

JOURNAL Of The



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£2.50 to Non Members

Welcome :: Welcome :: Welcome
G.O.E.S JOURNAL
Autumn/Winter 2003

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G.O.E.S NEWS :: G.O.E.S NEWS

Editorial

Welcome to the Autumn/Winter Journal! Once again my grateful thanks to those who have kindly contributed to this edition. Please remember that this is your journal which reaches a wide audience. If you have been on a trip either underground or somewhere on the top please put pen to paper, even if it is just a few paragraphs: it makes the journal all the more interesting! Once again our thanks to Ali & Tony Davies for their time and effort in printing this edition.

On a Sad Note.

Many members of G.O.E.S., were deeply saddened to hear of the tragic death of Gareth Davies's brother Mervyn Conway Davies. Members of the society would like to offer their condolences and very best wishes to Gaz and his family. Mervyn's funeral was attended by a huge crowd which included G.O.E.S. members. A special tribute in itself to a very well known and greatly loved man.

Deadline for Copy

The deadline for copy for the Spring/Summer 2004 Journal will **Friday 21st May 2004**. Please could contributors send articles either by post or e-mail. Articles to be posted which have been produced on a computer would ideally be sent on a floppy disk or CD in MSWord or Publisher.

Phil Barratt Editor

The Chairman Writes

After a committee meeting on Monday August 4th we think it important that we let all members know about a very important point, namely the insurance premium that we pay. The present policy we have covers all members whilst on club trips above and below ground against third party claims.

For many years public liability insurance has been extremely cheap, however the recent hiatus in the world insurance market has changed all this. The terrorist attacks in September 2001 are one key reason for this – not so much because of the massive claims to be paid, but more because they have brought it home to the insurance market that sometimes the seemingly impossible can actually happen. The net result is that all underwriters have been looking very seriously at their liabilities and trying to push premiums to a level where there is a reasonable possibility of making a profit from the business even if a huge claim occurs.

It is looking as though we are going to have to introduce some form of 2 tier membership to the society. We are fairly certain that our Goes membership will remain the same at £15.00. There will then be an additional insurance cover that all who take part in trips underground will have to take out individually. The cost of this has not yet been ascertained, the BCA are currently establishing the costs for us, and as soon as we have the figures we will see that everybody is made aware. The £15.00 membership will still cover for the occasional trip for newcomers to the Ty Gwyn. We believe these changes will be taking place later this year.

GOES Annual Dinner

As we said in the last issue of the journal our annual dinner will be held on Friday November 28th at the Kings Head. We are looking for a good turn out this year; if you all come we will have the room to ourselves. We will be showing videos of underground trips throughout the evening and various slides of recent exploration on our new computer equipment. Steve at the Kings Head has promised us some excellent food (Menus & details enclosed with this edition) at £17.50 per head. Book soon, then just look forward to a great night.

John Carpenter August 2003

MORE G.O.E.S. NEWS

Ty Gwyn Mine

The Ty Gwyn has seen a lot of activity in recent months. In August G.O.E.S. played host to members of the Porthmadog Climbing Club who came over to Llandudno for a day. Twenty members of the club spent the morning in the Ty Gwyn and then the rest of the day exploring the Great Orme. The group consisted of some very experienced mine historians and some complete novices. With twenty guests, Tom Parry split the group into two with himself and Mark Beardsall leading one group and Tony Davies and Phil Barratt leading the other. Despite there being no pre-rehearsed scripts the two groups miraculously passed each other half way and came out within minutes of each other. The trip was really enjoyed by their members and especially those for whom this was first underground experience.

Work has continued on clearing away mud and debris from the new stone pathway found near the entrance at the bottom of the shaft. Work has also been ongoing in an attempt to find the link with the Tyn Y Fron shaft (see page 5).

Other visitors to the Ty Gwyn have included new member Duncan Nield who has written something of his exploits elsewhere in this edition and Jenny McHugh a young lady from Rochdale who is considering a career in archaeology. This latter trip is worthy of a mention if only for the rather humorous way in which it ended. Your editor was the first person out and he pushed open the wooden cover into daylight much to the surprise of a spaniel which had been happily enjoying a quiet moment chewing on his rubber ball inches away from the cover. Being taken slightly aback by the appearance of a strange human with a light on his head, he did what all dogs worth their salt do best; he attached his canine 'gnashers' to the editor's boiler suit and made lots of snarling noises. Members may be interested to know that the wooden manhole cover also makes an excellent implement for persuading spaniels to let go of Journal Editors!

G.O.E.S. Computer & Projector

Since arriving in the capable hands of GOES members, the computer and projector have been used in a number of promotional talks about the work of our Society. Whilst not 'out on tour', the computer has been showing the 'video' footage of underground explorations in the Tram Shop at Victoria Tram Station, which has served to promote G.O.E.S., as well as stimulating a lot of interest from members of the public.

The Bleeding Of Another Newcomer :

Remember the old joke from your childhood 'What goes 99 bonk, 99 bonk, 99 bonk ?' Well that just about summed up my lack of elegance when worming my way around Ty Gwyn for the first time this summer. Thank goodness for the loan of the safety helmet and lamp ! (By the way the answer is 'a centipede with a wooden leg.')

With my wife Brenda and our children Gary & Lucy, I moved to Laid Back Llandudno in the Summer of 2002 from Manic Manchester to improve our lifestyle. My interest in beer and history soon led me to The Kings Head and into the welcoming arms of GOES. Specifically I had the great pleasure of meeting and becoming firm friends with Tony 'The Knowledgeable Lamppost' Davies (my word he's tall !) and Phil 'Religion For The Modern Era' Barratt. Together they pummelled me with wonderful and spooky tales of what lies beneath and plied me with good ale over a good few months until I eventually plucked up the courage to join the Society.

I thought I'd got away with it. Having signed up I went on a few Thursday night walks and met more lovely and like minded people - but not a hard hat or a black bottomless pit to be seen ! Phew !

And then one Sunday evening Tony said ' Phil and I are going down Ty Gwyn tomorrow, why not join us?' Skilfully they countered every one of my feebly spluttered excuses and so I was committed.

One sleepless night later I ambled around to our meeting point and with nervous laughter donned my ill fitting belt (thank you Tram Drivers Best Bitter) and borrowed gear then sauntered down Church Walks to the mine entrance near the pier with my confident escorts.

As Tony moved to lift the cover off the entrance he looked me in the eye and said. 'This is the only real test for a newcomer. When I lift off this cover and you look down you will either run away and refuse ever to go down this or any other mine, or you will go down and never look back. It's a game your mind plays with you. But remember I don't drink with wimps !' ' Ok go for it' I screamed unconvincingly and off came the lid. After the plumes of green smoke had cleared and the distant deep sounds of a dragon feasting on innocent victims had died away I peered in. After all the leg pulling of the previous night I was delighted to see the bottom of the pit was only about 12 feet down so I moved to get stuck in. 'Stop!' howled Phil ' rookies don't go first '. So I patiently awaited my turn and the call of CLEAR! and was soon standing at the bottom of the ladder looking up a long straight tunnel BONK!.

Tony brought up the rear having re-secured the entrance against prying council jobsworths and we were ready for off.

