

JOURNAL OF THE



Issue No. 1, 2011

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Cover Photo: Sion Jones emerges after a digging session in the Ty Gwyn.

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IN RETROSPECT

Since our last Journal of May 2010 it's hard to realise just how active GOES has been in the last year, both on the Great Orme and also further afield.

ORME ACTIVITIES:

Romans:

Six trips were made down Romans since May last year and yet still more new areas have come to light, but Dave Wrennall will tell you more about these. For me, the one trip which stands out was in late May when GOES hosted an evening for the North Wales Cave Rescue Organisation. Initially I only intended to observe, but somehow I found myself actually helping to manhandle the casualty from the Big Stope to the bottom of Romans shaft. Some of the passages en-route are really quite tight and at one point I found myself kneeling on my hands and knees whilst the casualty, I'm sure he was well over six foot, was slid over my back! It certainly brought home the realities of rescuing someone from underground.



Penmorfa:

Five trips were made to Penmorfa. Here again new passages were found, either through observation or actually digging our way through blockages. Although significant and exciting, at the time we always seemed to find ourselves back into areas where we have been before. More evidence that the Penmorfa is just like a big Swiss cheese; but once again, Dave Wrennall will reveal all in his Penmorfa Chronicles.



Flying Buttress Stope, Penmorfa



Pinnacle Chamber, Penmorfa



Calcited passage, Penmorfa

Ty Gwyn:

Seven trips were made into the Ty Gwyn. We continued to conduct interested groups and individuals around the Ty Gwyn, but our main energies this year were directed towards the dig in the lower passage adjacent to the Ty Gwyn shaft. Since the late nineties it was thought that this passage contained bad air but after testing the air in the early part of last year this was found not to be the case. If you remember from the previous Journal the dig here is reminiscent of the escape tunnel in the film 'The Great Escape' and the efforts of our tunnelers just as demanding! Progress continues to be steady but slow. Surprisingly, on our last visit, the tunnel took a significant upwards turn, on an angle of around 45 degrees and rising just 2 metres.

Ali series:

On our last trip of our Journal year, members entering via the Ali Series entrance, descended through the D-Day rift and into the Treweeks high level tunnel. Meanwhile a three man team completed the survey between the Ali Series and the top of the D-Day rift.

Other Orme trips:

These have included visits to the Cowboys trial, just past the Gun Site on the West Shore, Badgers Cave near the lighthouse (a mixture of a natural cave and a later mine trial) and Skeleton cave, also on the West Shore.



Inside Cowboys

OFF ORME:

All Off Orme activities were well attended. Our biggest group numbered 28 when GOES escorted members from the Snowdonia Society through the Rhiw Bach slate caverns near Cwm Penmachno.

In February this year, on a round trip through the Cwmorthin slate mine near Ffestiniog, our intrepid band of explorers found themselves totally lost, going around and around in circles before realising where they had gone wrong!

The long awaited return trip to the Bwlch y Plwm lead mine near Penrhyndeudraeth was made in March of this year. Comprising three easy abseils and a couple of rope protected steep rifts, members had descended nearly 300 feet before exiting to daylight.



Abseil in Bwlch y Plwm



The intrepid team at Bwlch y Plwm



Poachers

Other trips included visits to the natural limestone cave of Poachers in the Alyn valley near Cilcain. Clogwyn y Fwch slate caverns near Llyn Crafnant, which also included the many small lead mines in the Geirionydd gorge. In November we visited Dulas cave near Llanddulas, a mixture of a natural cave and mine. Our plan to visit the higher workings was abandoned when our route meant we would have disturbed a hibernating bat!



Finally, we must not forget the three occasions when the GOES exhibition gazebo helped to enlighten the general public about the underground wonders of the Great Orme. So you must agree, since our last Journal GOES has been pretty busy!

Brian Edwards, April 2011

SUMMER WALKS 2011

All walks start at 7pm and are usually gentle strolls which last approximately 2 hours. Sturdy footwear is recommended. Below is a list of the proposed walks, but all are subject to confirmation. Please check the community news section in the North Wales Weekly News, which will provide full details of the walk taking place and the arranged meeting place. If the weather is poor, it is very likely that the walk will be postponed until a later date.

Date:	Walk:	Meeting place:
26th May	Parc Mawr woods, Henryd, Conwy	Parking at SH761 744
2nd June	Summit of the Little Orme	Supermarket car park, Penrhyn Bay (SH818 816)
9th June	Invalids Walk, Zig Zags (steep), Haulfre Gardens	Street parking, West Shore boating lake (SH771 821)
16th June	Complete circuit of Parc wall	Car park above St Tudnos Church (SH769 836)
23rd June	Bodyscallen woods and obelisk	Car park off Marl Lane (SH800 786)
30th June	Vardre and Deganwy Castle	All Saints Church, Deganwy (SH783 790)
7th July	Bodlondeb Woods and Marine Walk, Conwy	Street parking, Benarth Road (SH784 773)
14th July	Conwy Mountain, Alltwen hill fort (steep)	Sychnant Pass car park overlooking Penmaenmawr (SH750 770)
21st July	Donky path on the Great Orme	Street parking, West Shore boating lake (SH771 821)
28th July	Bryn Pydew area footpaths	Village hall at Bryn Pydew (SH812 794)
4th August	Search for evidence of old pier, Llandudno	Pier entrance (SH782 827)
11th August	Great Orme gun site (steep) and Monk's path	Concrete road (toll on Marine Drive) (SH755 840)
18th August	Ffynnon Galchog and Pen Trwyn area	Ski slope car park (SH782 830)
25th August	Bishop's Quarry and Maes y Fachrell NNR	Parking at Water Board building (SH771 832)



ROMAN INROADS

LOCATION 1

New Circuit:

In October 2009 an area of blackness had been observed in an isolated section of Location 1 beyond the chamber containing an obvious down-climb. The blackness could be seen up through an easily overlooked cleft just beyond an old orange survey point. The cleft contained some large rocks and certainly hadn't been climbed before.

