

# **University of Leeds Speleological Association**

## **Investigation into incidents at Agen Allwedd, South Wales 22nd April 2014**

### **Background**

During Easter 2014 university holidays LUUCAS, the student arm of ULSA, planned a week-long trip to South Wales, from Monday 21<sup>st</sup> April to Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> April, staying at the Whitewalls Cottage (Chelsea Speological Society). In total, nine ULSA members attended, eight student members and one recently graduated member. Experience of the individuals ranged from 10+ years caving to 6 months.

The first caving trip of the week included all nine individuals and was planned to be the short round in Agen Allwedd. Unfortunately, events occurred during the trip that led to South & Mid Wales Cave Rescue Organisation (SMWCRT) being called out, described in more detail below.

This report details the events which occurred on the trip and identifies learning outcomes, and how they may be implemented to try to prevent a similar (or more serious) occurrence. The responses of the individuals involved have been compiled in the main body of the report but the individuals' statements in their entirety as well as the SMWCRT report are attached as an appendix.

### **Aims and Objectives**

1. To establish the facts concerning the incidents.
2. To identify the factors that caused the adverse incidents.
3. To analyse how those factors may have been overcome.
4. To establish what reasonable measures could be put in place to prevent similar incidents from reoccurring.
5. To enable these measures to be implemented within the club.
6. To promote a learning culture within the club and a template whereby adverse events can be objectively analysed in a non-threatening way.

### **Ground Rules**

- The analysis shall focus on identifying processes that went wrong (or right!) and to avoid blaming individuals.
- It shall be acknowledged that individuals involved may be upset by the incident and efforts be made to support them including the counselling services offered by the Union (see the end of this document).
- The editor reserves the right to seek clarification about the meaning of submissions and edit them accordingly.
- A summary of the report may be published by the club and made public as an educational resource for the wider caving community.
- Information made public will be edited to protect the identity of the individuals involved.

## Description of the cave

Agen Allwedd (Grid ref SO1876 1589) is a 32km system on the Llangattock Escarpment in South Wales.

*"A great deal of its length is made up of long sections of streamway and large, mainly dry, passage. Although the bulk of the cave presents little technical difficulty, its sheer size and repetitive nature can prove tiring."* Caves of South Wales (1995)

In the short entrance series the main way on is left at each of three junctions with incoming streams. The way on continues on through a Boulder Choke and past a fourth passage coming in from the right, to Baron's Chamber.

*"After a short distance an obvious hole down to the right leads to Main Stream Passage as Main Passage continues up a steep mud slope straight ahead..."* Caves of South Wales (1995)

A common trip in Agen Allwedd is the Inner Circle, which was the plan for this trip. This takes the hole down to Main Stream Passage and then continues on turning right at Northwest Junction into Turkey Streamway and again at Turkey Junction into Coal Cellar Passage (a longer Outer Circle route goes off to the left from Turkey Junction). The route continues through Easter Passage, and Midsummer Passage to the small loop of the Inner Circle coming off on the left hand side. After returning to Midsummer Passage the way out is back the same way. A guideline for the Inner Circle trip is 6 hours not including route finding.

If, as the group did, you instead continue down Main Stream Passage there is an obvious but ultimately dead end way on to the left into Aven Series. To the right leads to Southern Stream Passage and at a second right turn into the also dead end Upper Southern Stream Passage. The Grand Circle round trip through Southern Stream Passage turns right at the terminal sump, through three boulder chokes and a section of deep water to enter Main Stream Passage at the Northwest Junction. A guideline for the Grand Circle is 8hr+ without route finding.

## Trip 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2014 Members

Caver A – "I joined the club just under two years ago when I came to university, when I joined the club was much smaller so I was able to get a lot out of the training sessions and the trips that I went on in first year where smaller groups. I then became secretary of the club for a year and began developing leadership skills both above and below ground. Most of the caving I have done has been in the Yorkshire Dales involving SRT, which has allowed me to gain rigging/de-rigging experience."

Caver B – "Just over 6 months of caving experience. Fully SRT competent with 27 trips prior to the incident, including other South Wales caves and being a member of a rescued party."

Caver C – "Caving with ULSA since September 2013 on mainly beginner trips."

Caver D – "Joined the club September 2011, been numerous day and weekend trips since then, some leading + rigging experience over the previous 2 years."

Caver E – none given, see below

Caver F – "Began caving as a child with two youth organisations: Forest school camps and Education in the Environment Caving Club, began to lead trips with children in 2006 and continue to do so. Joined Shepton Mallet caving club in 2006 and became involved in a number of digging projects in the Mendip hills. Became involved in student caving in 2007 leading trips for Cardiff University Caving Club and undertook a significant amount of caving in South

Wales during this period. Joined Leeds and Sheffield University Speleological Society's in 2009 served as tackle officer, secretary and president for LUUSS between 09-12. Served as chair of the Council of Higher Education Caving Clubs in 2011. Member of 11 exploratory alpine expeditions since 2008. Hold Local Cave Leader, remote areas first aid and IRATA certification."

Caver G – none given, see below

Caver H – "Been caving since October 2013"

Caver J – "I caved infrequently as a child before coming to university, then became much more engaged in the sport on joining ULSA. Since September I have been on a trip almost every week of term time, mostly in Yorkshire but also in Derbyshire and South Wales, and have been involved in one rescue in December. Recently I was elected as ULSA secretary. I rigged under supervision in caves such as Gaping Gill, Simpsons Pot, King Pot, Sell Gill and Hunt Pot."

The following information was obtained from a previous tackle master:

Cavers E, G and H began caving in October 2013. Although that is only a short time ago, they have all regularly attended trips, and shown great enthusiasm towards the sport. They are comfortable with a wide range of SRT techniques, and have been on a variety of different club trips. They have always shown the ability to follow instructions, and as the year has progressed they have begun to think for themselves more, and shown an increasing awareness of others in the group.

### **Brief Summary of the trip and/or key factors**

A group of nine ULSA cavers of varying levels of experience (6 months to 10 years +) decided to undertake the Inner Circle route in Agen Allwedd. However the group failed to take the correct turning into Main Stream Passage for the Inner Circle route and instead carried on in Main Passage which requires the more arduous Grand Circle route to be completed. A key point to note is that individual's reports vary greatly as to when it was realised that the group was going in the wrong direction.

Once it was realised (by at least part of the group) the initial decision was made to attempt the Grand Circle route. However, various trip members showed signs of dehydration and exhaustion and were struggling to complete the route. A failed attempt was made to send two people ahead to extend call out. Instead, the group made camp and two people exited the cave the way they went in to inform SMWCRT of the correct location of the rest of the trip members. Upon exit the rescue call had already been made and SMWCRT escorted the remaining members out of the cave, exiting in the afternoon of the following day.

(See appendix for summaries from individual trip members)

## Action Plan

### Learning points summary

#### PREVENTATIVE (Proactive):

- **Trip planning** – the situation that led to this incident was preventable through the following methods
  - *Research* – use all available avenues to prepare for the trip especially in an unfamiliar area. This includes more experienced ULSA members, for example the reviewer has many useful comments about the cave and South Wales caving in general (see appendix), rant book, other (local) clubs including trip reports etc
  - *Descriptions* – ensure enough copies and that all members are familiar with the overall description
  - *Surveys* – take a survey and compass. Particularly for non-linear systems
  - *Food requirements including water* – take enough, this depends on prior research on caving style and local area knowledge
  - *Kit requirements* – again requires prior research on caving style and local area
  - *Define party size according to the cave/trip being planned* – depends on prior research into area caving style, the cave itself, knowledge on peoples abilities etc
- **Personal medication**
  - *Bring all required*
  - *Inform and train others in its use and symptoms*
- **Group communication**
  - *Define the group structure such as leader and specific roles*
  - *Min of 2 with knowledge of route etc*
  - *Ascertain member skills/ability and compare to planned trip*
  - *Group communication during the trip concerning route/energy levels etc*

#### REACTIVE:

The points below will be re-highlighted as risks, particularly ones which differ in different caving areas requiring local area knowledge, as part of ongoing training methods including publishing of this report.

- **Fatigue and exhaustion**
- **Dehydration**
- **Cold/hypothermia**
- **Injury**
- **Survival equipment use**
- **Getting lost**
- **Communication**

## **Risks identified and learning points**

**Preparation** – for welsh style caving with differences in activity, route finding, food, water, trip size, trip ability range, number and familiarisation with descriptions etc. A survey and compass can be very useful particularly when navigating complex systems.

*Learning point* - Make use of as many sources of information as possible, ULSA library, internet, local Cavers, Cavers with prior experience of the cave when planning trips eg the online Rant Book, particularly in new (to you) caving areas. If you don't have experience of an area or a local guide, don't rush a big trip. Either do smaller caves or shorter introduction trips to learn about the system.

**Spare kit** – The group should be commended for some members having kit with them ie slings, for aiding short climbs.

*Learning point* – The reviewer advises for welsh caving, “always have a belay belt on with a screw gate, could be used as a sling, to haul you etc, even if you don't ‘need’ it. Also many Welsh cavers carry a sling around 2m for climbs etc.” Consider what might also be useful if an incident occurs or if someone needs help with a climb, possibly a 15m rope in some horizontal caves. Extra kit such as this should be weighed up against the nature of the cave and the ability of the group as groups should be wary of taking unnecessary extra gear which will slow the group.

**Personal medication** - At least two members of the group take medications for conditions, one being asthma, and not everyone was aware of these. There is a risk that these conditions may become a problem during a caving trip.

*Learning points* – Individuals with a medical condition should carry any necessary medications with them in case of emergency even if they feel it is unlikely to occur. Although members should not feel forced to reveal conditions, it is encouraged and wise to make sure at least one other person is aware of the condition. Therefore, the trip will not be surprised should a medically related event take place, what warning signs to be aware of, and how to help. Trip members should consider that their ability to exit the cave affects everyone else's ability to exit the cave. ULSA strives for an inclusive and supportive caving culture and recommend that people act with common sense. If a rescue has to take place, make the rescue team aware of any medical conditions.