It was from this point on that the world changed. BONK!. Down there it's quiet, it's still and it's dark until you puncture it with a shaft of light from your forehead. It is surprisingly warm and you get used to paddling through lots of water both murky and clear and frequently banging your head BONK! But it is not the slightest bit threatening. All thoughts I might have had of being afraid of confined space, afraid of being suddenly crushed by rogue loose rocks or drowning in bottomless unseen pits of icy water evaporated. This place was wonderful. BONK! And to add to our intrusive lamps I also discovered a new side to my friend Tony. He further illuminated the whole place with his extensive knowledge of every nook and cranny and tales of earlier visits and excavations. BONK! Everywhere lay evidence of previous adventures - ancient nails and axe heads here, victorian wheels there, protected clog prints in the mud, ventilation holes, clear glacial seams in the rock face, precariously propped up rocks on rotting planks and even small collections of victorian bottles and clay smoking pipes. Tony anticipated the appearance of every feature with pinpoint accuracy. BONK!

I had a map with me of the layout of the mine which also showed what was at ground level above and in what appeared to be no time at all we had BONK! arrived at an engine shaft. Tony and Phil carefully stepped aside from the edge and invited me to hold on to a precarious sliver of metal protruding from the wall to the left and just hang over the edge to look up at the shaft roof. BONK! I rather impolitely declined this generous offer! Surely that tiny hook would not take my weight! Instead I did nervously peer over the edge and down into a dark abyss filled with water, which for some reason that day was rather misty.

Some minutes later having dropped down a hole BONK! and ambled bent double along another corridor DOUBLE BONK! we emerged at another shaft view and looked up at where we had previously been standing. At this point I could just about see the top of the shaft that I had been asked me to look up at, and I did wonder at how somebody had managed to construct such a thing.

'Good here innit' said Tony 'Something Something Smashing' grinned Phil in traditional fashion. BONK! I agreed.

And then we were off again and I lost my bearings. At some point we paused for breath by a feature that looked like a dishevelled fireplace BONK! filled

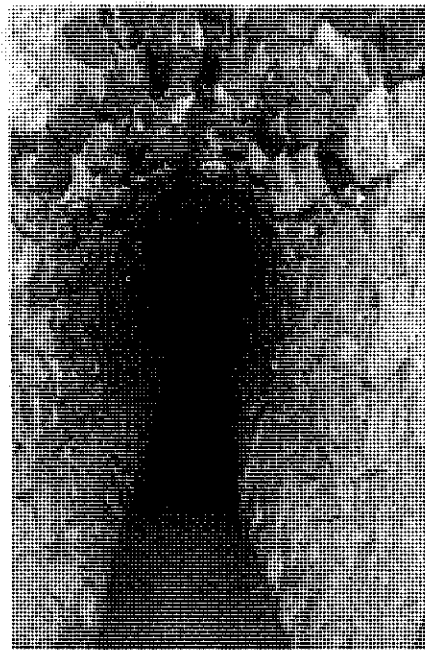
with victorian refuse, perhaps it looks like that because that's what it is? Then off again and after wadding in water that almost topped my wellies, we suddenly re-emerged into the main addit and I stood up too soon with an almighty BONK! We went straight across the addit and on, within seconds we were in a macabre shaped tunnel called The Coffin Level, so called as the bottom of the tunnel was thinner than the top to form a shape rather like that of a coffin - and then sadly a dead end. (Coffin level? Dead end? - Good here innit?) BONK!

Our time was up so we retraced our steps to the mine entrance and after a few final BONKS! re-emerged into bright sunshine and some rather startled tourists. I was astounded to discover that we had been underground for almost 90 minutes. It had felt like so many seconds.

To the seasoned mine explorer or pot-holer, Ty Gwyn, wonderful creation that it is, probably does not even register above zero on their excitement scale. But to me, a city boy (actually I'm 43) who is used to taking the lift, it had been many things: a great way to spend some time with friends, a new learning experience, a fascinating spectacle, a genuinely exciting adventure and a great way to exorcise some childhood fears that were tucked away in the back of my memory.

And so I've started on a new journey. Thank you Tony, thank you Phil and thank you everyone in GOES for letting me in! BONK!

Duncan Nield, October 2003



Coffin Level in the Ty Gwyn

G.O.E.S. @ Snailbeach Mine

On 16th March a group of members were the guests of Shropshire Caving & Mining Club for a days exploration at Snailbeach Mine which lies above the wooded slopes and moor land above Snailbeach valley. The ruined chimneys, engine houses and blacksmiths shops testify to a time when the lead mines of the south west Shropshire ore fields were the most productive in Europe.

Evidence of mining can be traced as far back as Roman times. In 1796 a pig of lead, weighing 173lbs and bearing the stamp of the Emperor Hadrian was discovered in this area. As the mining of that era relied on shallow workings, ores close to the surface were soon exhausted and as greater depths were explored, sophisticated methods of water removal were employed to prevent flooding.

By the end of the 18th century steam powered engines made it possible to reach new depths. In this rich environment, lead, copper, zinc and barytes were extracted. Barytes is a heavy white mineral, once used in the manufacture of paint.

In its heyday, during the mid 19th century, the Snailbeach mines average output of lead was between 2000—3000 tons per year. 500 men were employed in the process. The mine produced nearly 132,000 tons between 1845 and 1911 and by 1875 it was producing 10% of the UK's lead requirement, as well as 25% of the countries barytes output.

Around 1855 the competition from cheap foreign imported ore resulted in the price of lead falling from £20 per ton to just £11, which forced the closure of many mines.

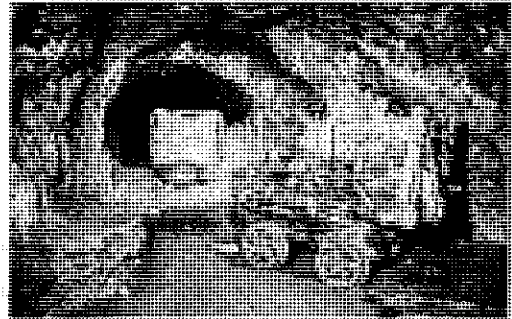
Drilling was carried out manually. A good team could average 1 inch per minute before the holes were packed with explosives. In 1881 a compressor was purchased to power the rock drills underground.

Once the explosives had loosened the rock to ore was wound up the shaft in large iron buckets called kibbles to a staging where the level met with the shaft and from here it was taken in trucks to the crusher house.



Tunnelling on the Day Level

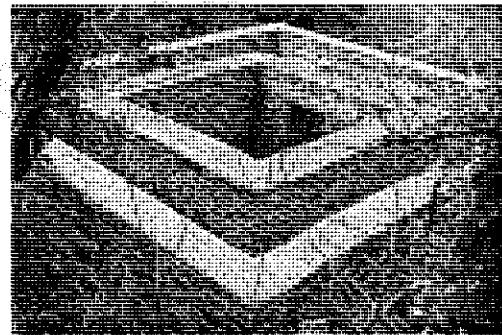
The whole site was huge as the old photographs below show, and today, the Shropshire Mines Trust have been able to open up much of the site for the public to use by re-laying some of the tracks on the higher levels and pushing visitors along the level on a specially made truck with seats. The lower depths of the mines are left to the more serious underground teams who welcome visits from groups like G.O.E.S.



Abandoned trucks on the 40 yard level



19th C Picture showing the extent of the site



Remains of the powderhouse

With grateful thanks to Shropshire Caving & Mining Club for hosting G.O.E.S. members, perhaps a return match is called for?

Grateful thanks to Mike Worsfold, Ian Cooper and Shropshire Mines Trust for their help in preparing this article and for their kind permission to use the photographs.

(Ed)

The Tyn y Fron / Ty Gwyn connection

A day for ducks...

On November 3rd 2002 a team gathered at the 280ft Tyn y Fron shaft ready for an assault on the blockage from the 'dry side'. John Carpenter, first to abseil down, found the water in the shaft higher than expected and the adit completely submerged. Whilst watching him climb back out we discussed whether the additional water was a result of high tides or high rainfall.

