



No. 168

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### Storm Cave in Flood



Toby Speight and John Crae at the entrance to StormCave. MA

Even wet weather caving can be exciting. Tourist trips to Cnockers were cancelled on 15 August due to high water in the stream chamber, Toby Speight, May Alexander and I went for a tour of the sinks on the moor above. The weather was miserable but it did allow us to see water in a lot of normally dry river valleys. We took a look at Deep Depression before descending into Storm Cave to find water levels reaching the foot of the main chamber with the lower passage flooded to the roof. Returning to the surface we were in time to see surface water pour over one of the small steps in the stream bed. The next hour and a half were spent watching the valley slowly fill with water disappearing in amazing quantities down a series of small holes. Martin Hayes joined us just as the rising waters in the cave reached the bottom of the entrance passage into Storm Cave. Streams flowing just under the surface entered Storm Cave from both left and right of the entrance suggesting the ground around the cave is very porous. It took 2 hours for water to fill the cave from noting the water level at the bottom of the main chamber to the water completely filling the entrance climb.

The Coul Dubh Sinks were under a lake and returning to Deep Depression we could see water resurging in the stream bed from a point above 'Roger's Dig' in Storm cave to flow into the recently sealed and protected dig at the entrance to Deep Depression. The dig site slowly filled and the hose pipe fitted to attempt to use water pressure to scour the cave below eventually took water and drained freely suggesting it was draining into a void below.

**John Crae**

### Kyrgistan Expedition 15-30 July 2017

The GSG boldly tackled the far reaches of Central Asia with this year's expedition to Kyrgyzstan. The aim was to reconnoitre previously unexplored areas for potential caves and entrances. A challenge not to be missed. The county is largely Muslim, but seems more of a mixture between Islamic traditions and the older shamanistic culture. As a former part of the Soviet Union there is still a strong Russian/Communist influence, more than a few statues of Lenin and Stalin are still to be seen!

On the first day our team met up with hosts for the trip, Alexey Dudashvili and his team in Bishkek. We were warmly welcomed by the founder of the Kyrgyzstan Speleological Society and presented with rather cool expedition t-shirts. The expedition was a joint caving and biological survey, cave biology being virtually unrecorded in Kirgizstan. The drive south to Osh and on to our first campsite took two days and covered around 1000 km through a spectacular, rugged landscape. So rugged in places flying to Osh might have been a wise option. At one point, the road reached a tunnel at over 3000 m altitude.

A 'big headache' pass as the Chinese call them. The road was part of the Pamir Highway connecting China to the west. The road trip was amazing, passing through areas of permanent snow to semi-desert,



Our team consisted of the following; Imogen Furlong (team leader!), Anton Brancelj, Andrew Brooks, Berenice Hunter, Tom Booth, Derek Pettigilo, Lee Knight Jay Broderick, Ross Davidson, Chris Playfoot, Rostam Namaghi, Ian Peachey, Bob Sommerville. Kirgizstan team; Alexey Dudashvili, Elly (Meera), Vasiley, Tonsom, Sveta and Ackabi. **BS**

lush irrigated valleys and vast grassland populated by Yurt dwelling herdsmen and their families.

Our first campsite in the Batken region was close to the Tortkul reservoir. From there we explored the surrounding hills near the disputed border with Uzbekistan (somewhat sensitive politically). The military authorities were actually very helpful, even on one occasion letting us drive through their firing range to explore the mountains from a more accessible route. The noise of machine guns and explosions from the neighbouring hillside added a certain drama to our day on the hill. A cave (approx. 60 meters) was explored and surveyed. Although this seems to have been visited by locals, our survey is the first recorded. The local people were the best source of information on caves and our local guide Ackabi was invaluable in this regard.

Our second campsite was at an oasis in the semi desert Madygen region. Extensive karst and rugged hills dominated this area, sparsely populated compared to Batken. Again, the area didn't yield extensive caves, although there were many small 6 – 10 m rock shelter entrances at the head of the valleys, these closed down quickly. We did explore a large previously known cave and collected cave fauna, including some potentially new species.

