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Third Series

Number 9

UBSS Newsletter

Charterhouse Extension
Mendip Cave Rescue Workshop
WW II Archaeology Around the Hut

Summer 2008

The Charterhouse Cave Extension



The Charterhouse extension looking downstream from the Blades (the stream is flowing under the floor of the passage).
Photo: Pete Hann

The UBSS team working in Great Swallet have missed the big prize and, now that Charterhouse Cave has gone, Bat Dig in GB certainly does deserve the accolade “Best potential in Mendips”, though that potential has been rather diminished. But it is not all doom and gloom, the Society did have a representative embedded in the successful team of Wessex Cave Club diggers at Charterhouse. What follows is my short summary of the discoveries.

A brief introduction is perhaps in order. Alison and I were instrumental in the somewhat controversial discovery of Charterhouse Cave in 1982. At the time we had little experience in tackling boulder ruckles so when we found at the end of the cave, the massive collapse beyond the Grotto of the Singing Stal, was not going to yield to a few furlges of a crowbar

we sub-contracted the dig to our club mate Pete Hann and set our sights elsewhere on Mendip. Pete had dug with Willie Stanton and he copied the methods Willie employed at Reservoir Hole. Cement everything in sight, remove the boulders blocking the way, move forward, cement everything in sight, remove the boulders blocking the way, move forward and repeat again, again and again. It is very effective but also very slow and tedious. The first assault ran out of steam at the end of the 1980s after over eighty trips. Digging continued sporadically for a few years longer with the final cementing session in 1997. Whenever Ali and I discussed potential dig sites the question of Charterhouse was always raised in the conversation. Not only was it ‘unfinished business’ but with over one hundred and sixty metres’ depth potential to Cheddar, in an area of proven cave development, it really did warrant another go. A couple of trips were done in 2003 with Tony Boycott to pop boulders at the end but it was not until January 2007 that a concerted attack began again with Ali, Pete Hann and Nigel

Graham (another of the 80s diggers) undertaking cementing trips each fortnight. I was happy to give moral support from my armchair. Then in April, with Ali complaining that the team were having trouble finding enough ballast in the splash pools through the cave for the concrete, I foolishly suggested that instead of wasting an hour or so each trip sieving grit, they bring gravel in from the surface. From then on I become the fairly regular fourth member of the team, co-opted to act as a sherpa, helping to carry loads to the workforce. Fortunately, after delivering my burden, with only three people able to work at the end, unless my services were required as first reserve, I was usually able to slope off back to the surface and the sunshine. The new campaign finally succeeded on the twenty eighth digging trip on 16 February 2008, thirty metres into the choke and twenty metres below Singing Stal (an average rate of progress from 1982 of less than twenty five centimetres per trip). Another useless statistic I probably will not be thanked for mentioning was that

Cover Picture:

*Unnamed Cave, Loser Plateau, Austria
2007 Expedition*

Photo: Andrew Atkinson

the combined ages of the four of us was now over two hundred years.

Description

The cemented section of the boulder choke consists of a series of vertical steps with a final constructed pot of six metres. The line of attack followed the solid left hand wall. Gaps in the choke ahead and off to the right were commonly encountered but the diggers resisted their lure and stayed with the wall heading down into the draught. At the point of breakthrough the left wall undercuts and a small stally area is entered with the Charterhouse stream, last seen sinking before the Grotto of the Singing Stal, encountered again. The stream disappears down beside the wall but boulders prevent it being followed. Instead, it is necessary to move out into the heart of the ruckle, which is now very open and near vertical in nature. The way zigzags down and in one particularly dangerous area one has to squeeze through a false floor of jammed boulders. The ruckle – Chill Out Choke - finally ends twenty metres vertically below the breakthrough point where a steep boulder slope leads down into solid passage. Near the base of the rubble slope are two huge blocks with curtain draperies horizontal to their formation. Goodness knows when they fell or from where they came.

