

Excursions [and notes] in Wookey Hole 2015-2018:

A personal account by Vince Simmonds

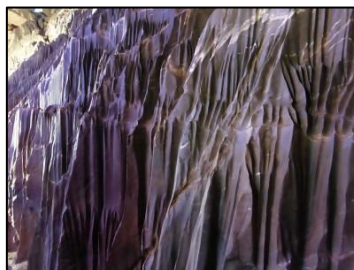
10th December 2015: with Tom Chapman, Graham 'Jake' Johnson, Nick Hawkes, Robin 'Tav' Taviner and Alex Gee.

The Hallowe'en Team beyond the show cave in Wookey Hole Chamber 20 (*pictured below*).



The decorations caught us by surprise somewhat and were the subject of some amusement.

Geologically Wookey 20 is interesting being formed mostly along the unconformity between Carboniferous limestone and Triassic dolomitic conglomerate. There are several fine rock formations including rillen-karren (*pictured below*).



We spent a while exploring the main chamber beyond the scaffold walkway looking at the sump pools where the divers exited, up to the unconformity and other formations.



You'll have to excuse the additional lighting of the image above.

We headed off to explore the rest of the cave accessible from Wookey 20 and we were pleasantly surprised by its quality and how much there was to it. A climb through an inclined passage of fine proportions with some good speleothems and interesting rock formations i.e. more rills, flutes and scalloping. At the end there is some considerable potential to extend the known cave and some side passages that would require some further attention. Another trip to properly assess some of the potential is planned in, the not too distant future. An excellent couple of hours caving!

22nd December 2015: With Tom Chapman, Keith Savory, Nick and Nicole Hawkes and Alex Gee.

A trip into Wookey 20 to assess the prospects of Tom and Keith's old dig there. Quite impressed by the initial size of the rift and it is well decorated in places. The rift then drops down to a narrow slot where progress becomes a little more constricted, but it looks good. We will return to carry out some rock engineering to ease further passage to whatever lies beyond.

29th December 2015: With Tom Chapman, Pete Bolt, Nick and Tav.

The start of the new mid-week project to extend Tom and Keith's old dig.

No lights and music this week but we managed to find our way in and out okay. The purpose of this evenings jaunt was to apply some rock engineering to the constricted top of a slot down into the dig. This will ease spoil removal and, of course access up and down the slot. 4no. holes were drilled, charged and completion of task was from the top of the stal' slope - all was good!

Back next week to clear and drill.

5th January 2016: With Tom Chapman and Duncan Price. Tav and the ATLAS team went on tour of the main passages.

The rock engineering applied last week had the required effect and access down through the slot was more comfortable. Before proceeding downwards, a stainless-steel hanger was inserted for a ladder and duly rigged. At the bottom of the slot I was pleasantly surprised by the continuing passage ahead but entry to this is somewhat constricted. The required engineering was carried out, kit and equipment packed away, we made our way out to meet some of the touring team who had come to see how we were getting on. Completed the task from the main passage and all was good.

Made our way out of the cave to get changed and discuss prospects ahead at the Hunter's Lodge Inn.

12th January 2016: with Nick Hawkes, later joined by Duncan Price. Tav and the ATLAS team (part 2) went on a tour of the main passages off Chamber 20. Tom was kept busy dismantling the Christmas decorations.

Last week's effort had the desired effect and passage along the rift was much easier. There is quite a bit of debris that requires shifting so a team will need to be organised. At the next narrowing of the rift some more rock engineering technology was applied and hopefully passage will again be more comfortable.

With the drop-in temperatures the draught was good this evening.

19th January 2016: with Nick and Tav. Tom took the 'Vanderplanks' on a tour around the main passages off Chamber 20, etc.

Last week's pop had done the job and the passage has been suitably widened although there is quite a lot of debris to be shifted. I passed some of the larger lumps back to Nick who, in turn handed them up to Tav at the top of the ladder. We really need to get some spoil removal system in place. Anyway, while Nick and Tav continued to move rocks around I moved ahead to deal with the next constriction at the top of a c.4m drop, some widening here will enable better spoil removal. There was already quite a bit of rubble at the bottom of the drop and I suspect there will be even more when tonight's task was completed. Still passage is dropping down quite sharply which is what we want.

26th January 2016: with Tom Chapman, Nick Hawkes, Duncan Price and Paul Brock.

Good to see Brocker's digging somewhere other than Home Close. Decided not to apply any rock engineering technology this evening and to concentrate on spoil removal instead. I had made-up a couple of skips yesterday afternoon ready for the clearing task. While TC and PB went for a quick tour around the rest of us headed down to the dig and set about getting a hauling system into place. There is only limited space available to stack spoil in so DP spent some time sorting this out while Nick and myself got the skip into action and started clearing the debris from the sloping passage floor. When TC and PB joined us, the clearance progressed well and most of the loose stuff was tidied away, still a bit left for the next session to be cleared while I engineer the next constriction. A good session!

4th February 2016: with 'Jake' Johnson, Nick Hawkes, 'Tav' Taviner, 'Brocker's', Tom Chapman, Les Williams and Sam Batstone.

While Tom took Les and Sam for a tour around the rest of the team headed on to the dig off the top of Chamber 20. I proceeded to the end with the drill to go about my task at the bottom of a c.3m narrow rift, Nick followed me down to start removing the accumulation of debris there, the others were placed along the passage to haul the spoil out. The requisite holes were drilled, a considerable amount of spoil removed, it was time to complete the evening's work from a safe distance. A loud bang, then 'kerplunk'. something moved, the wire could not be retrieved so had to leave it in place until the next session. Nick and I then hurried along to catch up with the others and all out of the cave.

Most of us made it up to the Hunter's for the usual debriefing.

11th February 2016: with Jake, Tav, Duncan P, Keith Savory and Rich (Warmbac) aka Kermit.

While Keith and Rich went for a tour around the rest of us went to the dig site. Last week's effort had the desired effect and there was plenty of debris that required shifting. I cleared away the loose rock and hammered off a few flakes to enable drilling while DP cleared the spoil into the skip for Jake, then Tav to dispose of in the small chamber. I slid through the next constriction to drill a hole in a boulder jammed in the rift and then another 3no. holes in the constriction, again the aim is to make spoil clearance easier. All done it was time to wire up and move out to complete the evenings work from a safe distance and a satisfactory conclusion.

Hunter's Lodge Inn for the usual de-brief session.

18th February 2016: with Jake, Tav and Duncan P.

As usual a steady trip up through Chamber 20 to continue the good works at the bottom of the rift. Last week's effort had done as required and the jammed rock was gone, unfortunately it's remains were lying at the top of the next climb down, a drop of c.4m, and will need clearing away, a job for next session. Back at the now wider constriction Tav set about loading skips while I drilled a few more hole to make the access and movement of debris/skips even more easy. Job done we made our way out for debriefing session at the Hunter's Lodge Inn. Not going to apply any rock engineering technology next week and will concentrate on clearing and dropping the next climb to assess our next moves.

25th February 2016: with Tav Taviner, Tom Chapman, Keith Savory, Paul Brock and Duncan Price.

A strong team tonight concentrated on the clearance of spoil and precariously balanced boulders from various points along the rift. While the others were hauling out skip loads of debris I hammered away at some fractured rock before getting another skip and clearing the debris accumulated at the top of the next climb down. When the debris was cleared I climbed down the rift, tidied away some loose rock at the bottom and slid over a mud bank to reach the furthest point attained 20 odd years ago by Tom and Keith when they were lithe and keen young things! Straight ahead along the rift progress is barred by substantial flowstone but down to the right is a low muddy slot that with some engineering offers a potential way on, I could hear a trickle of water that might indicate more open passage ahead. Worked out a strategy for progressing next session and by then it was time to exit the cave.