Before we departed two small yellow plastic ducks were thrown down the shaft; one labelled Gaz, the other Dave, a joke to commemorate our descent of September 1st 2002. (If Steve Lea and Glyn Davies can have plaques, we can have ducks).

One of our ducks is missing...

We next mustered at the shaft on September 21st 2003. This time the water was behaving itself. Steve Cross, Gaz and I descended the shaft equipped with shovels, lump hammer, various bits of scaffolding and a telephone system. Gaz duck was soon found marooned on the side of the adit. Further along the tunnel we encountered more water than anticipated. We waded through and were soon digging in the collapsed area. Working whilst lying down was awkward and tiring. The sticky mud proved difficult, building up on gloves and equipment, which became virtually unusable. Although the debris sounded hollow when we hit in our poles, a quick breakthrough seemed increasingly unlikely.

It had been arranged for a group to be at the Ty Gwyn side of the collapse at 2pm. Despite listening we heard nothing, though they heard our hammer blows. (This was disappointing because last year contact had been made in both directions).

In our last half-hour of digging we made much greater progress, being able to stand and cut down efficiently into the blockage. A substantial amount of material was removed and a trench established following the adit wall.

As we cleared up, and made our way back to surface, we were aware that Dave duck had not been seen. We had between us covered all the passageways but there was no sign. I searched the shaft wall whilst ascending. Perhaps the poor duck had bottled out and flown onto a ledge. No sign.

Don't duck the issue...

A rumour that the bird was seen bobbing around in the Ty Gwyn is unsubstantiated but shouldn't be dismissed out of hand. A connection exists - a small duck might just make it!

There may be hidden nooks and crannies. If they take in water during flood conditions they may have been attractive to an unsuspecting duck.

Maybe we just need to look harder. He's hidden on an obscure ledge in the shaft or he's dug himself into some mud. It's a horrible thought but flying in circles isn't every ducks forte. Perhaps he lost control and suffered a serious impact fracture to eventually sink without trace.

It would seem a great deal of effort is still required if the route from shaft to prom is to be reopened. Plenty of opportunity to discover the truth about our missing feathered friend.

Dave Wrennall October 2003

Moving Mountains.

In March this year David Atkinson produced another of his, by now, famous papers. It was, "With reference to Llandudno. A selection of writings about Llandudno and District. Volume 3." It contains over thirty entries dating from 1752 to the present day covering a range of subjects. On page 10 is an entry, "Notes of Family Excursions in North Wales." J.O. Halliwell F.R.S. 1860.

"An old sailor who visited (Llandudno) nearly a century ago has given the following quaint description, one which would have doubtless applied to the locality in all essential particulars until the last twenty years :-

Monday, Sept. 11th, 1769. We went to Llanrhos, breakfasted at the gardener's house, whose name is Sanders, went into the woods belonging to Gloddaeth and Bodscatlin (sic), returned to dinner, after which Commodore White and me were to take a ride, in order to reconnoitre the Great Orme's Head, which lay about a mile and half distance from us. This was done in order to prove whether it was, or was not, practical to remove it altogether to Liverpool, which we found might be done very easy, though we had much ado to convince them in reality; however we brought them over to our opinion, although they so strenuously affirmed contrary overnight. The main difficulty that occurred to them now was this, that the mouth of the Mersey near Black Rock would not admit the raft it was floated upon. Be that as it will, if we get no further it may be left there."

The entry stops there without further explanation. No mention is made of whom, how and why? Fortunately this bizarre scheme never materialised. Llandudno was spared the sight of waves breaking over Upper Mostyn Street, hordes of North Walians speeding to Liverpool every Bank holiday, and the Mersey Orme Exploration Society holding weekly meetings at the Pier Head!

It would appear however that this was not an isolated suggestion. The concept of floating large land masses to different locations was alive and well at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In New York at this time there existed the Central Market. Not only was it an important trading centre it also served as the unofficial city parliament. Here people congregated to debate, discuss and exchange news. One of the leading lights in all discussions was a man called Lozier, a ships' carpenter who had crossed the Atlantic on several occasions. He was a strong charismatic character with well developed debating skills, and the gift of suggesting sensible and practical solutions to most problems. He was also an excellent practical joker!

He then caused great anxiety by suddenly appearing to lose all interest in the daily discussion and banter. Deeply concerned a worried deputation approached him to seek an explanation. He explained that he was deeply troubled about a development that would affect them all. Manhattan Island was sinking slowly and inexorably into the sea. He showed them how the land from the City Hall to the sea ran downwards, and according to Lozier the slope increased daily. He explained that the reason for this was that far too many buildings had been erected at the seaward end and so caused the land to sink.

He suggested a radical solution he had devised. That which was needed was to detach the piece of land holding the heavy buildings, tow it out to sea, turn it around, tow it back and reconnect it. In that way the heavy end of the island would be against the mainland. Having done so it would be necessary to pass legislation to prevent any building at the seaward end and so prevent a recurrence of the problem.

Lozier then appeared in the market with a large ledger in which he entered the names of those prepared to take part in the venture. Over three hundred signed up on the first day. Contractors were then chosen to begin building the barracks and dining hall necessary for the labourers who were to be employed. Lozier then asked for tenders to supply food including over five hundred cattle, and three thousand chickens to feed the labour force.

By now Lozier was thoroughly enjoying himself and came up with some new scheme almost daily. He enquired after blacksmiths who could weld cross cut saws a hundred feet long. He explained it would be

necessary to have fifty men on each saw. Those underneath, the pitmen, would have to hold their breath for long periods as they would be working underwater! He organised classes for them to practice, timed their efforts with a stop watch and entered the times in a ledger. He ordered fathoms of chain explaining that it would be necessary to fix them to the islands trees as towing points. At the other end he needed a thousand boats to drag the land mass out to sea to turn it around. Amazingly no one queried who was to foot the bill.

Eventually he could procrastinate no longer and announced a date for the work to commence. He announced that this would be done with a huge ceremony. The public were asked to congregate outside the City Hall at six in the morning from where there was to be a procession led by several bands down to the water's edge. At the appointed time thousands of people had gathered outside City Hall in a frenzy of expectation. Lozier however was not amongst them. He had slipped out of New York the previous evening and was never seen again.

History does not record how long the crowds waited before realising that they had been fooled by a trickster who was a master of his craft!

Imagine what Lozier could contribute to a GOES evening walk!

*Hidden away in the depths of the steel cabinet which comprises of disjointed heaps of paper known as the GOES ARCHIVES are several of David Atkinson's Papers. They include :-

With Reference to Llandudno. Vol 1,2 and 3.

A list of those who did homage and fealty. AD 1301.

Llandudno District Methodists.

A translation by Alwena Maddern.

Geology of the District of the Creuddyn, Hugh F. Hall, F.G.S. 1860.

St. George's Harbour and Railway Report 1836.

The Williams/Parry Guidebooks to Llandudno 1855 - 1868.

The reason they are there is in case any members would like to read them! I can be contacted on 01492 879790 / archive@goes.org.uk

Tom Parry, October 2003.

Beached Whale Found in Romans!

If you would have told me when I first joined GOES that I would ever be an 'undergrounder', then I would have said quite simply, NO WAY! A convinced claustrophobic, it just wasn't going to happen. A few Ty Gwyn Trips later, I find myself rather slowly getting the bug. This year saw me place an order with Bernies Caving Supplies in Ingleton and become the proud owner of my very own lamp and helmet. Not surprisingly they didn't stay clean and new looking for long as August this year saw them put to good use again in the Ty Gwyn. Then another challenge was put my way it's Romans next then?