The passage continues as a large rift some five metres high, dropping steadily downwards. Aragonite boulders litter the floor. At one point where the roof lowers all the stalagmites have broken ends - we think from boulder strikes during some mega flood surge. Some eighty metres from the choke the passage reduces dramatically in size and becomes a rift very similar to Reynolds at the bottom of Longwood August. A couple of metres in height, it is only negotiable at floor level and has three pinch points, although nothing is as tight as the gate squeeze in the entrance series. The Narrows is thirty metres long; at the far end a fossil passage – the original stream route - can be followed back overhead for about ten metres to a wall of calcited cobbles. The way on is then down a nice little six metre pitch. On the first exploration I had to return to the ruckle to collect a ladder, while Ali had to restrain Pete Hann, infected with a bad case of exploration fever, from throwing

himself over. When we came out of the Narrows to reach the pitch head and saw the big passage below we each thought Wow! Below the pitch you climb down over flowstone coated boulders and encounter another streamway - GB. This was proved by a fluorescein test in March, the streamway turning bright green some thirty five minutes after the dye was poured into GB at the bottom of Main Passage. With Charterhouse heading straight for the GB Great Chamber area we were expecting to have to confront another boulder choke but we have gone below and skirted to the east of it. From the Confluence, after a short crawling and crouching section, downstream continues in fine fashion for most of its length around two metres wide and averaging 2-3 metres in height. There are many formations; at one point a pair of stalagmites shaped like twisted broadsword blades have grown down to almost touch the stream. There are several small down steps, though generally the gradient is shallow. Some one hundred and sixty metres from the Confluence the passage lowers and further on the stream flows off into a tiny crack. However a silt bank to the side, which we had to dig through, enters a large flood bypass and the streamway is soon rejoined. Unfortunately only forty metres from the silt bank the roof lowers again, this time to a sump. At about 75m OD, the cave currently is a smidgen less than six hundred foot deep.

From the breakthrough the passages head south and then from around the Blades the way turns south-east, jigs back south, and then heads purposeful off south-east again along an amazingly straight



Looking downstream from the Frozen Cascade (just visible on the left).

Photo: Pete Hann

section of streamway. All credit to Andy Farrant for his sketch in the December 1998 Newsletter postulating what we diggers might find. My only beef is to query where are those vadose inlets from Bertie's Pot he predicted joining the streamway?! As with GB there has been a lot of glacial infilling with subsequent re-erosion. In many parts of the extension there are old cobble banks calcited high up the passage walls and in the roof. Also you find cobbles and stones jammed between stalagmites a metre or so above stream level. We hope water levels this high only occur during exceptional 1968 type floods.

Fifty metres before the dug silt choke there is a fine calcite cascade four metres wide and four metres high on the eastern side of the streamway (away from GB). At the top there is a letterbox passage with a flowstone floor which comes up almost to meet the roof. Ali managed to force her way through on a trip on 15th March and found on the far side that the passage changed from bedding to rift. With

many large sandstone cobbles on the floor it had all the signs of being a major fossil passage. Pete H and myself, being of less petite frame were unable to follow. However Ali, being a lady, did not investigate further. Invited to the MCG Dinner the following weekend we speculated about the possibility of an unexplored inlet with over five hundred feet of vertical potential. After Easter we returned, with a ground sheet to protect the Frozen Cascade. The squeeze was quickly chiselled open, the calcite being very crystalline, like over-cooked fudge. Almost immediately on from where Ali stopped the passage swung right (downstream) and broke out into another of Charterhouse's two metre square passages. Gently descending, we followed this for an estimated sixty metres down, across small gour pools, until the roof lowered to a duck immediately beyond which is a large static sump. Approaching the duck there are several centimetres of mud coating the floor rippled like sand on a beach after the tide has gone out. I dived

the sump today, 3 May, but was unable to find a continuation because everything appears to have become blocked by ancient stal.

Future potential

The possibility of pushing upstream from the Confluence and connecting to GB appears remote. The vertical separation between the two is approximately twenty five metres with a horizontal displacement of about twenty metres. Our passage terminates in a nasty choke with most of the stream flowing out from the base. In GB the choke at the end of the main passage has been backfilled by about thirty five metres of mud following the 68 flood and 1973 collapse at the head of the Gorge.

Before the surveying, we did think we might possibly have the end of the UBSS Bat Passage dig. Upstream of the Blades a five metre climb leads to a short phreatic passage heading in what we thought was the right direction but blocked by mud.

Interestingly, in the streamway below there is a formation which appears to have been recently washed with a muddy in-flow, which we speculated might have been from Ben Morley's pumping work at Bat Dig. The survey now shows this to be highly unlikely so what the source of the muddy water might have been we don't know.