As usual a debrief at the Hunter's Lodge Inn.

3rd March 2016: with Tav, Jake, Nick, Duncan P, Brockers, Pete Bolt, Sam Batstone and Pete Hellier.

A big turn-out tonight so a good strong team for rock and debris clearance. I made my way to the bottom with the drill and other 'gubbins' with the aid of Pete B while the rest of the team set about their task. At the bottom spent a little time clearing some of the sediment from the way ahead and making the drilling more comfortable, we utilised the 20+ year old digging kit that had been left behind. 5no. holes drilled into a roof flake to ease forward progress and digging before making our way out to a safe distance to complete the task. Then debrief at the Hunters Lodge Inn, bloody marvellous!

10th March 2016: with Nick Hawkes, Tav, Brockers and Duncan Price.

DP wanted to shoot some more video sequences on the way in so the rest of us headed off to the dig. Nick and Tav went to the end to clear away the debris from last week while Brockers and me installed some stainless-steel hangers on a couple of the climbs. Put a hand-line down the 2nd climb and a hand-line and ladder on the 3rd climb. By now DP had joined us and the events were captured for posterity. Meanwhile Tav and Nick had shifted a considerable pile of rock and things were almost ready for me to do my bit. After everyone had inspected the prospects ahead I got on with the drilling and prepping ready to create some more debris for next week. The trip out is becoming a bit of classic Mendip caving and when we reach the streamway it's going to be a good trip.

The evening's work concluded we made our way out and up to the Hunter's Lodge Inn for the usual de-brief.

17th March 2016: with Jake, Brockers and Duncan P.

Got to the dig to find that a rather large boulder had slid into an unfavourable position and we spent a while trying to manoeuvre it to one side where it wouldn't cause too much of an obstruction. After much grunting and groaning, beating with a hammer and then, deliberation, it was decided that the best approach was to drill a hole into it and apply a more destructive technology. While Jake, Brockers and DP cleared away the rock debris I got out of the way to sort out the wire and tidied around the bottom of the ladder area, where some spoil could be stashed if required. It was then time to drill some holes including the boulder, that task complete we made our way out. The climbs are beginning to get muddy and require some thought to get up, this is a good caving trip. At the 'stal' slope the evening's work was brought to a satisfactory conclusion; all the while DP was adding to his video clip collection and making a record of events.

To the Hunter's Lodge Inn for debrief and welcome refreshments.

24th March 2016: with the regular team of Jake, Tav, Nick, Duncan P, Brockers, and Bean came too.

Only clearing this evening, and there was a lot of debris from last week's effort, plus the obstructing rock was dust! After some time shifting the fractured rock, gravel and some glutinous mud managed to squeeze through [eventually] into the open space beyond. To the left a rising rift c.2m high, c.0.7m wide and 3-4m in length with mud banks, this closes-down with some stal blockage, there is a narrow solution tube on the right. This doesn't appear to be

the way forward. To the right of the squeeze there is a continuation of the rift downwards along what appears to be a narrow tube (?) with some air movement; unfortunately, a good sight of what is ahead has been obscured by mud and debris pushed through while passing the squeeze. It is quite muddy. After I had extricated myself Nick came through to give a second opinion, which is always useful. One more session to apply some rock engineering technology will open the squeeze and make digging much easier. What to do with the mud will be our next head scratching moment.

To the Hunter's Lodge in for the usual debrief, even better when you don't have to get up for work tomorrow.

31st March 2016: with Tav, Nick, Brockers and Peter Bolt.

Continuing the exploration of the rift off Chamber 20 in Wookey Hole. This evenings trip was more about the application of some rock engineering technology really. While I was attending to that the rest of the team set about tidying the spoil and ensuring that the available stacking space was being utilised efficiently. When I had done my bit then my bags were whisked away out of the cave for me, all I had to do was to bring the task to a satisfactory conclusion and extract myself from the cave. Should be plenty to clear next session.

7th April 2016: with Jake, Nick, Brockers, Duncan P, also Sam Batstone, Roz Simmonds, Jeremy and Luke Hawkes.

Duncan has a sore back so took Roz, Jeremy and Luke on a tour around while the rest of us headed down the rift to dig. Nick, Jake and Brockers went to the bottom, Sam stayed at the top of the ladder to haul the skip and pass it up to myself where I was stashing the rock debris at the base of one of the climbs. There was a lot of rock coming up and eventually the available space, that was limited anyway, was just about used up. More of the spoil had been stacked below the ladder and there's still plenty of sediment, some quite sloppy, to remove. There's plenty to keep the team busy for a couple of weeks or so. By the time the tour party reached us we were just about ready to leave the cave and head up to the pub. With all the rock stacked at the base and part way up the rift the climb, that had been a tad awkward, was now much easier.

A good session.

14th April 2016: with Nick, Brockers and Dunc.

I had amassed a pile of kit to go underground including 2no. BDH's filled with cement, drill with assorted bits and hangers, new skip and a 1-ton dumpy bag, all to deal with the sloppy sediment issue. I was glad to see a good team to carry it.

On inspection at the end there wasn't quite enough space to fix the dumpy bag in the side-rift, so a rapid rethink of strategy was needed. A wall was constructed in the larger rift, this meant a rearrangement of the rock-pile that was already there, mixing the cement with the sloppy sediment dried it and the mixture used as mortar in the wall, hopefully it will harden.

While this was going on Brockers had been digging away at the end, in a largely solo effort, he then called back " I can see open passage" the question came, how much? "nearly 10 metres". I went down to have a look and there was passage beyond although it, initially, didn't appear too big and there was a lot of spoil in the way. Got to work with the spade, passing the sticky

mud back to Brockers, then got to work with the feet pushing the spoil ahead, "he's like a human bulldozer" Brockers exclaimed. The mud went, and I went with it squeezing through into the passage ahead, 'that's going to be interesting on the return' I thought to myself. I had entered c.10 metres of steeply inclined bedding with a vertical drop of c. 5 metres, it was relatively comfortable progress and there were a few formations. There is a continuation at the bottom that will require a bit more digging - encouraging though. After wriggling back up through the squeeze I suggested that someone else should have a look, second opinion and all that. Nick took up the challenge and he too was equally impressed.

Satisfied with our evenings effort we made our way out of the cave and, of course, up to the Hunter's Lodge Inn.

28th April 2016: I'm out of action for a while following some surgery on a dodgy elbow. However, the quest off Chamber 20 continues and thanks go to Nick Hawkes for penning the latest instalment, as follows:

Duncan, Brockers, Sam, Nick and Gavin Newman

7pm start, with a trophy tourist/film maker, Gavin who occupied himself trying to recreate photo scenes from the past, identifying the precise locations from where the old shots had been captured.

Fortunately, the rest of us had better things to do and quickly headed straight to the end. With the way remaining clear after last week's efforts we all slid down through. Sam took up the task of heading forwards at the very base of the rift while the rest of us further cleaned out the 'slot' above. After a full session digging the muddy slot was much bigger with steps carved for ease of exit, meanwhile Sam had headed on headfirst to a slightly bigger area with a boulder blocking the way on, a long-inclined rift was visible. Nick gave assistance and the boulder was removed. Sam was duly despatched to investigate the rift. He quickly reached a point near the end, perhaps 15 to 20m on, where the gently inclined rift turns sharply to a vertical inclined rift. Nick then came to look on beyond and it was quickly agreed that it was time for the pub and not wise to try and progress any more as it looked bloody tight.

It was significantly more knacker coming out than going in and it didn't help that Gavin was gleefully waiting to film and question us as we emerged from the dig....

28th July 2016: with Tav, Nick Hawkes and Matt Tuck.

After about a three month lay-off it was good to return to the explorations beyond Chamber 20. This was a relatively quick in and out trip to get things going.

