

**David (Dave) Checkley,  
BSc, MSc  
09 April 1948 – 20 February 2020**

Dave Checkley, the former BCRA President and Chairman, died on 20 February 2020. Dave was passionately entwined within the wider caving community for almost all his life. His interests spanned from digging in the Dales, organizing large caving expeditions around the world, conducting scientific research programmes, introducing novices to caving and playing a highly pro-active role within the BCRA as he both instigated and led change in different directions.

Originally from south Manchester, Dave headed to London for his first degree before returning north to Lancaster University in 1969 to focus on a PhD project studying nutrition characteristics in sheep.

For the fledgling Lancaster University Speleological Society (LUSS) Dave's arrival on the scene gave its membership a massive shot in the arm. Within a few years Dave and colleagues (including luminaries Mel Gascoyne and John Gardner) had made breakthroughs in Notts Pot, East Kingsdale and Far Waters in Gaping Gill, as well as producing three high-quality journals. LUSS 1, LUSS 2 and LUSS 3.

From the start of the seventies LUSS embarked upon a series of summer caving expeditions to northern Spain. Each trip delivered mixed rewards until Dave heard stories of villagers maturing their cheeses in the caves in the Picos de Europa. In 1975 Dave was one of the first cavers to enter Cueva del Agua below the village of Tresviso, and thus set in motion a series of annual British caving expeditions that is still continuing.

In 1973 Dave led an ambitious 6-month expedition to explore and carry out scientific research in caves in Falcon State and the Cordillera de Merida in Venezuela. Laden with supplies the team of 8 cavers travelled for three weeks on board a freighter as they crossed the Atlantic. Their discoveries were hard-earned, but notable amongst them was the exploration of Cueva del Guarantaro with its intimidating 168m entrance pitch. The cave, which ended at a choke at 305m depth, retained its status as the deepest cave in Venezuela for many decades.

Three years later Dave stepped aside from the annual Spanish caving trip and went to Ecuador as a speleological member of a large expedition to explore and survey the Cuevas de Los Tayos. These caves had already gained some notoriety because they had been detailed in the book '*Gold of the Gods*' by the maligned Swiss author, Erich von Däniken. He claimed to have found evidence of artificial tunnels, gold extra-terrestrial relics and a library of metallic tablets. Together with a group of selected British cavers, Dave photographed and surveyed the caves and found no evidence of anything unusual. The patron of the expedition was Neil Armstrong – apparently he had some links with extra-terrestrials... Dave proudly retained the Texolex helmet and blue caving suit that he had lent to Neil Armstrong when he headed underground.

Despite moving on from his extended university years Dave's passion, eagerness and fascination did not subside. It simply became more serious. In his professional life he moved from making glass-fibre shower cubicles in Lancaster to a researcher role on cancerous cells, with the benefit of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), at Manchester University. He was later headhunted by AstraZenica, the pharmaceutical giant, and his expertise was focused upon the effects of new drug developments.

But his professional life never overran his personal life.

His passion for expeditions never relented. He was on the ground-breaking Mulu expedition in 1980, and was one of the small team that entered Sarawak Chamber for the first time. A few years later, in 1985, he was on the first British expedition to China. He followed these expeditions with many return trips and also participated on expeditions to Uzbekistan, Madagascar, Sumba and Kalimantan in Indonesia, Thailand, Irian Jaya on the island of New Guinea, and Mount Suswa in Kenya. Far from being a passenger at any point, he was an accomplished leader, surveyor, photographer, biologist and report writer.

