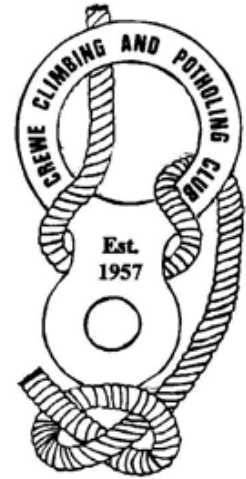




C.C.P.C. Newsletter 143. March 2023

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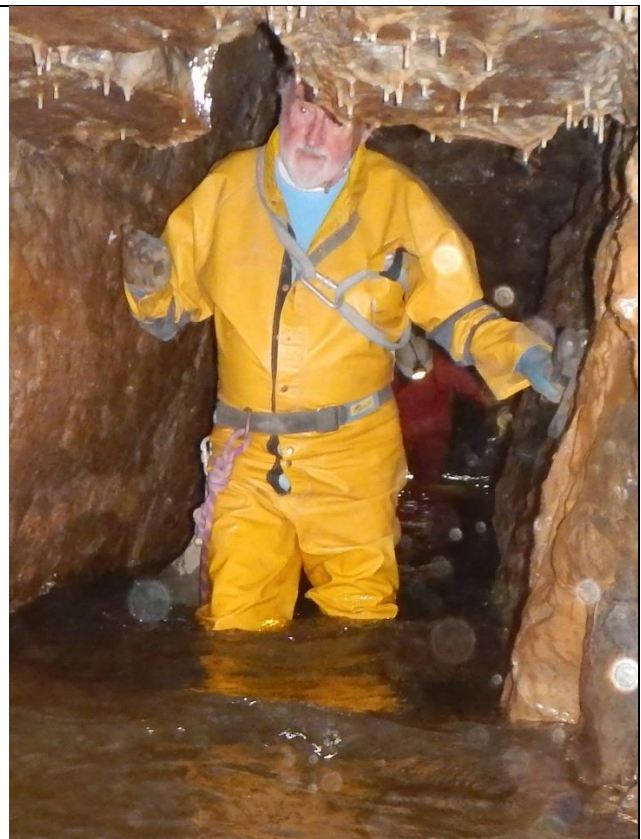
Editor: Steve Knox
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Dr. John Edward Gillett 1937 - 2023



22nd October 2011: John at the foot of Titan, having just descended the deepest shaft of any known cave in Britain, at 141.5 metres (464 ft).



31st August 2019: John exploring Mandale Mine sough level, in Lathkill Dale, in the Peak District.

It is with great sadness that this issue of the CCPC Newsletter has to pass on the information that our dear friend, and long-term Member of Crewe Climbing & Potholing Club, John Gillett, passed away on Friday, 24th February, while walking near Austwick in the Yorkshire Dales.

Like many of our Club Members, I shared trips with John, at home and abroad, and Annie and I enjoyed visits to John and Dilys at Gawsworth. He will be greatly missed by all those who had the pleasure of his company, and who benefitted from his vast knowledge of the underground world. **Funeral details can be found at the end of this Newsletter.**

An extract from John's book: 'Sixty Years of Caves & Caving':

'About the author – 2002 (modified):-

John Gillett was born in Buckingham in 1937 and started caving in 1958 during his National Service. He continued caving at university and became president of the university caving club before graduating as a chemical engineer. He then worked in the plastics and pharmaceutical industries for thirty-seven years as a technical manager. During his industrial career he designed, developed and ran several new processes, published many chemical engineering papers and wrote a book on risk assessment. He received an Honorary Doctorate from L'Institut National Polytechnique de Toulouse for his work in the field of chemical engineering education. He retired in 1999 and became a freelance writer and lecturer.

John continued to be an active caver, and has belonged to several caving clubs in the United Kingdom during his caving career. John was a fluent French speaker, and regularly caved with French and Belgian caving clubs. He also spoke Spanish, survival German, and a smattering of several other languages necessary in the European limestone regions. He led a successful expedition to the Gouffre Berger in 1983.

John is survived by one daughter, Catherine, who (not surprisingly) is a chartered chemical engineer and caver, and two granddaughters who enjoy hill-walking and caving.'

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John's contribution to CCPC Newsletter No. 105 – Winter 2011-2012, with additional material from a similar account in John's book: 'Sixty Years of Caves & Caving':

Titan: "The Last of the Summer Wine."

