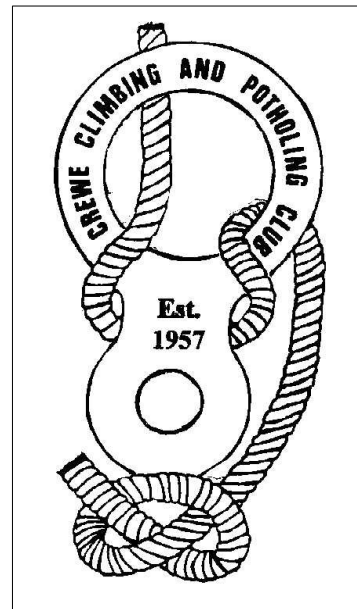


C.C.P.C. Newsletter 70. Summer 2001



Middleton Dale Level 7 / Hope Shaft, Stoney Middleton Catchment Area. Colin S. Knox 7-5-2001

With Foot and Mouth restrictions severely limiting our caving options, Paul Nixon and I decided to visit Stoney Middleton and chose this mine as it was new to both of us, and included some SRT pitches.

We quickly located the 'Lower Level' entrance, close to the bottom of the slope on the right side of Cucklet Delph, within 30 metres of the main road through the dale. A mini-ravine led to a narrow, vertical slot, with an earth floor sloping down into a passage visible beyond. Neither of us liked the look of it, so we climbed through the undergrowth on the slope above to find the 'Middle Level' entrance, which turned out to be an even tighter looking slot, with a small bush growing out of the rock to make it more awkward. One rock-terrace higher, Paul located an open rift entrance which appeared to drop directly into the 'Middle Level', about 4 metres below. Still seeking the highest entrance, known as Hope Shaft, we traversed left across the slope, onto more open ground where we could climb to the base of a small rock wall almost at the hill-top. A narrow, exposed path led to the right, below the rocks and overlooking the Stoney Middleton road far below, to a further slope upwards to a rock buttress split by a wide, natural cleft about 6 metres high. The upper entrance, Hope Shaft, drops vertically from the bottom of the cleft.

Paul rigged the pitch using two reasonable in-situ 'spits' at waist height on the left wall and a tree as a back up. (There are two other, scrap, 'spits' above, and none of the nearby trees are really sound.) After 8 metres sliding down between the narrow walls, Paul reached an earthy ledge where the shaft steps sideways before continuing. As the whole area was festooned with enormous spiders, Paul didn't hang around and missed a re-belay spit, obviously placed to eliminate the rub point ! Further down, the shaft passes through a natural open 'passage', apparently blind in each direction, where it would be easy to get off the rope. A 'spit' at this point was unusable due to corrosion. By this time communication was very difficult, but eventually Paul's muffled shouts, and the slack rope convinced me that the rope was 'free' and I set off down. I rigged the top re-belay then dropped a further 20 metres to land on a pile of earth and rubble in a narrow, mined level where Paul waited. On the way down we had both been careful to avoid the extensive stretches of dry-stone walling which lined one side of the shaft, however this seemed to be well made and in good condition.

There were two ways on. Back in the direction of the hill-side, a low, partially blocked crawl emitting a howling draft probably leads to the two 'Middle Level' entrances mentioned above. In the opposite direction the passage led through a couple of crawls to the top of another shaft, with a low, rubble

filled passage beyond. Paul rigged this using a 'spit' in the left wall, about 1 metre back from the lip, and a 'spit' in the right wall, partially hidden in a tiny alcove over the shaft itself, to give a 'Y' hang with a clear drop, although no back-up was possible. I followed Paul down, noting more dry-stone walling in the shaft, and landed on a rubble pile in another horizontal level after 10 metres. The rubble had almost blocked the way deeper into the hill but the opposite route was open, although it began with a downhill squeeze between the fallen rock and the passage roof, into a more spacious, walking-height section beyond !

Paul shot through the squeeze head first, but I stuck to the more sedate feet first approach. The passage has a fine stone-stempled roof, but some short sections had collapsed forcing us to crawl over the rubble, and led to a rift, crossing at right angles, with miners' waste in the left branch, and a superb, multi-banded mineral vein visible running up the face at the end of the right branch.

A little further, passing a depression in the floor, we reached an earth slope leading gently up to where day-light streamed in through the 'Lower Level' entrance. Once again, the walls and roof in this area were festooned with huge spiders, and their golf-ball sized, white egg sacks ! From the inside, the exit looks quite tight, but with SRT kit off (Paul kept his on) I found it easy enough to squirm through. If necessary the earth floor could be removed with little difficulty.

We could have reversed our route, but instead we walked back up the hill in the sunshine, then I kindly allowed Paul to go back down Hope Shaft to de-rig the second pitch before prussiking back up the shaft. The existing 'spits' are not suitable for use in a pull-through trip.

Altogether our trip took about three hours, but could easily be done in less. Most remaining areas of dry-stone walling or stempled roof seem sound, but collapses have taken place in the past, so such miners' features should be treated with respect. Also the various entrances to the system are clearly acting as major habitats for spiders and other cave life, and this aspect should be considered by visitors.

Historical Note: David Whitehouse, and others from the Hollowford Caving Club, opened, descended, and named, Hope Shaft, and explored the levels during the early part of 1980. Their activities, using ladder and lifeline are described in the D.C.A. newsletter noted above.