The vertical range between the streamway sump and Cheddar risings is about fifty metres so there is still scope for 'dry' passage. The sump approach is fairly horizontal suggesting that the sump may not be short. The Read's Grotto and Tynning's Swallet streams are not that large and in a summer drought we might find that the sump is not a permanent feature. There is no evidence of water backing up before the sump and I cannot believe it is going to be either too tight or hundreds of metres long. A dive is planned for the near future.

Pete Moody

Mendip Cave Rescue GB Workshop 2008

Sat 17th May 2008 saw a gathering of cavers from many of the Mendip clubs at Charterhouse farm, ready to learn or refresh their knowledge of rescue techniques and equipment.

After registering with Madphil, we were put into groups for the underground stations which would make up most of the day and had coffee whilst listening to a presentation on some of the background aspects of MCR (the new name for MRO). As we were in Group 2 we had a demo of some of the equipment that can be used in rescue operations before we headed off to the cave.

Above ground we had a quick demo of communication using the Heyphone to speak to people underground. The higher pitch of female voices apparently makes us better phone operators. Once this was done, we headed underground to the top of the gorge and our first station where we had a talk on hypothermia and played with Little Dragon and an exposure tent which are used to warm people up.

Moving on we tried to relay a message on the underground Heyphone to the surface. The interference these phones experience is a result of underwater communication in the channel. Despite this our messages got through and we moved on to casualty assessment further down the cave where an accident had been set up and a guy from the ambulance service talked us through the assessment.

The next station further up the Gorge was casualty packaging where we had to load a suspected spinal injury on to a board ready to be extracted from the cave. The following station was at the bottom of Devil's Elbow, where a dummy on a stretcher had to be manoeuvred down the climb and out of the cave via the Gorge. This took a lot of team work, planning and communication between us. On reaching the junction to the ladder up to Devil's Elbow we moved on to our final station which was pitch hauling up to the top of the ladder and back down again. Time constraints meant that Tom had already rigged the pitch and we just had a talk on how this was done and the equipment explained before we headed up the ladder to carry out the haul and lower before de rigging the scenario and heading out of the cave and back to the farm for coffee.

In the evening a debrief was held at the Hunter's where a free barrel of beer had been organised and changes to be made for future events were discussed.

All in all this was a very useful and enjoyable day which I found very worthwhile. I would strongly recommend it to any caver as it is a situation any of us could be involved in either as a helper or (hopefully not) the unfortunate casualty.

Kayleigh Gilkes

The President's Remarks: UBSS AGM, 1 March 2008



Anniversaries

AMA began by talking about anniversaries: on 19 March UBSS would be 89 years old, so next year, 2009, we would be 90. Should we send ourselves a card? Have an extra-special dinner? Obviously our centenary won't be till 2019, though Desmond Donovan, our senior Vice-President is already writing a paper about the Society's early archaeological work in the two decades before 1939, when the start of World War II brought its archaeological work to a halt.

Perhaps it's a bit soon to be asking how UBSS will want to celebrate its centenary? In any event, AMA won't be President then, so you'll have to sort it yourselves. HOWEVER, there is a centenary this year; anyone who reads our *Proceedings* ought to know that UBSS was the offspring of the Bristol Spelaeological Research Society, founded in 1912. This explored Aveline's Hole in Burrington Combe in the years before World War I, finding the remains of the largest-known Mesolithic cemetery in Britain. The BSRS itself had its origins in a trip to explore the Dundry Caves on the top of Dundry, really Roman freestone quarries, made in 1908 by 4 Bristol schoolboys - Leo Essery, Ted Purdue, Reg Read & Leo Palmer.

Reg Read was of course the discoverer of Read's Cavern and Read's Grotto; AMA remembers meeting him, while Leo was a vice-president for many years - AMA knew him quite well and particularly remembers carrying an electrode hundreds of metres across the mist-shrouded fields south of the Gruffy Ground at GB, during Leo's electrical resistivity testing experiment in which he claimed to have discovered Charterhouse Cave (only he didn't know what its name was); he also remembers the wag who thought it dead amusing to give the hand generator the odd whirl from time to time - 'aaaaargh!'. So that was where we began a hundred years ago; AMA hoped you'd raise your glasses to them that evening! (His thanks to Graham who'd remembered.)

