

Third Series

Number 6

# UBSS Newsletter



Sichuan China 2006 Expedition  
The follow up to the missing Read's  
AGM & President's Piece  
Goldney Well  
Dave Irwin

Summer 2007

Would UBSS members be interested in a second expedition to the Liangshan Mountains, near Yunyuan in China's Sichuan province, in summer 2008? We would not be able to have too many people (~ 8) in the base camp at any one time as it is a small village. This is a remote mountainous area with no rescue service. It is a fundamentally bad idea to have an accident here. No cave has (yet) been pushed below -120 m; although few entrances have been descended. The expedition report from 2006 is shown below. Contact Pete Talling in the pub if there is interest. It should be possible to subsidise the cost significantly for student cavers through grant applications. Apart from the flight, it is ridiculously cheap once you get there.

## Liangshan Mountains, Sichuan, China

### Hong Meigui Caving Club Expedition July-August, 2006

The expedition investigated three different areas, looking for new cave entrances.

Six people spent ~ 10 days exploring an area on the northern bank of the Yangtze River, near a town called **Leibo, Sichuan Province** (Fig. 1). An area suspected to be limestone was identified from satellite images that had 3000m of depth potential. Private transport enabled thorough investigation, which revealed the area to be generally disappointing. The limestone is thin and interbedded with other rock types. Resurgences were seen on the far (southern) side of the Yangtze river and this side of the river may be worth further investigation.

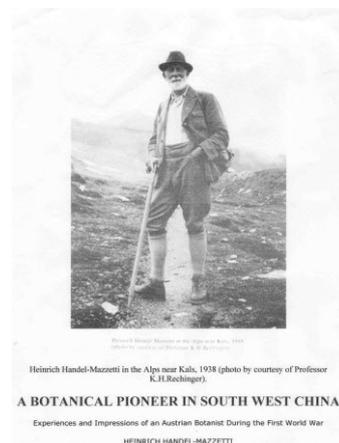
Roughly seventy five people-days were spent doing a reconnaissance of second area in the **Liangshan Mountains** near **Yunyuan, Sichuan Province** (Fig. 1). This revealed an extensive area (30 x 20 km) of well developed karst. The expedition confirmed the exciting potential of this new area, which has depth potential of up to 2,160 m (from 1750 to 3910 m above sea level). The area contains numerous large dolines and has heavily weathered karst. Pitch series were explored to -120 metres, with some caves left ongoing.

Finally, a team of four people spent two days near the town of **Wudu** in the province of **Gansu**, which lies to the north of Chengdu (Fig. 1). The team reported a very large expanse of limestone. This includes a high karst plateau that lies above a show cave, which is over 1 km long, and has passages that are over 50 m wide. This area also looks very promising and has depth potential of up to 1,500 m.

#### Liangshan Mountains near Yunyuan

An intrepid botanist called Heinrich Handel-Mazzetti reported 'bottomless chasms' in this area that resembled karst in his native 'tyrol'. Martin Laverty spotted these references in the monograph published shortly after the first world war. For details of Handel-Mazzetti's botanical adventures see [http://www.paeo.de/hl/hand\\_maz/pioneer/buch.html](http://www.paeo.de/hl/hand_maz/pioneer/buch.html).

The base for exploration was a small village called Baiwu that is a ~60 minute bus ride north of the large town of Yunyuan, which can be reached by bus (4-6 hours) from the large city of Xichang. It is possible to take a bus (~8 hours) or make an internal flight (<1 hour) to Xichang from Chengdu. The Chengdu-Xichang flight costs ~£100 and we got a flight from London to Chengdu for ~£550. Buses are very inexpensive (~£20).



*The man who originally spotted the Liangshan karst; and was himself spotted by Martin Laverty.*  
Image from:  
[http://www.paeo.de/hl/hand\\_maz/pioneer/buch.html](http://www.paeo.de/hl/hand_maz/pioneer/buch.html)



**Figure 1.** Map showing the location of Leibo, and the Liangshan Mountains (red circle) near the town of Yunyuan. Also shown is the Wudu area to the northeast of Chengdu. Chengdu and Xichang have airports. Previous Hong Meigui expeditions have investigated the mountains west of Zhongdian..

