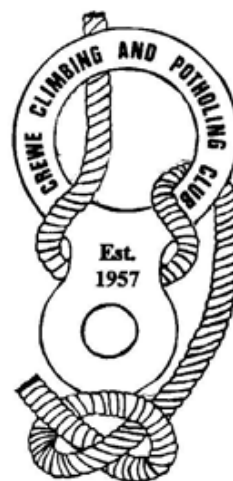




# C.C.P.C. Newsletter 133. April / May 2022

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Editor: Steve Knox  
colinknox@btinternet.com



## Marguerite Johnson 1945 - 2022

I was very sad to hear the news that Marguerite Johnson had passed away, peacefully at home, during the night of 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> April. As Ralph's wife, it was inevitable that Marguerite would be heavily involved with the club, and club members, from the very beginning. I actually met Marguerite for the first-time during January 1967, when I joined Ralph to accompany Marguerite on a trip into Axe Hole so she could take photographs for her college dissertation. That night I was a guest at Ralph and Marguerite's flat in Burslem – the first of countless similar nights - and we remained friends from that time onwards.



*22<sup>nd</sup> January 1967: Marguerite in Axe Hole.*



Marguerite would never have described herself as 'a caver', or 'climber', but she was a willing supporter in all Ralph's many adventures, and regularly joined in with Club meetings and surface activities.

Frequent trips to the crags of Snowdonia, or the gritstone edges of the Peak, dominated our activities in those early years, and it seems that Marguerite was always there, patiently watching from below, and encouraging us, as we struggled up yet another route. I can never recall Marguerite complaining.

Later, our two families shared holidays to various parts of the UK, as well as to the Pyrenees and the Alps, for climbing and caving, and despite some memories of soggy tents and cooking in the rain, we always had a good time. I remember Marguerite spending hours playing bat and ball games with our children, and they loved her for it.

Marguerite was a very special person, and will be greatly missed by all those who knew her.

Steve Knox

*4<sup>th</sup> August 1995: Marguerite in the Pyrenees, as we socialised with the local cave rescue leader and his family, after our trip to the Salle Lepineux in the Pierre St Martin cave system.*

Funeral: 2.45 pm., Tuesday, 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2022 – Macclesfield Crematorium – Family flowers only, thank you.

## Planned Club Meets, etc., from April 2022 to June 2022:



### *Crewe Climbing and Potholing Club:*

6 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	Knotlow Mine, Derbyshire.	<b>Two Members</b> enjoyed a short-notice evening trip. (2)
9 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	CCPC King Pot, East Kingsdale, Yorkshire. Alternative: Illusion Pot	CHANGED (due to several Members being unwell) to Yordas Pot & Cave. (3)
15 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	Water Icicle Close Cavern, Derbyshire.	<b>Three Members</b> explored the known system. (3)
22 <sup>nd</sup> April 2022	Dale Mine, Manifold Valley, Staffs..	Solo trip. (1)
24 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	CCPC Alderley Edge Copper Mines.	Gated: - extensive complex of passages and chambers - no SRT needed. (7 + 2)
	CCPC Dow Cave, Yorkshire. Alt. ; Dow – Providence through trip.	Large resurgence cave, can be wet – no SRT. Alt. serious, contorted, strenuous !!
	The May Meeting (on the second Monday, as the first is a Bank Holiday).	8.30 pm. at 'The Red Bull', Butt Lane, and hopefully also by 'Zoom'.
	Cwmorthin Slate Mine, North Wales. Alt. Croesor to Rhosydd through trip.	Massive slate mine complex. Alt.: Two slate mines linked by traverse wires and fragile bridges.
	CCPC Alum Pot / Lower Long Churn, Yorkshire. Alt. Diccan Pot, Yorkshire.	Impressive open shaft SRT pitches, and some easy stream passages.
	The June Meeting.	8.30 pm. at 'The Red Bull', Butt Lane, and hopefully also by 'Zoom'.
Limited, privately organised activities take place as, and when, permissible, complying with any current government restrictions. Some members may still be self-isolating or 'shielding' during this period.		



### **Derbyshire Cave Rescue Organisation:**

DCRO team members continue to be ready to assist whenever required, throughout the present period of the pandemic, and will use PPE, where appropriate. Training continues. <https://www.facebook.com/DerbyshireCaveRescue>

12 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	DCRO AGM	7.00 pm. Buxton Base, & via 'Zoom'.
20 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	DCRO Training: Underground Comms..	7.30 pm. Poole's Cavern, Buxton.
23 <sup>rd</sup> April 2022	DCRO Full PPE & equipment check.	10.00 am. Buxton Base.
	DCRO Training: Multipod	Meet at Knotlow triangle.
	DCRO Open Day	Full day at Buxton Base.
	DCRO Training – Full day exercise.	T.B.A.
	DCRO Training: steep ground.	T.B.A.
	BCRC Rescue Conference.	Based at 'The Rotary Centre', Castleton.