What had the President been up to?

Not really a very productive year; about three months of it spent in trying to write a paper about the Priddy Circles; about the most useful thing connected with this was Jon Brown's kind calculation of the resources needed to make the hurdling, about 3½ km of it, which the excavator thought had been used to hold up the banks of the circles; turns out you'd need several hectares of hazel coppice and 2-3000 man hours of labour. Now I have to see if something can be made of the paper.

In October Angus Watkins & AMA made their customary trip to the Severn Estuary Levels Research Committee's annual conference, this time held in the Archaeology Department. We had Desmond Donovan with us, then recently moved to Wells; we were very impressed to see how keen younger researchers were to talk with him. Among the talks we heard:

Mark Horton of TV and the Archaeology Dept, talked about the Berkeley Tide Mill;

Martin Bell talked about his survey, done for English Heritage, of the archaeology of coastal sand deposits from the Severn Estuary down to Lands End. These can be pretty impressive, between 20 and 30 m thick locally at Brean Down, south of Weston-super-Mare (papers in *Proc.*); - in the Bronze Age, sand blew right up over the top of the Down, 75 m above sea-level. Another local site is on the south side of Bleadon Hill, near the west end of Mendip, where at 80 m above sea level there is a deposit of sand, covered by shingle cemented together. It looks like a beach bar, but its origin and age have remained mysterious - might it be very old, much older than the Ice Age? Might it have something to do with the ice sheet which occupied the Bristol Channel around 800,000 years ago (in the 1980s glacial till was found about 1.5 km south of Brean Down)? Rather embarrassingly, AMA now remembers getting a sample analysed in Southampton University Geology Department. It turned out to contain fresh Glauconite, a mineral found in marine sedimentary rocks. So perhaps it really is Ice Age in date - since when Mendip has risen by 80 metres or so - 0.1 mm per year.

There was lots more about Mendip in Martin's talk, but alas not enough space for it here; the same applies to several other talks - Mark Horton on the Berkeley tide mill, Steve Rippon on a new Roman port at Pawlett at the west end of the Polden Hills.

Simon Fitch's keynote address was really that, reporting on 3D seismic survey of the floor of the North Sea down to -120 m OD using an array of receivers 1 km or so long towed behind a ship. The area covered is the size of Wales, showing shorelines and ancient river channels of a submerged river system the size of the Bristol Channel, ranging in age from early Mesolithic, when hunters roamed the Dogger Hills, to back into the Palaeolithic with a whole series of yet older landscapes. 3D visualisation at 500 year intervals shows ancient submerged landscapes much more interesting and sometimes better preserved than inland. Now comes news, in *Current Archaeology*, of 120,000 years old handaxes dredged up from gravel on the sea floor 25 m deep off Great Yarmouth in Norfolk. Exciting times! And our library gets the SELRC Annual Reports, so you can read about these things for yourselves.

Postscript

On 10th April, Desmond and AMA, and about 100 of the great and good, among them Chris Hawkes, Jon Brown, Tony B and Graham (showing off amazing pictures of the latest extension to Charterhouse Cave), attended the British Geological Survey's book launch party for their two new walkers' guides to, and 1:25,000 scale maps of, the geology and landscape of Western and Eastern Mendip, held in Wells Museum. Very nice wine and nosh, very nice booklets and maps, the principal author/compiler being our own Dr Farrant, who gave a typical humorous Farrant introductory chat - one of 3-4. Most encouraging was the number of illustrations in the booklets acknowledged as originating in the Society's publications - we haven't been wasting our time. After which Pres & Vice-Pres had a serious discussion with a bottle, *Les Jamelles*, Vin de Pays d'Oc 2006.

NOTICES

Kay Dixon, 1927-2008

Last June I had the pleasure of attending Kay's 80th birthday party held in the village of Maids Moreton near Buckingham. Very sadly I returned on 2nd April to attend his funeral, Kay having died at home on 26th March. Kay had been a member of UBSS since coming to the University in 1945 - only Desmond Donovan and John Pitts have been members longer. Kay's caving with UBSS was done between 1945 and 1950, he having started caving while a pupil at Sidcot School, Winscombe, and he was an active participant in the early trips to County Clare. We became friends in Wills Hall and he introduced me to caving in 1947 with a trip down GB, discovered only three years before. Our friendship was no accident though; my father and an uncle of his were at school together in the 1890s and remained life-long friends. A fuller notice will, I hope, appear in *Proceedings*.