**Figure 2.** Map showing dolines in the extensive karstic limestone adjacent to Baiwu.



**B**aiwu (Fig. 2) has one basic guesthouse, and a series of small restaurants that serve relatively varied and tasty local food. You can buy beer next to the restaurant. A slap up meal and several beers is ~50 p. Accommodation is ~£1 per night. One of China's largest and more colourful ethnic minorities, the Yi, dominate this area. This adds greatly to the experience, with unusual square hats and striped skirts in abundance. The Yi seem to have taken to playing pool, and pool tables can be found in the smallest villages in the mountains. There are few amenities in Baiwu but Yunyuan has a wide variety of shops and restaurants.

**B**aiwu lies within a large area of deeply weathered karst that extends for ~15 x 35 km which had not been previously explored for caves. The village lies on the gently dipping northern flank of the Yunyuan basin. The Liangshan Mountains rise beyond Baiwu and form the northern rim of this basin. The northern flank of the Liangshan Mountains drops steeply to a major river gorge with total relief in excess of 2000 metres.

**A** bus route heads north for ~20 km from Baiwu to the village of Guabi. This bus route greatly aids transport of caving gear. The botanist Handel- Mazzetti stayed in Guabi. On his return to Yunyuan from Guabi along a valley 'marked by numerous depressions and cave-ins' he found 'a swallowhole in the limestone' that he estimated to be 80 metres deep, as it took a stone four seconds to reach the bottom. This valley appears to coincide with the modern Guabi-Baiwu bus route. We observed that the valley contains large dolines with entrances that we explored to -120 m. A major tarmac road crosses the Liangshan Mountains further to the west, linking the Yi stronghold of Muli with Yunyuan. Rather surprisingly, 3 km west of Baiwu a charity has set up a new school with teachers from Taiwan, USA, Japan and France. These are the only foreigners we met in the area and they were a valuable source of translators and friendly advice. Most people in Baiwu spoke the Yi dialect rather than Mandarin.

**T**he Liangshan Karst can be subdivided into low-lying karst plateaus, intermediate valleys and wooded hillsides and high plateaus with small shrubs and heather.

### Low lying karst plateaus

These plateaus are pockmarked with deep dolines that are clearly visible in satellite images (Fig. 2). Examples occur on either side of Baiwu and next to the Yunyuan-Muli main road. The dolines are commonly several tens of metres deep. Numerous entrances were logged in the dolines, although time allowed only a few entrances to be descended near to Baiwu. One entrance to the northeast of Baiwu produced an 800 m long through trip. There is obviously a

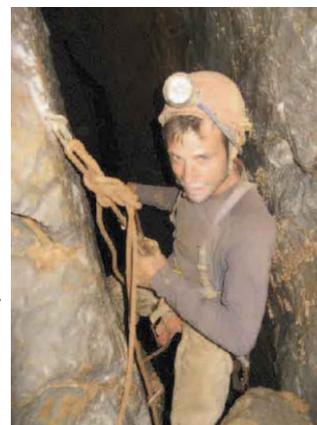
**Figure 3.** (Top) Fleur rigging down a 120 m pitch series. (Bottom) Si on a pitch in a 120 m deep cave at intermediate elevation, that is still ongoing.



significant amount of cave passage below these karst plateaus, but with minimal (< 300 m) depth potential.

### Intermediate Elevations

Significant numbers of large dolines were also found at intermediate elevations along the Baiwu-Guabi bus route, in an area with large internally drained valleys. Many of these doline take lots of water when it rains. Entrances in these dolines were descended to -120 metres (Fig. 3) and in some cases vertical pitch series were left ongoing. In addition to the vertical pots below the dolines, we saw evidence for large horizontal passages. A 50 plus metre diameter collapse feature near the bus route is particularly noteworthy. (See bottom picture, front cover.) The main passage is blocked but a small hole in the cliff was left unentered. In many areas there is dense forest at this intermediate elevations that makes prospecting for entrances difficult.



### High Plateaus

Surprisingly, given the amount of water sinking, we saw almost no resurgences on the southern flank of the Liangshan Mountains. It may be that the caves drain towards the deep gorge on the northern side of the mountain range, in which case they may have significant depth potential. There is up to 2,100 metres of depth potential between the high plateaus and the base of the limestone in the gorge. Exploration of the high plateaus is a priority. We had little time to explore these high plateaus. Pete and Fleur were shown and logged 15 entrances near the crest of the Guabi-Baiwu bus route in a period of ~4 hours. Si and Johan traverse this high plateau back to Baiwu and reported large expanses of limestone and karst features. However, the high plateaus seem to lack the large dolines seen at low elevations.