Titan, the deepest underground shaft in Britain (141.5m) is a magnet for many cavers. For those over seventy, especially those with arthritis, it is quite a challenge! I had wanted to descend it ever since an entrance from the surface had been dug successfully. I had specially reconnoitred the route as far as 'Colostomy Crawl' from 'The Treasury' in Peak Cavern and through 'The Trenches' to confirm that I could exit via Peak Cavern if necessary. However, if possible, I wanted to complete the trip with an easier exit from Speedwell Mine. Luckily for me, Ralph had promised to fix a trip for me with an exit via Speedwell for my seventy-fifth birthday. So, along with a very good turn-out of Crewe cavers, I went to Castleton on Sunday, 23rd October 2011, to collect my birthday present. There was a very good turn-out of Crewe cavers in Castleton. More than twenty club members went underground, and whereas most cavers planned to visit Peak Cavern, five of us older club members were intending to go down Titan, and come out via Speedwell Mine. Someone jokingly remarked that it was just like an episode of 'The Last of the Summer Wine', with no points for identifying 'Compo', 'Cleggie' or 'Foggy'!



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

Left to Right: Steve, John & Ralph at Titan entrance.

A cold wind blew across the tops and so everyone wanted to get underground as soon as possible. After a few photos, Sharon went down the entrance shaft first, followed by Ralph, who wanted to video, and then me. I found the thick rope in my rack slowed my descent. Steve was next and finally Paul, glad to get out of the cold wind. Once Ralph had videoed us in the connecting tunnel, Sharon clipped into the topmost rope in the Titan shaft and began her descent to 'The Event Horizon', situated just over halfway down.

The window from the connecting tunnel into the main Titan shaft. John is already far below at 'The Event Horizon'.



It was my first visit, so I took great care at the top of the shaft. I clipped my 'cowstail' into the traverse rope and sat down on the brink of the pitch. The vast dome and huge pit of Titan loomed in front of me, atmospheric, silent, and eternally black, with the cold air of depth. In contrast, the ledge on which I was sitting was beautifully decorated with stalagmites and yellowish flowstone. It was comfortable to sit on, and provided me with useful handholds that enabled me to reach the descent rope, attached to two bolts overhead by a 'Y-hang'. I peered apprehensively over the edge, having heard awful tales of cavers getting stuck on the bolt change at 'The Event Horizon' far below. I could glimpse Sharon's tiny spark of light far below as she abseiled soundlessly down to the end of the rope. The shaft was so large and sound-absorbing that I could barely hear her voice at 'The Event Horizon' as she shouted up that the rope was 'free'. I threaded my rack onto the rope, checked it was safe, unclipped my long 'cowstail' from the traverse line and launched myself into space. I had descended many deep pitches before, but this was very exciting ! The blackness of the vast shaft yawned below me and, as I cautiously descended, I felt as if I was in the middle of nowhere. The second rope was thinner than the first one and ran smoothly through my rack, so I had a fairly rapid and easy descent through the dark emptiness of the huge shaft. As I slid down to the end of the rope I saw that there was a short traverse line anchored to the wall. This led across to the edge of 'The Event Horizon', some sixty-two metres above the bottom of the shaft.

Sharon was waiting at the end of the ledge, having descended the short section of rope that ran down to the bolts holding the lowermost Titan rope. Securely clipped in, we chatted quietly in the numinous of the surrounding vastness. It seemed quite cosy! Eventually, Sharon crossed the free-hanging bolt-change and started to descend the last pitch, while I threaded my rack into the connecting rope and carefully worked my way down to the lip. Just as Sharon had disappeared, Ralph arrived on the ledge above me. Once Sharon was at the bottom, I took my time changing onto the last rope, and for awhile I was in a tiny world of my own, concentrating on the job in hand; lost in time and space. The change-over was not against the wall, but in mid-air. Tricky ! There was a sling that could be used as a foot-loop, dangling from a bolt; there was a piece of spare rope with a loop in it; and there was a carabiner clipped into the 'Y-hang', – several options to choose from. I hesitated, very aware of where I was.

"Are you O.K. ?" Ralph shouted.

"Yes! I'm taking my time, though!" I replied, as I quickly decided what to do.

I clipped my short 'cowstail' into the carabiner in the 'Y-hang', then descended until it held my weight. I peered into the darkness to see the lower rope – it was navy-blue and almost invisible! I clipped my hand-jammer, with its foot-loop attached, into the lower rope, then moved my rack from the top rope onto the navy-blue rope, below the jammer, and tied it off. With a foot in the foot-loop, and an arm around the rope for balance, I heaved myself up and unclipped my short 'cowstail' from the belay. Lots of unfortunate cavers have become stuck or had major difficulties performing this particular manoeuvre at this point ! However, all went well, and I was able to lower myself and

transfer my weight onto my rack successfully. Satisfied that the rack was holding me, I kicked my foot out of the foot-loop and released the jammer, letting it hang by its security cord from my sit-harness. I had passed *'The Event Horizon'* !

