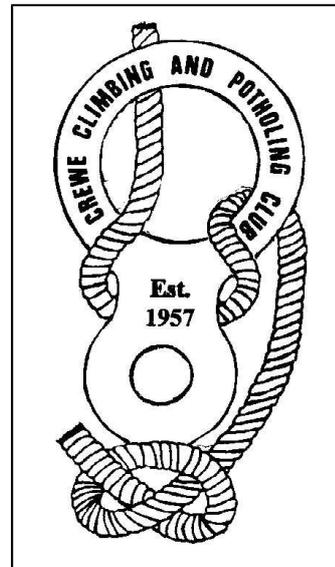


C.C.P.C. Newsletter 96. Spring 2009-02-02

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A Final Visit (for me !) to Holme Bank Chert Mine: Sunday, 7th December 2008

There was a good turn out (ten Members) for this gentle wander round the very uncertain looking remains of Holme Bank, near Bakewell.

The Chert is a very hard, dark coloured mineral, which occurs in layers about 5cm thick, separated by layers of limestone between 5cm and 15cm thick. The blocks of Chert were used as pavers in the china-clay grinding pans of the Pottery Industry of North Staffordshire, and there is a preserved mill at Cheddleton, near Leek, where this process can still be seen. The problem is that the Chert layers run all the way through the hill, and have been almost entirely removed by the miners. That's a little like trying to remove one slice from part way up a stack of toast, and expecting the rest of the toast above to, somehow, stay in place. Gravity doesn't really work like that.

Obviously the miners supported the roof as they worked forward. Waste rock was built into massive 'packs', leaving access roadways between them, but no matter how tightly the pack was built, it was never as solid as the rock that it was attempting to replace. Wherever you go in this mine, and there are over seventy accessible junctions in the roadways, you are always aware that the top of the hill, over your head, is trying to settle down onto the undisturbed rock, under your feet ! (I kept thinking about those vanilla slices, where you try to take a bite and all the filling oozes out the sides.)

In many areas the pack-walls, which should be vertical, bulge outwards ominously, and in places have burst, sending rock fragments hurtling against the wall on the opposite side of the passage. Ominous cracks zig-zag down through the packs, and not between the blocks of stone, but straight through them ! The packs are pinched so tightly that you can't remove a block from between the roof and the pack below, not that you would really want to.

For most of the trip there are no rock walls at all, only the packs, but at the north end of the site, each roadway reaches the working face, where a sort of half-collapsed wall, with a narrow open space in front of it, can be accessed all the way through the hillside, high in the west, and sloping gently down to the east to disappear into clear water. This is really shattered rock, deeply undercut by the miners, who temporarily supported the hanging chert and then removed the supports to allow each block to drop onto rollers, so it could be moved to a truck running on rails back down the roadway. In many places along this working face,

and elsewhere in the mine, temporary timber supports are still in place, although in a seriously rotted condition.

During our visit we explored most of the accessible roadways, the face area, the down-dip zone, where passages run into deep, clear water, and even crawled out to daylight through an entrance in the quarry at the top of the hill. There were numerous artefacts scattered about, and I took plenty of photographs of winches and pipe-work, but strangely, on the pictures, everyone seems to be looking at the roof.

This is an interesting site for geologists or mining historians, but has little for the cave enthusiast, although, it seems, the flooded passages have proved useful for cave-diver training. If you visit, be very, very careful !

Colin 'Steve' Knox, 8th September 2008. (apologies to Steve – this “disappeared” from the last newsletter!)

Trip Report - Hungerhill Swallet - 4 January 2009.

Picture if you will an icy cold Sunday, 4th of January 2009, and Crewe meet in the Café at Wardlow Mires, arms encircling various sizes of breakfast and cups of tea. Warm, comfortable, eating, drinking. “What’s it to be then?” asks the voice that nobody can put a name to. Well, the choices abound. Recent rebolting of Nickergrove has made the through trip a pleasant Level Two outing with no less than three different exits. And there’s always Carlswark ... and, of course, the recently improved Flowerpot Entrance into the Falls Chamber area of the Dynamite Series needs to be sampled. You’ve been wanting to do it for weeks – isn’t that why we’re here?

