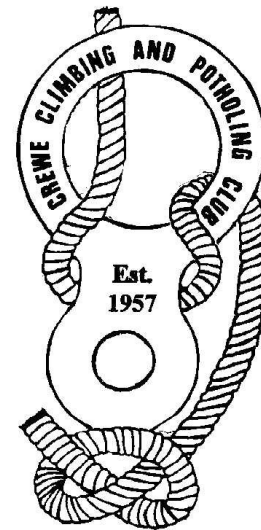


C.C.P.C.

Newsletter 80

January 2004

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OK, be honest – how many of you spotted the “deliberate” mistake in the last newsletter? (Prize for first correct answer- its on first page!)

Hi Ralph,

I've promised everyone a long e-mail for such a long time I've forgotten where I've got to start from. Scroll down to the bottom if the first bit is boring, there's some important news at the end.

I'm still in China and likely to stay here for the foreseeable future. I visited Britain for a month in July with the aim of selling my car - which Andrew and co. finally accomplished for me after I left - and the money's just reached my account (apparently). I also spent a considerable amount of time shuffling gear around between various places and got in a few caving trips, all into Peak Cavern, including a through trip from the newly opened Titan entrance (the biggest shaft in Britain) which was an unexpected bonus. I came back to China with a whopping 92kgs of baggage without being charged an excess - which I'm especially proud of since I couldn't even pick it all up on my own. I have now effectively moved a lot of my possessions to China and am not planning to worry about moving them back any time soon.

One of the aims of selling my car was to buy a restaurant / hotel / bar in Yangshuo to run for a number of years. After a lot of looking at a number of different places I found the perfect premises in the perfect location and negotiated a perfectly reasonable contract. I then looked at the worst case scenario column in my spreadsheets and decided I could make as much money with a deposit on a buy to let mortgage on a house in Britain. Nothing like as much money as the middle and rightmost columns but with the advantage of not working 24 hours a day for the next ten years. I can then work freelance for any extra cash.

I might not have rented a bar but I did start renting my own flat in Yangshou at a fraction of the price of the one I was sharing there. Much quieter and bigger, albeit a ten minute bike ride away and unfurnished. At 200 quid a year (that's not a typo) for an apartment with sitting room, bedroom, bathroom and kitchen I can't really complain, even if I've only spent about a month there so far. Those parts of August not taken up with bar shopping, house hunting and house furnishing I spent failing to learn more Chinese (again) and doing touristy stuff in and around Yangshou - surprisingly large amounts of which I had never done before considering it's the closest place I have to home at the minute.

September and October had long since been scheduled as a caving expedition to Tian Xing - where the deep caves are which we were exploring last year. Dong Ba has been explored over a number of years and is currently the second deepest in China. It stands a high chance of connecting to the deepest cave, Qi Keng Dong which we bottomed last year at -920m. We narrowly missed a connection last year, cold weather and other commitments stopping play. We also discovered a scary shaft, Da Keng, which looked from the surface to be about 30m deep - but once over the edge was obviously much deeper. Stones fell for up to 12 seconds before hitting the sides and continuing to rumble downwards. This year Dong Ba is rigged and awaiting dry weather and the enthusiasm to explore. A new dam has made previously dry passages wet and it's much less inspiring than before. I suspect one or two more camping trips and we'll pull the ropes out. On the other hand there is over 800m of rope in Da Keng and it's still going downwards.

Another highlight of this years expedition was about a week ago when our landlord informed us of a local farmer who'd lost a cow down Mi Dong and we could have half of it for ourselves if we went and helped them recover the meat. A sino-anglo-soviet recovery team was quickly dispatched and we set off to the cave. The cow had fallen around 250m but there's another way down, about 120m of steep walking and then about 80m of pitches down ledges. We rigged a rope down one side and the local farmers tied together all the telegraph wire they could muster to lower a basket down to haul the meat back up. Ilya, a Russian caver and I set off down with knives and performed some extreme butchery on the remains of the cow. The hide acted like a bag and contained most of the meat - although it no longer resembled the diagrams you see on the walls of high street butchers. We carved off what we could and sent it up in baskets - only once being rained on once by an upturned basket. Out for a good feed and beer. Photos coming soon!