**Figure 4.** Fleur logging unexplored entrance on high plateau

## Wudu Area, Gansu Province

This area was only visited for three days by Si, Johan, Andy and Sarah. Wudu itself is a moderately sized town at the end of a 18 hour bus route from Chengdu. The town is roughly similar to Yunyuan in its size and range of facilities, but looks a bit grubbier. All basic amenities and services can be found here. The team confirmed the impressive scale of the Wanxiang show cave (Fig. 5 for survey) and that an extensive high limestone plateau is present above the show cave. Satellite images suggest there is depth potential of up to 1,500 metres in this area.

The plateau consists of a series of rolling hills (see top picture, front cover), mostly given over to the growing of crops. Access onto the plateau is steep but progression across it is eased by a series of footpaths used by farmers. There were no signs of surface water on the plateau but sufficient water must be available to supply the isolated farmsteads scattered across it. Some entrances were logged during a brief foray onto the plateau

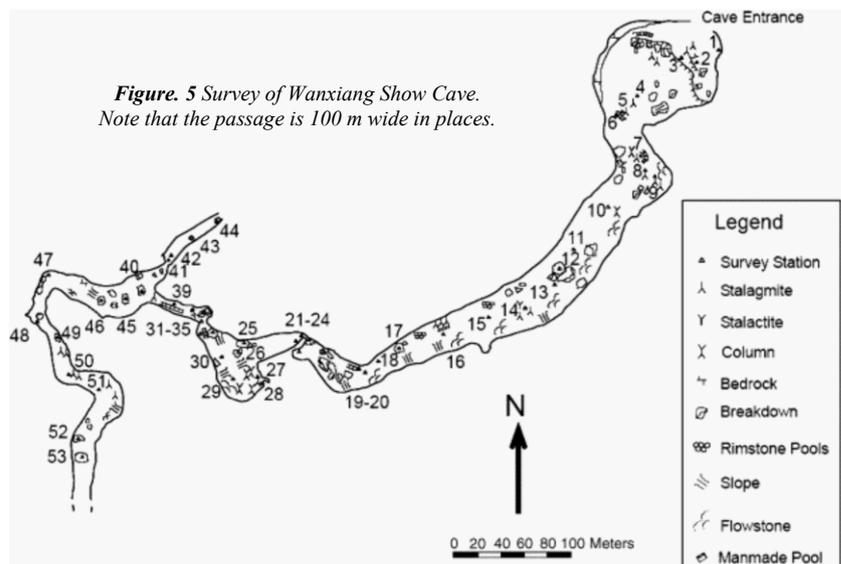


Figure 5 Survey of Wanxiang Show Cave.  
Note that the passage is 100 m wide in places.

areas. One cave was entered but exploration was stopped at the head of a 5m pitch, after which the cave appeared to continue horizontally, though no draught was felt. Si Flower also reports a 'donkeys dick' load of limestone along the bus route from Wude back towards Chengdu.

Pete Talling

## Treasurer's Report March 2007

The first thing that will be noticed about this year's accounts is that the format in which they have been presented has changed slightly. This is a side effect of the fact that I now keep the records on a spreadsheet rather than on paper which makes it easier to produce the accounts as part of that file. The opportunity was therefore taken, largely at the suggestion of our Auditor, to change the layout in this way, allowing more information to be presented in the form of the comparable figures for the previous year.

This makes it even harder to disguise the fact that we have produced a considerable surplus this year, for the second year running. There are a number of reasons for this: a lower cost for *Proceedings* than I had budgeted for; a significant improvement in investment earnings; a large donation which has been earmarked but not yet spent; better financial control over areas such as the personal PI insurance and a significant fall in spending on Stationery and Duplicating thanks to the deal done with Ward's Solicitors

over advertising space in the Newsletter.

Other changes that show up here and will be repeated in future years are the transfer of 10% of the *Caves of County Clare Reserve Fund* to the *Museum and Library Fund* and the banishment of the rates bill for the Hut to its proper place in the *Hut Fund*.

Ah yes, the *Hut Fund*. 10 years ago, I stood here and said that we needed to spend money re-roofing the Hut. Last summer we finally did it. We also did a lot of other things including installing electric lighting, hence the serious net overspend here. However, if usage by members keeps up as it has this year - and people pay their Hut fees - that will soon be replenished.