Gaz Davies told me not to worry about Romans, "*we'll just winch you out!*" My concern about my first SRT experience took on a new dimension as I imagined being hoisted in and out of Romans. "*No, I'll do it on my own or not at all*", came my reply.

My main concern about going in with a bigger group was the fear of holding everyone else up, being a plain liability or feeling a fool if I couldn't do it. Steve Lea gave me one great bit of advice: *just take your time*. So one windy evening in late August, Ali & Tony Davies led me like a lamb to the slaughter into Romans. The descent wasn't too bad. I had abseiled down rock faces many times, but never a *free-descent* with nothing to put your feet against. Dropping into a sixty foot hole was a little daunting at first, but once I got used to it I was fine, sure in the knowledge that Ali had gone in first and could stop me at one slight tug of the rope.

Once down it just got better! This was so different to the Ty Gwyn, an experience on a completely different plain as we crawled our way to the Treweeks shaft, through Bronze Age workings. I couldn't then and still can't find words to express my exhilaration and not a hint of claustrophobia in sight. Now I knew I had the bug. I have this vivid recollection of scrambling through a gap (which seemed tight to me - stomach and all) and coming out into a cavern of breathtaking colours. Tony said my face told the story.

When we returned to the bottom of the Romans shaft then the fun began! Ali went up the rope like a snake coming out of the charmers basket! Perhaps three minutes at most: then it was my turn. Tony carefully attached me to the SRT kit and explained the technique. Ali had made it look so simple, yet could I do it? Not a chance! The more Tony tried to explain, the more I panicked, and the more I panicked the less I could take in what Tony was patiently trying to impart. Swinging about in the bottom of the shaft about two inches off the floor I began to wish that Gaz Davies and his winch would magically appear. I even decided that if the worse came to the worse I could probably climb out if Ali could *top-rope* me, even in wellies!

Yet Tony did not give up and when he suddenly said

"Look, you're now two-feet off the floor", I realised that something had happened; I was moving. Slowly but surely it suddenly started to happen, the beached whale was in motion! The more I moved, so the more I relaxed and trusted the equipment and the more the things Tony had told me made sense. I really struggled to move into an upright position and made it harder for myself by being a little *laid back* (quite literally) It was not the most gracious (or the fastest) ascent but two or three pulls at a time I made slow but steady progress, encouraged by Ali's "*You're doing really well Phil, just take your time.*" And perhaps spurred along by Tony's "*We don't want to miss last orders now, do we?*" I finally made a very un-gracious climb through the concrete sleeve and back onto solid ground, muttering something profoundly un-clerical! The whole event from bottom to top had taken forty minutes : twenty minutes panicking and twenty minutes climbing! So much for Ali and her three minutes! But at least I did it. Oh and we made last orders!

So what next?

Well I think what a brilliant group G.O.E.S. really is. Here were people prepared to share their enthusiasm and expertise (not to mention patience) with a complete SRT novice and as a result of that, I still have the bug. Much to my amazement they have offered to take me down again and I can't wait to go. Next time there won't be twenty minutes having a nervous breakdown and I set myself the goal to be out a little quicker, if only to get to the Kings Head a little earlier!

Thanks Ali & Tony. Watch out Sunday-morning 'undergrounders' the *beached whale* is on the move!

Phil Barratt October 2003

Peak Cavern / Speedwell

(The Highs and Lows of 'The Devils Arse')

The car in front...

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



Photo : At the entrance to the caverns

Into the underworld...

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

Through hell...

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

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

Behind the scenes...

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

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

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

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

Further in...

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

Reinvigorated by more food and drink we left our bags to descend the slope and crawl into the intriguing smooth walled tunnel once accessible only to divers. Here pebble sections reminded us that our knees were sore. But forget the aches, don't think of the Colostomy to come, enjoy discovering more. And so it was that we went from tunnel to rifts, up ladders and down them, bridged across drops and clung onto ropes eventually to enter a small streamway. This was an area known as Far Sump Extension. Upstream another sump was soon reached.

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

Hallowed ground...

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

Our torches lit up little more than the initial damp well sculpted walls stretching up into the darkness, beyond which our beams faded to nothing. Only our imaginations could reach further to the 'Event Horizon', a narrowing at 65m, above which there were some big ledges and a widening shaft extending to the final roof.

It was like a magnificent geological hourglass with a waterfall cascading noisily down one wall recording the years. What a magical, inspirational, energetic place. Our smiling faces ran with the droplets that had fallen from afar. We ran our fingers across roughly textured rocks, looked into the various alcoves and marvelled at it all.

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

And back...

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

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

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

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

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

Dave Wrennall : October 2003

Ewe Wouldn't Believe It!

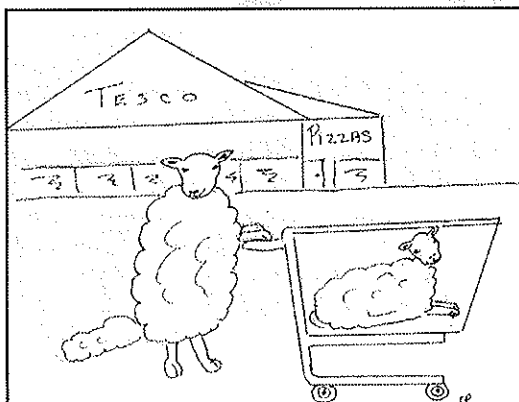
NEWS FLASH. (6th June 2003)

This morning a ewe with her lamb were seen wandering around Tesco Car Park in Llandudno Junction. This is a distance of some four miles from their proper place on the Orme. To reach Tesco, the pair must have crossed several major roads, presumably very early in the morning. We have been reliably informed by a GOES member, who resides in Degangwy, that just before 7 a.m. this morning, she saw two suspicious looking animals, sidling past her gate.

The incident was reported to Emrys, the Farmer, by the Trading Standards Office, who were called in by a member of staff in Tesco. They speedily sent an Inspector to the scene, who soon identified the offending animals by a tag number in the ear of the ewe. When the Farmer reached Tesco, the sheep had vanished, although a young boy told him that they had been grazing outside the Pizza Hut. Presumably they were in need of refreshment and thought a bit of Italian nosh would go down well.

The only other information that the Farmer could obtain was from a female assistant, who said she thought the lamb was very sweet. This was nice, but not much help for identification.

Eventually, the Farmer abandoned the search and returned to the Orme. However, much later, when Emrys was on his way home, he espied two very tired looking sheep, almost on their knees, valiantly climbing up the last few yards to reach their companions. The Prodigals had returned.



LATER.

Since this occurrence, presumably encouraged by the wondrous tales told to them by their kindred, many more errant ewes have been discovered in the Town. Several risked a trip to the Police Station and ended up in the custody compound. Not content with this blatant lack of respect for the law, sev-

eral days later, others of like mind decided to visit the Law Courts on Conwy Road.

Certain elderly ovine ladies have since been heard to mutter that "*things were different in their day*".

Eve Parry. September 2003

Members Publications.

As a group of Great Orme enthusiasts many of us spend our spare time sifting out articles, papers etc., about the Orme, depending on our particular interest. Our casual conversations, many on G.O.E.S. nights in the Kings Head, often reveal unknown interests. As you read in Tom Parry's article we also have a number of articles in the G.O.E.S. archive which is available to all members. As well as the archive, members like Tom & Eve have already a list of publications to their name.

If members have published any of their work or research, whether professionally or otherwise, please tell us about it so that we can spread the word!

