

SECRETARIES' REPORT

MARCH 2012 – MARCH 2013

Research

As part of his ongoing Ph.D. research Christopher Smith is currently working on a novel dating technique using uranium-thorium and uranium-lead dating of cave speleothems to determine the minimum formation date for a variety of cave systems over the last 2.6 million years. Understanding the timings of cave formation during the Quaternary period will help us to better understand long-term rates of landscape evolution and the impact of changing climates in limestone-karst regions. His specific research areas include cave systems in sub-Arctic Canada, Malaysia, Borneo, South Wales, Southern Australia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Gina Moseley has been continuing her work on dating rapid climate change events over the last glacial cycle recorded in speleothems from the Northern Alps. A paper produced from the work at Bristol is due out imminently in *Journal of Quaternary Research* on sea-level changes during MIS 5 in the Yucatan. Gina joined expeditions to Siebenhengste Cave and Milchbach in Switzerland, the summer European Gouffre Berger expedition and also did some caving in southern Minnesota. She has been awarded £200 from the Ghar Parau Foundation for a forthcoming expedition to Bhutan. She has also written small reports on work carried out in Mulu for *Cave and Karst Science* and the *Quaternary Newsletter*.

Expedition Caving

This year UBSS went back to Ireland on an expedition organised by Stuart Allred to Counties Mayo and Clare. Unfortunately the trip to the flood prone caves that were top of the list to survey coincided with the wettest June on record. Despite this, a full survey of Ballymaglancy Cave was completed in which the second entrance, full of large spiders, was found and a number of other small caves were located and described including Horse Discovery Cave and The Ladies' Buttery. A return is planned for next September, so fingers crossed for dry weather. UBSS members also joined CUCC for their annual Austria expedition and members are hoping to do so again this year.

Club Caving

Despite it being a tough year owing to tackle store relocation and a disrupted Fresher's Fair resulting in a low fresher intake those freshers that we have retained are of a high quality. Club trips have been to all the usual areas including Mendip, south Wales, and the peak district. To go with this UBSS has been very sociable this year with a joint trip to Yorkshire with CUCC and upcoming joint trip to the peak district with SUSS. Also UBSS attended CHECC where we caved with MUSC and SUSS and also attended southern CHECC in south Wales where we caved with Southampton, Exeter, Plymouth Cardiff and BEC members. As well as this a couple of UBSS helped run an SRT training session on the Saturday, not bad since there were only six of us. Hopefully this sociable theme will continue. The online trip log is up and running again so if you want to see what's going on have a look on the website. We have also had a few socials this year including talks on the Ireland expedition and the CUCC Austria expedition and also a pie social, which as you can guess, involved drinking and pie eating.

Other UBSS work

It has been a busy year. Stuart Allred and Simon Hadfield are involved in resurveying Goatchurch Cavern with assistance from Cayley Howard and Sarah Rae. Alison Moody, Pete Hann and Andrew Atkinson have been involved in digging at The Riser in Charterhouse Cave, Pete Hann has also been involved in digging Spider hole and Alison Moody has been working on Connecting Maypole Aven to Lower Terminus Chamber in Swildon's Hole. Many members have been involved in the recent finds in Reservoir Hole, including Alison Moody, Tony Boycott, Andrew Atkinson, Linda Wilson and Graham Mullan carrying out digging, surveying and conservation work.

There has been ongoing work on the Cheddar catchment survey by Andrew Atkinson, Graham Mullan, Alison Moody, Tony Boycott, and Clive Owen. This has included the surveying of minor caves such as Whitebeam Slitter & Swine Hole and starting a survey of Cox's Cave.

Alison and Andrew have also been pushing through the Neverland Link in Upper Flood Swallet, a conservation project to allow tourist trips to visit the passages beyond Neverland as well as digging at the end of the cave .

Alison Moody and Pete Hann have been working on Connecting Zed Alley to Browne-Stewart Series in Read's Cavern and re opening Lads' Luck. Graham Mullan, Linda Wilson, Tony Boycott and Alison Moody have also recently been involved in work on Longwood Valley Sink in order to alleviate the flooding that had led to the Cheddar Gorge road being closed.

Our thanks are due to the Student Union, the Tratman fund of the University of Bristol and the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund for grants received this year.

Last but not least, the UBSS hut toilet floor is once again structurally sound thanks to the President.