The significant grant aid that we have received over this past year from the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund; was ring-fenced into the Library and Museum Fund to pay for book binding and for the data projector. More was received in the form of direct payments, to buy lights and to

subsidise Kayleigh's Fresh BBQ, which was a resounding success. In all we received over £1,400 from this source, for which I am extremely grateful. The Trustees would, I am sure, be happy to hear from anyone who wishes to contribute to the continued work of the Fund.

I would like to give thanks to the help I have received from our Auditor, Derek Allen. Derek has now retired from the University but seems happy to continue to keep a watchful eye on our financial probity. He deserves the gratitude of you all.

Finally, it is now some 22 years since I took on this job, after Oliver's death. I think I have the Society's finances under reasonable control and the work is not particularly onerous, but the membership needs to think very hard as to whether it is healthy for such an important task to remain in one person's hands for so long. I am happy to continue for now, but you do need to look to the future.

Graham Mullan

## UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

### RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDING 31ST JANUARY 2007

2005/6	<b><u>Receipts</u></b>		£	£
£				
2,360.50	Members subscriptions			2,518.50
660.00	Student member subscriptions			864.00
406.80	<b><u>Union Grants:</u></b>	Capital	324.00	
300.00		Current	<u>300.00</u>	624.00
2,500.00	Tratman Grant			0.00
269.50	Grant from Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund			0.00
260.10	<b><u>Interest on investments</u></b>	Bank	542.31	
39.61		N.S.B.	<u>11.24</u>	553.55
857.40	Sales of Publications (not C.of CC)			£969.90
65.00	Donations			636.00
518.55	Tax refund on Covenants			539.21
0.50	Sales of Charterhouse Permits			-8.50
165.00	Personal contributions to PI Insurance			462.50
<hr/>				
8,402.96	<b>Total Receipts</b>			<hr/> <b>7,159.16</b> <hr/>
	<b><u>Payments</u></b>			
3,000.00	<b><u>Proceedings:</u></b>	Printing	1,450.00	
501.13		Postage	<u>265.55</u>	1,715.55
460.80	<b><u>Tools &amp; Equipment</u></b>	Capital	324.00	
		Current	<u>13.50</u>	337.50
58.00	Library Acquisitions			246.10
30.00	Sessional Meetings			
149.86	Other Postages			96.00
0.00	Hon Sec's Petty Cash			0.00
371.40	Stationery & Duplicating			79.32
36.74	Property Rates			x
1,104.50	<b><u>Insurances</u></b>	Third Party	1,121.00	
937.84		Property	<u>818.39</u>	1,939.39
140.00	Subscriptions			142.00
234.00	Travel Money			265.00
25.00	Donation to Mendip Rescue Organisation			25.00
65.00	(Surplus) /Deficit on Annual Dinner			(2.00)
	IT expenses			207.17
10.88	Miscellaneous			
<hr/>				
7,125.15	<b>Total Payments</b>			<hr/> <b>5,051.03</b> <hr/>
<hr/>				
1,277.81	<b>Surplus/(Deficit) for year</b>			<hr/> <b>2,108.13</b> <hr/>

*Balanced partially 2007*

# UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST JANUARY 2007

2005/06	<u>Assets</u>		£	£
£				
15,995.00	<u>Investments:</u>	Capital Reserve/AMC	19823.41	
1,278.47		NSB Account	0	19823.41
1,094.29	Current Bank Account			209.17
16.80	Cash in Hand	Hon. Secretaries	16.8	
0.82		Hon Treasurer	5.22	22.02
<b><u>18,385.38</u></b>	<b>Total Assets</b>			<b><u>20,054.60</u></b>

Represented by:

### Reserves

	<u>Hut Fund</u>			
3,464.89		brought forward	3,579.53	
114.64		add/(subtract) year result	<u>-1,015.98</u>	2,563.55
	<u>Printed Publications Fund</u>			
2,330.00		brought forward	2,330.00	2,330.00
	<u>Library &amp; Museum Fund</u>			
265.88		brought forward	295.88	
		Tfr from CoCC Res.	1,017.23	
		grant from OCL fund	1,236.50	
30.00		add/(subtract) year result	<u>-1,248.45</u>	1,301.16
	<u>Equipment Hire Fund</u>			
180.24		brought forward	310.24	
		Tfr from R & P Res	300.00	
130.00		add/(subtract) year result	<u>-58.50</u>	551.74
	<u>Caves of County Clare Reserve</u>			
8,436.22		brought forward	9,524.78	
		Tfr to Lib & Mus	-1,017.23	
1,088.56		add/(subtract) year result	<u>647.52</u>	9,155.07
	<u>Receipts &amp; Payment Reserve</u>			
1,067.14		brought forward	2,344.95	
		TFR to Equip Hire	-300.00	
1,277.81		add/(subtract) year result	<u>2,108.13</u>	4,153.08
<b><u>18,385.38</u></b>	<b>Total Reserves</b>			<b><u>20,054.60</u></b>

