

Sat 10 Dec  
3pm-4.30pm

# **Caves, Dwellings & Vibration: The Shape of Emptiness by Flora Parrott and Frank Pearson**

## **KEYWORDS**

cave, caves, space, programme, written, underground, Wordsworth, formations, people, waterfall, poetry, Dao De Jing, shelter, caving, sarawak, great, limestone

## **SPEAKERS**

Flora Parrott, Frank Pearson, Canan Batur

### **Canan Batur 00:14**

Welcome back. I hope you enjoyed our walkthroughs earlier today. My name is Canan Batur and I'm Curator of Live Programmes at Nottingham Contemporary. I would like to welcome you to Caves, Dwellings & Vibration, a two day programme deepening and complexifying our relationship with caves through a sensorial exchange across research, mediation and performance. Caves, Dwellings and Vibration highlights Nottingham's extraordinary condition as a city built on a caves network the UK's largest network over 800 hidden beneath us that goes back about 1000 years, a secret city lies underneath us. Caves, Dwellings and Vibration that aspires to look closer into the poetic and artistic knowledge and wisdom caves carry to think about notions of geologic and deep time, archaeoacoustics and the use of caves as space of dwellings, but also the spaces of upheaval. As you know often we reach or geological or architectural terms to make sense of caves. This programme tries to reach for an alternative vocabulary a possibility that blurs lines between the geological and architectural, the body and the intellect to provide a haptic space for the felt seen and heard. As an expression of our current research strand, Emergency and Emergence, which

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investigates transdisciplinary sensorial and speculative practices of radical sense making. This programme aims to think about vibration as a meandering a potential course of undoing dominant knowledges and modes of being. Today, we're going to partake in the offerings incantations and invocations from Flora Parrott, Frank Pearson, Katherine Yusoff, Andrew Goffey, Frances Morgan. And in the evening, we're going to descend to the caves that our gallery sits above to experience further offerings, performances by Evan Ifekoya and Maxwell Sterling. Tomorrow, we will convene again for further insights and offerings from Laura Emsley, Maria Angélica Madero, Emma McCormick Goodhart, Jessika Kenney, Ella Finer, Louis Henderson, Zeynep Bulut, Sarah Shin and Susanna Davies Crook of Ignota Books. And in the evening, in City of Caves, from Lucy Railton and Paul Purgas. Some very brief housekeeping notes before I introduce our next guest. Although we will keep an informal atmosphere throughout the evening our talks performances and screenings deeply create challenging environments where open mindedness, and respect for each other's approaches and perspectives can foster growth. Please be mindful and respectful of each other's opinions and views. In the unlikely case of emergency, a member of staff will guide you to the nearest fire exit, you will see that our toilets are located on the right hand side when you exit. So please do feel free to come and go as you please but of course, as quiet as possible so that our events are not disrupted. I would like to use this opportunity to extend our thanks to our funders the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University for generously and graciously supporting today's event, as well as my colleagues Philippa Douglas for her hard work leading up to this event, Shannon Charlesworth for her generosity of being back with us again, Catherine Masters for her meticulous organisation, Sam Harrison for his detailed insight, Andy Batson for his care, support and our tech team, Jim Brouwer, Craig Parr, Tom Harris, Tom Chamberlain, Paul Buddle and our confetti students, Holly, Jordan and Laura, thank you for making this programme possible. As with all

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events here at Nottingham Contemporary this programme is free to attend but all donations are greatly appreciated to help support the future within programmes. So without further delay, I'm very pleased to introduce our speakers. Flora Parrott, one of our exhibiting artist in our exhibition Hollow Earth and Frank Pearson with whom Flora has been spelunking together and thinking of ways in which one can describe the experience of being underground. Flora Parrott is an artist working in sculpture and textiles. She trained in printmaking at the Glasgow School of Art and Royal Sculpture Park. Her work explores subterranean spaces, deep darkness and everyday geology. Recent projects include Rates of Decay, Quench Gallery in Margate, I'm In The Bath On All Fours, a project made in collaboration with South African writer, Lindiwe Matshikiza, recently shown at Eastside Projects in Birmingham as part of Sonia Boyce's In The Castle Of My Skin, and MIMA Middlesbrough in 2021. Parrott has exhibited nationally and internationally and she's a postdoctoral researcher of European Research Council on project Think Deep based in Geography Department at Royal Holloway, University of London, through which Flora is working very closely with Frank. Frank Pearson has climbed mountains and caves in various parts of the world for nearly two years. He's a member of the Mulu Caves Project which aims to explore and survey case of Mulu, National Park in Borneo. He searches for and explores caves in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. and is the Northern Correspondent for Descent, the magazine of underground exploration, and for the British Cave Research Association annual conference, Hidden Earth. His PhD was research into the development of cave exploration of subterranean consciousness through travel writing, poetry, prospection philosophy and geology and chemistry between 1680 and 1830. Though retired from teaching he still gives lectures and writes on cave exploration, the history of science, Romantic literature, Classical Chinese landscape poetry and painting. He also works part-time as a research assistant and editor, and he writes poetry. Flora and Frank are going to talk about for an hour to touch upon their