I've done not a huge quantity of caving so far this expedition but am not complaining for once. Almost as soon as we arrived I set off to see Apple in neighbouring Sichuan province for a few days. My return was delayed by the threat of being called as a witness to a court case in Yangshou - being underground would have been little help to my friend

who had been charged with "Hurting people on purpose" Thankfully she was released after 15 days and further charges dropped. Still, it gave me a good excuse to spend more time in Chengdu. I returned to Tian Xing and was quickly followed by Apple so we've been doing lots of SRT practice, looking for caves on the surface, etc.

Finally we've just spent a couple of days a little further down the Yangtze for a quick look without caving gear at the Great Crack and the Great Doline - a source of amusement for cavers coming to China for the last ten years or so and still no connection between the two. Returned to Tian Xing last night via Chongqing collecting Jenny Drake, a fellow Crewe CPC caver on the way. We are now awaiting news from the four day camping trip down Da Keng - apparently there's big horizontal passage at -570m, and at the same elevation as our other horizontal development. Centre line surveys are regularly updated at <http://mrs30.quns.cam.ac.uk/~hmg/survex/?svx=tianxing/current/tianxing.svx> if you can make sense of it all.

The good bit of news which I've saved 'til last is my engagement to a certain Miss "Apple" Liu Xuan. We haven't set a date yet but it's likely to be early summer next year in Beijing to coincide with my Dad and co. visiting. More information, a photo and her Chinese name at www.mdryan.net/marriage

I bought (another) digital camera (a waterproof one this time!) and a video camera so I'll try and sort through my 1000 photos from the last couple of months and upload them soon(ish) to www.mdryan.net/gallery

Best Wishes to everyone, Matt

Yet another well!

Len, Andy & Ralph finally got round to "sorting" the well to the north of Nottingham that was mentioned both in Descent and a previous newsletter. Eight solid hours were spent removing the old pump mechanism, lead pipes, pump rods and associated woodwork the total weight being around a tonne. The majority of the physical work was done by Andy with "Lens' winch" proving its worth yet again both in hauling men & materials up the shaft. Fortunately the well now lies inside the kitchen extension since we experienced heavy rain towards the end of the session, which we thought might have kept us busy for two days but was completed in one.

"Britain's Largest Explosion". Part 2.

Having read with interest the article "Britain's Largest Explosion" in Descent163 I was delighted to receive an invitation from Nigel Cooper to visit the Gypsum mine that provided the epicentre of the explosion in 1944. Suitably clad we boarded our Land Rover and set off on the five-mile underground drive to the working face. The initial part of the journey is very disorienting as it follows a rather haphazard route through the old pillar & stall working excavated by the old miners. From then on the passages worked by the modern miners are much more regular

About 3 miles into the complex the miners hit a fault and this involves driving down and then up a 1 in 6 incline through the only section of the mine where there is any amount of roof support in evidence.

Arriving at the face we manage to study the mine plan- an UNBELIEVABLY extensive complex covering around 100 sq km with an estimated 130 km of accessible passages. I was surprised to find that the section affected by the explosion is tiny compare to the rest of the system.

Working conditions within the mine are pleasant (as mining goes) but rather noisy with output reaching 2000 tonnes on a good working day.

Peak Cavern/Speedwell(The Highs and Lows of 'The Devils Arse')

The car in front...

On July 6th the team meet at 7am in Penrhynside ready for the journey to Derbyshire. Incredibly Gaz's Toyota was able to accommodate all eight of us (myself, Erik, JC, Brian, Steve Cross, Shaun, Charlie and Gaz himself). Thankfully most of the kit went on the roof! In the event we survived but the brakes nearly didn't. During several of the long Peak District descents nauseating fumes filled the vehicle. We were glad to arrive and lucky to find a place to park for free. Picturesque Castleton seemed a busy, congested village. The local club hut, our changing room, was a half-converted garage on the main road. Here we met John Martin and other members of the Crewe Caving Club who were to act as our guides. (Paul Brice who had driven across earlier in his landrover also joined us).