AMA

Society Message Board/Forum

We have set up a members only private forum at:

<http://z11.invisionfree.com/UBSS/index.php>

This can be used to chat to other members about caving, club stuff, or anything else of mutual interest. It may be of use to those who want to keep abreast of what's going on but who don't like their inboxes being filled with emails from the mailing list. It has been set up and will be administered by Ben Morley (thanks Ben) and will be, essentially, limited to UBSS members only. In case you forget where to find it, there will be a link from the Home Page of the Society's website at:

www.ubss.org.uk - which is worth a look itself if you haven't visited in some time.

Graham Mullan

Treasurer's Report 2007-2008

Last year I announced a significant surplus, and made no apology. This year, the surplus has dropped by 75% to only £400. I still make no apology. This is in part due to an increased printing bill, for an issue of *Proceedings* significantly larger than last year, and partially to reduced income in a number of categories. Most of these are normal fluctuations, the only one requiring comment is that for the tax rebate on Gift Aid. This is not because we have fewer signed declarations but due to a change in the rules meaning that we had to claim to the end of our financial year and not to the end of the fiscal year. The figure will return to normal this year.

Apart from the cost of *Proceedings* noted earlier there is little change to report on the expenditure front. We spent more on equipment but that was simply the end of our three-year grant cycle with the Union.

Turning to the Balance Sheet, our cash assets have risen slightly, mainly due to continual strong sales of the *Caves of County Clare and South Galway* and good use of the Hut. You will see that the Library and Museum Fund has been spending on materials and on scanning, getting back numbers of *Proceedings* online. More will be spent here as the photographic cataloguing project gets underway. Spending in this category and in that of the Equipment Hire Fund have been generously supported by the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund.

To the Trustees of that fund, I give my thanks, and to those responsible for the Tratman Fund in the University; also the Union Treasurer for our continued grant income. Without all these funding sources we could not do all that we do. However our major source of funding remains our members. The Silent Majority who pay their subscriptions and support our appeals simply to give back what was given to them when they were younger also deserve our gratitude.

Finally I must give my personal thanks to our Auditor Mr Derek Allen for keeping me on the straight and narrow.

Graham Mullan

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDING 31ST JANUARY 2008

2006/7	Receipts	£	£
£			
2,518.50	Members subscriptions	2,368.50	
864.00	Student member subscriptions	876.00	
324.00	Union Grants:		
300.00	Capital	760.31	
0.00	Current	300.00	
542.31	Treatman Grant		
11.24	Interest on investments	871.55	
969.90	Sales of Publications (not C.of CC)	0.00	
636.00	Donations		871.55
539.21	Tax refund on Covenants		739.99
-8.50	Sales of Charterhouse Permits		213.00
462.50	Personal contributions to PI Insurance		117.86
	Misc		6.00
			241.80
			100.00
7,159.16	Total Receipts		8,595.01
	Payments		
	<u>Proceedings:</u>		
1,450.00	Printing	1,997.00	
265.55	Postage	356.56	
324.00	Capital	760.31	
13.50	Current	96.84	
			857.15
246.10	Library Acquisitions		167.50
0.00	Sessional Meetings		25.00
96.00	Other Postages		140.54
0.00	Hon Sec's Petty Cash		0.00
79.32	Stationery & Duplicating		28.06
1,121.00	Insurances		
818.39	Third Party	1234.5	
142.00	Property	793.63	
265.00			2028.13
25.00	Subscriptions		150.00
-2.00	Travel Money		300.75
207.17	Donation to Mendip Rescue Organisation		25.00
0.00	(Surplus) /Deficit on Annual Dinner		0.00
0.00	IT expenses		16.41
0.00	Miscellaneous		58.75
	Treatman Grant		2,000.00
5,051.03	Total Payments		8150.85
2,108.13	Surplus/(Deficit) for year		444.16