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**long lasting collaboration. And once that conversation is over, we want to hear from you. So this event is being recorded. So for us to be able to record your questions, it's important for you to wait for the microphone to be handed to you, please raise your hand and up and wait for the mic to be brought over two by one of our gallery assistants. So without further ado, over to you dear Frank and Flora. Thank you.**

**Flora Parrott 06:17**

**Thank you very much. fantastic to be here. So looking forward to the programme for the whole weekend. And Frank and I, we're going to discuss a number of sites that have that we've either visited together, or that Frank has visited or explored independently and spoken to me about and those descriptions it really inspired recent work and also the kind of engagement with caves in the works shown in the exhibition here. What you're looking at is a picture of a place called Leck Fell, an open moor land in Lancashire. Soon, we're going to descend below Leck Fell into the cave networks underneath. This is one of the kind of first networks that caves that Frank and I will discuss. But before we do that, I just want to tell you about how Frank and I first met, and why our conversations have been so important to me, and the development of my artwork. In 2017, I attended a conference at the Royal Geographic Society, celebrating the past 50 years of British caving. I was already interested in caves, and had recently finished a project exploring caves in Mendips using a fibreglass artificial cave to to discuss lostness and the sense of moving through these cave like spaces. I'll show you some of those slides later on. But that was the kind of point I'd reached when I went to this conference. There were many, many presentations over a couple of days, two or three days. And Franks presentation immediately stood out to me, I was really struck by the fact that he addressed the unexplored caves of Britain which there are many. And the compulsion to continue to go back underground, the draw of the spaces. During that conference there were a lot of incredible talks about the geology of the cave networks and discovering and**

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mapping. But Frank seem to talk about the poetics of these spaces, and why they are so why do you feel so compelled to go into them? Frank, uses multiple literary references in his talks, particularly for the Romantic Period really seemed I was really struggling, the whole presentation seems to focus on what we do not know rather than what we do. So I wrote to Frank soon after that and was invited to go and spent the day in Lancashire caving diggers, who are a really fantastic group of people. And Frank will tell you more about them. Frank describes them all as space miners, which I love. And when I first met the group I think the second time the same joke suddenly, which is that we're drinking pub with digging problems. That jokes come out every time I've met them. Since then, we have been corresponding by email and teams, in in various ways. And then in October, I visited once again, the Lake District, this time with my young son, who is three to explore the caves with his friends. And so we're going to talk about our various conversations, but we're going to start with Leck Fell. In recent months has been at least a month has been a moment where different quantities, over the last year, 2021. So there's been a new kind of discovery, which Frank has written two articles about? That's the name of The Shape of Emptiness article, it was to pass in the Descent magazine. And it's about this new space, which I have not visited, and maybe Frank can sort of tell us about this new this new site under Leck Fell.

Frank Pearson 10:33

Yes. Okay. I am going to stand up. Leck Fell is in Lancashire its in the middle of what's called the three counties system in the Yorkshire dales. So the far side, just off shot here is Cumbria. This part is Lancashire, and just off the shot is Yorkshire. The biggest cave system in Britain goes from Cumbria, under Lancashire and comes out in Yorkshire. So it's called unsurprisingly, the three counties system its around about 90 kilometres long. That's obviously not in a single line it's only a few kilometres across the cave is on different levels. So it's on a bed of very deep limestone. And it's worn

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through glaciation and previous events, has created an incredible network of cave systems. And so one of the things that myself and my colleagues try and do is find new caves. So we dig, we dig holes in the ground. I had a and we create scaffolding structures to keep ourselves safe. Looking at the mines, of course, we're not looking for coal we are not looking for precious metals. We're looking for an opening. You know, we're looking at the space. And just space enough to get in if it is bigger, great. If not, we still try to get in. So I named the group, the Space Miners all we were looking for was space. And this idea of moving into the underground was something that we were all devoted to, we couldn't stop. And so dig after dig, some don't work. Some we gave up. Others like this one, we just kept pushing, you got a feeling that something is going to open up. We could have to dig down through glacial boulder clay, maybe 20 metres, and the shafts would have to be lined with scaffolding. As we construct with my friends, construction engineers, we construct a safe passage through the boulder of the clay to where we hope a cave system opens up. Britain is only a small country, a small island, if you see it from space and night, there are lights everywhere. If you look for the small sections, where there were no lights, in many of those cases as limestone and when there's limestone, there are caves. And there's space beneath your feet. This is what

**Flora Parrott 14:01**  
going into

**Frank Pearson 14:05**  
we give the caves names. This one at the time a pandemic raging so while and the prime minister just called the health secretary, ethnic hopeless. So we were thinking, well, we're going into the underground, down to, you know, abandon hope all ye who enter, we always think that the reverse psychology we're not going to find anything. We like to pack it up and go. So we just brought in this term instead of calling it the full term. We just call it Think Hopeless. So we became Think Hopeless caves. We started with little hope just a

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long shot. And it turned out to be one of the most stunning and beautiful things we found. So with at the moment it is probably one of the greatest discoveries of recent years in the Yorkshire Dales and absolutely stunning cave. It's one of those moments of wonder when you think the world is so criss crossed with cars, roads, motorways, trains and all of it stratification and is still there is the unknown. And the beauty of the unknown waiting.

