Sheffield University Speleological Socitey

6oth Anniversary Journal

2021



Contents

Editor's note p.1 2019 A Holiday in the Sun, Natalie p.35 Greenwood-Sole 2016 p.37 SUSS in Meghalaya, Tom Smith Serbia Expedition, Jack Dewison **p.3** The Deepest Cave in the World, Peak District Diving Projects, Rob Jeff Wade p.39 **p.6** Middleton Cave Access Restrictions in Main-SUSS and DCRO, Hannah Moulton **p.8** land Britain, Rob Middleton p.45 SUSS in America, Rostam **p.48** Namaghi 2017 The Road to Nowhere, David Irish Student Caving Forum, **Botcherby** p.51 p.11 Michael Woodward SUSS in Kyrgyzstan, Rostam Namaghi p.15 2020 SUSS and the TSG, Michael p.53 Digging in SUSS, Will Whalley Holliday p.54 SUSS in Mulu, Helen Fairclough Diving Cliffhanger Sump, Rob p.56 SUSS in Ireland, David Botcherby p.17 Middleton Deep Down Under, Elise Freshwater-Blizzard p.59 2018 Tresviso Caves Project, Emmott p.20 **Baddeley** p.23

Armchair SUSS, Rostam Namaghi Cheshire Cave Biology Project, p.24 **Emmott Baddeley** p.26 NCHECC best CHECC, Olly Hall "Oh shit"; A Night in Dowbergill Passage, Sam Snowdon This Time to the Bottom; SUSS return to the Berger, Antonia Headlam-Morley

p.32

Front and back cover image: Leo and Jolene high above the Vegas de Andara in the Picos de Europa during the 2018 Tresviso expedition. Photo credit: Lydia Leather.



2021

Editor's note



Welcome to the SUSS 60th Anniversary Journal. Within these pages you can find information on most of our activities over the period 2016-2021. I hope that what you'll glean from these articles is a snapshot of an active club that keeps up with sport caving around the UK, projects in Derbyshire, holidays and expeditions abroad, while having fun and getting new cavers involved. This period is also important to me as it covers almost the entire time I've been with SUSS, from bright-eyed fresher to stressed committee member to that older dude in the pub the freshers avoid. While I suppose it's now a far cry from the original purpose of the journal, as there is only sparse information on new exploration and science (with most of this published in more detail elsewhere), I still think it's important to keep a record of what we've

been up to for posterity. I was surprised by how many things I'd forgotten about before putting this together, so I hope this will bring back happy memories to you too. My thanks goes out to all the contributors of articles and photos (even the late ones). Also a special thanks to co-editor Emmott Baddeley for designing and formatting the journal; it's much better than it would have been otherwise.

Love,

Botch

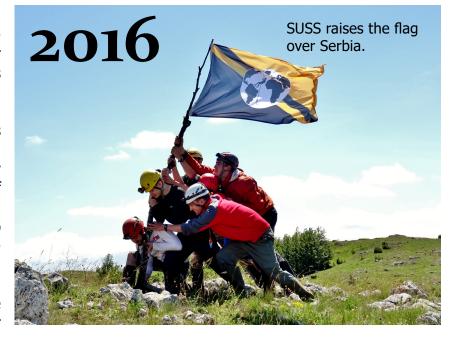
Happy diamond year SUSSians! It is pretty cool to be part of something with such a long and rich history. I joined in 2016 and seeing those five year captured in these pages, while they may have thrown up some challenges, has shown what we have achieved as a club together and what we have to look forward to for the next five, or sixty, years! Long may we continue to faff and do a bit of caving on the side.

Love, Emmott

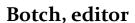
PS I'm never offering to help edit a journal again, whoever pulls the short straw for the 65th year - the joke's on you



As I joined in September of the previous year, 2016 was my first proper year with SUSS and so it'll always have fond memories for me. Though it was partially covered in the 55th Journal (copies still available), it was worth including it here for the Serbian expedition which hasn't previously been written up. This was for many of us our first real foray into expedition caving, and was an amazing chance to go somewhere truly beautiful. Certainly, after doing that in your first year, who could quit? Even disregarding Serbia, 2016 was a good year for the club under the watchful eye of Chair Will Whalley (and later Sam Snowdon



with a brief stint by Nat Greenwood-Sole). We'd had a decent intake from the last year who only became more keen as time went on, followed by an even bigger load of newbies in September. The summer also held the legendary Eurospeleo 2016 event, which saw us camping in the Dales for a week of pre-rigged caves and evening fun. This was also the year that SUSS won the Ultimate Student Caving Club prize (accusations of politicking for votes be damned!), which was proudly displayed first in the Cobden and then at the Student's Union until we had to hand it on in November 2017. The usual side projects were also active; I distinctly remember one of my first SRT trips being into P8 to see the Christmas Aven dig. 2016 also being the year of Brexit, May, and Trump, many visits to the pub were also necessitated to take our minds off things (with even our most American caver renouncing his home country, much our surprise) so please forgive if our recollec-



tions are hazy!

Below: Faces old and new at Peak Freshers.



Top right: Happy SUSS winning the grand CHECC prize.

Bottom right: We were a happy family back then!



Serbia Expedition

by Jack Dewison

Sheffield University
Speleological Society
2016 Expedition to Pešter,
Serbia

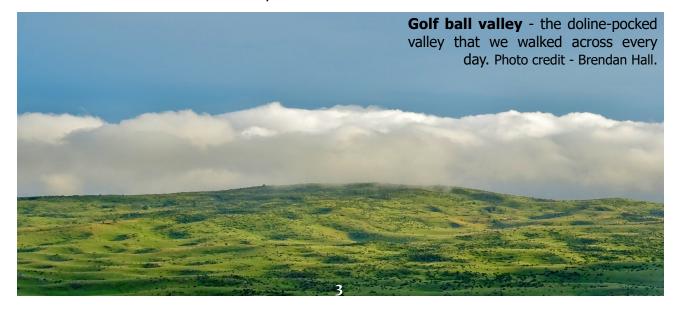
Our expedition to Serbia had one primary objective; to assist the Serbian caving club "Akademski Speleološko-Alpinistički Klub (ASAK)" in surveying the area north of the Montenegrin/ Serbian border on the Pešter plateau to check potential entrances to Đalovića Pećina, a large system on the Montenegrin side of the border. Potential entrance sites were located prior to expedition using newly declassified Soviet-era military maps, and Google Earth images. Once found we planned to map the cave system to determine its hydrology and catchment area.

23 SUSS members attended the expedition, of which 21 flew out to Belgrade, and 2 drove a SUSS-branded Ford Maverick (The Mav) across Europe on a grand road trip. Through "American Mike" Mlyniec we had booked bunks at Hostel El Diablo in Belgrade for the night we arrived. The drivers had got there early and were bedded down for the night when the riff-raff arrived fresh off the flight at half-past midnight, upon arrival the Hostel owner "Dragan" told us not to go to bed; "You are English, and all of Belgrade is out there waiting for you!" Round the corner we found a convenient courtyard with

several all-night bars and hundreds of people, we soon learned the Serbian way to order beers (or the dreaded Rakia) and had a fairly messy night chatting with Serbs young and old.

People went back to the hostel in dribs and drabs, but some of us stayed up until the morning when the bar owners bought us all burek pastries for breakfast, delicious. The last of us stumbled back to the hostel, scooping up other drunken SUSS members from the literal gutters on the way, to discover that Helen had not made it back to the hostel, despite leaving the bar several hours previously. It was 6:30am and we had a bus booked for 7:30am to take us to the expedition plateau - we woke everyone up and spread out across Belgrade looking for her. After an hour of searching, with a fairly pissed-off bus driver (and Alexander, a member of ASAK) waiting, we received a phone call from Helen who had found a corner shop, managed to somehow explain she needed to charge her phone (which she paid for by buying a kinder bueno bar) and call us up. We found her, returned to the bus, and set off.

The five-hour drive along Serbian roads was not fun for 21 people with stonking hangovers, but we eventually made it to the town of Sjenica, where we had to register with the local authorities. The problem was that Sjenica doesn't get many foreign visitors and so they only had 5 registration forms ready for us. We had to promise to return later in the week when they re-stocked the forms, so that the remaining 18 of us could register where we were staying in Serbia (Spoilers: We did not.) We were then driven further south, to within a few kilometres of the border with Montenegro, where the



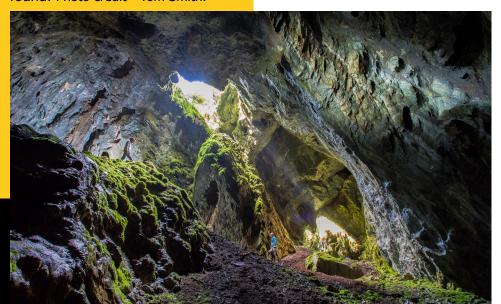
driver kicked us out at a lay-by and set off back to Belgrade. In the lay-by we met two more members of ASAK with a Lada Niva (there were very few members of ASAK who didn't have a Lada Niva). They guided the Maverick along the off-road route up to the camp. While the rest of us gathered our backpacks, having lashed as much stuff as we could to the roof of the Mav, and trudged up the hill afterwards.

We met ASAK at the top and soon had our camp erected, complete with covered eating and gear storage areas. We had brief introductions with the other members of ASAK and soon the beer and Rakia was flowing.

On the first morning Voja, who was one of the organisers of the expedition on ASAK's behalf, showed me the various maps he had procured, as many Soviet Military maps had recently been released, revealing a wealth of potential cave entrances on the plateau. We had 185 potential sites that were determined by aerial photography and topographic maps. Dividing the maps up into sections, we split up into teams to surface-bash each area – focusing on the sites which had been identified as potential cave entrances.

Each day consisted of a lengthy walk over hard terrain. Several teams ended up with 30km walking days, with very little prospect at the end of the hike. Most teams found a handful of potholes each day, but more often than not they choked out after a 20m abseil. During the first week, on a day where most teams were on their furthest

Area 52 - The most scenic cave we found. Photo credit - Tom Smith.



trips from camp so far, there was a Biblical thunderstorm. One team took refuge by breaking into a nearby barn, another had very little shelter and were left by a cave entrance, hiding beneath trees



as lightning struck within mere metre. A final team was left exposed at the top of a hill, with nothing but a single bush to hide under. Luckily, by dashing across the plateau in between thunder showers, all teams made it back to base before dark.

By the end of the first week, morale was running low. To top it off, The Mav had electrical issues while out on a recce to the far side of the plateau, so Glen spent most of the remainder of the expedition sat waiting in various mechanics to see if the problem was fixable. To boost the team's mood, Peca (an older member of ASAK) arranged for a local farmer to slaughter two lambs for us, which we cooked on a spit over a fire pit, with plenty of beer marinaded over them. The mid-exped meal was delicious and really cheered everyone up.

During the second week, we had resigned ourselves to the fact that there was little prospect on the Pešter plateau. The limestone up there was ancient and frost-shattered, so most entrances were filled with broken limestone. We decided to make the most of the rest of our time in Serbia by concentrating on the sites we had found. We drew up surveys and took photographs of the significant sites. Some members took the opportunity to practice exped skills such

> bolt climbs/traverses, and we helped tick off some passages in a cave that the Serbians were investigating.

> Of the 185 initial sites, many turned out to be choked-up dolines. We located 100 sites that could be described as "caves" in the loosest sense of the term; we GPS-tagged, photographed and mapped any that showed potential, we also found many new pits not spotted from the aerial data. We proved that

no such readily-open entrance to the System existed on the Serbian side, which we determined was due to all the potential pitted entrances being filled in by local shepherds, who were of great help whenever we passed by their homesteads — providing useful descriptions of cave locations as well as a level of hospitality above and beyond what was expected, indeed many times people were getting close to callout because they had been unable to get away from the farmers who offered a constant stream of rakia, strong coffee, and cheese.

We were successful in our second endeavour to train up the inexperienced members - over the course of the expedition it was possible to see everyone progressing in various expedition caving techniques such as bolting, rigging and navigation. The Expedition Committee also surmounted a steep learning curve in Exped Organisation as logistical hurdles were met in terms of vehicular misfortune and adverse weather conditions, leading to contingency plans being formulated mid-expedition. All obstacles were taken in their stride however, and we were able to get everyone home safely and on schedule.

Whilst we were unable to break into the System, we found numerous notable sites on the plateau; including "Dead Cow Cave" - a 60m deep shaft filled with fallen cattle, "Area 51" – an enormous chamber with a daylight shaft inhabited by countless interesting insects and unspoiled calcite formations tucked away beneath boulders in the floor, and "The Grave Cave" – a 20m deep shaft located next to a tomb built



Campsite at night - Photo credit - Tom Smith.

kilometres away from civilisation, translations of the Cyrillic script found on the gravestone revealed it to be of an "Ili-Petri Dubrovsky" who was a hero local to Pešter during the 1800s.

The Serbia expedition proved incredibly useful to both SUSS as a club, and to the members who attended. We made good ties with the Serbians whom we may continue to visit in years to come as there are still areas of unsurveyed karst in Serbia. One member of SUSS moved to Serbia to join ASAK, and used their expertise, as well as his own experience gained from the expedition, to further his archaeological work down Balkan copper mines.

The expedition team with the flag flying proud. Photo credit - Tom Smith.



Peak District Diving Projects

by Rob Middleton

My old club SUSS have been very kind to me since I started cave diving.

I've had a variety of interesting projects requiring carriers and I've always been able to source them from SUSS. I'm not sure whether this is due to the beer used as bribery, or whether students just don't have enough imagination to come up with their own ideas, but either way I'm very grateful for the assistance. SUSS have been kind enough to assist other local cave divers too. What follows is an A-Z of Derbyshire diving projects where SUSS help has been invaluable.

Gautries Hole, Perryfoot, Castleton

Between May 2016 and January 2017 I carried out 4 dives in Gautries Hole, in the newly discovered Lisa's Christmas Present Sump. This was entirely supported by SUSS, particularly Helen Fairclough, Sam Snowdon, Leo Bradley and Jethro Pryke.

This sump was initially unearthed due to the unusual digging habits of another SUSS alumni Rob Eavis and friends, who dammed and utilised the main water flow to assist in digging the mud choked end of the main streamway. This divert-

the water towards an older fossil part of the cave, and unearthed the impressive New series streamway for which this sump forms the conclusion.



2021

The sump pool at the end of the streamway is unfortunately choked, however a small tube over the top leads awkwardly back to water level, where it is just possible to kit up with assistance. From here small steps of progress were made over a number of dives in a heavily silted passage. In total 32m of progress was made on a rough bearing of 40 degrees until the passage became too choked to continue. Considering the effect water diversion has had here, the best course of action may be to continue with this for a few more years until the silt blocking the sump is pushed through.

On the last dive at the site, interest was maintained for SUSS carriers Helen and Sam, when upon returning to the entrance series, it became apparent the series had sumped. A rapid lesson in cave diving was delivered, before both carriers exited safely, exhilarated by the experience! It is worth noting that due to the new dam within the system, the likelihood of getting sumped into the system is now much greater than previously. However the dive is short, so following the excitement previously, and a previous cave rescue at the site, the team decided to install a free diving line. When sumped, the line provides 2x 3m dives to the exit with a sizable airbell in between, and would be much preferable to a long cold wait.

Tim Webber and Rob Middleton preparing to dive Ilam Risings. Photo credit - Helen Fairclough.



Ilam Risings, Staffordshire

In summer 2019 Tim Webber, aided by myself (both SUSS alumni), began a project of re-exploring and surveying Ilam Risings in Staffordshire. This is a major resurgence into the River Manifold, and is over 50m deep in sharp constricted passage. It is only possible to dive the sump in low flow conditions and the site requires a minder to look after kit, being adjacent to a busy footpath and the stately home of Ilam Park (National Trust). There is a cafe however, and as one SUSS member can testify, this at least allows for the minder to be rewarded with a cream tea. Quite a

tempting offer for students on a hangover day, and we are hopefully for more assistance as the project continues.

Main Rising, Peak Cavern, Castleton

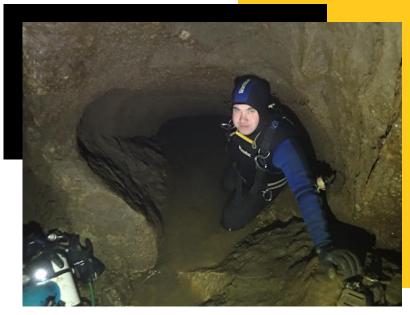
Between 2016 and 2019, Ben Wright (honorary SUSS alumnus) conducted 10 dives at Main Rising in Speedwell cavern, ably assisted by a variety of SUSS carriers. The dives culminated in the first reassessment of the final gravel restriction at -72m since John Volantham in 2006 and involved a complicated 6 cylinder dive on mixed gases

with 60 minutes of deco on the return. Unfortunately, the gravel restriction was again unpassable, but with so much flow, it's always worth another look.

P8, Perryfoot, Castleton

SUSS (and many other Derbyshire cavers) were of great assistance in the summer of 2016 when a large team from the CDG descended on P8 to try and tackle one of Derbyshire's last big questions: 'Where does sump 10 go?'. To get to sump 10 requires an 800m round trip of diving alone, with significant and awkward dry caving in-between sumps. To make matters worse, the sumps often fill with sediment completely after flood, so precise timing of the attempt, together with a fair dose of luck, was essential. Over a series of dives, Ash Hiscock, aided by Josh Bratchley, myself, and others re-explored and relined many of the sumps en route to sump 10, then on 18/09/16 Ash and Josh finally made it into sump 10. They made some progress in the restricted sump in poor visibility. Carriers from SUSS were utilised throughout the campaign and following the attempt no less than 10 large cylinders and associated paraphernalia were removed from the system. The question of sump 10 remains tantalising...See CDG Newsletter 202:p5 for details.

More recently there has been dye tracing carried out in P8 to help further understand the hydrology in drought and the connection with the 3rd streamway. This was spearheaded by John Gunn, with Tim Webber placing and retrieving the detectors in the sump and SUSS youths helping to carry.



Ben Wright in Whirlpool Inlet Sump.
Photo credit - Rob Middleton.

Waterways Swallet, Staffordshire

Waterways Swallet is a recent Staffordshire discovery, and is a very impressive digging feat, being 100m deep, and mostly within scaffolded boulder choke. At the bottom is a small sump (What No Sump), which was previously pumped and dived inconclusively. In 2016 I was asked to dive the sump by local diggers, again with the assistance of SUSS carriers. After an awkward dive of 20m I located a new airbell and exited the water. This led to a too-tight tube, beyond which sizeable streamway could be heard (the first streamway in the cave). A return trip was carried out with more SUSS assistance, to sound test the airbell and see if a bypass could be found. Sadly, there was no audio connection, but the site must be tantalisingly close to the fabled Staffordshire master system.