The easiest way to find the Upper Entrance (Hope Shaft) is to enter Cucklet Delph from the main road, on the right side (east) of the stream, and walk upstream to an old oil-drum. Turn right, up the steep, open slope, to a mature Beech tree with large, circular ridges running round it's trunk about a metre above the ground. Turn right, and follow a faint path across the slope between the rock wall and several small thorny bushes. Once round the corner, turn left up a short, steep slope to an obvious rock buttress split by a large cleft.

Friday, 13th March 2001.

Paul and I returned to Hope Shaft, and while Paul placed a new anchor for a re-belay at the level of the blind, natural passage, I dug through the soil and rubble blockage at the bottom and gained entry to the middle level. We explored this as far as the tight daylight exit, then returned, checking a short natural passage (choked with silt) in one wall, and a shaft in the floor which led down into another level which was blocked in each direction by back-filled rubble.

Friday, 20th March 2001.

Another evening trip, this time Paul and I were Joined by John Preston and Matthew Ryan, to improve the Hope Shaft re-belay. John and I actually managed to squeeze out through the very tight Middle Level entrance, (but have no desire to repeat this feat) while Paul and Matt placed three new anchors for the Second Pitch..

Rigging:

Pitch 1 (Hope Shaft): 40 metre rope

Tree and two spits at the surface.

One spit at the first re-belay.

One permanent anchor with chain for lower re-belay.

Pitch 2:

15 metre rope (3 permanent anchors at pitch head)

If you would like a rigging topo to "Level 7" contact Steve Knox or Ralph.

Scrubbers in Moss Chamber.

On a recent joint filming trip to Moss Chamber (MassonCG/CreweC+PC) I was amazed when the Masson group produced a variety of scrubbing brushes and began work on the calcite flows which have received copious amounts of mud over the years. The results were impressive and I must confess that I left them toiling away as I disappeared in the direction of Pickerings Crawl to continue filming. Perhaps news of this will inspire others to take up the challenge and "do their bit" for conservation.

Hoften Cross Swallet (Staffordshire Moorlands)

Following a request from DCA members of Crewe C+PC were involved in fitting lids to two swallet holes partly capped by Staffs Moorlands DC. It sounded a most unlikely spot to find anything worthwhile but Caves of Derbyshire suggested that the water sinking at this site resurges at Ilam some 4 miles distance and 500ft lower down!. On visiting the site I was impressed with amount of water, which is obviously considerable in times of flood, but not its odour! Apparently it arises from a local tip and when disturbed gives off a foul smell of hydrogen sulphide. Anyone proposing visiting the site should do so in dry weather. Many thanks to those involved and to those who offered their services.

Mera Peak, Nepal 2001.

This time the excitement started before we left the UK! Having set out with hours to spare problems on the M1 indicated that things were not going to be as leisurely as planned. To save time I dropped Darren, Andy and Sarah (Andy's sister) off at Heathrow with a mountain of gear which included around 60kg of clothing for distribution to our porters. I set off to drop off the jeep and things went from bad to worse!!. I finally arrived back at the air port with the rest of the group in the departure lounge and less than ten minutes to spare. To make matters worse in my panic I had left all my "spending money" in the jeep!

Following a pleasant flight we finally arrived in Kathmandu at 5 p.m. local time and as dusk fell we journeyed to the palatial "Summit Hotel" with a police escort. After an excellent meal and several beers we were "persuaded" to abandon various items of kit(to save weight!) before we retired sometime between 10pm and midnight. We had been informed that the runway in Lukla was "out of action"

After an early start we boarded a twin engined Otter for a "lumpy" ride to Phaplu in the foothills of the Himalayas. The scenery was stunning, not that Sarah cared-she was busy filling the sick bag! A VERY exciting landing left us on a dirt runway in the middle of nowhere. As we awaited an onward flight by helicopter a couple of "walking wounded" trekkers limped/were carried across the runway to be evacuated for treatment in Kathmandu., an ominous introduction! The ten minute chopper ride to Lukla was even more exciting than the ride in the Otter as we skimmed over the tees, the fuselage and wings of a plane that hadn't quite made the runway and eventually the heads of those waiting a lift out. (Safety standards are not what they are in the UK and I was pleasantly surprised that nobody -to our knowledge-was decapitated during landing and take off) After two shuttles the entire group were gasping in the thin air at 2800m. After removing our plastic boots (worn to save paying for the extra weight) we sat in a tea house enjoying a meal of Cole slaw, curried potatoes, bread and black tea while the porters sorted out the loads they were to carry. These loads are supposed to way a maximum of 30kg (plus their own kit of about 5kg) but we frequently saw them with loads well in excess of 45 kg! When I'm leading a trek I always warn clients that "everyone has a bad day!". Well this was mine!! A steep but pleasant walk downhill through a "jungle" of rhododendron and magnolia trees led to an uphill walk of getting on for five hours to Poyan, our stop for the night. By sleeping in the tea house

with its risk of fleas we avoided the need for tents which pleased the porters no end. We had an excellent meal and a reasonable, if rather stuffy, nights sleep in the crowded bedrooms.

Sunday morning began with even more uphill walking (although I felt much better) to the La then STEEPLY downhill to lunch at Karthe. Further downhill followed then a gradual 600m ascent to Panyum to our campsite, again at a tea house where we used the dining facilities. It was here that we organised the first of our clothing raffles which proved to be extremely popular. Unfortunately three of our four bags of clothing were still in Kathmandu. For some strange reason I decided to bivvy out!