**Flora Parrott 15:26**

We got a few pictures of these new formations that have recently been discovered. And this is one of the cave club members looking at one of the newly discovered formations here, this is a really small one, but this is the really extraordinary space that you've just found. But I want to ask you Frank Pearson, essentially one of the articles you've written that's discusses the kind of aesthetics of these caves. I was particularly struck by the notion that perhaps some of these formations are particularly extraordinary to look at because you've had struggled and struggled to get to them. I don't know if you can speak a little bit about that. Whether that's something?

**Frank Pearson 16:11**

Yeah, I think, again, many of you will fit into show caves, where you go through a large cave, and you go along the path and young guide, and you see wonderful things. And I've been to many, many, many show caves, and they look very impressive, massive. There is a difference I feel when you have to struggle to get into the cave to see what you're going to find. When we came to this for example, this is just a tiny fraction of enormous cave passages. And you come as it never had light on it's ever no light has ever shone on that. Until we arrived, crawled through the space, we drove that pitch after pitch, squeeze, after squeeze, a bit of lying in the stream, crawling along the stream bed. The first light part of me feels bad this light pollution. It had a been dark since the beginning of time, never seen light. So this idea of deep time. And this idea

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of darkness this thing of darkness always struck me as an amazing moment. The spatial philosopher, Edward Casey, he talks about when you move from a familiar location, into one that is radically unfamiliar. And he refers to the concept of dislocation. He doesn't talk about caves but, for me, the idea of dislocation was perfect with this, this kind of space. This wasn't familiar you were you were in a different spatial experience. Your body and taking you into that experience, your imagination was exploded as you came in. It was an open space, for me, immediately introduces another level of meaning in my life. And so most of them are show caves and they are caves and they are beautiful and I love caves. This kind of caving experience introduces you to another degree of meaning. It certainly does for me anyway.

**Flora Parrott 18:43**

I think that's one of the things I want us to kind of discuss it a bit is what it is that compels certain people to go into these spaces. I certainly feel the draw of them, but not in the way that you do, I know that you can go weeks. No, I this. I think I agree with you that some of the most profound or inspiring experiences creatively that I've had have been in the inner community in caves spaces or underground spaces in the last kind of decade. Something extraordinary about the kind of stillness and sense of being surrounded by a timespan well beyond my own fields of timespan I can imagine that I find difficult to leave behind. So I understand the compulsions to return. But I wonder if you could speak a little bit about what it is you think attracts certain people to these spaces on such a regular basis.

**Frank Pearson 19:37**

I think with with these types of spaces, these spaces it is difficult to know and it's difficult to articulate. I've been trying for a long time my work with Flora has really started to crystallise as it were kind of general ideas as to why. I mean, I know why I do what I choose. I know intuitively why I'm compelled to return again and again. And trying to articulate



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that compulsion is very difficult. I just got to keep saying, I can't help myself. I'm compelled to go, I'm drawn into it. I always remember as a child, on the cliff peninsula on a family holiday, at a beach called Portisco, on the ancient Peninsula, beautiful place. And I remember just going for a ramble, I can't remember how old I was, I was young, you know the score. And I walked up the hillside, and I came through the vegetation. And I found an old mine entrance. Back then, in the early 60s, nobody cared about leaving the old mine entrances wide open, and didn't seem to be any health and safety then. So it hadn't been closed off, it was just open, it was a large gaping hole of darkness, with vegetation hanging around. It was a magnet, there was a magnetic compulsion. I remember standing there and it was I had no light and I was being pulled into it. I felt that many times since I don't know what it is. It's not magnetic. But it felt magnetic. And so I think the work with the floor is trying, we've been trying desperately to find a discourse, if you will, a language that can somehow make sense of that compulsion.