### HONORARY AUDITOR'S REPORT:

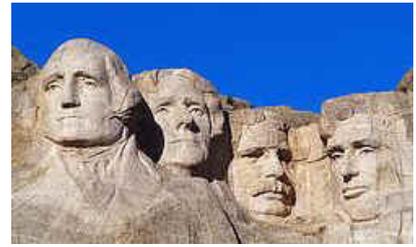
I have examined the above Receipts & Payments Account for the year ended 31st January 2007, and the attached Balance Sheet as at that date and certify that they are in accordance with the Society's accounting records and explanations provided.



D.J. Allen CPFA

# The President's Remarks

## AGM 10 March 2007



He began by saying how saddened we were to learn of the death on 19th February of Louise Donovan, wife of Desmond, our senior Vice President. Louise (née Sward) read Geology at Bristol, graduating in 1957. She preferred womens' hockey to soft sports like caving - UBSS's loss. She not only raised three children but also held her own as a professional geologist in the rugged world of North Sea platforms and oil exploration in Texas.

As always, he thanked last year's committee and officers for their work for UBSS, particularly our Secretaries, and Graham Mullan, our Editor for 14 years now and Treasurer for 22. Our thanks also to Gina and Clive, our *Newsletter* editors, for making the New Series so attractive, and to Wards for their support which has made it affordable; and lastly, to our Vice-Presidents, Chris Hawkes, John Pitts and

Desmond (for 44 years), still a vigorous contributor to our *Proceedings*, with articles on Gough's Cave stratification in the latest number and Aveline's Hole stratification in the previous one, both written remarkably quickly and bringing clarity to very imperfect records.

He welcomed the new committee and reminded members that though UBSS is first and foremost a student society, in most years students are outnumbered 2:1 by 'senior' members, whose subscriptions largely help pay for our *Proceedings*. Are we doing enough for them? Could we make the AGM a more attractive occasion for them in a more agreeable venue? Should we make sure that the *Newsletter* keeps their interests in mind?

## The Historic Environment of the Mendip Hills AONB (or what had the President been up to lately ?)

Well, he represented UBSS at the annual conference of the Mendip AONB Partnership (AONB = Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), held in Ubley on the north edge of Mendip, on Saturday 10 February. The main theme was English Heritage (EH)'s new research project: "The Historic Environment of the Mendip Hills AONB". This runs from 2006 to 2010, bringing a cultural approach to historic landscapes, archaeology, and buildings, with new aerial photography and LIDAR surveys commissioned by the AONB in 2005.

It will examine and define known archaeological sites; check out previous research; and find gaps in understanding and focus resources on these; widen participation and provide training opportunities in fieldwork & building recording; and lastly, put the historic environment on other people's agendas. As well as the AONB area, it will take in the villages flanking Mendip. There is also a *Lifelines* project on Mendip stone walls - how to repair and rebuild them.

EH had asked for details of current research by local societies and groups, so AMA 'posted' 2 projects of reappraisal and reassessment currently being undertaken by UBSS: 1) Read's Cavern (leaders: Linda Wilson & AMA); 2) Tynning's Farm barrows (leader: AMA).

In one talk, AMA's ear heard mention of the four Priddy Circles, behind the *Castle of Comfort*, as possible late Neolithic ritual monuments, surrounded by minery depressions. This prompted instant reassessment, surely our Hon. Member Willy Stanton had shown the depressions to be mostly sink-holes (*Proceedings*, 1985) ? And when Tratman dug parts of Circle 1 (*Proc.* 1967), which is 152 m (500 ft) across, he found a circular bank which had had vertical faces inside and out, 1.5-2.0 m high, revetted by hurdling supported by stout posts and stakes. It had a single gateway 4.8 m wide with big holes for gate posts of stone or wood; the area enclosed was 1.8 hectares (4.5 acres). It had been built in an open treeless landscape, there were no finds whatever, not even any flint implements.

What was the bank for? AMA's hunch is that it was to keep cattle in at night (the AGM audience said "and sheep"), and cattle rustlers and wolves out, probably a later Bronze Age cattle corral, when flint tools were no longer used. A paper for *Proceedings* seems called for: "Priddy Circles - IFAQS and some Answers".

