



In 2009 Andrew Atkinson, Holly Bradley and Becca Lawson found a large pitch near Usual Suspects in Tunnockschacht, pushing leads at its foot was our first aim in 2010, when members of Cambridge UCC returned along with cavers from the German ARGE Grabenstetten caving club.

Andy Chapman and Chris Densham thus rigged the 80m shaft, naming it String Theory and descended it to find two leads in the large chamber at the bottom. After plucking up the courage to climb over a dubious boulder pile to gain a small hole in the far wall, they found a strongly draughting pitch and, to its left, a window a few metres above the chamber. The following day the surveying team of Becca, Neil Peacy and Julian Todd discovered a second large window in the far right of the chamber, up a teetering boulder slope.

Andy and Neil climbed the slope to gain a small balcony, providing a starting location for numerous brews using Andy's stove. After a small free-climb, leading to a down-climb into a chamber, three potential leads were reduced to one that headed south towards Steinbrücken-höhle. The pair continued surveying Königsberg, aptly named for the small bridges that spanned the passage, eventually reaching a 30m pitch.

Pigeon in Flight. It dropped into the short, horizontal Sandy Balls passage, named after Andy's family holiday venue from years ago. Two more pitches trended leftwards – picking the nearest, Neil plus Chris Smith and German caver Thomas Holder, descended to a section of rift

passage leading to another shaft of perhaps 30m. The bottom of the shaft was choked but a 10m climb up led to a window overlooking another large shaft.

In the meantime, Chris Densham, Becca and Julian went through the window at the base of String Theory – a 30m pitch landed in the far end of the chamber at the bottom of the 100m deep Usual Suspects. During the previous expedition Becca, Julian and Steve Jones had spent a few cold hours here, huddled together while a roaring torrent hammered down the rock

face, making it impossible to ascend the poorly positioned SRT rope. This great discovery, named The Straight Rope, was therefore welcome as a much-needed dry alternative to Usual Suspects. Andy, Neil, and Chris Smith continued their exploration, still hoping for a connection to Steinbrückenhöhle, and began checking some side passages that headed south. Chris and Neil both stumbled upon pitches. Chris's seemed to trend deep and it did, for 100m to a floor containing a large hole with a two-second drop. Owing to a lack of rope and gear, it had to be left undescended for this year!

On another descent, Andy and Neil pushed a slot leading onto another pitch, best descended via a hole in the roof to avoid the crumbly rock nearby, so Neil commenced drilling. Two minutes later he heard Andy's voice from the bottom of the pitch by sliding through a small rift in the floor he had emerged far below!