My rack ran smoothly as I let it accelerate down the final navy-blue rope. At the bottom, there was some spray to cool the rack, lubricate the rope, and get inside my overalls. Once down, I joined Sharon, sitting comfortably on a boulder well away from the pitch bottom and we watched Ralph's descent, performed with no problems. Ralph then videoed Steve's and Paul's descents using very powerful film-lights which gave us superb views up the huge shaft. With everyone safely down, and the video gear packed up, we took photos, and then it was time for the hard work to begin !



'Last of the Summer Wine'

Left to right: John Gillett, Steve Knox, Sharon Brandwood, Ralph Johnson & above, Paul Nixon. - at the base of Titan – 141.5 metres !!

Steve and Sharon led the way on, down into a large boulder ruckle. The start was through a lozenge shaped, flat out, crawl with a smooth floor. Lots of wriggling between boulders followed until there was some scaffolding, so we knew we were on the right route. At one point further on there was a vertical squeeze down through the bedrock. I dislike this sort of squeeze because, if it narrows as you descend, you can get stuck. I hesitated and shouted to 'Steve' below for reassurance. "Just relax and you'll slide through OK!" he shouted back. As another 'older caver', I trusted 'Steve's' advice and did as he said. I lowered my feet into the squeeze and, taking my weight on my arms, lowered my legs into the crack and slid downwards. My hips stuck immediately ! I wriggled them free and slowly sank deeper into the squeeze until my chest stuck quite firmly! "Uh-oh!" I thought. I paused, exhaled, kicked my legs and scraping my chest, wriggled free to drop into the passage below. "I hope that's the last of that sort of thing!" I breathed as 'Steve' stopped me from falling. I had not been warned about that part, probably on purpose to make sure that I did not back out of the trip.

A short spell of upright movement led to the small stream in the *'Far Peak Extension'* then the route branched right into a low, very muddy crawl with a deep muddy pool in it that we had to pass on our stomachs, followed by a few climbs up steel ladders. Steve was leading and pointed out the stemples high above in *'Stemple Highway'*. There were more muddy crawls and some traversing above a rift, luckily with handlines to clip into. The final low, gritty, crawl, with two U-bends a third full of muddy water, led into the chamber at the base of the *'Leviathan'* shaft, the final pitch from J.H. Mine. Here we paused for a breather before climbing down through the *'Boulder Piles'* to the Speedwell stream-way. What a pleasure it was to clean off the mud and de-grit ourselves! We ate our snacks and then set off along the stream-way. The water level was mostly below the tops of our wellies except in one or two refreshingly deep places. Soon we were at the *'Whirlpool'*, a serious obstacle in flood conditions, where we balanced on the cables, fixed to the wall near water level, to avoid a wetting, but, at the far end, there was no avoiding an immersion to above the waist in icy water. Wading steadily past *'Pit-prop'* passage and *'The Bung'* passage, we were soon at the

gate to the show cave. Ralph had the key to this and opened it for us to continue, to the end of the 'Far Canal,' which was the end of the route for tourists visiting Speedwell Mine.

We emerged from the canal, slightly out of breath and dripping wet, at the chamber above 'The Bottomless Pit', where there was a large group of tourists, waiting for a boat to take them out. Their guide made capital out of our sudden arrival and kindly made space for three of us in the boat. It was 'Age and Beauty first'! Steve and Paul hung on the front of the boat as it slowly reversed its way along the final canal back to towards the tourist entrance. At one point, Steve and Paul had to walk as the propeller came out of the water! The draught in the tunnel was very cold, so we were all glad when the boat arrived at the base of the Speedwell steps and discharged its passengers. With our wellies full and all of our clothes and gear sodden with water, the 105 steps to daylight were hard work! Then it was a mile back to Castleton, or even further, uphill to Rowter! The walks warmed us up in spite of the icy wind. Back in the TSG 'Chapel' we found it was heaving with cavers who had been on different trips to us, changing from caving gear into their outdoor clothes. What a pleasure it was to be in dry clothes again! Along with the rest of 'The Crewe', we all went for pints of celebratory beer at 'The Castle' pub. The beer never tasted so good, and we felt particularly pleased with ourselves too ! It was a convivial end to an exciting and interesting traverse!

John Gillett 25-10-2011

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Digging through my photographs I came across a set which made me sit down and remember yet another stunning day, caving with good friends :- **John Gillett in the PSM.**

The Gouffre de la Pierre Sainte -Martin, in the Pyrenees.