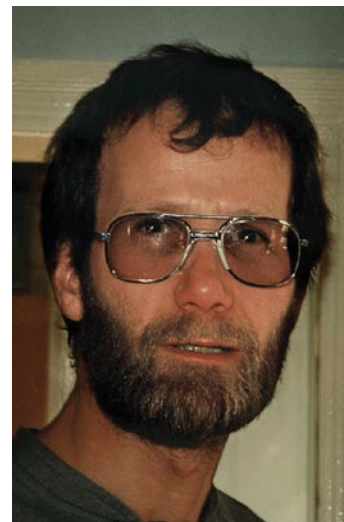
### Back Home

Dave's deep interest in international cave exploration and science led him to his role as BCRA Foreign Secretary. He assumed this role with characteristic determination for many years and in parallel he was a key member of the Ghar Parau Foundation awards committee that supports British caving expeditions.

He became BCRA President and convener of the BCRA Cave Science and Technology Research Initiative (CSTRI, which was renamed Cave Science and Technology Research Fund – CSTRF – in 2015) in June 2004, and served until June 2009 when he became BCRA Chairman and stayed in the role until December 2014. He continued as an active member of the BCRA Council and a Trustee until 2016.

During his tenure as President and Chairman of the BCRA Dave devoted considerable time to the creation of an Eli Simpson photograph and journal archive, and helping establish the BCRA's Cave Science and Technology Research Fund, granting money to those conducting cave- and karst-related research.

He was horrified by the piles of boxes containing uncatalogued books and journals that used to constitute the BCRA's Library. Along with other BCRA Council members he devoted much energy to making the new British Caving Library a reality, spending many hours lifting and shifting to set up the new Library at Glutton Bridge near Buxton. He also played a pivotal role in establishing the British Caving Archive.



*Dave Checkley, captured between expeditions, c.1988. (Photo Sheila Hurd.)*

### His later years

In 2003 Dave was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Although he was deeply concerned about this, he did not let the disease slow him down; he simply continued to do as much caving as he always had and continued to join expeditions. His natural curiosity, however, led him to put himself under the MRI scanner at AstraZenica on many occasions. One scan revealed that a 'mushy' zone was developing in his brain. In 2011 he was diagnosed with dementia.

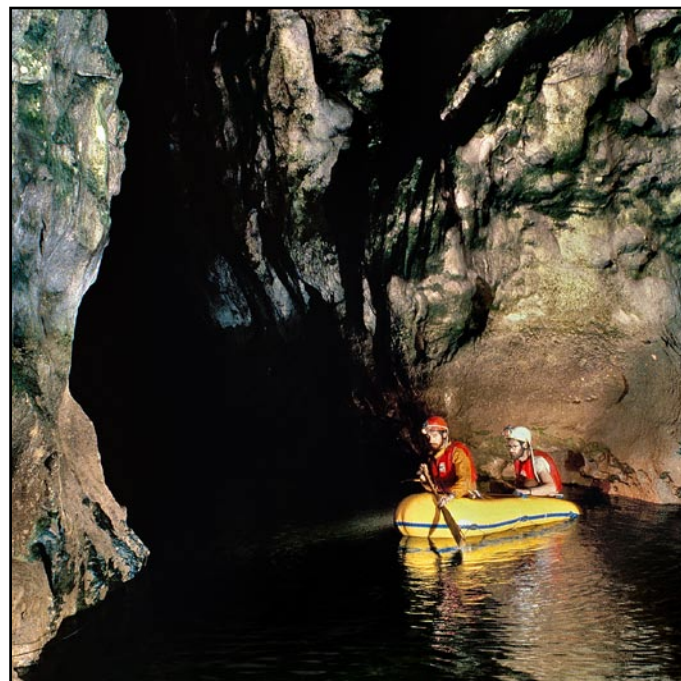
Dave managed this distressing news with the same tenacity that he had shown when he learned of his multiple sclerosis – determined to carry on regardless. He had joined the Yorkshire Subterranean Society and enjoyed the club trips and their weekly digging sessions; he also became a regular contributor at the local Creative Writing group and he was pleased to self-publish a book of his poems.

His spare time was devoted to transforming his garden and the neighbouring field so that he and his wife, Margot, could enjoy their market garden, the local wildlife and their various cats, dogs and hens.