Andy Lewis emailed:

'The tag you found with number 15 was part of the first survey. These points were renumbered when we started the main survey. The area of 'blackness' you describe was not investigated by us, so you have the possibility of finding more new areas.'



Dig to the left of old survey point

It was May 23rd 2010 before I arrived to investigate further, accompanied by Gaz, Charlie and Richie. Within thirty minutes several awkward hefty rocks had been safely manipulated out of the way and we were able to squeeze up through. The new area appeared substantial but our spirits faded when we spied another survey point. It was quickly apparent that we were in the more easterly branch of this location, accessed through the down-climb we had skirted in order to reach our dig. There were several areas of interest here. The main passage itself was blocked to the south by a wall of glutinous mud falling in from above, any further progress that might be made would certainly be messy. At a lower level 'Long Straw Grotto' provided us with some excellent formations.



Long Straw Grotto

LOCATION 2

Beyond the 'T'-Junction:

I had crawled down the most southerly tunnel of Location 2 sometime in 2009 looking for the 'T'-junction shown on the survey. Eventually, just past a large stone maul displayed prominently on a ledge, the tight passageway was blocked by rubble leading up into a small dome of shattered rock. Beyond the mound, through gaps between jammed rocks, I could just make out the 'T'-Junction. Passageways seemed to go off in both directions. Had they ever been surveyed? Had they ever been visited? Andy Lewis replied to an email:

'One area we did investigate was location 2, specifically near point 315. This was a small dig beneath a low crawl with loose material above. We managed to excavate and temporarily support this to get into a low east-west passage. (The 'T'-Junction) This was sketched briefly and we returned through the narrow section. Within a few minutes we heard rumblings from above and the entire area we had squeezed through filled in rapidly with sloughed material. We never bothered digging this again!'

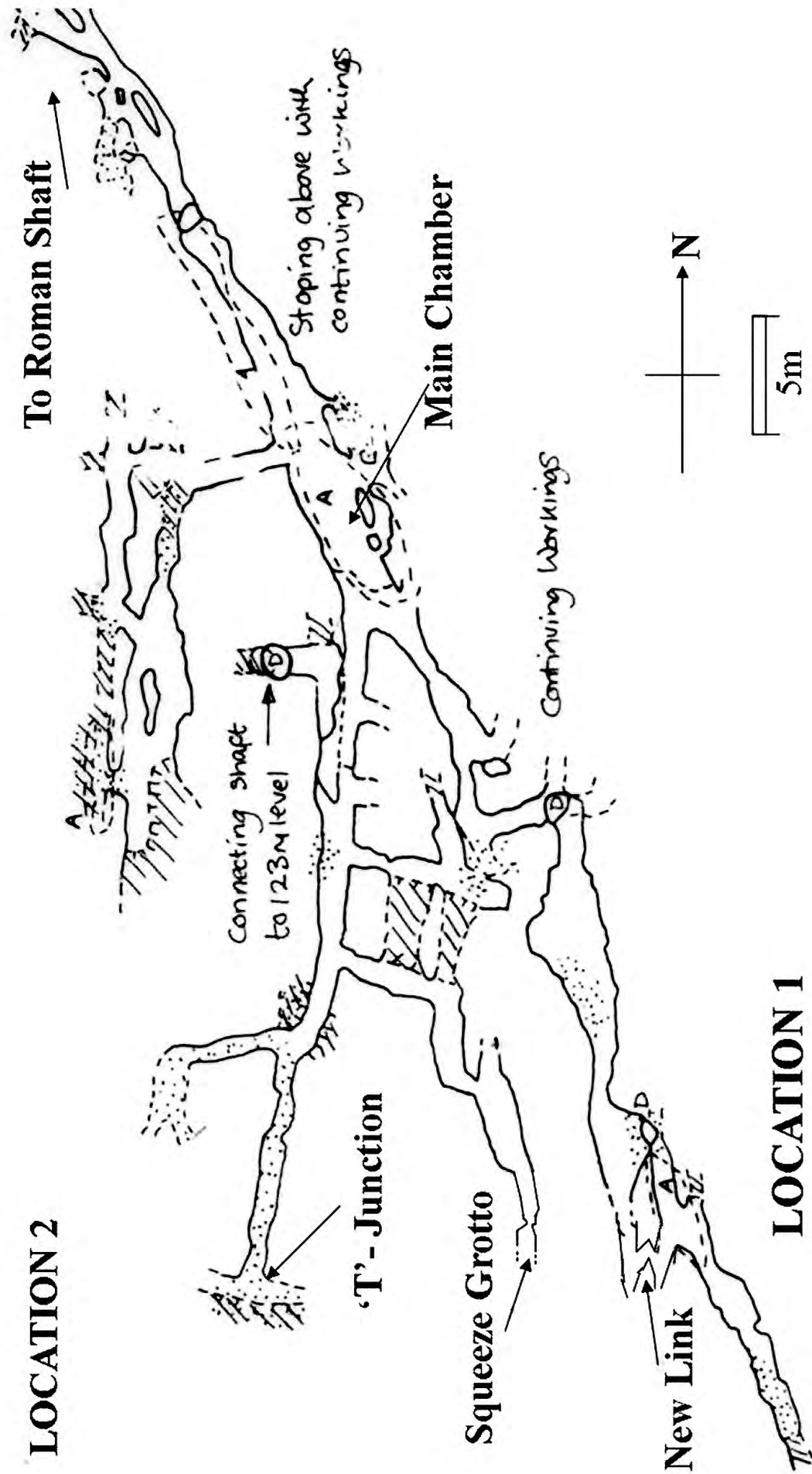
On July 18th 2010 whilst Steve, Gaz and Richie were showing new members, Angela Gawthrop and Debbie Wareham, around I had the opportunity, together with Brian, to scrutinize the place again. The shattered roof appeared very unstable and I had to be extremely careful exactly which rocks I removed whilst engineering a window. Quite soon there was just sufficient room to squeeze past the remaining hanging blocks to the safety of a clean ledge beyond, surrounded by solid rock. It was a simple step down to the 'T'-Junction and the unexplored passages leading off. Brian waited for me to report.