Whirlpool Rising, Speedwell Cavern, Castleton

In 2017 myself and Ben Wright returned to Whirlpool Rising to try to dye trace it from the recent discovery of a small sump in the bottom of the Crystal Orechasm in Rowter Hole. (According to the Castleton Survex model this is only a few metres from the Mary Rose Airbell in Whirlpool Risings). A large SUSS (and YUCPC) team assembled to deliver the dye in Rowter, and to assist with carrying to Whirlpool. Despite a vast quantity of dye being used, sadly no visual connection was made, and the connection remains elusive (for now).

Winnats Head, Winnats Pass, Castleton

In March 2018 a good keen section of SUSS youths surprisingly jumped at the chance to assist me on a dive of the main stream sump (sump 2) in Winnats Head. This had only been looked at once previously by R Skorupka in 1989 who noted there may be a possibility of underwater continuation.

The sump was accessed 4m down a final pitch giving the youths new skills in both hand bolting and use of an electron ladder for access. The sump dropped 4m underwater to a silt floor, where blind searching located an open but tight rift continuation opposite the pitch head. Removing fins, I shuffled sideways and diagonally downwards along the rift reaching a depth of 7m approx. 8m in from sump pool. With no belays and small tanks I turned back. However, the return was not uneventful. At one point I found myself staring at the line disappearing into a 2 inch gap in the rift. A drop back down found the original access point (phew), though I vowed not to return without many bog pipe stemples to secure the line. The rift is a serious line trap, though the sump continues...

Hauling practise in Bagshawe Cavern.



SUSS and DCRO

by Hannah Moulton

During the last decade, SUSS have ventured away from tradition by failing to star in any cave rescue callouts on home turf.

As a club, SUSS is very fortunate to be situated within close proximity of an excellent caving region, and this puts young keen Sheffield cavers in the lucky position of being able to contribute towards their local caving community by volunteering for Derbyshire Cave Rescue Organisation (DCRO). This has led to a steady trickle of young cavers keen to embark on the journey from Probationary Membership, with the eventual goal of becoming a Core Team member.

A typical cave rescue involves many different skills that all have equal value, from communications, fund raising, and surface support, through to technical rigging, gas monitoring and even dive rescues. A Core Team member is required to have to have a broad understanding of all these topics, many of which are transferrable from other aspects of caving life, from student club trips through to exploratory expeditions. It is only when you attend a cave rescue callout that you can fully appreciate the implications of an accident in the places that we enjoy, without incident, 99% of the time. With this in mind, SUSS members of DCRO organised a training event at the student caving forum CHECC in 2018 to give an understanding of various techniques used in cave rescue, (see photos courtesy of Rob Middleton). This event took place in Bagshawe Caverns, and no student cavers were harmed in the process.



If DCRO team members aren't careful, they may get co-opted into the DCRO Operational Group. Many unSUSSpecting alumni have ended up in the operational group, mainly to bring down the average age. Notable SUSS and Ex-SUSS members that have featured on the DCRO operations group over the last decade include:

- Ben Stevens and Katie Eavis, Controllers and long-suffering Training Officers
- Leaders include: Tim Webber, Rob Middleton, Glen Sankey, Hannah Moulton, Clare and Dave Harley. A brief stint by Ed Willatts before he left in search of sunnier climes.
- Brendan Sloan has been a long-standing Medical Officer, but recently relinquished that role to become the Medical Officer for BCRC.

Sorry to everyone I have missed, and thank you all for your contribution. SUSS continues to support DCRO by subscribing to be a Member Club.

If you would like to follow our antics then please check out the DCRO Facebook page. For more information on how to get involved, please visit the website: derbyshirecro.org.uk



Left: The author, Hannah Moulton, showing the kind of dedication to DCRO fundraising the team has come to expect from exSUSS members.

Right: Practising underground comms using Nicola radios.

Below: The team of trainers and trainees after the CHECC student cavers training event in 2018.



2017 was another cracker for SUSS. Sam Snowdon passed on the reins of chair to myself early in the year at the Annual Dinner in the Orpheus Caving Hut (Peak District), and so I had a full year of pretending that I knew what was going on. Riding high off the good start to the academic year, we followed this up with a series of great weekends and an Easter trip to Ireland for five of us. Summer saw most of many SUSS descend on the Jura mountains in France for caving and canyoning, meeting up



with some ULSA and NUCC members for some inter-club fun. Some members also made it on to join the CUCC expedition to the Loser plateau in Austria. A small number of SUSS even made it out to Kyrgyzstan that year — probably one of the more remote expeditions in this journal! The new academic year saw another influx of new blood, as well as other exciting developments such as the breakthrough in Cliffhanger sump. The November CHECC Forum saw us hand on the Ultimate Student Caving Club prize to our good friends at NUCC, though we did take home the conciliatory prize of the CHECC chairship for our own chair (stacking chairs). By the end of the year we were already getting a committee together ready for the expedition next year, and looking forward to future adventures!

Botch, editor

Clockwise from top left: This was our last year with the famous rope training tower - never forgotten!; Caving games at Peak Freshers, can you spot the future members?; Suspiciously few images of the 2017 France holiday...; The infamous breakdown of the greatest caving car ever. RIP 2CV.



Irish Student Caving Forum

by Michael Woodward

SUSSpicious Activity at the Border: An account of a SUSS trip to Ireland

Journey

In 2017, a SUSS contingent took a trip over the sea to our cousin cavers in Ireland. The intention was to head out for a week of caving culminating in the famed Irish version of CHECC, the Irish Student Forum. Thus early on a Monday morning, five bleary-eyed English cavers piled themselves and their gear into a silver 2005 Renault Mégane; the much-loved Megan: Michael 'Jreg' Woodward, Molly 'Jolly' Smith, David 'Botch' Botcherby, Michael Holliday and Liam Overett.

Arrival

After 3 hours driving to Holyhead, 3 hours on a ferry and 3 hours driving from Dublin to Cavan we arrived at our accommodation for the working-week preceding the forum: The Hoo. For those unfamiliar, the Hoo is northern Ireland's premier caving holiday destination. It has everything the young student caver requires: an alpine bunk, a fireplace, an old communal guitar (for 'that' guy), access to nearby pubs, a dodgy gas stove and caves. Not much else, there's no electricity, no heating, no running water, but these are all simply things that make the Hoo the magical place that it is; we all fell in love instantly.

The Hoo was in complete darkness when we arrived and after fumbling around in the dark we found a mysterious note, scrawled onto a paper napkin: "DEAR SUSS. HOPE YOU HAVE FOUND THE PLACE WITHOUT WEIRDING OUT ANY LOCALS. I'M AWAY TO BOHO PUB. WILL BE BACK LATER-ISH (12). COME ON OVER AND I CAN SHOW YOU BOHO + COOLARKIN CAVES. Signed, Sean the Miner". Underneath was a basic (yet perfectly accurate) drawing of the directions from the Hoo to the Linnet Inn, in nearby Boho.



Megan fully packed

Suddenly our post-trip weariness was gone. We stashed our bags in the hut and quickly set off to meet Miner.

We arrived at the Boho pub in the middle of nowhere and opened the door, at which point we realised that none of us had any idea what Miner actually looked like. But thankfully his warm welcome on entering the pub quickly solved this problem; "Hullo there, yous must be SUSS!". We had found our Miner. After introducing us to the charming barman of the pub and getting a round in, Miner took us that very night to our first Irish cave. This was to be Polnagollum-Coolarkin, which had been used in a filming of Game of Thrones (we think it was the Jon Snow sex scene, any massive nerds can please write to the editor if you think we're wrong).

Garden caves

The next day, we woke up and saw the Hoo for all her glory in the pale morning light. Our caving-objective for the day was to explore the Hoo's 'garden caves'; all walking distance (or waddling distance, as we shall see) from the hut.

The caves in question were John Thomas (insert penis joke) and Pollthanarees. John Thomas is remembered as being exceptionally muddy (insert anal joke) and being full of long crawls with lots of verticality, making for some interesting route finding. Pollthanarees proved much more elusive to find and we actually spend half the day wondering around the fields surrounding the Hoo like headless dickheads.

Eventually, we found something which resembled a cave and decided to crawl into it. We all lowered ourselves down the entrance; at least we thought it had been all of us. Molly, Liam and Jreg were about to set off exploring, when it transpired that Botch was not among them. "Botch, you alright mate?". "Ummmm..." came a replying voice from the top of the entrance climb. "Ummm, I think I'm gonna sit this one out guys, I'll see you back at the Hoo." And with that, Botch made what appeared to be a rather hurried exit back to the hut. We all had our suspicions and the general consensus was that Botch had shat himself. He will to this day neither confirm nor deny, but it was a long waddle back to the hut...

A bladder busting trip to Shannon

The following day the group tackled Shannon cave which has an awesome first pitch straight into some mega stomping passage which we all took great delight in getting lost in. A particular feature of note is the Re-Birth canal which lies deeper into the cave, the reward for combating this accurately named passage is a selection of dodgy-looking scaffold-braced passages and a ticket back the way you came eventually. We also spent a good hour or so playing on a rope swing which precariously flung out over a pool until we noticed we were actually in one of Ireland's premier caves and should actually explore rather than dick about.

For Jreg and Michael, one of the more memorable events of the trip happened whilst sat at

The Brits after another good day of caving.



the top of the first pitch. Jreg noticed that Mike looked somewhat uncomfortable, and finally admitted that his bladder was about to burst. The entrance to the cave was completely dry and with the



2021

with the amount of traffic expected of the forum taking a sneaky piss somewhere in-cave just wasn't cricket. So as soon as the next member reached the top, the two of them made a hurried exit to allow Mike the relief he so craved. Alas, it was not meant to be. Despite the impressive speed yet care with which Mike moved, on the final climb a relief-filled cry of "ah fuck" echoed back down the cave, and the group left with a carefully stream-washed oversuit, stowed in bin bag for the drive back to the Hoo.

Boho caves

That night, whilst drinking with Miner in the Linnet Inn, we decided to explore the Boho caves, conveniently only over the road from the pub. These were a cracking set of caves. Long parallel stretches of chert passage interlinked with short crawls made the whole thing feel like a labyrinth with multiple options of ways to go. This made for great fun with all of us taking different routes and inexplicably linking up a little down the way, allowing us to race off again shouting to each other as we went, the evenings Guinness' showing their impact (other than driver Jreg).

Eventually, we reached a passage which we believed would lead back to the surface. After crawling for what felt like much longer than

expected, Jreg and Botch began to become concerned. Had we missed a turn? We carried on crawling a bit, with a little more haste this time. It was only when Molly walked up next to us and asked what we were doing did we eventually look up to the ceiling; there was no ceiling. We'd been crawling in the ditches outside the cave for around 15 minutes.

A peachy 'lil through trip

The next day we tackled the immense Pollnatagha-Pollprughlisk through trip, kindly pre-rigged by the forum committee. The entrance pitch was fantastic;

a massive drop in from a rebelay sitting right above a huge waterfall. On searching around for the way on, Molly found an Easter Egg decorated as Donald Trump sitting below the waterfall. This confused us but this was Ireland, anything could happen. Long into the trip and deep into the connection crawl between the two caves, the group pondered between grunts and scrapes on the fact that so far, we had not met any other cavers on the trip. It was at this moment that some strange "hooooo"'s and "ohowoooooo"'s started to drift down the passage towards us. There were other cavers approaching! Not just this, but as the noises came close, they became oddly familiar... It was Botch who first recognised the odd yet distinct sounds: it was Ian Peachy from ULSA. Of all the places to run into friends, we did not expect it to be hundreds of meter underground in a cherty crawl in Fermanagh.

Handstand Drowning

By the time Friday rolled around, the four days of caving, travelling and drinking had begun to take its toll on the five of us. After nearly a half hour of failing to motivate ourselves, we decided the psyche for Prods Pot (a notoriously tight and testing cave) was off. Instead, we donned the wetsuits which we had all begged, borrowed and stolen for the week and headed to Pollnagollum of the Boats.

"Boats" is essentially a series of connected lakes, which can be explored by boat but we opted to take the true caver way and swim the lakes (hence the wetsuits). None of us had done a whole lot of swimming in caves (bar maybe a dip in East Canal down Giants Hole) so this experience was a lot of fun. On the walk back to the car, Botch's oversuit had become waterlogged in the legs leaving him looking like some horrific red and blue Michelin man. The solution was to give him his first proper shower of the weekend by holding him up in a handstand and draining the water. This of course washed almost exclusively from the head hole leaving him near drowned about a meter from the car.

The Forum

After grabbing ourselves some chips and a few bottles of Buckfast from Belcoo, we finally headed to the Forum. We all felt welcomed with open arms (copious amounts of alcohol) by our Irish caving companions, and we soon discovered that all we had heard about the Irish Student Caving forum were true. Broomstick jousting, Edward Bucky-hands, songs and good old classic student caving carnage ensued.

Details of the evening have long became lost in tonic-wine fog but some notable memories remain: Molly was lost for the better part of the evening trapped in a hangout room with the notorious (and self-styled) 'Trogs' and only managing to escape the shot-necking horror by climbing out a window, Botch ate a whole raw onion and in doing so inadvertently became captain of UCD caving club, Michael Holliday fell in love, and we introduced the Irish to SUSSmedicine through a zip-lock bag of questionablycoloured drink. Topping off the evening and cementing our groups reputation, Jreg lost a bet and ended up doing a naked streak up the to the small town central roundabout and back. This was well received and when the others found out what Jreg was doing they honourably also stripped off and completed their respective laps.

Floating down White Fathers

We woke up on the floor of the village hall hosting the forum and somehow managed to drag ourselves caving again. This time we were kindly invited to be shown some classic Irish caves by our new friend Adam Prior. We crammed ourselves into Megan and set off from Noon's Hole. Noon's has an interesting story; allegedly so named for Dominick Noone, a British Crown informer who in the 1800's was kidnapped and thrown down the entrance shaft to his fate. Adam also nearly met his fate as he descended the entrance as he found it extremely wet and nearly drowned in the waterfall as he struggled to change over on the rope. We opted to leave the too-wet Noons and instead did another short but classic wet trip. This was to be White Fathers cave, a stretch of watery passage which drifts under lots of pretty calcite and slips in and out of the surface. It also interestingly passes under a prison. It felt strange changing by the razor-wire topped fence in view of the prison and we half expected to find a few escapees tunnelling into the passages under their cells. We repaid Adam for this excellent day's caving years later when, on an Irish visit to CHECC in the Dales, one of our freshers threw up on him from the top of a pitch in Aquamole.

'Least Classy Cavers'

That evening after the traditional quiz held at a local pub the forum awards were handed out. The SUSS contingent graciously accepted our group award of 'Least Classy Caver'. This was originally intended for a solo caver but the forum felt it was best allocated to all of us in recognition of our nakedness and plastic bags of alcohol which was all common place for us English cavers. In true classy style we all saw off the prize of a single pint of Guinness through 5 plastic straws.

Marble Arch

Sunday was our last day of caving so we said goodbye to our new friends and finished off the week with a true gem: Marble Arch cave. Marble arch is a show cave but the staff are very tolerant of cavers; a key can be acquired for the gate to an entrance which skips the punter entrance and spits you out towards the end of the tourist path. It was hilarious emerging out from behind a boulder to the surprise of a nearby tour group who all thought we were part of the experience (we declined pictures). At the end of the tourist trail you simply jump the railing and wade through knee deep water to a passage the paying customers can only look from afar at. We

Continuing the grand tradition of SUSS bindiving.



explored the rest of the cave somewhat nervously, knowing that when we emerged we would have no more trips left of what had been a fantastic week of caving.



2021

Stoney-battered and home

We may not have had anymore caving trips, but we did still have one more evening in Ireland before our ferry early Monday morning. We had intended to stay at a hostel in Dublin but instead were kindly offered the floor of a student flat by Emily from DCU with the promise of an evening at a Stoneybatter pub and we gladly agreed. On the way to the pub that evening we were stopped by a gent who recognised our English accents and directed us to 'a cracking little pub for yous' folk'. We took his word and popped our head in for a look. We found a pub adorned with more troubles memorabilia than any of us had ever seen loudly blasting 'come out ye black and tans'. We decided between this and the looks from the locals in the pub that this was not the place for us that evening and promptly scarpered. The pub we did end up in was cracking with live music (big up Ye Vagabonds) and good craic all around. We really have to thank the Irish cavers for being so welcoming and showing us a slice of caving life over the seas which were all incredibly grateful for.

Eventually, the classy English cavers made their way back to Sheffield and Megan's suspension was allowed to relax for the first time in a week. The ferry trip back was actually particularly civilised, apart from putting Botch head-first into a bin.

I also wrote an additional verse to Hard Caver based on our travels to the forum:

A skip o'er the pond finds the Emerald Isle, There's plenty of Guinness and welcoming smiles,

With a bottle of bucky taped into each fist, We'll float down white fathers and drink till we're pissed!

SUSS in Kyrgyzstan

by Rostam Namaghi

I had wangled an invite through 'Scottish SUSS', **Imo and Chris Playfoot,** to go on the Grampian Speleological Group expedition to Kyrgyzstan.

Peachey (at the time a Sheffield resident) opted in too and so a quartet was formed. We had been sold this expedition by a member of the Central Asian Karst Institute (he later turned out to be the sole member).

After some shenanigans getting there - a couple members not realising that Istanbul spans 2 continents and that the airports might be guite far apart - we were greeted by the warm air of a hot desert country. Tall concrete soviet era building blocks dominated the skyline of Bishkek and we made our way into its patchwork suburbs. In the morning we left our rather pleasant hotel and were bundled into a minivan and drove towards the mountains. I noted that almost every vehicle were right hand drive suzukis – turns out this is where Japan exports its knackered cars.

The long mountain roads seemed to go on forever and we eventually reached 'the camel's pass'. This was a tunnel connecting north and south Kyrgyzstan and was at 3130m above sea level – we had driven up 2000m and many of the party were a touch breathless. The tunnel is one way and switches every 30 minutes so we had time to take in the views of some grand mountains. On the other side was a grand plateau with distant mountains rising even higher in the distance. Driving along you saw the nomadic tents still in use and giant herds of hundreds of horses roaming the mountain steppe. We stopped off for some horse cheese balls and they were beyond foul.