I awoke at around 5 am as the cook boys prepared breakfast to the accompaniment of much coughing and clearing of lungs and nostrils!. The majority of our porters seemed to suffer from nasal and chest complaints and each morning we awoke to the same ritual. Even our Sherpani, Pasan , would spend a few minutes clearing her nose and coughing vigorously each morning. As the trip progressed most of us also caught the "Khumbu cough" and would join in the morning chorus! Delhi-belly had struck during the night and a trail of diarrhoea led from the girls tent in the direction of the khazi! (When it strikes there is little time for delay!) Breakfast consisted of boiled egg and porridge, for some reason Fiona declined! Believing oats to be used primarily as horse food I settled for dry toast and black tea (with a little of my secret supply of condensed milk added-courtesy of Matt) The day began with a fairly easy climb to the La where we got our first if rather hazy distant view of Mera Peak. News came through that heavy snow had fallen on our proposed route and that this would mean fixing ropes, with inevitable delays, for our porters. However, all was not lost, a "new" route had been pioneered on our side of the valley which would avoid the difficult section and would also save us a day. However the news of heavy snowfall at altitude was far from welcome as it would make the summit difficult if not impossible.

On our descent to the next village we were accompanied by what I took to be a teenage monk but "he" turned out to be a Buddhist nun on holiday from a gompa that we had passed. She took great delight in introducing us to her sister, only a few weeks old. Darren and I were the last to leave and were puzzled by what appeared to be the decorated grave of a small animal. It turned out to be a "good luck offering" designed to improve the fortunes of the residents of the tiny household. Lunch was taken in considerable heat alongside a streambed. The journey after lunch passed fairly quickly with excellent views of the hill terracing around the village we had passed. Our camp at 2700m was in an area recently cleared of vegetation in which nestled a tiny farm. It was impossible to distinguish any external differences between the human and animal accommodation.

I picked a good bivvy spot, shortly afterwards the wind increased to gale force and it rained in torrents. Needless to say I chickened out (I'm a fair weather bivvier!!) Our porters spent most of the night checking the tents were still up!! It's nice not having to do these jobs oneself!

The next day began with a steepish climb to 3345m followed by an undulating path (described by Passan a Sherpani as level!!!) through jungle to our lunch spot close to a clear river where several of our more meticulous brethren washed their hair-Pat even went for total immersion! In the distance we could see shrouded in mist the route over the Zatra La-our proposed exit route in a couple of weeks time-snow permitting. We had an excellent lunch of cold baked beans ,cheese, coleslaw and pancakes washed down with the usual black tea.

Our route then followed a recently constructed trail, unstable in places, which climbed steeply in and out of valleys as it attempted to contour around the side of the mountain. Crossing a newly constructed log bridge we arrived within five minutes at our campsite at just under 3100m where the porters had been busy hacking down the bamboo jungle and constructing platforms for the tents. The cut-off bamboo stems proved to be quite hazardous, reminiscent of the traps laid by the Viet Cong for unwary Americans during the Vietnamese war!. As I, with the help of Passan (who had by now taken pity on me and was treating me like a long lost grandparent!) sorted out a comfortable bivvy spot, Darren and Andy investigated a short "cave system" close by.

We were awoken by bed tea at six and we were away by 7.20. The sky was clear but it was incredibly warm despite the early hour. Towards lunch we had our first taste of snow. However with the

exception of one short stretch the consequences of a slip would not have been disastrous (i.e. fatal!) so we omitted to use axes or fix ropes. By lunch we had climbed to 3600m (hence the snow) and after another stretch of jungle we dropped steeply to the river where the catastrophic failure of a moraine dam in '98 had emptied a lake a couple of kilometres long and the resulting wall of water had left the valley like a scene from a disaster movie. Boulders the size of small houses had been tossed out of the way like corks and NOTHING was left in the path of the water. Miraculously there had been no loss of life but the effects on agriculture lower down the valley had been serious.

After about 1/2k we were forced back into the jungle for about an hour until we reached our campsite on the edge of the moraine. A small temporary village had sprung up here with young females supplying beer (St Miguel), Snicker bars and Pringles to the trekkers. I didn't investigate too closely as to what the porters were supplied with but it did involve a fair amount of boisterous laughter which went on long after our bed time! Once again Passan had been singing so it rained. (She was banned from singing from this point onwards-very difficult for one of such cheerful disposition!) Lhapka our sirdar decided to post a guard that night. It was my first night of disturbed sleep and wild dreams- a sure sign of AMS (Acute Mountain Sickness)

Today was a rest day designed to give our bodies a chance to acclimatise. In addition to a crampon check Tim, our UK guide, organised "abseiling/fixed rope" and "crevasse rescue" sessions. The porters arranged a "Henna" session where each in turn had their hair blackened with some dye resembling soot and water. Not to be outdone I joined in having my beard blackened much to the amusement of all. It seemed to work quite well on them -I simply ended up with a black towel!! Despite the ban on singing it poured down again and the sound of avalanches and rock fall could be in the distance and our camp guards sat up throughout the night.

Friday. It took us a mere three hours to cover the 4 1/2 k to Osilikharka a climb of around 400m, most of it along the washed out river bed. Sections of it were distinctly hazardous as the path lay beneath unstable overhanging cliffs of moraine undercut by the recent floods. From our camp site we had excellent views of Peak 39 (as yet unclimbed) and our route up to Mera Peak via the Mera La. Darren, Andy and Sarah decided to wander up a couple of hundred metres to some spectacular seracs while I prepared my bivvy spot -the cue for a heavy snowfall and an excuse to sleep "indoors". The porters (particularly Passan) spent the night clearing heavy snow from the tents.