“But,” says a voice (and have you noticed how there is always a but, which manifests itself exactly at that point where you have convinced yourself that there really is no other option), “there’s also Hungerhill.” At this point the whole café goes quiet, the piano player, who works evenings entertaining dogs at The Three Stags Heads across the road, stops playing in mid tune, the waitress drops a teaspoon ... and everybody looks at Ralph. “Hungerhill?” you ask, as more savvy Crewe members concentrate intently on finishing off their eggs and bacon. “What’s it like?” Ralph slowly smiles.

And from this point onwards, as happens all too often, the fate of the day is sealed. “What about doing Flowerpot and Hungerhill?” you offer, hoping to at least win back a little ground.” That’s a good idea ... which one do you think is the tightest?” – difficult question this, because it’s a sucker question, and you just know that the wrong answer will kill your chances of Flowerpot today. You toss a coin. “Flowerpot – it has to be the tightest.” “Right, we’ll do Hungerhill first then!” But the mind behind the poker face tells another story ...

And as you leave the warmth of the café and head towards the refrigerator known today as Eyam, Ralph says, “Don’t forget to measure the ropes afterwards. We need it for the new Rigging Guide.”

Three cars jolly their way up the winding Eyam Dale lane, past the long hoped-for Flowerpot, into the village and out on the Foolow Road, tootling way past Hungerhill House before turning around at a lane junction and returning. “It’s a while since I’ve been here,” explains Keith, celebrated discoverer of most of this system we are about to descend. “Why’s that?” you ask – but you know the answer already.

Getting changed in January is always a race against time, and so is putting your rig on – especially when it is still wet from last time, and the ice man cometh and quickly stops it bending. The only advantage is that everybody knows that the quicker you get underground, the sooner you’ll get warm. But remember ... warm is a relative term!

A tree lined shakehole reveals two entrances. The first looks very much like one of those shell craters that Siegfried Sassoon used to lie in while he was writing his poetry. This is euphemistically called The

Timbered Shafts, an entrance long since slumped which now offers no access to the would be explorer. The other entrance, known as The Mined Level, is a cage-lidded tube, held shut by a large bolt arrangement requiring the Derbyshire Spanner that Keith has left in his car ...

Oh, and there is a third entrance, for, sticking out of the side of the doline is the muzzle of a huge water cannon, pointing straight at you and both the entrances. Fortunately for you, it is not currently active, any water being nicely frozen since the previous weekend. However, you slowly begin to understand the state of The Timbered Shafts.

Once the lid is opened, a ladder leading into the depths is revealed. It almost looks pleasant – you know, the sort of thing they should do with Stream Passage Pot up on The Allotment. One by one the party descends. At the bottom, there is (and there is no other word for it) a mud bath – a cold mud bath, at that. “This has been improved” offers Keith, with a smile. Daren and Ade just shake their heads and worm off into the conveyor belted crawl which follows.

After a brief sojourn along the coffin level towards the fore field (Keith says “We certainly won’t want to look on the way out!”), you return to a small chamber and descend through what the guide book refers to as The Squeeze, and which has now been much improved - according to Keith.

Feet first, and much thrashing of legs lands everybody in another small chamber which also acts as the initial receptacle for the icy water from the Old Pasture Mine, presumably also the source of the blackness of all the walls hereabouts. This water forms the stream which leads you down through a couple of mildly amusing and acrobatic squeezes to the top of a pitch known as Deep Space!! (Note the exclamation marks – you’re supposed to think this title in a very deep Lurch-like inner voice. Remember that.)

“So this is what we’re supposed to be measuring?” There is, you note, already a rope attached to two fat expansion bolts at the top of the pitch. It looks as though it has been there for quite a while. You look back at the other three, but they stop making eye contact, and start whistling, and re-adjusting their rigs ... so you clip into the old rope and pop down the first bit for a look.