One little conference tailpiece from among the local society presentations; Blagdon Historical Society are using an excellent cataloguing program called *Eclipse*, we could borrow it to try for our library and museum, it'll do all sorts of objects, 800 books a day!

Finally AMA hopes you read his little piece in the last *Newsletter* and spotted the (un)deliberate mistake: it was Roman salt production on an industrial scale on the North Somerset "levels" and not lead, - that was up at Charterhouse.

*A. M. ApSimon*

# Goldney Well

Most Bristol students will probably be familiar with Goldney Grotto, the artificial underground room in the grounds of Goldney Hall built in the 18th century by the family that owned the mansion and after whom it is now named. Some will be aware that the fountain in the Grotto was originally fed by water lifted from a deep well by a steam engine housed in the nearby tower. And some UBSS members have descended the well.

The Society has visited this site



several times; in about 1969 some students then resident in Goldney pirated it one night. The descent, on ladders, was accomplished and the only casualty was Jane Grant's bra on which the underwiring broke as she squeezed back past the gate. Some years later, in 1973, we were contacted by the then Warden of Goldney who wished our help in assessing whether an electric pump could be put in place to feed the fountain (the steam engine was removed a very long time ago). I think she was somewhat surprised to learn how much we already knew about the place. The upshot of this was a second descent, by Charlie Self, Chris Smart and Mike Bertenshaw, and a report submitted to the Warden. Charlie made a sketch survey and concluded there was insufficient water at the bottom of the well to supply the fountain. The well was found to be 37 m in depth from the lip of the access tunnel. The water at the bottom was about 60 cm deep at this time.

In 1996 Bob Savage, then the Society's President and emeritus Professor of Geology, wanted a sample of the well's water for analysis and so another visit was arranged. A motley bunch of cavers turned up on the evening of the 21st August to meet Bob and Peggy Stembridge, who has written the history of Goldney Hall and its gardens and, eventually, the gate to the side tunnel was opened (a new padlock would now be needed) and a descent organised. We rigged a rigid ladder across the well so that we could cross and survey the continuation tunnel and, on a second trip a week later, rigged an extremely iffy belay from a scaffold bar with someone sat on either end. I was the lucky man who clipped into the rope and zipped down.

It was just as Charlie had described it; the shaft is brick-lined until just 7 m from the bottom when it breaks out into massive Carboniferous Limestone. The chamber at the bottom is roughly 2 m by 2 m with a low extension of a couple of metres on the west side. The floor is of silt with some pieces of stone and wood. A length of iron pipe, the last remnant of Goldney's pump, rests against the wall. At this time the water was about a metre deep. I collected the water sample for Bob and then made a rapid exit when they turned the fountain on and I got soaked. I never did see the results of the water analysis, Bob died before he could finish this particular piece of research

For a number of years after this visit I mullied on the problems raised by this visit. Bob's survey of the Grotto (Savage, 1989) showed the well to be just

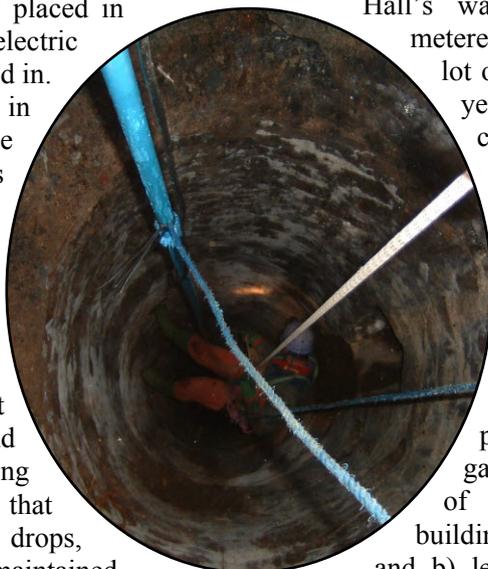


beyond the tower, in the wrong place for the "fire engine" to have directly powered it. Moreover Bob's paper had a note indicating that the water had originally been raised by a wind pump. However a degree of research at odd times over the years produced no further evidence to take this hypothesis further; neither could I find much more about the fire engine itself nor about how long the system was operational for, nor when it fell into disrepair. Charlie's thought that the well could never have supplied the fountain could not be proven one way or the other. Interestingly enough Peggy has never found a reference to when the well was dug either, it could easily predate the Goldney family's development of the gardens and grotto. It was with great interest, therefore, that I received the email requesting our help once again.