There are some excellent trips on the calendar for April, May and June; please try to support Club trips when you can. **Steve Knox**

Many thanks to those who continue to share accounts of their adventures, and their amazing photographs, with the rest of the club membership. It is greatly appreciated.



## Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2022: Knotlow Mine, Derbyshire.

- Gaz McShee, Jack Lingwood.

Gaz McShee

Jack and I had arranged to go and do a bit of SRT work in the grotty but strangely addictive Knotlow Cavern. The plan was to rig the 210 shaft, and the climbing shaft down into Waterfall chamber, then do a bit of a round trip. Well, at least that was the plan!

I arrived first and found the parking at the triangle very full - not your usual odd car, but a whole row of them. I hopped out to see what their plans were, and was greeted by a lovely guy called Nigel Berry. He informed me that it was Peak Caving Club's weekly meet, and they had already rigged the 210 and climbing shaft and were happy for us to use their ropes instead of cluttering up the shafts. Well, there goes the rigging practice, but as they say, never look a gift horse in the mouth ! So I sucked it up and prepared for Jack's arrival.

Jack finally messaged me to say he was struggling to find fuel and may not make it, so I got ready to do a quick run around on Peak's gear. Already running late, I started to head off just as Jack pulled up the lane, so I hung back and enjoyed the spectacle of a 4wheel drive BMW which is stuck in rear wheel drive, attempting to escape from the glorious Knotlow mud.

Panic over, and Jack and I finally headed over to the climbing shaft. It was absolutely freezing in that wind, so quickly I slid in, and was relieved by the sudden temperature hike that always surprises you as you float away from the awful returning winter conditions outside.

I landed, and called up to Jack to start his descent, but at that moment one of the Peak lads popped his head out of the pit from Pearl Chamber, and informed me they were coming back out and had derigged. 'Bugger', said I, and quickly shouted up to Jack to get back out, and once he was clear I started my climb.

Now I've done this shaft so many times I can't tell you. I come here sometimes, very early, and do laps on it before breakfast. It's easy, but try it the week after Covid - it was horrible ! I was completely shattered by the time I reached the lid and pulled myself out. The mood brightened when I saw Jack doing a weird dance to keep warm in the Baltic wind. We went back to the car and got my ropes and as we arrived back at the shaft Nigel was just derigging. I rigged, and once more dropped into the warm mine air, then slid through the hole to rig pitch two while Jack dropped in to join me. We had a few minutes running through deviations, so that there was no repeat of my first encounter in here, when mid-pitch Steve P-A calmly talked me through the finer points, while half of the DCRO watched on in horror as the spectacle unfolded before them. Anyhow, that bit done, we shot off down to the waterfall, where I sorted out the traverse and Y-hang, and we both dropped in.

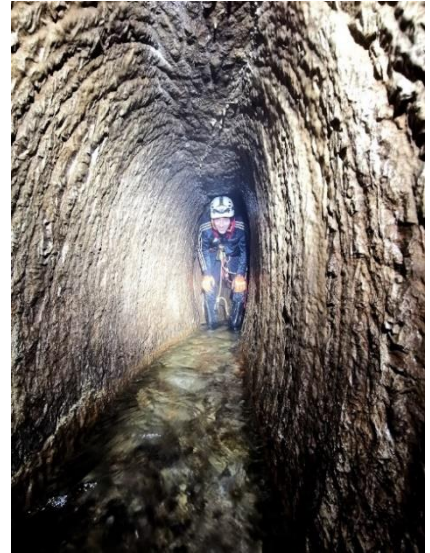


The waterfall was pretty small considering the weather lately, and we hardly got wet at all. As this was Jack's first time, I crossed the pump pool to show him the dive line and pretty green water in the collapsed passage floor. To watch a man who self-admittedly doesn't like water, cross a narrow, submerged path is nothing short of breath-taking. In the same way a chameleon changes colour to match its background, Jack moulded himself to the contours of the wall so well that I got quite a fright when he suddenly reappeared in front of me. Good effort though Jack - a step towards overcoming your fears (though he drew the line at crossing the collapsed-floor pool).