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST JANUARY 2008

2006/07	Assets	£	£
£			
19,823.41	Investments:		
209.17	Current Bank Account	AMC Bank	19,626.82
16.80	Cash in Hand	Hon. Secretaries	1606.72
5.22		Hon Treasurer	16.80
			27.43
20,054.60	Total Assets		21,277.77
	Represented by:		
	Reserves		
3,579.53	Hut Fund -	brought forward	2,563.55
-1,015.98		add/(subtract) year result	499.30
			3,062.85
2,330.00	Printed Publications	brought forward	2,330.00
	Library & Museum Fund	brought forward	1,301.16
295.88		Tfr from CoCC Res.	71.78
1,017.23		OCL Fund Grant	200.00
		add/(subtract) year result	-587.81
-11.95			985.13
	Equipment Hire Fund	brought forward	551.74
310.24		OCL Fund Grant	350.00
300.00		add/(subtract) year result	-400.26
-58.50			501.48
	Caves of County Clare Reserve	brought forward	9,155.07
9,524.78		Tfr to Lib & Mus	-71.78
-1,017.23		add/(subtract) year result	717.78
647.52			9,801.07
	Receipts & Payment Reserve	brought forward	4,153.08
2,344.95		Tfr to Equip Hire	
-300.00		add/(subtract) year result	444.16
2,108.13			4,597.24
20,054.60	Total Reserves		21,277.77

HONORARY AUDITOR'S REPORT:
I have examined the above Receipts & Payments Account for the year ended 31st January 2008, 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 C.P.F.A.

WW II ARCHAEOLOGY AROUND THE HUT

If you have ever walked up towards the top of Black Down from the hut you cannot fail to have noticed the strange "Tumps" that erupt like large ant hills at the side of the path. Beyond the crest of the hill, as you begin to descend to Tyning's Farm, you encounter much larger grassy mounds covering brick and concrete bunkers. In the his concluding article about the origins and purposes of these mysterious excrescences, Jon Brown explains all...

In the summer of 1940 Britain expected a German invasion soon, with the victorious German armies having conquered most of Europe and Scandinavia in a matter of months. It looked as if Britain was next and the country was ill prepared to meet an invasion at this time. The Germans had made very successful use of parachute and glider borne troops during their invasions of Norway and Belgium and there was a national effort to prevent the use of large fields and open spaces as landing strips for enemy aeroplanes and gliders. On Black Down this took the form of earthen mounds which became known as Tumps.

The Tumps were constructed by the excavation of a small ditch, the earth from the ditch being used to form the Tump. The ditches are not very deep now but may have filled up with new deposits since the war. The Bronze Age round barrows seem on the whole to have been respected during the construction of the Tumps. Maybe it was thought that these barrows were more useful as mounds of earth to prevent aeroplanes landing?

The Tumps were put up in a regular grid pattern which has resulted in them sometimes being confused with a bombing decoy built on Black Down in 1941.

The air attacks on British cities in 1940 had highlighted the need to try and divert German bombs away from major towns and cities. These decoys were given the name "Starfish" and it was in 1941 that a decoy was constructed on Black Down to help protect the city of Bristol from air attack by causing German bombers to drop their bombs on a diversionary target. The decoy site involved the placing of special lights, cables and fires to simulate poor



A section through a Tump eroded by walkers near to the west control room and water in some of the ditches dug to form the Tumps.

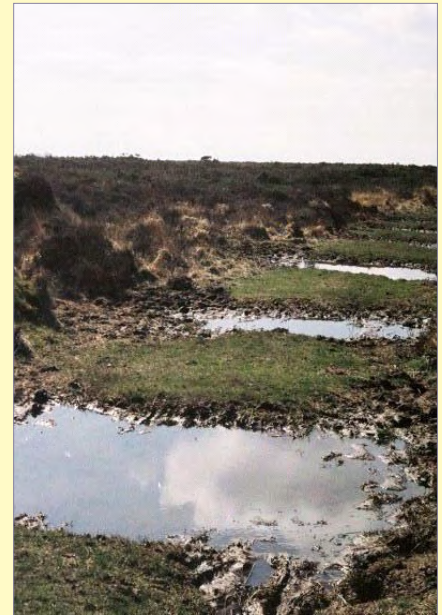
Photos: Jon Brown

blackout conditions, boiler fires from locomotive engines, as well as fires caused by incendiary and high explosive bombing of a city. Viewed from the air it would appear that Bristol had been bombed by aircraft in front of the ones approaching and, believing they were over their target, they would drop their bombs on the decoy. This decoy made some use of the Tumps on Black Down but it is believed that the regular 'street' like pattern of the Tumps as viewed from the air is not directly

related to the decoy phase of Black Downs use.