Overall, the exploration did not yield the results we hoped for, but hopefully, our efforts (visiting at least 40 separate sites) have gathered valuable information for future expeditions and helped further speleology in Kyrgyzstan. The local people were welcoming and hospitable on every occasion and I for one would return. One further note: Kyrgyzstan has the best vodka I have had in a long time and the most savage sheep dogs (wolves?) I have ever encountered!

**Bob Sommerville**

### **Progress at UNCABAC**

A very successful week in July thanks to Derrick Pettiglio, Julian Walford and Duncan Butler who worked the sharp end to get from Cherry pit to the new end and increase the length to around 60 metres with 3 chambers and now dry sand to work in. The way on is now more of an issue with removal of large slabs, with a few metres of 3" air gap ahead heading into the hill and has trended upward.

Down dip is now pretty much totally clear of the stuff washed in last year, and bags have been left to find their own way into gaps where the water flows, and will provide an indication of how much water gets past the entrance blockade. This might stem the flow but the canal is now only about 5 - 6" higher than the entrance, wider and has a downward tendency. At the bottom of the down dip 2 ways "on" are now getting to the point of being accessible, but will need work.

Stuart Lindsay's dig at UNCABAC continued 11-24 August. Following on from the major progress made in July, on the weekend of the 12/13 a group prepared the entrance and cleared the pond at the lowest point. The slabs/rocks blocking the way on were attacked with plugs and feathers, Stu's capping kit and snappers sent up from Edinburgh. Passages immeasurable wait to be found ...

**John Crae/Stuart Lindsay**

### **Flood Cave (Uamh Nan Tuil), Applecross**

At the end of May, a modest group from the GSG assembled at the campsite in Applecross to look at the discoveries in the sometimes dry streambed of the Allt Breugaireachd. Although most of the trips were tourist trips. Alex Latta and Derek Pettiglio pushed into several new areas including the low muddy crawl at the far end of the cave to where up a tight sloping squeeze red and white tape could be seen protecting the formations in Liar's Sink and thus linking the two caves. This squeeze had on an earlier trip been investigated from the other side by Ritchie Simpson who at that time declined to crawl through the low muddy crawl. On one of the tourist trip Toby Speight and Mike Todd pushed through and up the slope to complete the round trip from Flood Cave out through Liar's Sink.

**Based on information from Alex Latta, Derek Pettiglio and Toby Speight**

### **Diving in Cnockers**



Simon in the static sump. **SB/OC**

Cnockers' Upstream Static sump was dived in 1975 to reach a stream passage and 3 further sumps. The sump was passed again in 1976 by GSG members but no further progress was made. With interest focussed elsewhere the first sump was not re-visited until 2003 when it was found to be silted up. Since then a campaign of digging has removed about 1 m or so per year. In January 2017, there evidence of peaty silt in the approach passage suggested water has been forced through in flood conditions. In May, the sump was dived reaching 12-13 m and passing the sump on a future dive seems possible. A full report will appear in the GSG Bulletin.

**Simon Brooks**

### **Liar's Sink (Poll Breugair)**

The Liar's Sink / Flood Cave system has now passed the half-kilometre landmark. [At the Applecross meet at the end of May, amid several tourist trips, Toby and Mike Todd visited the upper passage and Toby pushed beyond a low squeeze to extend the upstream passage. **JC**]. There is now 475 m of surveyed passage, and an additional 50 m or so in the upper passage awaiting survey. Slot Dig is about 30 m away, and close to the same depth as, the downstream choke.

**Toby Speight**

## **Cave of True Wonders**

The entrance to the cave being through a tight squeeze under a 2 ton slab of rock supported on unstable boulders, immediately after the tourist trips finished in May, most of the loose rocks were removed as well as a big chunk of the slab and the remainder of the slab pivoted into a more secure position using a winch rigged between two trees. The result of this is that the entrance is now passable to larger cavers although it still drops immediately into the 30 m of canal passage.

**John Crae/Toby Speight**

## **Space Age Caving**



Launching the Drone. ESA/Natalino Russo

In May, ESA astronaut Luca Parmitano helped to explore the caverns under Sicily using a drone that deliberately bumped into its surroundings in order to build a map. An extension of ESA's Cooperative Adventure for Valuing and Exercising human behaviour and performance Skills course, CAVES-X1 saw Luca join a scientific expedition organised by La Venta Association and the Commissione Grotte Eugenio Boegan in the La Cucchiara caves near Sciacca, Sicily. Course designer Loredana Bessone says, "We now want astronauts to take part in existing scientific caving and geological expeditions – scientific exploration does not get more real than this." A Flyability drone deliberately bumped into walls to learn how to navigate and to map tight areas that are too dangerous for humans. The drone used its thermal camera to map how the cave continued all the way to an unexplored area featuring water, impossible to reach for humans.