We awoke to deep snow through which we had to trudge for a couple of hours or so to Tagnag stopping at a tiny gompa on route where Lhapka (a lay lama having spent 13 years in a Buddhist monastery as a trainee monk) and his wife Passan (our assistant sirdar) held a touching ceremony involving prayers and the burning of a sweet smelling local shrub. As we arrived in Tagnag our porters were busy clearing snow from the terraces behind one of the tiny tea houses.

The afternoon was hot but the temperature dropped dramatically as clouds blew up from the valley and once again light snow began to fall. After lunch a group of four French climbers arrived complaining bitterly that their (French) guide had aborted their summit bid 50m from the top and their proposed trip over the Mera La into the Honku Valley.

(We later learned that their climbing sherpa made the summit but their guide had considered it too hazardous when his hair stood on end in an electrical storm!! -we had experienced this albeit it at low level. In addition two of the party who had remained in camp during the summit bid had spent the night in and out of a Gammow bag due to HAPE (High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema) a complaint that frequently proves fatal!)

An hour or so later a fifth member of the group arrived looking like death warmed up-or rather partly warmed up. In addition to suffering from HAPE he drank 4 litres of fluid without going out for a pee!! -a sure sign of dehydration. Some time later the leader of the group arrived virtually carrying, with the aid of the porters, an elderly woman of around 15 stone wrapped in a foil "space blanket" She was obviously VERY SICK!

Fortunately, in addition to our two pharmacists (and 3 cave rescue team members!!) we had three consultants in our party!! The evening was spent administering drugs to both casualties while the female was in and out of the Gammow bag like a fiddler's elbow. At one point I tried to lift her

unaided-no chance-it took the combined efforts of myself, Andy and Darren to make any impression. While we struggled to keep the casualty alive the remainder of the French party (apart from the male HAPE victim) continued their meal and loud discussion on whether or not they should have turned back (I suppose they could have buried the two casualties and then carried on!) Fortunately we were also able to scrounge a bottle of oxygen off a Japanese party. Apparently the two casualties spent the entire night taking turns in the hyperbaric chamber. Presumably it worked since they were both alive in the morning when they were evacuated by helicopter.

Bed tea at 6.30, breakfast followed by the heli-evacuation then a snow plod up to our base camp at Digkharka at around 4600m. There was blood and sputum on the fresh snow-evidence of the problems experienced by the French the previous evening. We were forced to pitch the tents on snow. After lunch Darren, Andy, Sarah and I took a stroll up to the Dig glacier, a climb of around 150m. We all felt good but declined to explore further due to overhanging seracs and evidence of recent avalanches. That evening we took the opportunity to practice with OUR Gammow bag-we sincerely hoped we wouldn't need it.

Monday. Breakfast was followed by a walk up to Kharrie, our proposed base camp, a suitable patch of snow provided snow and ice practice on the way. We all carried on past the site of our proposed camp to a ridge above the site which led up to the Mera glacier. The weather was glorious throughout the walk although word on the grapevine was that snow conditions had prevented anyone reaching the summit since the ill-fated French attempt mentioned earlier. A group from KE grimly told us of their failed attempt. As we descended snow fell and this persisted for most of the day.

Tuesday. It had been cold overnight (-3 degrees inside the tent) so at least the snow would have had a chance to consolidate. Andy was feeling distinctly unwell so Darren, Sarah and I took a leisurely stroll with him up to base camp. I was unfortunate to miss filming a really spectacular avalanche on the way-fortunately at a safe distance!. On arrival we put Andy to bed and, leaving Sarah in charge of the patient, Darren set off in perfect conditions to catch up with the others filming on the way. Once again as the afternoon progressed cloud (and snow) drifted up the valley -things were not looking too good for a summit attempt. The afternoon was spent filming, avalanche spotting (none close enough to film) and admiring fleeting glimpses of "our" summit which looked tantalisingly close. Once again our porters had declined the use of tents and were ensconced in caves formed beneath the large boulders. Yellow legged (Himalayan) choughs circled the site as we further honed our crevasse rescue skills courtesy of some conveniently placed boulders.

Wednesday. We were awakened by the noisy cries of Tibetan snow cocks (rather like a large grouse) 6am bed tea followed by breakfast then all except Andy, who was still well under par, set off for the Mera La. A helicopter hovered and finally landed at base camp, well below us by now. We believe a Japanese group had paid to be lifted out. As we reached the glacier the cloud blew in and it began to snow. On top it was FOUL! As we beat a hasty retreat we learned that still no one had managed to summit during the last week. Dejected and wet we staggered into camp for a "council of war". Moving base camp up to the La as planned was not an option since it would put the porters at risk. We decided on a "rest day" at our existing camp after which we would be forced to make a decision "up or down!"

Thursday. Andy had almost recovered so the entire group set off in excellent weather for the La. I brought up the rear filming all the way. The weather was perfect, sunny days with hard frosts at night. The snow could just be in condition for a summit bid! As we descended we passed a group of very badly shod porters climbing up to the glacier. Many were wearing plimsolls bound with rope to increase their grip. Eventually we came across a very young looking cook boy lying in the snow apparently lifeless and clutching his head. After a brief (to the point) discussion with the party leader we removed his load, gave him some warm clothing and paracetamol before assisting him back down the mountain. His recovery was rapid and remarkable as he lost height.

