

MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 14.

AUGUST. 1957.

EDITORIAL

Since the last Newsletter caving has been continuing on a rather smaller scale than was expected. The turn out at the August Meet was much lower than experienced at a Bank Holiday before. The lack of a set meet programme can be blamed for some things but not the situation at August Bank Holiday weekend. How is a Meet Secretary to plan a programme when nobody seems to want to take part in any of the items.

The task of excavation of Timber Hole has stagnated over the past month or so. Work on the dig is now a job for at least three men hence a good measure of support is required for any attempt on Timber Hole to be successful. At the end of this Newsletter there appears a short meet programme. If anyone wishes to attend a function but has no transport and cannot get over to the Royal Hotel, Boston Manor, for our weekly meetings, if I am informed within reasonable time I can possibly arrange transport.

ANTHONY J. KNIBBS. Hon. Sec.

NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome the following new members into Mendip Caving Group.

Reginald Johnston,
Terang Bulaw,
Caterham Drive,
Old Coulsdon,
Surrey.

Brian Robinson,
29 Prince's Avenue,
Fett's Wood,
Wing Crpington,
Kent.

Robert Knott,
4, Shacklgate Lane,
Teddington,
Middlesex.

GENERAL WEEKEND.

Base: Manor Farm, Priddy, Somerset.

Members present: Anthony J. Knights.
Brian Robinson.

Visitor: Peter Weedon.

ACTIVITIES

Our only caving trip was on Saturday afternoon when we entered Eastwater Swallet. The 380ft. way was explored including the rift on the left hand side going down. We carried on into the Boulder Chamber and followed the Canyon down to the Cross-Roads. Here we turned left up to the head of Dolphin Pot route. For ease of descent the chimney was laddered and so, subsequently, was the first part of the Dolphin Pot. Unfortunately the tackle ran out at this point curtailing our descent. The return was made without any undue difficulty.

The evening included celebrations for Brian's Birthday at the 'Hunters'.

On Sunday we had a look into Timber Hole to get a better idea of how to move the rock which was blocking the way on.

"MIC"

THE BELGIAN WHO NEVER ARRIVED

July 20th

July 21st.

Base: Manor Farm, Priddy, Somerset.

Members Present: Austin Sanders.
Anthony J. Knibbs.
Brian Robinson.

ACTIVITIES.

Most of Saturday was spent waiting for Austin to arrive with our Belgian visitor, and friend of Derek Holmes. After lunch Austin arrived alone; the visitor had not turned up.

We passed the rest of the day at Cheddar and paid a visit to Goughs' Show Cave.

On Sunday we started by taking a look into White Spot Cave before moving off to do Longwood Swallet.

Descent of Longwood Swallet was hampered by a very slow party going down ahead of us. Once we had passed the two ten foot pitches we moved at a more usual speed and descended into the Great Chamber down the waterfall. After wandering around in the Great Chamber we pushed on as far as humanly possible in the terminal stream passage. On the return trip we climbed out of the Great Chamber by way of the Traverse. We surfaced after 3 1/2 hours ahead of the other party who were using wire ladders with 1 ft. spacing between the rungs.

"MIG"

SUMMER CAMP ON MENDIP

July 27th - August 5th. 1957.

Saturday, 27th.

Malcolm, Mig, Tony, Richard and Bob met at Manor Farm, Priddy. In the latter part of the afternoon we all went up to Pitts' Farm to see a large swallet crater, at the bottom of which is a dig; then we went to Charterhouse to inspect the earth collapse seen earlier in the year. In the evening the dig was rigged ready to work.

Sunday, 28th.

Everyone worked on the excavation, Timber Hole, until early evening. Progress on the rock was slow indeed.

Monday, 29th.

Mig gave Peter Weedon a lift to Bath and returned at 3.30p.m. with the key of the dig.

Earlier in the day a large rock had shifted as the rest worked on the dig by crawling in the unblocked gap at the top. Richard was coming out at the time and his leg was trapped by the descending boulder. We untied his bootlace and removed his boot enabling him to get his leg clear.

Attention was now turned to shoring up the dislodged boulder.

Tuesday, 30th.

Practically the whole of the day was spent in securing the boulder. Ricky purchased cement and a short section of steel girder and in due course the boulder was pronounced secure.

Wednesday 31st.

Tony and Bob went to Stoke Lane Slocker and also received permission to look into a new slocker nearby.

Mig and Ricky succeeded in removing the rock, which was blocking the dig, and shifted it into the wider tunnel entrance.

Thursday, 1st.

Mig and Ricky went to Weston-Super-Mare and then, via Bridgewater, on to Minchhead. On their way they checked the identity of a bone, found in Timber Hole, at Axbridge Museum - Sheep's Tibia!

Tony and Bob worked on the dig and succeeded in splitting the rock removed the day before. By teatime half the rock was brought out to the surface and the rest left in the rift.

At 6 o'clock we walked up to Charterhouse to see a re-discovered cave.