The current work has included three site visits, so far, and a descent by Clive Owen. Several questions have been answered. For a start, a manhole at the top of the shaft now facilitates entry and shows unequivocally that the well



is in the “right” place with regard to the tower. Bob’s survey was wrong! Another bright idea bites the dust. The manhole was placed in order to allow an electric pump to be lowered in. This has been in place now for some time and has demonstrated that Charlie was both right and wrong. “Normal” water level is roughly where it was when I descended, not Charlie, and continuous pumping has shown that although the level drops, a flow rate can be maintained, but only of 4 - 5 litres per minute. This is insufficient to feed the cascade, but a storage tank has been discovered built into the side of the grotto complex. It would seem that the water was collected and stored in sufficient quantity to feed the cascade but only during short periods when guests were present.



That was not the reason for installing a pump, however. Goldney Hall’s water supply is metered and costs a lot of money every year. This is clearly not to supply the Hall itself - it is well-known that students don’t wash - but to deal with losses elsewhere. The ponds in the garden are a part of the listed building notification and b) leak badly. The well is thus being used to top up the water in these. Interestingly the water is *not* used to supply the cascade as it is too murky.

On our third visit the pump was removed as it had developed an electrical fault and we returned for a fourth visit and second descent by

Clive to ensure that its replacement was properly positioned in the water. Unfortunately (for the SRT freaks) the addition of electrical cables, pipes and other paraphernalia means that future descents will not be possible unless we are needed again should the pump require maintenance.

As a spin-off from this work, Linda and I have been asked to submit a report on the conservation of the grotto itself. Watch this space.

*Graham Mullan*

*Photos: Jon Brown*

**Reference:**

Savage, R.J.G., 1989. Natural History of the Goldney Garden Grotto, Clifton, Bristol. *Journal of the Garden Historical Society*. 17. 1

## ‘Not Read’s Cavern’

I read with interest Graham’s article in the last issue about the mystery surrounding a cavern full of bones near Read’s cavern. I have a small amount of information that I thought might add a piece to the jigsaw.

I live at Hill Farm, just up behind the UBSS hut. My parents lived there from before the war and as they were then only just in their 20’s they were friendly with the UBSS students and their associates, who used to use the hut on a more regular basis than now. These included Charles Barker and Francis Goddard (as in GB), and Herbert Taylor and his wife.

I showed Graham’s article to Mum and we tried to make some sense of the mystery. Certainly scout troops used to camp at Hill Farm and the camp site was only 500 yards or so from Read’s and the site of the mystery cavern. Unfortunately she has no recollection of an explosion blowing up a cavern, but as she put it, ‘there were always things being blown up then’!

Mum does clearly remember going for a walk one summer’s day along the track which runs from the

UBSS hut, past Read’s and beyond. There was a small group of people doing archaeological type excavations in a hollow, within a few yards of left-hand side of the track, between what was then the “University bath” and the old entrance to Hill Farm. Amongst the group were Herbert Taylor and his wife, with whom she briefly chatted.

Mr Bridson reported the unfortunate destruction of the well decorated cavern containing bones as happening on ‘a hot summer’s day in 1939’. I think that either the same year, or within the next 5 years, Herbert Taylor and friends may have been investigating the remains of this scene of destruction. If this was the excavation which Mum saw, its site can be estimated to within a hundred yards or so.

It is a pity that there are not more facts to go on, but maybe Graham can come up with some more information from the archives.

*Chris Hayes*

# DAVID JOHN IRWIN

## “WIG”

17 November 1935 – 27 March 2007

Dave Irwin, known to his friends as Wig, died at home from an aneurism, sitting peacefully in his black swivel armchair, in his front room, with half a glass of wine in front of him on the coffee table. Not a bad way to go, all things considered. I suspect it's the way he would have wanted to go, but for everybody he left behind, it was far, far too soon.

Wig was born in Braunton, Devon and went to work as a draughtsman at Westlands in Yeovil at the age of 16. He later came to work for British Aerospace at Filton, here in Bristol. But it was never just his work which defined Wig. His passion was always caving and everything connected with it. Soon after starting caving on Mendip he joined the BEC and became an enthusiastic and committed cave surveyor, spending literally thousands of hours underground in St. Cuthbert's Swallet, engaged in the high grade survey of the cave which finally came to fruition in the BEC's major publication on the cave.