Flora Parrott 21:52

And I was gonna ask Frank about kind of based on that last observation about your time spent in bothys. And I know that this is something that we've kind of been returning to, over and over again, as someone who goes walking in the highlands, and then finding yourself in an enormous expanse of space. And something about the small bothy environment relates in some way to the idea of what it is that attracts you around about a cave and this kind of idea of the perimeter in these big open spaces. And we've kind of talked about a lot, especially in relation to your work on the translation of poetry, which we'll go into a bit more, but maybe we must hear about that relationship between the kind of huge expanse of the attraction to that, but then the kind of need to return to the small enclosed spaces, if that makes sense. The question or space as you can see right there. And then this is more kind of traditional sort of bothy, and then this is the inside there. So many of you know that these are very simple parts of shacks

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kind of thing in the middle of the highlands that you can go to without renting them or booking them. There's nothing inside and there's no running water, electricity. There's sort of like camping but with bricks, I suppose. In the space that you use a lot, especially when you're unable to go caving

**Frank Pearson 24:00**

yes thank you, sure you must have heard of the bothy, the Mountain Bothies Association. Do a plug for them, their fantastic. What it is is a group of people, myself included, who joined together and helped with funds, with work with repairs. Old shepherds huts in the lake district, theres a couple in the Lake District, but mainly in Scotland, and then Scottish Lowlands and in the Scottish Highlands. And they're used as basic shelters. They're open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. Always now open air free there for everybody. Anybody that wants that shelter can have it. And they're maintained by this group of volunteers. But all they are as Flora said are shelters, there's no running water, no electricity, no facilities. They are just sleeping platforms and if possible a fire, you're gonna bring in many cases your own fuel if you want to light a fire. And that's all they are very simple raw, basic dwellings. Shelter in its most simple form. As with caves, there is something about meaning to be had in these. And many of these bothys. I mean, the whole idea of it is that they exist in a wild, open space, miles from anywhere, you can't drive to them, you've got to walk to carry your sleeping bag, your food etc. These are often these special places because they take you back to an experience as it were. What it is to dwell in places where there's nothing to interrupt your thought. If you want to go and write something, this is a great place to do it.

**Flora Parrott 26:09**

I've actually nearly interrupted your thought, after you said, there's nothing to interrupt your thoughts. Sorry. I wanted to kind of think about those spaces. One of the things we've been trying to get to the bottom of a lot of our conversations

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is this paradox the paradoxical nature of the cave. And there's a really fantastic writer called Veronica della Dora. I'm happy to give these books out to anyone interested in them. Has written a book about the the Byzantines landscape. And she's written about a cave in a section of that. And one of the things she articulates so beautifully is the idea that this cave can be all of these different things at once all of these different states at once is completely confusing space as a result, and I think that a bothy kind of sits in that space as well. It's both a shelter, as well as something quite nerve wracking that a lot of people find fearful. Something that she's written here, the small empty space of the pain is suddenly filled with the uncontainable and the unspeakable. That's what she describes as the cave becomes dark as you turn the light on. And a very narrow enclosed gap can suddenly become vast because of that profound darkness. And those kinds of ideas of edge and perimeter that are so distinct solid a moment ago, these ancient rocks around you suddenly completely disappeared, you feel as though you're in outer space. And so the idea that these sort of things are both a container, but also kind of those edges can be porous, and that you can summon feeling floating in these massive spaces. Yeah, it's something that keeps reoccurring as a problem. And I suppose that's one of the things I find so compelling conceptually about these spaces is that you can't ever really get to the bottom of them. They're ungraspable in that way, in Franks, talk about this a little bit more in a minute. But Frank and his wife, and Lian Xiaomin, a friend of theirs, have recently translated Laozi's prose poetry. And there's a section in numbers in Section 55. A little, the clay is baked into earthenware, the emptiness in the middle makes earthenware useful. And that is something that I kind of think about in relation to these spaces a lot in that they have the outer edge in some way, but also the inner edge and both of those things simultaneously. Not exactly sure if it's in the order of how to put things but maybe it would be a nice time to talk about this a little bit more. I can say that this translation of Laozi's prose poetry with Feixia Yu, UK director of the Confucius Institute at the University of Central

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Lancashire, lecturing Chinese, Asian Pacific Studies and translation studies and Lian Xiaomin, Bachelor of Engineering at Tsinghua University, Beijing and your wife Frank, and you've translated this over a number of years? One year one year. I just wonder if you could speak a little bit about this translation process and your caving and how those and your experiences in the bothys and maybe how some of those thoughts come integrated or how they influence each other. That makes sense.

**Frank Pearson 29:35**

The Dao De Jing is the the general term for for this book by Laozi. We assume it was Laozi. 2500 years ago. So classical Chinese originally written on bamboo slats very difficult to translate. Its translated and I think it's the most translated Chinese text in existence. So before we had to do another one, it can never be enough. Lian Xiaomin, our colleague wanted sent out a message around the internet that he wants you to husband and wife team, ideally, two people who work together. Somebody who spoke classical Chinese, or read classical Chinese, and was fluent in Chinese, and understood Laozi and classical Chinese culture was also married to a person who was a native English speaker was a linguist who was also interested in daoist, classical Chinese culture. And it just so happened my wife and I've been married for 32 years, we were both fascinated by classical Chinese, English. We were both fascinated by the Dao De Jing, Laozi classical Chinese poetry and so so the three of us got together, almost within a week of the message going out over a year, we translated Dao De Jing into English, slightly different version of the Dao De Jing that you'll see through most translations in English now. And it was the text, which have things in a different order. So that's why we didn't call it a Dao De Jing, you could call it the De Dao Jing because it's slightly twisted. But this, I've been studying Chinese for 30 odd years, however much I studied, our children are bilingual. Their Chinese is fluent, and mine is still rubbish. So it's one of those things they've been speaking Chinese in a shorter time, than I've