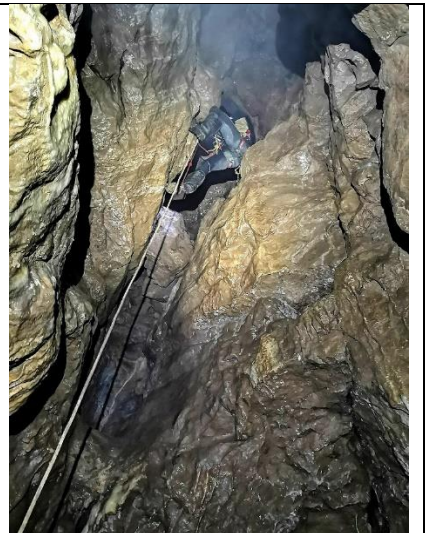
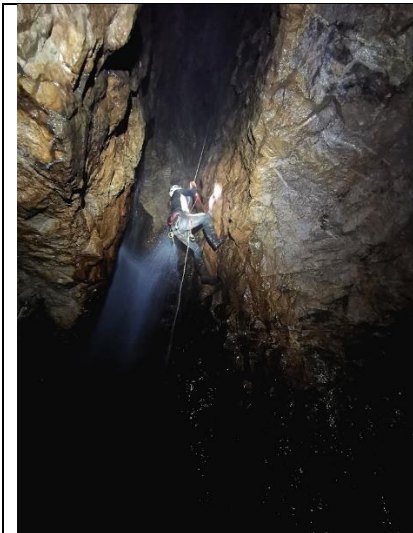
*Left: Jack descending the waterfall pitch.*



Next, he went for a wander into the coffin level, which annoyingly he breezed, with room to spare - unlike chunky guy here, who fills the damn thing. It didn't seem long before we were heading out, and once again the post-covid lung condition reared its head. Seriously, I was producing (in quantity and consistency) enough colourful foam to sell to children for Squishy-making.



*Right: Jack crossing the pump-pool in Waterfall Chamber, and, Left, in the superb coffin level to Four-Ways shaft.*



*Jack climbing the waterfall pitch, then climbing the Second Pitch, out of Pearl Chamber. All photos courtesy of Gaz.*

Finally we popped out into the freezing cold, Knotlow darkness, at 10.30 pm.. I didn't realise it was possible to spend so long in there. Oh well, there is a first for everything I suppose. Cheers Jack, for a great evening, and thanks to Peak Caving Club, my lungs didn't have to contend with climbing back up the 210 shaft.

Full set of photographs: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/1f2y32bgZaiHSb9>

**Gaz McShee**



**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2022: Yordas Cave, Kingsdale, Yorkshire.**

- Steve Pearson-Adams, Mark Krause, Dan Baddeley.

Most of the regular crew were otherwise engaged yesterday. That being said, three of us made the run up the M6 for a trip into Yordas. Mark, Dan and I fuelled up at Inglesport cafe, then, having made a couple of purchases, headed up to Kingsdale in the glorious spring sunshine. Surprisingly Kingsdale Beck was dry and in my naivety I thought Yordas would also be dry. Several trips had been made into Yordas previously but none of us had ever entered via the 30-metre top entrance.

Plans were made to drop this pitch, then make our way to the waterfall pitch. I suggested to Dan that he might want to have a go at rigging on the back of the recent practice day at Whitehall. Fair play to Dan, he was willing to put into practice what he had learnt on the day, while Mark and I watched on.... offering support and encouragement. Satisfied with his rigging, Dan headed down first, with me second and Mark bringing up the rear. From the bottom of the pitch we could see a stream running in from the right wall and disappearing under the wall opposite. So much for my earlier wishful thinking. What followed was a flat-out crawl for approximately 20 metres in the stream, with no way of avoiding this immersive experience - sorry guys.

Shortly beyond this point, the approach to the waterfall pitch is reached. This can be rigged as a pull through, which follows the water over several cascades, or by rigging the high route on the left wall which keeps you out of the water.

So it was that I began rigging the high route, edging my way further out, with the white water crashing over the cascades below me. Having placed a traverse line out to the 4th P-bolt I was faced with quite a reach to the next bolt, which was proving problematic. In my mind I was expecting to see P-bolts on the wall opposite, which would then take me out beyond the water to a descent avoiding the cascade. In hindsight, what I should have done was abseil down and across from where I was, instead of trying to reach the next bolt, then cross over the cascade to find the bolts lower down on the opposite wall. Having retreated, the decision was made to re-rig as a pull through, which we did. I dropped first, trying my best to avoid being deluged while untangling the rope as I went. Safely at the bottom, I shouted up to Dan that the rope was free. Not satisfied with the soaking in the crawl, Dan inadvertently immersed himself in the pool at the bottom of the first cascade. Mark was holding station at the top and soon joined us at the bottom, commenting on how clean our gear was. Job done, back to the cars, changed and on our way. A fairly short trip but enjoyable all the same despite failing to secure the high route.