He was known to huge numbers of cavers through his authorship of four successive editions of Mendip

Underground, which have assisted numerous people in finding their way around and enjoying Mendip's subterranean landscape. Mind you, in spite of that, he invariably got any pub-quiz question based on his own book hopelessly wrong! His defence, when we would round on him in justifiable complaint was always, "Don't ask me, I only wrote the f#@#@#g thing!"

Dave became a UBSS member twenty years ago, in 1987. Although he was never directly connected with Bristol University, he had worked extensively with the Society as a contributor to Proceedings, initially in the context of the large series of papers connected with the Cheddar Caves, which began in 1986. He was always a strong supporter of Proceedings, contributing papers not only on Cheddar, but also on Plumley's Hole and Banwell Bone Cave and at the time of his death, he was working on another paper for Proceedings, on his theories about the Lost Cave of Cheddar, intending, so he would gleefully tell me, a debunking of what he regarded as erroneous views published elsewhere.

His main passions in later years were his collection of classical music, his writing and his postcard collection. Whenever I spoke to Dave, which was an awful lot, he would always tell me what he was up to on his various projects: his contributions to the forthcoming Swildon's book, being published by the Wessex, his various papers, and his ongoing magnum opus, the History of Mendip Caving. I used to joke that it would never be finished as it was clearly being written in real time, with even our conversations being recorded. His response, as ever, was a cheerful, "F##k off!"

The postcard collection alone took up vast amounts of time and space. I never knew how he found the time to maintain and catalogue everything, but the fact remained that he did. He had an encyclopaedic memory for everything in his collection. It was awesome. I used to trail around after him at postcard fairs in Bristol, buying one or two here or there, not really sure what I had in my own meagre collection, listening to Wig discourse not just on what he'd found, but on every conceivable version of every card he saw, dismissing many

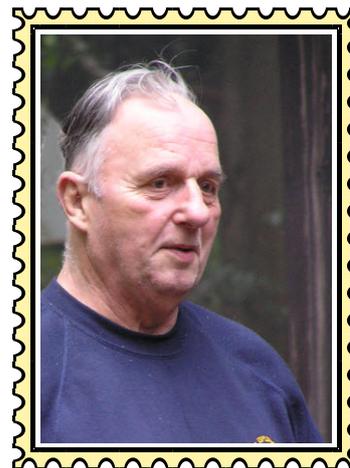
of the common ones as “wallpaper”, his favourite phrase when bemoaning the lack of decent material.

Mendip has not only lost one of its best known and most loved characters, but it has lost the unimaginably huge clearing-house of information that was Wig’s brain. No matter what minutiae of caving information anyone needed, it was always quicker and easier to go to Dave rather than to try and find something yourself. And he might swear at us all for being lazy, but he’d also provide what we needed, complete with imaginative insults along the way! Jonathan Roberts coined the phrase a *Wigabyte* of information, ie something bigger than a megabyte and a gigabyte put together, defined as “Everything you’ve never wanted to know, but the old bugger’s going to tell you anyway!” That drew the usual response when I relayed it to him as well.

Dave was recently made a Vice-President of the Wessex Cave Club, which brought him a huge amount of good-humoured teasing from his friends and caused Graham and I to point out that he was a life-member of the BEC, a Wessex V-P, but he the only club he actually paid a subscription to was UBSS. And there was no doubt about the fact that he was proud of it! For many years, he used to come out to the Hut at New Year for the annual celebrations and would always bring excellent roast potatoes with him.

His contributions to the caving world were quite literally too numerous to list here, but include his work with CSCC as Chairman for many years, the MRO, the Speleo History Group and the Mendip Cave Registry, to name but a few.

He was good company and a great friend. I’ll miss his enthusiasm, his knowledge, his sense of humour and even



his weird taste in television (he was certainly the only person I knew with a complete set of *Murder She Wrote* on video!). His passing will leave a huge gap in so many different ways that no one person can possibly replace.

I’m still waiting for him to send us all a postcard, complaining that the survey of the Other Place isn’t up to scratch! It’ll come, I’m sure of it .....

*Linda Wilson*

### **A note from the editors**

We hope you have all enjoyed reading the latest newsletter and send our thanks to all who contributed.

If you would like to send us an article for the next issue please email us at:  
[newsletter@ubss.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@ubss.org.uk)

Images are always welcome but please obtain permission to use them first.

*Gina & Clive*

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