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been studying, they are still better than me. One of the things it did for me was to open up another channel of thinking aesthetics. And see what was the Dao De Jing talks about emptiness about shapelessness. And the more I study the Dao De Jing, the more I studied the language and the poetry associated with it. From the fourth century, in China, I then got introduced. I mean, I've known about it before, but I haven't followed it to the same degree. The mountains and rivers tradition, about a third or fourth century China, Shanshui mountains and streams, poetry, or Shan shui mountains and streams painting. And the third or fourth century to come out with an aesthetic, as subtle, as detailed as brilliant as this just blew my mind. But the idea of the interrelation through yin and yang, of narratives and rivets, in a perpetual not as binary opposites, is a perpetual dynamic interrelation, in a way, opened up the cave. And what is a cave if not formed by water in a mountain, water fills the cave, what fills the cave up with water, the pictures we saw before the calcite the porous rock in the water pouring in water brings in sediments water brings in calcite fills the cave up again. Water comes on another wave opens the cave again. Calcite comes in water sediments, water fills the cave up again. Water comes in, washes away the sediments, breaks on the calcite opens the cave again. So the cave that we found last year this year. You could see the wave after wave after wave of sediment washing in washing out washing in washing out, falls towards a calcite 30 metres above the ground. Filled up calcite, water all washed away again and filled up again and washed away again. Layer after layer for me, these great fantastic thinkers you know two thousand years ago, they were expressing, they wouldn't they were telling me this is how I look at it this way absence, giving way to presence, presence, giving way to absence, and so on and so forth relentlessly. As the great poet said, towns and cities come and go but mountains or rivers, are without end

Flora Parrott 35:36

This recent discovery Think Hopeless that it is a shapeshifter

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cave, once you find what you think to be a defining path, passage, it metamorphosis and something different. So that's obviously kind of in your thinking at all times. And I'm going to talk really briefly kind of go really briefly from this kind of idea of the absolutely ancient, and it was talking with you about the artificial cave that I rented as part of a project, because it kind of, in a way, it's almost the exact opposite of the case that Frank's been showing us. The artificial cave, some of you can hide from the British caving associations, fibreglass set of tubes, that you got to come modular, and you put them all together, all together in different ways. And I got some funding and it took about three days of workshops. One was with a group of artists, about 12 artists and geographers and various people that I come across. In my discussions, this is quite a while ago, about 10 years ago. And I asked them to come to the Mendips to go caving, to spend a day looking at cave maps. And then finally to spend a day working with his artificial cave and the idea of this cave, I think this artificial cave is to encourage young people or people who maybe wouldn't necessarily have a go at caving maybe this is a little bit nerve racking, to actually go down to the earth. To have a go in it and see that actually, the spaces that look really tiny, are actually quite open, and you can fit through them if you just move. So I invited some people to come along, including a geographer called, James Irvin and artist called Daniel Clark. Fay Nicolson, Beth Collar, Francesco Pedraglio, Dr. Harriet Hawkins, my partner's Johnny. And my little girl, Marina, who around the time is about four. Together we sort of shuffled this thing together, and then trying to move through it. And the inside of it, you can see here is fibreglass. Kind of spray painted number, and it's really quite difficult to move through. But it's in such deep contrast in some ways to the caves Frank's describing and it makes me when you're moving through, you felt perhaps a bit self conscious. The temperature of the thing was quite warm, I suppose, was definitely dry. It had a kind of echo when you knocked on it definitely sounds sounded synthetic I suppose. And it made me think a lot about Frank the piece that you wrote about

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aesthetics, and kind of wonder, and where that kind of sense of wonder comes from, whether it's something that you can imagine whether it's something that you can recreate? And as an artist, obviously, that's something I'm always trying to think about whether it's worth trying to recreate these spaces, how do you what happens when you try and recreate? Do you do them justice? Can you believe in justice, and then the very kind of ancient spaces that you're describing, that are 25,000 years old, for a little formation this size, and millions and millions of years old around you. And it makes me think a lot about different types of imaginary formations, and perhaps some of the formations that you've described to me I've never visited, but I have somehow got a gap for them in my mind. And I just wonder if you think that a space that's an unauthenticated space, can have any kind of wonder of the cave of the ancient cave, or whether it is inherently part of whether those formations are particularly, particularly because of the depth of eight.