Eventually we reached our campsite for the week and our hosts had built us a toilet block to use, it emerged this was made out of asbestos. On the



first day we surveyed a known cave to a length of 70m - a couple of pitches, narrow, little potential. Sadly, this was the only karst we would see. We went to some uranium mines for some reason, and scoured the hills for some entrances. One day we were out across this field and it was pointed out there were these odd white circles of stones, no clue what they were so walked on. Saw some bullets and thought nothing of it, then saw a burnt out tank. Eventually it clocked that we were walking across a firing range. A Serbian speleobiologist who was with us picked up an RPG and threw it at us, laughing as we cacked ourselves; "Hahaha it is obviously used".

We moved on after a week even further south and spent a day in Osh, visiting its (somewhat pathetic) show caves and its bazaar. For me that was worth the trip - seeing spice mounds, barrels of nabat, and actual blacksmiths hammering things out in the square. We all bought Kyrgyz hats – kalpaks and enjoyed being tourists. Anyway, back on the road we went to a much more promising place and went canyoning for a day (apparently a first descent but I doubt it). We also caught glimpses of some 7000m peaks which were truly breath taking.

When we arrived at the apricot farm that was hosting us on the ridge we were going to prospect I knew we would find nothing. The limestone was recently uplifted, shattered, and tiny springs were coming out of the hill every 5m. We persisted and found nothing but had a wonderful walking holiday. Oddly this very rural farm packed its produce in old Morrisons free plastic bags (the ones before the minimum

charge came in) and we slowly realised that almost every plastic bag in the country was branded with the Morrison's logo.

All in all what with the whiskey fuelled singing sessions, the weird second hand nature of Kyrgyzstan, the amazing scenery and great company, we had the nicest speleo con job going.



The expedition team and friends.

SUSS and the TSG

by Michael Holliday

Since the loss of the SUSS's own caving hut at The Old Hill Inn in 2008, if there's a home-ground for SUSS it's the TSG (apparently called "The Chapel").

The ex-tearoom, ex-methodist chapel, is an iconic backdrop to photos of SUSS members as freshers, suspended sock-wrestling, engrossed speleological debate, and innumerable unpublished images. Though the hut has been "neatened" up significantly over the years, partially with the help of our own members, there's a timeless quality to nights at the TSG.

The exposure starts early with the annual Peak Freshers event, where we drag upwards of 30 fresh-faced freshers out to Casteton - often on their first ever caving trip. A modern, classic itinerary would be: a "fresh" 8am meeting in the Notty House car park; a morning/afternoon finding out how cold caves are; a hearty lunch of soup and bread; and an afternoon/morning scavenger hunting around Castleton and being introduced to some of the tamer caving games. Peak Cavern is an amazing first/early trip for the cave-curious but running so many trips over

the course of one weekend is no easy task, and simply wouldn't work without the TSG. Without the direct help of TSG members (and the largely overlapping Peak Cavern Keyholders) this vital event couldn't happen, and though we could *probably* make our own soup - it just wouldn't be the same without them.

The TSG is also one of the more popular clubs to graduate into once you deem yourself "grown up", or when you need somewhere to crash for a few weeks between leases. An ideal base of caving operations for the recently graduated, recently dropped out, or between jobs - even those non-drivers among us have even been able to make the most thanks to the excellent Sheffield-Castleton busses. This leads inevitably to an extensive use of the free for all shelf, discovering that the sofas upstairs are comfier than the beds, and making up some nonsense whilst working at Peak Cavern.

It's only fair to note a few touchy moments in the relationship between the two clubs. There have been a few controversial incidents relating to microwaves, toasters, or sudden lacks of crockery. Like siblings, there's usually a storming confrontation followed by the younger sibling doing a noble effort at recompense and penitence. Only once the bridge has been rebuilt does it emerge that most of the damage was done by the dodgy older cousin all along, and our youthfully naive selves were merely carried

along for the ride... usually.

It's not just Sheffield's proximity that's caused a familial connection between the clubs - it's also the help, care, and forgiveness of some key figures in the TSG's membership. To name some recent names: Alastair Gott; Matyn Greyson; and Ann Soulsby have all put countless hours into helping SUSS. There has always been friendly voices at the TSG to reach out to - for sorting out access; negotiating with disgruntled voices; cooking black pepper stew for Peak Freshers; donating

kit and food to needy students; or for bestowing 2am wisdom about kit or where the next SUSS dig should be.



however it was a good fitness challenge in and out of JH with cylinders, and the SUSS youth carriers seemed to enjoy it, so I arranged a second attempt.

Diving Cliffhanger Sump

by Rob Middleton

Cliffhanger sump is in an enticing position, being the most westerly point of the Peak Speedwell system.

It was first dived by the legendary John N Cordingley in 1988 and described in the 1994 Derbyshire Sump Index as "a complete impasse and efforts should probably be con centrated on more promising leads elsewhere".

Well as 1988 is a long time ago, gravel in well known to move in the Peak-Speedwell system sumps, and as I've never been one to listen to sensible instructions and do as I'm told, I decided to have another look at Cliffhanger sump. And what better way to find willing carriers but to pester the youth of SUSS.

The first dive wasn't particularly successful. I struggled to find any line belays in the fine gravel floor and so was forced to turn around 10m short of JNCs 45m limit,

This time I came better prepared, with a variety of drop weights and net bags to collect the gravel ready to make safer line belays. The sump starts with a tight down dip squeeze and is best entered feet first on your front. After a few meters of awkward wiggling in zero vis, the passage opens up enough to turn around and the vis improves allowing a pleasant passage 1.5m wide by 1m high to be followed for the next 40m to where JNC's major impass had been. However, when I arrived, all there was was a low arch and within a few more metres I surfaced with whoops of joy. This was something!

The constricted sump entrance.



The passage turned out to be over 100m long with a large breakdown chamber 15 x 20m wide and a couple of promising avens in the roof. I named it 'Horizontal Limit', partly as its the Western most limit of the Peak Speedwell system, and partly because Cliffhanger is an awesome/cheesy climbing movie from the 90s, and there's another (shit) climbing movie called Vertical Limit.



202

2 more dives followed, the first solo to survey and photograph (which also included finding a surprise second sump hidden in the boulders), and the second to attempt to climb the aven and dive the sump with the assistance of Jim Lister. Unfortunately Jim has a larger chest than me and couldn't quite fit through the squeeze at the start of the sump, so the bolt climb will have to wait for next time, however I did manage to get a dive in the second sump, laying out another 30m of line in zero vis.

A massive thanks must go to all those who carried from SUSS, particularly Helen Fairclough, Leo Bradley, who foolishly carried twice. Exploration continues....

For more details see CDG Newsletter issues; 199:p11, 206:p14, 209:p9, and Descent issue 259.



"Horizontal Limit" Beyond the sump looking towards the large breakdown chamber.





2018 was an eventful year to say the least. There was certainly a high point in our summer expedition to Tresviso, but also a definite low point in the Prov-Dow rescue at the March Annual Dinner. Despite these troubles, psyche remained high, with many of the new recruits from last year getting prepared for their first expedition in the summer. I handed on the chairship to the capable hands of Antonia Headlam-Morley (and the inevitable rescue fallout too....). This was also the year of the Beast from the East, giving many of the caving trips towards the start of the year that extra added spice. SUSS put in some work for the community by cleaning out Ben's dig in P8, also looking to extend it. Our Easter trip to Ireland was again a success (in convincing the Irish of British madness). Preparation for the expedition also encouraged extra training as usual, with an expedition training weekends to the YSS and SWCC providing much amusement. Around this time was also the peak of the now-largely-abandoned Cave Biology Group, which provided some projects for SUSS cavers. As the new academic year rolled around, we welcomed a new batch of freshers, who despite their smaller number quickly integrated with the club and whet their teeth on the local caves. We also sourced a new training venue towards the end of the year in Access Techniques (thanks H!). This has the advantage of being central and dry but is a fair but less scenic than the tower. CHECC that year was held in the Peak District at Hope Valley College, which was an excellent opportunity to show off our local trips to other cavers (and cause a small degree of stress to the poor headmaster!). We saw the year out by finally breaking through at the P8 Christmas Aven dig to an astounding 30m of passage. An excellent 3 years of effort!

19

Botch, editor



photo at Swarthghyll Farm.

Below: A wet freshers weekend in the Dales.



Tresviso Caves Project

by Emmott Baddeley

2018 saw Sheffield University Speleological Society return en masse to expedition caving.

We had been kindly invited along to the Tresviso Caves Project (TCP) and tasked with running a "top camp" high in the Picos de Europa at Vegas de Andara. Our camp was set to recreate the expeditions by Lancaster Uni and others in the 70s and 80s, and we were excited to carry on the tradition of university expeditions, especially as they tend to require you to spend lots of time camping in beautiful sunny places and drinking plenty of local vino.

Our camp was situated at around 1800m, with a passable track for landrover supply missions and close to the spring used by the local populace (and the nearby refugio). Sheltered as it was in the valley between the smaller El Castillo de Grajal and the hulking Pico de Samelar, we were saved from the worst of the mountain weather. We were even granted an excellent viewpoint (the only place with signal) to look at cloud inversions in the valley below (we later realised that we were looking down on the miserable rain falling on our TCP friends down in Tresviso). The location of the camp gave us perfect access to

Camp SUSS. Photo credit: Lydia Leather



the high level entrances in the region, including our main objective, the double-sided Flowerpot (Torca del Picu Boru), the soon-to-be-infamous Torca Septrin and a number of other caves with with promising leads.



We spent two weeks in this mountain paradise, though (un)fortunately we didn't see so much of the aboveground! Subsisting on porridge, fish (every other day), and vegetables unknown to Hullensians (courgettes), our ramshackle camp made an interesting site for the hikers passing by. We even befriended some of the local lion-size shepherd dogs, which developed a taste for the 'butter cake' we'd bought from the supermarket in Bilbao. Most of us remained at altitude for the duration, though some joined the TCP team down the hill for some sorties to the bar (and a camping trip in Cueva del Agua, granted). We also received a surprise visit from a wandering American traveller, who brought supplies to bolster our spirits at just the right moment, though perhaps the late night landrover party did leave some a bit worse for wear.

We took a large team of 25 cavers with eight new to expeditionary caving, and had no major mishaps! The results of our efforts were 2564m of cave surveyed and over 500m of new passage found. We got a much better understanding of the area, and a return visit would likely be even more successful. Thanks to TCP for having us, and we hope this isn't the last we see of the underside of the Picos! (Ed: SUSS did plan to re-

> turn in 2020 and 2021, though our efforts were stymied by a pesky pandemic. Members of SUSS did however manage to join the TCP exped in 2019 and 2021).

Flowerpot

As it had been left relatively unexplored since the times of LUSS, we set out to rebolt, resurvey and explore leads throughout the Flowerpot system with its twin series "Bill" and "Ben". The known depths of the two series were -723m for Ben and -150m for Bill. Focus was given to higher leads in Ben, whereas in Bill our

objective was to push leads at the end of the known cave.

Ben

Several unchecked alternative routes led to a few new discoveries. From the 'Rock Garden ' boulderpile, an upstream rift was followed to reach a ledge hallway up a large shaft with two waterfalls entering and a gravel floor (Boulder Bluff). A crawl and small pitch followed, but the watercourse was lost in

small fissures. Leads in the side of the Boulder Bluff shaft were found to lead to the bottom of a large boulder pile, presumably the Rock Garden. Bolt climbing and traversing were also used to pursue the origin of the waterfalls in the main shaft, leading to choked passages above. The shaft was not followed to the top given its overhanging nature and an absence of obvious leads.

An interesting discovery made by accident towards the end of the expedition was an alternate route from the Pozo del Lago pitch. Instead of the normal route from the bottom of the pitch, a higher level fossil route was entered, with a climb down to the active passage but extensive fossil levels above. This fossil level was followed past decorated calcite and mud passage and two short pitches (Bottom of the Barrel 10m and Tequila Sunrise 8m) to a pitch with the sound of a stream at the bottom. Due to lack of time this was left undescended, but is thought to lead back to the known system.

The resurveying attempt reached -304m in Ben, with the new discoveries and the alternative route also being added. Given that the total depth of Ben is -723m, there is still plenty of resurveying and new leads to be checked.

Bill

An unexplored tight crawl was found leading from the 2nd pitch, which was followed to a 15m chamber with an 'impressive' central stalagmite. Despite the newly named Deflowered Chamber's endowment, no obvious route on was found, with the water entering through small inlets in the ceiling.



Our biggest discovery was of a continuation route above the previous end constriction at -150m, through 40m of decorated crawling, the Ivory Market. A pitch of 30m, The Elephant's Trunk, lead to a 20m wriggle through a body sized tube to the impressive 70m Invasive Species pitch. The continuation rift (Waterway to spend a Sunday) becomes too tight, but leads remain in an inlet partway up Invasive Species and a traverse over the Elephant's Trunk pitch head, both left unexplored. In total, these discoveries added 150m of depth to the Bill series, doubling the surveyed depth.

Torca Septrin

This -180m cave already had a fair reputation among cavers, with an exposed entrance, cold water running down many walls, and multiple pitch heads having been capped repeatedly to enable access. The last visit in 2010 had resurveyed and extended the known depth, with all ways on being too tight. Despite this, one of the 2010 team was insistent that a 'walking lead' existed at the very bottom. Whether this was poor recollection, Septrin madness, or simply a hilarious practical joke, we naively accepted this 'hot tip', and duly set off rebolting (the previous ones being already too rusted).

Two previously checked too-tight rifts were followed and both passed for a short distance before being impassable even by the small team. The 'walking lead' was found to be a tight rift with an X decisively inscribed on the wall. However, a tube was found to pass above the rift, leading to the 7m Backshot pitch. The stream could then be tantalisingly seen through a too-tight rift, which was resistant to hammering and

was left uncapped as we had reached the end of the expedition. This cave is officially classed as cursed due to its cruel nature, habit of stealing equipment, and manifesting events such as being struck by lightning and doing unspeakable things to a bag while in a squeeze.

and doing unspeakable squeeze.

Others

Pothole T207 was rigged by a small team, with the hopes that it would provide an alternate entrance into Flowerpot. This was abandoned at a constriction due to the amount of resources required to cap through. Pozo Natacha was also revisited, with the previous end constriction being bypassed through an awkward rift. Two pitches of 20m and 5m were descended before the way on was completely lost, extending the total depth to -309m.

The impressive high altitude 25x25m shakehole of Torca Samelar was also descended, with hopes of passing the smaller-than-usual snowplug. No route on was found without recourse to shovelling, so this was left for global warming to do its magic.

An effort was also made to find a stable entrance into the Systema Sara, a network of mine and natural passage close to the camp. T82 Karen was connected to the system and surveyed, and the Sara III entrance was confirmed as the safest entrance into the system. Though no further progress into the system was made, groundwork was laid for a planned future expedition to dive the sumps (Ed. Though Middleton has now been trying to arrange this for two years, some pesky virus keeps getting in the way!)



Above: The spectacular Vegas de Andara Photo credit: Lydia Leather.

Below: ...although the views weren't always so good! Photo credit: Lydia Leather



Armchair SUSS

by Rostam Namaghi

It's a bit odd to be proud of a caving club for its prowess sitting down, but over the last 10 years SUSS has had a large role in British Caving Politics.

I know you're tutting and shaking your head but trust me it's a legacy we can be proud of. From CRoW to Covid, the black and gold contempt for authority has played the part of puppeteer.

When I joined, I found an outward looking club that had reasonably close ties with several other student clubs. We held joint weekends, travelled round the country, went to CHECC and Hidden Earth in big numbers. We had members that hadn't been to Sheffield University (or Hallam) and it was come one come all.

The first foray into the political stage comes with Northern CHECC – an event that was essentially a SUSS 'joint-weekend' where we became more ambitious and added several more joints (mostly non-cannabinoid) with many Leeds and, somewhat oddly, Cardiff. Edd Willatts who despite his cultish upbringing in UBSS had seen the light and joined SUSS organised the first few of these events and the CHECC brand was applied. What it created was a network of trainee leaders from across the student scene and inadvertently a network whose votes could be whipped.

This is where I swan in and become Youth and Development Officer for the BCA, having been duped into the role by Hellie Adams. I had many difficulties, I fought with the BCA training officer, Liverpool University, various guilds and organised CHECC delegate meetings. It was an incoherent mess and so I resigned and then was reappointed with a working group that combined BCA, Scouts and CHECC into a cohesive unit. It was during that BCA AGM where a large number of SUSS attended, it being in Derbyshire, and represented many clubs and passed the constitutional changes that withdrew some obscene constitutional blocks to BCA campaigning on CRoW, and perhaps more baffling, promoting caving in general. This sparked wave after wave of constitutional reform to achieve such modern things as online voting.

This is where one of the most unsung heroes of the piece walks in. A veritable Gimli of man, Will Burn has etched his name in BCA history. He sorted the internal bureaucratic shuffling in order to allow online voting, obstructed by a member of the Pridderati, a group that would curse his and my name in vain. Whilst in the Y&D Working Group, Mr Burn had had the temerity to ask on the behalf of a 14-year-old why he could bottom the Berger but not go down GB. In a multi year saga we battled with the most obstructive, gate empire building and anti-democracy campaigners in British Caving, She-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, who incidentally wrote the access agreements to Dan Yr Ogof, Draenan and 'represented' the BCA during the Countryside Rights of Way Act despite the council having voted for the BCA to lobby for caving's inclusion.

Youth and Development during that time gained another SUSS member; David Botcherby as chair of CHECC. Despite being known in SUSS as Botch the bacon stealer, he proved to be an effective diplomat. His crowning achievement is probably whipping CHECC to send 20 clubs to an AGM where they constituted an absolute majority in the house of groups. That constitutional amendment (to democratise the BCA by removing the group voting stage) passed the threshold by 1%.

It should be noted that during this whole period Y&D started new 4 student caving clubs, made BCA membership for under 18s free, secured emergency funding for student clubs and got legal advice proving that it is not an infringement of your human rights to give consent if you are below the age of 18 (not even making it up). We also formed a voting block on council that supported CRoW.

The party had to end as the springs in our armchair began to creak. Will became Conservation and Access Officer, Botch the vice delegate to the Fédération Spéléologique Européenne and myself to Publications and Information. And yet we overlook other SUSS participants such as Henry Rockliff, Matt Wire (who participated in the early rounds of the IT civil war), Emmott Baddeley in Conservation and Access, and an honourable mention to Rob Middleton who even completed an academic work on Caving politics.