Two new publications have been produced since our last edition of the *Journal*. For a long time now Ali & Tony Davies have been taking painstaking original GPS data of the Great Orme and the result was the production of a brand new map of the Great Orme which arrived in late July. For those who love pouring over maps this a must! The map is available from a variety of suppliers including Ottakars, Vollams and Great Orme Mines Ltd or direct from Tony.

Members may recall a two article piece about the life of St Tudno. After some reworking *Tudno Saint of the Orme* was published at the end of June and the first print run of 100 has now sold out with a reprint to follow. Profit from the first print run is to come to G.O.E.S. The book is available from Ottakars, Y Siop Cymraeg, Great Orme Mines, Visitor Centre on the Summit or from Phil Barratt.

New G.O.E.S. Website

For some time now Tony Davies has been working hard to put together the new website which is now up and running. We thank Tony for all his hard work and hope that members will pay a visit soon. See Tony's article on page 12 and visit www.goes.org.uk

An Unusual Photo

A recent trip to Ottakars with my family found me browsing the local history section. Having found nothing new I turned my attention to the other displays where a book of photographs from the Conwy County Borough Archive caught my eye. By this stage I was waiting for the rest of the family and so I picked up the book, opened it at the middle pages and saw the photograph of the promenade that you see at the bottom of this page.

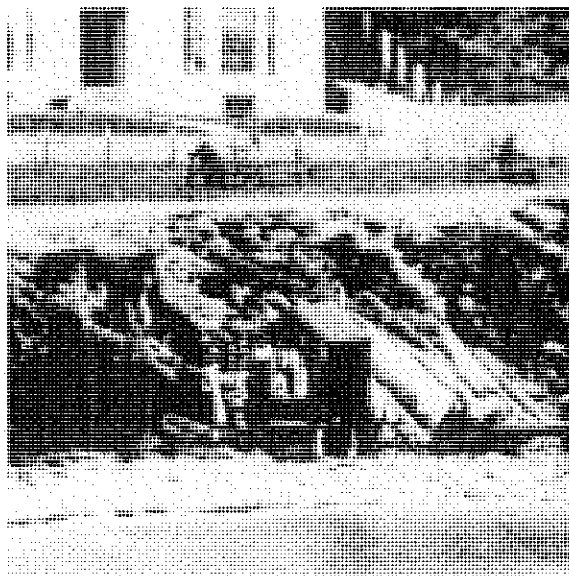
This interesting picture taken in 1857 shows an early promenade, but what really caught my eye was the quite clearly shown entrance to the Ty Gwyn adit on the shoreline.

The book purchased, the next job was to track down the original which was eventually found in the county archive in Llandudno (the old school in Lloyd Street, next to the Lifeboat Station). This place in itself was a great find, I didn't know it existed at all! I made an appointment to go in and view the photo which is just slightly larger than A3 size and of exceptional quality for its period. Explaining to the staff my role as Editor for G.O.E.S. I was given the full catalogue of photo's to peruse and realised very quickly that this place had hundred's of boxes of old photographs of Llandudno and the surrounding locality. (If you already know about this place please forgive my enthusiasm!).

I was able to order a proper photographic reproduction of the original which, whilst not cheap, has made a fine addition to my collection at Tan Y Graig. Ali kindly scanned the photo and we have attempted to blow up the area around the adit entrance. (see photo opposite).

The photograph was taken by Roger Fenton on his 1857 photographic tour of North Wales. Fenton was an important photographer of his time and became the first official war photographer for the Crimean War as well as photographing many royalty

(including Queen Victoria) and important statesmen.



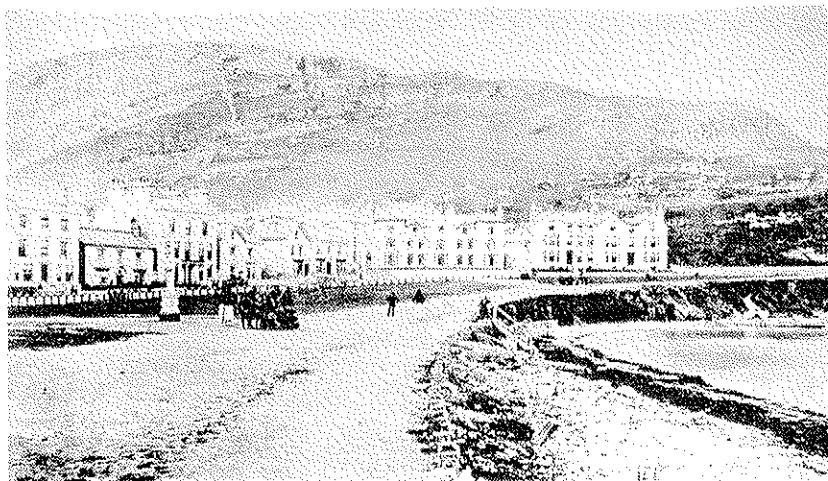
A little research into his life also threw up a strange coincidence: Fenton grew up in Heywood Lancs and was Baptised at St Lukes Church where his father was churchwarden for fifty years. I thought I had seen the name somewhere, I was Curate at St Lukes when first ordained!

Although not clearly shown on the reduction below, the areas of white on the Orme around what is now Hill Terrace are washing spread out to dry on the bracken. These show up much clearer on a larger size print. There is also a rather unusual plinth in the foreground which I have not been able to find anything about, other than the fact it wasn't there for very long. If anyone can shed any more light on the photo or in fact knows the whereabouts of any more of the Roger Fenton North Wales Tour photos, any information would be gratefully received.

One last question that the photo raises: are there any other photos of the Ty Gwyn entrance? If not then that makes this particular photograph rather special. Again if anyone knows or has others please let us know.

I am very grateful to the staff of the Conwy Archive for their time and patience and for their kind permission to reproduce the photograph in this journal.

Phil Barratt September 2003



www.goes.org.uk :: Web Matters

By the time you read this, the new G.O.E.S. web-site will be up and running; the result of a lot of hard work and a steep learning curve in web-site construction!

When we first went on the web, it was thanks to the hours of hard work put in by Steve Lea, to whom we are indebted. Web-sites need constant updating and some tender loving care to keep them fully operational and so we decided that the time had come to give our site a face lift, building on the excellent work Steve had done.

Whilst constructing the web-site, I was interested to download some statistics which would give us some idea of how many people had actually logged on for a look inside. The statistics made fascinating reading!

Between May–October 2003, 12,191 hits had accessed the site there had been 3261 page requests (dipping further into the site) and a total of 59940700 bytes served up to willing customers. The following tables show some further stats:

Month	Requests	Pages
May 2003	730	151
June 2003	3123	553
July 2003	2625	847
August 2003	2466	751
Sept 2003	2311	795
October 2003	936	164
<i>October figure is only up the 8th of the Month</i>		

The statistics can be broken down a few ways and converted to a daily summary we find that strangely the two busiest days for the site are Monday and Tuesday when almost 35% of the weeks total hits are made.

Breaking down the figures into an hourly summary there are three periods in the day which are busiest at an average of 1150 hits per hour: around 11am, around 4pm and around 8pm.

The quietest time is between 2am and 4am. These hours are not dead though; there are a good number of requests coming in between the hours of midnight and 7am, we assume mostly from overseas, USA etc. (or perhaps the occasional insomniac!)

What these figures show is a healthy interest in G.O.E.S. from far and wide. No one of could have imagined that there would be so much interest in the site of the society. This is a good way to promote our work, and as the figures show, there is considerable interest.

Members are encouraged to have a look at the site and your help is sought in two ways. Firstly, we would welcome some more photographs from members to include in the photo gallery. If you have photo's which would be of interest, please let us have them. We will add them to the web site and then return them to you. You would be credited for the photo on the site. Photo's can be in slide, negative or digital format.