**Group size/team/cave combination** – a large group will take longer to undertake a trip, increase the risk of people not speaking up if they are struggling and lead to more difficult rescue situation, particularly with a mixed ability group,

*Learning point* – This group size was fairly large but would be fine for some caves. An appropriate group size should be set depending on various factors such as size and difficulty of cave/trip, familiarity of group with the cave, and ability and range of ability of the group. Several team members mention the possibility of the group splitting in which case prepare extra descriptions and surveys, and consider whether there are enough people of suitable experience to lead subgroups. In this situation, an easier, cave familiarisation trip may have been more suitable or the same trip but with a smaller group.

**Fatigue and exhaustion** – various trip members experienced fatigue affecting their ability to continue caving and to complete the trip as well as increasing the risk of injury and

hypothermia. Part of this was due to not enough food and water being taken underground. A positive feature of the trip in question was a cave emergency food dump being sent back to the waiting cavers.

*Learning points* – all trip members need to be aware of the possibility of gradually building fatigue especially relevant in this type of cave, and to look out for it in themselves and others. Trip members may not have experienced this type of exhaustion before. When planning what food to take consider something more substantial than chocolate for long trips or trips that could become long if route finding goes wrong, also plan to take enough to have extra in case of emergency.

- personal wellbeing: if you are ill before a trip be honest about your abilities, your decision affects others as much as yourself.

**Dehydration** – various trip members experienced dehydration affecting their energy levels (see fatigue and exhaustion), and their ability to continue caving as well as increasing the risk of injury and poor decision making. A positive thing to point out about this trip was trip members collecting water in Darren drums for camp. However, this might not be possible in some caves and should not be relied upon.

*Learning points* – all trip members need to be aware of this risk and should consider taking more water underground, and think about how long they might be underground in case of an incident. This is also more of a risk in different caves – with a higher risk in longer, quicker paced South Wales' caves such as Agen Allwedd (see reviewers comment for examples).

**Cold and hypothermia** – various members of the trip experienced cold which would have become more serious if it had developed into hypothermia. These factors can affect energy levels (see fatigue and exhaustion) and the ability to continue caving. It was positive that the trip had taken and used group shelters although not to their full usefulness (see use of safety equipment).

*Learning points* - The group should be commended on identifying when members got cold and helping them to warm up, also for taking and using group shelters. Trip members are more likely to be aware of this risk due to caving mainly in Yorkshire and how to address individuals becoming cold. This risk factor should not be overlooked in S. Wales due to the different nature of caving. In Welsh caves sweating/perspiring is a major cause of fluid loss that a Yorkshire caver may not have experienced before. Trip members should be aware this is still a risk in caves such as Agen Allwedd and consider bringing an extra (thermal) layer as body temperature can easily drop. Without group shelters this could have become very serious.

**Injury** – The group should be commended on stopping when they realised that they were in a dangerous situation as tiredness of team members had increased the possibility of injury.

*Learning point* - see exhaustion/dehydration

**Stress** – several trip members mention experiencing this factor in one form or another and the impact it can have on decision making, it can also impact on the risk of injury.

*Learning points* – all members should be aware that this can impact on decision making, talk to each other, look for it in others and in those situations try to keep calm themselves and/or calm the other person.

## **Complicating accident due to one or more risk factors above**

*Learning points* - Team members should be aware that risks change based on other factors on the trip and the possibility of needed to look after each other more.

**Getting lost** – this could have particularly impacted on rescue with rescuers looking in the wrong place

*Learning point* - At least several of the trip members should check the description against a survey if available, if it is not a clear lead trip, this may be extended to all members. Take a survey if available and compass – especially for trips such as this with multiple route options. Take multiple copies of survey and/or description in case a trip needs to break into subgroups. If there is a question mark over a route decision spend the time checking it and make everyone aware of the situation rather than assuming everything will be ok.

**Poor group communication** – there appears to have been confusion over the roles within the group – particularly the risk of relying on a more experienced caver who is not in fact leading the trip

*Learning point* - If roles are delegated or spread out make sure everyone is clear on this, have a clear conversation over who is leading the trip before starting. Everyone needs to take responsibility for themselves and other members of the trip and not rely on someone else, particularly as people become more experienced. Equally people with more experience should be aware that people may unconsciously rely on them even if they are not a designated leader.

Various trip members mention not feeling able/wanting to speak up when they feel something is wrong with the direction or their or other's state of energy/health

*Learning point* – People should be aware of their own and other's energy state and relate this to the trip length, before and during the trip. People should feel they are able to turn the trip at any point knowing this and having the confidence to do so. It is also important people speak up as their ability to get out of the cave affects everyone else's ability to get out of the cave. People should feel they can question route directions, trip length and consider the possibility of turning back. We should have a caving culture where people check on each other, are open, not defensive when others check on them and everyone feels able to speak up. Know when you are getting tired and cold and let people know, learn your limits and when you should accept them as opposed to pushing them.

Individuals appear to have become aware that the trip had gone in the wrong direction at significantly different times.

*Learning point* - If something has gone wrong make everyone aware of the situation as quickly as possible so that the most effect plan of action can be made

**Use of survival equipment** – The group should be commended for taking and making use of survival equipment including group shelters and making use of the emergency food store. However, SMWCRT mention that candles can be used in group shelters and then shelters turned inside out to the dry side after water evaporation to aim warmth to make the wait more comfortable.

*Learning point* – To maintain knowledge and train new members by periodic training on

shelter use etc as well as some suggestions for what to do in an emergency. The editor will investigate the possibility of putting together a PDF on the construction and use (including candle tips etc) and keep in bag with shelters

## **Action points and implementation**

### **Callout**

One serious point to raise is that there was some difficulty with the callout being put through to the correct SMWCRT phone number. This is mentioned in the SWMCRT report (see appendix), suggesting further training on the roll of a callout. On further investigation, callout was undertaken correctly but the police did not put the call through to the correct number (see appendix for statement from callout).

*Implementation* – This is a serious issue for the caving community in general and is currently being followed up with SMWCRT, BCA and the police contact.

### **Taking responsibility for trip planning and developing trip leading skills**

A part of learning to cave (in ULSA or any group) is learning to take responsibility for trip planning and to get involved with this rather than leaving it all to a more experienced member. In this way members will start to develop trip leading skills. We need to continue to ensure that people learn about these areas of trip planning.

*Implementation* - This Incident Report will be made available on the ULSA website and ULSA/LUUCAS members encouraged to read it to learn from this situation. We will continue to cover different skills in various training sessions and the editor will investigate the putting together of an information sheet on group shelter use etc. Several students have attended an Expedition training weekend, run by Ario Caves Expedition team which covered some relevant issues.

### **Use of all available sources of information**

Raised within this report are several instances of trip members not using all available sources of information whilst trip planning. This is again something which needs to be built on over time and highlighted as students progress in ability.

*Implementation* - The editor will prepare some notes on available sources of information to be circulated, possibly through the newsletter, to highlight the use of library, rant book and older member experiences as sources of information which are available and should be made use of. See also trip planning above.

### **Group communication**

Several of the factors which led to this incident and which have been highlighted as risks whilst caving relate to group communication, in terms of making sure everyone knows what is going on, admitting if you as an individual are unsure of the way on and speaking up if there are problems, and also checking on other group members. These factors will be addressed by making students and new caving members aware of the importance of group communication. This is a really important point to address and as a club we also need to ensure that people feel confident they are able to speak up.

*Implementation* - We as a club will ensure that in future we improve highlighting of the importance of group communication and taking responsibility for trip planning and route finding, particularly over the next year. Already a general safety and awareness meeting has taken place in advance of students attending expeditions over the summer (29<sup>th</sup> April 2014). As per club protocol there will be an Incident Report meeting with all involved covering risks, learning points and action plan (7<sup>th</sup> June 2014). The editor will also raise this with ULSA/LUUCAS committees.

*(Ed. Note: When caving I have always felt that ULSA had a wonderfully supportive native in terms of checking people are ok in the cave, keeping the group together and anyone being able to speak up about any problem. It saddens me that people felt unable or unwilling to speak up on this trip. I feel this is a key issue to for all ULSA members to address to ensure members cave safe and get the most out of trips.)*

### **Training of how to deal with emergency situations**

Several risk points deal with the need for increased knowledge of how to respond underground to an emergency situation. We need to ensure that members who are getting to the point of starting to lead trips get training in this as well as rigging etc. We also need to ensure people get refresher sessions such as contents and use of safety kit.

*Implementation* - Already a Caving First Aid training course is planned for 7<sup>th</sup> June 2014 with many ULSA members attending. Several students have also attended an Expedition training weekend, run by Ario Caves Expedition team which covered some relevant issues. In addition the editor will raise training of use of ULSA safety equipment with the Tackle Master. See also trip planning above.

### **Bibliography**

Agen Allwedd information

[http://www.ogof.org.uk/agen\\_allwedd.html](http://www.ogof.org.uk/agen_allwedd.html)

Agen Allwedd survey

<http://www.cerberusspeleo.org.uk/surveys.htm>

Agen Allwedd trip write-up

<http://mmmmargot.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/agen-allwedd-with-ycc.html>

CDG Online Incident Reporting System

<http://www.cavedivinggroup.org.uk/IncidentReporting/incidentshome.html> (accessed 5 November 2007)

SMWCRT Incident Report

<http://www.smwcr.org/j32/index.php/newsmainmenu/179-rescue-agen-allwedd-22nd-23rd-april-2014-overdue-party> (accessed 26/05/14)

SMWCRT call out advice

<http://www.smwcr.org/j32/index.php/callouttopmenu> (accessed 26/05/14)

Stratford, T. Caves of South Wales (1995) Agen Allwedd description, Menasha Ridge Press Inc.