Although Dave's interests extended far and wide I think it is fair to say that his overriding motivation was his love of, and infectious passion for, caves and caving. He is sadly missed.

### Colin Boothroyd

March 2020



*Dave Checkley (wearing the white helmet) with Tim Williams during the 1984 Mulu expedition. The entrance canal of Lubang Nasib Bagus (Good Luck Cave), leads to the immense void of Sarawak Chamber. (Photo Jerry Wooldridge.)*

## Peter Alan Standing MB, ChB, BSc, MSc

16 February 1947 – 16 November 2019

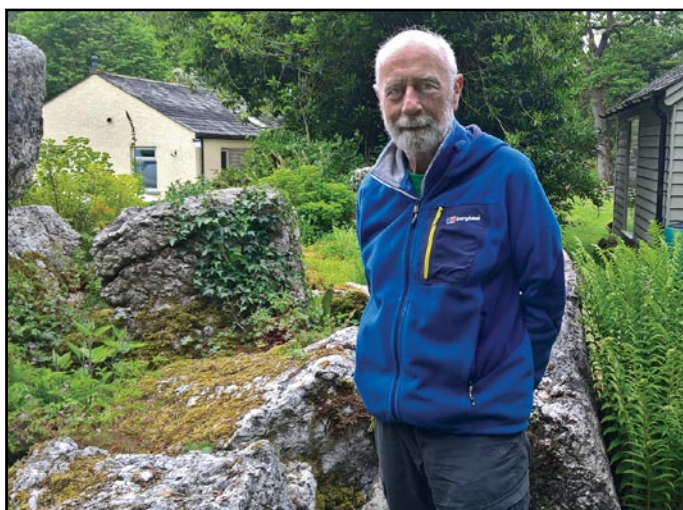
Peter Standing grew up in rural Gloucestershire and enjoyed what he often referred to as his “feral childhood”. He first ventured underground in the Box Stone Mines at the age of 13 and joined the Gloucester Speleological Society in the early 1960s. By 1963 he had become their Librarian and he was already an experienced caver when he came to consider his university options. Peter graded the various medical schools on the basis of their related caving opportunities, and he chose Bristol on the strength of its caving society – the University of Bristol Speleological Society (UBSS).

Peter trained as a cave diver in 1967 so that he could continue the exploration of Little Neath River Cave, in South Wales. In fact, his most visible and significant contribution to British caving was probably being responsible for the Little Neath River Cave survey. As well as taking part in the vast majority of the surveying trips he was also responsible for drawing the completed survey. What’s more, his original data were re-used when the survey was computerized a few years ago.

In 1966 Peter made his first visit to Co Clare in western Ireland, where he participated in the prevailing UBSS sport of squeezing through tight, wet passages, often with little tangible result. His passion for speleology, both sport caving and science, meant that he was as happy with a minor gain of 200 metres as he was with finding ten times that length. In a recent oral history project for the UBSS, he fondly recalled his interest in “chemical persuasion” and the “bangers’ headaches” that were a common result. First as a medical student and later as a General Practitioner (GP), Peter combined an academic interest in the science of caves with the characteristic robustness of a sport caver.

Peter also participated in several foreign expeditions, where caving-doctors are always particularly welcome. He organized a UBSS expedition to Czechoslovakia in 1967, helped by David Judson, who had been on a British expedition there a few years earlier. They remained friends, despite maintaining a routine caving rivalry, and this led to other expeditions to what was then known as Persian Kurdistan, and the discoveries in Ghar Parau in Iran. An accident on one of the cave’s deep pitches led to it being named *Standing’s Horror*. During the 1972 expedition Peter was one of the three explorers – along with Glyn Edwards and Mike Jenkins – who used every available scrap of kit to get to the head of what was to be the now-infamous final pitch – the full story of reaching the 1972 limit, and the disappointing sequel, is told elsewhere.