So be proud SUSS and I hope the next generation picks up the torch and continues the fight against the evils of CICs, Gate Builders and Healthy and Safety Zealots.

Cheshire Cave Biology Project

by Emmott Baddeley

In March 2018 Graham Proudlove advertised on the Cave Biology Group facebook page that he had been contacted by the Sandstone Ridge Trust (SRT), a volunteer-run group who preside over the mid-Cheshire sandstone ridge.

This piqued my interest as a Cheshire-native, having spent a lot of time in the area as a child and knowing some parts of it very well, although little about the caves.

In June, me and Botch visited the ridge and were shown three of the caves on the Bolsworth estate with Peter Winn, one of the trustees of the SRT. We learnt that the trust was mostly

The entrance to Queen's Parlour. Photo credit: Emmott Baddeley



interested in the archaeology, as the area is associated with a long history of human activity from the last 6000 years. Some of the caves on the ridge are known to have been inhabited, and all are thought



to have been enlarged by man, mostly to mine the high quality white sand of the triassic sandstone. There is also a long history of copper mining in the area, as well as several notable wells including the one at Beeston Castle which is 136 meters deep and may have horizontal adits that acted as sally ports during the long history of the castle.

Peter had contacted Graham ahead of any archaeology work that took place in the caves to get a gauge of their biological significance in order to avoid any damage to the caves present invertebrate communities. On our recce, Peter showed us Queen's Parlour, Bloody Bones and Musket Hole. The first cave had some perennial darkness at the back, while the second was entirely within the twilight zone and third was an exposed rock shelter. In Queen's Parlour and Bloody Bones, we observed multiple species of spider including Meta spp., caddis flies, true flies and moths. Peter also told us about some other caves along the ridge, most notably the caves below Beeston Castle which were larger than any we had visited that day.

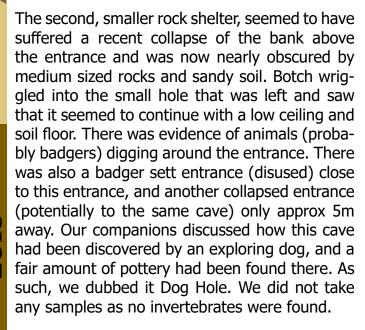
Our recce and a following search of the British Cave library showed us the worth of revisiting these caves, as no survey data or in fact any other record of these caves seems to exist. We

> planned to return on the 27th/28th July with Will Whalley to collect invertebrates to ID and take survey data.

> Leaving from a sunny Sheffield, we arrived at a cloudier Beeston Castle at 7pm on Friday evening. We were met by Peter one of his volunteers from the SRT. Unfortunately we were unable to access the main caves under the castle that evening, as we hadn't realised we needed to be accompanied by a bat group representative. However, we had secured an escort for the Saturday night and Carolyn who is the steward of the Castle agreed to show

us some smaller rock shelters she knew of within the castle grounds.

The first of these, dubbed Beeston Cave 1, was a small rock shelter just within the outer Victorian walls of the castle. This "cave" was approx 1 meter deep by two meters wide with a animal (probably badger) tunnel in the back wall which led off further. We took a quick survey and collected a small number of invertebrate samples, and noted the presence of two wren nests.



We met Peter again on Saturday morning to survey the caves which me and Botch had seen in our initial visit. This started with Queen's Parlour, the largest of the sandstone ridge caves outside of Beeston. We took our time here collecting survey data and invertebrate samples which were divided into twilight and dark zones. This cave is clearly quite disturbed, full of beer cans and candles and even part of a tent. Despite this life seems quite abundant, especially in the sheltered around away from the entrance but where there was still some light.

After a brief lunch overlooking north Cheshire and the Wirral, we visited Bloody Bones, a much smaller cave just below Raw Head. Both of these caves were thought to have been used for the extraction the white sand, which may have been used to sharpen tools and scrub the underside of canal barges. Bloody Bones seems to be less disturbed by people but has become more full of



The team bags up samples. Photo credit: Will Whalley.

organic matter and plant debris. A second entrance close by may have provided a connection to the main cave at one time but the tunnel has since filled in.

The data collection at this cave was much quicker, leaving us with a couple of hours before we could access the cave at Beeston. In this time we visited the Bickerton Poacher, a pub Peter had informed us contain a shaft of some kind in the bar! The landlord informed us that it may have been a prospecting mine shaft as part of the nearby copper mining industry, but it appeared to be less than fruitful. Now, however, patrons drop loose change into the shaft and anyone willing to descend and collect it can donate to a charity of their choosing (DCRO?).

After a pint and a nap, we returned to Beeston Castle after closing at 5pm accompanied by the Cheshire Bat Group representative, who also caves with CCPC. Of the two main caves, we only visited one, which we dubbed Beresford's Cave in lieu of any official name, after the man who is said to have quarried the sand from it. This cave is now gated at the entrances and, along with the other large cave at Beeston, contains the only county records of the lesser horseshoe bat, comprised of 2 individuals visiting the caves variably in the last 6 years (although not last year). The second cave (unnamed) has been bricked up to only a narrow slit in aid of the bats, and we were under the impression that it contained a larger bat colony and as such as couldn't visit it. However, the bat group rep told us that it is equally bare of bats and we could visit it if we were willing to squeeze through the slit, as he does to survey it. Unprepared for this, we resolved that we may be able to visit this cave at a later date.

Beresford's Cave is an incredibly complex system of pillars that were left to support the ceiling during the extraction of sand. As such, collecting survey data was a bit of a nightmare complicated by large pieces of iron in the walls. We sampled invertebrates in light, twilight and dark zones, the fauna generally being less abundant and diverse.

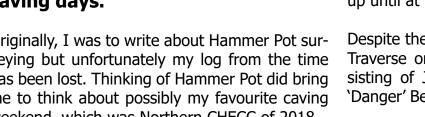
Some notable species we recorded were an unknown (to us) species of parasitic wasp which were found in both Bloody Bones and Beresford's cave. There was also an incredible abundance of a species of true fly that seemed to gather in aggregations in certain areas. Meta spp. (cave spiders) were recorded in all 3 caves visited on 28th.



by Olly Hall

recently graduated Having being asked to write for this journal I've been reflecting on my student caving days.

Originally, I was to write about Hammer Pot surveying but unfortunately my log from the time has been lost. Thinking of Hammer Pot did bring me to think about possibly my favourite caving weekend, which was Northern CHECC of 2018.

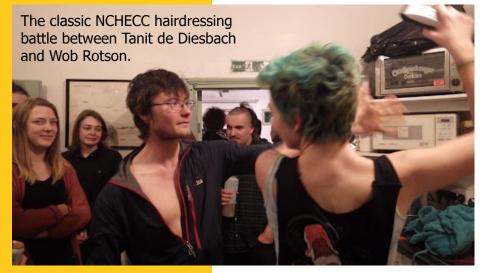




The weekend started normally enough with the drive up and the session starting up at Bullpot Farm. Perhaps on the Friday night Adelaide was given some hair clippers. This led to multiple men from multiple clubs being shaven, or at least having half their hair shaven. From this excitement a well photographed stand off between Wob Rotson and Tanit ensued. The rest of the night was filled with enough antics to keep me up until at least 4am.

Despite the late night, I was on to a full Easegill Traverse on the Saturday. A strong team consisting of Jack Dewison, George Breley, Laura 'Danger' Benn, Wob Rotson, Rachel Turnbull and

> perhaps most importantly Nathan Walker was assembled and headed up to Top Sink to set things off. Soon we were at the first pitch and in order to conserve energy Wob and George decided to bat hang (hang upside down by the feet) on any available ledges. This ultimately used more energy in the multiple attempts to get a good hang but was good entertainment for the rest of us.



Nathan and his nose lead up on a speedy whistle stop tour of the beginning of the traverse. Without Nathan's knowledge of the system this trip would have taken a lot longer. So speedy in fact we ended up running through some sandy passages and soon encountered a group led by Will Whalley and Brendan Hall. Rachel decided she'd had enough of our trip and tagged out for Brendan.

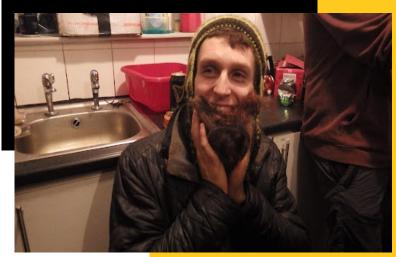
Soon we were around the Wormway and Nathan's nose was struggling to sniff out the correct route. Turning back

was perhaps briefly mentioned. But only briefly as we were soon back on track to Pippikin. It was around this time we passed through Echo Aven where an abseil was required. This is usually fine however Georges Kong banana (belay device) was not playing ball. Although slowed down he managed to get down, but another abseil was out the question. Fortunately, there was no more abseiling on our route.

Pippikin was finally reached and the awkward scrabble to the surface began. The upward nature of the squeezes here definitely adds some difficulty. Most of the fellas powered through and out the cave leaving Brendan, Danger Benn, and me. I believe we made it out in about 7 hours. Out in plenty of time for the Saturday night shenanigans.

Being at Bullpot farm means that an evening trip on a weekend is always possible, due to the easy and close by Shuttleworth Pot. If I remember correctly there was an evening trip after having done the Easegill Traverse. Likely the team included Jack Dewison, George, maybe Botch, likely some other people. Shuttleworth has a spooky sump; spooky due to the noises it makes, which sound like someone slapping a tackle sack. It also has a great ceiling full of straws which is definitely worth seeing, as well as some good sediment that has even been taped off to stop trampling.

After this trip there was another 4 or 4:30am night, involving a Death Grips listening towards the end. Due to the caving and late nights we were feeling pretty tired on Sunday morning but perhaps the most important trip of the weekend was ahead: surveying in Hammer Pot!



ULSA's Adam Aldridge sporting the spoils of war.

After some moping about in the car park with George and Tony Seddon, we finally headed off. We were particularly hesitant as we knew what was ahead. On that day we had to survey Sludge Crawl, perhaps the most unpleasant part of Hammer Pot as it involves crawling through at least elbow deep water and laying in it for longer than you want in awkward positions to get the survey data.

George drove us over and we suited up, trekked across Fountains Fell, and headed in. I think we had realised keeping your SRT kit on through Stemple Rift was possible at that point; making our descent to the beginning of Sludge Crawl rather speedy.

We decided I was to go first, meaning I had to go backwards and do back shots with the Disto. We got going and progressively I went more mad, the pinnacle being when I accidentally said passage the way you would say massage. At the time this was the height of comedy. Despite the insanity we got the data, but now we had to get out the cave.

This was not a problem for George. I however was pretty tired, and soon discovered the entrance crawl was really comfy to just lay in. I managed to remind myself that bed is comfier than cave and got out, much to George's relief. At this point I was the most tired I had ever and perhaps will ever be. Even walking seemed like too much effort.

To round off the weekend Booths provided a good Sunday haul including Easter eggs. A suitable end to a great weekend.



Above: One third of the crack squad for Easegill, George Breley and Rachael Turnbull, prepare for the traverse the only way they know how, while watched by an approving author.

Right: The author Olly Hall setting off to survey Hammer Pot.



by Sam Snowdon

I awoke on the first morning of the annual dinner felling pretty fresh and ready to do some caving. Not true!

But, I went and joined the others to see what plans were being made and in typical SUSS fashion, it came as no surprise that no trips had been planned. I managed to get some left over beans and a brew down me before jumping on a trip with Dave, Antonia, Molly and Jolene on the Providence Pot – Dow Cave through-trip via Dowbergill passage. We had to crack on a fair bit if we wanted to be back in time for the dinner later that evening.

Antonia gave the first fright of the day by driving

Dave's car to the end of the lane at the hut (Swarthghyll Farm, Oughtershaw). Dave jumped back in the driver's seat and eventually we safely arrived at Kettlewell, donned our caving garms and were making our way to Providence pot. Other than being a bit misty with a few patches of snow, the air was mild and I got very hot on the way up and decided to cool down in the various pools in the stream on the way and by making snow angels with Dave whilst the others followed. It was comforting to see that there wasn't a great deal of water on the surface.

It took about an hour but eventually we made it to the entrance to the cave and down we went. It was easy going and Blasted Crawl made for some awkward thrutching but we were quickly in Dowbergill passage. We had a quick look upstream until it sumped and we then plodded on downstream. It is a pretty straightforward cave as you are pretty much following the passage in a straight line for about a mile. Or so you might think. It turns out to be a rabbit warren with no continuous route.

We entered the stream at 800 yard chamber and

it seemed a bit sporting, with the water being around waist height. We pressed ahead and decided to take the high level route along an ascending traverse into the roof. I felt a little out of my comfort zone at this point as you are just traversing round a series of false floors. Eventually we came across one pretty wide section with very few holds that we had to traverse around with difficulty.

At some point along the way, we ended up back at the water and decided to keep high and climbed up an awkward section of cave before ending up in Gypsum chamber. I was starting to get hungry by this point so was starting to dream about the dinner that was planned for later. We followed Gypsum traverse which again was a false floor dropping down to the streamway below and we took a route into a continuous crawl.

I was at the front of the group and came across a knotted rope that dropped down to the streamway. I was confused because I swear the book had said that no equipment was required and the others confirmed that too. Having read the trip in the black book, I thought this was just a way of making the cave not for the faint hearted. I proved to be one of those faint hearted because then my mind draws a blank and everything went black.

I do not know if it was the cold, whether I had become weak or fear gripped me but regardless, I had fallen out of the top of passage – it was very slippy and smooth rock for a cave wall. I awoke to hear my name being screamed out. And then, my senses slapped me across the face and I found myself hanging over the river. I got myself into a stable position and shouted back up to the others to let them know I was alive. Thoughts were just racing through my head at what had just happened, it was quite hard to get over this feeling of dread that had taken over me. Looking up, that was a pretty big fall, had I nearly just died?

Jolene was the first down and it was clear that we were both shaken up by what had just happened. I felt very dazed and confused. Jolene took the reigns and explained that we have to move because we were so close to the exit and had to get out. I agreed and Jolene decided to go first and get in the water. Little had we

realised that the water levels had risen, so Jolene immediately started to struggle against the strong current.

I'm not sure why but some instinctual drive seemed to override what had just happened and I found myself hoping from one foot to the other down the passage trying to find a safe spot in the streamway to help Jolene. I could not watch her be taken by the current. It was a very risky move and on reflection, maybe a bit stupid but I jumped in the streamway downstream of her and god it was cold, it felt like glass stabbing into my body. I managed to brace myself against the current and Jolene was swept into me. I held. Thank god. I stand to my word and would have done that again.

Conveniently, there were some boulders up above the streamway and so Jolene was able to climb up me onto the boulders and then I followed her up. If we had been taken by the current, we would have been dragged under this, a scary thought! We called along to the others who also awkwardly traversed the streamway and climbed up Dave to get up onto the boulder. We were together and we were safe.

We were to stay here until help came, huddled like penguins, soaked to the bone and cold. The others were worried about me after the fall, and after all of the difficult traversing were feeling pretty exhausted. It was close to our call out time and remembering the duck to get out of Dow Cave which was most likely flooded, it made sense to wait. The thought of having to traverse all the way back was exhausting enough. Adding to all of this, we had no group shelter and were using our knee pads to prevent us being in contact with the cold rock which would have sucked any ounce of warmth out of us. I kept drifting in and out of sleep, not much was really being processed at this point, numb to everything. I think I hit my head hard. To help reassure ourselves, we were counting down the stages of the rescue operation to ourselves but the time we had set for them to arrive came and went. There were points where we thought they would never come, had they even been called? I could tell the others were worried about me and the situation we were in. To keep us entertained we all decided to have a shouting competition in the vague hope that the rescue team would hear

Eventually at around 6am and 10 hours after being stuck on that boulder, we were having a good old sing song to Bohemian Rhapsody when out of the darkness there came a sound unlike what we had heard. Everyone's ears pricked up and we had this similar look of recognition, had we finally been found? Eventually light started to bleed around the bend in the streamway up ahead. Dave had not returned but the rescue team had arrived.

They explained that the water level had risen whilst we were in the cave which is why they had taken some time to reach us but it was safe enough to exit again. Apparently up in the mist on Great Whernside, snow had melted during the day on Saturday. That would explain how cold the water was! Dow Cave was still inaccessible so to our annoyance, we had to traverse all the way back up Dowbergill Passage and out of Providence Pot. It turned out that the rescue team also thought that we may have gone down Providence Mine, which is close to Providence Pot, being on the other side of the ghyll and they had spent some time searching down there. This delayed them reaching us.

Freedom! Photo credit: Upper Wharfdale Fell Rescue Association.



The way out was hard, we were malnourished, cold, wet and just wanting to be out \sim of the cave. We were glad to hear that Dave had been found and we waited for him to catch up with us all. I was



2021

in a considerable amount of pain but I had some renewed faith that we would see the light of day again. There were not enough rescuers for each of us so Dave fortunately volunteered to look after me for the whole way back. I found it difficult concentrating on what we were trying to do but I kept putting one foot in front of the other. I think I fell a further 2/3 times down into cracks in the floor.

Eventually we arrived back at the 800 yard chamber I then saw many familiar faces from SUSS and DCRO dotted around who had helped with the rescue. It was great to see them again. And also dawned on me how serious the rescue operation was by seeing how far some of these people had travelled to assist. We were given these foil ration packs of stew that we had to eat cold but after not eaten properly for the past 24 hours, I didn't care one bit and they tasted amazing.

6 hours after being found, I began to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Its up there in the top 10 best sights I've ever come across, and I've seen a fair few! I raced to get out whereas Antonia held back for 10 minutes so that she could pass the 24 hour underground mark.

As I emerged I was overwhelmed by strong emotions, the first person I saw passed me a hot chocolate and it was honestly the best thing I had ever had. I was driven down to the car park in the centre of the village where we were greeted by warm blankets and food by the North Yorkshire ambulance service. The others eventually caught me up and it was so good to see everyone out in one piece. How we didn't even get hypothermia is beyond me. Apparently, the Air ambulance were on standby because they were expecting us to be severely hypothermic. After being in such harsh, cold conditions for such a long period of time, I don't blame them. I will admit though that it was the coldest I have ever been in my life.

My parents were waiting at the hospital, it was good to see them too but it also turned out to be Mother's Day, shit! My intention was to visit my mum as my parents live nearby but I hadn't meant to visit this way! After a quick telling off from my nan, it was great to hug them all. We were all huddled in a room together whilst a doctor examined me, I was given some codeine (they worked wonders!) and then we were on our way back to some form of normality.