## **Appendix**

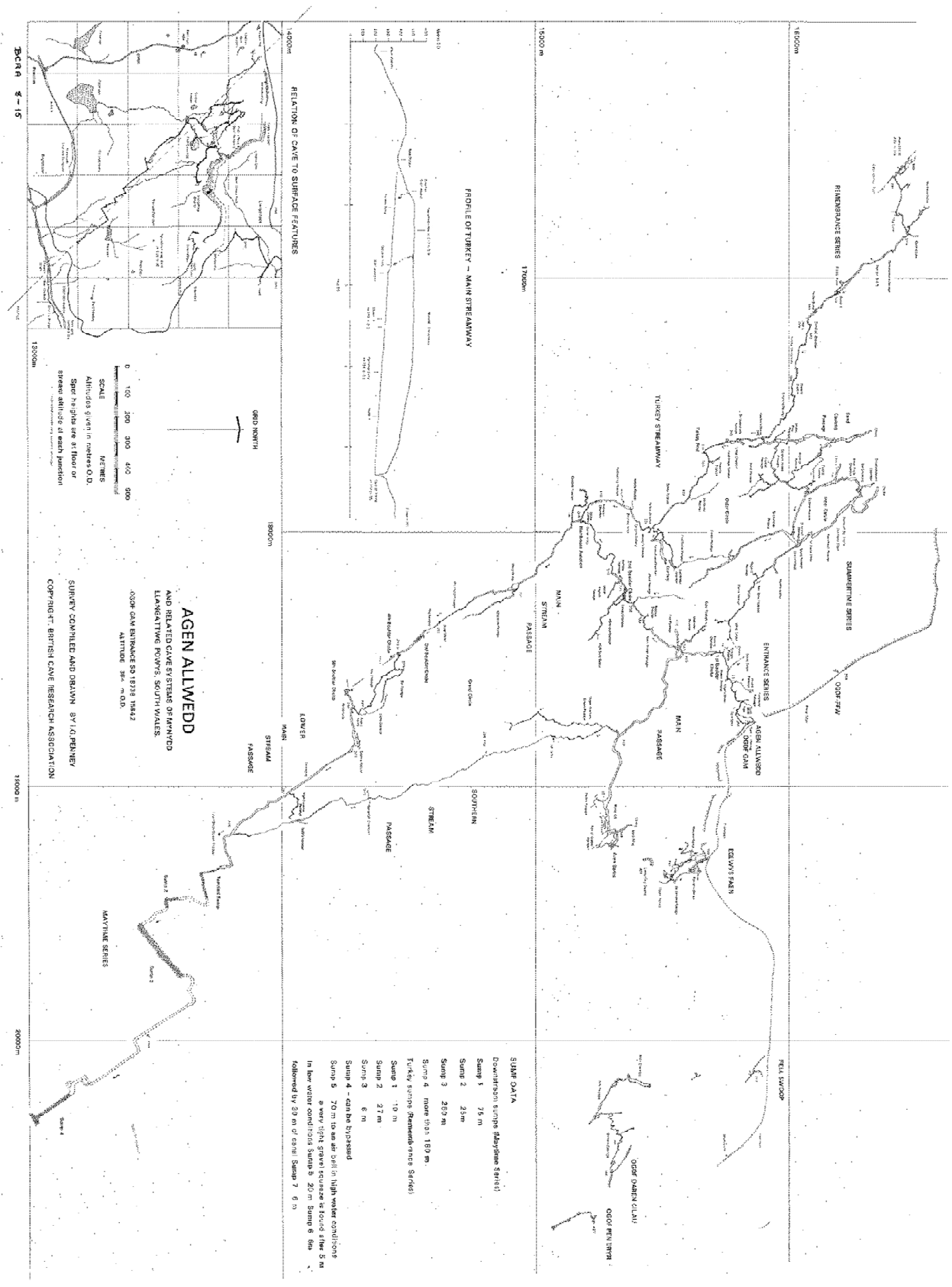
Agen Allwedd Survey

Individual forms from Cavers A – J

Addition learning points (incorporated into action plan) and comments from an experienced South Wales caver

Incident report from SMWCRT

Statement from ULSA member acting as callout



## Form from Caver A

### Summary of trip

This was the first trip of a week of caving in South Wales that I had been co-ordinating, prior to us leaving Leeds I had asked a few people to organise getting cave keys, descriptions and surveys that they had done whilst I organised the transport and food for the trip. We travelled down on Monday and it was decided upon a trip into Aggy on the Tuesday, this was for a variety of reasons the first being that the cave was close to where we stayed, we had a key and a description and it looked like a good trip. After a good breakfast everybody began to gather personal gear together ensuring we had food for the trip, the description and the key to get into the caves we then left a call out with a student in Leeds (Ed.) and set off. The initial entry to the cave went smoothly with everyone staying close together, we then got into a section of awkward boulder, crawly passage where the group divided into sub groups at this point I was further back and talking to Cavers H and C with Caver D and G behind and Cavers B, J, F and E went up ahead.

We were moving along making sure we could always see/have each other aware that the group ahead would wait when they found suitable spots. As we got to the end of this section of passage I suggested that Caver C go at the front of the group to set the speed, as the others seemed to be moving faster than they were. This worked well and we continued into large easy passage. I was still roughly in the middle of the group with Caver C ahead setting the speed and Cavers E, J and F - to the best of my knowledge- reading the description and finding the route. It wasn't until we got to Sothern Stream Passage that people began talking about time pressing on it was about 5 I think, and that we should hurry up. I decided to stick with Caver C who had slowed down over the slippery rocks that made up the passage and although people kept coming back to get us to hurry up, Caver C, myself, D and G continued at the same pace, for my part I didn't want to rush Caver C and have an injury caused.

It was also around this point that I began speaking with Caver F about splitting the group, a combination of the fact that one half seemed to be moving slower than the other and those moving more quickly ran the risk of getting cold waiting about. I was confident in the knowledge that we were doing a circular route so at this point it seemed counter productive to turn back when it sounded like we just had to reach the canals and then we'd be back at the entrance series. At around the time of this conversation with Caver F we swapped positions Caver F started moving with Caver C and I moved up ahead to see how the two with the description were getting along, they had found a slightly awkward climb up a baby waterfall and talked me through it before pointing out a rope climb up to the left. At this point the group had mostly re-assembled so I volunteered to climb up the climb first to see how tricky it was, Caver F followed me up and got up the second section faster than me. Caver F wasn't certain so went back down to re-read the description and discuss it with the others whilst I climbed back down. It was decided it was the way so I climbed back up and we began guiding the others up the climb, Cavers C and H struggled with the climb but we managed to adapt the equipment we had to make it easy for them, putting in slings as extra foot holds and attaching them onto a rope so that we could support them from the top. Once we'd all got up it became clear that we were getting closer to our call out time so we re-arranged the group so that Cavers C and H were at the front behind Caver F setting the speed but with the awareness that we may need to split at some point soon.

The next passage was sandy and involved a lot of crawling and it became clear we were going slower and slower, Caver C was tired and dehydrated. At this point Cavers B and J who had

been memorising the description went on ahead, but came back shortly after as it was a dead end. By now it was clear that Caver C wasn't going to get out of the cave without a break/ sleep so we decided to re-trace our steps and set up a camp with someone bringing back the now empty water bottle with more water for Caver C. Caver H and myself stayed with Caver C going back the way we came at a slower rate than the others, it was at this point that Caver H told me they were starting to get tired and cold but they'd be alright if we kept moving. With that in mind I kept the three of us moving as best I could, until the water bottle returned and we re-hydrated Caver C and continued now with Caver F as well, the second time the water bottle returned with Caver D and we found the camp the others had set up.

By this point I really needed the loo so went back to the stream way prior to the rope climbs, and unfortunately ended up slipping in the water and getting my over suit and under suit very wet. Caver F gave me their jumper to put on beneath my under suit and Caver D helped me to ring out and roll up my over suit and under suit. They then explained that Cavers F and B would be going out the cave to tell rescue where we were and that Cavers J and E would be following them but potentially at a slower rate. The rest of us would make camp and wait, Caver D had come down to fill up the Darren drum with water so people didn't get dehydrated and also put a flashing backup light to mark where we were. When we returned to the camp we passed a spot that was much larger and more comfortable so we arranged for everybody to move a couple of meters up the passage, we then re-arranged everyone so they were sat on knee pads, tackle sacs and over suits before all snuggling together inside the group shelter.

Some point latter Cavers J and E returned with a food store they had found on the way out, Cavers J, E, D and G opened it and set about lighting the stove that they found and brewing some tea they also distributed the chocolate from inside. We decided the food store must have been left between the 70's and 80's based on the packaging of the food and the difficulty they had getting into the store itself. By this point I had got quite cold and was sharing Caver C's body heat until the tea was passed into the shelter and we all sat holding onto the tin it was in. Soon after they passed in some spaghetti bolognaise and we then re-arranged ourselves to maximise the heat sharing between the three of us whilst the other four set up our second group shelter. Caver H had become quite upset but once we were all sat cuddling each other they seemed to feel slightly better. At some point latter in the night they threw up what was eaten but refused more food because they didn't want to be sick again.

We stayed in camp until rescue arrived and then they fed us with more mars bars, tea and dextrose tablets before creating a life line system to get us down the climbs safely. We explained to them what had happened and they explained that we were actually in the grand circle which is a much longer more difficult trip. We were then grouped together at the bottom of the climb in a new group shelter whilst we waited for each other to come down. At around this point Caver F came back with more rescue members and they arranged our group between the rescue members. I was with the first group to go and we were taken back the way we came apart from a slight diversion to avoid the worst of southern stream passage. During the time in camp I hadn't actually slept and so part way out I began to feel incredibly tired, but was fed with Kendal mint cake, fudge and other forms of chocolate. We got out around 1/2 on Wednesday.

### **Potential risks identified**

Potential risks:- from the beginning, we where all aware at varying degrees that Caver G took pills but nobody knew what they where for.

We had not all checked the route we planned against the description and the survey.

Only a few of us were carrying spare clothing meaning if we got wet or cold we had nothing to change into.

We were prepared for the group to split and for members to travel away from the party with no description or survey into cave passage they had never been into before so take several descriptions and surveys as well as a compass.

Dehydration, nobody was drinking enough water as we only had one bottle between nine.

### **Your suggested learning points.**

Looking back at the trip it's easy to identify where we went wrong, for a start we should have printed off a survey as well as a description because between comparing the two we would have seen that the route we were following looked nothing like the route in the survey. Also making sure that the people navigating are following the correct route within the description. We should have made it clear before we went in the roles we were all anticipating playing once we were in the cave so that we could make sure that a couple of people had taken responsibility for learning the route and they had explained it to the rest of us. Potentially we should have been in two smaller groups making it easy to manage and keep an eye on everybody, but equally everybody should have been keeping an eye on each other. Anyone is able to turn the trip at any point knowing this and having the confidence to do so these are things that need to be built upon.

