

Caverns return for record man Geoff

Feature

At the age of 84 Geoff Workman still feels the same joy of discovery which first took him into caves as a potholer.

And on Sunday he emerged from Stump Cross Caverns, below the Yorkshire Dales, exactly 50 years to the day he became a world record breaker.

In 1963 he spent 105 days on his own in the caverns breaking a previous world record by more than 40 days.

Local potholers celebrated his achievement by recreating the moment when Mr Workman was lifted out of the caves and into the history books.

However no special preparations were needed to help the 84-year-old for the event as he still goes potholing at least twice a week.

The idea to mark Mr Workman's record-breaking efforts below the surface came from Stump Cross Caverns' owner Richard Bowerman who arranged for members of the Craven Potholing Club to help him to relive the occasion.

Mr Bowerman said: "He has been unbelievably relaxed about it. He still goes into the caves regularly.

"He spent 105 days down there in the 1960s. It was supposed to be 100 but he

lost track of time without the cycle of day and night. He slept when his body needed to.

"He wanted to show that it could be done both mentally and physically.

"Geoff took enough provisions to survive down there and slept in a tent.

"He said this wasn't to keep him out of the damp of a cave but so he had somewhere to come home to."

Mr Workman, who lives near the caves between Pateley Bridge and Grassington, said he had enjoyed reliving his achievement.

He went down into Stump Cross Caverns on

Sunday morning and came up at around 1pm.

"It has gone quite well. It was quite pleasant," he said.

"I still go into the caves once or twice a week.

"I do remember the 105 days and we went to the place where I set up my tent."

When asked what first attracted him to potholing he said: "I suppose the first time I did it would have been caves at the beach on holiday.

"It is the thought of being the first person ever to have found a place. It is the joy of discovery."

Mr Workman said that he had kept himself busy with a programme of geological work during the 105 days in Stump Cross Caverns. His stay also investigated the effect on the body of deprivation of the day and night cycle.

When he broke the record in 1963 his achievement was welcomed by a nation at the height of the Cold War.

The newsreader on the Pathe newsreel from No-

'I do remember the 105 days and we went to the place where I set up my tent.'
Geoff Workman



Geoff Workman is carried from the caverns at the end of his visit by Ric Haliwell, left and Terry Shipley, above, in a recreation of a picture taken half a century ago, below left; and Geoff with his tent in 1963, below right.



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ON THE WEB



member, 1963, said: "He wanted to prove that if we need to head into caves in the event of a nuclear war all we need do is wrap up warm and take enough food.

"For that comforting knowledge we are indebted to this local hero Geoff Workman."

But Mr Workman's contribution did not stop there.

In 1996, while in his sixties, he discovered a passage that is now known as Reindeer Cavern which opened to the public in 2000.

Mr Bowerman said: "He is very well respected. At the time when the Chilean Miners were trapped underground newspapers were turning to him to ask for advice on how these men could survive physically and mentally for so long underground.

"His 105-day world record has been broken since but Geoff is the last British record holder who is still alive.

"We wanted to mark fifty years to the day since the world record with an occasion which was for just him."



Geoff and pals underground at Stump Cross Caverns.

Millions of years old

The formation of the Stump Cross Caverns began millions of years ago, when the area which is now the Yorkshire Dales was still covered by oceans. However, they were not discovered until the 1860s by miners who were looking for lead seams beneath the Dales countryside. Miners did not see the commercial value in the caves, but a

man named William Newbould realised they could be profitable. He opened the caves to the public at a cost of 1 shilling per visit. Show caves remain open to the public today. Many of the deeper caverns are only accessible to experienced cavers, but there is a possibility of further sections of the caverns being opened in future.



Geoff and pals underground at Stump Cross Caverns.



Geoff underground at Stump Cross Caverns in 1963.