**Steve Pearson-Adams.**



## **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2022: Water Icicle Close Cavern.**

- Gaz McShee, Jack Lingwood, Steve Pearson-Adams.

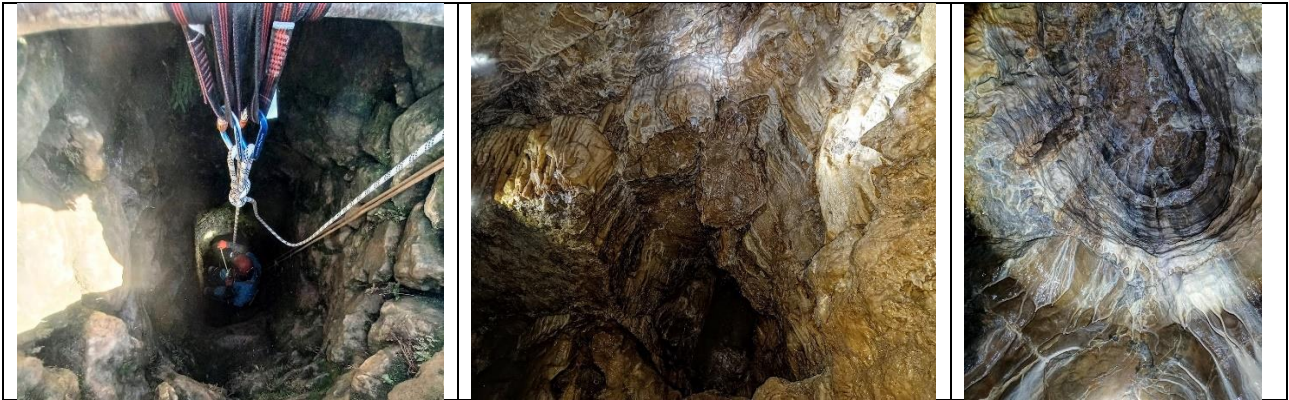
**Gaz McShee**

My plan had been to do Dale Mine in Ecton, but when Steve put a call out for a trip into Water Icicle Close Cavern the temptation was too great, anyway Dale Mine isn't going anywhere soon so on Good Friday morning I found myself scoffing a bacon butty at the café in Monyash. At 11.00 prompt I wandered back to the café from my car to meet Steve and Jack already waiting outside.

We relocated into my car and headed up to try to blag a free parking pass at the farm in the lane and upon arrival Steve pottered off to woo the farmer's wife into allowing us to dodge a hefty parking fine by parking in their silage pit. While Steve was working his magic, Jack and I spotted the farm's guard-bull, damn, that guy was big, and did not look as if he was in any mood to be messed with, but it was ok, Jack and I were in the car and in prime position to watch Steve doing the bull run round the farmyard. Sadly this didn't happen, but the free parking definitely did, and saved us a good twenty-minute walk from the village.

I have a feeling that the curse of Neil has taken me over because I found that the underlayers I'd packed were not there. Damn it you numpty I would have to either go naked underground or naked home the former seemed easier to explain to a passing Bobby so I started to strip at which point Steve threw me an under layer to borrow probably due to the fact that a sudden dress malfunction with the boiler suit would result in an uncomfortable caving experience for all, except the now liberated me. Anyhow now fully dressed we wandered up the lane to the field containing the shaft-top lid, chatting mindless rubbish and sweating in the early summer

sunshine. Steve rigged and shot down, followed by Jack, and finally I jumped in, but I was on my 'ID' which really scared me the last time I used it in Wharf engine shaft. The first half went well, but then came the stall, and then the bounce. Damn it, this piece of gear is industry standard for rope access, and every time I use it, I end up bouncing, but I'm a tryer, and finally I landed on the hard deck.



*Above; Lovely rigging for the entrance shaft !!, and typical Water Icicle passages .*

Jack hadn't been in before, so we wandered off down Northwest Passage to see where the breakthrough was made into the amazing extension and all its magical destruction. Last time I was here in February, it was a case of 'let's get this done', and I missed a lot of the little intricacies of the place. This time however, I was free to go where-ever the hell I wanted, and I did, and although the intricacies didn't go very far they were great fun and a pleasant change from walking.