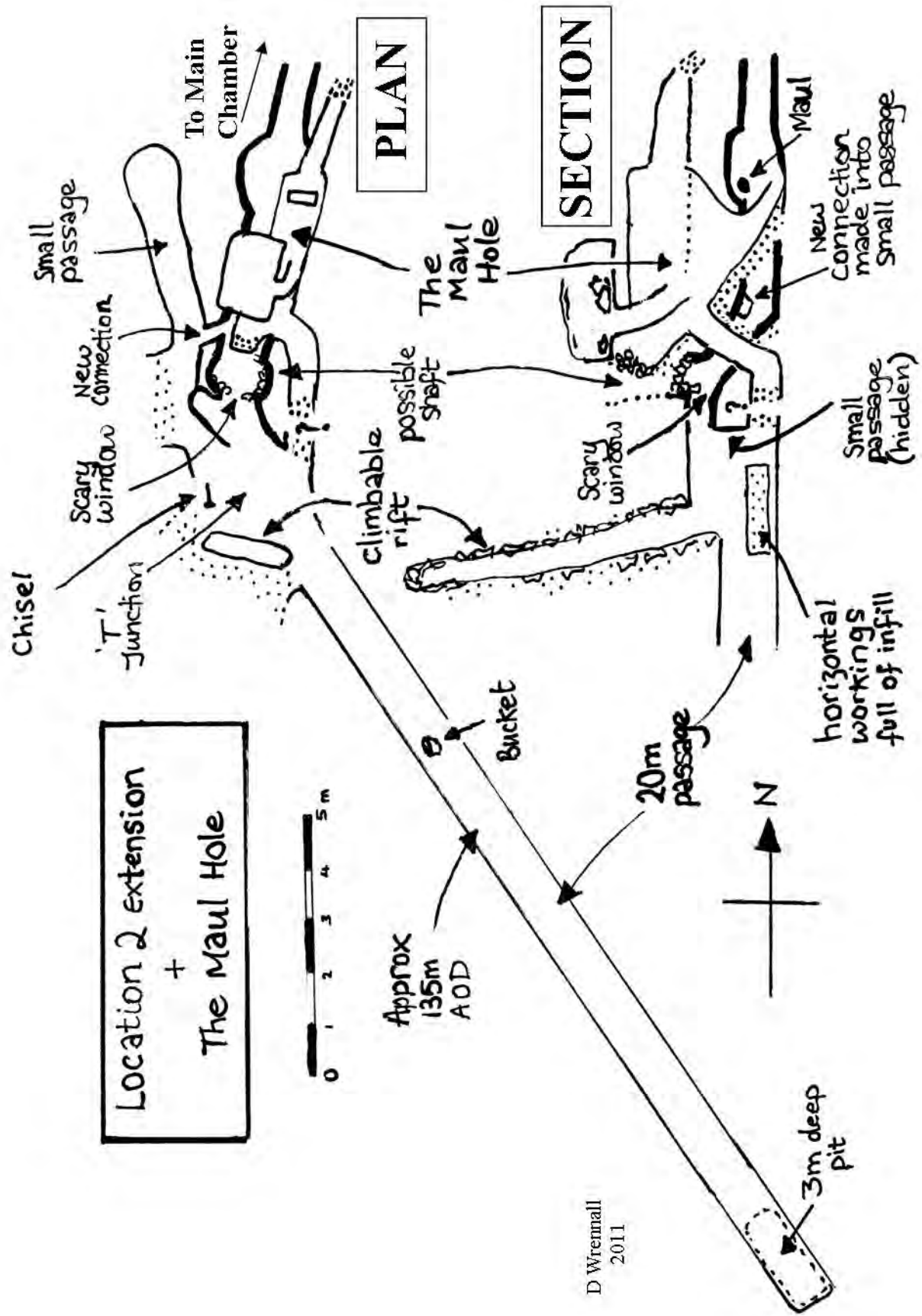


The Maul Stone



Brian back through the scary window





D Wrennall
2011

The left tunnel ran south east at a stooping / kneeling height for some 20m to finish with a clean cut 3m deep pit, with compact fill at its base. En route there was an old bucket. The right passage swung back to the north, ending after 7m at a small passage filled with rock. At the 'T'-Junction itself there were several narrow horizontal fissures, impassable due to rock fill and a vertical cleft formed within loose rock scalable for over 6m. A chisel was found on the ground. There also appeared to be another tunnel running back to the north, immediately east of the entry point, but it was totally full of stones.