**Frank Pearson 39:49**

And I think that's a great question. I think for me, as Flora was just saying that these are tests and they are interesting constructions of a cave. But as Flora already pointed out, as Flora asked me to talk about was the idea of the Bothy. I am obsessed with bothies as well as caves. Not that bothies are underground. But it is that space. I mean, Bachelard with all with I'm sure we're familiar with Gaston Bachelard's poetics of space. And for me that he focuses on the house, and that was really quite interested in which sort of took that poetics of space approached and looked at the bothy. And what is it about the bothy of this space of the bothy a space of that shelter? A small shelter, and in many cases, there is no cellar. Sometimes there are rocks, what I loved about Bachelard's description, about whatever you see moving in a cellar, it moves more slowly than what moves in the attic. That was a great kind of gothic rider. But bothies there are no cellars, it is just one level. There is something about the poetics of the bothy. It's not just a roof bothys have history. There used to

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be shepherd's cottages for example. There are lives, and the history of lives in there. There was one bothy in the south of Scotland, in the Ettrick Valley. And is the one of the only, it's the only bothy, owned by the bouncing off the association. Over Phawhope. Fantastic name, but it was there to the grandparents of James Hogg, the shepherd and the poets of the 1820s used to live Hogg just lived in a house further down. So on going there Hogg famously wrote The Confessions of Memoirs of a justified sinner. This was an early kind of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde character being pursued. I always think about Hogg when I stay in that bothy. That bothy has history. It's incredible. So in many ways, those spaces are filled with, it's the meaning that they give to you and it's your experience. It could be underground, it could be very deep underground it could be very shallow. Could be a house. Its that space. I know, I'm fascinated as I am sure you all are of course, why we are here, with this idea of space and place. And what is it that attracts us?

**Flora Parrott 42:55**

part of what was so interesting about this project with other with other people interested in caves, I was gonna say other artists, but it was a mixed group, interdisciplinary group that even though this cave has sort of, it was inauthentic in lots of ways. It did other things that I thought were really fascinating that you could suddenly conjure a kind of perimeter. So from lots of little bits of rings, you can put them all together and make something that had an inside or an outside that could appear in front of you. And it was also really interesting working with artists who some people are more interested in movement and choreography. And thinking about the movement and having negotiated that space was really interesting, because I think the underground spaces and probably this artificial cave, which became this kind of knotted thing here that helped me understand and think through the project. And was that I think those spaces demand particular kinds of movement that very few others that I've experienced anyway, ask of you they asked you to



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move your body in ways that feel very unfamiliar. But there was a definite kind of lack of wonder about this artificial cave in some ways. And I think it is about that it was not imbued with meaning in the way that you're describing the bothy and the real caves as well. We've got two more sites that we want to discuss one of them I've never been to. And so this imagining this idea of authenticity comes up a lot for me in this work, because I feel maybe I can't really make work about it, because I've never been there. But I'm thinking about that a lot and thinking about how these caves occupy our imagination, and how maybe my experiences and just hearing you speak about it can be have a value in themselves, I think. So we're going to move on to Mulu which is an incredible place in Borneo. That Frank has been part of an expedition for many years, many years, and it's an extraordinary isn't the biggest cave network, the biggest, biggest cave chamber in the world as

**Frank Pearson 45:10**

With Sarawak, one of the biggest, longest cave systems in the world.

**Flora Parrott 45:18**

you were just saying there about the kind of mountains and valleys these photographs you sent me of the kind of just to give you a bit of a sense of the landscape and the scale of the place and just feel so certainly so extraordinary to me certainly something I've never experienced personally is a landscape of that scale I would say, can you tell us a little bit more about these, about these sites?

**Frank Pearson 45:44**

Yes. Mulu is in Borneo, northern Borneo is close to Sarawak. Sarawak close to the Federation of Malaysia. It's very close to the Brunei border. If you look at this image, of Brunei is just over the way there just off picture. National Park is largely made of limestone. There is sandstone there that Gunung Api, and Gunung Mulu amount of chamber. There are about

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240 kilometres of cave passage, but they're all on a series of levels. So again, it's not one single passage. So it's very long. And it has numerous entrances, the pictures Flora has just shown, to find the entrances. You have to search the forest. And so the group that we have the exploration expedition with is a blend of well world cavers there are American cavers, European cavers, Asian cavers, we do the cave, obviously, with the Malaysian cavers and Sarawak foresters. So these are forest camps that the Sarawak foresters, and the local people who work with us, and come caving with this the Penan so the Penan people who live in the forest, they would make these kind of shelters. And what used to amaze me was to watch them do it. They would use a parang or machete and they would never use nails, no hammers, and they would create shelters entirely with a parang everything was bound with twine and would be cut, fixed and bound and they could knock one of these up in an hour or two. It was absolutely astonishing when we leave these bases to go searching the mountains for caves. These would be the size of the caves we would find this is called Racer Cave. These photographs, the big ones were taken by Mark Burkey. A fantastic, tremendous cave photographer. That's me I didn't take a photograph. You can see the scale of the cave systems and the roots of a very wide limestone very different limestone to that we find in Yorkshire. Deer Cave, you will see this cave on David Attenborough documentaries where the bats over 4 million bats in the roof. About six o'clock each evening they fly out and go looking for food on top of forests. So after the warmth of the day, the insects have been rising, and the bats will go out. But when you see the bats go out, they don't all go out at once, they go out groups. And they go in pulses, spirals and twists and turns, create the most amazing shapes. Millions 4million of them. Go out an evening and then come back. And this is in Deer Cave. This is a clear water cave. You can see that they're not streams their river canyons. So all of a sudden

**Flora Parrott 49:47**

**you go in with the team. It's quite a serious amount of**

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equipment. The team includes a medic. I mean there's quite a serious amount of training and thought that goes into these expeditions and you're underground for a number of weeks at a time is that right?

