

Scouts Hannah, Harvey, Imogen and Gabriella with Martin Dold. Imogen, a Titan Explorer, is the daughter of Paul Dold

DIGGING DEEP FOR CAVING DREAM

Martin Dold, Scout Leader at Horsham District Scouts, is helping to raise funds for an artificial caving facility in memory of his twin brother, who died tragically in 2016. In his own words, Martin talks about Paul Dold's commitment to the Scouts and how the project is progressing...

We joined the cubs at 1st St Leonard's Forest when we were eight-years-old and Scouting became an important part of our lives. We were boys that enjoyed the outdoors and it was natural that we would continue into the Scouts and Venture Scouts.

The opportunities that Scouting presents are phenomenal. Whatever activity you're interested in, you can do it! Caving was something that we both loved, although I preferred kayaking. However, those early caving expeditions inspired a lifelong passion for my brother.

We both chose to continue our involvement as Scout Leaders. Paul became a Level 2 Cave Leader and was also a member of the West Sussex Scouts' Caving Team. His aim was to make the sport accessible to all and he gave Scouts the opportunity to explore underground, at sites including Merstham mine.

Paul would also lead trips for more advanced cavers in the Mendip hills in Somerset, where Scouts could navigate limestone caves. He took groups to Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Wales and even overseas. He always ensured it was a safe environment that still provided the adrenaline rush you experience from venturing into the unknown.

Paul would head off on an underground expedition several times a month, as caving was his main hobby. He was also part of an experienced team that surveyed and mapped entire cave networks.

In the summer of 2016, Paul was on holiday at a lovely place called Portholland Beach on the south coast of Cornwall. He was diving in only 10 – 15 feet of water when something went wrong. It's unclear exactly what happened. His equipment was checked and even though it was designed for caving, it was okay to use for diving. He was PADI qualified and like many cavers, would adapt his equipment for diving.

The emergency services were quickly on hand with a defibrillator and the air ambulance attended, but sadly Paul didn't make it. He was only 43-years-old.



The artificial cave system would have a ball pit to simulate a flooded passageway



The tunnels would include tight passages through boulders (Pictures above courtesy of Hangfast)

It's incredible when I think of all the different adventurous activities he enjoyed in his life. There was always an element of risk and as a younger man he put himself in some crazy situations. Yet something went wrong in what was a relatively controlled situation.

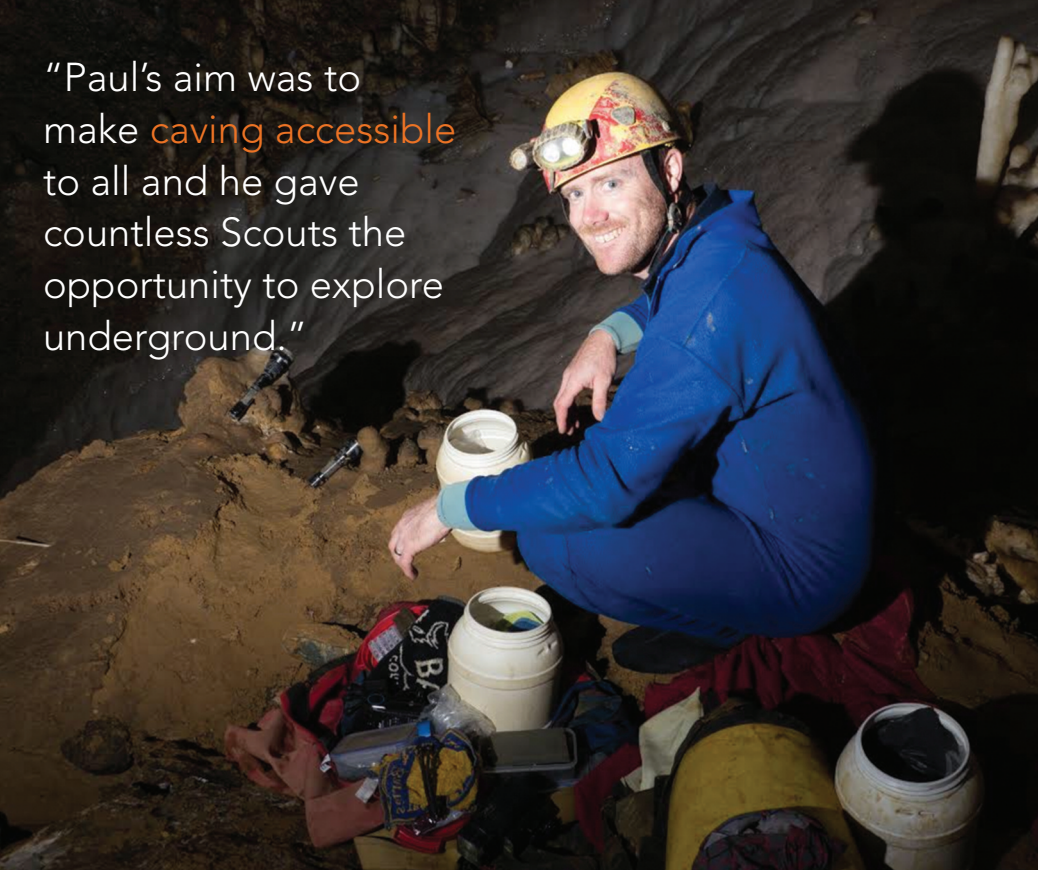
A Just Giving page was set up in his memory and we were amazed by how much was raised. Money was split between the Cornish Air Ambulance, the South-East Cave Rescue Organisation, of which Paul was a member, and Horsham District Scouts. Paul's father-in-law is the current Scout District Commissioner and we both had the same idea of how we could spend the money. A caving experience would be the perfect way to commemorate Paul's service to Scouting.