The original article (modified here) was included in the CCPC Newsletter :- January 1996 - we didn't have photographs in the early issues !

Back in the Summer of 1995, a small group of CCPC Members, and their families spent some time in the Pyrenees mountains, very close to the French/Spanish border. We arrived just about forty-five years, to the day, since Max Cosyns sent his message to Norbert Casteret:

"Have discovered deepest known vertical shaft." - August 1950.

That discovery was the start of an amazing story of exploration and courage in the early days of modern caving. Sadly it is a story which involves a tragic accident.

Briefly:- Exploration of the P.S.M. began in 1951, using a bicycle powered winch to lower each caver into the gigantic chasm. Georges Lepineux was the first down, finding the shaft to be 1,135 feet deep (about 346 metres), and landing in a huge chamber, later named after him. Three others followed him down, including Marcel Loubens, who found a way down through a squeeze, then laddered a pitch to discover a much larger chamber below, containing a river - afterwards named, 'La Salle Elizabeth Casteret'. Worries about the winch brought exploration to a close, and by the time the four had surfaced the winch was worn out.

The following year the team returned, this time with an electric winch and plenty of supplies. Marcel Loubens was lowered first, followed by Tazieff, Labeyrie and Occhialini. They spent five days exploring, then Loubens used the shaft telephone to say he was ready to go up. He strapped himself into the parachute harness at the end of the cable and began to ascend. Suddenly, when he was about 100 feet up, the clamp fixing the harness to the cable failed, and he fell to the shaft bottom.

Although he was still alive, Loubens was terribly injured, and there was little his companions could do to help him, other than try to make him comfortable. As soon as repairs were made to the clamp, the team doctor was lowered and reached the bottom safely. He prepared Loubens for recovery, strapped onto a simple stretcher, but there were narrow places in the shaft where a stretcher could become jammed, so Casteret and five scouts from Lyon began to fix ladders in the shaft so they could guide the stretcher as it passed. Scouts took up positions at -263 feet, -492 feet, -699 feet, and -787 feet, and then they waited. Sadly, just as the surface team were ready to start bringing Loubens up, the doctor underground declared that Loubens had died. After 18 hours in the shaft, the scouts returned to the surface, and it was decided that it was impossible to recover the body without risking further accidents. The cavers still underground buried Loubens close to where he died. It was 15th August 1952. On the boulder by his grave was written: **'ICI MARCEL LOUBENS A VECU LES DERNIER**

JOURSDE SA VIE COURAGEUSE'

[Here Marcel Loubens spent the last days of his life courageously]

With everyone was back on the surface the expedition was abandoned for that year, but a year later they were back, and explored downstream to reach the most enormous chamber they had yet discovered. They called it 'Salle de la Verna' in honour of the Lyon scouts from the La Verna troop. At the end of the chamber the river disappeared into the floor deposits – it was the 17th August 1953 and the team had reached the lowest point in the cave, at a depth of 2,389 feet – the P.S.M. was then the deepest cave, so far discovered on the planet. A year later the cavers were back, but not for exploration – the main purpose of the 1954 expedition was to recover the remains of Marcel Loubens for proper burial. Completed successfully.

Soon after this, the French Electricity Company engineers began to take an interest in the discoveries underground. At that time the valley of Sainte-Engrace had no electricity, and plans were made to use the underground river discovered in the P.S.M. to drive the turbines of a hydro-electric station. A tunnel was driven horizontally through the hillside to intersect the Salle-de-la-Verna so the water could be captured and brought to the surface. The water would then fall through pipelines for nearly 2,300 feet to a generating station below – however, something went wrong, and after the tunnel was completed the project was abandoned – bad for the E.D.F. ('Electricite De France'), but good for cavers, who now had access to the deepest chamber without the challenge of descending the huge Lepineux shaft.

Back to our trip in August 1995:- Annie and I left our camp site and drove up the Sainte-Engrace valley to the Col de la Pierre Sainte-Martin, some 4,500 feet higher. All around there were vast patches of exposed limestone, and many deep, open shafts. We soon located the top of the Lepineux shaft, the original entrance to the P.S.M., now capped with steel beams and concrete, and disguised with loose rubble, but with a small, locked, and barred gate at the side. Nearby there are several memorial plaques bolted to the rock.

After talking about the system in camp, we were extremely fortunate when John Gillett (not camping with us, but staying locally with Dilys) told us that he could arrange a trip in through the E.D.F. tunnel for us. Amazing !