Back to the shaft we went, and off down South Passage, which our guide last time had shown me while the others were climbing out. At the time he had whet my appetite to explore more, but given time constraints we just shot through to Oh No Choke, to reacquaint him with his shovel, two years down the line. It was quite a unique moment for anyone who knows anything about attachment.

*Left: Classic phreatic passage shape .*

Anyway in we went, trying hard not to mess up the muddy puddle under the low entrance squirm, for no sensible reason whatsoever, and off into the lovely phreatic passage. It's broken relic decorations, adorning the walls and floor all around it, may not be as amazing as those in the Northwest Passage, but what it lacks in looks, it more than makes up for in pure caving pleasure. You see, in the Northwest Passage you have a walk in, and a walk out, - it's almost the perfect show cave if any of the punters survived the thirty-metre free fall down the main entrance shaft. But South Passage has crawly bits, and climbs, and pretty bits, and mud, and rotten rock, and bad air -it has everything a caver could wish for.

We passed Batty Farber's passage, which I thought I'd do on the way out, then looked at the easy looking aven, with a step ladder to enter it, but neither Steve or myself were going up there without a climbing rope and gear, so we just looked. Next was the Great Rift, which we had a good old climb all over, and then over to Donkey Kong, where I wish I'd kept my harness on to have a look up the fixed ropes at the unseen extents of the cave, hidden out of sight by darkness.

Then was my time to shine - we arrived at the Oh No Choke and over on the left wall was the focus of my visit, The Olympic Stroll. While Steve and Jack gave the choke-dig a good seeing to, I slid into the restriction guarding the way into the lovely, low to flat out, mud-filled phreatic passage that almost gives Sidetrack a run for its money. Alone in a hole is definitely a happy place for me, and being my first time in here, all the excitement was heightened as I commando crawled further and further into the unknown. Sadly, after what seemed like forever, I came to the point where the passage got too low to go on, and then I had the pleasure of trying to reverse for ten metres or so, in glutinous mud, until I was able to turn around and head back to the others, with a huge mud-strewn grin on my face.



I'd enjoyed it so much that I forgot all about Batty Farber's Passage and didn't even think about it until I started writing this up. It does, however, give me a damn good reason to go back.

Off up the shaft we went into a beautiful, warm, sunny Good Friday, and thankfully the last remnants of my Covid were gone, and the prussik up the shaft was quick and painless – well, as painless as SRT ascending goes.



*Left: Looking back down the entrance shaft, and (above) out into the sunshine.*

Back at the car we had a bit of a collection for the farmer who had kindly let us use his yard, and although she didn't want it, Steve persuaded the farmer's wife to use the money to get an Easter egg for her kids, and the world was happy. Jack was the camera man on this trip he sent me his images to doctor, and remove the noise, as he wasn't sure how to do it. So I'll link them below for anyone that would like a look.

**Photos: Jack Lingwood**

**Gaz McShee**

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/ynfg2Lai3gjHCaCt7>

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**Alan Brentnall responded with much more first-hand information about WICC:**

Thank you so much for that great write-up Gaz - and please keep these write-ups going, they are keeping me well-informed and interested in what's going on in the club (500 miles away!). I'm also captivated by Eldon's progress in Stoney Middleton - there are loads of tales on [EPC's Website](#) of the various sessions over the last couple of years, and, now that they have effectively created a dry way through to the Master Cave, I'm very much expecting a write up of a Crewe trip in there sometime - Cliffstle Mine to Cussy Pot exchange maybe?

[Cliffstle Mine is high above the Lovers Leap cliffs of Stoney, and the path between Stone village and Eyam. It's a 100m shaft which drops into Morwood Sough - **A.B.**..

- see pages 19-22 in 'Descent' (285) – April/May 2022 – which includes a superb survey of the Caves and Mines of the Eyam area. - **Ed.**]

I've always thought Water Icicle Close Cavern was an amazing place, and I greatly enjoyed being a guide there over several years. I always looked forward to those trips ... they never got boring.

Originally, going back to early trips with the midweek caving bunch, we just used it for SRT practice; there are two spit re-belays on the entrance shaft and you can also re-belay from naturals at the point where you break into the bottom chamber - in fact, it's worth considering this last re-belay anyway as it can get rid of an obvious rub point, and it can also prevent people from bouncing their bourses into the roof on their way up, before they get into the shaft proper.

But it was Keith Joule who first introduced us to the fantastic phreatic horizontal passages in the place.