**European Space Agency**

## **Drying Room Efficiency**

Members using the new coin meter have noticed a significant change in the cost of keeping the drying room dehumidifier running. Please note that this cost can be reduced by only using the drying room for damp items requiring to be dried overnight. Excess water can be removed from wet items by using the spin drier before they are placed in the drying room. For those unfamiliar with it, the spin drier is the small barrel-like machine by the back door. Please place a basin below the lower outlet to collect the removed water. Relatively clean wet oversuits can be hung up to dry in the drying room lobby and should be almost dry by morning. Remove dry items from the drying room as soon as possible and do not leave the dehumidifier running when it is not required.

**John Crae**

## **Hut Fire Safety**

Over the last six months or so, Julian has fitted new smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and more emergency lighting. The CO detectors have already proved their worth by detecting emissions from the gas fire in the front bunk room. This was caused by the balanced flue corroding through and letting exhaust gases flow into the room. That fire has been disconnected and is awaiting replacement. Visitors are going to be asked to check the alarms when they start their stay and instruction notices will be appearing if not already in place.

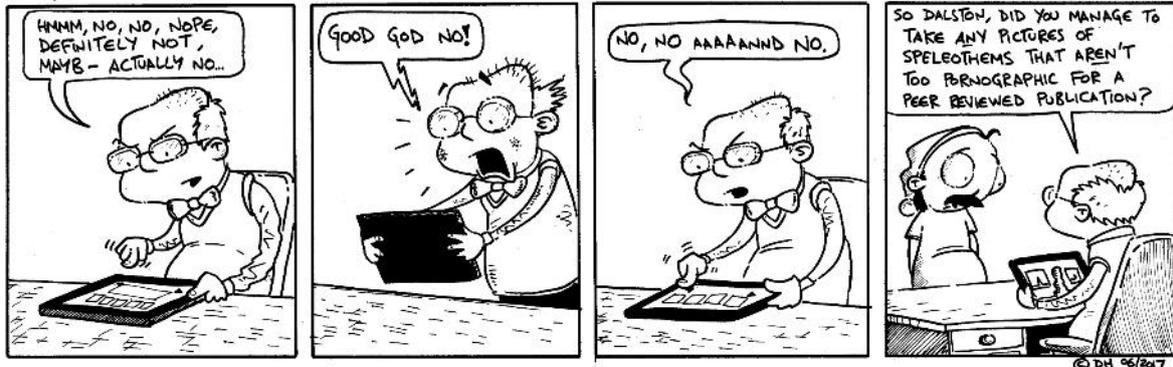
**Ivan Young**

## Hut Coin Meter

During the Midsummer BBQ weekend I replaced the hut's electricity coin meter with a new one that takes both the new pound coin and also the two pound coin. I was never able to adjust the old one to charge the correct amount so you will notice that the new meter will need feeding more often!

Ivan Young

## **STICKS AND STONES.**



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## Tackle

A repeated request is made for suitable second-hand oversuits to be donated to the club for the use of guests and prospective new members. Donated oversuits should be reasonably clean and intact.

The deposit scheme where borrowers lose their deposit if returned kit is damaged or required cleaning when returned is now in place. This is mainly for SRT kits, oversuits, ladders etc. This deposit is £5 per use (to be reviewed).

For now lost or mislaid kit is still at the Elphin Caving Centre (tool shed extension) but this may be looked at soon and chucked if not of use.

John Crae/ Derek Pettiglio

## Cave Database

Despite delays, due to work and crossing e-mails, progress is very slowly being made on moving the Scottish Cave Database to a more user friendly format. We now have space on the BCA server but preliminary version the SQL format database which we had intended to be ready by the mid-summer BBQ is still not in place (Sorry, not there yet). The excel version of the data can be found in the members section of the GSG website in the documents archive under miscellaneous information.