A couple of days later, at 08.00 am, John Gillett, Ralph Johnson, Paul Holdcroft, and I met up with John's friend, Michel Lauga (a well-known local caver, and co-ordinator of cave-rescue in the P.S.M. area) outside the bar in Sainte-Engrace ready for our trip, in through the E.D.F. tunnel, and then as far upstream as time allowed. Ralph had warned us that reaching the tunnel entrance involved a considerable uphill slog through dense forest, expected to take about two hours. Ralph set off, heading right, while the rest of us followed Michel to the left. "No wonder it takes him two hours", Michel commented (in French), shaking his head. Fifty minutes later we arrived at the wooden cabin outside the tunnel entrance, having had our fitness tested by Michel's pace on the way up.



Once changed, but carrying our oversuits, we approached the entrance, which was closed by a pair of steel doors. The wind howls through the gaps in the doors, and getting them open can be difficult because of the pressure, but combined tactics overcame this, and we were in. Keeping to established club practice, my carbide light refused to function, so I had to resort to my back-up electric, while plodding along, struggling with bits of my 'Ariane' generator. Michel was not impressed. The tunnel ran straight and level for hundreds of yards to a three-way junction, where the main route branched right, then after another straight section the route angled left for the final straight section to the 'Salle de la Verna'. Piles of abandoned timber, and a dummy caver (not one of our group) had made it impossible to go the wrong way in these tunnels, then, suddenly we arrived in the chamber. It was huge !

It is almost impossible to describe something so vast, and so black, that it's difficult to convince yourself that you are actually inside a chamber, inside a mountain ! It would be easier to believe that you were outside, on a still, black night on Tryfan. The tunnel had emerged onto a flat terrace of broken rock, probably at least some of it from the tunnel construction, and we walked forward to the terrace edge, marked by a cable, and saw nothing. No roof, walls or floor, except the small patch of boulders directly below, revealed by the combined lights of our group. The sensation of space was awesome, and remained with us for most of the trip. It was all so big.

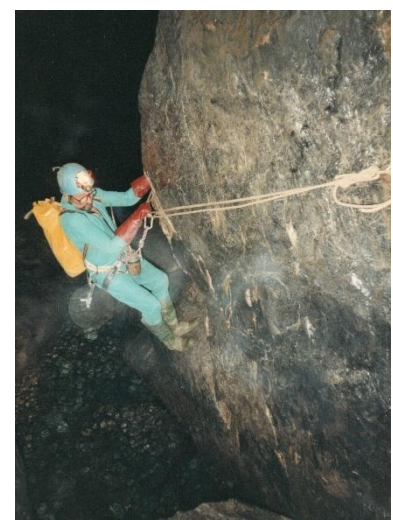
We followed the left wall round towards the roar of falling water, where the river emerges into the chamber before cascading 165 feet towards the jumble of boulders far below. The path was well marked, and had clearly been constructed by the E.D.F. workers, as it led to some old pipe work. Nearby, on a boulder, was a marble plaque to commemorate Marcel Loubens - this was probably the nearest point to his original burial site that could be reached by non-cavers, and only possible since the tunnel was constructed.

Our onward route upstream was hidden behind a vast jumble of enormous boulders. We had to struggle up a polished slab before we could follow a narrow cleft through into the open river passage beyond, where we crossed easily to the other side. John had been this way before, and Michel (who knew just about every part of the system) was content to let him lead the way. It is difficult to remember the sequence of features, as we made rapid progress through one great chamber after another, although passing from 'La Salle Chevalier' to 'La Salle Adelie', we were halted by a lake stretching away between the rock walls.

We used the same way to pass the obstacle as the original explorers had done - a narrow ledge on the right, which allowed us to squirm through without getting a soaking.



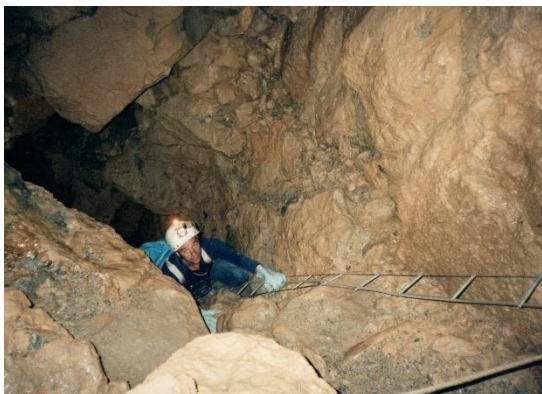
Left: John Gillett leading the way from 'La Salle Chevalier' to 'La Salle Adelie', followed by Michel Lauga, Ralph Johnson, and Paul Holdcroft.