**Frank Pearson 50:02**

Days, it is how much you can carry. Yes. Food you can carry. We we could carry your food for maybe three or four days of a camp underground. Medics, we just have, sometimes we're lucky to have a doctor with us, a medical doctor. On one expedition I went, and I was the I had to be the medical stuff. And now I'm not a doctor. I'm a doctor of Literature, and not of medicine. So the rest of the cavers said, Well, if nothing else Frank, you can write us a good epitaph. Do a good eulogy, I can have a good speech.

**Flora Parrott 50:52**

And they can the purpose of the expeditions is to connect and map these this huge network. I don't know about you, but I find so hard to kind of piece this thing together to imagine the scale of it, because it's how many kilometres of caves? You've already said that sorry.

**Frank Pearson 51:10**

A normal expedition, you could get maybe seven or eight kilometres kilolitres of new cave. So the idea of the cave for Sarawak forestry, the National Park, all of these caves have to be surveyed. So I go in there with that intuitive love of space. Now one of the guys are going there with, their going with an intuitive love of numbers. And they go in there with your compass, your trainometre to measure the height and so on. But also, you're measuring stick, your laser. And the laser measures the distance builders, surveyors, architects use them to build houses. So laser surveying for measuring is very advanced now, they do it in three dimensions. All of these survey, distometers they're called incorporate the compass and the clinometer. So you can point your laser, and it will give you the compass bearing the angle, and the distance, all in

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one.

**Flora Parrott 52:25**

I'm trying to imagine the space you are describing I kind of think it's because I'm much, much less knowledgeable about the space. But I find it hard to make distinctions I know we've discussed before, dreaming and caves, because quite fascinated by the idea of there being caps which we come to in a minute mention the that the caps, and you guys sleeping in there, thinking in there and talking about measuring in there. About whether these caves in your mind become merged, whether you dream about them, whether they feel distinct, and the mapping kind of stays quite clear, or whether they become a little bit less clear than that.

**Frank Pearson 53:08**

I think I've found if I go into a cave, for you, and something else, I can't remember where I am. But if I go into these caves, and I just I will take things with my peripheral vision as well as main vision I am amazed how much I remember. And so I can go in long distances and find my way back out of this cave. And this cap is in a place called skull ring. It's in the ascension of the clearwater system. And it was called skull ring because birds a little swiftlets find their way into the cave through echolocation. And they nest in the in the roof. They create the nests that people have a bird's nest soup. If you're interested in the birds there, they live in the ceiling. So that feathers in there rain down. And this particular large chamber was called skull ring because right around the edges, there was always a tide mark of birds feathers all the way around this size of this room. And nobody ever see the flood that raised the water. There was no water there when we went there it was a trickle. This hole here is normally an empty hole with a little trickle of water where we gather our water. So nobody had ever been there to see the tide coming. And we were there one night on January and we were woken up by the ball of water and looking up at the roof was a column coming down, crashing down to a ledge above pouring into the hole. That the back is

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normally a dry passage that was surging. So we knew that on the surface, there was a storm. And it found its way through all the layers and the labyrinths it was passing through. We would pass through here. We were quite hard so we would try on. What we experienced, the tide came in, creating the route around, and we spend the night on a heap of water, not as comfortable as it sounds.

Flora Parrott 55:38

for our time as well. These are some pictures of the camp and where they will stay. Your son goes with you as well. And we're going to we're going to finish with a really beautiful trip to, got about sort of five or 10 minutes. A recent trip to Weathercote Cave, which is in its in Yorkshire is North Yorkshire by the edges. But Yorkshire yes in Yorkshire but it's on the Lancashire border. And here is me by Diane and Emma. Diane's incredible caver and Emma is a cave diver on those things. But we went together with Frank and another group of people to this cave, Weathercote Cave. And we just wanted to finish this because it's a cave that we've been talking about a lot recently, I'm so interested in because it's a vertical cave, essentially, a waterfall kind of plummets down to a waterfall. I found out recently, there's actually only in the 70s being closed off. And that was because there was an accident there. So you have to ask permission to get the key to go in. And that's been that's been done for safety rather than anything else. I've been completely taken with this idea of this cave. And part of that, by so many people, many of the poets that Frank is interested in, and Turner made lots of drawings of this cave as well. But one of the things he can see a painting by Turner 1822 I think. This is one of Frank's photographs of a cave today. But the idea that Frank is so taken with that speaks so much to many of our conversations, is this idea that this is vertical passageway, essentially, it's got a waterfall going into it, which is really spectacular in itself. But very quickly, another waterfall from the top can come in and completely flood the whole channel a whole vertical space, including the waterfall within it, making that underwater waterfall,