I personally found that I'm so used to Yorkshire caves where you're looking out for people getting cold or feeling unhappy with a climb that I didn't spot the fatigue which builds gradually and I didn't notice until it was really extreme. Equally we should all feel able to tell each other when we feel tired, cold or uncomfortable with the situation. I now know I didn't bring enough of the right food, although I carried two snickers bars I had eaten them as I was going along the trip I should have had something like sandwiches as well which I could sit down and eat giving everyone a break and myself slower releasing energy so that I could save the chocolate for a real emergency. Communications was the biggest problem here before going in we hadn't really communicated with anyone who knew the area, partly because we didn't know very many people down in S. Wales. Then once we were in the cave we failed to communicate who was doing what and we failed to communicate or question the length of the trip, at some point I should have said that the trip felt longer than I expected it would have been.

Also we all trust Caver F a huge amount and which led to an unquestioning following despite the fact they did not have the description and was not actively leading the trip. Later on a mistake that we got away with only because we were in a dead end was letting Cavers J and B set off through new cave passage without a description to cancel the call out. Through this action we could have lost two people completely.

We were caving in an unfamiliar cave with better planning we should have spoken to locals not just about the trip but about what caving in the area is like in general, for example are you likely to overheat in a furry suit? We also need to better understand the kit we carry, we took a first aid kit with us and in it there were tea lights which until it was explained none of us new to light then beneath the group shelter build up a steamy environment then turn the shelter the other way around so that everyone inside dries off.

## **Form from Caver B**

### **Summary of trip**

The night of the 21<sup>st</sup> of April, we decided that we would go down Agen Allwedd the next day. In the morning Cavers J and A decided after looking at the Aggy survey located at Whitewalls that we would take the Inner Circle, a route which we estimated would take us about 6 hours to complete. I phoned an ULSA member in Leeds around 11:30 and left a callout for 22:00. After the usual amount of faffing we headed off to Aggy, taking with us a description that we'd brought from Leeds, and were underground by 12:15. Caver G and myself each had a tacklesack containing a group shelter and other emergency supplies.

Slow progress was made through the cave with a number of stops to rest on the way. By the time we reached Main Stream Passage I was getting wary of the time and the energy levels of other group members, so I started helping Caver E and Caver J with navigation. That was when I learned that we weren't in the Inner Circle after all. We were meant to go up a fixed rope climb to go further in Main Stream Passage, and when we found a climb that seemed to correspond to that, I suggested to Caver F that they go see if the passage seemed to be the right way. Because some of the members of the group were less experienced Cavers and were less confident with climbing, I thought it would be best if we made sure the route was correct first. While Caver F explored off ahead, I took a closer look at the description and realized that we were significantly deeper into the cave than Caver J and Caver E had thought. Caver J agreed that we seemed to be at the base of the climb up to Biza Passage. Although we were starting to get worried about the time, Caver F decided that we would take the group up the climbs. The majority of the group were comfortable with the fixed rope, but we needed to make a makeshift safety line to help Caver C and Caver H get up the climb.

We were still moving very slowly, largely due to members of the group getting tired, so Caver F decided that Cavers J and myself should go ahead to try to find the way on. The two of us carried on until we reached a bit that didn't seem to go anywhere. When we told Caver F that the passage didn't seem to go, they agreed with our decision to turn back and re-evaluate our plan. On our way back we were told that there was a camp being set up near the top of the second fixed rope climb. There was no way we would make it out before callout, and it was unlikely that we all had enough energy to get out on our own. As we waited for the rest of the group to arrive at the camp, Cavers J and myself started advising members of the group who would be staying as to how to set up an unexpected underground camp. We suggested that the Cavers staying try to take off wet clothes and get in group shelters to stay warm, try to make a comfortable seat, keep as few lights on at a time as possible, and conserve food but drink lots of water.

When everyone was at camp, Caver F told the group they and a couple others who still had the energy would get out of the cave ahead of everyone else, as we all now realized we wouldn't get out in time for callout. Caver F, Caver J, Caver E and myself set off from the camp at around 21:20. Shortly after the entrance to Southern Stream Passage we found an ammo box containing food, chocolate, candles, and a small stove. Although it looked like it dated from about the 1970s, the group was very short on food so we decided to send it back to camp with Caver J and Caver E. Caver F and I carried on out of the cave, making good progress despite briefly getting lost in the entrance series, and were aboveground by about 1:30.

When we arrived at Whitewalls we briefed CRT on the situation. In particular, we pointed out where in the cave we actually were, since they had been under the impression that we would

be in the Inner Circle. After a couple hours of rest, Caver F decided to join the second rescue party, which left Whitewalls around 4:00. I was instructed to stay on the surface and help CRT as needed, which I did until the rest of the group was safely out of the cave. The first of our group were out at around 13:45. The remaining members were out around 16:30.

### **Potential risks identified**

The major risks during this rescue were dehydration, exhaustion, cold, and injury as a result of these other risk factors.

Dehydration was a particular risk with the members of the group who were less experienced cavers and those who got tired more quickly. It was also a risk with members of the forward parties, particularly in dry sections of cave, as we were moving faster than the rest of the group.

Exhaustion was a major risk factor on this trip. We as a group failed to keep a close enough eye on all the members of the group. As a result, we had some members who were tired enough that injury due to exhaustion was a very real risk.

Although South Wales caves in general are warmer and dryer than Dales caves, cold was still a major risk factor. When we set up camp we were wet from coming through Main Stream Passage and we were low on food (to boost blood sugar).

These factors, particularly exhaustion, combined with the stress of a caving trip going wrong, could have easily contributed to someone injuring themselves. In particular, having set up the camp at the top of a rope increased the chance of injury as people went up and down the rope to get to the stream.

### **Your suggested learning points.**

- There needs to be more effective pre-trip planning.
  - Check to make sure the description matches the intended route.
  - Have a clear conversation about who is leading the trip. People seemed to assume Caver F would be in charge though there was no conversation to that effect.
- All trips should take a survey and a description where possible. Large groups should ideally have two in case the group splits.
- There needs to be plenty of food on the trip. If you think you have enough, bring more, particularly if there are less experienced cavers in the group.
  - Your personal energy levels before the trip need to be taken into account. If they're lower than normal, bring extra food.
- Every member of the trip needs to take responsibility for themselves and for the rest of the group.
  - If you're getting tired, you need to say so. Bear in mind that however far you get into a cave, you still need to get back out.
  - Everyone in the group should be keeping an eye on everyone else and should raise any concerns they have.

- Group shelters are crucial.
- Trip leaders and more senior members of the club should be shown the contents of the ULSA first aid kits and taught the basics of how to use them.
- Cave rescue should be made aware of any relevant medical conditions that may affect the rescue.
- If you're unsure of the route and worried about time, turn back.
- Leave callouts with plenty of time to spare. Try to avoid leaving callouts for late at night.

A number of these learning points could be prevented in future by improving club procedures and training. In particular, training club trip leaders in group management and how to respond to problems could be very beneficial. It should also be made clear to club members that caving is a group activity, not one where there's a designated leader and everyone else just follows along.

## **Form from Caver C**

### **Summary of trip**

It was decided that we would do the inner circle of Agen Allwedd but the turning for the inner circle had been missed and we continued straight on. The description we had was consulted several times but what was being seen was being made to fit the description, no one seemed to have the confidence to say I don't think this is right we should turn back. Once it became clear we didn't know where we were going, callout time was close and some members had become very tired. At this point the decision was made to camp, while two members who could make it out the way we came left to intercept cave rescue so they could inform them of where we actually were, as a callout had been left for the inner circle. The two members reached cave rescue and with their information were able to direct cave rescue to our location. After being fed we made our way out in two groups, those suffering with tiredness being the last group to slowly make their way out.

### **Potential risks identified**

Assuming one individual has taken the lead and not feeling able to speak up leads to avoidable mistakes being made. Individuals not having an awareness of where the group is or should be going and not having the confidence to voice their opinions leads to a loss of information to the group which could have been used to make more effective decisions.

### **Your suggested learning points.**

All group members need to be aware of the details of a trip, irresponsible to assume one individual will take the lead and the rest just follow. All group members need to feel they can speak up and voice their opinions. Individuals need to be taught how to effectively plan trips, taking different cavers abilities into account, how to avoid silly mistakes and to be aware of what could go wrong and how to prepare for that.

## Form from Caver D

### Summary of trip

We decided to have a trip in Agen Allwedd taking the inner circle route on Tuesday, we had a two page description for route finding but did not check a survey of the system. We entered the system at approximately 12:15pm and progressed through the entrance series without issue, with a brief pause as Caver F went to collect his thermal that they left at the entrance. After the entrance series the cave becomes large walking passage which we passed through quickly and without issue, at this point I was towards the back of the group.

At some point in the large passage we reached a turn off to the right which lead to the inner circle route, however due to a misunderstanding with the description we instead continued down the main passage. The route we took instead leads to the "southern stream passage", a very long passage consisting of crawls and stooping as well as a couple of traversy climbs. At some point either shortly before or after the end of southern stream passage there was an ammunition box labelled "Food for emergency only" or something to that effect, I briefly wondered what constituted an emergency... I think it took us about 4/5 hours to get to the main streamway at the end of the stream passage.

When we reached this point I think there was some concern over missing callout but we believed (or at least I got the impression that we did) that the quickest way on was down the main streamway and not back through southern stream passage, there did not appear to be any cause for concern as far as I could tell with regards to fatigue levels in the group at this point. The ground in the main streamway is uneven and slippy and as such the group ended up splitting with the faster people at the front and a couple of us staying with Cavers C and E who were progressing slowly. At this point I was not worried about their fatigue levels as it is not unusual for some people to have difficulty progressing through parts of caves but otherwise be ok. During the streamway Caver F dropped back a couple of times to urge people to move a bit faster as we were on track to miss callout at this point however we still believed the way on to be fastest way out.

After a while in the streamway ( I do not recall the time for this but I believe it can't have been far either side of 1 hour from when we finished southern stream passage) we reached a rope climb. From the description we believed this to be the way on into Biza Passage and towards the exit. After Cavers F and A went up the climb they were unsure if it was the one from the description, however after a brief check further down the streamway it was decided we would go up the climbs. Caver C struggled greatly on the climbs but with a couple of slings and an improvised belay they were able to ascend. At the top after a couple of easier climbs the passage became smaller and more difficult to progress through. Around this point Cavers B and J were sent ahead to extend the callout time as we still believed we would be able to exit the cave via this route.