Into the underworld...

We kitted up in something of a rush needing to enter Peak Cavern (The Devil's Arse) before the tourists started at 10am. (Apparently since they started to market its original name numbers have increased). The impressive entrance (Britain's largest at 31m x 18m) was only five minutes from the garage. We said goodbye to Shaun and Charlie who were staying on top to do some sightseeing. Through the gates we entered the showcave admiring its well-lit features as we sped along a cement highway. Eventually we climbed some railings and descended into more rugged territory to follow a small stream set in large mud banks with half a path, an area once part of the tourist trail. Then a rough and rocky streamway led to the low roofed Mucky Ducks and some wading. (Until opened up in 1947 they were the limit of exploration). More pleasant rocky passageway followed. Forty minutes in and we were well warmed up. It was time for a decision. Stay in Peak and explore some of the classic cave features it contains or make our way into Speedwell via a long muddy crawl. We duly split into two groups with Paul preferring to stay in Peak Cavern.

Through hell...

We were soon climbing a ladder, scrambling through an old metal gate and stooping along an increasingly lowering tunnel to reach the main difficulties. The Trenches and Colostomy Crawl are well named, amounting to 300 metres of laborious knee work, slithering and wriggling along a restrictive tunnel part filled with hard mud banks down the middle of which runs a line of puddles. Part in part out of the wallow was torment and having to constantly drag or push forward bags was especially annoying.

Our suffering increased as the passage wound ever onwards and it became tedious. Corner after corner.

A painful rocky restriction was rumoured to signify halfway. At least the name would change now. The slippery climb next to it apparently led to 'Heaven', a nicer, dry, well decorated way to Speedwell, but it needed ropes. Sadly it was back to the wet squirming. Realising that this would be our route back later made it even worse. Our plight was unavoidable and the horror of it sapped our spirits. Aligned one behind the other, we couldn't see the anguish on each other's faces, but we heard each other's groans and knew of the pain and misery inside. We were as broken men.

Behind the scenes...

Then at long last there was something new. After over an hour of seeing the same cramped muddy tunnel extending in front of us we reached the top of the ladder in Egnaro Aven. At the bottom of the ladder we were thankful to reach a spacious stream passage. Congratulations you are in the Speedwell system. Time for some food, drink and group therapy. Partly recovered, we continued upstream crawling through a long dry oxbow to rejoin the stream close to where it fell from a tall artificial dam. (The Bung Hole). A ladder at the side avoided most of the water. The dam and the electrical wiring beyond formed part of the control system for the tourist canal in Speedwell. We were now in the main Speedwell Streamway.

At this point we heard fresh voices and saw more lights in a high side rift. We discovered a rope. Some cavers were using it as they descended out of Heaven. They were jolly and dry. We decided it was definitely the route for us if there's ever a next time!

At this point Gaz and Steve Cross decided they had had enough. Unfortunately they had dressed for a dry trip in Peak. Their exertions in The Trenches and Colostomy had kept them warm despite the water but now they had cooled down and were shivering. It was prudent to go back. Again the group divided.

Erik, JC, Brian and I continued up the well-proportioned rocky streamway with four of the Crewe Club team, at one point avoiding the deep pool, The Whirlpool, using in situ ropes. We were shown a dry passageway festooned with words and drawings left by the lead miners of the late 18th century. Names with dates, a wine bottle with glasses and salutations to the workers. Further along a sump 'Main Rising' was revealed as the source of our stream.

Further in...

Downstream, in another side-passage, we climbed several ladders to emerge on top of a rubble slope in a very large cavern at the base of a shaft. (J H Mine). A relatively dry place clearly having been used for a campsite. We were told it was possible to arrive here by abseil. Two thick hosepipes dropping from the shaft ran across the wall to us, discharging water in the direction we had come from. The water had apparently been redirected to dewater a sump at the chamber's lowest point.

