in the expertise.

But, as I have just proved on the Whitehall Course, this is easy and affordable. Getting hold of a CIC is simply a matter of looking at the list on the BCA website and making contact via telephone or email. Sourcing the venue is also straightforward, and can often be delegated to another member. After that, it's simply a matter of maintaining a list of names, collecting deposits and agreeing a date.

There is, of course, a wee bit of red tape, but it isn't too onerous. In order to make the event financially viable, there is a BCA form to fill out prior to the session taking place, and BCA require a short report afterwards.

For the record, the Whitehall course catered for 12 CCPC members, and was run by one CIC, assisted by me as gopher and tea-maker. It cost £300, and the 12 attendees paid £25 each as a deposit, which covered the cost. The BCA have promised to provide a grant of over 50% towards the cost of the course, and I have recommended that CCPC refunds the attendees £12.50 each, with the remainder going into the Rob Farmer Fund to cover future training where grant aid may not be available.

And that's all there is to it. Each training event is a straightforward clerical task which anybody could do, and an easy way of putting something back into a great caving club which provides an extensive and interesting meets list which is the envy of many other clubs in the region.

So what's holding you back?

Alan Brentnall

Answers to Quiz (p11) 1) Carlswalk Cavers (Karls, Walk, Ka, Vern) 2) Jackpot (Jack, Pot) 3) Titan (Tie Tan) 4) Petzle Stop (Pets, Hill, Stop) 5) Gaping Ghyl (Gay, Ping, Gill) 6) Devil's Arsehole (Devil, sR, Sole).