As the passage became smaller Caver F reached the conclusion that it would be best for Caver C to cease attempting this route, based on their fatigue level and that fact that if this were the correct route there were a number of short swims between us and the exit which could have led to a severe incident if they had been unable to swim through them. We backtracked towards the streamway and found a suitable place to camp for the night, Caver E went to fetch water whilst Cavers D and G remained at the campsite to await the remaining Cavers who were escorting Caver C back through the more difficult passage. After a while Cavers B and J, (Ed: returned?) the passage having become impassable further on. After water was brought to

Caver C and the others we eventually grouped at the camp where it was decided that Cavers B and F would exit via our entry route to ensure callout had been sent and to inform rescue that we were probably not where we said we would be on the trip plan.

Cavers E and J also elected to leave as they felt able to and did not want to camp. The rest of us remained in the two group shelters we had brought. I think this point was around 10/11pm.

After a couple of hours Cavers E and J returned having reached the ammunition box brought it back, this refilled our supplies of chocolate and gave us 2 slightly dubious but otherwise appreciated hot meals, we decided we weren't desperate enough to see what 20 year old "warm cornflakes" were like.

At around 7:30AM (plus or minus an hour or so) Wednesday rescue arrived. By this point I had become very cold, in hindsight I think this was due to lack of food due to not eating much since the ammo box arrived despite our newly resupplied chocolate stores. We began to make our way back to the main streamway. Here we split in to two groups, Cavers A, E, G and J exiting first as they felt more able to keep a faster pace, and Cavers C, D and H who felt less able, each group supported by at least one rescue member per Caver along with extra rescuers. After receiving a jacket and deciding that instead of climbing round the first waterfall climb I would instead fall off and go for a brief swim we progressed down the streamway and once moving again everybody seemed to have little trouble moving through the cave and keeping warm. We progressed down the main streamway to a ladder climb followed by a series of crawls that cut out a significant amount of main streamway and southern stream passage and included a much nicer campsite than the one we had found. We then progressed slowly but mostly without incident through the remainder of southern stream passage and were all (including rescue) rather pleased when then cave returned to the large passage before the entrance series, Caver H had some issues possibly to do with exhaustion at the end of the stream passage and it was decided Cavers C and D would progress ahead with Caver H being brought out more slowly, however they recovered quite quickly and caught up with us not long into the entrance series. By around 4PM we were all on the surface and greeted with some very welcome bread and soup.

## **Potential risks identified**

Fatigue

Temperature

Route planning-had two cavers not left the cave, rescue would have been looking for us in the opposite end of a 30km system

Food stores- brought food for a 6-8 hour trip, received a 26 hour trip, extra supplies brought by Caver G were exceptionally useful.

Shelter- We fortunately had two group shelters, had we only had one it would have made for a rather (even more) uncomfortable night, had we had none it could have been a serious issue.

Safety gear- Even on a trip that required no rigging gear we needed slings and carabiners to help on a climb, had we not had those the climb could have been much more dangerous or forced us to camp by the streamway which would have caused even greater temperature issues.

Medication- A couple of members of the group require medication, one brought theirs with them, one was without asthma tablets for the trip (if I remember correctly), fortunately this did not turn out to be an issue but could have been severe.

### **Your suggested learning points.**

Plan for the system you are going to, a description may work fine alone in a Yorkshire pothole where you go from pitch to pitch, but in a 30km largely horizontal system you haven't been in before a survey is indispensable.

Bring more chocolate than you need

Bring your thermals- even if you just shove them in a bag or the back of your undersuit.

first aid kits- there are tea lights and dextrose tablets in the first aid kit but we did not think to check it, those of us who had been through the first aid kit contents in the past had forgotten them,- we should go through first aid kits more often. (there were also large candles in the ammo box but we did not use them for safety concerns regarding candles in group shelters, in hindsight largely unnecessary concerns)

Group shelters are rather useful.

Group Health- Communicate more, if you are tired let people know, if you think someone may be tired press it further than a simple "are you ok?" Don't get defensive when people ask if you are doing ok. Don't be afraid to request the trip be aborted and to head for the exit.

Individual health- Bring your tablets if you need them, maybe even if you think you can get by without, while this probably falls to the individual and their knowledge of their condition it is still something to be considered.

Know when you are getting tired and cold and let people know, learn your limits and when you should accept them as opposed to pushing them.

Get more involved in trip planning/leading – The more people helping to plan the trip, the more people there are to help with decisions, it would have only taken one of us to point out that maybe we should double check the description and think about the turn off we missed however many of us had taken a back seat while planning the trip.

Group roles- If navigation is not going to be group responsibility then the navigation should be designated for someone to be responsible for it, that way they are more likely to have a clear idea of what needs to be done. If everybody thinks everybody else is checking routes etc then things get missed.

Group sizes- We had a group of 9 people, in a group that large it is hard for people at the back to communicate with and assist people at the front, it also means that in the planning stage everybody's role becomes a lot more vague and things get missed. In a group of 3 or 4 it is much easier to consult with people and give opinions as well as making it easier to assess what needs to be done before the trip.

Don't over rely on people- Especially on trips later in the year where specific people 'leading' trips doesn't really happen, everyone has to try and take responsibility for themselves and for the group.

## **Form from Caver E**

### **Summary of trip**

The cavers mainly taking responsibility for navigation of the cave were: myself, Cavers J, B and F.

At around 1200 the trip started off well; using the description we swiftly found our way into the main chamber.

The description said to look out for an "obvious passage to the right" as you walk down the main chamber.

I failed to notice the first "obvious passage" into the inner circle and instead headed further down the main chamber until I met the entrance to the Sothern stream passage. I assumed this was the "obvious passage" and suggested it to the rest of the group. Everyone agreed that this was the passage we were looking for.

From the point after we entered the Sothern stream passage we Caver F decided give me, Cavers B and J responsibility for navigation as we were able to move faster than the rest of the group and could stop at junctions in the cave to assess which way to go.

I decided to listen to key points read out by Cavers B and J e.g. this passage should go on for X amount of feet followed by some sideways walking... we're looking for a... etc.

I remember we were trying very hard to make the description match the cave, even though it seemed confusing at points, we insisted to the rest of the group that we were going the right way. I believe this was because me, Cavers B and I being the quite keen, we were eager to prove ourselves to the rest of the group and were probably subconsciously ignoring the fact that we may have gone the wrong way.

By the time we reached the end of the southern stream passage we entered a larger chamber I remember Caver F pointing out we needed to read the description backwards in order for it to make sense, I found this a little confusing but seemed to make sense at the time. The group was pretty tired at this point and we were all under the assumption because this was a round trip that we'd "arrive in the main chamber again soon." Clinging to this hope we carried on though the main stream way until we reached mini waterfall. We climbed up mini waterfall and at this point, I remember Cavers B and J saying to look for: "a short climb" followed by something called "high wire traverse". Off to the right at the top of the waterfall there was what looked like a short climb so we assumed this was the way to go. Caver C was feeling pretty tired at this point and struggled with the climb but we eventually made it to the top.

When we reached the top of the climb we realised that we may not make it out in time for the call out, at this point we were still under the assumption that the main chamber was around the corner so it seemed like a good idea at the time to send Cavers B and J ahead to cancel the call out and avoid the embarrassment of ULSA second rescue in 4 months.

I was hanging around at the back of the group at this point so I can't comment on what happened after Caver F told Cavers B and J to go ahead, about 20 min after they went ahead and we were crawling through very low cave passages, at around 1900 I remember hearing Caver F say to Caver C, "Okay I don't expect us to make it out of the cave today" it was only at this point that I realised something had gone seriously wrong with the navigation and started

to feel bad about bringing the group 7 hours into the wrong part of the cave. I headed back to a larger part of the cave further back with Cavers D and G, at this point everyone else was still in the more narrow passages including Cavers B and J who I still believed to be trying to get out of the cave. I decided to head to the stream with Caver G's darrum drum to get 10 liters of water. I was gone for about 20 minutes and by the time I got back Cavers B and J were waiting with Cavers G and D, we consumed lots of water, set up a group shelter and waited for the rest of the group to return.

When we were all in the same place resting in a group shelter, it was time to make decisions.

- Caver F was determined to leave the cave to inform cave rescue that we had accidentally entered the grand circle in order to speed up the rescue.
- Caver F gave us the choice to leave the cave with them if we wanted, this made sense at the time because everyone seemed like they'd be okay for a few hours until cave rescue arrived.
- Me, Cavers B and J volunteered to go with them. I probably should have stayed with the rest of the group and suggested to Caver J we stay for moral. But then decided I'd rather not spend the next 10 hours waiting for cave rescue and joined them as they began to leave the cave.

On the journey out of the cave I was feeling extremely tired and hungry. I was sick the night before and only got about 3 hours sleep (something I neglected to tell the rest of the group as I felt fine in the morning). An hour after we left we came across an ammo box containing food. Caver F suggested that me and Caver J take it and head back to the others, we agreed and set off back to where the others were. I was traveling very slowly on the way back, Caver J was really supportive and helpful offering to give me some of the food from the box and carry it most of the journey back.

When we made it back to the group we decided to split into two shelters:

- Shelter one contained: me, Cavers D and G
- Shelter two contained: Cavers J, C, H and A

We waited 10 hours for cave rescue who arrived at around 7am, and took over from there.

In hind sight we may not have gone the wrong way if we had a survey as we would be able to better recognise the parts of the cave we were in especially when we entered the "impressive chamber" at the junction between the southern stream passage and the main stream way.

### **Potential risks identified**

Dehydration, hypothermia

### **Your suggested learning points.**

So overall lessons learnt:

- Bring/look at a survey before going into a cave
- Tell people if I felt ill the night before
- Don't let people ahead go ahead to cancel a call out in a cave they are unfamiliar with
- Admit If I don't think that we are going the right way, especially when approaching half time on the call out

## Form from Caver F

### Summary of trip

Prior to the trip we discussed trip options and Agen Allwed inner circle route was suggested this didn't seem an unreasonable objective. A laminated cave description for Agen Allwed had been brought by the students however I didn't cross check this description against the survey available at the hut to ensure the description was for the right trip and neither did anyone else. We set a call out for 10pm and entered the cave shortly before mid day giving us 10hours to complete the trip.