“It’s wet,” you offer, as an excuse for something, but you’re not quite sure what. “No it’s not,” answers Keith. “When it’s wet, you can’t even breath in here. It’s like Niagara!”

By this time, you are standing on a wee chert ledge where a Y hang in the old rope indicates a rebelay. You’re not sure if your light’s OK – or maybe it’s the black walls – but you turn on both your side lights, change over to the lower rope and set off again.

On the other wall, at just the wrong height, is The Shortest Deviation Sling In The World. And when you bridge across the chasm, which is about as far as you can make your legs bridge (ouch!!), you find that the krab, a steel screw gate, has rust-welded itself shut, and nothing, short of risking some of your expensive dental work, can make it move.

“Bugger!” you offer, but the others seem to have started a conversation about something else entirely, which totally excludes you, and you are left to just get on with it. Keith recalls tales of Tom Proctor, prodding boulders out of rifts and blowing up spooky miner ghosts in some crawl named after a dance done by Lowly Worm – while you delicately pull the old rope up and through the rusty old krab. Suddenly, lo and behold, two frayed ends appear, lashed together with a granny knot. “Err, I think it might be best to use ... our rope.”

Still doing the splits, you convert your soft lock to a hard lock, clip in your jammers and start back up the old rope. At this point, the other three spot the movement, and, with a bit of persuasion from yourself, they belay the nice yellow Crewe rope to the main bolts and pass the bag down. The rebelay is straight-forward, but, once back at the deviation, you realise that the sling is so short (Yorkshireish I think is the correct term) that you have to inch the splits six inches higher up the pitch before you get enough slack into the deevie so that you can add a new krab and clip the rope. “Phew!” you utter, in

time-honoured fashion, as you sit back on your stop and enjoy the remaining 34 freezing cold-shower metres of the black pitch which is Deep Space!!

“Rope free!” you shout, as you stow your cows tails and dash for cover before the first of the pieces of chert start falling down the pitch towards you. Slowly folk begin to arrive at the bottom, cursing the shower bath, cursing the deviation and cursing the bloke who is next on the rope and who has now taken his turn at loosing off cobbles down the pitch.

Eventually all four are cowering under the canopy of boulders, and, after a few minutes, somebody realises that there isn’t anybody else left at the top of the pitch ... and the trip can continue.

“Let’s go look at Elbon’s Kram,” says Keith. “Somebody reckons it’s blocked, but I think that they went the wrong way.” And so the you all follow Keith down over boulders, bones and various washed in trivia, to a traverse over a sump and beneath a boulder choke. The traverse is followed by a view of Keith’s legs thrutching upwards into the blackness. This is followed by various crump-like sounds, accompanied by heavy breathing and the occasional mild curse. “Are you OK?” offers Ade to nobody in particular, and nobody in particular answers. “Is it worth us coming up there?” shouts Ade, louder now. This is, we think, answered – but it is more a sort of mumbly version of a kind of Hebridean throat music, which you don’t often hear nowadays, and we decide to take that for a “No”. And so we all reverse the sump traverse.

“Is nobody coming up?” Suddenly we can hear Keith. “No,” we answer, whereupon Keith thrutches and crumps and mumbles his way back down to the traverse. “Just as I thought,” he says, triumphantly. “Elbon’s Kram is still open!” But what he doesn’t say is that there are some extra boulders partly blocking it which he didn’t think to remove, and close encounters with some of these has re-cracked an old rib injury of his. But isn’t it amazing how one can still smile when the adrenalin is still flowing.

“You must see The Bag of Worms!” he beams. “Right!” we all agree as we troop back under the icy shower bath and up a loose boulder pile at the other end of the chamber.

Well, he’s right. It is worth the trip. Really good formations in a huge rift – very reminiscent of The Other Side in Eyam Dale House Cave – and complete with helictites and (a new sight for me) heligmites!!