John Crae

## North West Highlands Geopark

The North West Highlands Geopark's financial difficulties following the loss of its government grants were resolved when a crowd-funding campaign reached its target of £30,000 in 56 days.

Geopark Website

## Trips & Expeditions

I am not aware of any new trips or expeditions planned in the immediate future but if anyone has any suggestions please let me know. The Meets Secretary Andrew Morgan should also be notified of proposed meets and new exploration.

John Crae

## **2017 Meets List and Events**

September	8-10	Assynt	GSG Family Meet
	9-17	Assynt	Claonaite Survey Week
	16	Assynt	SCRO Training Exercise
	27	Midlothian	Cousland Mine
	30-1 Oct	Mendips	Hidden Earth
October	7-8	Assynt	GSG Meet
	14-15	Yorkshire	Newcomers Meet
	28-29	Perthshire	GSG Annual Dinner (Kindrogan)
November	11-12	Assynt	GSG Meet (with GUPA)
	25-26	Yorkshire	GSG Meet
December	9-10	Assynt	GSG Christmas Dinner
	28-29	Assynt	GSG New Year's Meet

### **Hidden Earth**

This year's national caving conference will be held slightly later than usual, over the weekend 29th Sept-1st Oct. at Churchill Academy, which lies just across the A38 from Burrington Combe. This is THE prime occasion for catching up on all UK and international exploration, make or renew contacts and simply have a great time in the presence of like-minded people. Members are encouraged to make the effort to attend – and some evening trips to Mendip could also easily be achieved.

**Alan Jeffreys**

### **GSG Publications**

'Caves of Assynt' still delayed.

Copies of Jim Salvona's "A Guide to the Awe-Inspiring Raasay Fissures" are available from Raasay Post Office, or Goon may be persuaded to print a copy on request.

**Publications** (prices to non-members in brackets)

Decades in the Dark	£20.00 + £2.00 p&p	De Profundis	£3.00 + £0.58 p&p
Caves of Skye	£6.00 (£8.50)		
Jim's Festschrift - A Wanderer in Dens and Caves of the Earth	£5.00 + £0.75 p&p	Buddy Reading (Caving in Couplets)*	£2.00 (£2.50)
Caves of Applecross and Kishorn	£4.00 (£6.00)	NAMHO Field Booklets	£2.50 (£4.00) set
Mines in Scotland	£4.00 (£5.00)		
	GSG Ties	(Old)	£5.00
		(2012 Vintage)	£10.00

\* out of print – photocopies available.

AND – Cave Pearls of Meghalaya – Volume 1	£26.00 or £30.00 with postage.
Cave Pearls of Meghalaya – Volume 2	£35.00 or £39.00 with postage.

**Alan L. Jeffreys, Recorder**

### **Sutherland Hut Logs**

The latest transcription volume of the Elphin Hut Logs (Vol.13) has been published, covering the year Jan-Dec 2016. These publications allow infrequent visitors to Assynt to be informed of field work there. Copies are available from Goon at £1.50 plus post (all merely to cover production costs).

**Alan Jeffreys**

## Roadworks on the A9

The first phase of the A9 Dualling project (Kincraig to Dalraddy) still seems to be approaching completion. Completion was due in Summer 2017. The works were not complete at the last visit in July but could be completed by now. The second phase of works at Slocht where access points for preparatory ground stabilisation works led to temporary traffic lights on alternate single file traffic sections has been completed. The start date for construction has not been announced. The main delays on the road north seem to be at Perth where a new bridge is being built to access Bertha Park (due for completion in 2019). The new road does not form a by-pass for the Inveralmond roundabout but should divert some local traffic. Four more stretches of roadworks are planned to start in 2017(Luncarty to Pass of Birnam, Pitagowan to Glen Garry, Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore and Tomatin to Moy). 40 mph speed limits are in place for length of all works.