Once the grogginess of the incident eventually wore off about a month later, something still wasn't quite right and after a couple of visits to the Dr, I was diagnosed with a mild traumatic brain injury as a result of the fall. This mainly affected some higher functions like concentration and memory and it also seemed to induce some mild epilepsy because for several months I felt these weird jolts through my brain. As a result, my master's degree had to be put on hold as otherwise I would have failed it. I was plagued by nightmares; recurring images of me falling or being trapped in a cave filling with water left me waking up in sweats, with soaking bedsheets, heavy breathing and scared of going to sleep again. On reflection, I was probably also suffering from some form of psychological trauma as a result of the whole experience. To prevent this developing further, I started to talk about it. At first it was difficult, I didn't like returning to what had happened but as word spread about our experience, the more I began to open up and talk about it. The more I talked, the more it got easier and the more normal it became.

I needed to overcome this barrier. If I sat dwelling on what happened, and let the thoughts stew, I knew I was going to develop a fear of the things I loved doing. I had to combat that and meet it head on. So, I started by getting into climbing more often and making that a regular thing. I had started gaining a bit of a fear of heights around this point but by getting regularly involved with that, the fear turned into enjoyment. There was the odd occasion when I was on the wall and

would look down, gripped by this intense fear, taking me back to the cave. I think we have all felt the fear of falling from time to time, but I was able to meet it head on and combat it there and then. I then started with a relatively easy caving trip down Winnats Head cave as that was always a trip I loved doing. Soon after that there were more trips that followed. And boy was I glad I did. Returning back to these things, to the things I love doing, reignited the passion within me and that helped me recover. Don't get me wrong, I don't cave nearly as much as I did (I put that partly down to adulting), but I can now say that I no longer fear being back inside a cave and can once again enjoy a sport I love with friends (who I also love ;)).

The summer after the incident, the Upper Wharfedale Fell Rescue Association held a fund-raiser that a troop of SUSSians got involved with. This involved a 22 mile walk or run of the Wharfedale three peaks, consisting of Birks Fell, Buckden Pike and Great Whernside. It is on the flanks of the latter that the Prov-Dow through trip sits beneath. It's a cracking corner of the world which I would very recommend visiting and even taking part in the walk. But it was nice to get together and help raise money for the organisation as they are voluntary, receive no funding from the government and as can be seen from this, are a vital part of the community.

Team SUSS at the start line of the Wharfedale 3 peaks fundraiser featuring an unknown participant who just wanted the photo op (second from the left). Photo credit: Upper Wharfedale Fell Rescue Association.

34

Before the fall, I almost felt indestructible, I don't think the fear centre in my brain was switched on very high at all. It is in these high-risk situations that the adrenaline is pumping and it feels great but it can also get the better of you, I couldn't evaluate risk the same way. I have learned a lot from this experience over the past couple of years and now act with more caution but I am still able to go out and do the things I love to do and much more. I am constantly planning the next thing I can be getting out and doing. But, it could very easily have nearly ended there in that cave, even afterwards I could have let that fear drive me away from the things I loved doing.

The fall also taught me a lot of things about life and it really made me want to grab it by the balls, to make the most of what I have and to experience it more fully. To many, the activities seem abnormal and bonkers but to me, and others I have met along the way, there is an amazing feeling to be had from them all and I am glad that never died.

This Time to the Bottom; SUSS Return to the Berger

by Antonia Headlam-Morley

In the summer of 2018 Dave and I joined the BEC holiday to the Gouffre Berger.

As we were only able to join the group for the remaining days of the permit everyone else had already successfully bottomed the cave and was enjoying canyoning and via ferrata, so ours would be a two-man trip. It was a stunning journey through the Vercors National Park and up to the camp near Autrans to meet up with everyone,

where it was good to see some other SUSS members (Rostam, Sam Goodyear and Jeff) amongst the BEC. The next morning we drove up to the Moliere car park, faffed and packed for a good while before making our way to the entrance.

Once we got to the cave, we bumped into a few friendly faces who were mildly surprised at how long the journey had already taken us. A positive start. Eventually we started down with Dave optimistically saying 'it'll be such a nice walk back this evening'. The trip to Camp 1 was varied, losing a lot of height quickly with pitches hung in impressive chambers, mixed in with some travers-y meanders and scrambles through gigantic boulder fields. 'Camp 1' to me always had such a homey sound to it, so I was pleased to discover it all lit up when we got there. Some French cavers were on their way out, and after a chat with them we went off to admire the Hall of Thirteen and its gour pools which surpassed its reputation. Luckily for me, as Dave had been part of the SUSS holiday to the Berger in 2013

he was in full tour guide mode and telling tales of the last SUSS trip.

We continued down past the Enormous Cascade which sounded like a roaring waterfall but in reality was a stream from the ceiling, echoing and magnifying around the cavern, followed by some calcite slopes and onto the canals and cascades. This was the part I'd been most apprehensive about, but fortunately it had been such a dry summer that the water levels were low and the flow of water was calm. Despite this I foolishly still traversed, ungainlily, on the ropes. I felt less alone in my bruises over this when back at camp there was

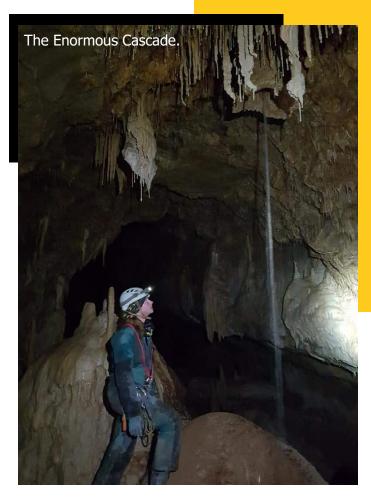
At the entrance



a chorus of 'raise your arm if you're shit at traversing' to which half the group revealed the tell-tale bruise which had formed around the arm pit as a result of this particular technique.

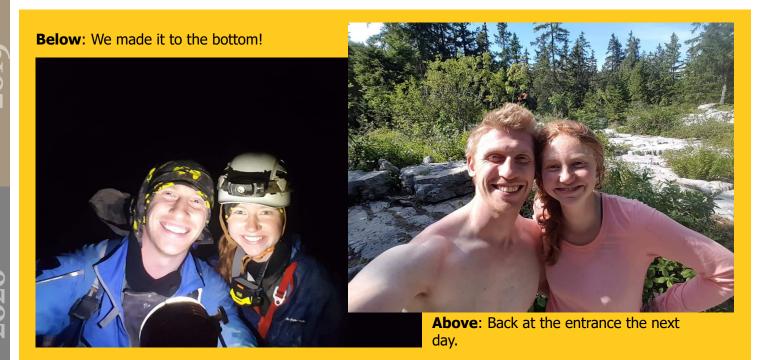
Nearing Camp 2, we emerged at the top of the Grand Canyon which had such an impressive slab of rock for a roof that it stretched as far as our lights would let it. After picking our way through this, we reached the camp. This was a far more miserable sight than Camp 1, and keen to get to the end we carried on until we were at the top of the pitch Little Monkey, ready to descend to the last Hurricane Pitch. Aptly named, despite the dry weather it was a thunderous 40m waterfall which buffeted us as we descended, and after a final hours walk we reached the Pseudo Siphon at just over 1000m deep. A little sloe gin and a selfie to celebrate and then up we went, Dave leading and ready with the sugar packed trail mix at the top of each pitch to perk us up for the trip back. Thankfully, there was no need to de rig as the BEC had arranged that we would use a French clubs ropes.

The pitches and massive chambers felt a lot bigger on the return journey. At Camp 2 again, we stopped, warmed up in our bivvy bag and cooked some mac and cheese, to which I remarked 'at least it's got pepper in!' with Dave grimly replying, 'that's mud.' It was a welcome sight some hours later to meet some other members of the group who had come to collect the things from Camp 1. Up the last pitch we went to the sweet



smell of the next morning, only a little bit over from Dave's estimate...

Luckily, we had driven over in a converted ambulance which came into its own the day after, as the handrails proved very useful in getting around. It was a fantastic trip and exceeded my expectations, many thanks to the BEC and especially Laura Benn for organising everything!





2019 could perhaps be called a quieter year for SUSS, with no big rescues or expeditions. However, members still kept themselves busy with many trips away, side projects, and holidays. Early in the year the traditional pilgrimage to Ireland was made by some members, while others went slightly further afield to Tennessee. Most of our weekends this year were joint weekends, with our usual partners -in-crime of GUPA, NUCC, ULSA, and MUSC making appearances. Some members also made time this year to help out on some local DCA projects, including the reopening of Wardlow Sough (Cress-

Dale) and clean-up of Snelslow Swallet. We started to face a bit of resistance from Sport Sheffield this year on the administrative side of things (as a result of the rescue), but managed to keep evening trips and weekends running. The Annual Dinner took place at the Yorkshire Mountaineering Club Hut in Coniston, enabling some sketchy mine adventures. Soon after, a new committee took over, with Ben Thompson taking charge as chair. Our summer trip this year was a holiday to the classic caves of the Picos and the canyons of Rodellar, in which we were thoroughly baked by the Spanish sun (necessitating much cooling off in the river and the bar). Some SUSS returned to Tresviso to join the main Tresviso Caves Project expedition, while others chose different international exploits (read on to find out;)). When September rolled round again, we had another smaller intake, marking a tipping point from the 'Big SUSS' days of a couple years before. Not to worry, we thought, the new guys are keen and we can always make it up in 2020...

Botch, editor

Clockwise from top left: The Boys at CHECC 2019; Enjoying our new training venue; A snowy NCHECC scene; Our only official team photo in 5 years!







A holiday in the sun

by Natalie Greenwood-Sole

In 2019, I organised our holiday to Northern Spain.

We went to the Cantabria region as they had recently abolished the permit system for most caves in the region. This meant that we could explore a variety of interesting caves in the area. There was a good turn out from Sheffield University Speleological Society, eleven the first week and eighteen the second week.

Since our last trip to Cueto-Coventosa in 2015, the Spanish have really improved their way marking and fixed aids; all our trips had reflective markers pretty much the whole way through, and good quality bolting which is a welcome improvement to stomping around with a half-translated description!

We had the usual endless drive down from Sheffield with the obligatory seasicknessinducing ferry and overnight camp half way down to reach La Barguilla just outside Ramales.

The view upriver from the campsite at Rhodellar.



The three classic through trips we completed were Tonio-Canuela, Red del Silencio and Mortero-Rubicera (a gorgeous exchange trip between a massive shake-hole and an arch entrance in the side of a cliff). We also managed to squeeze a day in at the beach as well!

I recommend Tonio-Canuela as a through trip — whilst it was knackering (and seemingly endless at times) it was worth every minute. To find it, we followed a series of shepherd huts along a muddy farm track for over an hour. The entrance was smaller than we expected so we took a while to find it as it was well disguised. We had split into two teams that were setting off half an hour apart with myself in the second team. Deciding that I wouldn't be in enough discomfort during the trip, I set myself up perfectly by sitting in some stinging nettles whilst messing around waiting just before beginning the descent (1/10 — would not recommend).

The entrance involved a series of interesting pull through pitches. The first were a series of 15m, 17m and 10m lengths. The next 48m pitch was a little tricky as you needed to find a window 15m above the floor to pendulum into. If you missed it, you would end up descending a series of pitches 228m to the bottom of La Sima de Tonio and be unable to do the through trip. I was nearish the back during this singing off key songs for moral support and rope chauffeuring so missed out on the discussion of "are we sure this is the right way? and "where do I rig that?".

After this, we reached the Diaclase Vertical, which is famously narrow – it is only 10m long but is 30-40cm wide at the narrowest part. This made for some interesting faces, some huffing and odd positions to get through from some members but we all made it – eventually! We raced through the next series of pitches, hand lines and traverses to descend the 55m free hang into an enormous chamber.

Entering the Oliver Guillaume Hall was amazing at over 100 metres high (the second largest chamber in Europe). The chamber was genuinely impressive. I could not see the walls with my light on its highest setting, which was a little unsettling. It felt almost like walking on some dark, unmapped territory and I was suddenly aware of how far underground we had come.

Moving through the next part of the cave was interesting as there were beautiful formations that looked like a coral reef and interesting deposits of calcite. There was a pretty lengthy traverse in this part which tired us out, so we stopped for our lunch and a rest. The tuna pasta salads that are in the Spanish supermarkets are a godsend for these kind of trips (even if they all contain olives – blergh).

Continuing down the seemingly endless rocky slope to the next part of the cave, we found muddy huge stalactites that were like swords. We eventually after a lot of walking and picking our way over very large boulders reached a fork in the road. Whilst both ways lead to the exit, we chose the right passage as the route description for the left passage used words to describe it like "narrow", "confusing" and "labyrinthine" which are not that encouraging near the end of a long trip.

The right way continued through an enormous gallery with an incredibly smooth floor (The Galeria del Bulevar) in which we could finally feel the air that was blasting through the exit. The exit was a gaping hole in the side of the cliff which meant that we could see the stars that were staring to emerge through the twilight as we clambered out tired but happy (total time 7 hours).

We then headed to Rodellar to stay in the now-traditional El Puente Campsite for canyoning,

Right: The end of the Mascun Canyon.

Bottom left: SUSS re-enact the last supper in the bar. **Bottom right**: In flation means that Don Simon is

now over a Euro a litre - rip off!

via ferrata and climbing. We spent some time actually enjoying the sun (imagine that!) and sampling the onsite bar's many offerings.



Quite a few people took in
2021
flatable rubber rings for buoyancy which meant
the faster flowing river sections could be used as
a lazy river. We did the Mascun canyon, Gorges
Negras, Barranco de Otin to name a few.

Whilst we were there Rodellar held its very own RodFest, so a few of us went up to meet the locals and join in with the local custom (namely drinking red wine from a height using a Pouron). The second week was a chance to relax (and clean our kit) from the first and we were sad to begin the long drive back to the UK and have to face cold, gritty British caving again.



SUSS in Meghalaya

by Tom Smith

After arriving in India from **New Zealand following some** epicly long layovers we were really looking forward to topping off what had been a pretty epic year. Caving in the Abode of the clouds wasn't going to disappoint.

The team gathered in Shillong, those who had been out before were staying in the Eee Cee Hotel. Myself and Jethro, who had not been before, ended up at the "Travelers bed and breakfast" which while cheap was incredibly cold. Fortunately it did give us plenty of opportunities to experience taxis in the town. These predominantly consist of Suzuki Altos, which is about the smallest car currently on the market. With four seats and space for six or more people, this fantastic little city runaround has fuel saving features such as turning the ignition off at the top of a hill.

The trip really started with Loading up Melissa, the exped truck that had many years of service under her belt, and setting off to the small village of Sakwa, about a day's drive away. Fortunately, although the last leg for us was on foot, the mighty melissa with Simon Brookes at



week and a half.

As with most expeds, the caving was a mixed bag from promising looking entrances that crap out frustratingly quickly, to some really awesome passages found just when you weren't expecting it. This is certainly one of the most international groups I've been on exped with, with representatives from the UK, The Netherlands, Austria, Italy, India, Switzerland, Poland and possibly some others that I've managed to forget. This is definitely pretty much at the top of my list of expeds to go back to for all sorts of reasons, the people, the caves and Meghalaya as a place is an amazing experience.

Midway through the exped we headed back towards Shillong for a day's R&R and a bit of an exped meal before heading out to Mawsynram from where we would be based for the second half of the exped. The main focus of this week and a half would be surveying and pushing leads

in Krem Puri. For anyone that's not heard of the "Fairy Cave", it is completely unlike any other cave I've ever been in. Officially the longest "Sandstone" cave in the world with over 24 km of of passage, it's not a small place. Except the bits that are.

Krem puri is a maze. Owing to its sandstone nature the survey is a bit of a grid with hundreds of junctions and a few different levels, making navigation quite an important skill. Fortunately, the process

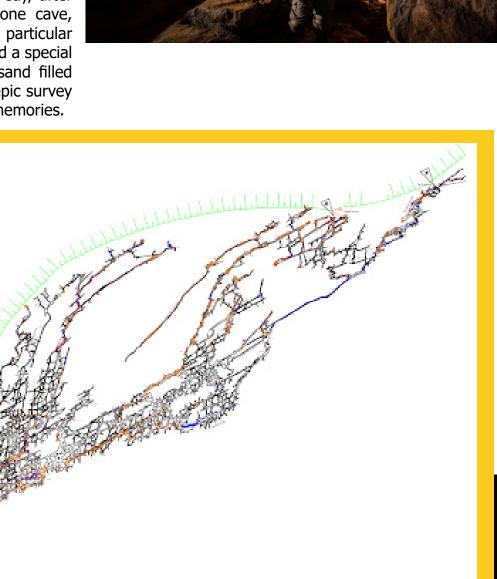




of surveying is also a pretty good way of learning your way around. The trip was a great success with the surveyed length of the cave being doubled in our explorations and two new entrances being found by the time we'd closed off pretty much every lead.

It did take its toll though with an overabundance of stooping or lower passage and very gritty roch, many knees were punished and knee-pads ruined. I have to say, after over a week of exploring this one cave, I'd definitely had enough of that particular environment but it will always hold a special place in my now slightly more sand filled heart and looking at the pretty epic survey now brings back, mostly, happy memories.

Krem Puri



The Deepest Cave in the World: Veryovkina

by Jeff Wade

As a student caver, I recall the discovery of Krubera as the deepest cave in the world, in some unknown land called Abkhazia.

This all seemed to be an adventure in another world and a long way from the caving exploits of SUSS in the Crete White mountains in 2006. In the year that followed, I bumped into a group of Russians in China, during an expedition to Miao Keng, along with honorary SUSS (former Hallam student) member and camera wielder Robbie Shone. Little did we know that this chance meeting in China, notably with Pavel Demidov, would develop further in the future.

Many years of caving later and now with aching knees, in 2018 Robbie had, by chance, narrowly missed Pavel at an Italian congress who was there talking about a cave in Abkhazia. Robbie later got in touch with Pavel who suggested that he should come to the cave they had found, now the deepest cave in the world, Veryovkina.

Robbie, as a photographer, needed another pair of hands to help with carrying all the camera gear - something I'd been doing with Robbie since the Crete expeditions. Initially when I got a phone call from Robbie asking me if I would like to come to Veryovkina I hesitated and said I needed to check if I could clear it with work. After a few days, I realised that I would quit work for this opportunity, so I said yes and mentally prepared for what I was about to do.