Reinvigorated by more food and drink we left our bags to descend the slope and crawl into the intriguing smooth walled tunnel once accessible only to divers. Here pebble sections reminded us that our knees were sore. But forget the aches, don't think of the

Colostomy to come, enjoy discovering more. And so it was that we went from tunnel to rifts, up ladders and down them, bridged across drops and clung onto ropes eventually to enter a small streamway. We were now back in the Peak Cavern system. This area known as Far Sump Extension was once reached only by long arduous dives from Far Sump. We walked upstream and soon reached an impasse - yet another sump!

Time was pressing now. It was a long way back and we were expected at 'the arse' by a certain hour. "Is there time to visit Titan"? someone asked. If you can find the correct way through the mass of jumbled boulders above, then perhaps, was the answer. I was very keen to accompany Neal and Mike from the Crewe team and try. If after fifteen minutes we hadn't made it we would return. Erik, JC and Brian in the meanwhile would be taken to have a quick look downstream. We were all to meet up back at the large cavern in half an hour.

Hallowed ground...

Squirring up into the chaos of rocks and climbing numerous short pitches led to several dead-ends. Eventually one crawl found a framework of scaffolding shoring up loose debris. Beyond this a tight squeeze up between big boulders and then more supportive scaffold indicated we were on route. We emerged at the foot of Titan an awe-inspiring 147m (475ft) high shaft, the highest so far found in Britain. Discovered January 1st 1999, it eclipsed the record once held by Gaping Gill at 103m (340ft).

Our torches lit up little more than the initial damp well sculpted walls stretching up into the darkness, beyond which our beams faded to nothing. Only our imaginations could reach further to the 'Event Horizon', a narrowing at 65m, above which there were some big ledges and a widening shaft extending to the final roof. It was like a magnificent geological hourglass with a waterfall cascading noisily down one wall recording the years. What a magical, inspirational, energetic place. Our smiling faces ran with the droplets that had fallen from afar. We ran our fingers across roughly textured rocks, looked into the various alcoves and marvelled at it all.

We spent perhaps ten minutes absorbing our surroundings, etching them to our memory before it was sadly time to go. With some hesitation, one small piece of rock made its way into my pocket as I said farewell to Titan and followed the others back down through the boulders.

And back...

We rendezvoused and made our way out through Speedwell in high spirits. Colostomy and The Trenches with their muddy puddles were onerous yet thankfully seemed somewhat shorter. But the cold water and our exertions were making us increasingly tired. I couldn't stop shivering and my teeth chattered constantly. Through a lack of concentration I fell off a rock landing heavily on my hip. Luckily I was able to hobble on.

The worst part of the day had to be the compulsory washing of our muddy clothing before we entered the showcave. A special pool had been created behind a small dam and brushes were provided. Lying down to be scrubbed whilst virtually hypothermic was a gruelling final torture.

The walk up into the showcave was a hypnotic cold trudge. The day's final tourist group watched as I staggered past them. Inside I felt the start of a glowing contentment. What a day! Then at last, warm sunshine, a dazed walk through crowded streets, a garage, shower and a return to normality. The beer in The Bull was wonderful.

Thanks Gaz and the Crewe Club for an extremely memorable outing. The sore hip and knees recovered after a few days as did my other aches and pains but a chesty cough lasted five weeks and required a course of antibiotics! At home my rock is proudly displayed. Occasionally I run my fingers across its coarse texture and breath in its incense to be transported back to that amazing place which I was privileged to visit.

A 30m-tunnel dug in a shakehole on the surface at Hurlow provides a direct link to the top of Titan. Because the abseil is free-hanging an especially long rope had to be commissioned. How about trying it?

(This should be a 50m vertical shaft leads to a short tunnel into the top of Titan- ed).
Submitted by the "Welsh Mob"

Xmas Do.