Secondly, we would welcome input from members on the descriptions that we have for the various thumbnails on the site. We hope that they are accurate, but would like to know if you see any that aren't and need alteration.

The site has also given us the chance to have easy internet contacts for members with particular areas of responsibility within the society. In the 'Feedback' area of the site you will see G.O.E.S. e-mail addresses for several of the key members. This allows us to display contact details without putting private e-mail addresses into the public domain. So for example, if you wanted to contact the Chairman, John Carpenter, he can be accessed by chairman@goes.org.uk and the site will send your e-mail to his private address through a link. This is particularly useful as people often change e-mail addresses. A full list of those addresses is given on the back page under committee contacts.

Please do pay us a visit and let us know what you think. We will constantly try and update the site and any constructive comments would be really welcome.

Tony Davies - webmaster@goes.org.uk

The Penmorfa Chronicles

Skylight revisited, a new circuit and lost bags!

Our adventures continue

My story begins deep in the heart of the Great Orme after negotiating one hundred and thirty metres of pipe-work, wading along more than six hundred metres of tramming adit and clambering up through a stunning labyrinth of tunnels and chambers. Truly a copper mine with attitude but once you get to know her, a friend with secrets to share.

Return to the top...

January 26th 2003. At long last I am back at the 'Skylight' with some time to spare. Although we had discovered it almost two years ago (Journal No 1 2001) this is my first opportunity to scrutinize it fully. Leaving Paul behind in the safety of the Third Attic I scramble up the spoil tip and bridge carefully up the shaft until I'm under the impending roof of consolidated debris. A scaffolding pole provides a secure foothold from which to assess the situation. I am at the highest point of the Penmorfa system, at the limit, the nose cone of a Saturn Five. The roof above, part clay part rock, has definitely been dumped from workings above. Is a connection close? I'm ever the optimist. Whilst I work out what to do, let me take you over some of the events that preceded our arrival here.

A New Year, new energy...

Since our breakthrough into the 'Carpenter Series', and its exploration during the spring of 2002 (Journal No 2 2002) this complex and intriguing mine had remained largely undisturbed.

Perhaps to help combat the worst excesses of the festive season or maybe triggered by the arrival of a New Year, we resolved to pay another visit. The proposed destination was an area known as Devil's Head Chamber (named after a clay sculpture) and a tunnel which linked to the so-called 'Rock Eyes' (two drill holes). Close to these an obscure connection which I had only visited once was thought to have the potential to lead into new territory.

Being unable to go myself I awaited news of that Sunday's trip with great interest. The stories which emerged were of a second set of 'rock eyes', big drops, a maze of tunnels and a final wall of deads, which would require bolting. A magnificent calcited passage added to the excitement and set the scene for our trip the following week.

The map man...

It was thought that the discoveries had led into an entirely new section of mine. I decided to make a rough map to check. The graph paper looked professional. I started my drawing at the base of the First Stemple Shaft, pacing the metres, or adding two for each flat body length. Quick compass bearings were taken at each turn. I was rushing things, attempting to keep up with the main team. I wasn't too aware of the surroundings, kept busy recording the data. Along the way, well past the second

'rock eyes', it dawned on me that the top of the page was now south. When did the error start? Perhaps I was 180 degrees out on one of the bearings, which one? The increasingly difficult computations needed and the continual readjustments to the map were putting my head into a spin. Eventually my best guess revision seemed to indicate we were indeed into a new area of the mine.

The calcited passageway...

The team regrouped at an open area surrounded by numerous tunnels. Leaving our bags I was introduced to a hidden jewel. A small damp secluded passage leading gradually upwards, its dripping walls and roof covered in calcite, the wet floor a thick carpet of whiteness. Numerous decorated grottos set back in the walls and enchanting pools of water added to the magnificence of the place. Mineralization in excess, unrivaled, a splendid find.

The frontier...

We reclaimed our bags and travelled an intricate warren of tunnels. Still working on my map I was convinced we were in entirely new territory. Eventually I reached Brian and Pete, sheltering from the debris descending from Gaz and Dave Flowers who were in a very precarious position at the top of a crumbling spoil-heap in the narrow rift above us. A drill was already in action. After a while I was encouraged forwards into a higher niche. Here I could better study the neatly stacked wall of deads, which rose tantalizingly some thirty feet to an unknown area above. Alongside on a solid wall Gaz and Dave were finding it hard going, drilling a line of bolts. The spoil was continuing to erode and cascaded past me towards the team below. The wall of rocks would be undermined at this rate, with dire consequences for all.

Drill man...

Enthusiasm was ebbing, with only one bolt left and plenty of height still to gain, when I was given the opportunity to have a go. Getting to the deads proved arduous enough, everything was falling down. Two bolts provided security as we swapped positions and I tied into the rope. Clipping the drill bag onto my harness and accumulating numerous tapes and karabiners, I suddenly felt heavily laden. The hammer and spanner were added as I swung out to the foot of the deads and a vertical line of four bolts. Time for action.

Five strenuous minutes of methodically clipping, stepping and straining got me to the top bolt. Increasingly flustered by the effort required and the weight of my paraphernalia, I was thankful to finally span the rift in a bridging position, right foot in a tape, left foot pushing against the far wall. Able to regain composure I reviewed the problem. The remaining wall covered in grit and basically disintegrating would provide no useful hold. The last bolt needed to be placed as high as possible to have a chance of reaching the top. It was arduous putting pressure on the drill when it was at arm length, as was tightening up the nut. It refused to

tighten and seemed likely to fall out if I continued trying, so I made do with it loose. A monumental effort allowed me to stand in the final sling almost within striking distance of the top and its edge of loose rocks. Time to retire and come back with more bolts, or make some bold moves, bridging ever higher in the hope things worked out. The latter course led with bated breath to a hidden hold and broad smile, with a final heave over the top to the euphoric shout "We're there".

Beyond the pail...

Discarding kit, I made a quick exploration along the new level. One passage led upwards into blind workings, the main tunnel ran down a little before reaching a battered, but modern looking metal bucket, inside was a flashcube! The passage went further but I returned with my news for the team to ponder. Dave Flowers was to come up next. Unable to find a suitable anchor, I positioned the kit bag to protect the rope over the edge and sat down behind a large rock, well back, clipping the rope to my harness. Dave duly arrived. My description had sounded familiar. We hurried back to the bucket and continued only a short distance before dropping down into an extremely familiar passageway. The foot of the main stemple shaft, a route we had past two hours earlier, and from where I had started my cartography! The inaccuracies of my map were now all too obvious.

Gaz and the rest of the team were already retracing their steps. I left some kit at the entrance of our tunnel to ensure they knew exactly where we were. In the meantime we returned to our climb. Dave abseiled off me to collect the kit and strip the bolts of their hangers, they wouldn't be needed again.

Gravity intervenes...

We were disappointed not to have discovered a new area but at least we had the satisfaction of finding a circuit and we didn't have to come back with extra bolts on another day just to find that out.

Fate took a hand in the exploration of Penmorfa at this juncture. On the return journey back to our rendezvous at the stemple shaft, Gaz somehow managed to drop two tackle bags! The first, his own, vanished down the deep inhospitable chasm found between the Devil's Head Chamber and the new 'rock eyes'. The second, Brian's bag, went down a lesser drop below the rope at the Bypass. It was getting late, we were tired, and it was time to go. We would have to make a return trip soon to search for the lost kit.

The search begins...