Right: Ralph on one of the traverse lines

For most of the trip we seemed to be high up where the piles of rock debris met the vertical walls of the chambers, sometimes following narrow ledges, or having to climb up and over mounds of gigantic boulders. In several places traverse lines had been fixed, with one in the first section around a corner close above the river, so we could avoid wading or swimming, and there were hand-lines on the more awkward climbs.

We eventually reached a pitch (down), of about 30 feet, which was rigged with a wire ladder, although apparently it usually only has a rope in place, and we carefully descended.



Left: Paul on the wire ladder pitch.

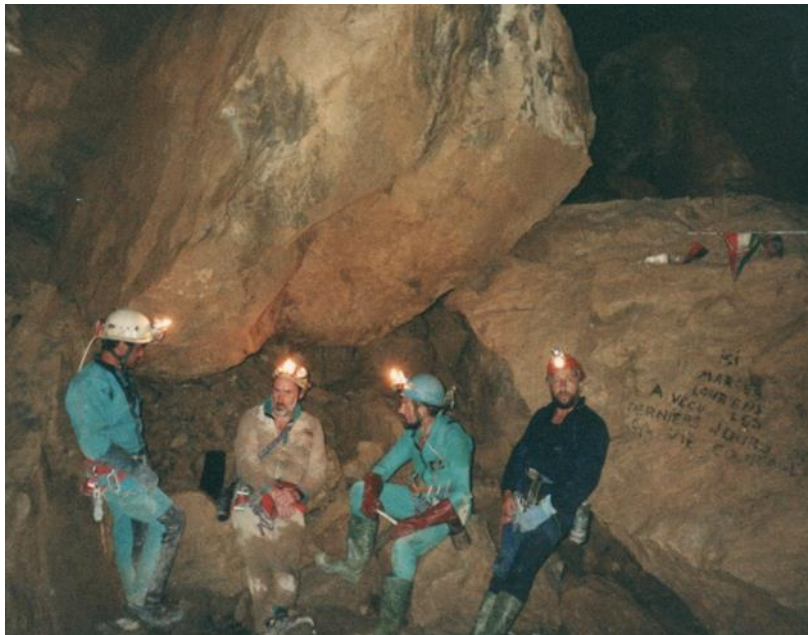
We left the river, and passed through the huge 'Metro' passage, to reach the end of 'La Salle Loubens', where there were large flowstone formations and crystal clear gour pools. It seemed a good place to leave our sacks, then we went on, up through 'La Salle Elizabeth Casteret', climbing steeply upward all the time, to a narrow space that we passed through into the bottom of 'La Salle Lepineux', close to our destination.

We continued to climb, scrabbling up the rubble slope until, quite suddenly, we stood at the place where Marcel Loubens had been buried. The boulder still carried the original inscription from August 1952, though now a little less clear, and there were two flags, and a container for flowers. John and Ralph had both visited this spot before, but it was my first time, and it felt special.

At the burial site of Marcel Loubens:



John Gillett with Michel Lauga.



*Michel Lauga, John Gillett, Ralph Johnson, Steve Knox.
Paul Holdcroft was the photographer.*

After resting by the boulders, Michel took Paul and me further up the enormous slope to a point almost directly below the entrance shaft, invisible somewhere in the blackness above. At one side, tangled on the rocks, there was a great pile of decaying wire ladders, which Michel told us had been left from the rescue attempt, after having been used by the original explorers. Right or wrong, I couldn't help picking up a couple of rungs to bring home.

It was time to start back, towards the E.D.F. tunnel, and so we retraced our steps to the sacks we had left in 'La Salle Loubens', where we stopped for a meal break by the gour pools.



Left: The meal break in 'La Salle Loubens'. L. to R.: John Gillett, Michel Lauga, Steve Knox, Ralph Johnson. Paul Holdcroft was photographer.

Right: Paul & Ralph refilling carbide generators at the gour pools.



Our journey out was uneventful, apart from one or two wrong turns in the chaos of boulders, however we were guided by odd scraps of fluorescent tape, and Michel's comments, if he saw that we were going off route, saved a lot of time. Back in 'La Salle de la Verna' I was surprised to see several tiny specks of light on the opposite wall of the chamber. I was still trying to work out what they were when John pointed out that they were cavers on the 'Aranzadi Wall' – an 80-metre climb to further passages. [John wrote about a later visit to climb the wall in Chapter 25 of his book: 'Sixty Years of Caves & Caving'].

Back outside, we basked in the bright sunlight, surrounded by other cavers who had returned from their own trips, though we had seen none of them (except the distant 'Wall' group), and we chatted about trips past, and plans of trips yet to come. That in itself would have been the perfect end to our day, but more was to come.