3m deep pit, chisel and old bucket

Whilst Brian and I were talking we were able to discover and then excavate another less worrying access point with a solid roof running direct from the base of the rubble slope to the start of the small rock filled passage. In the meantime, Gaz, who had arrived to see how we had been getting on, clambered through the original entrance casually bashing away several of the rocks I had taken great care to avoid dislodging 'It's all calcited up' he maintained. He was probably right as to my amazement nothing moved!



New 'safer' entrance

The Maul Hole:

I was the last to leave and on the way back down the tunnel I noticed something else. The rock immediately below the maul's ledge didn't quite reach the floor, there was a gap of several inches and infill could be seen pouring in from somewhere. Within minutes I had lowered the floor using my ice axe and removed enough infill to enable me to limbo into the hidden workings. I was standing at the base of a steep rubble slope in a small chamber.

By using the walls I was able to reach the top of the pile without dislodging too much, but stones were 'flowing' threatening to block my access point. At the top, approximately above the shattered dome of our original access point, I found a column of rougher infill and a small piece of blue pottery, possibly suggesting a filled shaft. To the left, running south, was a small hole leading down to a blockage, very likely the other side of the stone filled tunnel next to the 'T'-Junction. Turning around to survey the working revealed a tunnel disappearing to the north, inaccessible without a risky traverse above an increasing drop. There used to be a false floor, its residual outline still glued to both sides of the wall, its collapse having clearly led to these workings being sealed off.

Being on my own it was not the time to take any further risks, the others were heading back to surface unaware of my extra find. As anticipated, when I reached the base of the debris pile, I was blocked in. Only by lifting handfuls of rubble and placing them carefully further up the slope was I able to reinstate the cranny at its foot. I began the limbo with some trepidation as it seemed much smaller than before and there was the additional risk of snagging on dragged rocks. Caution and exhalation paid off and I was able to join the others at the exit shaft with my news.

On January 9th 2011, whilst Brian was showing Ange and Debbie around the Duncan James area, I returned to the Maul Hole with Richie who stayed on point in the main passage. On this visit I traversed into the tunnel running north which sadly proved short, quickly dropping into infill. Another climb enabled an upper room to be reached with an unstable roof, large chunks of it on the floor.

Squeeze Grotto:

This was discovered on October 11th 2009 but not documented. At the end of a crawling passage a small working is reached. At its southern end an optimistic dig revealed a very tight squeeze through a circular hole into what appears to be older back filled workings. The infill lies close to the roof and no progress is possible without disturbing the extensive calcite formations on ceiling and floor and a dig would be difficult, material needing to be thrown back up through the squeeze. The dripping decorations and fill contrast greatly with the previous dry and dusty workings and the squeeze is highly unlikely to have provided the main way into the grotto, both suggesting a different era of development.



Finding Squeeze Grotto and the decorations inside



David Wrennall, April 2011

THE TRUE MEANING OF 'ORME'

There have been many interesting articles about how The Great Orme came by its name. The Viking or Norse entry in the naming contest - when silhouetted against the setting sun The Orme resembles a great serpent breathing fire - is probably the most popular. In that instance, the name Horma Heva (or Heava), from a 1088 CE reference, gives the probable first relevant mention of the word horma from which Orme, translated as serpent, is derived. Relatedly that reference also gives us heva, translated as great.

In researching various academic articles about the mining history and geological aspects of the area, I discovered another possible, intriguing, and perhaps more plausible explanation for The Orme's identification with a Great Serpent. A reference in the scientific journal Nature caught my eye. ("The Sea Serpent," Nature volume 27, page 293, 25 January, 1883.) I had to investigate. Rather than rewrite the passage I found, I quote it here verbatim:

"BELIEVING it to be desirable that every well authenticated observation indicating the existence of large sea serpents should be permanently registered, I send you the following particulars.

About three p.m. on Sunday, September 3, 1882, a party of gentlemen and ladies were standing at the northern extremity of Llandudno pier, looking towards the open sea, when an unusual object was observed in the water near to the Little Orme's Head, travelling rapidly westwards towards the Great Orme. It appeared to be just outside the mouth of the bay, and would therefore be about a mile distant from the observers. It was watched for about two minutes, and in that interval it traversed about half the width of the bay, and then suddenly disappeared. The bay is two miles wide, and therefore the object, whatever it was, must have travelled at the rate of thirty miles an hour. It is estimated to have been fully as long as a large steamer, say 200 feet; the rapidity of its motion was particularly remarked as being greater than that of any ordinary vessel. The colour appeared to be black, and the motion either corkscrew like or snake-like, with vertical undulations. Three of the observers have since made sketches from memory, quite independently of the impression left on their minds, and on comparing these sketches, which slightly varied, they have agreed to sanction the accompanying outline as representing as nearly as possible the object which they saw. The party consisted of W. Barfoot, J.P. of Leicester, F. J. Marlow, solicitor, of Manchester, Mrs. Marlow, and several others. They discard the theories of birds or porpoises as not accounting for this particular phenomenon. F.T. Matt Birstall Hill, Leicester, January 16."