Two weeks later the team returned. I enticed Paul Brice a newcomer to the Penmorfa to climb down directly to the original Rock Eyes from just after the Bypass, to dispel the myth created by my awful mapping that there were two sets. I then introduced him to the Rocking Stone and indicated the direction we had taken to find the Calcited Passage and the bolt climb. In the meantime Gaz had been attempting to get to grips with the loose rocks at the top of the void where his bag had disappeared. It was proving

very hazardous clearly nothing was going to be achieved quickly. As the drilling began and the discussions continued, I offered to continue Paul's education with a circuit of the nearby attics. And that's where we are now having just clambered up the Second Stemple Shaft. Needless to say, passing below the Skylight was too tempting I just had to climb up to have another look at the possibilities in the top of the shaft.

It was always in my mind to get back to this unique spot, forbidding yet so inspiring. The true nature of our discovery intrigued me, the unknown beyond perhaps so close.

Back at the top...

Bringing you up to date has given me time to consider the situation and allowed my senses to develop a feel for the place. But can I trust my intuition as I focus on all the possibilities and the implications?

The dubious looking roof hasn't fallen down yet, perhaps it will survive some careful probing. This large tent peg, I have brought with me is the perfect instrument with which to remove loose material with precision. The pieces fall to the spoil tip below and rattle beyond towards Paul. Look at this, the wall closest to me is definitely made of solid rock plastered with a layer of gritty clay. By gradually dislodging this layer together with the numerous stones it contains I'm revealing yet more of the solid wall. Working upward from the level of my hip has also enabled me to engineer a platform. I can now step off the scaffold pole and sit under this slight overhang, which now gives me a sense of protection from the ominously hanging mass above. I have already decided that if there is any movement from that direction my best plan will be to sit tight. I can see a small hole in the rock near my head, which could be threaded with a rope. Perhaps tying on will be a good idea in the future?

Progress with the peg is steady and gradually the ledge is extending leftwards to reveal yet more of the solid wall which seemed to be running straight, perhaps the start of a passageway. All too aware of the dangers involved in disturbing the roof as it is undermined I am attempting to create a nice curvature, hopefully it will prove stronger. At the end of my ledge I am starting to encounter larger rocks that appear to have been stacked. A good sign. I'll throw them down the shaft as well, after shouting a warning of course.

New voices, the rest of the team have arrived. Apparently the drill bit and the bolts were different sizes, so no abseiling was possible. A bit more digging to do and a few more rocks to trundle. "What the f#!" Unfortunately one of my missiles has hit Gaz on the knee (his bad one of course). Perhaps he wasn't quite aware of how the rocks were flying or maybe I wasn't diligent enough with my warnings. Either way it really isn't his day. Sorry Gaz!

Back out bagless...

Everyone is hopeful of having more luck finding Brian's bag. They negotiate a cease-fire and scramble over the spoil below me to reach the top of the First Stemple Shaft. As they abseil down into the distance to begin their search I continue awhile with my digging, but a feeling of isolation starts to grow. This is a lonely and dangerous place to work without back up from below. Reluctantly I clamber back down; well pleased with the progress I have made. Hopefully I will be back soon.

I catch up with everyone at the foot of the stemple shaft. Brian's bag has been found, but the draining rods being used to reach it have unfortunately pushed it even further away and the bag has fallen over an edge to somewhere beyond. Yet again we realize it is time to go. Although no bags have been recovered we are still optimistic. See you all in Penmorfa next week!

New connections and old beer

(How umpteen abseils re-modeled our world...)

New discoveries...

Unfortunately I was unable to make it on either of the following two weekends which witnessed some major breakthroughs. These were to transform our understanding of the system and lead us to some hidden treasures. Both bags were retrieved. Brian's lay close to the regular route up, at the foot of the 'Third Ladder Climb' (Journal 1 2001) down which it had been prodded. Dave Flowers survived the dangerous abseil to recover Gaz's bag and find a cross cut passage linking to a much safer parallel rift below the Rocking Stone. Both rifts continued down a long way and offered new opportunities for exploration.

Whilst recovering Gaz's bag, Dave also discovered some brilliant artefacts in a long, lost, isolated tunnel. An ancient ginger beer bottle and some drilling tools were taken to the Rocking Stone for display. Fuses that were too delicate to move were left in situ. There were also several lumps of clay with candle imprints. The miner involved must certainly have been planning to return.

A connection was also made from the Rocking Stone rift to the Wet Way. Although the Wet Way led up to the Third Attic it had always been regarded as a separate region with no links to our regular route at this height. Finding one greatly improved our appreciation of the mine layout.

Whilst still celebrating the previous successes, Erik checked out a few small tunnels close to the Rocking Stone. He was astonished and extremely pleased to suddenly pop out onto the regular route, well below Llyn Penmorfa Chamber. 'Erik's Back-Passage' a superb shortcut will now save everyone forty minutes of effort, climbing up in order to drop down. Places like the Rocking Stone and the Calcited Passage are now easily attained.

Wipe that grin off your face Erik and thank-you!

Big stemple, huge possibilities...

On the 9th of March I was introduced to Erik's shortcut as the team (and Charlie) returned with the intention of abseiling down some of the recently discovered rifts.

Gaz and Erik first abseiled down a circular hole next to the calcited passage. Anticipating the outcome I popped back through the shortcut in time to spy them through the false floor of the 'Foot Traverse' making their way back up to rejoin us. A nice ab, but no new ground. Next we all dropped down the rope at the Rocking Stone. Then whilst the rest went ahead to bolt and rig the next major abseil, Gaz and I took the opportunity to visit the spot where his bag had been recovered. After crawling through the cross cut, we clip two bolts and descended our own rope to the bag's final resting-place on the spoil at the foot of the rift.

But this was not the end. A few short steps led us to an impressive opening into the top of an awesome chamber. There was water to be heard somewhere below, a rarity in Penmorfa. Maybe we were behind the Waterfall area in totally unexplored workings? In the gloom we could make out a huge stemple spanning the void. It was an atmospheric place of considerable promise. But it would have to wait.

Returning back up the rope I quickly swung into the small isolated passage from where Dave Flowers had recently collected the bottle and drilling tools. Perhaps only the second visit in over a century. I examined the fragile fuses and blobs of clay searching the area for other artefacts but without success. It is likely that the miner reached this tunnel by using stemples, which were subsequently destroyed through old age or rock-fall. The rift no doubt being used to send ore down to the tramming levels below.

A helping hand...

Soon we were at the top of our rope and scuttling through the connection into the Rocking Stone rift. We quickly reached the abseil point established by the team, their flickering lights and faint voices far below. The descent was an exciting journey into the unknown. As the space widened and the blackness below showed no sign of ending, one wall suddenly disappeared to reveal a large chamber at the side. JC was waiting, a cheery stationmaster secured on the edge of the abyss to ensure my safe arrival at his sloping platform. "Easier if you stand on the stemple first, we've all done it". Detaching from the rope I scrambled up the slope to the others investigating a network of passageways. We eventually find a yellow plastic hand hanging from the roof, a navigational aid I had placed at a kink in our regular route. We were in the Pinnacle Chamber! Another connection established.

The end of the line...

But we had the rest of the chasm to explore yet. Soon we were back on the sloping platform where more bolts had been placed, taking turns to catch the rope and set off again into the darkness. It wasn't long before we were on a cone of debris at the end of the line. Our final station being a chamber we recognized. From it a cross cut connected through to the Blue Streak Chamber, just above the Ice Bridge. (There was also an obscure connection at one end to the wagon in the Second Rift). Once again, we were back in very familiar territory.

We departed for the surface discussing the developments; happy with our new circuits and still hopeful that Big Stemple might provide a breakthrough into the fresh ground we sought.

Off the rails...