I took a back seat during the trip in to the cave being quite happy for the students to get some experience taking themselves caving I didn't consider myself to be leading the trip just providing a safety net should problems arise. I didn't keep a particularly close eye on the time (there were two watches carried by the group though I wasn't carrying a watch myself) I had half an eye on the group but was nowhere near as vigilant as I would be with a freshers group in hindsight I was far to slack with a group of this size and variable experience.

Caver J navigating from the description led from the entrance series to southern stream passage and down southern stream passage to the lower stream passage unfortunately this isn't the route for the Inner Circle but the Grand Circle which is a significantly more challenging undertaking. Having not checked the survey before hand and lacking sufficient knowledge of the system I did not correct this error. Southern stream way is quite a monotonous and physically challenging section of passage I assisted Caver C with some climbs and traverses but interpreted the need for help as a lack of confidence rather than developing exhaustion this was an error. There were some grumbles and groans moving through southern stream passage however this is normal for unpleasant passages I grumble and groan in them too. Nobody expressed fatigue to me during this section of the trip. I did begin to feel as though the passage was going on for rather a long time and did start to become concerned by about 2/3rds of the way through southern stream that we might be over committing the group however the knowledge that we were on a round trip and that we should soon be into easy stream passage made me reluctant to turn the group and drag everyone back through the way we had come. This was a crucial error I should have turned the trip and at this point I could and should have foreseen what happened next.

On reaching the lower stream way I checked the time with Caver J it was 17:10 this caused me significant concern as we had no time margin for return before call out. At this point I began to assume leadership of the group something I should have done about an hour earlier however I made a further crucial judgement error. I had a choice of dragging everyone back through southern stream passage in which case I would probably have to split the group so that an advanced team could return to the hut and delay our original call out whilst the slower members of the group made their way out of the cave or I could play for easy ground and continue around the other half of the round trip potentially exiting the cave faster with the whole group. Reluctant to split the group I decided to try and continue around the grand circle. A factor which was nagging at my mind when I made this decision was that to complete the route home there is a very short section of out of depth canal and I checked with the members of the group that everyone was confident in their ability to swim. As we progressed through the lower stream way it became clear that several members of the group were becoming tired and beginning to move slowly especially Caver C. We made our way up a rope climb into Biza Passage several of the group found this climb challenging and I improvised a body belay using one of the two insitue hand lines to protect the climb by this point I was

becoming seriously concerned about Caver C but felt committed to my course of action as there was no time to return the way we had come before our call out.

Biza passage turned out to be quite physically challenging and whilst we attempted to pass this section of passage Caver C's condition deteriorated very rapidly. I sent Caver J and Caver B who were in good physical condition ahead of the main group to scout the way through to main stream passage they returned shortly after reporting that they couldn't find the connection. At this point I admitted to myself that we were completely stuffed and would have to return the way we came. Even if the way through to main stream passage was located the condition of Caver C was now such that there was no way I would risk taking them through the short swim. We had a Darren drum which would provide additional bouyancy but by this point I didn't think it an acceptable risk to rely on Caver C maintaining contact with this form of bouyancy aid. By this point I felt I could not adequately supervise a group of this size were we to attempt to self rescue the entire group. The risk of complicating injury or hypothermia that might result from pushing the group back through the lower and southern stream way's was in my opinion significant. As our call out was going to expire and a rescue be initiated anyway there was little to gain from this course of action. I told Caver C that I didn't expect them to get out of the cave that night and began moving the group back to a comfortable section of passage above the rope climb to set up a bivy. We had two group shelters some spare food and one of the clubs emergency kits which contain glucose tablets and candles/lighters.

I knew that a group would need to go for help as we were not in the correct location and a search for our group would therefore take a long time. I initially left Cavers A, D, C, G and H at the bivy to await rescue and took Cavers B, E, and J with me to locate assistance. I left my back up lamp at the stream way junction in strobe mode to mark the location of our party. When we reached Southern stream passage we found an old emergency dump on inspection this contained a Trangia stove and fuel, candles and food I considered this useful enough to be worth sending back to the bivy group so I sent Cavers J and E back to the group with the kit and continued out with Caver B we reached the surface at about 1AM. We met the first member of SMWCRT on our way back to the hut who was on his way to set up coms at the entrance. Once back at the hut we described the location and condition of the party to a first response team had some food and tried to sleep. About an hour and a half later enough people had arrived to form a secondary team. It had not been possible to establish underground comms using hey phones due to the grit stone cap and nearby Gas pipeline so I went with the team to ensure location of our party. We had relatively little equipment to carry and caught the first team up shortly after they reached our group. The evacuation was quite strait forward we split the group into a "fast" and "slow" group dependant on condition and I came out with the fast group, we reached the surface at about 2pm the slow group exited a couple of hours later.

### **Potential risks identified**

Dehydration: I think dehydration played a large role in the fatigue suffered by several members of the party this can be quite serious as it massively reduces the individuals physical ability and decision making capacity increasing the likely hood of an accident. Caver C particularly responded well to rehydration. The nature of South Wales caving being far more an exercise in covering ground then negotiating technical vertical obstacles may have caught members of the team by surprise sweating is not a common problem in most dales caves.

Exhaustion: Steady depletion of energy reserves in some members of the group eventually resulted in a rapid deterioration in there physical and mental condition augmented by

dehydration. This rapid deterioration is something that those individuals had probably not experienced before and may not have expected. This exhaustion rendered the individuals more susceptible to complicating injury and hypothermia.

Hypothermia: Though no one in the group suffered from hypothermia the depletion of individuals energy reserves will have rendered them very vulnerable to hypothermia without group shelters this would have created a serious situation which might have resulted in death.

Complicating accident resulting from any of the above: With individuals physical and mental capability's impaired the risk of complicating injury such as a broken ankle or wrist from a slip especially in the slippery lower stream way rose substantially. The effect of shock on top of Dehydration/exhaustion/mild hypothermia would have created an extremely serious situation with a considerable risk of death. Safely evacuating the group required close supervision of multiple members of the group which I could not reliably provide.

Stress: Having neglected my duties within the group to long I was making decisions from the back foot trying to dig the group and myself out of a hole. I could feel myself becoming progressively more stressed and this was starting to affect my decision making in a way that was not beneficial to the groups safety. There is a significant urge to try and avoid rescue however accepting rescue was inevitable was the main step required to regain a cycle of positive decision making. Allowing mental stress to continue to build would have led to me making further poor decisions potentially placing the group in a situation where complicating injury was more likely.

### **Your suggested learning points.**

Group sizes/ratio to leaders: The group was too large to be suitable for this trip once things began to go wrong the size of the group made the situation difficult to manage. During the planning of the trip I had thought that we could split the group if necessary however when it came to the crunch I realised that I didn't consider any of the other members of the group experienced enough to reliably deal with any complicating situations on their way out of the cave I should have realised that was the case before beginning the trip and not factored this course of action into deciding whether or not the trip would be viable. Identifying this in the planning stage I could have suggested that a group go on a less complex trip where the leaders would be within their comfort zone. Furthermore the group only had one description whilst a splitting group would be going back the way we came this factored into the decision not to split the group as it increased the risk of a party getting lost on its way out.

Proper oversight during planning phase: Checking key parts of the route on the survey prior to departure is something that should have been done by every member of the group so that everyone had an idea of where we should be I didn't check the route by leaving this to others I did not pick up on the route error which led to the group overcommitting and ultimately our predicament.

Better the devil you know: Once I had realised that the group was overcommitted I should have immediately turned the group back through the passage which we had come through by committing to taking the group through unfamiliar terrain I left us open to navigational errors and unknown variables such as passage length and difficulty I should have gone with the devil I knew even if it was unpleasant.

Awareness of influence on group dynamic of experience gap: My presence in the group may

have caused other members of the group to feel that I would make important decisions like when to turn the group and that if I hadn't said anything then they didn't need to either. Were I not in the group the other cavers would probably have turned the trip earlier without the false sense of security that having me with them provided. I was not unaware of the possibility of this dynamic before the trip and as an experienced caver with a group of this experience level I should have encouraged discussion within the group facilitating group decision making rather than leading but I should not have allowed a leadership vacuum to develop in which no informed decision making or group monitoring was occurring in a group of very mixed experience which was in unfamiliar terrain.

Individuals need to take responsibility for themselves as they develop and be comfortable asserting their thoughts within the group: Following from the previous points every member of a group needs to be an autonomous decision maker with regards to their own capability's. This is a culture that needs to be encouraged within the student section of ULSA. Leaving decisions on personal condition and capability of each member of the group entirely to a leader on relatively advanced trips is neither fair or safe everyone must be looking after everyone else and everyone must be empowered to turn a trip if they feel it is necessary.

## **Form from Caver G**

### **Summary of trip**

We all read the description of the cave the previous night. On the day, 22<sup>nd</sup>, from the first, we had a bit of time loss. We couldn't find the entrance of cave, we were about to go, and managed to walk passed it and came back to the half way. While in the cave, most of the time, everyone seemed to enjoy caving. Cavers A, B, E, F, and Caver J kept asking each other "Are we heading to the right direction?" The description didn't seem to match, but it did seem to match at the same time. Cavers C, D, G and H concentrated on keeping up with the team, and didn't join the major decision of directions. After 5 or 6 hours of caving, I felt tired, but didn't complain about it, because I positively thought, we must be about to be near the exit. Caver C was visibly getting tired and Cavers F and A had been carrying them. When Caver C could not move anymore due to dehydration, Caver E, D and I (me) were told to go back the way we past and to wait. Caver F informed us that we need to stay in the cave, and some of Cavers realised that we had got lost. Caver B and Caver J were sent to the ground to notify the situation; however, they couldn't find the way and they came back.