Left: Outside the E.D.F. tunnel cabin, with Paul, Ralph and John preparing for the walk back down the hill after our trip.

That evening Michel, and his wife Annie entertained us all to a superb meal on the terrace at his house, with a back-drop of the surrounding mountains and forests. By 'all', I mean cavers and families, making twelve guests altogether .

Right: Cavers and families enjoying Michel and Annie's hospitality after our P.S.M. trip.

John excelled himself with his multiple, simultaneous translations of the various table discussions – French / English / Basque (!) – despite Ralph's often slightly confusing contributions. It really was the very best of endings, with the very best of company.

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Finally, back in the U.K.: 31st August 2019

After our C.C.P.C. trip into Mandale Mine, Lathkill Dale, Derbyshire, a group of us retired to the Old Smithy Café, in Monyash.

[L. to R.: Steve Knox, Alan Brentnall, John Gillett, – others off picture.]

This is how we will remember John; as a bright, but modest star, at the heart of our group of like-minded underground enthusiasts. He was a master of his craft, and was always ready to share his vast knowledge of the world beneath our feet, to the benefit of all who were fortunate enough to know him, and especially to those of us privileged to call him a friend.

Steve Knox

Mon. 6 th Mar.	CCPC Meeting. 8.30 pm. Usually also accessible via Zoom.	'The Red Bull', Butt Lane, Kidsgrove, Stoke-on-Trent. ST7 3AJ.
Sun. 12 th Mar.	Hough Level, Alderley Edge Mines. <i>Alt.: Hartington Moor Farm Adit.</i>	Huge complex, with a boat trip or swim. <i>Short passage with crawls over debris.</i>
Sat. 25 th Mar.	P8 (Jackpot), Perryfoot, Derbyshire. <i>Alt.: Mistral Hole, Yorks..</i>	A superb little system with two short SRT pitches.
Sun. 9 th April	Cae Coch Sulphur Mine, near Trefriw, Conway Valley, N. Wales. <i>Alt.: Perryfoot Cave, Derbys..</i>	A complex of chambers and workings with extensive mineral deposits.
Sat. 22 nd April	Shuttleworth Pot, Leck Fell, Yorks..	A recently discovered system with superb formations. SRT pitches.
Sun. 7 th May	Mouldridge Mine, Derbyshire. <i>Alt.: Moorfurlong Mine & Cavern.</i>	Interesting mine complex, often used for novice trips.
Sat. 20 th May	King Pot, Kingsdale, Yorkshire. <i>Alt.: Illusion Pot.</i>	
Plenty of other trips continue to take place, often organised at short notice. If possible and practical, please let other Members know what you are planning, by using e-mail, and try to support Club trips when you can. <p style="text-align: right;">Steve Knox, Ed.</p>		



Derbyshire Cave Rescue Organisation:

DCRO team members continue to be ready to assist whenever required, and regular training continues, either at the DCRO base in Buxton, or at cave locations in the Peak District – both underground and on the surface.

<https://www.facebook.com/DerbyshireCaveRescue>

For emergency assistance with a caving incident: call **999** – **Police** – ask for **Cave Rescue**.



Gaz Mcshee

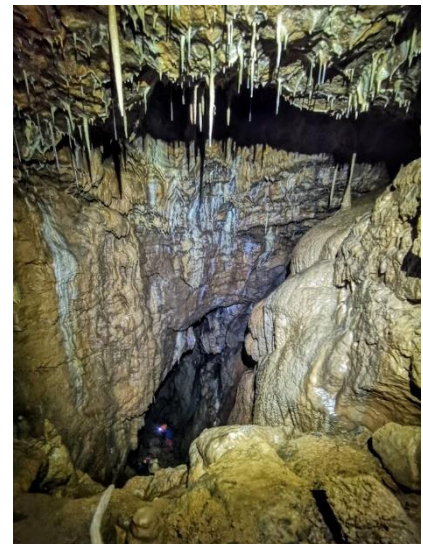
Seven of us made the trek over to Castleton today for a club trip into Peak Cavern:- Dan Baddeley, Neil Conde, Jenny Drake, Heather Simpson, Gaz Mcshee, Rob Nevitt, Steve Pearson-Adams. Today's target was Victoria Aven, so called because in the late 1800's Queen Victoria visited the cave for a concert and was so impressed *she free climbed and bolted the route !*

Anyhow, the Chapel was very busy today. VERY Busy ! - which was really good to see with groups from various parts of the country visiting to enjoy the Peaks underworld. We made good time getting to the base of the pitch and looked forward to a clean day without the need for a cold bath in the Buxton water 'bathtub', as we were just going to be floating around in space for a few hours. Ha-ha, how stupid could we be ?