But this isn’t enough. Furtively, Keith begins scrambling up into the boulders at the far end of the Bag of Worms fissure and, once again, murmurs, crumps and bangs, curses and expletives are eventually followed by “Anybody coming up?”

Well, it doesn’t do to always be saying “No”, does it? So, one by one, you all climb up the fissure using chock stones, ancient wooden stemples, whatever ... until you end up in a scaffolded square-off with big planks holding back the boulders. The chamber, known as Beyond The Bag of Worms, is also very, very pretty – lots of stal, even coloured stalagmites, in a Nettle Pot Red River Passage stylee.

And it’s here that the old dig goes shakily upwards and over into a further chamber with an ancient cracked mud floor. It’s also here that the new Eldon dig is going under – hopefully with some success.

But that’s it for today’s trip. One-by-one you return to Deep Space!! and carefully, slowly, jug your way up the pitch (there are some awful rub points – you should see the rope!). Keith shows you a neat trick involving a deviation krab, a jammer and a one hundred foot drop. You are impressed. You’re even more impressed when he reveals how painful cracked ribs can be while struggling through The Squeeze.

Outside it’s even colder. Everybody is now soaked, covered in black mud and shivering. In order to get to Flowerpot, you need to drive, and in order to drive, you need to change. Will you really want to change back into these wet, filthy rags?

And so ... “Stuff Flowerpot,” somebody offers. “I couldn’t do it anyway, not with these ribs,” agrees Keith.

Well ... another day, maybe?

SOME RIGGING NOTES

The pitch, Deep Space, requires 50m rope, 4 maillons, 1 extremely short deviation sling and krab and 2 rope protectors (which we didn't have – sorry, Ralph!)

A large thread on the step above the main pitch-head acts as the backup, followed by a 1m traverse line to two bolts for the main anchor. Two sharp edges immediately below require a rope protector and a 4m descent lands on a ledge with a Y hang. Below here is another sharp edge which needs a protector (the deviation which follows 4m below does avoid this rub, but, on ascent, unless there is some pretty good fending going on, the rub will happen once above the deevie) and after the deviation it's a straight (but wet) descent to the bottom, although there is a further rub point halfway down. Because of loose stuff and these rub points, the whole pitch needs care.

In times of “wetness” it is possible (Keith says “easy”) to free climb this pitch, but you need to traverse towards The Bag of Worms in descent (be careful, the direction isn't obvious!!) or start climbing from the pitch end of The Bag of Worms in ascent.

A complete rigging guide will form part of the forthcoming *Crewe CPC Peak Rigging Guide*.

EPILOGUE

According to Keith we saw less than a quarter of the known Hungerhill system. The remainder is on the far side of Elbon's Kram and much more easily accessible through The Timbered Shaft. The remainder of the system is also the downstream part of Hungerhill, and the Way On into the Stoney Middleton system where future exploration will boldly go!

One day The Timbered Shafts will be restored. Keith thinks it's only the top shaft that needs a lot of work – but that will require shuttering and something really will need to be done with that bloody water cannon!!

But what a trip it will be – and what potential!!!

BAT CONSERVATION TRIP

Ron and I picked Sarah up from her house in Manchester as arranged, and set off to Matlock. We were in good time we thought. When we finally got there “damn road works” we gave our apologies and got changed quickly as everyone else was ready.

John and Jess from Derbyshire bat conservation trust gave a talk about bats. It was really interesting we were told about the bats, the food they eat moths, spiders, and small insects. We learnt about their habitats summer and more important to us their winter roosts.

In winter the bats go into torpor (a form of hibernation) the bats enter their winter sites in October up till the end of March. Bats use a number of different places for their roosts but to the caver it is the caves and mines that we have an interest in.

After our talk we split into two groups, Ron Sarah Dave Webb and I were in the group lead by Jess, John lead the other group that Alan and “Steve” were in.