Works on the Queensferry Crossing should be completed and the bridge opens on Wednesday 30 August only to close immediately for a series of three walks across the bridge and the Queen's official opening of the bridge on 5 September. Traffic should start normal crossings on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

### Scotsman/Transport Scotland/Perth Transport Futures

## Elphin Caving Centre

Confirmed Taigh nam Famh Bookings (contact Hut Warden Pete Dowswell or Deputy Hut Warden Imogen Furlong for latest information)

Date (nights)		Group	Size
<b>2017</b>			
August	11-24	Stu L	4
	17-18	Jacobites	2
September	1-4	Nevis Hill Walkers	6
	8-10	GSG Family Meet	??
	8-15	GSG Claonaite Survey	??
	15-17	SCRO	??
	22-24	Dundee NCR Mountaineering Club	10
October	7-8	GSG Hut Meet	??
	13-15	Dundee NCR Mountaineering Club	15
November	11-12	GSG Hut Meet (with GUPA)	??
	25-26	Lost Sheep – Roybridge, Annual Dinner	TBC
December	9-10	GSG Xmas Dinner	??
	28-2 Jan	GSG New Year's Meet	??
	30- 2 Jan	Lost Sheep, New Year	TBC
January	19-20	Inverness Mountaineering Club	15
	26-28	GSG Poets Supper	??

*Note: '??' for GSG/SCRO events means the entire hut has been reserved for members and guests.*

Hut fees are £8 per night for non-members and £4 for GSG and BEC members, students, unemployed, children and OAPs. Camping is permitted at any time but the reduced rate of £4 applies only when the hut is full. Day fees are £2 for members and £4 for non-members.

If you want to stay in the hut, please contact Imogen Furlong who is responsible for hut bookings (Tel. Home:- 07532 388474. E-mail:- [imo.furlong@gmail.com](mailto:imo.furlong@gmail.com)) – to check if there will be space. For any other hut related issues contact the Hut Warden – Pete Dowswell. (Tel. Home:- 01463 229250, e-mail:- [hutbookings@gsg.org.uk](mailto:hutbookings@gsg.org.uk)).

## Assynt News

### NC500

An increase in traffic through the village has been noticed. This has been attributed to the publicity surrounding the North Coast 500. Most but not all of this traffic keeps to the speed limit. So take care.

**John Crae**

### Sundays at the Tearoom

Coffee and cake session at the Tearoom for those in Elphin between 11 am and 1 pm on Sundays, if you fancy a chat with friends & neighbours!

**Russell and Bridie Pursey/Peter Dowswell**

## Hut Maintenance

In July, Julian Walford and Pete Dowswell braved the septic tank to unblock the main drain from the hut. The blockage (the second in a month) was caused by solidified fat and grease in the pipe. Fat digesters have been purchased but it would help if cavers would not pour fat and grease down the sink.

Construction of new ventilated wood store (in progress).

Floor cupboards and workbench to be fitted in Tool Shed extension. Design required. The wall cupboards have been fitted to the back wall of the shed. Shelving is to be fitted between the cupboards.

Replacement of door and window at drying room lobby (by joinery contractor). Replacing the bargeboard/soffit at the edge of the roof above has also been suggested.

Replacement of door to conservatory (by joinery contractor).

Box shelving to be fitted in drying room lobby.

Replacement of kitchen cupboards and repositioning/redesign of shelving.

Re-grading of driveway. Concrete surface suggested with cross drain at upper gateway.

Peter Dowswell is looking for local tradesmen to do the work not suitable for DIY.

Leaking roof at gutter above door from kitchen to conservatory, possibly due to blocked gutter. 30 mm depth of accumulated gunk cleared from gutter. Leak to be investigated further in dry conditions.

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### REMINDERS

- 1. Inform the membership secretary (Ivan Young) of any changes of address or contact details, check what appears on the GSG web server and send any corrections to Ivan.**
  - 2. Send news items to John Crae for the Newsletter, longer items to Alan Jeffreys for the Bulletin. If in doubt send to both.**
  - 3. Borrowed kit should be returned clean and dry. If possible record the length of time lamps are in use (do not recharge lamps before returning them). Do not allow lamps to remain in wet bags.**
  - 4. Consider standing for election to the GSG Committee at the AGM, attending committee meetings as an ordinary member or shadowing a committee post (acting as deputy committee member and becoming familiar with the duties of one or more of the committee posts).**
  - 5. Digital versions of all Bulletins, Newsletters and other official communications can be downloaded from the GSG website as alternative to paper (saving the GSG money on both postage and publication costs).**
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**Photo credits:** - May Alexander, Bob Somerville, Simon Brooks/Oana Chachula , Dave Hughes, ESA.