We had followed the lead first pushed by divers, Tom Chapman and Keith Savory, and this had ended at another sump that Duncan Price is planning to dive in a few days.

From the muddy squeeze to the newly discovered sump we have added about 80m to the length of the known cave.

The plan is to follow another potential lead at a higher level, unfortunately this is a little constricted, hence the purpose of this evening's jaunt.

Drilling wasn't good as there was a bit too much calcite to get through and some alterations were called for. Perseverance paid off, job done and a satisfying conclusion. We'll see next trip how things worked.

As usual it was rather warm tonight and I was only wearing the lightest of caving gear, Matt, however suffered most in his nice warm fleece and heavy duty 'cordura' oversuit.

To the Hunter's for refreshments and debrief.

4th August 2016: with Tav (Duncan Price and Claire Cohen).

Tav and myself made our way quickly up to the high route along the rift that we had started to widen last week. Cleared the debris that had been created and drilled some more holes and charged ready to make some more work for the next session. Made our way along the traverse and didn't have to wait too long for DP and Claire, who had been down the lower route to the sump to deliver some dive kit ready for the next push. Completed my task successfully and we all exited the cave.

11th August 2016: with Roz Simmonds. Duncan Price and Tom Chapman were in the also cave surveying from Chambers 9 to 20.

Tried out the new camera - Olympus TG-4 - but only quick point and shoots, it really requires a dedicated photo trip to try it out properly.

At the dig with Roz we cleared enough of last week's effort to enable more holes to be drilled. The rock is not good - there is too much calcite including flowstone, it's fractured, there are voids and mud filled cracks. It was difficult to get 4 holes drilled and those weren't brilliant, there were some failed attempts too. Charged the holes, the evenings task was completed from a safe distance.

Exited the cave and met up with DP and TC who were just leaving Chamber 9.

25th August 2016: with Nick and Peter 'Snablet' MacNab.

Snablet is over from New Zealand to visit for a week before heading onto China to meet up with Mad Phil Rowsell to go caving there, so I gave him a call at his parents to invite on this evening's trip.

We headed up to the top of Chamber 20 and along to the high route in the rift to clear the bang I had placed a fortnight ago. As we intend to put this dig on hold for a while I wanted to retrieve the wire as well. Snablet and Nick cleared the debris while I sorted out the wire, a good pile of rock was shifted and there is a decent face to continue the widening process when we return in the future.

That job done we headed back up to Chamber 20 and on to the area where the UBSS had been looking some while ago and there we did some 'furling' about.



Before deciding to have a poke at a different site in the same area. We cleared a large pile of loose rock from the spot until we were left with several much larger boulders that will require capping to reduce them into more manageable pieces.



We then had reached a natural pause and it was time to depart. A steady trip out of the cave, got changed and headed up to the Hunter's Lodge Inn.

A fine way to spend my 60th birthday - caving with my friends!

27th August 2016: with Duncan Price, Rick Stanton and Karen Dealy.

Trip to assist Duncan who was going to dive the sump at the end of the dig [not quite] to Wookey 24.

I hadn't seen the passage beyond the inclined bedding as this had been opened while I was recovering from surgery on elbow. It is very Eastwater like, reminds of the West End but with a liberal coating of mud ending in a deep clear pool of water.

Duncan kitted up while balancing on some precariously wedged boulders and was soon in the water. Rick had come down to the sump while Karen waited at the top of Wookey 20, when DP had gone Rick went back up to join Karen. I waited for DP who wasn't too long. De-briefed and de-kitted, it was time for us to head out, then you realise how steep the climb back up is and just how slippery, it is not a journey that can be rushed, and slow progress was made. Then there is still the climb back up the rift I was glad when I had reached the top of Wookey 20.

There is still more to do in the sump, but fresh bottles are required.

1st September 2106: with Jake, Tav and Nick.



Capping boulders at the top of Chamber 20 new dig site. Some went, some needed more than one hole, some didn't go at all. We shifted a lot of rock and more requires removing before a proper look can be had.

8th September 2016: with Jake and Nick.

More of the same at the end of Chamber 20. Drill hole, place cap and whack, result big boulder reduced to manageable pieces, repeat several times. Shifted a lot of rock and some sediment. Looks better but not deep enough yet. Work will continue next session.

15th September 2016: with Jake, Tav, Duncan P and Pete Hall.

While Duncan and Pete headed off to look at '19' before joining up with the rest of us later. Jake, Tav and Vince carried on to the dig at the end of '20'.

A mixed bag of bucketing out sediment interspersed with the occasional capping of a rock obstruction. Downward progress was made but we still need to go deeper. We might have to

consider removing the fractured rock on the right-hand wall, there is a lot of it, as we go deeper the fractured rock might be a problem.

All too soon time ran out and it was time to exit the cave and head up to the Hunter's for the usual debriefing.

22nd September 2016: with Jake, Tav, Duncan P and Gary Jones.



Slight adjustment to the position of our dig in Chamber 20 away from the fractured rocks. A couple of the more unstable boulders were capped and cleared. With a bit of clearing, mostly cobbles, gravel and finer sediment a promising looking gap could be seen. Capped another boulder to uncover flowstone and an enticing small gap under what appears to be a solid roof. There are some boulders that require some more attention but that is a task for the next session.

29th September 2016: with Roz, Tav and Nick.

On arrival at the Wookey Hole car park we were greeted by Tom Chapman who presented me with a small box of animal bones and a single pot sherd recovered from a site within the cave. The bones, at first glance mainly rodent, will need to be cleaned and sorted and a visit to the site will be carried out soon (*see entry 26th November 2016*).

At the top of Chamber 20 capped more rock and a better look at the prospects was possible. After some discussion and scrutiny of the area we decided to dig in the area that UBSS had previously been scratching around. We did some general tidying of the area mostly removing a dump of rocks to a safe place before exiting the cave. We will return to the site next week to continue the dig.

6th October: with Jake. Tav took some members of the Axbridge Caving Group (ACG) on a tour.

Tom Chapman briefly appeared to show where the small mammal bones had been found and led us up to the main entrance. Jake and myself climbed up to the proposed adventure caving route while Tav and the ACG reverted to the more usual route into 20. The area where the

bones were found has largely been cleaned and I suggest that they were either deposited by a predator (owl or other raptor?) some of the bones might have been carried in by nesting jackdaws, I have seen similar occurrences in caves in Yorkshire.

Anyway, we continued through the show cave and up to the top of 20 where we put Tav's new mattock quickly to work. We started excavating a trench in the area where the UBSS had shown some scant attention. The digging is mostly of fine sediment, silt and sand. Tav and Pete Flanagan (ACG) made a brief appearance giving Jake the opportunity to clear a skip run for later use.

It will require a few more digging sessions before we have a clearer idea of what lies ahead, although both Jake and I detected a very faint air movement low down at the current end of the dig.

As ever it was very warm, sweaty work and a thirst was coming on, we called it to an end and headed out of the cave to get some refreshment at the Hunter's Lodge Inn.

13th October 2016: with Jake and Tav.

Tav headed to the rift to retrieve a skip and rope while Jake and I went on to the dig at the end of 20. There we continued where we left off last week just using the mattock to loosen the fine sediment, silty sand with some interesting colour bands but no large rocks. When Tav arrived with the skip and rope I set about removing boulders along the skip run using the capping gear. At the end of the session the skip run was clear, just requires a few skips of sediment to smooth it over, and there was a very large hole where Jake and Tav had been active.

As ever it was very warm, thirsty work!

20th October 2016: with Jake and Tav.

Well what do you know! Should have brought the camera as all the Hallowe'en decorations were out, there were 'ghosties, ghoulies, skellies', coffins and things floating in the sump pool. What can you say!