The two groups set off in different directions as we were going into different mines to count the bats, if there were any bats. As we climbed the steep hill I was hoping it wasn't going to be like the time Ron took me to see the bat he had seen, the new species the **rock** bat, Ron did get some new glasses.

When we got to the entrance of the mine Jess told us that there were at least two bats as she had already been up earlier, we entered the addict it was full of broken glass and rubbish Dave said it was down on the DCA list for clean up, but why did someone climb up here in the first place with the sack of rubbish, it makes you think.

Anyway being careful and watching were we was walking we all just got passed the broken glass and Jess informed us that we had all just walked past a bat, “where?” we all asked I know we were told to look in every nook and cranny but even if we weren’t looking down at the glass (typical caver look at the floor) I do not think we would have seen the bat, it was in this tiny crack in the roof just inside the entrance, we took it in turns to see it, we had to stand on the broken glass, get our heads as close to the wall as possible and shine our lights into the small crack and you could just see if (the taller people had the best view), it was the first bat I had seen in a cave/mine.

That put everyone in good spirits and we were all looking in every little crack, we all stopped looking on the floor, and started looking around to see if we could find another bat.

Not too much further on, and high up, there was another bat, you could see this quite clearly it was glistening with condensation on its back, Jess said they get the condensation because of there low body temperature. We were amazed at how small they were. To see one so close up they were completely different to what I expected these little tiny furry creatures they are so cute.

We carried on looking for more when Dave found one. It was just there about shoulder height, just hanging there, the condensation twinkling in our lights, we could not have been closer you could see its wings folded into its sides with the tiniest little claws, it was amazing to see how it clung on by the claws on its feet, they were so small, how can it stay stuck onto the wall, and its sweet little face. Jess was explaining how they get knocked off by cavers, or by the bags we carry, and how the caver behind stands on the bat and kills it. No one means to do it, but the bat can’t get out of the way because when they are in torpor it can take up to 1 hour for them to warm up enough to fly.

We did not stay to long around the bats or have a large group as the heat of our bodies can warm up the area and arouse the bats.

A few yards on there is another bat but this one did not have any condensation on it we did not stay long as Jess wasn’t sure if it was waking or going back into torpor.

As we carried on Dave who was in front said “WATCH WERE YOU WALK” we were back to caver mode as there were some beautiful gour pools we all had some careful walking to do. It was a really nice area with the gour pools on the floor and dog teeth on the walls.

We carried on to the end but we didn’t find any more bats so we made our return, we had been in there for hours but it did not seem it Dave took some photos on the way out .

When we got back to the cars we had another talk about what we should and should not do with bats in caves,

We should not handle bats. It is illegal unless you have a bat licence or if you are taking an injured bat for help.

We must beware of dislodging bats from there roosting position, particularly when moving through low passages (I for one will be taking more notice what is around me).

Flashguns can be very disturbing don’t use them if bats are present (it is illegal to photograph bats without a licence to do so)

Warming up hibernating bats can cause them to arouse from torpor. Try not to linger in confined spaces as even your body heat is sufficient to cause arousal.

Do not shine bright lights on bats as this will cause them to wake from torpor. The use of carbide lamps in bat roosts is particularly undesirable because of the heat and fumes that they produce.

Any strong stimulus can arouse bats so **avoid smoking or making excessive noise underground.**

Do not take large parties into bat roosts in winter. Rescue practices should be avoided when bats are present.

Seek advice before digging or blasting .Explosives can cause problems both from the blast itself and from the subsequent fumes. Sites used by bats need careful surveying to investigate whether or when certain works should occur. Digging operations may alter the microclimate of bat roosts by altering airflow.