A lot of preparations had to be made including the joy of getting a Russian visa whilst being a British resident in France. However, fitness-wise I had been putting in a lot of effort in my new home of Grenoble, France, with the Vercors on my doorstep. Then the week before leaving I might have tried pulling an endo on my road bike whilst out with friends for a 'few drinks' in town. I smashed my right knee up pretty badly, but I could still walk. To top it off, I then decided



to get the Flixbus to meet Robbie for preexpedition preparations, where I picked up some kind of stomach bug during the journey. I was not well and very worried for my once-in-a-lifetime trip.

My stomach got a little better and I managed the flight to Moscow and then onto Sochi, bordering Abkhazia. In Moscow, Robbie and I met Pavel. The last time I had seen Pavel was on the 2007 Tianxing expedition, China, where he had blonde leopard black spotted hair. My first meeting with him is etched in my mind, "I am Pavel, I like vodka and champagne", he said whilst holding a bottle of each in each hand. What kind of expedition would this be? To say the least, I was nervous.

By the time we got to Sochi, Pavel could see I was not feeling great and I explained that I had already taken a course of antibiotics. Pavel went to the pharmacy and put a tube of friendly gut bacteria pills into my hand stating that I must take them three times per day. I swallowed the pills in the supermarket, drinking the nearest off-the-shelf bottle of water whilst we did the whole expedition's shopping. This trip to the pharmacy saved my expedition, as my stomach only got better the day before we headed underground for two weeks.

The Russians, from food shopping in Sochi, to getting up to the base camp near the entrance of Veryovkina, were a well-oiled machine. Everything was planned and at first I thought that there was too much time spent sorting on the surface, but actually the packing of foods into the right bags for the multiple underground camps took a considerable effort to plan, along with the packaging of all items to ensure they were waterproof for the aquatic sections.

Veryovkina is in the Caucasus mountain range very close to the Black Sea and only a stone's throw away from Krubera. The landscape is a mixture of rugged mountain ridges sloping down to pasture land and shepherd huts. The pasture gives way to forests, and the mountains fall sharply into the valleys below that discharge their waters to the Black Sea shimmering within view. It is a spectacular place.

After several warm-up trips to shuttle many of the tackle bags through the more arduous entrance series down to -400m, we were all feeling ready. In reality, from this depth we would all be carrying 3 tackle bags each to ensure we had enough food and equipment for the 2-week planned photo trip.

Two weeks underground is hard to describe, but to give a feel of a typical day, here is an extract from my diary for the descent from the first bivouac at -600m to the second at -1350m;

8th September 2018

So after coming in together, today we would split up to maximise time. Robbie and Pavel would head back up to the top of Babatunda to plan the setup of a potential photo on exiting the cave and then spend another night at -600m. The rest of us would head on down to the -1350m camp.



2021

Natasha and I formed the first group; Natasha with two heavy bags and I with 1 heavy and 2 lighter ones with camera gear. I had hoped that the cave would develop into a more vertical system, but instead we entered into meanders interspersed with some 50-60m vertical sections. One section was a huge breakdown with blocks the size of houses and unnerving cracks in the walls showing the shear stress on the rock. At these parts we had to stay *close together so not to by accident drop stones or* rocks onto those below. It was fairly technical and my 3 bags didn't help. Natasha is by far the fitter and a quicker caver, but she was happy to wait for me at my steady pace and never complained much to my reassurance, because she had to wait a lot! [...]

I was really pleased to see the camp, and the 7 or 8 hour descent (-600 to -1350m) was more than I had foreseen for such little depth gained. We were cold and damp after the day and once in the bivouac tent we set about making home and trying to warm up. A packet of sausages left by a previous group made for a welcome snack as during the day since a hefty breakfast I had only eaten a couple of chocolate bars. With the tea on, Natasha radioed up to the others at -600m, and a -1000m temporary camp. Petr and Roman had similarly had a tough and delayed trip down and decided to stick it out there for the night.

The view across the Caucuses.

For Natasha and camp and one of was to place a sleep with the stove between sulated shelter. To heat the body at I was too hot. We food to recover from the above extractions and the camp and one of was to place a sleep with the stove between the body at I was too hot. We food to recover from the Russians and 6 or more people.

For Natasha and I this meant for a cold camp and one of the tricks I was taught was to place a sleeping bag over our heads with the stove between us creating an insulated shelter. This worked really well to heat the body and after a few minutes I was too hot. We carried on preparing food to recover from the day's ordeal.

The above extract doesn't truly represent the warm nature of caving with the Russians and the experience of 6 or more people in a tent, sleeping side by side as comrades. The food is second to none; real lemons, garlic,

onions and spiced pig fat, plus fried bread, make camp life a luxury. Underground enough neat alcohol is brought so that it can be mixed to the magical 40% so that everyone can have two to three shots a day, but strict rules are followed that no-one can have a drink until all the team are home and safe.

Unlike many alpine caves, Veryovkina is a cavers' dream; it reaches the master system at the bottom, and the currently known horizontal development starts around the lowest camp at -2100m. These galleries

are sizable, 15m across in places, and are a real mix of pure clean washed phreatic and well-decorated passages all ending at the sump at -2212m depth.

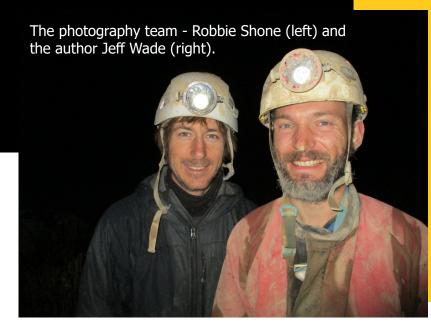
Due to the depth of Veryovkina it means that the catchment of water for the master system at the bottom is huge and studies into the hydrology are still underway. The first trip we undertook in 2018 proved to be an eye-opener, as nearing the end of the time spent at the bottom camp, one day's worth of heavy rain on saturated ground saw the cave flood dramatically, meaning the team had to abandon the lower camp and escape up the ropes in charged waterfalls to set up a temporary, and assumed safe camp higher up at -1900m.

For myself the mental trauma of that day still remains as the cave flooded over 130m in vertical height in a few hours from the terminal sump level. Here is an extract from my diary of that day, obviously written later once back on surface, but it gives a feel of the situation.

16th September 2018

Today would be the arrival of a new team so for Robbie and I we would be taking photos around the -2100m camp until they arrived. During breakfast [...] Natasha phoned through that a flood pulse had hit the middle camp and this would most likely be with us in about 30 or 40 minutes [...]

To the dot, mid mouthful of breakfast pasta, a metro train could be heard in the distance. We all got out of the tent and moved up to the cascade of water [...] The tap had been opened and what was a



spray and drippy shower was a full wall of vertical water nearly filling the shaft, but still a few metres away from the traverse line leading up and out on the ropes, or down into the lower depths which for today would be out of the question. Petr filmed the change in water levels and Pavel explained the situation. We would be staying at the bivouac to see what happens and wait for the others [...]

Whilst all the team were at camp, Robbie and I set about taking some photos to keep us occupied and our minds off the thundering waterfall some 10 metres from camp. During which we were keeping track of the sound of water which was not going down, but up, now hitting the exit traverse line filling the 8m or so diameter shaft with water. It was dramatic. [...] Robbie and I both put fully charged batteries in our lamps at this point as we were a little nervous, and I had already been for a post-toilet walk to one of the neighboring siphons to see if there was a sign of water levels going up, which there wasn't.

Getting back to camp we had a tea and tried to relax. At this point another team had gone off to look at the neighboring sump consisting of Pavel, Jenja, Andrei, Andrey (another one) and Kostia. Petr was with us at camp and a small hole we had been spitting our toothpaste into some 6-7metres deep he was keeping an eye on with a powerful torch every now and then. Robbie and I were also keeping track of this too.

Petr went over for a check, Robbie and I were a few metres away, but on seeing Petr's face we knew what he had seen. Robbie and I looked into the hole to see a jostling and rising puddle of water. We knew we had to leave, and fast, as to get 8 people up the ropes was not going to be a quick process [...]

At this moment only Petr and Andrei were in camp, we told Petr we were off as the rest of the group were just coming back from looking at the siphon, and now there was around half a metre of water at the lowest point of camp. It only needed to rise 2 or 3 metres more and everything would be underwater.

Robbie and I left everything pretty much. I took some basic shelter stuff and candles, and Robbie his SD cards. Standing at the traverse line out of camp, what was a 15 to 20m pitch down was now a pool of water. Robbie was off like a rocket and shouted 'come on Jeff, we've got to go! ' Firstly I needed to get my foot jammer on, I needed to be quick and smooth to get out of here, and to keep calm. I left camp with a view of Petr and Andrei organising themselves to leave too. Now it was time to face the cascade.

Traversing across to the ropes up with the water maybe 2 metres below me, I was well within the falling water and spray. I was happy to be in a dry suit. I could hear Robbie above me, but with time his shouts became fainter and fainter [...]

I swung into the water and kept my chin against my chest, which then allowed for my helmet to create an air pocket for me to breathe as it was impossible to look up, or at best to the side without potentially drowning. I slowly climbed and was pleased on reaching the next rebelay out of the water. I had certainly practiced for situations like this, but never under such conditions of water or stress of water from above and below. Heading on up I felt somewhat on my own, Robbie had shot off like a rocket and after a short crawl in water I arrived at the bottom of a dry 20m pitch. He was at the top and I shouted at him to wait as we were now in a relatively safe place [...]

Robbie and I were chatting and looking at the next spray lashed pitch as we already knew that the temporary camp at -1900m would be the best place to wait out the flood as there was a tent and some food to provide shelter. At this point I was mentally preparing myself that we might need to get out of the cave on our own, as I really feared for those who had gone off to look at the sump near the camp and that if they were trapped they would most likely be drowned.

During our discussion a light could be seen below it was Andrei who had only descended the same ropes that morning. This was the first time we had really spoken, we asked if he had seen the others and he said



202

'no'. My heart sank, but as a three we needed to get to a better place to shelter. Andrei headed up first, and we followed behind. We arrived at the -1900m temporary bivouac, now 200m above where we had been. As a three we went to look at the next pitch up, it was awash with water and impassible. On top of this the pseudo-siphon would almost certainly be a full siphon now only some 60m above. We weren't going anywhere.

Five or ten minutes passed on the dry ledge with the sound of thundering water all around. From below we saw the first light, I think it was Kostia's, not only safe, but also with a bag full of gear [...] One by one the rest of the team came up, Robbie and I were still in shock from the ordeal and the calmness of the rest of the team made us doubt for if we had reacted too hastily. In fact, it hadn't been that simple for them either [...]

The majority of the team got into the tent, but Robbie and myself to less of an extent were still in shock and the noises coming from down the shaft were not pleasant to the imagination. Petr was also regularly having a look down every 10 or so minutes to see if water was rising [...] After an hour outside I went in the tent with the Russians and Robbie followed. Neither of us wanted to take our dry suits off, as we wanted to be ready to go, even if that meant a limit of 60m due to the probably full pseudo-siphon! The Russians were incredibly jovial for what they had been through, but I think when they saw the shock it had taken on us two they were quite a bit more silent. We needed warmth and rest, they were quite right to get into the tent to sit it out. Robbie and I settled for our furry suits and joined the team for tea. Thankfully they had also brought a stove along with sleeping bags to hot bunk and snacks. A very well organised team [...]

Due to Petr's fall, Pavel requested Robbie and I head up tomorrow morning with Petr, now being early evening, having evacuated the bottom camp at 2pm approximately. I was happy to do this as the thought of going back down wasn't appealing,

but at the same time our escape route needed to be checked, otherwise we might be bailing it with our wellies!

Some of the team had already had a slot to sleep, there being 4 sleeping bags and 8 persons. Now it was our turn. It was warm and cozy, me being pinned between Robbie as the large spoon and those making tea just behind me. I could feel the vibrations of the stream below, but with all the warmth and the knowledge that someone every 10 minutes was checking to see if the water was rising, I eventually fell asleep for a few much needed hours. Robbie I don't think slept a wink, but I can pretty much sleep anywhere.

So tomorrow, water-depending, we would go up; Robbie, Petr and I, and Pavel, Andrei, Andrey, Kostias and Jenja would head on down.

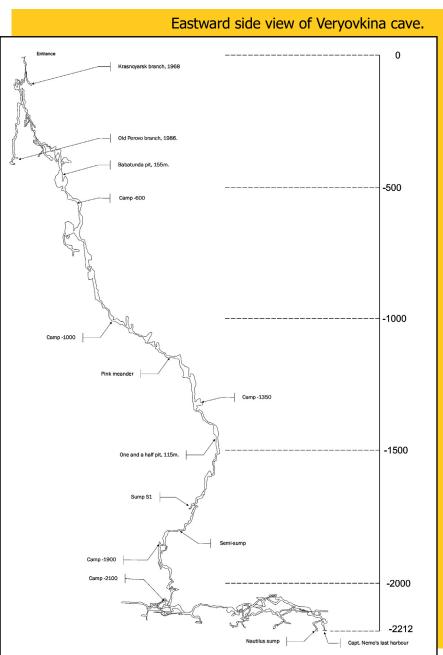
As something to remember on Pavel reaching the camp after almost getting washed away, I said I think you better contact someone about those water level detectors' both he and I smiled....

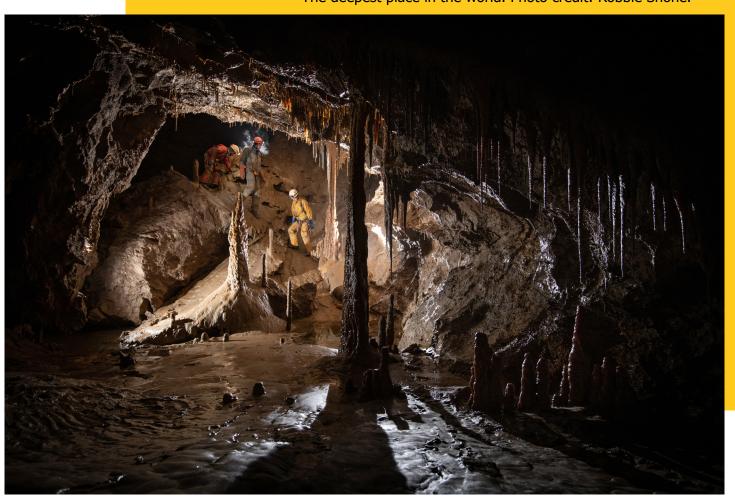
The above extract portrays a day of horror and a trip almost ruined by this one event, but for myself Veryovkina and its beauties within make this trip a positive experience overall. The emotions from those two weeks underground in 2018 in particular and the time spent with the Russians, and Robbie, are some of my best caving memories that I will always remember.

Going back in 2019 to continue the photos, it gave some closure on the events of the previous trip and for us all seemed more relaxed. The team had learnt from the trauma of 2018 and serious considerations had gone into future expeditions on how to make these safer based on the dramatic reaction of water levels in the cave.

The Russians have a determination that is unparalleled and goes to show why they are able to explore such deep caves. They are well organised, keep themselves fit even while living in cities most of the year, have close bonds and consider the welfare of all the team, but are also creative in the way they develop ideas for caving techniques. A true pleasure to cave with, and hopefully again soon, but with less water!

As many of you will know Pavel Demidov passed away in 2020 in another cave in Abkhazia when a rock slumped upon him. The above article is dedicated to him, especially his determination, care as a leader, excellent cooking and enthusiastic character, along with the other members of the Perovo Speleo Team and Robbie, who I owe these experiences to and for getting me back safe every time.







A warm camp in a cold dark place. Photo credit: Robbie Shone.

Reasons for, and perceptions of, Cave Access Restrictions in **Mainland Britain**



by Rob Middleton

In 2017 I returned, after a long hiatus, to higher education, studying an MSc in Environmental Management at Sheffield Hallam University. In part completion of this, I chose to focus my dissertation on access to caves, a subject that has been close to my heart for many years.

History/Background

Recreational access to the outdoors has been a controversial issue throughout the 20th century. This began with the fight for rambler access to the uplands culminating in the Kinder Trespass in 1932, and has continued throughout the century, with various disputes between landowners and outdoor enthusiasts, and even between different groups of outdoor enthusiasts such as anglers and kayakers.

In 2000 access restrictions to the countryside were significantly reduced with the CROW Act allowing free access to designated access land

Cave Dale Vent, a gated entrance with no allowed caver access in Derbyshire. Photo by Robert Middleton



(typically mountain, moor, heath and down) for the purpose of recreation including walking and climbing. It is still debatable whether this applies to recreational caving (a long, savage and tedious debate), though the right of access to walk to a cave entrance on CROW land is certain. However this is not the end of the story as many popular caves lie outside of access land, or have other access restrictions applied to them.

Historically, cavers have been known to take matters into their own hands when they disapprove of access restrictions, and as early as the 1950s a gated entrance was 'opened' with the help of chemical assistance (Lancaster Hole), while many access disputes have been rumbling on for many years since and still exist today. The vicious and toxic arguments at Ogof Dreanen being a case in point. Likewise, some caves are still completely off limits to cavers outright (e.g. Lamb Lier on Mendip, Mossdale Caverns in Yorkshire, Ogof Carno in Wales, and Hazlebadge Cave in Derbyshire).

Therefore, using a mixed methods approach of stakeholder interviews, questionnaires, a desk study and case studies, this project aimed to increase understanding of the myriad of access

> restrictions present to caves and mines in Britain, and cavers perceptions of these restrictions. It also aimed to produce clear and concise recommendations which could be used by the BCA also aimed to produce clear and concise recommendations which could be used by the BCA and other cave access management bodies to help guide their access policies.

> Suffice to say there is far more detail than can be discussed in this quick article, so I would recommend

either a visit to the British Caving Library (an excellent and very friendly resource for all issues caving) if you would like to view both a paper and digital copy of the dissertation in more detail, or feel free to contact me direct at r-middleton@hotmail.co.uk.

However some of the most interesting results/ conclusions are discussed below.

Results

A desk study analysis compared the 5 longest and 5 deepest caves in each region to see how the various access restrictions present compared, and whether regionality was a factor in the likelihood of access restrictions being present. It showed clearly that this was a major factor, with Northern areas prominently having less strict or indeed non present access restrictions, and southern areas having more rules to follow. See Fig. 4.1.2 below.