Up at the dig the skip was trimmed to shape, the rope was attached, the slope smoothed over and ready to go. It's very warm work swinging the mattock, then shovelling the sediment into the skip for removal, keep going until you start to overheat and then swap around. A lot of spoil was shifted and there's a whole lot more to shift!

The Hunter's is a welcome stop on the way home.

25th October 2016: with Jake, Nick, Tav and Duncan P.

All went in through the 'adventure caving route' near the main entrance where I stayed behind to take some photographs, the rest of the team went on up to the dig at the top of 20. After taking the photographs, I then headed into 20 to join up with the others, but I was distracted along the way and stopped to take even more photographs.



Then I got side-tracked by a passage that I thought might by-pass the climb, it didn't, and I was glad to get back out as it was rather too snug in places and I was not convinced it was entirely stable among the rocks.

Eventually arrived at the dig and joined in with the team shifting spoil back and dumping it in various gaps in the floor of the chamber.



All too soon it was time to depart the dig and we made our way out of the cave exiting by the more traditional route along the tunnel.

3rd November 2016: with Jake, Tav and Nick. Duncan P. went to DW to check his dig there.



The 'top of 20' team had another warm trip up to the dig. Tav and Nick began the proceedings, Jake and Vince hauling and dumping the spoil. When Tav and Nick overheated we swapped roles.

It's a big hole filled with silt and sand and it isn't clear why there are no rocks as there are plenty on the approach and on both sides, perhaps they are lower down. There is some interesting banding ranging through yellow and red with alternating thinner bands of yellow and brown, probably signifying past flooding/filling events.

When we were all suitably warmed and thirsty we exited the cave, and finished the evening at the usual local hostelry to discuss the dig and other plans for the future.

10th November 2016: with Nick, Tav and Jake.

The bears are back - *Ursus fibra glassicus!*



Putting our excitement aside we had a steady jaunt up to the dig. Arrived quite warm and straight into digging so no chance to cool down. Nick was clearing back the skips as I filled them, Tav and Jake hauling and dumping. When I had suitably overheated I swapped places with Nick until he too, overheated, we swapped places with Tav and Jake. Dug out lots of sediment and at 21:20 we left for the pub!

17th November 2016: with Jake.

With hindsight, perhaps it shouldn't have come with too much of a surprise to find the dig under a considerable depth of water. We didn't really think there had been that much rain lately, but we knew that this area had flooded before.



There had been plenty of signs along the way to the dig, where there were drips before now was a trickle, it was noisier, the cascade was once again rippling with the flow of water, and a pool of water with a stream had appeared in the chamber just before the dig, the result of an overflow of water from a tiny flooded side passage.

As I approached the dig I could see the water, it's probably 1.5m deep and there's a small stream flowing in being fed, we suspect, by the tiny overflowing side passage previously mentioned.



We collected the tools together and stashed them up in the higher chamber. We will return when it dries up sometime in the future. Meanwhile we will have to find somewhere drier to dig!

Following below is a description of the bone assemblage received from Tom Chapman a while back:

26th November 2016: A summary of an assemblage of bones and a pot sherd found in Wookey Hole cave, Mendip Hills, Somerset.



Introduction

An assemblage containing an assortment of animal and bird bones and including a single pot sherd was found during clearance works to enable an adventure caving route in Wookey Hole cave. The location where the bones were collected is to the right of, and above the main entrance into the show cave in a narrow passage that eventually widens and leads into Wookey Hole cave.



It should be noted that the assemblage was not recovered during a systematic and controlled excavation but were received by the author as a random collection of bones and sediment.

The assemblage was contained within sediment consisting dry and friable reddish-brown sandy silt with occasional sub-angular fine and medium gravel of limestone and fragments of calcite; there was some organic matter content, mostly of fine roots.

Method

The assemblage was initially sorted as received and the larger bones were separated from the assemblage, this process included the pot sherd. Where possible smaller bones such as small mammal skulls and mandibles were also separated, any coarse granular material removed. The remaining sediment and bone were wet sieved over a 63-micron mesh sieve to remove the silt and clay fraction, the sample was then air dried. The larger bones, small mammal skulls and mandibles were washed and dried separately. The dried sample was then dry sieved using a 710-micron wire mesh sieve to separate the bones from the sand fraction. Small mammal skulls and mandibles (lower jaws) were the selected for basis of this summary analysis as they were easier to identify, there are a lot of very small bones in a shrew.

Results

The small mammal bone assemblage contained numerous skull and mandibles of smaller rodent species mostly mouse, vole and shrews, as seen in the photograph below, along with a myriad of tiny bones that were not identified as part of this analysis.



These bones were then separated into two groups comprising shrews and mouse/vole.



The 9 skulls and 22 mandibles of shrew species include both common shrew, *Sorex araneus*, and pygmy shrew, *Sorex minutus*. Common shrews are the more abundant species in the shrew bone assemblage, but pygmy shrews are represented.



There are numerous skull and mandible bone specimens from both mouse species, *Mus* or *Apodemus*; and vole species, *Microtus* or *Myodes*; these appear to make up a large part of the bone assemblage. There were also numerous fragmented remains that were not identified.



The larger bones included bovid (sheep/goat) three metacarpals and a phalanx with other unidentified fragments. There is more than one animal. None of the bones showed any sign of

butchery although one bone, a metacarpal, did have some evidence of gnawing probably by rodent. The damage to the bones occurred post-mortem most likely during excavation.

The three metacarpals, with varying completeness, have an undulating surface at the distal end that is typical of an unfused epiphyseal junction, the phalange is also unfused. This indicates these specimens originated from immature animals less than 18 months old (O'Connor, 2000).



The assemblage also contained a small number of bones from an unidentified bird species, but probably corvidae (perhaps jackdaw).



The pot sherd has been identified as Black Burnished Ware perhaps originating from Dorset during the Roman period.

Conclusion

The small mammal bone assemblage is interpreted as an accumulation of bones deposited by a predator in a favoured rest spot after hunting and feeding. The species that are identified in the assemblage suggest a raptor, most likely a barn owl. Barn owls are creatures of habit taking prey to a preferred perch to consume and digest their catch. Pellets containing fur, claws and bone are regurgitated and if these are undisturbed quickly become incorporated into a forming sediment, the more robust constituents, such as bones, might survive as a closely packed clump of material (O'Connor, 2000). It is possible that this accumulation later becomes incorporated into material taken into the cave for nest building.

There are no butchery marks or significant evidence for gnawing identified on the larger bovid bones, these are unlikely to have been transported into the cave by a scavenger, such as fox. It is suggested that these might have been picked up by jackdaws, perhaps as nest material and carried into the cave.

The pot sherd has been identified as Black Burnished Ware, this is one of the major types of coarse pottery used for the dating of Roman sites (Gibson, 2002). The sherd was not a diagnostic piece, i.e. part of a rim or base, hence a wider date range of 1st to 4th century AD. It is likely to be a residual find, as with the bovid bones, perhaps carried to the location by corvid species. There is documented evidence for Romano-British occupation at Wookey Hole beginning around the early second century and continuing into the late fourth century AD. This phase of occupation appears to be domestic as the pottery includes cooking and eating vessels (HER 24355).

However, the assemblage was not recovered during a systematic and controlled excavation; therefore, any potential relationships cannot be established or suggested with any certainty.

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1st December 2016: with Tav and Nick.

The plan was to go up and check the water level in the dig at the top of Chamber 20 and then to search for Rob Harper's passage.

The dig is still flooded, although the water has been much deeper it is at the level noted by Jake and myself a fortnight ago. There is not any sign of water flowing in, so it may be receding slowly. There has been some slumping of material into the dig.

We went then, in search of Rob's passage and after some rummaging around looking at, other potential leads we located the passage. A low, wide phreatic arch requiring some flat out crawling through puddles, strewn with boulders, plenty of calcification and some small formations, about 20m in length. We need to see a survey to see where it's heading and then decide if it is a viable dig. A pleasant evening's stroll around though!