Friday. 5.30 bed tea. A long walk up to the Mera La where we had originally planned our base camp, a brief rest in cold conditions with poor visibility then on again towards top camp from where the summit attempt would be made. All three of us (Andy, Sarah and I) were making heavy weather of it whereas Rachael was, according to Darren, "going like a train"- she was to pay for this later. Low

cloud kept obscuring my view of the lead groups as it did of our goal. At times the poor conditions even rendered our path "invisible" and I only now I had gone off route as I sank knee deep into the soft snow. Even the packed snow on the route was "soft" making progress slow and tedious. Eventually we crossed a mega crevasse using a convenient snow bridge and within the space of a few minutes (although it seemed like hours) we were in top camp feeling absolutely whacked! The views were amazing-we could clearly see Everest, Lhotse, Makalu with even Cho Oyu in the distance. Hundreds, no thousands, of spectacular peaks lay before our eyes. We went mad with our cameras praying that threatening clouds would not obscure the views. I deeply regretted not carrying my videocam-but needs must! Our campsite was spectacular nestling beneath a crumbling rock outcrop facing a line of tottering seracs. The bad news was the snow. I think Darren and I came to the same decision simultaneously- there was no chance of the summit in such soft snow but Tin our guide was committed to giving everyone a crack at it come the morrow. Breakfast was arranged for 0230.

Saturday (Summit Day) It was minus 8 inside the tents as breakfast was served (Boil in the bag) The summit party was reduced to 6 (plus Tim, Lhapka and a climbing sherpa) The group left after about 90 minutes but Malcolm, and Mary, accompanied by Lhapka returned after an hour so, Malcolm feeling ill and Mary due to the cold. I guess the rest of us got up around 6-ish and prepared for the descent. Rachael had been sick throughout the night and was suffering from AMS. It was arranged for her pack to be carried by one of the porters, just as we left Fiona and Tim caught us up having abandoned their summit attempt.

The descent must have taken us a leisurely 3 or 4 hours and as we surveyed the summit slopes a tiny group of dots were making their way down. Against all odds 3 of our group (Pat, Simon and Martin) had made the summit accompanied by Pertemba our climbing Sherpa. Other groups were following in the tracks they had made. Around 3pm the triumphant group arrived in base camp having descended most of the way unroped (unwisely in my opinion in view of the crevasse risk and poor snow conditions)

Sunday. We were now pushed for time and HAD to cross the Zatra La! We set off in sunny conditions covering two days inward march before lunch. Two more stages were covered in the afternoon and we arrived in camp amongst showers of hail and thick mist. We had lost 1300 m of height.

Monday. It was going to be another long day- and if we couldn't cross the pass Well that didn't bear thinking about! A stretch through the jungle was followed by a stretch on the washed out river bed followed by a further stretch of jungle which climbed for what seemed forever. We stopped at a tiny tea house, little more than a shack, for lunch. As we ate an Australian group passed by having done a high level route but not having any definite news on the condition of the pass.

We ate in cold conditions and quickly hit snow well before we reached the top of the pass marked by a chorten (a cairn with religious significance) Passan set off and I instantly found myself standing on a tiny ledge consisting of crystals of hail loosely bound together (if at all) with no axe to hand (not that an arrest would have worked in the mush) and no option but to continue. To my left the steep slope disappeared into the mist, I had no idea of the size of the drop and had little interest in finding out! The others followed axes in hand and Tim wisely insisted a rope be fixed for the porters.

The next stretch was marginally better but again Tim insisted on a fixed rope. One of the porters refused to cross this next stage even with the fixed rope so was left to await the arrival of the remaining porters . To be fair he had been feeling unwell previously and had already had his load reduced. It took a further couple of hours to reach our camp site at Titikharka well in advance of our porters and equipment, fortunately there was the inevitable tea house which could provide us with hot drinks while we waited.

Tuesday. Hopefully this would be our last day of trekking - but we still had to cross the Zatra La at 4600m! A steady climb led to the summit chorten where Lhapka erected a string of prayer flags, spending some time in prayer before we set off. A short steep section led onto an undulating snowfield. The situation and views were magnificent with Lukla several thousand metres below us and to our left and the peaks of the Himalayas as far as the eye could see. We spent ages crossing to the

next col stopping frequently to admire the view, to film and to take photographs. Personally I felt this to be the most spectacular part of the whole trek.

On reaching the next col we could see the route (which takes three days to ascend) lying stretched out in front of us, fixed ropes had been placed on the steepest ground at the top. Using "cows tail techniques" we quickly descended to the end of the ropes then made our way cautiously down the steep snow slopes below. The porters found it less easy with their heavy loads. One had lost his crampons and Andy lent his axe to the one who seemed to be carrying the heaviest load. Eventually everyone made it safely down although several bags did take spectacular tumbles emphasising the need for care and the consequences of an uncontrolled slip!!

Following lunch we made our way down to Lukla in small groups. Darren, Sarah, Andy and I were in no hurry spending ages just enjoying the last few hours of our mammoth trek. Arriving in Lukla we were treated to the usual hot lemon drink and welcomed with the news that we couldn't get a flight out the following day!! We spent the early part of the evening in the tea house before Andy, Darren and Martin "went out on the razzle!"-no mean feat in a "town" that could easily fit onto a small football field!

A further day and night were spent in Lukla the highlight being a "goodbye party" for our porters (with plenty of free chang- a local beer brewed from millet) and a further raffle of clothing which had finally arrived from Kathmandu.