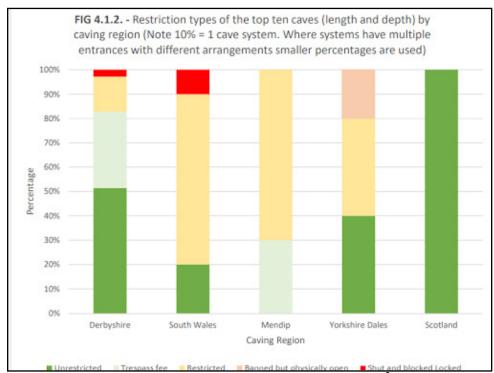
The case study analysis involved arranging to visit a variety of sites with difficult access throughout the various caving regions and reporting back on the barriers encountered (How many people can say they got to go caving as part of their dissertation?). This was mostly enlightening as to just how many different types of rules were involved (leader systems, keys booked in advance, trespass fees, the whim of the farmer on a given day etc.), and how many

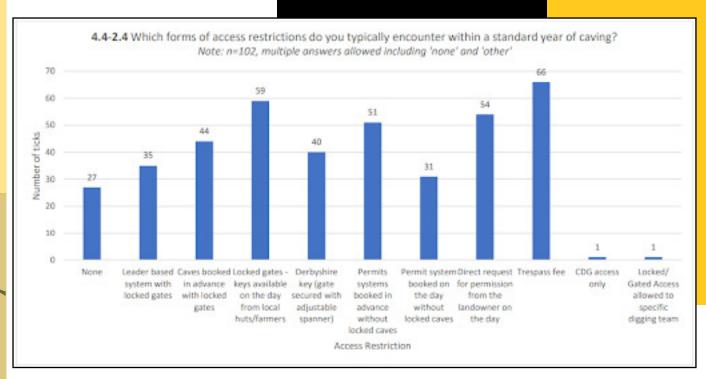
different access controlling organisations had to be contacted to arrange this (10 for 10 caves!). Likewise, one site I approached was fully booked (with 2 months notice), where as another said it was way too early to book yet, and it's also worth noting that of the leader controlled trips (5) only one happened, due to a combination of practical reasons (no leader available, cave fully booked, poor weather, illness of the leader on the day). These factors make arranging access to restricted caves truly a minefield for the travelling caver.

During the project I was also lucky enough to interview a number of stakeholders within the caving world. This included representatives of 3 local access bodies, the BCA conservation and access, and CROW liaison officer, a showcave manager, a rescue controller, and the Chairman of the British Cave Research Association. The data they provided collectively was analysed using both thematic and analytical coding methods, and was truly enlightening. I am greatly indebted for their time and honest candour on the subject, though this is way beyond the scope of the article, but the main take away from a personal point of view was just how much each one of them cared about their specific area of caving, and despite their disagreements, how each one of them really was in it for the right reason.

Finally, the last element of the project was an online questionnaire targeted at ordinary cavers,

to try and quantify the strength and breadth of opinion regarding cave access issues. I am indebted to UKCaving.com for allowing me to use their site to advertise the survey. A total of 102 cavers responded to the call (approx. 2% of the BCA membership). This brought up a number of fascinating issues, a few of which are displayed graphically as overleaf (fig. 4.4-2.4).





Finally, one objective of the project was to produce a set of recommendations to help guide the BCA and other access granting bodies in their ongoing role managing cave access in the UK.

	FIG 5.1.7 Conclusion Table						
0	Objective 4 - Produce conclusions/ recommendations to help guide the BCA and regional caving councils, in their ongoing role managing access arrangements						
The majority of cavers believe cave access restrictions are too restrictive in mainland Britian, and that all caves should be open access to genuine cavers - Below is a ten point plan of recommendations to help improve access restrictions, and cavers perceptions of them, in mainland Britian							
1	Access restrictions need to be justified, and justifications for restrictions need to be well known and understood within the caving community in order for them to be abided by. Currently many cavers don't believe the stated reasons for access restrictions.						
2	Nearly all cavers are willing to accept restrictions on the grounds of conservation, however many are much less willing to accept restores on the grounds of caver safety. Education is essential to aid cavers understanding of restrictions.						
3	Restrictions which only allow access to club cavers are seen as discriminatory, and unpopular amongst most cavers It is recommended that these should be phased out!						
4	Trips requiring prior arrangement are unpopular amongst cavers, particularly if the cave is flood-prone. Leader run trips have particular issues, both in terms of lack of adventure for visiting cavers, and the myriad of logistical problems associated in organising such trips. It is recommended that these should be used as a last resort!						
5	Access restrictions are administered by too many different bodies. This makes life difficult and complicated for the travelling caver, with evidence it also affects participations in restricted trips, and also likelihood to pirate caves. A central body managing access for every cave in each region would cause fewer barriers to access and be more popular amongst cavers						
6	Digging restrictions are unpopular throughout, as is any favouritism shown to specific clubs or cavers with regard accessing restricted sites. It is recommended that these should be abolished and clubs should no longer be responsible for individual caves.						
7	There is a strong regional divide in opinions on cave access restrictions with the North typically preferring freer access restrictions than the south. This is evident at both administrative and caver level and needs work to make the caving community less divided. There is also strong potential for the regions to learn from each other in issues of perceived landowner liability and landowner relationships						
8	Pirating caves very much still exists. Cavers are willing to pirate caves for a variety of reasons but usually based on fairness, or whether an entrance is on CROW land. Bear in mind that any unreasonable access restrictions will be challenged. This is the nature of cavers.						
9	Trespass fees are generally regarded as reasonable as long as it is easy to pay, and not too expensive (less than the price of a pint). The Derbyshire Key is regarded as a good system for protecting the public from dangerous sites, while allow full caver access. In theory the CSCC key can be seen in the same light though currently this seems unpopular and education of cavers is required						
10	There is a strong belief that caving should be included in CROW, and the entrances on CROW land should be devoid of restrictions						

SUSS in America

by Rostam Namaghi

After (finally) graduating in Medicine in 2015 I was offered a free ticket by my uncle to the States so I could enjoy 6 weeks of freedom before entering the world of work. After spending a couple of days with family on the sunny beaches in Florida I headed north to Alabama to begin my

love affair with the American South. I remember driving onto the I-75 and the Sat-Nav said 'keep left for seven hundred miles.'

My hosts in Huntsville (Amata and Brian) arranged trips for every day of my stay and soon I had ticked off many TAG classics like Neversink, Valhalla, Ellison's, Tumbling Rock and War Eagle to name but a memorable few. From gorgeous pots with heavenly shafts of light, to streamways that go on for miles and calcite halls, I was having the time of my life. Despite this I had booked to go to the NSS convention in Missouri to broaden my horizons and make some new contacts. This involved driving some of route 66, drinking and singing, and sleeping in my 'compact' car's boot (I am 6'4"). This was uncomfortable and so with some amorous advances I booked a tent for the week.

One amusing anecdote I have from this time was from caving with Chad McCain, (in southern Illinois) where we went for a swim down a grand river cave (Blackfathom - oddly named after a World of Warcraft level) amongst many catfish - who would jump out the water when they hit you, and turtles who looked like they could bite your fingers clean off. One day we drove 40 minutes out of our way for what turned out to be a tremendously bland traditional diner breakfast. I asked why and they promptly told me it was so I could see their roundabout. This was genuine and I hadn't the heart to tell them they were using it wrong (stopping to let people on as if it was a 4 way cross). I said I might have come across a couple back home.

The most valuable contact I made at the NSS



was Clinton Elmore, and the next couple of years I would go out there in the spring (before the ticks and chiggers) and we would go 'nerdholing.' I was once asked when I had moved to Tennessee and realised that over 4 years I had effectively lived in Cookeville for 3 months!

'Nerdholing' is pushing what we would term 'promising leads' but to the TAG (Tennessee Alabama Georgia) caver they are often inconsequential. Especially if they involve crawling... I clocked up a few memorable adventures, some notable highlights were a first through-trip of a somewhat biological 83m Oxbow (named Welshman's folly), surveying possibly the largest sandstone chamber in the world, accidentally turning a dig into a cannon and launching ourselves, and even doing a kayaking through trip in Rumbling falls (the second ever through trip). Every time out there was a new adventure and I loved it but I wanted something longer lasting.

This is where the East Fork of the Obey comes in. We (Myself, Paul Fairman and Clinton) went to Mountain Eye and fall in love. Giant strolling borehole, waterfalls, mazeways and passages leading off, we thought we had found something amazing. The reason for its tremendous variety is that the big borehole is formed because the water collects in a top layer of limestone (the monteagle) and then has to punch through a thin sandstone layer (the Heartselle) and then this concentrated volume travels in the lower limestone (the Bangor).

We surveyed 6 miles of cave over 2 weeks (popping out the other side of the mountain) and planned for the next year's great American

adventure. Incidentally the survey led to me developing some notoriety in the cave surveying world for creating the largest ever single pocket topo sketch at 3MB - I had emails from Finland and Australia that were no more than an eloquent 'hahahahahaha.'

The plan was for an expedition of about 12-15 members but then things began to snowball. SUSS's contingent included myself, Will Whalley, Hannah Moulton, Leo Bradley, Sam Goodyear as well as the SUSS adopted vagrants Ben Wright, Ian Holmes, Lydia Leather and Chris Jones. There were about 9 from the BEC, a couple of others and then once you added in the Americans we get to 28. Rather more than I had planned for. I had a lot on my plate and my enthusiasm had outgrown my ability to organise.

The expedition got off to a rocky start with a hideously dirty house we were letting that had to be cleaned, finding out that this was the wettest year in recorded history in Tennessee (2019) and seeing the hydrology change the way it functioned in the cave as a result - a network of phreatic outlets under the Lott Dean Entrance turned into inlets and caused the cave to behave in unexpected ways with the entrance chamber nearly flooding and trapping one of the groups. We had to cut new routes to the cave (one was originally approaching crossing the river), find



a new driving route as the main road had subsided and refocus the exploration on the other entrance.

This was just the start of the challenges, however. Owing



to the conditions the dive leads were not 'go-ers' and that team split off and focused on a project called Mill Pond. This would turn out to be an internationally newsworthy disaster, with Sir Josh Bratchley MBE losing the dive line and getting trapped in an airbell for 27 hours. The dive team attempted rescue but understandably were not able to manage this, and two rescue divers were sought and came to the rescue. Fortunately, Edd Sorrenson found Josh, gave him a tank and helped guide him out using the new line.

My own view of the rescue is somewhat coloured – I agreed with the divers' initial assessment and organised a local place for them to get some rest and I went to wait by the entrance with food, shelter and treatment for hypothermia. The divers instead drove back home and were in a dreadful state and so a formal rescue was initiated. I found this out by being woken up by a policeman at 4am, a flashlight shining through the tent and aggressively being told not to make any sudden moves and to get out of the tent with my hands up. I duly did so and walked over to the police car and talked through with them what was going on. Towards the end of the conversation my interrogator looked down and in an effeminate way uttered 'Oh gosh, I didn't mean to get you out here in your sock-feet.'

2 hours later the mobile disaster unit arrived with all the trimmings (it had an arm that took down the telegraph wires and plugged them straight into it!). I gave my statement and headed back to a sombre house. Much discussion was had on whether he was dead, and the atmosphere was paralysed with worry. When he got out there was much jubilation and piss taking - a line was tied to the bathroom for instance, but the whole ordeal had exhausted everyone's spirits. Then there's the tale of Barry – a golden retriever that had barked a lot at the divers on their last dive and had then been run over 3 days later. Naturally Josh was told this was by a News crew van covering the rescue.

A few trips were undertaken to tidy up the survey towards the end of the expedition. On one of those (my) trips a rescue was almost initiated – a slow exit led to cavers going out one by one near the pitches, and on the survey it was a straight line with no turns other than a big hole in the floor with a 20m drop. The

middle of the 3 cavers went missing and we searched for 45 minutes. As we were turning round to exit and start the rescue I heard a very faint voice, though I've heard far more convincing cave voices, and managed to crawl through a small opening that led to a tall narrow vadose canyon. I ran along it and found our missing caver 15m above me traversing some brittle chert. To say I was relieved was an understatement.

All in all, the expedition achieved its aims; the cave was comprehensively surveyed and measuring in at 15 miles long (approximately 3 miles



The (harrowed) Mountain Eye team ennjoying a meal.

were virgin), Sexytopo (a survey programme) had been tested and further developed, many people had been taught how to survey and had gone on their first expedition. The damage to confidence, the emotional toll and the lack of future work in the area gave a hollow ring to the success. I will still espouse the glory of TAG caving and I'll still go out there but the fact I have not yet produced the journal of this expedition underlines how difficult it was for me, and no doubt others, to come to terms with.

The Road to Nowhere

by David Botcherby

In the summer of 2019 I received the call to join the notorious NUCC member German Alex (Alex Ried) for some potential projects in the Titan area.

We were both roughly unemployed at the time, so were able to take advantage of a weekday to go check out the leads. It was a boiling hot day, and I was informed (in typical no-nonsense fashion) that we would be carrying the Titan ropes plus all the digging gear (pickaxe, spade etc) up the hill from the TSG. This led to the fairly comical scene of two topless men with oversuits and wellies on the bottom half carrying a bundle of tools up Cavedale - we certainly turned a few heads. By the time we reached the top we were fully sweaty and ready to get underground. Luckily we were leaving the tools down there and so wouldn't have to haul them back up! The leads

that Alex was investigating were crossjoints of AI passage leading to major/minor sump, although that day we were looking at the big breakdown just before Major sump. We didn't get anywhere with the breakdown despite our efforts (mostly because it was huge blocks the size of cars), but on the way back Alex pointed me at a 'finished' lead he'd called the Road to Nowhere. It was a tight sandy tube that twisted on for a little way before becoming 'too tight'. I took that as a challenge, and went off to have a look. It was far from being too tight (at least for me), though it was quite energetic. I followed this on to where the passage split, with the right passage being wet, and the left passage leading past a small aven to another wet passage. I was low on time by this point, so had a quick look and returned, thinking both ways on to be sumps.

Nothing much came of this for a while. Most people were not particularly bothered by my story,

and Alex said that he'd return with Alastair Gott to survey the passage. I think he did entice Michael Holliday to dig some of the other tubes (notable Epithemeus). I did mention these two 'sumps' to Rob Middleton, who promptly got over-excited and organised a reccy, which was not particularly successful due to most of the team not getting through the tube, as well as somehow getting diesel poisoning from a dodgy Honda Jazz. After this I forgot about it for a while, until Alex published an article in Derbyshire Caver about the various projects, and I realised that it had never been surveyed.

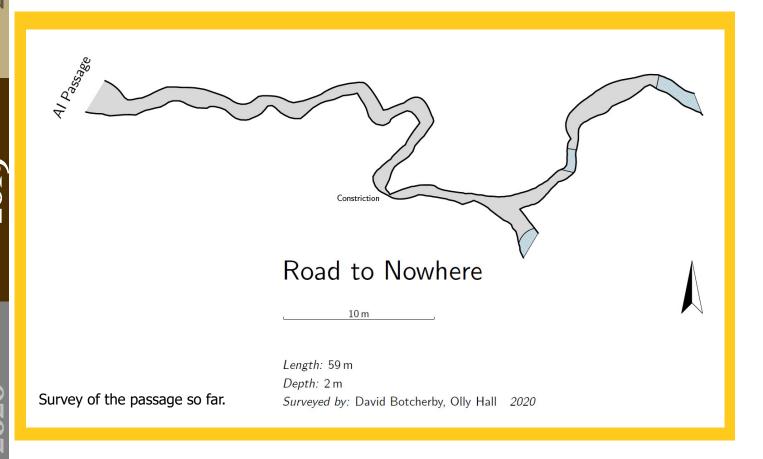
I decided that I had to go and at least survey it, so I enlisted the only other willing (and slim) person, Olly Hall, and went down on a cold January morning. We decided to go to the end and survey back after having a look to see if the sumps really existed. The way straight on (left hand passage) led to a narrow canal half full of water. I made it almost far enough to see around the next corner when a bad smell came out of the mud and we backed off. Not to be deterred, I also decided to have a look at the considerably wetter right hand option. After watching me flat out crawl/swim through a deep pool, Olly decided not to follow. This was probably for the



2021

best, as I continued to progress through tight and sharp (though slightly less wet) passage for around 5 metres before realising that it was going to continue like this and that I was already fairly cold, with the crawlway survey still to do. Unfortunately I couldn't turn around and so reversed the crawl and swim, returning to an unimpressed Olly. We completed some more miserable surveying through the tunnel before the disto crapped out (luckily just as we reached AI passage).

After the trip, I sent the survex data to the peak master survey team, where it was bodged onto the rough position of the junction. I made a basic survey as an exercise in learning Therion (you can see how well that went), and planned to return to explore the leads and then resurvey. Unfortunately, this was another victim of coronavirus, and now being based in France I don't know when I'll be able to return.



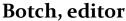
2020 was for SUSS, as for most people, a year of many disappointments. The year started off well, with preparations well underway for our summer return to the top camp at Tresviso, and the new guys just getting to grips with proper caving. Northern CHECC also went ahead, with a record number of people staying at Bullpot Farm. Unfortunately, this was all happening to the backdrop of increasingly worrying reports of a global pandemic (as you might have



heard). COVID-19 put an end to club activities from March until the end of the year. This made recruitment and retention particularly difficult, leaving an already fairly small SUSS struggling for members going into 2021. We held many online quizzes, catch ups, and virtual pubs, though the zoom fatigue began to set in after a time. At an E-AGM, Ben Thompson handed on his responsibilities as chair to the man he trusted most: himself. In the summer window of eased restrictions, many of us did start up caving again, and there was even a brief window in which we thought we could go to Tresviso after all. Alas, all hopes were dashed and events re-cancelled. SUSS did manage to host a vital CHECC training session for leadership skills in late September, sharing some skills with other student cavers. Despite all this, SUSS did manage to pick up one or two freshers and eventually get caving again (though I'd buggered off to France by this point). 2021 so far has brought more of the same, but we live in hope that one day we can get back to normal weekends and trips away.

Please note: Most of what is talked about in the articles did not in fact happen in 2020 for obvious reasons. However, some of it was in late 2019, and all of it falls into the category 'Things that

would have continued into 2020 if possible.'





Digging in SUSS

by Will Whalley

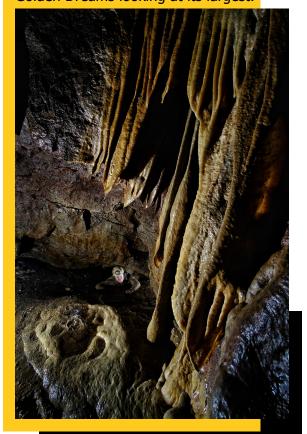
It was 5 years ago, that Jack Dewison wrote "Can we dig it? Yes we can" and since then, well - turns out we couldn't that much.