8th December 2016: with Roz, Nick and Tav.

At the dig the water has all but receded, just a small puddle and some slop remain. We began the task of clearing spoil so that a retaining wall can be built to try and prevent any further slumping in should the dig flood in the future.

The plan is to build a series of stepped dry-stone walls as we dig deeper, first though we will consolidate the depth we have already gained. Several large rocks, and some medium sized ones, were moved into location and by the end of the session the first stage was almost completed.

As ever it was warm and thirsty work and soon time for some refreshment.

13th December 2016: with Nick and Tav.

The dig at the end of Chamber 20 has dried up, it's a bit claggy on the top but underneath it is relatively dry, at least it was where we reduced the level for the drystone wall. Nick decided to roll some rather large boulders down the slope for use in the next stepped wall and some of them took quite a lot of effort to position. It was very warm work indeed.

We plan to return on Thursday evening to continue the project.

15th December 2016: with Nick.

Just the two of us this evening.

A steady jaunt to the end of Chamber 20 where we continued the construction of the stepped wall. First lowering the sediment, then I collected rocks for Nick to build up the wall.

By the end of the session the retaining wall was just about completed, now we are ready to resume digging.

29th December 2016: with Nick, Tav and Duncan.

A steady trip up through Chamber 20, stopping for a while to point out the entry to 'Attila the Hun's Sardine Cannery' to DP so that he can add it to his survey in the future.

At the dig, it was rather disappointing to find that it was full of water again. I can't remember when it rained but Tav seemed sure it was around the 23rd. On the way-out we noted that the

pool in the chamber was deeper and a trickle of water was coming from the solutional slot in the roof, filling the small side tube that was overflowing and trickling into the pool.

Hopefully, the weather will remain dry and the water will drain away so that we can resume digging next week.

14th March 2017: with Jake and Nick.

The plan was to go up to the end of Chamber 20 in Wookey Hole to check the water levels in our dig there. Optimism, mostly on my part, began to waiver when a strong drip of water was noted in the show cave, further on, the calcite cascade was flowing, approaching the dig, the small side passage was overflowing into the pond in the chamber just before the dig. The dig, was of course, flooded, the water had been deeper, but for now, had receded to its perched level. A little while yet before the digging effort can re-commence.



To pass some time we made our way over to the rift to retrieve some kit left part way down, the equipment will be of use in the future. Then, we left the cave to go to the pub.

11th April 2017: with Nick.

The main purpose of the trip was to have another look at the water level in the dig, so that we can get work there underway. It was noticeably drier on the approach through the cave passage.

At the top of 20 we paused to investigate a curious gurgling sound being created by a trickle of water through a tiny fissure in the rock. We, then collected the digging kit we had stashed about a month ago and took it down to the dig, some of it will be useful I'm sure. The small side passage, that overflows into the dig was dry. I was optimistic that the dig would be dry. It was!

After sorting-out the digging kit, Nick suggested that we remove the clay film that had settled as the water had receded. So, that we did, taking turns to fill the bucket with the claggy sediment and load the skip. Hauling the skip wasn't so easy either, the haul rope could do with replacing, then there was the thixotropic slop to be removed from the skip. But, we managed to get most

of the slumped and settled material out and the digging should be easier next session. Hopefully, more of the team will be available and that will make the task a whole lot better.

Time for refreshment, another warm, thirst inducing digging session.

13th April 2017: with Roz, Nick, Tav and Paul Brock.

Happy days! Back to digging and a good team assembled. The usual steady, warm trip up to the end of 20.

Tav and Brocker's took it in turns to dig, me and Nick did the hauling - a joint effort, while Roz emptied the skip and managed the spoil heap. Hauling was made considerably better with the replacement rope donated to the cause by Brockers.

No-one counted the number of bucket loads removed, but there was a good-sized hole at the end the session. The digger's reported that the sediment was becoming more compact and it's not easy to work-out just where the water has gone.

As ever, we'll just keep digging on.

4th May 2017: with Jake, Tav and Duncan P.

The usual warm trip up through 20, even though we kept a relaxed pace. Ma and Jake took it in turns to dig, Tav and Duncan hauled and emptied the skip. The new digging buckets were put to good use and spoil was removed at a steady rate. The hole got deeper, it won't be too long before a ladder will be needed to get in and out.

There is some interesting layering within the sediments, evidence of successive flooding/drying events. Some of the laminations are compact, some less so.

11th May 2017: with Jake, Nick, Tav, Duncan, Roz, Roger Haskett, Dave King and Ray Deasy.

Roz took Roger up to chamber 20, Tav took Dave and Ray for a tour around, the rest of us headed up to the dig at the top of 20.



At the dig, Nick and Duncan rotated the digging effort, Jake and myself hauled the spoil away. We were joined later by Tav and co., Ray and Dave went up to the end to assist with the digging, Tav helped-out with spoil dispersal.



All too soon, it was time for the pub, it had been another enjoyable session.

18th May 2017: with Jake, Tav, Jonathon, Dunc P, Matt and Mandy Voysey.

Me and Jake made our way to the dig, the rest of the team tarried awhile to admire the scenery. At the dig, Jake and I started to dig, it wasn't too long before we were joined by the others. Jonathon and Matt assisted Jake with the digging, Tav did the hauling aided by Mandy, Dunc and I were on spoil management. It was a very mellow digging session with plenty of banter. All too soon it was time for refreshment at the Hunter's Lodge Inn.



15th June 2017: Jake, Tav, Duncan P, Pete Bolt and Max Fisher.

Continuation of the slope engineering. Tav, Pete and Max with a combined effort in spoil removal, Duncan and myself were hauling it away.



Jake was in control of spoil dispersal management. And, building a retaining wall.



Another fine evening in this mellow spot.

6th July 2017: with Jake, Jonathon, Tav, and that stalwart of the Grampian, Goon.

The usual warm trip up to the dig, the difference was the trail of blood left by Goon.

At the end, Jake and Jonathon, quickly got on with the digging, continuing to engineer the slope. Tav and I were on hauling duty and occasionally re-arranging some lumpy pieces of

limestone, Goon was assigned to spoil dispersal. A good steady session. I will need to bring the capping kit next session to split a few hefty boulders.

To the Hunter's Lodge Inn to quaff a few glasses of fine ale.

13th July 2017: with Jake, Tav and Nick, back from his travels, just!

Continued with the slope engineering, progress is being made. Nick and Tav took-up the digging duties, I was on hauling, Jake, also hauling, but attended to spoil dispersal as well. We will get back to digging at the bottom soon.

5th August 2017: Duncan Price visited Wookey Hole yesterday and reports that, after recent rain, the dig has flooded again.

21st September 2017: Back in the day, there may have been more of us, but many of the team fell by the wayside, just me and Tav made the journey.

Along the route, up through Chamber 20 to the dig, there is plenty of evidence for some recent high-energy water flow, many of the mud banks have been washed-out. The water appears to have issued from above, so fast surface run-off likely, it has been rather wet recently. Maybe there's a higher network of passages.

We were not surprised to arrive at the dig and find it underwater. Spent a bit of time tidying away the tools and other equipment, before making our way back out of the cave, taking some stuff out with us. It is still a warm trip, even when a gentle pace, taking time to look around.

7th November 2017: Solo.

The main purpose of the trip was to check-out the current state of the dig in Chamber 20. After the recent rain, I wasn't surprised to find that the dig was still underwater.



But, I did take the opportunity to spend some time admiring some of the fine formations that can be seen in this cave passage



These formations are formed by the precipitation of carbonate that is in solution in water, the energy of water can also lead to natural sculpting of the rock.