I think it was a really good fun day out and very informative
Bat numbers are on the decline. Caves and mines give them the ideal low temperature humid environment they need to hibernate. (The humidity is needed so they don't dehydrate) Bats need to hibernate as they live on flying insects and are faced with surviving the winter when the flying insect numbers are greatly reduced.
Every time a bat is aroused from torpor it uses the same amount of energy as for ten days of torpor. Once a bat has started to be aroused the process is often irreversible.
Awakenings scheduled by their own internal rhythms or are stimulated by natural conditions can be accommodated, but unplanned awakenings for example from cavers, can run the risk of starvation because the bat's fat reserves can run out, or the bat may not recover in time for a successful mating. A bat only produces one young every year so successful breeding is so important.
We are not totally bad for bats in some circumstances cavers and miners have helped bats by opening up new sites, many sites have been lost through sealing for safety or security.
But we can help bats, they go down caves and mines for survival we go down for the fun
If we just take that bit extra care, and follow the rules on bats, their number of bats could increase, following the rules does not spoil our caving, and lets show some respect to the animals we share the caves and mines with, (the bats were there long before us) everyone is a winner.
I would recommend the bat day out it was great fun, even if you're not keen on bats.

Patsy Price

And for the connoisseur-PAN-ROASTED PIPISTRELLE RISOTTO

3 tbsp. olive oil
2 tbsp. chopped fresh basil
2 lg. garlic cloves, minced
20 (8 oz.) medium sized Soprano Pipistrelle bats
1 tbsp. olive oil
Corn Risotto

Clean, skin and gut the bats. Remove legs and filette.

Combine first 3 ingredients. Coat bat legs with basil mixture. Season generously with pepper. Cover and chill 4 hours.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Heat oil in heavy, large oven proof skillet over medium high heat. Season pork with salt. Add bat legs to skillet and brown on all sides, about 8 minutes. Transfer skillet to oven and roast bat legs until thermometer inserted into centres registers 150 degrees, about 10 minutes. Transfer bat legs to work surface and let rest 10 minutes. Serve with Corn Risotto. 4 servings.

Anon.

Incident on Saturday, 24th January 2009: All's Well That Ends Well.

Sat 24 Jan saw around twenty odd of us ensconced in Inglesport café prior to a visit to The Lancaster-Easegill system. A small select band set off for a walk over Whernside with eventually eighteen stalwarts arriving at Bull Pot Farm where protracted discussions took place on the day's agenda.

Eventually twelve set off with plans to enter the system via County Pot, followed by Manchester bypass, to Stop Pot, then doing just about everything upstream of there. (Needless to say they ran out of time!)

A rather more select band of six planned on a more relaxed trip, entering via the Wretched Rabbit entrance, followed by a quick look around Stop Pot with an exit via County Pot. Not to be!!

Ralph.

Ron takes up the story:

Having been asked to add to this account, I have spoken today to our prospective new member, and have given my word that the name and exact medical condition of that person will NOT be identified; suffice to say that we shall call the person, "caver Z" with a "medical condition".

I was last in the team led by Ralph & consisting of myself, Mel, Steve & Z, we were about two thirds of the way down Wretched Rabbit when Z said that she would like to turn back as she was feeling unwell.

It was discussed and decided that her best and easiest route out was to continue on the original route, shortly after this Z passed out & fell into a slot in the floor. She was only stopped from falling about eight feet, face first, by her shoulders becoming wedged. I straddled her, grabbed her harness, and shouted for help.

Steve came and helped me to pull Z out and into a better position (if indeed there is a better position in WR) shortly after that, she came round and after a short time was able to carry on.

We moved on for a short while and then Z again lost consciousness, this time only for a few minutes. I asked Ralph to send someone out to alert CRO and ask for urgent assistance, having only last week asked an EMRT [Emergency Mountain Rescue Team] doctor what to do in such an event.

It was decided that Ralph & Alison should make the dash back to the surface. As I knew we had a major club outing that day, I expected loads of our members to rush to our aid upon hearing of our plight, if Ralph could find them.

I told Ralph that if we were able to, we would try to make our way back the way we had come, up the WR streamway, however, Z was again becoming unwell and I asked Steve (a very experienced caver) to try to find a suitable place to set up our emergency bothy tent.