Up we went, with Neil and Rob taking the left-hand route, and the rest of us going right, through rebelay after rebelay, and traverses with good feet and bad feet. The bad ones killing everyone below you should you release their wrath upon the world by slipping from the minimal footholds hovering disappointingly close to the trigger. The vertical stuff in there is almost insane, with the exposure going on and on into the darkness, until you feel like you could reach through the turf and grab an unsuspecting tourist's foot as he wanders around Peveril Castle - like in some dodgy 80's video nasty.

Once up at the top, the world turns pretty, - extremely pretty, with some of the most pristine formations in the Peak.



Victoria Chamber was beautiful, with some amazing, clean flowstone, straws, carrots and cave bacon. Once up at the top, a brave step up on good holds gave access to a low, very beautiful crawl, over gours, and past a couple of small avens to a squeeze. While 'geared-up' it was too tight for me, but Dan managed to get in by stripping off his descender going in, and his entire rack coming out. The last words I heard, as I tried to push through for the second time, were "Don't you trap me in here."



I didn't trap him, and after a 'necky' climb out, we were soon descending for a visit to the left-hand side of the system. That route was guarded by a rope-to-rope changeover. Oh well, seventy metres up is the ideal place to learn this new technique, right ! It went well, and up over the simulation of a via-ferrata we pottered, avoiding another wall of hanging death in the process, to climb to the high point, which again was stunningly decorated.



Off we set, but that action came with a choice: stay at the top sucking up the beauty, or enter the bowels of the earth in the vain hope that we would find more.



We chose the latter. And dropped into the mud hole from hell ! At the bottom of the really big pitch into Coopers Ave, we bumped into Neil and Rob who were just coming back out. The words from Rob were, "I'm never coming back here !", should have been enough to warn us off, but no, we ploughed on (no pun intended) through mud worse than anything Colostomy Crawl could throw at you, and at one point Dan lost a wellie!



As if things couldn't get any worse, now we had to get out again. Jenny went first, and I followed while Dan derigged.

I can honestly say that I've never before had to use two hands to undo a carabiner to release my ascender - another first for me today! The twist ring kept sliding back just before releasing. Behind me, Dan was having similar issues with the maillons as he derigged, and we shared a few curses to put the world to rights.

The ropes were now a sheet of mud, and after the first pull the ascenders were choked. The chest ascender wouldn't run, and the handle wouldn't lock up, so the whole way back was:- hand ascender up, push the chock in by hand, then pull the rope through your chest ascender by hand. It was a very tiring and time-consuming exercise. Added to that was the occasional total miss fire of the gear, sending you back a few feet just to

add spice. I can honestly say I've never been happier to get off a pitch. Once we were all back at the top Dan announced that he had forgotten how awful it was the last time, and he was never going back.

What the hell ? – Dan, you forgot about that! Wow!



Now it was all down-hill, pitch by pitch, until the sound of the Buxton Water could be heard, and the prospect of a lovely cold bath, to get all this crud off, suddenly became very appealing.

All clean again, we hit the Pub for a debrief, and ruined Dan's day by setting him straight on the finer points of getting old. Sorry Dan, but you will thank us some day, long after we are gone.

It was a very worthwhile trip, suspenseful throughout, as the exposure is immense, but

thanks to everyone for probably one of the most memorable day's caving I've shared with the club. I'm sure there are a lot of tired bodies out there today!

A link to the pictures I got when I could get the camera out safely is here:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/SP5XSkM6uyQ4XLUi9>

Text and all photographs by Gaz Mcshee.



Funeral notice for Dr John Edward Gillett

Dr John Edward Gillett sadly passed away on Friday, 24th February 2023. Details of the funeral date and arrangements are available here on their Funeral Notice page. www.dignityfunerals.co.uk

The service and thanksgiving will be held at St James Church (Church Lane, Gawsworth, Macclesfield SK11 9RJ) at 13.00 on Wednesday 29th of March. There will be refreshments afterwards and an opportunity to look at books and photos at Gawsworth Scout Hut, Church Lane, SK11 9QY.

Dress code: no need to wear dark colours. Instead of flowers, any donations towards John's preferred charity, East Cheshire Hospice, would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,
Catherine

As always, my thanks to everyone who contributes to the CCPC Newsletter, and also to those who acknowledge receipt afterwards. It's always particularly good to hear from Members adventuring in the more distant parts of the world, but sad that we also have to pass on the news when we lose one of our group. All errors in this Newsletter, changes, or corrections are mine – my apologies.

Keep safe, keep caving, and continue to support your club.

Steve Knox, Editor.