Two of the decoy's control rooms survive, one located towards the eastern side of Black Down and the other to the west. According to the Somerset Archaeology and History Society the layout was:

"...an upstanding, earth banked building resting on a concrete raft 9m in length and divided internally into two rooms. The field control room contained



The west control room showing the blast wall and also one of the outlets for control cables.

Photos: Jon Brown

switchgear, a stove and communications equipment; whilst the engine room housed the generators (on cast concrete beds). One entrance at ground level gave access to a lobby between the two rooms and was screened by an external blast wall.”

Defences were also set up to resist enemy ground forces moving up from the south. Some of these would have been manned by Home Guard and Auxiliary Units. The Auxiliary Units were a resistance group set up in Britain before an invasion occurred, their job being to wait for the German army to pass over their locations and then to act as a guerrilla force in the enemy’s rear.

These units had Operational Bases in which they stored their arms and equipment, where they would hide while the enemy passed. Operational Bases can still be found scattered around the country, including on Mendip, where they were often sited in caves and disused mining tunnels fitted out with bunks and shelving. There were also supplies to last two weeks as well as ammunition, weapons, explosives and an oil heater. Foxes Hole in Burrington Coombe was one such Operational Base. A former Auxiliary gave an account of it:

“We pinched a long hinge from BAC (Bristol Aircraft Company) for the door. I put it down my overalls and walked stiff legged out to my car. We made the door but didn’t lock it. We took our weapons home and stored our explosives in the cave. We had some army rations up there in case we got cut off. There were two compartments in this cave. The door opened into a first chamber and then there was a chamber down below that we were just able to go down. We made an airing cupboard down there for our wet clothes.”
(Eion Fraser, *Blagdon Auxilier* quoted in *Somerset V Hitler* by D Brown.)

There is also an account from the UBSS’s wartime Hut log book, which notes cavers visiting Foxes Hole and discovering “forces” there, which was over written with “foxes”, possibly in case it was read by enemy agents. One drawback of using a cave as an Operational Base must have been that the local caving club might very well discover it and Foxes Hole is noted by local cavers as having had wooden bunks visible until the 1980s, when



The current entrance to Foxes Hole.

Photo: Jon Brown

according to some they were burnt during a party held in the cave.

Today Foxes Hole has a steel door which was put in to protect the bat population after parties were held in the cave in the 1980s. The remains of the bolts used to hold together the bunks in the cave and fragments of a broken bottle of a type concomitant with a wartime date can still be seen. The cave certainly has good views up and down Burrington Coombe and is hard to find unless you know where to look.



The view from the entrance of Foxes Hole looking down on the road heading towards Ellick House.

Photo: Jon Brown

There are many other WW II sites around Black Down, Rowberrow Warren and Churchill but space does not permit me to describe them all here. Besides, it’s often more interesting to discover things for yourself!

Jon Brown



One of the bolts believed to be from the bunk beds which were in Foxes Hole. The scale in the photo is a ten pence coin.

Photo: Jon Brown

A Mysterious Expedition to the Pyrenees

Visitors to our web site will find, at <http://www.ubss.org.uk/expeditions.php> information about the various foreign expeditions that the Society has undertaken. However, one trip is missing. In 1963, the Society seems to have visited the Pyrenees. Unfortunately, except for some small hints at various places in both Newsletters and in *Proceedings*, I cannot track down a report of this trip. I cannot find anything in the Library archives.

Some details exist: it was apparently to the vicinity of Mont Perdu, one pot of 450 ft depth was explored and surveyed and several others were partially explored. I gather that Frank Nicholson gave a talk about it at a Sessional Meeting in February 1964. (Frank, I have written to you about this, did you not receive my note?)

Anyway, I would be grateful for any reports of this trip, not least any details of the mysterious 450 ft pot, so that we can fill this hole in our records. I can be contacted at all the usual places.

Graham Mullan

A note from the editors

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

Now that you are all about to depart on your summer hols and expeditions, give some thought to next term's newsletter and don't let the memories fade before you set pen to paper (or its electronic equivalent). Take some pictures too and become famous!

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

Images are always welcome but if they are not your own please obtain permission to use them first.

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