Shortly afterwards, Steve returned, having found a sand filled shelf out of the water and almost perfect for our needs. We managed to help Z to the 'BED CHAMBER' that Steve had found, and Z complained that she had asked for a four poster! Little knowing that, in fact we were in 'Four Ways Chamber'.

Z passed out again, and we tried to insulate her from the cold with rope, bags, and polythene, then managed to encourage her to climb into an emergency sac. We covered her with the bothy tent and she slept peacefully for about twenty minutes or so, giving us chance to further assess our predicament. While we waited we emptied every bag we were carrying to see what, if any, useful emergency kit we had with us,

and we discussed how we should proceed if there was any improvement with Z.

We decided that every step Z could take, however slow, would speed her exit from the system. It would be far faster than if she was carried out. A plan was made that we should help her every inch of the way and try everything possible to save her energy.

After what seemed like an age (probably twenty minutes or so) Z awoke smiling, and announced that she was inside the "Rabbit" but was unaware of what day it was.

We asked her if she could manage to push on a little, with breaks whenever she needed. She took some medication that she was carrying with her, and was up and away at the speed of light!. Mel asked her if we could share !

Steve was leading the way out, followed by Mel, Z and myself. Steve was fast as is the case with most experienced cavers, and Mel was slower, as is the case with most cold, inexperienced cavers. I asked Mel if she would lead explaining why (I remember reading somewhere that the best way to keep a team together is to put the slower members in the front), so Mel led, and this worked very well. Z was showing signs of deterioration again.

I was worried that further spells of unconsciousness may be irreversible and cause serious medical problems (well, worse than they were already).

With Mel in the lead & Steve second in line, I asked Mel to help Steve find the easiest possible route. With Mel as the guinea-pig, and with Steve armed with some rope and a pulley, gradually a team was beginning to emerge, with everyone finding new skills and teamwork that they didn't know they possessed. We pushed and pulled and Z tried, with every inch of her soul, to help in what must have been hell for her. We were literally 'walked on', in attempts to make the exit easier.

Steve told me later (after Z had walked all over his back) that he had broken his spine in a skiing accident! Oops!.

We used a line and pulley for a 2-1 advantage and managed to ascend various climbs, and overcome squeezes. We all protected Z at every possible danger point, mostly by jamming ourselves in slots and holes. This carried on, with a few more unconscious spells and recoveries for our casualty, until we came to a six foot climb and Z2 collapsed yet again. Now we were really worried.

Mel suddenly became a superb nurse and monitored Z as I had instructed. Steve and I discussed how we would manage the next few climbs should Z reawaken. We managed to rig another line on the awkward climb ahead and Mel stayed comforting Z with instructions to shout to me, if there was any problems with her airway or breathing.

At last Z reawakened, but this time looking very weak and shaky. After a discussion she was able to press on, and we managed to attach her to a line and lift her up a short way, standing on a ledge, and being held in place by Steve keeping her tight on the 2-1 rope yet again.

Suddenly Steve shouted, "Can you hear that!"

We were silent, and Z smiled as we heard the clatter of approaching cavers. I expected to see the Crewe lads before CRO members, but the CRO lads were fast.

The CRO leader introduced himself to Z2 & I and I handed over Z's care to the CRO, giving a full A.M.P.L.E. report.

We managed to assist the CRO with Z to the last few climbs, where she passed out again. The CRO Doctor arrived, and asked for a Sea King helicopter to arrive an hour and a half later. After discussion the escape route was rigged. Suddenly I saw Gareth, and he said, "Ron, it's me Gareth from Crewe".

I felt relieved and shook his hand. CRO had asked DCRO members to assist.

We were all busy rigging the last few climbs and the lads above me were asking me to rig the pitch below, but Alan beat me to it.

I knocked a large rock off the pitch, right above Z, but luckily managed to grab it.