After retiring as a GP, Peter moved north to the Arnside area (Cumbria) and did a BSc degree at the University of Lancaster. His 2010 undergraduate dissertation was “*The emplacement of erratics in grikes: a study of the limestone pavements of the Silverdale peninsula*”. Among other things this showed that the erratics studied were of Lake District provenance, giving the important finding that the grikes had formed before the erratics were transported into the area by Late Devensian ice and/or by glacial meltwater. He followed this with a 2013 Masters dissertation supervised by Peter Wynn: “*The chronology of karren formation on the lowland limestone pavements of SE Cumbria*”. This concluded, after considering more erratics and dissolution rates, that the major grikes, and therefore the karren surfaces, existed before the Late Devensian Last Glacial Maximum.



Peter Standing, photographed in his garden in Arnside (Cumbria), complete with inspirational exposures of Carboniferous limestone. (Photo: Linda Wilson; May 2019.)

Peter gave talks about his work at the BCRA Cave Science Symposium in Cardiff on 05 March 2011 and at Keyworth on 09 March 2013. He also attended the BCRA field trips to Norber on 24 June 2009, Lincolnshire on 10 March 2013, Ingleton (Porcellanous Bed) on 06 July 2013 and Whitbarrow on 25 April 2015, and perhaps others. Additionally he attended the joint QRA/BCRA field meeting on Cave Archaeology and Karst Geomorphology of NW England (21–24 June 2012) that was organized by Hannah O’Regan and Trevor Faulkner, as parts of which he led a visit to Hale Pavement and wrote a chapter in the Field Guide (pp 103–111). He also wrote the Whitbarrow report that appeared in the BCRA Annual Review for 2015 (pp 47–48). Aside from his university research and his many contributions to the BCRA and its events, Peter is perhaps best known for his series of self-published guided-walk pamphlets, which have introduced many people to the delights of the limestone landscapes around Arnside, Silverdale and adjacent areas around Morecambe Bay. But for the early onset of his illness he would certainly have continued to refine his own research and contribute even more to the general understanding of Quaternary events and chronology.

Even as his health was failing, Peter remained committed to the caving organizations of his youth. The most recent BCRA Symposium, held at the British Geological Survey in Keyworth on 19 October 2019, was recorded and he was delighted to have been able to participate remotely in this event. His final involvement in the world that had been so important to him throughout his life was his attendance at the UBSS Centenary Symposium, *Travels Beneath the Earth*. Peter was elated to have been able to attend in person and to meet many old friends as a group for the final time. He died in hospital just a week later.

Linda Wilson [with thanks for valued support and contributions from: Trevor Faulkner, Graham Mullan and Phillip Murphy]



## Chas (Charles James)Yonge, BSc, MPhil, PhD, FRCGS

08 September 1945 – 20 January 2020

Chas was my friend for almost 50 years and there are simply too many things that can be said about him. Some of these have already appeared among a plethora of tributes, on line and on paper. This short section presents a mere handful of cryptic comments illustrating just a few highlights from myriad milestone memories that, in these early days since his passing, jostle continuously to be replayed and relived.

- In June 1972 Chas was among a team of 11 expert cavers who spent 44 hours in Langcliffe Pot (Yorkshire Dales) while they waited for flood waters to subside. Chas gained (figurative) immortality by having with him a small stove and a supply of Mars bars that enabled him to sustain the team members with “*Mars Bar Soup*”.
- Less well known – in November of the same year Chas and three friends became temporarily “confused” during an unorthodox variation of the “trade-route” trip from Lancaster Hole to County Pot (western Dales). Though embarrassing to be guided-out by CRO rescuers, it was more so when one of the team was accidentally left underground, whence he somehow managed to find his own way out and back to the hut later!
- In 1975 he was a member of the British caving expedition to Papua New Guinea, which arguably represented a worldwide step change in the scope and ambition of caving expeditions in general.
- After emigrating to Canada in 1977 Chas, continued (among many other things) his already spectacular and intense programme of study, academic achievement, rock climbing and both national and international cave exploration (see below). From my own viewpoint, best of all, he masterminded the 1983 and 1984 Anglo-Canadian Rocky Mountains Speleological Expeditions.
- In 1981 Chas married Pam Burns and in 1991 the triplets Alex, Carolyn and Emma were born while Chas was away working overseas as part of an educational Project in Bhutan.