The flight to Kathmandu was exciting as expected although it was two hours late leaving-again no surprise. At leisure in Kathmandu really meant having a long hot shower in readiness for a thorough exploration of the capital next day.

We "did" Kathmandu in small groups having lunch at "Kilroys Irish Restaurant" Kathmandu is a typical third world city with more than its share of traffic and pollution (although to be fair less pollution than we had been led to believe) beggars, holy men and the most persistent street traders I have ever met. Fortunately Darren seemed to act as a human magnet for these which gave the rest of us some respite.

The evening was rounded off with a BBQ in the hotel before we all fell into bed to await our "early morning call" -without bed tea!!

Ralph J. (with apologies to Andy, Darren and Sarah!)

PS. Despite warnings about meat/barbecues/vegetarianism our 3 carnivores spent a good part of the flight back and following week on the bog!! Some folks never listen!!

A Rocky Introduction to Caving

My daughter Jess aged 14 came to me one afternoon and said "Dad" with that particular inflection of the teenager on the want. "mmmm" I replied waiting for the crunch, mainly, was this about to cost me money. "I am doing the Duke of Edinburgh Award at school so could I come caving with you?"

The rest of the details poured fourth, hours required, activity periods to show commitment, log books to be completed and could we take some photographs for her portfolio. "Yes we can do all of that" I replied.

Then there was quite excited discussion about what we could do and photos we could take, places we could go, how to make a start and we chatted happily away for quite a while. I could have 'quality' time with one of my children and do something I loved too.

The first need was going to be to impart some basic theory. Jess is a natural climber from heart stopping arboreal adventure in the high trees in our garden to climbing walls on various outward bound school trips, one of which included abseiling and a short caving trip.

The other thing to sort out was getting her some kit. After a chat with Ralph Johnson he rustled up an over suit and we were able to borrow a set of SRT, helmet and with a bit of tinkering a lamp was sorted at a very reasonable price, old clothes and a fleece were to serve as an under suit and she had her own wellies. Morrisons had some really nice small washing up gloves so she was well set up.

We had a theory session in the kitchen going through the equipment, Jess is great to teach as she listens carefully, remembers things well and asks if things are not clear or she's forgotten.

Next we moved to the garden and kitted her up in SRT gear, threw a rope over a tree and went through the safety aspects of rope, SRT, and the use of cows tails. To ensure she had trust in the rope we went from leaning back off the garden wall on hard locks then abseiled a few feet down the wall and prussicked back up. Great, that all went well. I was enjoying writing these episodes up nearly as much as doing them.

Now she was ready to move onto the next stage, but sites were limited due to Foot & Mouth, so one damp morning saw us off to Eyam Dale Shaft at Carlswark in Stoney Middleton Dale. We parked at the sub station, renowned for tackle theft from cars, and got Jess kitted up. We loaded the Biological Anti Theft Device (dog) back into the car and crossed the road to the cave.

I rigged the pitch and included a safety rope via a pulley on the pitch head to an Italian Hitch through a HMS krab on the eyebolt. Jess attached herself to the rope, I clipped on the safety rope and we ran through the procedure. Jess was to abseil down to the ledge in the shaft, clip her cows tails into the loop I'd tied in the rope, and keeping the safety line attached take off her Stop. I took some photos as she abseiled happily down. When she called she was on the ledge and clipped into the loop I rigged the safety rope to both P bolts, so Jess was safely attached at all times so if she had trouble getting her jammers off the rope I could come up the safety rope to help.

Jess called "Rope free" I abseiled down and met her on the small ledge. "Hi" I said "OK" "Great" she replied. She put on her jammers and set off back up, making good progress, I must have got her leg loop right I thought remembering the time I had 'improved' mine, and spent an exhausting age getting up the fifth pitch in Maskill, fortunately I had not cut them so after a struggle with the knots we put them back to the right length. "OK" I called up "Can't get my jammers off"

"OK have you put your cows tails in the loop?" "Yes" came the reply in a tone of, you said it was the most important thing to keep me safe so I've done it.

So I came up the other rope, I had not explained properly the pulling down and out idea of opening the jammer, but she had not pushed it all the way up to the knot, which was good. So we had a few practices to get it right. Then Jess went off down and back up a few times while I life lined. So ended the first session, we went back to the car and got changed while the dog investigated the sub station fence for would be intruders.

For her next experience of caving and cavers Jess acted as a casualty for a DCRO training session where she lay fully kitted up for an hour on bags of rock salt and a pile of rope, while I demonstrated examination and moving the unconscious casualty. AG stated there was no way normally DCRO would rescue anyone caving in a pink oversuit, but I am sure come the day they would make an exception for Jess.

Our next trip took us to Carlswark again. We ran through the procedure and Jess abseiled down to the bottom this time, called rope free and exited the bottom of the pitch and waited just through the crawl where I joined her a few minutes later. We had a look round. I was enjoying her success and having her on a trip, we proceeded, took photographs of cave features, Jess coming through the water and some crawling. As we paused for a rest she said her legs were uncomfortably cold so some wet suit socks and a fleecy undersuit are going to be next on the Birthday /Christmas list. This soon passed and we carried on talking through water and mine dangers, deads, stemples depressions in the floor, hanging floors and roofs and finally exited through the Gin Entrance. We walked back to the car, got changed, recovered the rope and feeling very satisfied went to the café in Eyam for a sandwich and a drink.