As I turned to look up, I noticed Mel shivering in the corner, and we asked the CRO lads to give her a leg up and show her to the surface. She had done remarkably well for any caver, let alone one that has only done a handful of trips. I looked for Steve and realised that he was probably at the top by now (late for the 50th birthday party he was supposed to be attending). *(He was in fact assisting CRO on the pitches and he helped Mel to the surface stayed with the CRO team and assisted with the hauling until we were out in the open valley. I was surprised that it was dark.*

Z was helped into a stretcher, and wrapped up warm. She had a few words with me and was then carried up the hill opposite by what seemed like hoards of rescuers.

As she neared the top of the hill an RAF Sea King helicopter arrived bang on schedule. It was huge.

I asked where she was being taken and was told it would be Lancaster.

Walking back to Bull Pot Farm I suddenly felt very glad to be walking out and not leaving in a helicopter. Then I fell into a bog! *(Steve had also managed to fall into a bog on his way back to BPF! Probably a trap placed to trap unwary pirate, or southern cavers.)*

Ralph chips in (as usual):

Being the only one “vaguely familiar” with the system, I had left my personal ‘emergency kit’ and the CCPC rescue bag with Ron, and set off at speed, closely followed by Alison who is possibly the UK’s fastest female on two legs. *(Sadly on opening the bags the contents were “yuck” as both had obviously leaked on a previous trip – a point to remember in future)* On reaching the surface using combined techniques reminiscent of a small Chinese acrobatics team, in what could well be world record time, Alison abandoned her gear with me and set off across the fell at remarkable speed, despite being clad in her oversuit, and wearing wellies.

We had decided that rather than returning underground as originally planned it was better for me to follow Alison, at a somewhat more leisurely pace, as we needed to be sure that CRO had been contacted. Alison arrived at the farm to find the phone not working so she drove up the road still clad in her caving gear until she got a mobile signal (I wonder if Alan has got the mud off the drivers’ seat yet - or maybe he hasn’t noticed!)

CRO were expected in around 30 minutes, so we did what any sensible adult would do - we got into dry clothes and had a coffee. The first CRO vehicle arrived as predicted, and gradually the team began to assemble. This bit always seems to take ages. Two of the first to arrive were CRO doctors and one of them knew Z quite well, as they had both studied (and I believe caved) together at Manchester University. He told me that Z is prone to these attacks, but that they are normally mild and that she recovers rapidly (NOT the case today though!).

A ‘go and look-see’ team of two were despatched with a Heyphone and these met our other group crossing the fell. Alan, Keith and Gareth joined these two while the remaining nine returned to Bull Pot Farm.

Back on the surface after what seemed a remarkably short time we received a radio message stating that Z was approaching the surface and a helicopter was required. *(We weren’t to know that Steve and Mel led by Ron had been VERY busy*

underground.) By sheer chance, a Sea King had just finished a job on Coniston Old Man so it headed straight for us, via Carlisle for refuelling.

The helicopter arrived within minutes of Z reaching the surface and within around five minutes she was arriving at Lancaster Hospital.

Ron continues.

I got changed, and was the last to leave Bull Pot Farm. It felt very strange to be the sole person on the fell after such a huge number of people, just a short time before. I spent a few moments thinking how lucky I was, then I rang home and made arrangements to get Z home.

We arrived at her house at about 1 am. Sunday.

Z was disappointed to have missed all the action and the helicopter ride!

I rang her today and asked her permission to write this account, wished her well, and invited her to do some more caving when she has recovered.

I must take this opportunity to thank and praise Steve & Mel, without whose level headedness, ingenuity and strength of character in this remarkably scary situation, things may not have ended as well as they did.

Thank you both.

Ron

Meets.

Sun Feb 8th Washfold AND DCRO Ex at Knotlow

Sat 21st Feb Simpson's- Valley Entrance.

Sun 1st March Peak Cavern

Sun 8th March Sell Gill

Sat 21 March Knotlow

Sun 22 March DCRO training

Sun 5th April Depart for China

Plus Ireby Fell

Sat 18th April GG- Stream Passage.

9th – 15th March Majorca

Sat 25th March DCRO training and AGM.