Outline of the sea-serpent seen near Little Orme's Head, drawn by Mr F.T. Mott after three different sketches:



I hope this was not the only past observation of the actual Orme serpent and even like to think there will be future sightings. I also like to suppose a small colony of Hormas still survives and discreetly frolics in secluded coves around each of the two Ormes. Who knows? Perhaps they indulge in occasional jaunts northward, to certain Scottish lochs.

Andy Lewis, April 2011

It is well worth reading an interesting treatise on sea serpents which can be found at:

<http://www.book-of-thoth.com/portalsupport/coppermine/albums/cryptobooks/Seaserpent.pdf>

Account number 155 (pages 363 and 364), in chapter 4, also quotes this reference from Nature, but includes some additional information, and then in chapter 5, page 378, there is another mention of the Orme serpent.

Editor.

A FEW MEMORIES OF BILLY DAVIES

I first met Billy in The Kings Head back in the mid 70's. In those days the pub was largely unchanged from its early 19th century layout, with a separate lounge and public bar and a nook to the right-hand side of the fireplace. That was a great place to have a pint, especially as we were all underage drinkers; in the nook we could keep a low profile. Billy was a fixture at the bar and known by all. During that time he was involved with the precursor to GOES, the Great Orme Cave and Mine Exploration Society. Other members were Huw Tudno Williams, Keith Griffiths, Duncan James and David Jones. Their main points of exploration were the Penmorfa adit as well as the smaller mines scattered over The Orme. They did not do much exploring of Roman or Treweek shafts as these required climbing equipment and money was tight for such items. However, they discovered many new areas in the Penmorfa workings, naming many of the locations we still know today. For example, the 'ice bridge' and 'stemple shaft'. These pioneering explorations resulted in a series of weekly articles by Huw Tudno for the Llandudno Advertiser in the late 1970's. Like many fledgling cave-mine explorers, I looked forward to reading each installment and only imagined how marvelous it would be to set foot in these areas as the privileged few had done.

I can recall my first discussion with Bill, sitting with him at the bar. I was aware of his exploits in the Penmorfa and regarded him as a local folk hero, so was pleased he was willing to speak with some spotty-faced teenager. He told me about the many new discoveries down the Penmorfa, as well as stories of The Great Orme and old Llandudno. You only needed to buy Bill a pint and he would keep you amused with interesting tales for hours. At the time, I wanted to be invited on one of their trips underground, but was never asked. I presume they did not want the liability of an inexperienced but enthusiastic kid tagging along with them.

So the years passed and I went to college and spent time during the summer months exploring the smaller mines and caves on The Orme with Chris Jowett. Favourite areas were: Maze Cave, also known as Five Entrance, Monk's Path trials, Gun site level and Badgers Cave as well as farther afield around the Llanrwst lead mines.

In 1983 I purchased a house on The Orme and very soon got to know Billy again. Gradually more and more people became interested in going underground and very soon organized trips were planned into the Penmorfa and occasionally down Roman shaft. About this same time we formed the Great Orme Exploration Society, with our first official meeting in April of 1985. I am sure that occurred in The Kings Head, but for a while meetings were also held in the Mostyn Arms bar at the Royal Hotel. During this period I got to know Billy quite well and heard more stories of his days underground and his travels through Europe. He told me how easy it was to get work in the 70's. Back then he was working at Hotpoint in Llandudno Junction and periodically would give his notice in at work and then hitchhike across various parts of Europe. When he came back to Llandudno he was able to get his old job back at the factory without any problem.

Another great story was his vivid description of being trapped by a collapsed roof in the Porth Helyg adit, and how he was passed a small bottle of whiskey through a gap in the fallen debris to help him while away the time until his rescue was accomplished.

Reports from the rescue services suggested they took a very dim view of such activity. Later, Bill showed me the national paper clippings which covered this event. He was quite proud of that momentary celebrity. He also had a collection of other articles about the mines which I was able to copy, and I still have them. In fact, I was recently reading one of these which I copied on 4th February 1985: an interview with an old miner named John Williams, recorded by G. A. Humphries – Chief Agent for Mostyn Estates, on 6th March 1911.

Coincidentally, Billy lived in the same house as John Williams the miner. Like other houses on The Orme, it had been specifically built for a miner in the mid-1850's, possibly by the John Taylor Company, which was then operating the mine.

Occasionally we managed to get Billy down Roman Shaft with the help of wire caving ladders and a new rope purchased by GOES. One particular trip stands out: Billy, Phil Smith and I visited the Wagon Gate area and passages south to where the old miners' clogs were situated. We were able to explore a new set of tunnels, just to the south of Location 15, referred to on the detailed survey drawings of the workings produced in 1993. I remember that Phil and I free-climbed a shaft and found what became known as the 'E Jones' workings. This name along with other initials had been written in candle soot on the passage ceiling. We also heard the movement of trams overhead which indicated our proximity to surface. Billy contentedly stayed at the base of the shaft and explored other areas more accessible to him. Eventually the three of us made our way back to Roman's and Phil and I kept a tight rope for Bill as he clambered and struggled out of the shaft. After the trip we dropped him at his house and spoke to his mum, who told us the bad news about the Heysel Stadium disaster in Belgium. Rioting fans had caused the football stadium to collapse, killing 39 and injuring 600. The date was 29th May 1985. I think this was Bill's last trip down Roman's. After that he kept to less strenuous trips, including to the recently opened Ty-Gwyn level.