Really for our next trip I wanted to go to Knotlow and go as far as the top of the Waterfall pitch where Jess in Carlswark do a couple of pitches, pass a deviation, see some water and some bigger chambers but Foot and Mouth made this impossible.

At a committee meeting Level Seven was mentioned so I found out where it was roughly and had a walk up with the dog for her morning constitutional. The entrance is only five minutes from the road (for a healthy mountain goat.). The next evening found Jess armed with her mobile phone, Deet and a

Level 7 Entrance

I tied myself with 50 meters of rope and SRT gear climbing up to the entrance. Wow had the nettles grown in 24 hours.

This was the first time I had used Spits I looked at them noticing a fine crack from the first vertically down the rock but the second was sound and the tree was big and strong so I backed up to it and went down.

Level 7 Entrance Ah I remembered the other thing said at the meeting, 'it's got spiders'. I had a look round and descended looking for other spits for rebelay, I passed one, it was rusty and dirt filled. I came to a new piece of chain and linked into it, I had not seen one like this before, I went on and came to another rusty mucky spit and descended on through the spiders escalator to the bottom of the pitch, looked round, I was in a narrow rift of a chamber with a low exit at each end. I called back up to Jess and set off back up. It seemed ages since I had done any rope work and it felt good to be back doing some. I talked to Jess as I got nearer the top and emerged into a beautiful orange sunset.

We returned a few days later with John Shepherd my friend, regular partner at work and fellow caver since we both took it up as a hobby after becoming interested through work.

We parked by the quarry entrance and crossed the road; there was a cool breeze which was a blessing for such a steep walk in caving kit. I abseiled first and tried to put in as many rebelay as possible, so Jess could practice passing them. But as I had noticed on my look see trip several would not take a bolt so I finished up with one in about 30 feet down where the shaft kinks to the side, for no very good reason I put a krab through the chain as a deviation for Jess to pass just to give her the basic principal. I waited just beyond the bolt change and Jess joined me, we went through the procedure together, then I went off to the foot of the pitch and called rope free. I could hear Jess and John talking as he could see her from above. I stood back and had a look at the exits, one was draughting strongly. Jess arrived through the hole in the roof and I was ready with the camera and took a couple of photos. My wife does not seem to have missed her Olympus XA1 it fits really nicely into my poly bottle and so far mud and wet wipes don't seem to have bothered it much. John arrived and we went through into the draughting rocky muddy passage which opened up a bit after the low crawl, we passed a smallish hole in the floor then another and it looked as if it did not go on beyond. Another picture and we turned round returning to the chamber, we had already realised the 20 meters of rope for the second pitch was still on the surface, but no problem we would find the second pitch head then return to the surface and be very happy with that, a through trip could wait and fill up more log book pages another time.

We entered the opposite passage and soon came to the second pitch head so we returned to the shaft. John went up first and waited for Jess just beyond the rebelay, Jess went next and I could hear her and John talking at the rebelay. I was looking round at the odd wood louse, snail and multiple spiders, they are the big black body and long legs variety, good job Jess isn't bothered by them.

Then there was a rumble. A big rumble. A roar. A flash of white from the shaft into the chamber. Rock smashed clean and white. There was dust. The noise stopped. Then tinkling, small bits rained down the shaft.

No blood on the rock. Jess isn't in it. "JESSICA" I yelled up the shaft. How can it not have hit her? Is she dead on the rope? Where did it come from, below her? Above her? Did something come out? Is the rope safe? Is John OK? Is the rope still on the tree?

All these things went through my mind in the microsecond before she shouted "I'm OK Dad!" Breath rushed out of me. "Is John OK?" "Yes dad he is - he says keep away from the bottom of the shaft." I raised a smile, seemed like a good idea to me. "OK" I shouted back "What happened?" "Wait." she called "OK Jess, just stay where you are and John will help you, it will be OK" "OK Dad" "Dad, John says stay back he may need to send the rest down" Rest, rest what rest, where from? Then Jess called "Dad, John is shielding me from any more with his body and I am going up" It was, I reckoned about 30 feet to the top. "OK see you on top"

I knew there was nothing to do, John could and would sort it out, and that Jess was in as good hands as mine so the wait was not so bad, but a small part of me wanted to examine the fallen rock to look for spits, it wasn't the best thought I'd had so I stayed where I was. "Tom" John called from above "Yeah,

is Jess out” “Yes she is, I am at the rebelay come up” I cleared the rock from the rope on the floor and set off up. “What came down?” I asked as I got nearer the bolt.

“The under side of the pitch head dropped off” “What’s holding the rest up” I asked taking the krab off the rope. “Talk about it later”

“Is that your delicate way of telling me to get a shift on” I said leaving the krab behind on the chain.

“Yep, I’ll go up, you climb past me while I fill the hole” We squeezed past each other.

Jess was sat on a rock eyes moist but not crying holding her leg. “She’s got a nasty gash on her leg” John said opening his first aid kit, he was pulling up her suit leg, the wellie was already off and the sock was bloody. “Its OK love” I said “You were brilliant” “Lucky you’ve got the best ambulance crew in Derbyshire to look after you” said John as he tied off the bandage.

I had undone the bolt on the way up, Jess was in good hands so cows tails attached I tried to pull up the rope, but it stuck. “We’ll leave it for now” I said but I did not want to encourage any one else to go down. So I gardened the entrance with my boot, then pulling in another direction the rope came up. Jess and I set off for the road with as much as we could carry while John derigged the pitch head. Jess could walk ok and we made it to the car.