And so it went on, as is documented elsewhere. Chas simply kept his foot on the “gas”. He caved, he climbed, he ski’d, he was a husband, father and bread-winning entrepreneur, and he was a productive scientist and writer. When possible he visited family and old friends in the UK. Never seeming hurried, he was inevitably generous with his time; his personality never seemed to change and his visits were always thought-provoking scientifically, yet relaxed and enjoyable.

But Chas’s lifelong contribution is far more objectively summed-up by the excellent words below, “borrowed” from Katie Graham, and by the thoughts of professors Derek Ford and Art Palmer that follow ...

At a ceremony on November 17 2015, Chas was awarded the first and only “**Lifetime Achievement Award**” of the Alberta Speleological Society. Kathleen (Katie) Graham, the Society President, said:

“... We wanted to recognize Chas not only for his discoveries, but for his contributions as a mentor; entrepreneur; scientist, advocate, liaison, and role model ...”

Katie went on to mention just some of Chas’s achievements:

“As an explorer, his caving exploits have taken him to many of the karst areas on Earth; to name a few places – Cuba, Barbados, Belize, Mexico, United States, Norway, Indonesia, Australia, China, Vietnam, Bhutan, England, Wales, Ireland, France, Spain, Turkey, Papua New Guinea and Canada ... There are almost too many expeditions and trips to quantify, all of which ... have amazing stories and backgrounds.”

When closing her address Katie added:

“... Chas inspires a new generation of cavers to challenge themselves, and strive for more than instant gratification, but rather to seek to understand the unknown. He is a mentor to small business owners, outdoor pursuit students, students of geology and speleology. He is an advocate of science among cavers, and advocate of cavers among scientists.

To your commitment and passion to speleology past, present, and future: Thank you Chas!”

In hindsight maybe Chas did miss one golden opportunity, and that might have been to produce a memoir of his remarkable life – to cover its battles as well as adventures. But, with so much going on, and despite always being so generous with his time, the time simply ran out ...

**David Lowe** [many thanks to Katie Graham for sharing her words.]



Chas Yonge and I first met at the International Speleological Congress in Sheffield in 1977, where he was one of the leading organizers. He already had a reputation as a strong caver and held an MPhil degree in physics, so it was a pleasure to invite him to join our cave and speleothem science group at McMaster University in Ontario for PhD studies. His thesis (1982) was the first experimental and field study of the  $^1\text{H}/^2\text{H}$  and  $^{16}\text{O}/^{18}\text{O}$  isotope ratios in the fluid inclusions (tiny quantities of formative water) that become trapped in most growing stalagmites, etc., and thus can tell us much about the sources and temperatures of rains and snows from long ago. His was a careful, thorough, pioneer undertaking that is still much cited. More importantly, Chas met Pam, a McMaster maths student, who joined him for a long and successful marriage.

After McMaster the couple settled down in Calgary for a number of years, where Chas broadened his experience of environmental isotope studies as a post-doc and lab chief at the University of Calgary, working on many different western Canadian waters, such as sulphate-rich springs and oilfield brines. He was within sight of the Rocky Mountain Front Ranges, which have abundant limestone for caves, and great rock and ice climbing potential.