I had many happy days with old Bill underground, walking on The Orme, having a pint or two at The Kings Head and discussing a diverse range (Bill was always well-read) of subjects over numerous cups of tea and coffee at my house on The Orme. It was quite usual on a Saturday morning to have a visit from Bill as he walked home after collecting his newspaper at Black Gate corner shop or as he headed downhill to his favourite pub.

He is really missed, but I know his spirit lives on. Next time I am down the Penmorfa workings, I wouldn't be surprised if he wasn't far behind!

(Billy Davies passed away quietly at his house on 30 December 2009)

Andy Lewis, April 2011

Some thoughts:

The last edition of the Chronicles in 2009 dealt with the discovery of Clog Passage and the opening up of the blockage at the foot of Internal Shaft. Although the impressive shaft is now open and yet more rubble has been removed, it is still not frequented as a site of interest, reflecting perhaps the reluctance of visitors to squirm over muddy rocks in the constricted access from Trammings Adit. More work is required. Clog Passage itself has been marvelled at by numerous groups and excellent pictures of the clog prints taken. In the interest of preserving them, maybe the access ladder should now be removed to this fascinating but ultimately blind passageway. (This was done March 20th 2011, the ladder being used to explore hollows higher in the rift.)

Billy's ashes:

On February 7th 2010 members of GOES scattered the ashes of a founder member, Billy Davies, in Penmorfa. An outline of his life, together with accounts of underground explorations from the early sixties, both on and off the Great Orme, was described in the last Journal.

The spirit of exploration:

After a simple but solemn ceremony and having paid our full respects to Billy's memory, individuals drifted off for a little therapeutic exploration. It was during this time that two additional features of Penmorfa came to light.

Firstly, after a small amount of digging, a direct route through to the ore cart in Rift 2 was unearthed. The small hole now provides easier access for visitors, although care has to be taken not to damage the cart especially with flailing legs when leaving.

Secondly, a lower crosscut in Rift 2 which ends with loose infill was found to be slightly lower and extremely close to a rubble slope in Rift 3. A conversation could easily be held by parties on either side. The slope runs directly under stemples holding up neatly packed deads to a final small wall of shattered rock and is a somewhat worrying place to be. From previous investigations it was known that this final wall acted as a partition between the two rifts. In Rift 2 it was the bottom half of a very high, precariously overhanging, fractured section of rock at the lowest point of the main chamber.

Raised eyebrows:

Subsequently (July 25th 2010), despite concerns, rocks were extracted whilst under the safety of the crosscut's solid roof, in an attempt to realise a useful connection. Before a link was established there was the inevitable thunderous collapse of rock filling the space that had been engineered, subsidiary rumbles continuing into the distance as a domino effect took place. Eyebrows were raised as to just how much material seemed to have been disturbed, had the overhanging wall fallen or the stemples given way? Amazingly, an inspection revealed that nothing had altered although you could still hear and see rocks moving on the floor of the main chamber in Rift 2 below the overhanging wall ten minutes after the collapse!

Further work has been suspended for fear of bringing down the entire overhanging wall. It was, however, a lesson in just how noisy a moderate thickness of rubble can be when it collapses.

Good news perhaps, for the next dig when we hear the terrifying roar of falling rock and the continuing echoes in the far distance; there may be less digging required than you might think?

Fact from folklore:

The trip on February 28th 2010 was organized to search for lost workings off Rift 3. Both Steve Lea and Gaz Davis were adamant that a section of impressive workings were once reached, without crawling, by climbing the small ladder crossing the chamber and turning left through a passageway. We poked our noses into the few possibilities to no avail. The 'lost' workings which could represent a Rift 4 were definitely not the section of trammings adit discovered in 2001 which we knew lay isolated through collapsed material just to the north of where we stood. Something must have altered; perhaps more deads had fallen hiding the access passage. After some delving and much deliberation the team moved elsewhere.

It was whilst probing into all the nooks and crannies in this area that I began to think about the possibility of connecting through to the isolated trammings level. The most likely was a small tightening crawl, with a solid overhung wall on the left and precariously jammed and treacherous rocks falling in from the right. For a while I stayed behind reaching as far as I could dragging rocks out, assessing the stability of the rubble and generally widening the approach with a view to possibly having a team working there next time.

A huge amount of optimism:

It wasn't that we expected to empty the shaft, it was, after all, 130m high and the bottom 40m was probably full of rock, but Gaz had investigated earlier and was under the impression that rubble wasn't falling directly down but was rolling in from further back. There may just be the possibility of sneaking into hidden workings running off to one side or the other.

And so it was that the team, Steve, Gaz, Brian, Richie and myself, arrived on March 28th 2010 at the foot of Vivian's Shaft! Well not actually the foot, as the shaft extended further down to now flooded workings below sea level. As the trammings adit lowered and swung north, a large stack of rock and gravel fell in from the hidden shaft on the right dampened by a cascade of water. It was a more restricted place than anticipated, awkward to dig, to fill and pass buckets and with little room to stack. Soon the diggers were saturated and the shifters suffering with bad backs. Progress, what there was of it, regularly vanished with the next influx of rock and wet grot, with an accompanying booming rumble reverberating in the distance.