I was unable to make it on the next trip two weeks later. The team eventually abseiled into Big Stemple only to discover that they had dropped into the Second Rift. There was the wagon. Another way into a part of the mine usually accessed beyond Rift One, twenty metres up the left fork of the main tramming level.

People started to recall seeing the big stemple before, and remembered gazing up into the roof at the false floor of hanging rail-track and an inaccessible passage above, the tunnel from which they had just abseiled. Even the noisy water that had created such an impression proved to be a mere trickle, adding to a sense of injustice.

Penmorfa wasn't finished just yet, having one last laugh at the team's expense. A tricky climb up out of the rift proved too awkward, and a large stemple was used to create a maypole in order to attempt an escape. Fortunately Steve Lea who had been tinkering around in the main tramming level appeared above them to help resolve the situation.

Reflections...

These explorations which took place during the first three months of 2003, resulted in some major additions to our understanding of the mine layout. One myth shattered was that the First Rift is more inclined than the others. (After all didn't we regularly scramble up it on route to the attics?) Our abseils were like plumb bobs, proving that the workings are basically vertical.

The First and Second Rifts run into each other and lie on the same north to south line of mineralization. (The Devil's Head Chamber in the First Rift for example is some 30 metres directly above the wagon area of the Second Rift ('Big Stemple') linked almost directly via Gaz's bag drop). They should be referred to as a single rift.

Only by following the intricacies of these stories and surviving the complexities of the mine diagram will you have truly shared in our wild adventures. If you were successful, congratulations, hopefully you have also made a friend. But to those of you that got lost along the way, don't worry, it happens to the best of us, even when we think we know the place.

More recent events

Visitors...

June 8th saw the return of some half dozen members of the Crewe Caving Club. Having already been shown around Romans in March they were keen to be introduced to the delights of Penmorfa. The trip organized and led by Gaz took in the three 'attics', visiting our prized beer bottle, the calcited passage and other points of interest. It ended with a look at the further reaches of the main tramming levels. Beer after the event was of course compulsory. Whilst sitting outside the King's Head in glorious sunshine plans were hatched for future outings. (C.f. our excursion to Peak Cavern/ Speedwell in July, guided by the Crewe team).

Kayaking...

It had been in my mind for some time to take a Canadian Canoe into the Penmorfa adit. Partly to aid those less adventurous daunted by the arduous wading, but also to carry equipment. Experiments in the garden with a child's hoop suggested that the boat might be persuaded to squeeze through the 750mm-diameter entrance pipe if the seats were removed and the weakened frame strapped tightly around a small barrel.

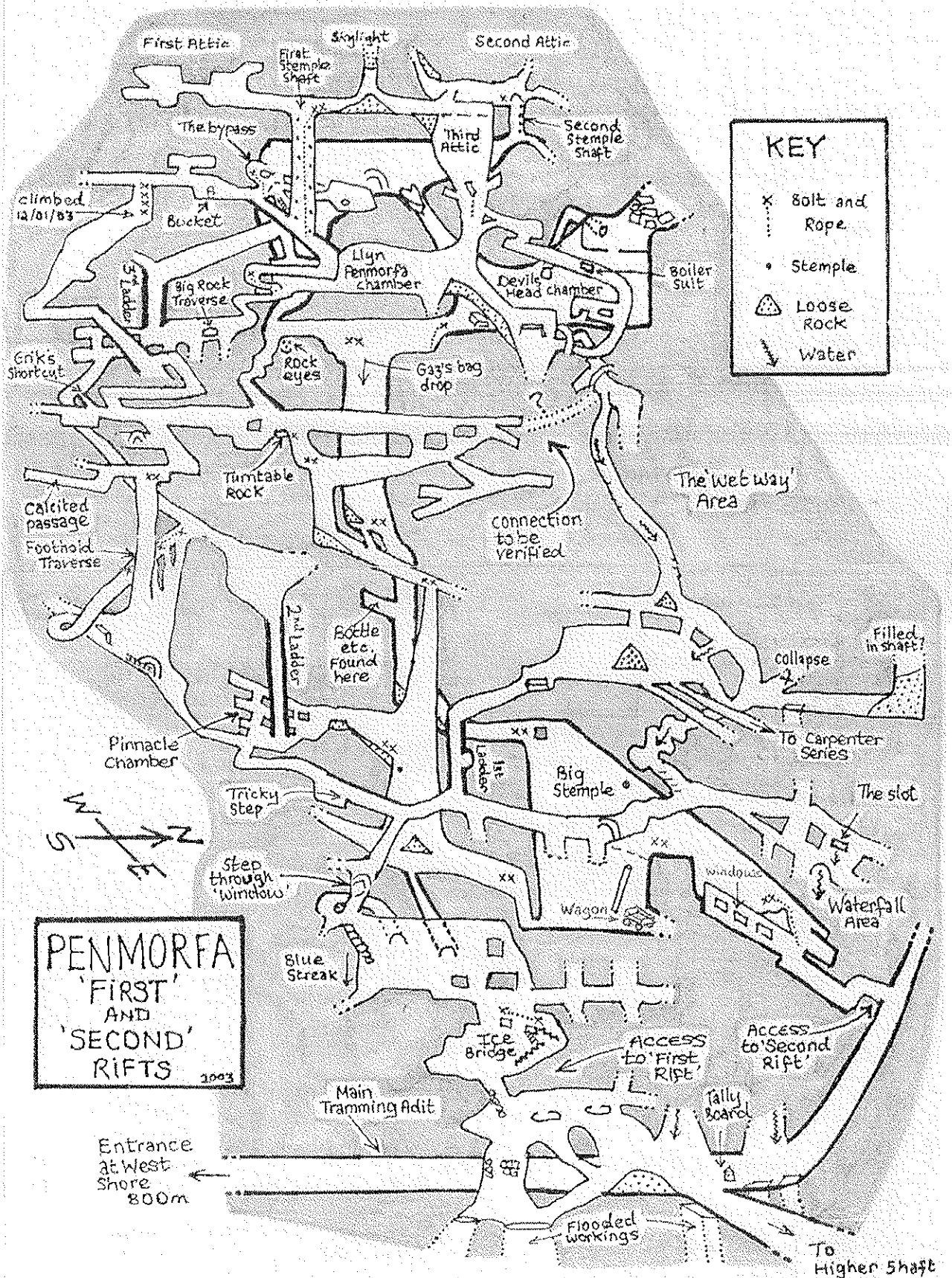
In the end however I opted for a smaller kayak. It proved of use then the Canadian could follow at a later date. It was dragged in using a set of wheels on the day of the Crewe visit. I was first into the adit. It was a very odd, eerie experience, being on my own, gliding quietly over the water into the gloom. The shortened paddles I had made worked well, but hands were adequate and easier to use. (Must try tennis bats). I stayed dry and had fun. Transporting numerous gear sacks was easy. The boat is presently moored and awaiting its next client.

Lines of Communication...

Wednesday June 11th saw an experiment in the use of a set of 'mole-phones' developed by Keith Jackson of Parys Underground. Gaz and Keith took one phone into Penmorfa. The other phone was taken into the main chamber of Great Orme Mines some 140 metres, above by Nick Jowett, Erik and others. The phones which use some sort of electronic wave to penetrate the rock, (Details for another article perhaps) rely on a 10 metre length of well-earthed wire set out to form a right angle.

At the appointed time of 7pm communication was established but only in one direction. Keith and Gaz could hear those above but up top, the phone remained silent. It is thought that the reason for this discrepancy was that the drier conditions in the upper chamber meant that the wires there were poorly earthed.

The Chronicles will continue
Dave Wrennall : October 2003



Updated Pen Morfa plan © Dave Wrennall 2003