We had nearly £3,000. My initial thought was that we could clear an area at the Beacon Hill Campsite on the outskirts of St Leonard's Forest in Colgate. Then, we could approach businesses for tubing and concrete pipes to create a network of tunnels that children could enjoy. But Peter rightly felt that we should be creating something suitable for the whole community. We approached specialist companies making bespoke artificial caving, but the costs have risen to £100,000.

The Colgate site is perfect for a caving facility. The Headquarters of various Scout groups throughout the Horsham District have limited space, but we can build it at Beacon Hill without impacting on the natural beauty of the site and surroundings. There is an ideal gap amongst the trees that is close to the car park and easily accessible. Supplying the facility with electricity won't be an issue and we also have changing and bathroom facilities at Gummy's hut.

There would be a small area at the front for changing and safety checks. You enter through one hole and behind it is an entire

“Paul’s aim was to make **caving accessible** to all and he gave countless Scouts the opportunity to explore underground.”



Paul Dold was an experienced cave expedition leader

multi-level system of tunnels and obstacles, with tight gaps and boulder chambers. It recreates a real cave network, with areas that you might need to squeeze through on your side, and open areas with balls that simulate a flooded passageway. Depending on budget, you can add features like cave paintings and stalagmites!

There would be emergency exit points so if anyone doesn't feel comfortable they can come out easily, which obviously isn't the case in a real underground network. Being in a closed, claustrophobic environment is not for everyone. When you take young people into a dark and cold confined space underground, they react in different ways. They can get scared, as children have wild imaginations.

With a dry system, young people can get used to exploring the novice routes before we turn the lights off and they try something more challenging. They can also learn how to use the head torch and equipment, slowly building up their confidence. So, when the time comes to go to natural caves, it is an experience they all look forward to.

We are also in conversation with emergency services such as Sussex Lowland Search and Rescue and the South-East Cave Rescue Organisation (SECRO) who could use this as a training facility. There are countless possibilities.

At this stage, our aim is to spread word of our plans and invite interested parties to help in any way they can. That might be through manpower, helping to lay the initial concrete base, ground construction firms providing expertise or people helping us to finance the project, either through sponsorship or fundraising. We hope there are enough people out there who are or have been involved with Scouting who might help in some

small way. Already, we are almost a third of the way to our funding target and our Cubs, Beavers, Scouts and Venture Scouts have been raising funds. My daughter, Hannah, had her long hair cut off and raised £500.

Paul often talked about building an artificial cave as a training facility for Scouts of all ages so this would be a great way to honour his commitment to the Scouting movement.

INTERVIEW: BEN MORRIS
PICTURES: TOBY PHILLIPS/PAUL FOOTLEG

● The fundraising page can be found at <https://wonderful.org> Search 'Horsham District Scout Council' and scroll down for the 'Paul Dold Memorial Artificial Cave Project' or use the URL code at <https://bit.ly/2Rla5FJ> or the QR code below...



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