15th February 2018: with Jake, Jonathon, Tav, Roz, Duncan and Mike M.

Good to have a project in mind and make a return to the quest in Wookey 20. Duncan and Max Fisher, on a diving trip into 24, have followed a dry rift passage for c.10m to a constriction, beyond, the rift appears to continue. They plan to return with caving kit and pursue the rift further.

On the way-up through Wookey 20, it was noticeable that there was plenty of water after the recent wet weather. We were not surprised to find that the 'sand dig' was occupied by a deep pool of water. We collected the tools and equipment required for the mission and made our way to the descending rift that leads to Sump twenty-three and three-quarters, passing a group from Cheddar Caving Group for a second time.

A short drop down the rift, we arrived at the site of interest, a small alcove we had previously backfilled while widening the rift to the sump, we had commented at the time that, "we will probably be digging this all-out in a couple of years", and so we are. We made a small dimple in the spoil stash but, all too soon, it was time to vacate the cave. We shall return.

22nd February 2018: with Jake, Jonathon, Brockers, Dunc and Mike M.

Mike M and myself dropped further down the route to Sump 23.75 to have a quick look at another potential lead, where a feint air current could be felt. This will be left on the back-burner for the while. We returned, up the climbs, to re-join the rest of the team clearing the alcove. Beyond the alcove is a narrow 'draughting' rift, it is this we are trying to regain access to.

8th March 2018: with Jake, Jonathon, Dunc and Mike.

It was good to get underground again after a two week lay-off, due to snow and other things.

We continued with clearing-out the alcove and narrow rift beyond. I thought I sensed some air

movement now the gaps between the fill are opening-up. The drips through Chamber 20 were active, water flowing down the cascades strongly. It was an enjoyable evening.

Should remember to bring the camera.

15th March 2018: with Duncan, Jonathon, Max Fisher, Tav, Mike M and Leonie (MCG). Alex came too!

While us headed-off to the digs, Alex did his own thing, mooching around 20, etc. I went with Leonie to look at the 'Sand Dig', the others slid down the rift to go digging.

At the Sand Dig, water levels were higher than the last visit, a consequence of recent heavy rain. It could be a while before it dries enough for digging.



We left the Sand Dig and joined the rest of the team to help with the digging. At the end of the session, the dumped spoil had been removed from the alcove and the narrow rift beyond could be seen. Progress forward will require the application of some induced rapid speleogenesis (IRS). That will have to wait until next week after I return from the Peak District.

It was a fine evening's activity!

21st March 2018: with Roz.

A trip to apply some IRS. As usual, a pleasant trip though Chamber 20, a fine section of Mendip cave passage. There is still a good trickle of water in places.

At the dig face, 4no. awkward holes, 500mm x 12mm, drilled and filled, a loud retort and all was well.

Passing the Hunter's Lodge Inn, it would be churlish not to stop!

29th March 2018: with Jonathon, Nick, Brockers, Jake, Tav and Alex.

Alex did his own thing while the rest of us headed up to the dig to clear the bang. The IRS had been quite effective and there was plenty of debris to shift, kept the team busy. Most of the

fractured rock was removed, however, a very large flake remains in-situ and will require some further attention.

I'm not convinced of the viability of this lead, it appears to be going downwards towards known passage. The removal of the large flake will allow a better view, and getting someone to investigate lower down the known passage below will probably throw some light on the prospects for the future.

A steady trip out of the cave followed.

3rd April 2018: with Roz.

A bit of a mare really. While drilling the holes in the large flake to further the IRS, it decided, rather disconcertingly, to move towards me. Hastily, I jammed a bar across the fissure, an effort to keep it in place. I managed to get the required number of holes drilled but, they were shallower than intended. Then, the 20g cord was a different brand the usual and it was a slightly larger diameter, I struggled to get the pre-prepared charges into the holes. In the end, I did what I could, it all went bang anyway. Hopefully the flake has been reduced and there will be something to shift on the next visit.

12th April 2018: with Tav, Jonathon, Brockers and Duncan.

Five go digging! I couldn't make the trip last week, but others did and had cleared some of the resulting bang debris, the flake had been successfully fragmented. This evening, we continued to clear the accumulation of spoil from the slowly expanding alcove/rift. The digging is the easy bit, the removal of spoil along the rift is awkward and quite technical, five people is the minimum number required to make digging effective. The spoil mostly comprises gravel and cobbles of conglomerate and limestone with the occasional boulder, these were soon reduced to a more manageable size with the small sledge-hammer. At the end of the session, I could stand-up in the rift and turn-around. There remains, plenty of spoil for another digging session, maybe we will be able to make a better assessment of the prospects then.

Some drier, warm weather is forecast, we might consider going to have a look at the sand dig soon.

19th April 2018: with Nick, Duncan, Brockers, Jonathon, Mike, Claire Cohen and Ray Deasy.

A good assembled for this evening's foray. As there were plenty of people to carry-on with the dig down the rift, I decided to go along and check the current state of the Sand Dig, Nick came along too. We've had a spell of drier weather recently, and surface temperatures are rising. It had been noticeable on the trip through Chamber 20 that water flows had decreased, it was not a surprise to find that the Sand Dig was now, dry. There had been quite a slump of sediment into the end of the dig, as we were there, Nick and I started to clear-out some of the rocks. A skip and hauling rope will need to be organised ready for the digging activities to resume next week.

It was soon time to re-join the rest of the team, they had continued clearing the spoil from the fissure leading-off the rift. When they had emptied the last few bags and climbed the slope, we exited the cave.

26th April 2018: with Brockers, Nick, Jake, Jonathon, Roz, Duncan, Mike and Alex.

A big team assembled this evening, keen to get the Sand Dig re-started, it might have been bigger had others been able to attend. Roz and I had arrived a little late, the rest of the team were ready, so off they went with the skip and ropes, Brockers had brought along some ropes as well.

At the dig, Jake, Nick and Brockers were digging and emptying the filled buckets into the skip. Hauling was carried-out by Jonathon and Mike; the rest of the team were assigned the task of spoil dispersal. Water was poured down the slope, an effort to ease the passage of the skip, it worked for a while, on the down-side, it also had the effect of muddying the rope making it difficult to grip. One of the spare ropes was knotted-up and replaced the slippery rope, making the haul a bit easier.

At the end of the session, a lot of spoil had been shifted. The sediment comprises mostly silty, fine to medium grained sand with the occasional cobble of limestone. There's plenty more of it to shift too!

1st May 2018: with Jake, Tav, Jonathon, Duncan and Mike.

A bigger turn-out than expected for this digging session.

At the Sand Dig, Mike digging, Tav shifting the filled buckets back up to Jonathon, who was loading the skip and, in between time, dismantling some of the old spoil heaps at the top of the dig. I was on the slope, helping to haul the skip, Jake and Duncan, sharing the hauling and spoil dispersal tasks.

We need plenty of room at the top to slope down, allowing the digging to go deeper, hence, the moving of some of the old spoil heaps. The rocks will be useful for building walls later.

By the end of the session, a large quantity of spoil had been removed but, there's plenty more to shift.

3rd May 2018: with Jonathon, Alex, Tav, Brockers, Mike and Ray Deasy.

Another fine assemblage of willing diggers gathered, destined for the Sand Dig.

Alex digging, aided by Brockers, I was loading the skip, Ray on the slope, leaving Tav, Jonathon and Mike to manage spoil dispersal.

To say it was a jovial evening with plenty of banter uttered would be an understatement, Ray was prompted to suggest that the dig be named "Windrush", very topical too!

However, at the end of the session, a significant quantity of spoil, had again, been removed from the dig, more good progress achieved.

10th May 2108: with Jake, Tav, Brockers, Mike, Jonathon and Duncan.

While Tav took Jon and Mike on a quick detour to 19, Duncan tagged along as well, Brockers, Jake and myself carried on to Sand Dig.