We discussed what we should do next: Caver A and F were asked to stay with Caver C to look after; Caver H decided to stay in order to avoid the delay of return journey; Cavers F, B, E, J headed to the surface, and I decided to stay there in the cave because I thought it would be difficult for me to cave safely with the tiredness. So, 4 of us stayed in a group shelter and shared the chocolate. Caver C seemed holding up well, but Caver H started breathing heavily and they couldn't breathe normally anymore. Caver E, Caver J and F came back and brought us an ancient emergency food, and Caver J and E stayed with us and F headed to the surface with Caver B. Caver J and E started a fire and distribute the food they brought. We stayed in two group shelters: Caver J, A, C, and H in a warmer shelter and Caver D, H are with me in another group shelter. I did not communicate with others for a while, because I was sleeping. After waking up, I heard the condition of Caver H who had thrown up after eating, and I noticed Caver D was getting unwell due to the cold and hunger, and both Caver D and E were getting very cold. Three of us tried to keep warm by touching my neck. In the morning, we heard the voice of cave rescue member. He gave us chocolate bars and water. Having had stomachache, I took my own medicine. We found Caver F had returned for us, and we separated into 2 groups: Cavers A, J, F, E and G to go faster, and Cavers C, D, and H in the latter group. We went all out with the assistance of Caver rescue team by 5-ish.

### **Potential risks identified**

Not prepared enough for caving: map, survey, and description  
Not stating the current physical condition/feeling to others

### **Your suggested learning points.**

Bring emergency food (tackle officer or somebody who has a tackle bag)

## **Form from Caver H**

### **Summary of trip**

We entered Agen Allwedd at around midday on 22/04/13 with the intention of exploring the Inner Circle route of the cave, which is a round trip and takes about 6 hours. We were using a description of the cave to guide us, but as Agen Allwedd is so big the description isn't very thorough for specific routes. Having unintentionally missed a crucial turning to follow our intended route we continued further into the cave, following the cave description that was not necessarily for the parts of the cave we were in. About 5 hours in people were becoming worried about missing our call out, but we pressed on with the hope that we were still doing the round trip and would be out sooner than if we turned back the way we came. Around 9pm it was realised that one of our group was dehydrated, having been exhausted for most of the trip, and the rest of us were becoming exhausted too. At this time Caver F decided that most of us would be staying put in the cave, while they and Cavers J, B and E went out the way we came to intercept the cave rescue, and tell them where we were, as it was now apparent that we were not doing the inner circle route. The rest of us remained in our group shelters and Cavers J and E returned a couple hours later with an emergency food box that had been left in the cave. Cave Rescue turned up at about 7 am and the 7 remaining Cavers left in two separate groups, one group (Cavers A, E, G and J) exiting the cave at about 2pm and the second group (Cavers C, D and H) at about 4.30pm on 23/04/13.

### **Potential risks identified**

- We were not where we had told our call out we were, so if Cavers F and B had been unable to get out, cave rescue would have taken a lot longer to find us.
- We carried on not knowing exactly where we were and could've got lost.
- People were cold and wet and could've become hypothermic
- Not having enough food- if cave rescue had taken longer we would've really struggled
- At times we weren't close to water, and more people could've become dehydrated.

### **Your suggested learning points.**

- Identifying who is leading the trip before we start.
- Knowing the route we are taking before we start
- Having a survey and a detailed description of the route that we'll be taking in the cave, if the cave/ route is unfamiliar
- People need to know that they can put their opinions across/ ask to turn back/ say they are tired etc.
- Become familiar with the first aid kit available and all the actions to take when sitting and waiting to be rescued in a group shelter; removing wet clothing; huddling together to stay warm; light a tea light for warmth
- Cavers who were freshers at the beginning of this academic year should now realise they need to develop into being responsible leaders and not simply blindly following the 'leader' on a trip.

## Form from Caver J

### Summary of trip

Surprisingly for an ULSA trip, no one was incapacitated by heavy drinking the night before the trip. Everyone ate a large breakfast and we packed 2 group shelters, a first aid kit and lots of chocolate. 2 members of the trip had a knife and whistle, and the majority had an extra light. We left a callout of 10pm. The weather had been checked and no heavy rain was scheduled that day, with the weather in South Wales having been dry for the past 2 weeks. Caver H and myself had been in charge of laminating and preparing descriptions so had read the description for Agen Allwedd, and Caver F had been on a trip in Agen Allwedd once before, but aside from this no one else had any real knowledge of the system. We set out with the plan of doing the Inner Circle route, as this was the shortest round trip in the system. I had looked at the survey briefly the night before the trip to get a rough idea of the geography of the system, so I knew the rough shapes and areas visited by the Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Grand Circle.

We entered the cave at 12:15pm, and were through the entrance series to Baron's chamber in around an hour and a half. We then entered Main Passage. The description stated that there was an obvious turnoff right down to Main Stream Passage, and on the back of the description it stated that to follow the Inner Circle you take this turnoff and enter Main Stream Passage to then enter Turkey Streamway. However, after brief discussion between Caver F and myself, this turnoff was inexplicably overlooked by us and we continued on down Main Passage to then go down Southern Stream Passage, possibly because the way that the description was written indicated that this was a natural follow-on from Main Passage, with the turnoff to Main Stream seeming to be just another variation on the main route. Southern Stream proved to be much more arduous and tiring for the group than I anticipated having read the description, which merely described it as "tedious". One climb in particular was very tricky for some of the group, with the ground being slippery and treacherous. We then entered the main streamway, which proved to be extremely slippery and progress was not made as rapidly as we had hoped, despite Caver F mentioning before the trip began that they knew the streamway to be extremely slippery. By this point, the group was starting to fragment somewhat, with Caver C struggling particularly. We had had 2 chocolate breaks by this point, and the time was coming on for 6pm.

We reached 2 rope climbs out of the streamway which we thought to be the way onward, but which in fact turned out to be a dead end maze of sandy crawls (though we weren't to know this at the time). Caver C struggled here, and after an effort to climb it herself was eventually belayed to the top. Caver C was evidently extremely fatigued by this point, and must have been suffering for some time prior to this. It was then decided that Caver B and myself would attempt to get out of the cave and cancel our callout, and that the rest of the party would make an impromptu underground camp and continue out when all felt rehydrated and had more energy. However, our attempt to head out onward on what we thought was the continuation of the route was halted by a series of dead ends in quite low crawls. As I was dressed in a PVC oversuit, and had probably not taken on enough fluid on the trip, I began to become quite dehydrated, and this and the situation we found ourselves in caused me to lose it in my head a bit and panic unnecessarily. I calmed down when I again saw Caver F. Realising that we would have rescue called on us anyway, it was decided that it would be best heading out steadily the way we came and helping the rescue effort to find where the camp was rather than blitzing it to cancel callout. Caver F, Caver B, Caver E and myself began to head out, leaving the others at the camp. Some way back along Southern Stream Passage, we found an old ammunition box which contained a lot of chocolate, a Trangia, tea and some dried main meals. It was decided

that Caver E and myself would return to the camp with the box and that Cavers F and B would continue out alone. Caver E was becoming very tired at this time, but after a 15 minute rest and some chocolate recovered. We returned to the camp with the box at around half 11.

On returning to the camp, we prepared the meals and tea and everyone ate some. Caver H, however, was becoming very cold and was struggling to breathe evenly having not brought their inhaler or asthma tablets down the cave. I persevered with the spungy gravel that passed for spag bol, and then got into the group shelter to sit it out for 10 hours, with stories being told and little (probably no) sleep. At around 8am that morning, the first party of SMWCRT arrived. The strength of group members at this time was very variable: I was still warm felt ok, whereas Cavers D and H had become extremely cold during the night and were not up to much. A belay was rigged to get down the climbs, and from there everyone made their way out at their own pace, with a ladder rigged on High Traverse to bypass some of Southern Stream. The rescue team were at all times very positive and friendly, and their knowledge and skill was hugely appreciated by all. We surfaced in two groups, one at 1:45 and one at 4:40 to meet extremely welcome food kindly donated by Waitrose.

### **Potential risks identified (Ed Note: dealt with together)**

#### **Your suggested learning points.**

- All cavers within a group should communicate how they feel to the other members of the group without any ambiguity: if a caver is tired, or if they notice another is tired, they should say so. Communication within a group of cavers is key to ensure the success of the trip without mishap, and this was severely lacking from all of us here. No one person, however experienced they may be, can be expected to shoulder all responsibility on a trip and should definitely not feel that they are doing so. Everyone on a trip should be involved in the decision making: not saying something if you feel a bad decision is being made just because others may be more experienced should be discouraged. We all caved together because we share the same interest of having fun and caving safely, and being involved in making the decisions on trips is key to this.
- This may seem obvious, but it was overlooked here: caving in South Wales is not the same as caving in Yorkshire. Systems are extremely complex, and not enough preparation and data was compiled here to avoid getting lost. One 40 year old description was clearly vastly inadequate. Having spoken to John Stevens, the warden of Whitewalls and a very experienced Caver, after the incident, I learnt that very good descriptions and surveys of Aggy, Draenen and other big systems were available in the CSS journals in the ULSA library, which was a resource I had totally overlooked. These should be used on future South Wales trips. This was a definite complacency on my part, and I now think that a description and a survey, along with discussion with experienced local cavers and a heightened sense of caution for the trip, is something I will always take with me on trips of a similar nature in the future, be it Easegill, Aggy or wherever.

## **Additional learning points and comments from an experienced South Wales caver**

My main thoughts are:

- They were unprepared in many ways before even entering the cave, route info/surveys, abilities, group size, provisions.
- Most of the reports gave the impression that fairly on there were signs things were not going as intended. Use of the words slow, couldn't keep up, go on ahead etc. The trip should have stopped way earlier and returned the way they came.
- In the words they used in why the trip was chosen there appears to be a degree of arrogance. They chose a known big cave and big trip for their first one. There was definitely an over-confidence in being 'experienced' – in Yorkshire maybe.

From here is a list of points and thoughts

### **Action plan learning points**

Fatigue and exhaustion

- personal wellbeing – if ill before a trip be honest about your abilities, your decision affects others as much as yourself

Dehydration

- for the inner circle (which I think is drier) we had 1L water each which wasn't enough and we refilled when water was available

Cold and hypothermia

- group shelters – put together a 2 sided A4 PDF on the construction and use (including candle tips etc) email to all members and keep in bag with shelters
- In welsh caves sweating/perspiring are a major cause of fluid loss that a Yorkshire caver may not have experienced before

Personal medication

- although no one should feel forced to reveal conditions to others their decision not to could endanger the lives if it becomes an issue, it only needs to be one other you trust

Personal kit

- always have a belay belt on with a screw gate, could be used as a sling, to haul you etc Even if you don't 'need' it. Also many Welsh cavers carry a sling around 2m for climbs etc.