Activity has waned compared to the five years previous, especially given for the last two years most of us have been trapped at home, ever fearful of Derbyshire Constabularies watchful drones. Nethertheless, some progress has been made, and I have described it below.

P8 Xmas Aven 2015 – ongoing

We were tipped off to this "lead" or potential dig in 2015, after Jack Dewison and I had done some very unsuccessful digging above the organ pipes in Giants Hole. Rob Eavis sent me a big email with a description of what we needed to do, and voila – we started a new dig. What Jack described was the dig as it was up until he wrote his article – a 5m pot descending to a muddy hole, with a rope strung above to haul on.

Golden Dreams looking at its largest.



I'm happy to report success in this dig, as 30m of passage (at least) has been gained. 7 The muddy hole was scaffolded, and spoil stacked behind it, to eventually break into a small chamber via an oft-wet



duck. This then leads via Bin Bag Crawl to Golden Dreams, a (relatively!) roomy chamber with an ongoing, although difficult, dig.

The break through occurred in November 19th 2018 by Merryn Matthews, who had gone silent for a long time before informing us of the black space beyond. Merryn was a fresher on her first digging trip, so unless she has taken up digging since down in Mendip, she has a 100% success rate in breakthrough trips.

The chamber at the end is called Golden Dreams. because I had been dreaming of it for three years, and David Botcherby politely pissed in it after pushing himself in. Binbag Crawl is so named because whilst Ethan Johnson (A fine example of AmeriSUSS) and myself were waiting for Tommy Moore and Botch to survey the passage, we became incredibly cold. Ethan was jubilant he had an "American Group Shelter". This turned out to be a bin bag, because in America, a bin bag is big enough to fit a group. Unfortunately, Ethan did not buy his bin bag from Tractor Supply Co. he bought it from Tesco, consequently

we both sat in Xmas Aven with only both of our heads in a bin bag.

Golden Dreams has a dig at the end of it and it is my intention to return, so watch that space – one day we will fine New Mans Rift!

P8 Bens dig - ongoing

After Christmas Aven, I buggered off to York but Jack Dewison fancied himself a bit of new P8 passage. Consequently, he began digging the end of Bens dig, which has a whopping phreatic that must go somewhere. The passage ends with a ladder climb to said phreatic, which then ends in a sandy tube down a climb of a few metres. The area now has via ferrata stemples in it for getting to the dig and an elaborate haul system – it's also significantly more pleasant than Xmas aven and consequently eminently more visitable. I think it's going to break through any day now... and we will run leftwards in walking passage,

right underneath Eldon Hole and on through to Peak. Any day now!

Gautries

Gautries was dug by Jack Dewison without my involvement. Whilst the prospect sounded exciting, several months of digging were undertaken here without much progress. The digging became too technical and miserable to focus on going forward — with the dig essentially moving into the shale (sorry - "reef marginal conduit"),

the dig required a lot of scaffolding to move forward. Occasionally, bits of farm machinery appeared which convinced Jack he was actually digging a new entrance!

SUSS elsewhere

Also worth noting is the guest contributions by SUSS members towards other digs. Corin Donne and Michael Holliday put significant time into Puttrell's Dig in the Great Cave, alongside fellow TSG members Nigel Ball (who sadly recently passed away) and Dave Shearsmith. An upwards sloping dig through fossil phreatic, theoretically coming up the other side of Cavedale into untapped space, the digs potential is well worth the showcave-related faff. Old tools found towards the end of the dig, and the anecdotal evidence of the diggers, demonstrates the constant collapse from above. Whilst this has been optimistically described as "a self self-digging passage", the only way to progress seems to be a coordinated





and concerted effort, requiring stabilization work and regular visits to make progress against the tide.

SUSS in Mulu

by Helen Fairclough

The Gunung Mulu national park in Malaysian Borneo is home to some of the world's largest and most impressive caves, including Sarawak Chamber (largest chamber by area), Deer Cave (second largest cave passage), and the Clearwater system (currently 9th longest — and still growing). Combine this with the tropical climate and ongoing potential, and it is easy to see why caving in Mulu is on many caver's wish-lists.

Many SUSS members have been lucky enough to be part of, or even lead, expeditions to Mulu over the years (see previous SUSS and Mulu Caves Project publications for details), and this tradition has been maintained in recent years.

The Mulu expedition of Spring 2017 was a complicated affair, involving 29 cavers in four teams spread across the park. SUSS alumni had a heavy

presence in the team led by local Derbyshire digging legend Dave 'Moose' Nixon, who were exploring the exceedingly remote Hidden Valley (including Rob Eavis, Rob Middleton and Jeff Wade). The Hidden valley lies on the far side of the main limestone hills of Mulu, a solid day's walk from the comforts of the park headquarters and requiring the team to construct a makeshift helipad to land all their gear. This team found 12.5km of new passage in 'Wonder Cave', heading northwards into a surprisingly empty area of limestone. They also found the worlds longest known straw stalagmite (9.13m!).

Other teams in the spring 2017 expedition were based at the park headquarters searching out new connections between the major systems, and new leads in the highest levels of the Clearwater System.

The autumn 2017 expedition was fairly simple by comparison, there only 8 expedition members who were all based in one location. This expedition was based at the idyllic Camp 5, a permanent base by the river in the Melinau gorge, mainly used for adventure tourism trips. This gorge forms the northern edge of Gunung Api, the largest of the limestone mountains, which contains the Clearwater system and Wonder Cave. A team of three, led by Moose, were aiming to scale the cliffs on the south side of the Melinau Gorge towards a small black smudge seen in helicopter footage. The smudge a ppeared to line up perfectly with the projected line of Wonder Cave. Unfortunately, after some

Below: The climb into Redemption. Photo

200m of bolt climbing, the team found that, rather than discovering new cave passage, they had instead invented the entirely new sport of 'Extreme Alcoving' - finding only a small hollow complete-filled with calcite.



The remaining 5 members of the autumn 2017 party were all current or ex- SUSS members (Mark Brown - leader, Tom Smith, Jethro Pryke, Rostam Namaghi and Helen Fairclough). This team were focusing on exploration in Whiterock cave, the northern end of the Clearwater system. Despite 80% of this team being on their first trip to Mulu, 4.2km of new passage was found. This included the 'Redemption' passage which lies on a different 'horizon' to those previously known, potentially implying the existence of another layer of cave sandwiched between known passage. (Sometimes it feels surprising that there is any space left for the rock under Mulu!)

A return to Camp 5 was planned for autumn 2019, this time co-led by Rob Middleton and Frank Pearson. This trip focussed on both exploration in Whiterock, and in Hurricane Hole to the north side of the Melinau Gorge. In Hurricane Hole, the team climbed 'The Mother of All Voids', a shaft some 200m tall and 60m in diameter.

Below: The Mother of All Voids. Photo

credit: Tom Smith.



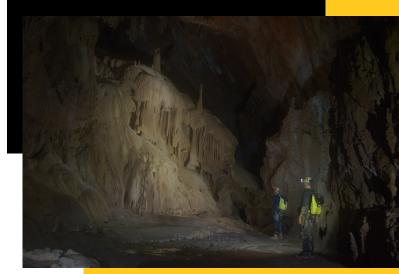


In Whiterock, a total of over 7km of new cave was found, including over a kilometre of well-decorated trunk passage, 'Shimmering Showers', often over 10m wide and tall. Current affairs played into the passage names, with Brexit inspired choices including the 'Magic Money Tree' helictite, the 'Perpetual Extensions' series, and 'Strong and Stable' (a particularly loose and chossy boulder slope).

The team also ventured back into Black-rock cave, the central section of the Clear-water system, which had been neglected for many years. This led to one of the least comfortable nights underground in Mulu for one team as a sudden rainforest downpour on the surface cut off the route back to camp; it turns out even Borneo caves can be very cold when all you have is a tackle bag as a roll mat and waterfalls appearing all around you.

The southern reaches of the Clearwater system were not neglected in 2019, with a small team (led by Moose, and including Brendan Sloan) exploring leads in Clearwater cave itself and being rewarded with almost 2km of new passage.

Plans for expeditions in 2021 and beyond are being made, more details can be found on the Project's website, www.mulucaves.org





Top: Shimmering Showers. Photo credit: Helen Fairclough. **Bottom:** The Magic Monney Tree. Photo credit: Tom Smith.

SUSS in Ireland

by David Botcherby

After the success of the 2017 trip to Ireland, we all decided that Ireland was an amazing place with excellent caving and good people.

As a result, I vowed to return the next year for the Forum. This led to a series of visits to I reland over the next few years with a rotating cast of SUSS members and student cavers, endingwiththe2020cancellationofboththestudent Forum and the SUICRO symposium. This arrangement became reciprocal, with at least one Irish

club attending every CHECC Forum from 2017 onwards, and even the 2020 Northern CHECC. We met many good friends over the course of these visits and have seen a fair amount of the underground of Northern Ireland. My sole regret is that the Student Forum has not found a venue in the south these past few years, meaning that I've never sampled the delights of Cavan caving as did the SUSS of yore. Even my summer 2021 attempt to scab onto a field trip down that way with the notorious Nob Royston ended in cancellation. I can't be too upset however, as it just

means that I've got something to go back for!

2018 Forum: The Beloved Sequel

Easter 2018 saw myself and Michael Holliday assemble another team to tackle the Forum, which was again in Fermanagh/Cavan. We had somehow managed to swing ourselves free tickets as speakers at the event, myself talking CHECC and Michael leading a singalong. The other three from the previous year had made alternate plans, so Craig 'Creg' Hamer and ULSA members Brendan Hall and Mike Butcher were pressed into service. The idea was briefly entertained of taking my car and Brendan doing most of the driving (I had a provisional licence at the time), but a failed last minute brake disc replacement put an end to that fantasy. So it was that Mike sped us across to the ferry at Holyhead, and on to our destination at the Hoo. Our first night saw another mid-pub attempt at Boho caves, with equally hilarious results. This time, we got lost in a small loop near the entrance with no side passages, with the sober navigator Brendan having equally no clue where we were. After this I vowed to watch the number of pre-caving pints the next time... The next day saw a successful Prod's Pot trip, before arriving at the Forum to meet old friends. Wob Rotson was already awaiting us there, having started a master's degree in Dublin. This left us with 6 people in one car, though between Creg's social butterfly-ing and Michel's inability to get out of bed on most days this was only a small problem. Our most hilarious trip was when myself and Rob somehow convinced an incredibly hungover Mike to drive us to Pollnagollum of the Boats, and he refused to even get into the water. The most dis-



appointing was my second attempt to enter Noon's Hole, where we fell for a classic Irish prank (the 100m rope that's definitely long enough to reach the bottom). In between trips we spent much time bothering Tony Seddon, for which we were rewarded with a trip down Pollnaraftra. At the end of the Forum, Michael decided that he hadn't had enough, and so remained in the Hoo with Tony for another week (it is unknown if any caving occurred). This meant we could take Rob back with us to Dublin, where we were again hosted by the local cavers before returning to the UK.

2019 Forum: The Oddball Threequel

Heading to Ireland over Easter had now become somewhat of a tradition, and I was keen to repeat the fun. This time Michael backed out due to girlfriend duties, but Brendan was still on board. We also opened up the invite more widely to CHECC cavers, ending up with a slightly thrown-together group. We split into two teams: Myself, Emmott Baddeley and Merryn Matthews being driven by Simon 'Si' Protheroe (SUCC) and staying at the Hoo for a few days; and Ben Auton (RUCC) and Rowan Cleet (BB) being driven by Brendan and arriving a day or two after. After

> assuring Merryn's parents that responsible were adults (Emmott being her Youth Rangers leader helped somewhat), we set off from Sheffield in Si's very fancy Skoda Octavia and headed Hoowards. The Hoo portion of the trip was much as usual, except that we were joined by a large group of Belfast students towards the end (which made things much more fun). Though I ended up repeating a few caves, it has to be said that I enjoyed them as much as ever. I also saw a bit more of the aboveground of Fermanagh, which is equally beautiful, with many Neolithic tombs and other





remains still standing, a geopark full of interesting rocks, and the impressive resurgence at Shannon Pot (also great for swimming). I finally completed my goal of descending Noon's, which turned out to be an excellent cave; starting out like a proper Yorkshire pothole with a daylight shaft, it descends to small streamway and a squeeze before becoming huge again. I have to say that it's one of my absolute favourites: great story, great location, and great

caving (though we did almost lose Ben to the cave madness). The Forum lived up to expectations, with excellent catering (apart from the time they forgot to feed us) and good craic. We even got involved with a cave clean-up, the cave in question having been used as a tip since at least the 50s, giving it a somewhat archaeological feel. On our return via Dublin, we managed to catch Ye Vagabonds playing at the pub folk night, adding a great end to the trip.

2019 SUICRO – The Spinoff No-one Asked For

I'd spent the past few years in Ireland hearing

As always, giving Brits a good name.





2019 Forum team photo.

tales of the SUICRO (Speleological Union of Ireland – Irish Cave Rescue Organisation) symposium: the Irish answer to Hidden Earth. Unlike Hidden Earth this is a free event as the Republic of Ireland government pays for the annual meeting of sports organisations (though this only covers the venue and not accommodation, and certainly not the expensive drinks from the hotel bar). This year, SUICRO was due to be in Leitrim, which interested me as it was somewhere I hadn't been (though as it turns out, not far from Fermanagh). Corin Donne and Michael mentioned to me in the pub that they were going, and I was easily swayed into joining. This time we would catch the ferry from Liverpool, taking advantage of the cheap deals for foot passengers for the crossing, arriving in Belfast to meet up with local cavers. Paul McCarron kindly offered to chauffeur us for the weekend, and we were swiftly on our way to Leitrim. Because I'd joined in late, I was to be staying on the floor of the room that Corin and Michael had already booked. Little did I know that they were already crashing another booking: that of Tony Seddon, Fleur Loveridge, and some other speakers at the event. So, I was to be playing the full dirtbag caver role (though by this time my student days were behind me). The advantage to crashing this booking, as we later discovered, was that each house came with its own boat take out on the canals. We would make good use of this on the Sunday, when each house took out their own boat and travelled the river down to the local tourist village of Carrick-on-Shannon, occasionally crossing paths or running a boat aground. Otherwise, we managed a small amount of caving in a slightly busy trip to Teampall Shetric (otherwise known as Temple Shite-rock), which

was a good cherty classic. The talks at the symposium were quality, covering a range of topics, and there was enough fun in the evenings to stave off the surprisingly extreme October cold. A squeeze machine was also brought which operated a bit like a guillotine, with the unfortunate consequence that you could surpass the limitation of your head size. I had always wondered what it felt like to really hurt yourself in one of those.... Upon our return to Belfast we were well fed and hosted, though we left Corin behind for a week of bumming around the Hoo convincing local cavers to take him underground and reading the literature. All in all an excellent weekend with a great tshirt to boot; I would very much like to return.

Deep Down Under

by Elise Freshwater-Blizzard

Creating the Youtube and TV show 'Deep Down Under' took 2 years in total, for both seasons one and two.

It is perhaps one of my proudest accomplishments in the caving community to be able to show my progression in documentary making. Perhaps ironically, this is since it was constructed to be shown to a non-caving audience. It explains simple cave science and the caving experience to those who are uneducated on the life of cavers, and allows a metaphorical dip of the toes into what our lives are like. Furthermore, it gives a chance for people who are not physically able to go caving, or perhaps don't want to go caving, a look into what caves are really like. It also showcases UK caves for the overseas caving community.

Before filming Deep Down Under, there was a few months' worth of planning the story arc of each episode, planning locations, trying to mentally see how I would place shots in the cave locations before I shot them, and scripts. Scripts were perhaps the most important, since fact-checking and the studying of cave maps had to be done before I could present any information. I also had to be selective on the information



Boating boys.

to give audiences, to keep the format short and fun. Themes also had to run through each episode, to cover only select and interesting aspects of caving. In season 2, after this lengthy process was completed, I then searched the local area to find people to interview about the subject. A good example would be the Derbyshire Cave Rescue Organisation, who were very helpful and truly made episode one in season two captivating. All script learning, organising, and filming in different locations across Yorkshire were done independently, and was sometimes quite challenging since I do not drive and only use public transport. The other big issue was completing this lengthy and difficult task whilst studying for my degree. To be sure, there was never a minute wasted in my life at that time!

The most important and integral part of the series was the final episode in season two, in which I realised that the experience was not only humbling but also brought about the realisation of how many close caving friends had affected me on my journey. In season one I had very little confidence, but Jolene was very attentive in giving me the time and support I needed, by going underground with me to help film. She was always patient and kind whilst we were filming. There were indeed many others who helped me learn throughout the series, such as Jeff Wade, who brought amazing camera skills to the plate. In the final shot of the final episode, the sight of the friends I had with me truly made me smile. These were SUSSians who are close to me, and even whilst trying to remain professional, it felt like friends hanging out and was very joyful at the time. All these people supported me and the Deep Down Under project over the last two years, and I am thankful to say that these are now not only on Youtube, but also have been airing on TV for quite a few months now.

I would like to finish with my fondest memory of filming Deep Down Under, that I will cherish forever in my mind's eye. This was when, on my birthday, both Jolene and I decided to film on a cold winter's day in Peak Cavern. This was a simple video for the round trip one might take for a fresher trip. We had filmed for four or so hours and were sitting just below the Surprise View ladder. We had decided to take a break and sit down. After carefully laying the bothy over both of our shivering bodies, with the camera equipment in the driest corner we could find, I began to unpack the pasta I had cooked the night before and took out 2 forks. We both ate leisurely and it seemed to pick up our spirits. I believe in the previous shot, I had laid down in the water giving a monologue, which was charged with snowmelt from the surface. I felt wonderfully enlivened by the cold and pulled out a large piece of wrapped birthday cake, that we shared crumb by crumb. [Trying not to spill any, which felt impossible with so little dexterity in our hands.] Deep Down Under constantly gave moments like this of warm friendship, which I am forever thankful for, and will never forget.

(Ed: The project continues through Elise's Youtube channel, including a recent collaboration with the renowned Tom Scott in Peak Cavern)



The author in Peak Cavern.

[Deep Down Under is available on Youtube, under the channel name: Elise Freshwater-Blizzard]



2021

Here's to the next 60 years!