Brockers digging, Jake passed the filled buckets up to me and I emptied them into the skip. The others soon arrived. Duncan positioned himself on the slope, Jon hauling up-slope to the top, Tav and Mike were on spoil dispersal.

A lot of sand was shifted, a large boulder re-positioned, and there's still more sand to remove. As the session progressed the sand became wetter, whether that is of any significance, who knows?

15th May 2018: with Jake, Tav and Duncan.

We did what we set-out to do. The loose rocks, plus a few others, were removed from the top of the dig, we also cleared a quantity of fine sediment as well. This should enable us to angle the slope down, allowing the digging to go deeper. Peering down from the top, it's a big hole.

17th May 2018: with Roz, Jake, Jonathon, Alex and Tav.

Jon and Tav digging, Alex loading the skip, Jake and me hauling the loaded skip, Roz emptied it, adding the spoil to the burgeoning heap.



A lot of sediment was shifted, and the hole grows ever bigger and deeper!



24th May 2018: with Jake, Jonathon, Alex, Duncan, Nick and Mike.

Nick, after a longish stint working away, was keen to get back to digging, so we let him, Mike clearing away the filled buckets to Jake, who was loading the skip. I was at the first stage of the haul with Jonathon and Duncan pulling the skip up the slope to Alex on spoil dispersal. The sediment was added to the ever-increasing spoil heap, there weren't many stones, mostly silty sand.

When the time reached 'ten past beer o'clock' we finished digging and headed out of the cave.

31st May 2018: with Brockers, Alex, Mike, Nick, Jake and Duncan.

Called in at the farm to collect the mattock retrieved from Hallowe'en last Saturday before meeting the rest of the team in the Wookey Hole car park.

Usual warm trip through Chamber 20 to the dig. There was a little bit more moisture in the cave following some recent rain. At the dig, Brockers digging, Alex and Mike shifting the filled buckets and occasional rocks up to me loading the skip. Nick and Jake hauled the skip up the slope to Duncan, who was managing the spoil dispersal.

The dig is getting ever-deeper and a good-sized team, as tonight, is becoming a necessity for removal of spoil from the bottom. A long bar and a sledge-hammer would be useful for dealing with larger rocks, most of the tools we had here were taken to the dig along the rift and haven't been returned.

We moved lots of spoil then, we went to the Hunter's.

7th June 2018: with Jake, Mike, Jonathon, Brockers and Alex.

Jake digging, Mike passing the filled buckets up to Jon who was loading the skip. Brockers did the brunt of the hauling up the slope and I was emptying the skips for Alex to shovel the sediment up onto the spoil heap. Some large boulders were shifted but they were retained for use for wall building in the future. There was lots of sand and lots of banter, at our end anyway.

Time passed, it reached beer o'clock, we left the cave, got changed in the car park and headed up to the Hunter's for well-earned refreshments.

14th June 2018: with Mike, Jonathon, Tav, Alex, Brockers and Jake.

Mike was upfront filling the buckets, Jonathon and Tav were passing the filled buckets up to Alex who emptied the contents into the skip. Brockers did the brunt of the hauling up the slope, I passed the skip to Jake who dispersed the spoil to the heap.

Sediment was shifted at a steady rate but there are some irksome boulders impeding more rapid progress. These will need looking at and a plan formulated as to how best to deal with them.

There was, of course, plenty of banter throughout the evening session.

21st June 2018: with Brockers, Nick, Jake, Tav, Jonathon and Mike.

I went to the dig-face to look at a potential boulder blockage, Brockers and Nick were behind me. While I concentrated on cleaning around the boulders and into an alcove, they continued to expand the working space at the bottom of the pit. Filled buckets and the occasional were removed from the dig at a good, steady rate.

By the end of the session, the boulders don't appear to be too much of a problem at the present, they can be worked around and dug-out, if necessary.

Another fine digging session, thirsty work, time for refreshments.

28th June 2018: Tav, Jon, Mike, Jake and Nick.

Tav's account, I finished work too late. "Removed the usual steady stream of sand and clay which further exposed the group of large boulders in the floor of the pot. With the aid of the full team, two of these were later physically manhandled up on to the upper ledge."

5th July 2018: Jake, Jonathon, Nick, Brockers, Duncan and Tav.

The spoil removal team: Jake, Jonathon, Nick and Brockers, got on with digging out the sediment, breaking up boulders with the new sledge hammer, and loading the resulting debris into the skip. The spoil dispersal team: Duncan, me and Tav, hauled the skip up the slope and emptied its contents on to the ever-growing spoil heap. This procedure repeated over and over, until the clock passed beer o'clock when we left the cave. Plenty of spoil shifted, plenty more to shift!

12th July 2018: Report by Tav:

"President Trump digging passing buckets to Jonathon, who passed them to Jake and Tav to remove. Lots more out including big boulders. Noticeable inward draught going where?"

2nd August 2018

I haven't managed to dig in Wookey Hole for a while due to one thing or another, in the meantime, the rest of the team have continued with the task. Good to get back and see the progress made.

With Mike, Alex, Jonathon, Duncan, Claire, Tav took some Wessex members for a tour around Chamber 20, etc., he joined us later.

Mike and me digging, the others clearing the spoil away. The digging was not speedy, some big boulders impeding progress, scratched around them and managed to shift a couple of them. The way forward is not entirely clear, so keep digging and see what happens. It was warm, as ever.

9th August 2018

With Brockers, Tav, Nick, Jon, Duncan and Alex.

Jon, Nick and Tav playing in the sand-pit with their buckets and spades, Duncan took away their buckets, while the rest of us hauled-away and emptied the buckets and then, sent the buckets back. Some rocks were broken-up too, until Jon broke the hammer. A good time was had by all!

16th August 2018

With Roz, Jonathon, Duncan, Tav, Nick and Mike.

Nick, Tav and Mike down in the sand-pit; Duncan, Jon and Roz were on hauling duties; after taking a few photographs, I was emptying the buckets. The sediment removed varied from sand to boulders and there was plenty of it, plenty more to come too!

It was a pleasant evening with lots of friendly banter.



23rd August 2018

With Duncan, Mike, Jonathon, Nick and Tav

Duncan and Mike down in the sand-pit digging, Jonathon and myself shifting the filled buckets up to Nick and Tav who were hauling and emptying the buckets. Plenty of talk about speleogenesis and looking at scalloping to determine flow direction, seems recent events in Hallowe'en Rift have got us thinking and talking. Just don't mention paragenesis!

30th August 2018

A depleted team, Roz, Duncan, Jonathon and Mike, sallied forth and kept the effort going. On arrival at the dig a puddle was bailed away and digging commenced. With a small team it requires more effort to shift the spoil., but they stuck at it and progress was made.

25th September 2018

With Snablet, Roz and Tav

An impromptu trip after Snablet's enquiry "are we doing anything tonight?" following up some beer fuelled conversation we'd had on Saturday evening at the Hidden Earth conference in Churchill.

We sort-of expected the sand dig to be under water or, at least, wet following the heavy rain that fell over the last weekend, it was neither, so we set to work. Snablet and Tav rotated the digging and filling buckets, as one overheated the other took over, Roz was taking the filled buckets and loading the skip, I was hauling the skip up the slope and emptying the contents. It was a pleasant, evenly paced session with plenty of banter.

After the digging session the evening was rounded off with a trip to the Hunter's. Snablet is returning to New Zealand on Thursday. A fine time was had by all.

27th September 2018

Duncan, Mike, Jonathon and Alex kept up the effort. Buckets were filled and emptied, rocks were removed.

4th October 2018

With Roz, Jonathon, Duncan and Mike

A mellow evening. Jon and Mike rotated the digging, Roz transferred the filled buckets to the skip, Duncan hauled the skip up the slope and I emptied the filled buckets. The procedure was repeated at a regular rate. A large rock was reduced in size, the pieces were added to the wall retaining the spoil.

