Whitewalls Caving Trip, Brecon, 18th – 20th March

For our final trip of the spring term, the RUCC headed to Whitewalls in the Brecon Beacons, an old cottage converted into an excellently located caving HQ by the Chelsea Speleological Society. Whitewalls is surrounded by the stunningly scenic hills and valleys of southern Wales, and provides a prime base for exploring a multitude of the cave systems which span the area. While the ‘pretty’ scenery became ‘pretty terrifying’ during our late-night ascent of the rugged roads leading to the huts, we arrived safely and began our weekend with a staple of any RUCC trip: caving games! No trip would be complete without cavers traversing and bumbling around furniture like low-budget, cider-fuelled spider-men in a bid to demonstrate their caving prowess, and we launched our evening with the club’s infamous Squeeze Machine. The rules are simple: the squeeze through which each caver must fit gradually decreases, and whoever fits through the smallest gap is the winner! While most non-cavers seem to imagine some form of re-branded torture device whenever this game is described, it’s excellent fun, and leads to endless comedy as people begin to strip off thick clothing and belts in a desperate bid to become the squeeze champion. While Whitewalls is surrounded by potential caves to explore, our trip focused solely on Ogof Craig a Ffyonnon, and after a fry-up breakfast and copious amounts of tea, we set off on a journey on Saturday morning to explore the entire cave from beginning to end. To ensure this feat didn’t become too serious, one of our members (who will remain nameless, but there are photos out there!) decided to conduct some extreme market research by donning some suspiciously discarded lingerie from the roadside near the cave entrance, with a view to determine how long it would survive. This skimpy addition to his kit endured surprisingly well, surviving crawls through muddy water, ladders and free rock climbing, wellie-deep mud and a tight boulder choke before we reached The Hall Of The Mountain King, an open chamber where cascading calcite has formed stunning features. Even by this point, the cave had provided us with quite a workout, with a variety of climbs, crawls and hilariously awkward shuffles reflecting everything the cave had to offer. This variety continued with a lengthy crawl and walks through quartz-infused passageways, to a climb leading to the caves terminal stretch, Promised Land. Largely untouched by visitors, this furthest area of Ogof Craig showcased as much as its earlier passages the beauty of its formations, and reaching the end of the cave was an incredibly rewarding experience, made possible by the support and teamwork of our members. Overall, a challenging but fantastic experience, and a highly enjoyable trip made possible by the dedication and hard work of the RUCC community!

In memory of the thermos flask which served us valiantly, but did not survive our underground escapades. Gone but not forgotten!