Anya Keatley

MUSEUM REPORT, 2013

Continuing in the same vein as my last report, the past year has been another busy one in the Museum, although I am pleased to report that there have been far fewer irritations and I have been blissfully free of television producers.

This year has seen the start of a long overdue project to finally write up and publish the work done just over a decade ago at a site called Fishmonger's Hole in South Gloucestershire. The cave was discovered through the efforts of David Hardwick, now a member of this Society, and other cavers. The cave was the subject of a Time Team dig, and a large quantity of bones were recovered, both animal and human, and a surprising number of dog bones were found. Preliminary dating places this site in the Iron Age, possibly very soon after the Roman occupation of Britain and theories about the origin of the dog bones range from ritual to purely practical. The landowner would like the collection to be lodged with the society and preliminary discussions in this regard have now taken place. With the aid of Andy Carrant, the bones have been retrieved from the Natural History Museum, and Professor Mark Horton will be obtaining the human remains. The aim of this project is for the bones from the site to be fully catalogued and all aspects of the site written up for publication in our *Proceedings*. David

Hardwick and Mark Horton are key players in this regard and my role will be one of coordination between the various researchers who will be involved.

The full archive from the recent excavations at Read's Cavern has now been deposited with the museum, and I would like to thank Chris Kerns and Alison Marcucci, both formerly of the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at Bristol, for all their work and co-operation in this regard. I was also approached by a researcher from Time Team who was interested in a dig at the site, but following consultation with the landowner it was clear that numerous concerns meant the site would not be suitable for such a dig, and permission was therefore refused. However in other Burrington related news, I was able to secure permission for Vince Simmonds of the BEC to conduct archaeological investigations in Whitcombe's Hole.

Stephen Clews, the manager of the Roman Baths and Pump Room, visited the museum to look at the material from the Iron Age hill fort of Little Solsbury near Bath and is willing to take a party of cavers on a trip into the tunnels beneath the Roman baths. Objects from this site are on display in our museum and it is well worth taking the time to look at them, particularly the very fine, decorated bone weaving combs.

I have received the usual steady stream of enquiries of enquires of the course of the year for access to the Aveline's Hole material, and without a doubt, this collection is the most important material the society holds, and it is great to see that the site of the society's first archaeological dig, which actually led to the formation of the society itself, still holds enduring fascination for a wide range of researchers.

Kate Mackay, a PhD student from the University of Leicester has viewed the material from Aveline's on a number of occasions researching for a general interest book on the Mesolithic. Also on the subject of books, Paula Gardiner of the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology will need access to the same material for a book she is writing on the Mesolithic of Mendip. Philip Marsden, researching a book about the mythology of place in the British Isles also visited the museum to look at the Aveline's material, as did Bryan Moore, doing an MPhil at Winchester University, researching the art and burials of prehistoric Mendip.

Rick Shulting, who wrote and co-ordinated the modern re-examination of the material from Aveline's Hole published in our *Proceedings* in 2005, wishes to revisit the stable isotope dates from some specimens as he has reason to believe that the nitrogen levels might have been too low. In Rick's own words: "The aim is to get stable carbon and nitrogen isotope data that is more directly comparable to the other samples we have for the Early Mesolithic, as well as from earlier and later periods. As more results have accumulated in the 7 years since the original work was done, it has become apparent that the analyses done at Groningen gave unusually low nitrogen isotope values (which would usually be interpreted as indicating greater reliance on plant foods), quite out of keeping with other results for the period. It is important to resolve this, since at present it makes the diets at Aveline's Hole look quite unique, when I suspect that they are not."

I will be delivering the relevant specimens to him in Oxford in a week's time. With modern methods, the amount of material needed for destructive testing is extremely small, in the region of 0.3 g, so a museum curator's job has been made much easier in this regard, and all that is needed is procedures for the safe transport and curation of the material during testing. On the principle of 'once bitten, twice shy', I now insist on personal collection and return of all museum specimens needed for such purposes.

During the year I have also played an active part in the University of Bristol Curator's Group, an informal committee made up of those who are involved with the many and varied special collections to which the university plays host.

As I remarked last year, the sheer range and volume of enquiries and visits the museum receives is a testament to its continuing importance as a collection and it is a pleasure to be able to co-operate with researches in such a wide variety of fields. On a final note, activity levels have been so high this year that this report has spilled over onto two pages!

Linda Wilson, Museum Curator