We had always thought of Water Icicle as a mine, but, in reality, there is very little evidence (apart from the entrance shaft) of T'owd Man anywhere in the place. Most, if not all, of the stacked deads you can see lying around are the result of the many different cavers' digs, and even the huge air-drill tubes, carved into the rock below the Great Rift, are the work of Terry Worthington, trying, according to Bill Whitehouse, to prove John Beck's theory that a chamber exists below that point.

It's all natural, and it's all phreatic - which means that there are probably many more huge circular passages waiting to be found. Phreatic geomorphology defies gravity along with cavers' predictions, with its ability to stop and start monster passages without any obvious reason. This will account for the many digs evidenced in the cavern - lots of clubs have had a go down there, and I can remember an episode when Ralph Johnson had me climbing to the very top of the Great Rift with a radio set in order to try to locate a second entrance within the linear copse at the edge of the field. The Devonshire Estate people put a stop to that, I'm afraid - ventilation yes, new entrance no!

There have also been reports of "rumblings" - literally. Diggers retreating from a session in one of the three digs at the end of the Northwest Passage reported a huge and frightening crashing noise from back near the dig, which caused them to think that their project had totally collapsed. However, when they returned the following week, nothing had changed. More recently, while guiding the Tuesday Night group, I descended the Elevator pitch, along with Poole's Cavern manager, Alan Walker. As the two of us explored the Orpheus dig however, there was a sudden rumbling from above - a significant rock fall had effectively blocked our retreat. Fortunately there were enough folk in the party who were still in the Urchin Passage, including Pete Dell, and, between them, they managed to clear the blockage and make it safe for our retreat, using some spare 'scaff' from elsewhere in the cavern.

And, of course, there's the "Ghost Story" which has haunted the place since the last decade or so of the 20th century. I remember three terrified cavers (one an ex-Marine) desperately trying to get onto the rope simultaneously in order to avoid being the dreaded "last man up". Water Icicle is very much a case of "Watch This Space" - the complete history of the place has yet to be written.

**Alan Brentnall**

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**A quick question for the experts:-** In a previous write-up about Water Icicle, and again here, Gaz comments on the broken stalactite formations which seem to be commonplace in the 'new' extensions in Water Icicle. I believe the term 'Water Icicle' was used by the miners to refer to such formations, and it was (apparently - where has that come from ?) not unknown for miners to break off formations to sell as garden ornaments, and to decorate 'grottos' in the grounds of large houses. Is there a geological reason for the damage in W.I.C.C., or could the damage indicate that the original miners did access the passages of the 'new' extensions ?



## Friday 22nd April 2022: Dale Mine, Manifold Valley, Staffordshire.

Gaz McShee



*Mine entrance gate.*



*The initial pumpway passage.*



*The varied form of the pumpway.*

Having cancelled a trip here for Water Icicle on Good Friday I packed my gear for an evening session into what would become a quite eventful evening into another of the Peaks more esoteric underworld.

I had given thought to this place several times over the years, but I had always shied off because of the sensitive access, however, when Heather passed me a couple of PDMHS mining history bulletins at the last venture into Peak Cavern there, in volume 21 number 3, was a full over-and-underground report on the workings so, I decided to suck it up and just go.

I was standing at the gate in the little ravine next to the river Manifold at 16.30 and after releasing the latch I made the low damp crawl into the standing passage on the other side, which although originally a trial level it was later adopted as the Dale pumpway for the now flooded lower levels which lie below the valley floor and hence also below the water table. The mud in the canal is annoyingly deep and incredibly sticky, almost stealing my boots several times, and along its edges the prints of animal tracks abound. The other noticeable thing in here is the strata which the mine was cut through. The layers are bent and twisted into waves on the passage walls, showing the immense forces which formed the hills around here, something you take for granted as you potter around the trails above.

I decided to leave the raises and side passages for checking on the way back, and pushed on through the ever-changing passageway strata until I reached the main engine-chamber. It was once the home of a hydraulic water-pressure engine, but is now part filled with a rubble pile, and all that is left of the old pump engine installation are a few metal pins and some slots cut to house timbers to support the machinery and floors. At the far end of the chamber is the flooded main shaft to the lower levels, and which also continues above, to the surface workings. From here I soon found myself at the beginning of the dig which PDMHS did not survey in their report, but it is a very impressive and massively engineered dig, holding up some seriously loose and quite sizable headstones !

I passed the second dam; why it was built I have no idea, but it must be quite close to the surface, as tree roots are penetrating the roof everywhere, filling the passage with a sense of foreboding. Then, as if to confirm this, the tell-tale signs of Co2 gas started to creep in, leaving me short of breath, and sweating. I saw another gate-grill in front of me, so I decided that it would be my turning point. As it happens just the other side was the dig face, and the extent of the toils which must have taken years to achieve for whoever had a mind to push that far.



