

## SECRETARIES' REPORT

MARCH 2002 – MARCH 2003

### Research

The “Carbonate Processes and Palaeoenvironments” group continues to flourish with the addition of three new members: Dirk Hoffmann is undertaking postdoctoral research into radiocarbon calibration using submerged stalagmites from Grand Bahama with David Richards, Graham Felse is acting as a research assistant for Pete Smart modelling the growth of carbonate platforms and Siobhan McGarry is currently on a temporary lectureship in the School of Geographical Sciences and will be undertaking research into speleothem palaeoclimate. In addition Patricia Beddows and Sam Smith having now completed the fieldwork phases of their projects are writing their PhD theses and Ed Hodge has been undertaking further PhD fieldwork in Spain and Portugal.

During last summer and autumn Helen Dewar and Jon Pash, two undergraduate members of the Society, undertook geography dissertation projects looking at the drainage characteristics of Agen Allwedd and sediment characteristics of Ogof Draenen respectively. Linda Wilson & Graham Mullan have continued with their study of Franco-Cantabrian cave art. Highlights of this year's work included a visit to the Grand Grotte d'Arcy sur Cure, where significant conservation work is underway, and further visits to caves in the Lot, the Dordogne and the Ariège regions of France.

### Caving

Once again UBSS members have been prolific throughout the major caving regions of the UK and beyond, starting with a trip to Sardinia over Easter 2002 which yielded some good sporting caving. The following term was busy with club trips to Wales (staying at Whitewalls) and a trip to Yorkshire staying at the Old School at Helwith Bridge. A well attended BBQ at the UBSS field HQ, with caving around Burrington was followed a week later by the UBSS involvement in the Wessex Challenge gun race after an interesting day of caving talks and related entertainment in Priddy Village Hall.

During May a group visited Co. Clare, Ireland, where Andrew Atkinson and Clive Owen found more cave, and yet more leads, beyond the sumps in Poulmagree. Steve Cottle dived the upstream sump to a too-tight airspace. Much work was also carried out on the completion of the new edition of the County Clare guidebook. This should be finished very soon.

Over the Summer members were to be found in the Vercors and the Jura, France. Freshers' Fair in October yielded another large number of new student members with over 50 joining on the day and several more at a later date. Later that week both new and old members enjoyed an informal and interesting tour of Redcliffe caves. Freshers' weekend then saw the usual increase in traffic through most of the Burrington caves with many, if not all enjoying their first taste of caving. On a weekend trip to South Wales several parties explored various parts of OFD before returning to a very packed Croydon hut for an evening of entertainment. As usual the annual bonfire night at the UBSS HQ was a great success with an entire lamb being partially roasted for the benefit of the assembled revellers. The rain let up long enough for a rather professionally executed firework display to take place before people retired

to the Hut to finish off any stray Butcombe. Another visit to Yorkshire took place towards the end of term with visits to Lancaster Hole, Large Pot and Swinsto and Simpsons Pots.

Over the Christmas holidays a party of 12 made the long drive to the Dordogne/Lot region of France. The caving was mostly vertical as heavy rain and flooding made the more horizontal sporting streamways too hazardous. There were certainly enough good caves in the region to keep everyone happy and each evening gastronomic delights were enjoyed. The student members of the trip were generously subsidised by the Tratman fund.

Spring term started with a rowdy Burns' night supper at the hut in what is becoming a bit of a tradition (any excuse for a good party) and there have also been several trips to Yorkshire, with permits having been obtained for a number of caves.

Throughout the period training in the union has been a great success with many people on the SRT trips mentioned in this report having been trained in the last year.

Thanks to the anonymous donation of a projector screen and shelf in the Society's library, a number of talks have taken place. Last term the inaugural talk was given by Steve Cottle on caving in Sardinia with an entertaining slide show set to music. Sam Smith then gave us a very interesting insight into cave diving research with an equipment display and demonstration, along with slides and a video of some of her sites in the flooded caves of the Yucatan in Mexico.

This term, to celebrate 10 years since the Society was given use of the Stables, the library hosted a special "GB night" on the 5<sup>th</sup> March. This started with an old member, Geoff Wood, showing some slides he had taken of the Ladder Dig extension in its pristine state just days after its discovery. Linda Wilson then gave a talk on the history of discovery, ownership and conservation of the cave with slides showing the remarkable results of recent stal washing efforts. The evening's entertainment was capped off with a video, filmed and edited by one of our novices, Tom Kelly, and shot in GB cavern, following a party of three cavers on an evening trip, with authentic cave sounds to make the audience feel thoroughly nostalgic.

Finally, a library working group has been formed by Linda Wilson with the task of re-cataloguing our library. This project has been helped enormously by those who generously donated components towards the assembly of a library computer.

#### Acknowledgements:

The Society would like to thank all those who support its activities with grant aid, especially the University of Bristol Union for assistance with the day to day running of the Society. Special thanks are also due to Ivan Sandford for the construction and donation of a new stove for the "ladies quarters" hut at the UBSS HQ, to Mrs. Elizabeth Hawkes for a kind donation and the anonymous donor of the new projection screen and projector shelf.

*Ed Hodge and Helen Dewar*