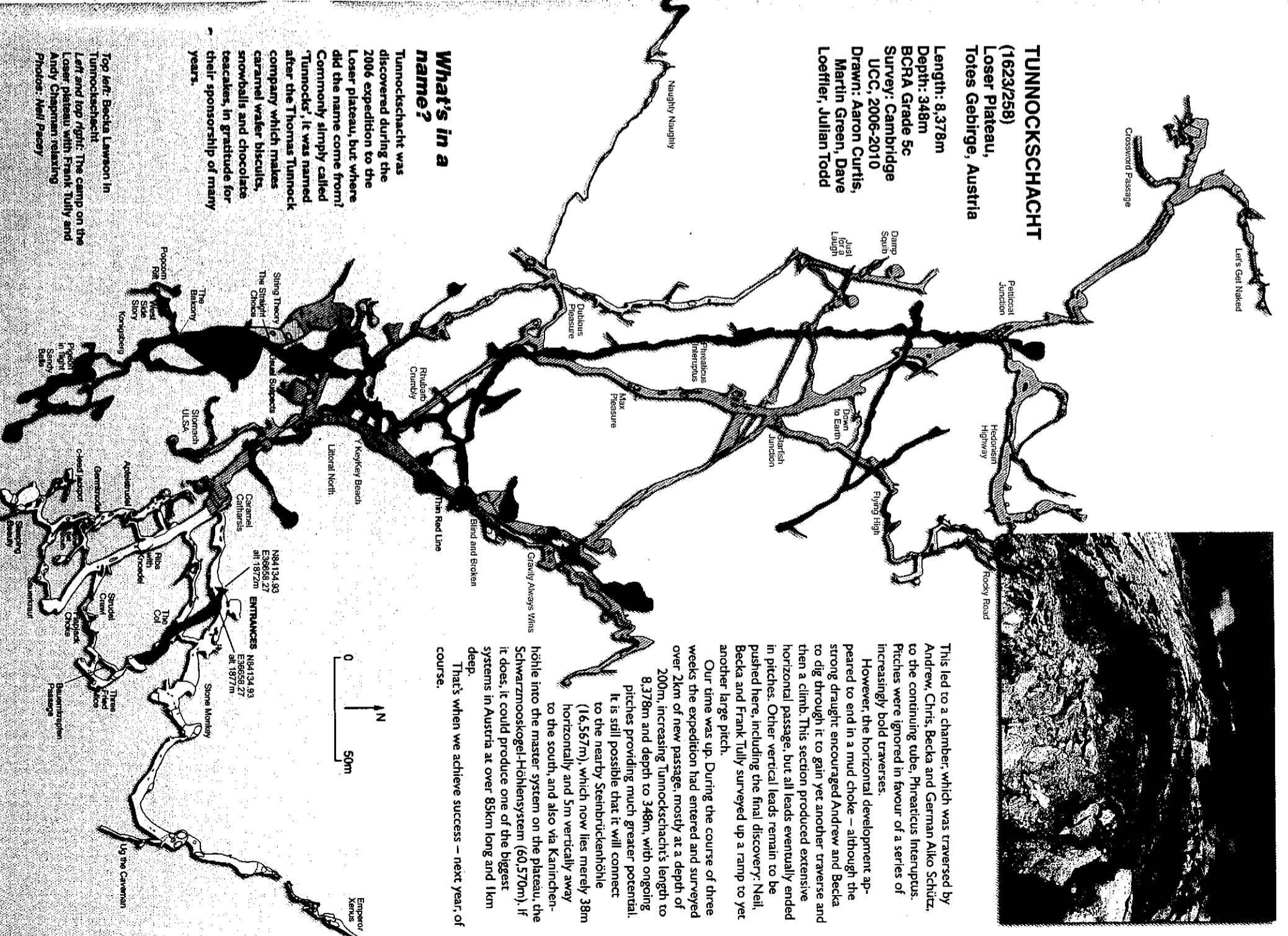
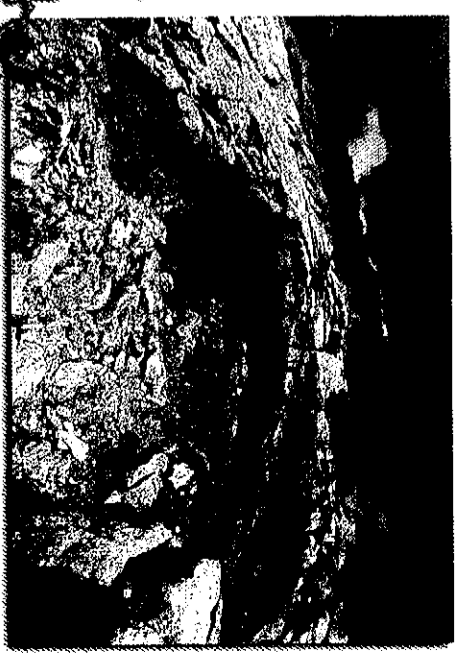
A good poke around the latest chamber ensued, but the only real way on appeared to be a small climb from which both Andy and Neil had backed off after an attack of common sense: another spot to be left for next year, and a bout of aid-climbing.

This left any available wishes to the chamber beneath Usual Suspects, Becca and Chris Densham had spent some time mopping up leads in the northward-trending passages below the pitch, finding a small pitch dropping into a rift and a phreatic passage in a second horizontal development only a few metres lower than the extensive phreatic passage explored in 2009.

TUNNOCKSCHACHT

(1623/258)
Loser Plateau,
Totes Gebirge, Austria

Length: 8,378m
Depth: 348m
BCRA Grade 5c
Survey: Cambridge UCC, 2006-2010
Drawn: Aaron Curtis, Martin Green, Dave Loeffler, Julian Todd



What's in a name?

Tunnockschacht was discovered during the 2006 expedition to the Loser plateau, but where did the name come from? Commonly simply called after the Thomas Tunnock company which makes caramel wafer biscuits, snowballs and chocolate teasacks, in gratitude for their sponsorship of many years.

Top left: Becca Lawson in Tunnockschacht
Left and top right: The camp on the Loser plateau with Frank Tully and Andy Chapman relaxing
Photos: Neil Peacy

This led to a chamber, which was traversed by Andrew, Chris, Becca and German Alko Schütz, to the continuing tube, Phreaticus Interruptus. Pitches were ignored in favour of a series of increasingly bold traverses. However, the horizontal development appeared to end in a mud choke – although the strong draught encouraged Andrew and Becca to dig through it to gain yet another traverse and then a climb. This section produced extensive horizontal passage, but all leads eventually ended in pitches. Other vertical leads remain to be pushed here, including the final discovery: Neil, Becca and Frank Tully surveyed up a ramp to yet another large pitch.

Our time was up. During the course of three weeks the expedition had entered and surveyed over 2km of new passage, mostly at a depth of 200m, increasing Tunnockschacht's length to 8,378m and depth to 348m, with ongoing pitches providing much greater potential. It is still possible that it will connect to the nearby Steinbrückenhöhle (16,567m) which now lies merely 38m horizontally and 5m vertically away to the south and also via Karinchen-höhle into the master system on the plateau, the Schwarzmoozkoegel-Höhlsystem (60,570m). If it does, it could produce one of the biggest systems in Austria at over 85km long and 1km deep. That's when we achieve success – next year of course.