Our "first" Xmas Do of the season was organised by Gareth at The Black Lion in Butterton. About 30 turned up for a very pleasant evening even though Ralph made Gareth & Lizzie "sit up a corner" After a restless night in a COLD camping barn (Andy T got the prize for the loudest snore) members set off on various activities- some were even tempted underground into one of Len's "dry & dusty pits" (Fly Mine) A further Xmas Do is planned for the Spring- Mark L is organising this one. (Does anyone know which Xmas Do this will be? Estimates range from 1997 to 2008!)

and the morning after... saw a group of "Crewe" congregate in the lay-by below Ecton Mines in surprisingly good fettle after the annual club soiree at The Black Lion up the road.

The group divided with the more intrepid attacking a walk over Ecton Hill. The rest of us kitted up to tackle Fly Mine, so named by Nellie Kirkham in the 1940s due to an infestation of insects.. Fly Mine follows a steep bedding plane down a series of both inclined and short vertical pitches with a lot of water running down to exit through the rubble floor of the last pitch. This is believed to exit the mine via a walled off section in Good Hope level into Dutchman level and out at the gated portal.

An interesting little mine with the possibility of being extended into Goodhope, Bag and Gregory workings, which are massive. However this could only be achieved by cavers with the cooperation of future owners. We live in hope that the next generation will be given the opportunity to extend our knowledge of what was once the countries biggest metal mine.

Len Kirkham.

NB. There is no general access to Ecton Mine at present.

DCRO

One of the busiest years so far with 11 shouts with Crewe being involved in 5 of them in one way or another. (Blue John, Walsall-stood down en route, Knotlow, Pindale-missing girl, Giants)

Attempts are being made to raise money (A LARGE SUM!) to replace the old “ambulance” with a NEW one. Ralph is producing a video to raise funds towards this. You can purchase this on video or DVD (thanks to Jenny D) – you probably feature in it & will be able to impress your friends & family.

Meets.

Jan 11 Nickergrove. Derbyshire.

Jan 17 Bar Pot- Disappointment Pot. Ingleboro’ Yorks

Jan 25 JH & Rowter. Castleton. Beginners could do P8 or Fgiants.

Jan 31 Birkwith. Yorks. Good beginners trip.

Feb 8 Nick Pot (& Alum for beginners) Yorks.

Feb 15 N Wales. Details later.

Feb 29 Marble Steps. Yorks. All abilities depending on route.

The rest is up to you! If you don’t ask you won’t get- let the meets sec know and it will (probably) be arranged.

And finally....

If a certain elderly gentleman talks you into an evening “quickie” down an old copper mine I suggest you decline the invitation. It was (almost) the end of 2003 and I’d been out in the Peak District all day but couldn’t resist the temptation to visit a “dry/dusty pit” to round off the old year! Needless to say the pit was neither dry nor dusty (but I did get the pleasure of seeing my companion -who remains anonymous-fall into a rather deep level when demonstrating how (not) to launch a boat constructed out of an old bath and tractor tyre, sadly he did not suffer a complete immersion. Having explored the first “pit” we, against my better judgement, descended another where we had to stop every couple of feet to admire pick marks, shot holes and countless mineral specimens that all looked the same to me. We finally surfaced at well-gone midnight to spend the next ½ hour or so wandering apparently aimlessly through dense woodland trying to find the vehicles. Our guide gave the impression of being familiar with the terrain as he casually blundered through dense thickets and climbed fallen trees, owls screeched as we disturbed their night time activities. If I’d been dressed in dry footwear the walk over the frozen ground might have been pleasant but in wet neoprene socks...! As the hour was still young (nobody possessed a watch!) we spent a further age admiring “artefacts”. At around 1 am I managed to get a phone call through to call off any “shout” that was imminent. The message I got was to the effect “your dinner’s in the dog!”

My resolution for the NEW Year is to be less gullible!

(Names have been omitted to protect the identity of those taking part.)

Stop Press. Slide show on Stok Kangri, Bleeding Wolf, Wed Jan 21 st , 8pm. Admission free! All welcome.
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