He and Pam enjoyed them to the full, including Rat’s Nest Cave, a fine, sporting challenge readily accessible from Canmore, the Olympic ski resort just inside the mountains and on the busy Trans-Canada Highway. They left Calgary and seized an opportunity here, opening the cave as “*Canmore Caverns*”, a guided real-caving adventure for tourists, providing all the gear, helmets, lamps, rappelling kit, etc. It proved a big success, and demanding in business sense and time. Nevertheless, Chas continued his environmental isotope studies, focusing increasingly on their significance when preserved in perennial ice in caves in the western mountains and farther north in the Wood Buffalo gypsum karst lands. He became a world authority, in fact, taking the lead on the Canada chapter in “*Ice Caves*”, a major systematic and world regional review published in 2018. He collaborated readily when I proposed a trans-continental isotopes in cave drips programme, but the curiosity of the eponymous bushy-tailed wood rats in his cave proved to be too much for our electronics there!

Chas and I last met in November 2019 at the annual meeting of Fellows of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society, where he was awarded the Sir Christopher Ondaatje Medal for Exploration. It was truly earned, by a fine and courageous caver and climber.

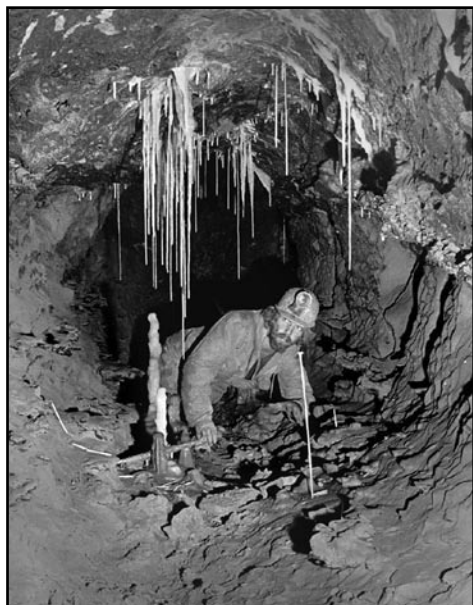
**Derek Ford**



I knew Chas Yonge during his early life as a caver, when we would meet occasionally on field trips and at meetings. He was fond of sharing interesting tales – and he had many to share. Then for several decades I lost contact with him, simply because of divergent paths. But in 2015, during a karst meeting at the University of Birmingham (UK), I spied a familiar face. Clearing away the mental cobwebs, we recognized each other immediately as long-lost friends. Chas hadn’t changed in all those years, except for the enhanced whiteness of his hair. We spent several hours reminiscing. I was glad to hear that he was still involved in caves and their science, and with undiminished enthusiasm. His latest book, regrettably his last – *Understanding the Banff Hot Springs through Karst Hydrogeology* – was about to be submitted for publication, and I gladly accepted his invitation to write the Foreword. The book is ambitious, addressing both the general public as well as scientists, and I think he was able to meet all of his goals. With a keen understanding of the topic, he turned this challenge into an adventure in learning, by discussing groundwater flow paths and chemistry, while keeping his readers on the edges of their seats with tales of exploration.

From Chas’s personal history, one quickly realizes how much he downplayed the difficulties he faced throughout his travels to some of the least hospitable places on Earth. He was not one to dwell upon the challenges, but instead to show the enjoyment they provided to him. In his latest book, where he describes his background, Chas mentions “a mis-spent youth.” He certainly proved that early wanderings can lead to a full lifetime of curiosity, wonder, and adventure. We miss you, Chas.

**Art Palmer**



**Left:** Chas Yonge in the Nebula Series of Selminum Tem, Papua New Guinea, in 1975 (image supplied by Howard Beck; original: Tony White).  
**Mid Top:** Chas during ACRMSE-83, crossing Resplendent Creek, swollen by glacial meltwater, southwest of Arctomy’s Cave, British Columbia.  
**Mid Bottom:** Chas fire-lighting after the first winter snows in “Goat Valley” southeast of Arctomy’s Cave (both “Mid” images September 1983: Neil Anderson).  
**Right:** Chas receiving the ASS Lifetime Achievement Award from Katie Graham (ASS President) in November 2015 (Photo: Christian Stenner).