

*Wookey Hole: 75 Years of Cave Diving & Exploration* by Jim Hanwell, Duncan Price and Richard Witcombe. Cave Diving Group. Wells. 2010. ISBN 978-0-901031-07-5. Hardback 352 pages. £25.00. For availability see [www.wookeybook.com](http://www.wookeybook.com).

This book has a long history. The original intention was that it should be published in the 1980s to mark the 50th anniversary of the pioneer ‘hard hat’ dives in Wookey Hole in 1935. Between 1985 and 1987, Jim Hanwell collected the reminiscences of those involved with cave diving in Wookey Hole from the earliest days and the 21 chapters of the book comprise either first-hand accounts by the divers themselves or Jim’s own retelling of each person’s contribution. However, at that stage the project faltered as no publisher could be found and only a small number of bound copies were produced and given a limited circulation. I well remember one of them kicking around at home for some time as Linda was asked by Jim to review the text.

The successful publication of *Swildon’s Hole 100 years of exploration*, in 2007 provided the spur needed to restart this project and caused Duncan Price and Rich Witcombe to collect the modern accounts of diving in the cave and bring the project up to date in time for the 75th anniversary of those first dives. Intentionally, the first chapters, as collected by Jim were only lightly edited as many of the earlier pioneers are no longer with us, to approve (or not) any changes.

In this approach lies both the book’s strength and its weakness. Each contributor has been allowed to tell their own story in their own way. Jim, in the chapters he wrote, has used extracts from other publications and personal logs as much as possible. This gives much of the tale an immediacy and impact that can only come from personal experience, but it does mean that the style is patchy and somewhat variable. Each chapter covers a particular aspect of the history of diving at Wookey, either a specific time period or a specific series of dives. Interspersed with these, sometimes in separate chapters, are accounts of diving at the ‘other end’ of the system in Swildon’s Hole, whose history is, in many respects, solidly tied to developments in Wookey. Other chapters also discuss explorations in St. Cuthbert’s Swallet and Eastwater Cavern. The book does resemble the Swildon’s book, mentioned above, in some respects, as they were both designed and laid out by Mark Lumley. This one is better than the previous one, though, not having even the minor stylistic niggles that your reviewer noticed before. It differs in content however. That book was far more about the cave, this one is really about diving and the people who did the exploration.

The later, newer, chapters are more diverse than the earlier ones as they describe more developments than just those in diving, with chapters describing surveying (Willie Stanton) photography (Pete Glanville) and climbing (Alex Gee) and filming (Gavin Newman). Overall the history of exploration at Wookey since 1935 is covered in great detail.

Although I am not a diver, many of the authors and others whose work is described have been and are good friends of mine. In addition, I was present, at Wookey, when a number of the events described took place, such as turning up in the car park, with Lloyd, whose fault it was, when Bear and Geoff were packing up after the discovery of '24' in 1976 and being in Chamber Nine when the divers returned after Rob Parker's 'push' in 1985, when we drank all the champagne kindly supplied by the management whilst waiting for the divers to reappear. I can say, therefore, that the book does capture the mood of the events and the character of the participants extremely well. For anyone interested in Mendip, caving and cave diving this is an excellent read.

Graham Mullan