*Left: The run of steelwork frames supporting the roof, in the recent dig at the inner end of the pumpway level.*

*Right: Gaz in the main engine-chamber, just off the side of the pumpway level, with the shaft (flooded), continuing down to the lower workings, and continuing above to where it is capped at the surface.*



I got out of there as carefully and quickly as possible, given that by now my head was pounding, and although supported, the roof was pretty horrific to look at and I didn't wish to touch any of that damn Jenga pile.

For some reason the main passage drafts, and once out of the dig (ironically an extension of the main passage) the air was fine, so I started checking out the side passages. First the second engine chamber which was abandoned and never actually housed an engine, now full almost to the top with 'deads' which needed to be scaled to enter the chamber. Whether the air was stale in here too or if I was still a little under the influence of the air in the dig I don't know, but I didn't stay long in here and I had to really take my time climbing back down.

Next there were a couple of short trials, closing down at fore-fields after ten or so metres, either side of the passage, and now stacked almost to the roof with deads.

Back past the main engine chamber were another couple of trials, and again the air was awful, so I didn't hang around for long and they were only short anyway.

The next focus was the raises. The survey shows two of them: a mid-level entered by climbing up into the roof, and a high level, entered via a steel ladder above a flooded lower working, fitted with a dive line from a previous exploration.

Upon climbing the ladder, the mine became a pipe working, with mud floors and some of the most evil hanging death imaginable. Added to this was the sound of creaking, which was, to say the least, un-nerving, but even here the mud was literally covered with animal tracks. How they got up the ladders I can't for the life of me imagine, but whatever it was, did, and did it often ! After maybe twenty metres of trying not to touch anything above me, and the creaking noise now blatantly not the roof, but obviously being made by the owner of those tracks, I looked into the passage ahead to be met by the sight of an otter, a big individual too ! He looked at me, then turned and pottered off into the pipe working beyond. I decided to leave him be and get out, rather than disturb him, and possibly his family.

Once out of there, I climbed up into the roof, to the mid-level workings, and again animal prints were everywhere, so after a short exploration to a forefield, I left the pipe working to its otters and headed back to the daylight world.

I exited and locked the gate at 20.30, to see a beautiful sunset-lit view of Ecton Hill, and made my way home.

Having done a bit of research since I got home I discovered that there have been unconfirmed reports of otters in the River Manifold. Last night I confirmed them, and got to see yet another example of how wildlife can cope in the most difficult conditions - apparently very well.




If anyone has any details of the dig I would be very interested to hear them.

The full selection of Gaz's pictures can be found here:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/6mR5PquHheTjuZs57>

Gaz McShee

A few photographs from the initial stage of the Dale Mine Project, during the latter half of 2006. (Ed.)

		
The new steelwork, at the point of the blockage, looking 'upstream', with miners' pack wall on the right.	Looking 'downstream', through the newly installed steelwork, with the miners' pack wall on the left.	Looking 'downstream', above the newly installed steelwork, showing the unstable boulder roof.



**Sunday 24th April 2022: West Mine, Alderley Edge, Cheshire.**

Gaz McShee

Today would have been a bad day to have an accident underground. The DCRO controller 'on call' was definitely not on call, as a total of nine of us hit the dark side of the money belt - seven Crewe members and two Derbyshire Caving Club; one, the aforementioned saviour of the lost and needy. I mean, he may have taken a long-wave radio, connected to a Bluetooth transmitter on the surface, connected by Sat phone to the switchboard at DCRO headquarters, but there was probably a greater chance of him having the Bat-phone. So yes, definitely no screwups anywhere in the Peak today, so with hindsight, all you out there caving today have been warned!

**[See Jenny Drake's response, at the end.]**



Unlike most of my writeups this one will be relatively short as I have not a clue where I was, other than down a flipping big, no strike that, huge hole, beneath some of the most expensive pads I've ever seen.

Into the hole in the field we went, and along a pretty average, mined level, beneath a nice little wayboard, until we met the junction where the 'walk-ins' parted company with the 'drop-ins'. I had chosen to drop-in, down the shaft, then potter off with the 'walk-ins' at the bottom.

Once rigged, I followed Steve down, cursing the fact that the new cams in my Stop were making the ride a lot less than smooth. This was compounded by the fact that Steve was having a whale of a time practising his 'bell-ringing-skills' at my expense.

Anyway, once the child in him had passed, I joined him on the hard deck and we were once again reunited with the walkers, and then, once again the two parties went their separate ways.