The evening was concluded at the Hunter's Lodge Inn in time honoured fashion.

11th October 2018

With Nick, Mike, Jonathon, Tav, Alex and Duncan

Nick, Mike and Jonathon at the sharp end, digging and filling buckets, then moving the filled buckets and occasional rocks to Tav who then facilitated dispatch. Alex hauling the loaded skip and passing buckets and rocks to Duncan. The buckets were emptied onto the spoil heap where

I was on spoil management duties. It was a pleasant evening with the usual banter and a lot of sediment was shifted. The dig goes on!

We were joined, for a while by a large [queen] wasp. It was noted too, that the cave was slowly becoming wetter, previously dry pools now have water in them.

18th October 2018

With Mike, Duncan, Nick and Tav



After persistent rain last weekend, it was not a surprise to find that the trip through Chamber 20 was wetter, the calcite cascade had water flowing down it. As suspected the sand dig was had about a metre of water at the bottom and there was still a trickle of water flowing into it, as such, it was undiggable. There were a few rocks in a vulnerable position, if a slump-in occurred they might end up at the bottom of the dig. So, these were moved and the spoil retaining wall was extended.

We were in the Hunter's a bit earlier than usual. At least the forecast is for dry weather for the next few days, so the dig might drain. Unfortunately, it will not take much rain to refill it though.

25th October 2018

With Alex, Nick, Jonathon, Mike, Duncan and David Walker (curator at the Wells & Mendip Museum and MCRA)

At the sand dig we were relieved to see it had dried-up and quite quickly after the fill event by the look of it. I started to dig in the [dry] alcove, because I got there first, Alex reduced a limestone boulder in size and removed the slop from the lowest point of the dig. The spoil management team were not impressed with the slop and were experiencing some difficulty in

extricating it from the bucket. The solution, they decided, was to put a couple of handfuls of drier sediment into the bucket first, the diggers, of course, complied with this instruction.



Duncan and Mike wrestling with a boulder, 18/10/18

Nick was on the steps passing the filled buckets to David, loading the skip to the spoil management team comprising Jon, Mike and Duncan.

When Alex had removed the slop, he turned his attention to clearing the loose sediment that I was creating in the alcove. The buckets started to move freely at a good constant rate. There are some very interesting layers of deposition to look at in the sediment bank, these can become, somewhat, of a distraction. Flood events and subsequent drying periods can be clearly distinguished.

All too soon it was time to stop digging, clear the loose, stash the tools at a safe height and make our way out of the cave. Changed in the car park and up to the Hunter's for well-earned refreshments.

1st November 2018

A summary of the night's activities from Jonathon

“Three intrepid diggers (Tav, Nick and Jon) were joined by a tour guide (Duncan) with a party of seven from the SBSS. While the tourists travelled wide and far, the diggers went straight to the face, where they found a completely dry dig. Taking turns to haul, they dug in random directions, clearing many buckets of spoil before the tourists arrived and offered a willing hand.

Eventually, the arid conditions took their toll and the party were forced to retire to a local hostelry for liquid refreshment.”

8th November 2018

With Alex, Mike, Jonathon and Roz

It's been raining recently and all the way up through Chamber 20 the results of this were clear; the drips were stronger, pools were filling-up and water was flowing down the calcite cascade. However, on arrival at the sand dig, we were pleasantly surprised to find it bone dry and no signs of water having flowed into it, this despite the small tube being full and overflowing.



Alex reaches for the mattock

Alex climbed down into the pit and began digging in the alcove, I was moving the filled buckets and passing them up to Mike, who then placed the filled buckets into the skip, hauled by Jonathon, Roz was in control of spoil dispersal. The empty buckets were returned, the process repeated, many times.



Height of sediment sequence c.100mm

In between moving buckets, I spent a little bit of time tidying-up a section of the sediment bank where evidence of flooding and subsequent draining events is clear. It really needs more time spent on it and a full section cleaned and recorded.

All too soon it was time to move the tools to higher ground, just in case, and depart the cave.

15th November 2018

Surprisingly, the sand dig was dry and didn't appear to have backed-up at all after the very heavy rain last weekend. However. A seepage of water through the sediments in the alcove had caused some slumping and work was concentrated there to tidy-up and consolidate. The trickle of water that enters from the chamber was constant, making the steps slippery so these were tidied up too, very sloppy spoil. The water from the trickle is draining freely through the sandy sediment at the bottom of the dig.

Alex and Nick shared the digging, Mike loaded the filled buckets into the skip, Jon hauled the skip up the slope and I emptied the buckets. The process was, of course, repeated many times.

29th November 2018

Last weeks digging session was abandoned for the pub when only three of us turned up at Wookey Hole.

Better turn-out this week, with Nick, Tav, Jonathon, Duncan, Mike and, course yours truly, all keen and raring to go, unfortunately Roz got left behind and wasn't happy about it!

After some persistent wet weather recently, we weren't all that hopeful about this evening's prospects but, we headed off anyway. The cave was active, the sound and sight of dripping, running water all the way up through Chamber 20. At the sand dig, the anticipated puddle of water but, rather surprisingly, not as deep as expected.



The excavation had become self-digging as more had slumped from the roof to reveal a space overhead, which was encouraging, and potential lead(s). Some digging was possible but continual slumping and a large, suspect slab overhead soon put an end to it. That was, until Nick decided to poke a bar into the bottom of a small pool of water that became a flow of water and a pile of sloppy sediment. After some more interventions, more slumps, and time running-out, we decided to leave it to settle down, perhaps continue to self-digging and return next week. hopefully, the water will continue to drain freely, and wet conditions will not impede further progress too much.

To the pub!

6th December 2018

With Duncan, Jonathon, Nick, Tav and Alex

The trip through Chamber 20 didn't appear to be much wetter than last week, despite of the recent rain. At the sand dig, the water level had risen c.150-200mm and was encroaching into the alcove. Everything at the bottom of the dig was slippery, the self-digging hadn't occurred, and the large, precarious slab of rock was still overhead. After some protracted discussion, it was decided that the rock needs to be dealt with before digging can continue [relatively] safely, some chemical persuasion is required, it will be done!

Tav suggested that we might re-locate the retaining wall and so create extra spoil dumping space, this seemed a good idea so, that's what we did for the evening.

I had a less than comfortable trip out of the cave, the sole of my boot had decided to become detached and go solo, one moccasin is not great for caving – or one socked foot either!

13th December 2018

Jon, Roz and Mike gallantly kept up the effort in the absence of others, I was working away in Suffolk, I don't know the other excuses. The sand dig had dried and the small team were able to remove 25 buckets of slop, with some difficulty. Apparently, the buckets were not easy to empty and required plenty of scraping clean. So engrossed were they that the usual cut-off time, "beer o'clock", was missed and they arrived at the Hunter's, late on parade.

20th December 2018

Couldn't get enough people together for a team this evening, no digging.

27th December 2018

With Roz, Brockers, Nick, Tav and Jon

Had purchased some supplies and a good team assembled to help carry the equipment, including drill bag, sundries bag, drill-bit tube, wire and a 3.5m aluminium ladder, into the cave. There was some debate regarding the length of the ladder, so Brockers carried in a hacksaw, just in case. A careful trip through Chamber 20 to the sand dig where there was plenty of evidence for recent slumping.

With a bit of jiggling the ladder was installed and I was able to drill 4no. holes into the slab of rock. Brockers passing various bits of kit and stuff as and when required. The rest of the team

digwookeyhole

spent time sorting out the spoil heap and ran-out the wire. The holes were charged, and the evening brought to a satisfactory conclusion from a safe location.

Hunter's!