Unfamiliarity with area

- if you don't have experience of an area or a local guide, don't rush a big trip. Either do smaller caves or shorter introduction trips. Most have good multi hour trips that will teach you much about the system

Communication

- Often it is worth formally writing down the trip list and leave with the car/callout person. Also clearly mark the leader.

**Cave**

- Inner circle trip with CCC 4 people or less with lots of water
- Boulder hopping is a skill Yorkshire cavers need to learn, Its strenuous and exhausting in usually dry passages.
- When I used to visit South Wales regularly we visited Aggy a lot but rarely did the large trips due to the strenuous nature of them. Each time an experienced leader that knew the way would run the trip (same with DYO) and ensure that party members had water/food etc for the trip.
- The inner circle has some interesting navigational points depending on the direction it is undertaken. The Coal Cellar is ok if taken from Midsummer Passage back to the streamway but the entrance to the passage is hidden behind a large car+ sized boulder – easily missed on first inspection.
- Experienced leaders in CCC would take in Inner Circle trip clockwise. The Coal Cellar is downhill in small drops in narrow passage (from memory) if taken from Midsummer Passage.
- I think we took approximately 6 hours for an Inner Circle trip but that was moving at a good pace with no route finding issues. A slower pace and route finidng could easily add 2+ hours on.
- The Entrance Series can also be confusing to first timers in the cave. The boulder chokes are not always obvious and soon start sapping strength from party members.
- I have not done the full Grand Circle – the time never seemed right as it is a major undertaking and in CCC was always fully understood to be so. We did trips into sections of it and then exited the same way.
- This says it well ([http://www.ogof.org.uk/agen\\_allwedd.html](http://www.ogof.org.uk/agen_allwedd.html)):
 

*Agen Allwedd is a long system with areas of complex route finding so a full description of the cave is not given here. There are several notable standard routes that can be undertaken in the cave. A trip through the First Boulder Choke into Baron’s Chamber and then down the mile long Main Passage with its impressive dried mud floor to the Music Room offers a gentle introduction to this cave. For the more adventurous the Grand Circle following the main streamway through the Second, Third and Fourth Boulder Chokes to the main sump and then returning via the long and unpleasant Southern Stream Passage is one of South Wales most classic trips. The Inner and Outer Circle routes accessed by the Turkey Streamway offer arguably the more interesting trips in the cave, with pristine crystal covered passage walls in Selenite Needle Passage, the massive Dome of St Pauls and the very interesting Swiss Village Mud formations. In recent years an attempt to forge a link with the neighbouring Ogof Daren Cilau has resulted in the discovery of some of the most impressive formations in the UK in Iles Inlet, accessed via Southern Strem Passage and the Priory Road.*
- An interesting and fairly accurate write-up of the caving style required; and the leaders knew the way! <http://mmmmargot.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/agen-allwedd-with-ycc.html>

### Notes from individual reports:

1. ‘CANCEL THE CALL OUT’ / ‘EMBARRASSMENT’
  - Never, ever, ever, ever cancel a callout. ESPECIALLY when there is even a hint of trouble.
2. I got the impression the group was out to bag something ‘big’ without local knowledge of what they were letting themselves in for.

3. Only one report (caver F) even considers that the choice of trip was a problem. This is probably the biggest issue. South Wales caves are completely different to Yorkshire in many ways. They can be far more strenuous, continuous, dry (therefore dehydration), etc.
4. All reports (except one) mention the slow progress from nearly the beginning. Considering the trip, alarm bells should have rung already.
5. Thankfully all reports agree the lack of preparation (by all members) and lack of survey meant this trip was going to fail. These are not linear caves – think Easegill but larger.
6. Many mentioned the splitting of the group. At this point a decision should have been made for at least the slow group to perhaps get to the streamway and turn back having had a good enjoyable trip.
7. Local knowledge and experience!
8. ‘One bottle (Ed: *of water*) between nine’ (caver A)!!!! This is a massively mostly DRY cave involving much strenuous activity (sweating). Think a hard walk on a hot day. All should have carried at least 1L if not more.
9. All mention that each member of the party is responsible for speaking up about concerns, being tired etc. If others won’t listen or help they are not people to be caving with.
10. In addition to point 9 there needs to be a clear leader. They may not be the route finder but someone has to be in charge.
11. The leader should be aware of the groups abilities and if not monitor closely. Stopping and going back is not a failure.
12. Commended for taking group shelters and first aid.
13. When visiting any new area take time to familiarise yourself with the caves/terrain. Do shorter initial trips and build slowly. Gives members a chance to learn caving methods for the area and their own abilities.
14. ‘Don’t be afraid to request the trip be aborted’ – true for anywhere.
15. Navigation – considering the scale of Aggy, the hit and miss navigation style is just asking for trouble. Should have turned around as soon as it became known they might be in the wrong place. (When was that exactly?)
16. There are very cheap watches available. Get one... and a compass.
17. Obviously a large range of abilities in the group and those ‘in front’ should have caved to the slowest person’s ability. Should they have turned around instead of pressing on at the earliest signs of this discrepancy?

### **Other**

- 6 months is not a lot of cave experience. Its good but far from being a rounded caver if all in one area and similar style of trips.
- Too much emphasis on SRT and technical (measurable) skills and not enough on the environments in the UK and beyond, planning etc.
- Foster some ties with other clubs for a region you are visiting (SWCC/CCC/Chelsea/Westminster). A polite request might get you an experienced leader or at least someone to discuss your plans with and the common pitfalls. (Ed note: *on another day “the group split in two and went with Cardiff down Daren and Draenen”, caver A .)*

## **South and Mid Wales Cave Rescue Organisation write up of incident call out**

<http://www.smwcrt.org/j32/index.php/newsmainmenu/179-rescue-agen-allwedd-22nd-23rd-april-2014-overdue-party> - accessed 26/05/14

At about 23:00 on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April, one of SMWCRT's members received a call from a friend who was acting as "Callout" for a party of 9 caving in Agen Allwedd. The party had missed their 22:00 call out time and the contact was unsure what to do. The call was passed to Team Wardens who initiated the call out.

Initially, one local member was dispatched to Whitewalls to check for cars and/or cavers while more Wardens were placed on standby. At Whitewalls, there were cars but no cavers and further call out was initiated.

Based on the information from the home contact, search plans were being drawn up around an Inner Circle trip when 2 of the party exited the cave.

The update from these 2 cavers changed the picture completely as it transpired that the group were not on the Inner Circle at all.

From the survey and descriptions of the route taken, Controllers were able to establish that the party had missed the turn for the Inner Circle trip and had taken the turn for Southern Streamway. Having followed this all the way down, they had reached the Lower Main Stream way and followed up stream. After a tricky climb up, the party had reached Biza passage where it was apparent that they could go no further.

7 of the party bivvied down while 2 were sent back out to find help. The 2 reported that 3 of the party in the bivvy camp were particularly cold and tired.

This was all vital information – a search plan based on an Inner Circle trip would have wasted many hours searching in the wrong place. In fact, the party couldn't have been much further from where they were expected to be!

Two strong search parties were despatched into the cave and, several hours later, the party were located. After being warmed and fed the party were lowered back down into the Stream Passage. The 4 strongest members began their journey out while the 3 remaining cavers were given warm clothes and escorted by the remaining 7 rescuers. The trip out was slow, with all 3 party members suffering from the effects of dehydration and over-exertion. There were one or two exciting moments on the way – notably when one of the party slipped, becoming temporarily wedged in a narrow rift but steady progress was made until the final party exited the cave at 16:35, almost 28 hours after setting out!

Rescuers and Rescueses were fed hot tea and pizza – supplied once again by the ever supportive management of Waitrose in Abergavenny – and the incident was officially closed at 17:05

Well done to all the team members involved in this marathon effort and thanks again to all those who supported and were woken in the small hours of Wednesday to be put on Standby.

A mention should go to the party of cavers – After realising their mistake, the decision to bivvy down made a big difference to the outcome. The fact that they were sufficiently well equipped

to be in a position to make that call should be commended.

Just one reminder for anyone acting as "Callout" - please familiarise yourselves with the correct callout procedures - [click here](#)

(Ed: <http://www.smwcr.org/j32/index.php/callouttopmenu>)

## **How to Call Out South & Mid Wales Cave Rescue Team in an Emergency**

**1 - Dial 999 (or 112)**

**2 - Ask for the POLICE** (Some mobile calls divert to a National Call Centre, you may have to ask for the relevant Police Service. Most of our caves are in the Gwent or Dyfed-Powys areas)

**3 - Then ask for CAVE RESCUE**

**4 - Be prepared to give as much information as possible about the location of the cave, the cavers involved and the injuries sustained.**

**5 - STAY BY THE PHONE** - If using a mobile, ensure you remain in an area of good reception!

**6 - A Cave Rescue Warden will call you back for more details**

## **Statement from ULSA member acting as callout**

*Rang 999 at 22:46*

*Redirected to West Yorkshire Police*

*Redirected to South Wales Police 01633838111*

*Given the Phone Number for South Wales CRO 01873810548, phone rang out*

*Phoned Dxxx @ 22:57, he then contacted South Wales covers*

*@ 23:12 Txxx (a South Wales CRO Warden) phoned me, Txxx (not currently in South Wales) phoned round to initiate rescue.*

*Txxx Phoned back at 23:33, call out has been initiated with Jxxx (01591xxxx) coordinating from his home.*

*Phoned University Security at 23:42 informing them of the situation.*

*Phone Jxxx @ 01:30 on Wed 23 April, no sign of anyone at Whitewalls, should be a rescue group there soon who'll go underground and coordinate the rescue from Whitewalls.*

Basically there was 2 issues:

firstly the 999 operator would/could only put me through to my local Police force from where I was calling (so West Yorkshire) despite me asking for South Wales Police. The West Yorkshire Police quickly gave me the relevant phone number for the South Wales Police.

Secondly (and a more severe issue) was that when I eventually got through to South Wales Police, the phone number they gave me to call for cave rescue kept ringing out and turned out to be an incorrect number (Txxx didn't recognise it as a SMWCRT number).

Fortunately on this occasion there were people I knew down in South Wales who were associated with SMWCRT and who I called after the normal protocol failed. Txxx said he'd look into why the police had the wrong number.

*(Ed Note: this problem is being investigated currently with SMWCRT, BCA and the police)*