Now once you exit the shaft, you are suddenly plunged into the cavernous underbelly of the Alderley Edge ridge. The scale of the extraction carried out here is nothing short of staggering, and other than the connecting hand-picked levels, the whole mine consists of cavern, upon cavern, upon cavern, and the fact that it hasn't imploded is the only thing more amazing than the scale.

Now the mine has three challenges apparently, and the

first is in a cavern with a beach, complete with sandcastles built by children who visit on Boxing Day for a quite unique Xmas treat. The challenge however is not for the children, at least not the little ones, it's for us: climb a slippery, sandy slab, and without falling off and hurting yourself, exit through a tiny porthole in the wall between chambers, and run round, fist pumping the air in triumph. Steve, Mark and Neil bobbed through, followed by me, who arrived late to the party through getting waylaid taking pictures.

More chambers followed, and a beautiful underground canal in a flooded level, with a part-laddered internal shaft, whose top was out of sight above. Once again I was playing catch-up, having been left far behind.

I caught up, just in time for challenge two: the Laundry Chute. Callum, the guide, was just about to leave, having seen Steve off up the chute. 'Just climb the shaft, and using the rope is cheating', he said, and off he went.

Up the shaft I slid on gritty, slippery smears, and nothing but bridging to make progress upwards. Then, at the top, a narrowing in the shaft above no footholds, an annoying distance below a very sandy top, served to focus the mind and bring into clarity that I was alone above a ten-metre drop. Oh well, been here loads of times before, so out I popped and followed the distant sound of voices. Challenge two in the bag.





After more chambers, a bridge of death, and a passage or two, we found challenge three: a hole in the roof above a passage into a chamber, about ten feet above. 'Just climb it', said Callum, 'I'll spot you when you fall'.

Once again faint sandy smears on the passage wall gave access to a very distant good undercut, and a very out-of-balance pull up, into the narrow neck of the shaft, then an upper body jam allowing a knee to be put on a decent slippery, sandy ledge, and then the work starts. There are no hand holds, other than the slippery ledge that your knee is on,

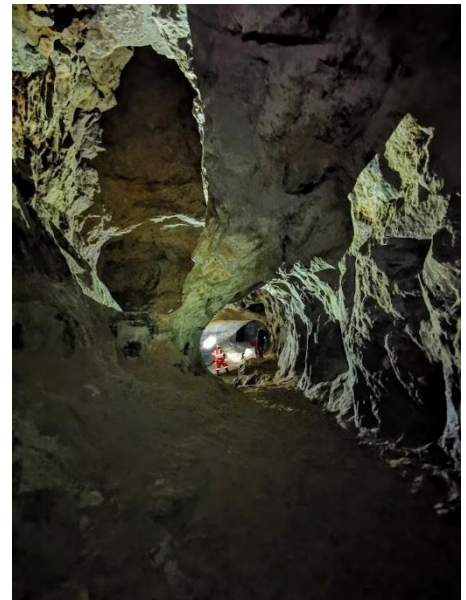
and now the other leg is dangling and useless as the only foothold is way out of reach. You thrutch, feeling that at any moment all your body tension will run out, and gravity will drag you down into the pit, but gravity had pitted its wits against a reset, stubborn character today, and had to admit defeat. And that was the hat trick ! Neil had a pop, and with a 'Forget it', gave up.

That was the end, and then back through nameless chamber after nameless chamber, which was driving Mick daft, and then Callum had a problem - we were lost. Callum shot off, and we waited in a chamber for a while until Callum had retraced his steps far enough to recover his memory, and set us off in the right direction again. Thank goodness for that, as the DCRO controller was unreachable!

Back in the daylight we potted off to the car park to reflect on an amazing trip into the dirty underbelly of a very respectable neighbourhood and to horrify the posh locals with our less than respectable appearance.

'Man of the Match' definitely goes to John, for his legendary skills, and for putting us all to shame with them.

Gaz's pictures can be found at: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/KAukxcZskw7BkY6a8>



### Jenny Drake responded:

Just to add:- the DCRO duty controller for that month will hand over the "follow me" number to another controller, or leader if they are likely to be out of contact for a while. The police also have a list of alternative numbers to go through if the "follow me" doesn't connect for whatever reason. One of my jobs is drawing up the duty controller rota and making sure the police have the right contact details.

Thanks to those who submitted material for this Newsletter - as always, I am keen to receive anything (cave related !) for the CCPC Newsletter - photos, write-ups, whatever !

Finally, keep safe and keep caving,

Steve Knox.

1<sup>st</sup> May 2022