On the way down I asked her what had happened from where she was. “I heard it coming and I heard it go. I was worried because you were down there.” We were all relieved by each other’s voices. “Then I prussicked out. My leg itched and it was all bloody, I found some marks and thought that was it, but when John put his head out he said “find the big cut and press on it,” that’s when I looked further up my leg.”

John was soon along and we cut off Jess’ kneepad, changed out of our caving gear and set off for Chesterfield Royal Hospital. Now we had to phone Tracy, (Jess’ mum,) to tell her we were out as is my usual caving routine, and to tell her the news, just not quite the full bulletin all at one go. When we got a signal I said you ring mum just tell her we are out and then I’ll talk to her. “Hi mum it’s Jess, we are out” said an up beat Jess, “Yes we are, I’ll put dad on” “Hi Tracy, we are going to be late Jess has cut her leg, it looks like a stitches job so we are going to CRH”

We waited in A&E for a couple of hours then her wound was washed, the doctor had a look. It was cut in a triangle shape about 4cm. each side, down to the bone, with the piece of skin and tissue missing. There was bruising to both lower legs knee to ankle. The doctor said the wound was extensive and would scar badly and as there was no skin to cover the hole it could not be stitched, so it was dressed and antibiotics prescribed.

On Jess’s third appointment the consultant operated and spent an hour removing damaged tissue from the wound and fat from around it to make enough spare skin to cover the wound properly and stitched it carefully closed in a very neat job. Horror of horrors he prescribed more antibiotics, Jess hates tablets and sees them as the worst part of the whole thing.

Has it put her off caving NO its not, she is just waiting for her leg to heal and by then we hope some better venues will be open again.

Basically when the rocks fell all three of us were in the only places we could survive. John was close to the top though some caught his shoulder most slid past him. Jess on the bolt was to the side and under a slight overhang. I was at the bottom, and due to good training from Ralph Johnson, had resisted the temptation to stand under the shaft and watch Jess going up. If Jess had not been a novice, she would have passed the rebelay and been mid pitch and I would also have set off and been mid pitch. If one of the other spits had taken a bolt or I’d used the chain as a rebelay we would all have been mid pitch. In one way we were unlucky, in many more ways we were very very lucky and lessons have been learnt from the hard knocks of an experience.

Tom Bailey.

PS. Level 7. A couple of days after the above incident Steve Knox and Paul Nixon paid the site a visit in order to do some work to the top of the shaft but as Steve points out- with all old mine shafts it should still be treated with caution.

STOP PRESS. On a recent trip to the Milwr Tunnel an electron ladder snapped on Brian. Fortunately he was close to the bottom of the pitch so was unharmed. We were guests of another club who had not rigged the pitch with a safety rope-all goes to show! (Remember the Nettle Rescue?) **NEVER use a ladder without a lifeline.**

This could be your last chance ever to buy a Stop at £12.50!! Don't delay-act today!!

The rope on Idiots Leap was considered dangerous and has been removed.

New SRT Venue.

Jim Shallcross has offered us an alternative venue for SRT training at his new factory in Shelton. It consists of a stairwell to the first floor (Jim is going to modify the floor so it can be removed-it will then only require a few ring hangers in the rsj's and away we go. Doubtless it wont receive much attention during the summer months (especially as folks are keen to get underground as F+M draws to a close-I hope!) but once the nights draw in it will prove to be a useful alternative to the "Holden Lane Tower"

DCRO Practice.

Due to the F+M outbreak the venue for this exercise was changed to Peak. Expecting to be wallowing chest deep in mud and/or water many folks kitted up with wet suits and the like only to find that the casualty had crushed his hand at the top of the 75m Victoria Aven (Careless sod!). Lots of energetic prussiking took place before the casualty was extricated from the scene in around four hours leaving plenty of time for a "debrief" in the Bulls Head!

CCPC FX3 Lamps.

To offset the cost of replacing halogen bulbs in our FX3 lamps a "donation" of 50p will be charged in the future. If you prefer to borrow a lamp with a 4v "Oldham" bulb you will not be charged but will be unable to see where you are going!

Meets.

Sadly, with F+M still rampant in the Dales these continue to be on an ad hoc basis! Derbyshire, N and S Wales are open but Yorks, with the exception of White Scar and Ingleboro' Cave, remains firmly "out of bounds". Perhaps now is the time to bring some of our digs to a conclusion. Hillocks, Giants, Hypothermia, Lumb all spring to mind plus the bolting work (and possibly further exploration) in Far Sump Extensions (Peak Cavern). In addition negotiations are well under way to open some of the old copper mines in the region of Royal Edge Mines in which we were involved around 20 years ago. A small group of members have attended a site meeting and things "look promising." (Have I heard this before somewhere?)

Mid week trips continue to take place during the daytime and evening. If you want to do something midweek ring around (try Matt, John M. or Ralph for starters)

Addresses: If you are not getting regular emails informing you of "whatson" it's probably because we haven't got your email address! While you're at it - check we've got your other details correct, it's surprising how many times they're not-often due to changes of mobile no. or email provider. If you're naffed off with getting unwanted emails from the club let us know and we can delete you from the list.

Tony Reynolds. Our best wishes go out to Tony who as I write is thankfully making a good, but rather slow, recovery despite residing for the last couple of weeks in the intensive care unit at Leighton Hospital. He should be allowed visitors in a few days time.