Gaz digging Vivian's Shaft

The event always brought a wry smile, mocking comment or an ironic cheer. Eventually sanity prevailed and the mission was aborted.

From across the pond:

On Saturday June 12th 2010 Brian and I accompanied Andy Lewis around Penmorfa. He was over briefly from Galena USA and had asked to be reacquainted with the place. Whilst there, he took the opportunity to pay his respects to the memory of his friend Billy Davis. During a general tour round, Andy was able to provide us with a scientific analysis of the geology and chemistry of the mine and we were able to swap anecdotes about explorations, past and present, and ideas for the future.

End of an isolation:

On July 25th 2010, immediately after the 'raised eyebrows' episode (cf earlier in this article), I returned briefly and alone to the small tightening crawl in Rift 3 to resume my search for the lost tramming level of 2001.

With the jumble of rocks to the right seemingly stable enough, I was encouraged to lie horizontally beneath them and stretch further in than before. Extricating the deeper rubble was slow and awkward requiring periodic retreats from the front to fill and empty a bucket. Eventually, rock gave way to damp clay and although the process was much the same getting wet was less fun. My resolve was virtually ended when, at the physical limit of my reach, I pushed through a wall of clay with my axe to reveal the huge blackness of the tramming adit, with its dripping walls and cool air. A metal rod we had once used for probing lay on the floor. Mission accomplished for now, reinforcements of the human and structural kind would be needed to gain a safe entry.

Doorway area:

On the western side of Pinnacle Chamber, beyond a series of short drops and rifts, a peculiar short narrow tunnel had aroused some interest. Just before it opened into a working area there seemed to be the outline of a door frame chiselled into the rock. Initial thoughts were that there had been a closable doorway to encourage ventilation elsewhere in the mine, a reservoir was discounted there being no water and the nearby ground being porous infill.



The 'doorway'

On October 3rd 2010 we investigated a small shaft just beyond the 'doorway'. At 5m the shaft was filled with rubble and larger rocks which had clearly fallen in after supporting stemples had failed at the top edge of the shaft. Some rocks were still there precarious and ready to topple, our rope ran across them and our first task was to remove the hazard. Once we were safely down the shaft and able to start clearing rubble, we remained tethered to the rope,

just in case there was a sudden collapse. After half an hour of hauling up buckets of rock or throwing it into a slight alcove, blackness began to appear down to one side and it was eventually possible to slide down debris into a hidden section of workings containing a short tunnel. Here was a fascinating 'witches hat' candle stub stuck on the wall with a blob of clay and on the floor the remnants of a rusted bucket. It might be possible to dig down further but it would require a good deal of effort with little to indicate that there would be much to find.



Candle stub



Metal bucket

Whilst we had been busy Dave Flowers had been entertaining himself at the top of the shaft not far from the 'doorway' pulling rocks out from a tiny cavity in the roof. His enthusiasm led to a breakthrough when the rocks ran out and he was able to squeeze through into quite a large rift. Initially, there was an open space soaring above but down a small rock pile he arrived at a vertical drop leading to another level. It was here that the sight of two bolts made him realise where he was. He had unearthed a shortcut to the legendary 'Gaz's Bag Drop' an ore chute leading almost directly from Devil's Head Chamber to the Ore Cart in Rift 2.

Through the looking glass:

On October 10th 2010, Steve, Brian, Angela Gawthrop and I sailed down the adit with the express intention of pushing through into the tramming level of 2001 and making the breakthrough safe. A strong plastic barrel with both ends sewn off and numerous pieces of wood would be used to protect the dig.

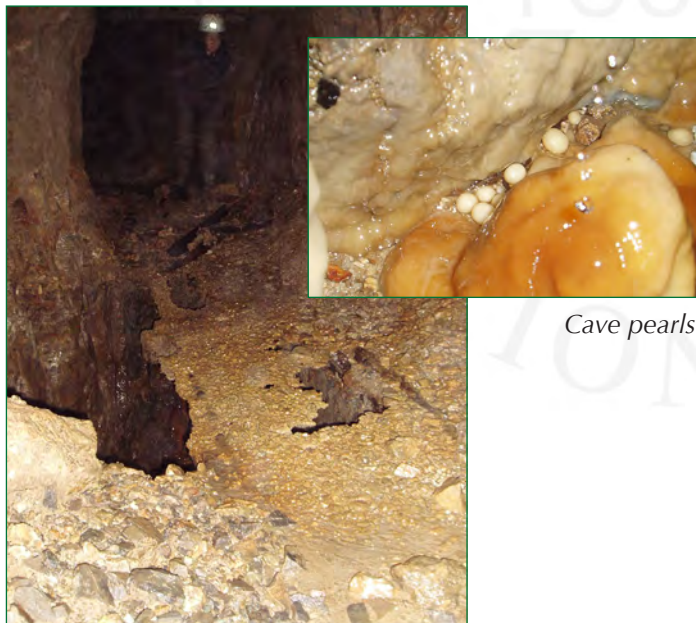
Quite a lot of rubble had to be removed from a pinch point in the Main Tramming Adit at the entrance to Rift 3 in order to squeeze the barrel through. The resulting excavation now provides an easier access for everyone and was long overdue.