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essentially kind of trying to get my head around it at the moment. And this has been my my little boy who came too. This is Franks daughter Inca will also be there soon. She's only, how old? About one so we'll give it a couple of years and then she'll be there. And this is Hannah at the waterfalls and you can see this photograph I think that's Diane, but just behind the kind of the lower waterfall and it's really rapid it's incredible. It's such an extraordinary space to be placed to be isn't it immense power in this vertical cave in there. You can go in under the waterfall in through and then a passage is fairly recently been understood to come out underground and it's been dying. There's been nothing they've explored it with diving equipment, and it comes out just up on the way there a few 100 metres out. It comes out here. So I suppose that stretches a few 100 metres from the bottom of the waterfall out through this hole here. And Emma we were on this trip with has done that dive. Part of the reason the fact that this little bit of network so fascinating, because I know it is to your interest, it's fascinating to you is because it's so timeless and it's it's it's extraordinary nature is so timeless, and we have found it compelling every time we visited it, but then so have Wordsworth all of those. I don't know if you want to tell us a little bit about the relationship with this cavles network. that's going into final cave from the inside that's been shoved through back out again.

**Frank Pearson 1:00:16**

Yes, this is Oh my gosh. A good part of my life was one of the things I was fascinated by was the way caving had developed, and the way the imagination of caves and developed over time. And we've gone from a period where we find caves. Even though there were there were records of miners leaving ideas and descriptions of their caves. Invariably, these were few and far as it's often the case, the miners were on the walk. So what you started to get was probably around the 17th or 18th century, invariably, priests, strangely enough, and because, and so they obviously didn't work very much, because they have the time. They have the money, they could

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go on holidays. So all of our but most of our early descriptions, of caves were for pleasure, not from mining. As a pleasure. While recording in so many instances, not all the many, by vickers and curates. So by the end of the 18th century, holidays started to appear, the roads were getting better, their hotels were getting better. And so farmers, local people set up tours of caves, it tended to tie in with people's Tour of Britain. And if you think about a great classical texts, like a Aeneas, Epicuri, Odyssey when Odysseus, Ulysses, many of these classical journeys, became kind of really holidays. And so people would go on their Odyssey around Britain, but as with Odysseus, and as with the Aeneas, they have to go underground, they have to go into the underworld at some point. And so they they focused on when you're going to come here and go into the underworld, in Yorkshire. And one of the first great cave journeys was not just Yordas Cave in Kingsdale. It was Weathercote, reading the letters and the diaries, and when Dorothy Wordsworth began Grasmere journal it was done on the day that William and John, two brothers went to Yordas and Weathercote. To go, so my argument would be that Dorothy's Garsmere journals were the first descent narratives that we have. One of the things, Wordsworth went back there several times. By 1805, when he did the first writing with the prelude, he described the creative imagination, very close to a subconscious. And so another 100 years before Freud's interpretation of dreams and so on. So we've been somewhat anachronistic to talk about it as however that the unconscious, but that was something going on here. And once you read a passage of Wordsworth state, he never said it was Weathercote. My argument is, it is Weathercote simply because I have been so many times and I recognise it. And the line he writes everytime in book 13 prelude, this faculty, the imagination, has been the moving soul of our long labour, we have traced the stream of darkness, and the very place of birth and his blind cabin gate campaign. Once it's finally heard, the sound of waters followed. It's a light, I don't know the day accompanies course, some of the ways that nature afterwards lost sight of

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it bewildered, and engulfed Weathercote Cave, Hurtle Cave, Joint Cave sinks and sinks, rises, sinks, and then give me greeting as your rose once again, with strength reflecting it's solid rest. Works of man in the face of human life. So if you follow Weathercoate it is the most incredible cave system, it comes out because it's in cast limestone the water sinks into the limestone it then rises in places like Weathercoate and sinks again, rises in Joints and sinks again. Rises in Hurtle and it sinks. And as Flora mentioned before, Emma is on the bench, dived as a cave dive. We can't do it. Got to be a diver they've dived it and it's full length. And it comes out of God's bridge, interesting enough. It's the river Greta in Chapley. So it's absolutely fascinating system. It's super. And I will argue that it is metaphorically obviously, it doesn't have to be geographically determinate. It could be anywhere. But I would argue that Wordsworth got his inspiration from Weathercoate.

**Flora Parrott 1:05:37**

That's it. We're going to finish our kind of, hopefully this has been a bit of a giving you a bit of a sense of how our conversations evolved and how these sort of spaces live in our memories for Franks memories occasionally for me, but also in my imagination, and also the imagination of lots of good poets and artists that inspire us and wanted to finish this is an image of something in the studio I'm making in response to Weathercoate Cave and the waterfall and the journey that I've been on with Frank.