Once at the dig the barrel was slid in as far as it would go. Then from the safety of its cocoon, rubble was removed to facilitate it being nudged in even further. Eventually the barrel filled the most hazardous section and pieces of wood were used to safeguard the rest, angled against the roof and wedged with rocks.



Ange emerges from barrel crawl

Squirming through the final wet section of clay was straightforward and the opening was easily enlarged from the far side. Ange soon crawled through to join me and I was able to introduce her to the dangers and delights of the locality. Immediately you encounter rail lines running across the remains of a false floor, it's fraught with danger, but beautiful in its fragility. Keep to the solid rock on the right or risk falling 3m into flooded caverns visible through the mosaic of holes. In several places small recesses on the left allow the mesmerising depths to be viewed in safety. The noise of cascading water intensifies as a rope is seen, the entry point of the 2001 abseil. Look carefully at a pile of collapsed rubble, amongst the calcited rocks and timbers find clusters of treasure in the form of majestic white cave pearls nestling in their protective alcoves. Suddenly, you realise the floor you stand on is strewn with them but they appear as rather grubby marbles, traipsed on and contaminated with dirt.



Cave pearls

New tramming level

Over the top of the calcited pile you could find a final short section of tramming adit but it's time to turn round. On the way back take time to consider the broken bottle, the stem of a clay pipe and perhaps explore a parallel rift to the east. Of course you will gaze into the water again but watch out for those false floors. Stay left this time!

It was whilst contemplating the depths that a small rust encrusted oval disc was first noticed on a nearby ledge. Perhaps some sort of opaque glass brooch. Within its ochre staining you could imagine a face, discern figures or visualise a street scene. However, the arcs of angled rust strongly suggest Victorian pince-nez spectacles, although when the discolouration is rubbed off the glass, it doesn't seem to possess any noticeable corrective properties.



Spectacular find

A station revisited:

March 20th 2011 was a day of speculation. Dave Flowers had seen several possibilities in and around the Flying Buttress area above Internal Shaft. One of these required the ladder used for access to Clog Passage, to be relocated at a higher level as mentioned at the start of this article. In the event nothing was found. Below the buttress a network of horizontal crawling tunnels provided some amusement, an obvious dig nearby was abandoned as only likely to lead into Pinnacle Chamber.

The main effort went into crossing a hole. It can be found in a rift decorated by pieces of broken mirror (Mirror Rift) between Pinnacle Chamber and the 'doorway area' already described. The hole with its wooden stemple was on the long abseil line previously described in Journal No 2 of 2003:

"As the space widened and the blackness below showed no signs of ending, one wall suddenly disappeared to reveal a large chamber at the side. JC (John Carpenter) was waiting, a cheery stationmaster secured on the edge of the abyss to ensure my safe arrival at the sloping platform. 'Easier if you stand on the stemple first, we've all done it'"

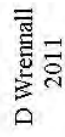
The far side of the 'abyss' was eventually reached after Gaz had placed numerous bolts. The stemple again proved useful, as did long legs to span the gap. Unfortunately, the rift soon narrowed to a final low passage full of spoil.

The team departed in different directions. Some used the new bolts to complete the lower section of the 2003 abseil into 'End of the Line Chamber' exiting through a cross cut to the Blue Streak Chamber just above the Ice Bridge.

Addendum:

It can be seen from the plan accompanying this article on the following page that the nomenclature traditionally used has produced a discrepancy. Rifts Two and Three were always seen as separate areas accessed from Main Tramming Adit. It is now apparent that the main chamber of Rift Two lies directly on the north to south workings of Rift Three so even though there is currently no useful connection, it should still be referred to as being in Rift Three.

David Wrennall, April 2011



THE CAVING CODE

1. Get the basic gear: Helmet, lamp, warm clothing, spare lighting, insurance.
2. Always get permission from the owner: If in doubt, ask the local group; always leave the site secure and follow the 'country code', close the gates.
3. Tell someone where you are going. How many, which mine and where, time in, out and home-contact; if overdue contact CAVE RESCUE 999.
4. Never go underground alone or intoxicated:
The minimum number is four, one to stay with the casualty and two to go for help. Alcohol or drugs in you, or one of the group, compromises the safety of the entire group.
5. Do not exceed your capability: Do not over estimate your skills and endurance; and remember, it is always more difficult coming out against gravity.
6. Do not get lost: Take a reliable plan or guide from the local group.
7. Never climb on mine ladders or machinery: If it is rotten you will not defy gravity for long, but you will accelerate at 32ft/sec/sec.
8. Never climb on stacked or dead walls: They may collapse around you like a house of cards; take care.
9. Never fool around underground. It might be the last thing you do for yourself or your mate(s), or they do for you.
10. Do not spoil the mine environment: Take your rubbish home, leave artefacts in situ, leave bats and other flora/fauna alone, do not smoke.
11. Know your emergency self-help drills: Don't panic; apply first aid to save life (bleeding, breathing, consciousness) prevent deterioration (shock, hypothermia) and promote recovery (reassurance, and go easy on the gallows humour); stay with the casualty while two of you go for help.
12. Access to the mines on the Great Orme is controlled, but is available to caving groups or individuals via the Great Orme Exploration Society Ltd. Arrangements for guided access can be made with the Society Secretary.
13. TAKE only photographs, LEAVE only footprints, KILL only time.

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GOES meets informally every Thursday evening in the Kings Head, Llandudno from 9.30pm. All are welcome.

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