Friday, 2nd.

We all went to Charterhouse to see the new cave by daylight. Not as big as it had seemed. Ricky took several photographs of the area.

The next job was to transport all our kit from Friddy to Velvet Bottom.

Tony and Bob went to Stoke Lane once more to be the first to inspect the new slocker, which would undoubtedly do if a large piece of the quarry floor could be cleared. Sadly,

the owner told us that this part of the quarry floor is to be filled within the month.

Saturday, 3rd.

Bob and Tony went on an expedition to St. Cuthberts' Swallet with Chris Falshaw of B.S.C. (see separate report). Mig and Ricky worked on Timber Hole for the day.

Sunday, 4th.

Mig and Ricky joined a working party into the new series of Swildons' Hole, conducted by W.S.C.

Tony packed and left for home during the afternoon. Les James had arrived during the night and slept like a tramp under all his gear not deeming it worthwhile pitching a tent. Dave Harle joined us on Sunday afternoon after a slight delay en route. Later in the day Bob, Dave and Les made a trip into August Hole.

Monday, 5th.

Packing occupied most of the day and an early start for home was made by those remaining at Velvet Bottom.

TONY CRAWFORD.

SWILDONS' FOUR

August. 1957.

As members of a working party, myself and Ricky set off into Swildons' Hole at 10.15a.m. accompanied by Phyllis Davies of Westminster Speleological Group. The pitches were already laddered and we reached the operations Base Camp in the far reaches of Paradise Regained Series in just over two hours.

Here, at the Breakfast Chamber, we halted for some refreshment before pushing on into the Blue Pencil Passage. At the end of Blue Pencil Passage we encountered what is one of the worst squeezes on Mendip; so far it has no definite name but I'm sure that is not for lack of suggestions.

Past this point we entered the new stream Passage of Swildons' Four proper. Of all the stretches of stream passage in the system as a whole this is probably the most interesting. For much of its course the stream flows between shingle banks stream with blackened bones deposited by previous floods. The sides of this large passage show signs of both phreatic and vadose formation.

Both ends of Swildons' Four terminate in a sump, the upstream sump in all possibility being the downstream side of Sump 11.

Our main objective was to explore a muddy chimney a few feet from, and to the left of where the downstream sump occurs; a most uninviting area of deep glutinous mud leading into a gloomy sump. With Ricky operating the lifeline I climbed the virgin mud slope at an angle of some 40 degrees upwards for about 45 feet to the junction with four more passages, one from the streamway below, and the other three continuing upwards at a similar angle to the one I ascended. A strong draught flows upwards into the most accessible passage which may require excavating before it can be passed upwards.

After taking notes and a rough survey we returned via the gruesome squeeze, through Blue Pencil Passage, to satisfy our appetites at the Breakfast Chamber. As we were eating we were joined by Len Dawes and Fred who had been exploring a roof-extension upstream in Swildons' Four and later by two pipe-stoking figures bearing sections for the much needed Maypole. Brian Ellis and Bill Kitchin of Shepton Mallet Caving Club. Myself and Ricky left just after the main support party who were transporting tins and other scraps back to the surface.

At 5.10p.m. we emerged, muddy, hungry and thoroughly pleased with the near 10 hours spent in this truly remarkable system. By the look of things Swildons' Hole is entering a new phase of activity and great things may still be achieved in this fine cave system.

"MIG"

MORE DOINGS IN SWILDONS'

August. 17th - 18th. 1957.

Base: Manor Farm, Priddy, Somerset.

Members Present: Anthony J. Kibbs.
Gerald Pope.

ACTIVITIES.

After a fairly late start on Saturday, Gerald and I arrived on Mendip and unpacked at Manor Farm. At opening time we hid ourselves to the 'Hunters' where we met Len Dawes looking for a support party on a sumping trip into Swildons' Hole. Having nothing special on hand we volunteered our services for this purpose.

We entered the cave two hours after the assault party and proceeded straight down to Sump 1. where we gave a hand boiling water and brewing soup. After a short time the assault party returned through the sump, having placed a negatively buoyant float in Sump 11. attached to a length of fishing line.

It is hoped that during the winter months the floods will carry the line through the sump and if the theory is correct, it will appear in the upstream sump of Swildons' Four.

As previously arranged Len Dawes, after giving me the necessary instructions accompanied me on my first trip through Sump 1. Diving the sump is a straightforward procedure if somewhat chilly. Gerald remained with the support party during this interlude, hardly being expected to dive the sump on only his second caving trip. He is, however, absolutely set on doing just this on his next opportunity.

We returned to the surface more or less in company with the rest of the team and made our exit at about 3.15p.m. Having been down for 4 hours.

Sometime in the future a beginners Sumping Party may be organised to give people the opportunity to pass Sump 1. under guidance of those who know.

"MIC".

AUGUST WEEK: ST. CUTHBERTS' SWALLET: EXPEDITION REPORT

In this account of St. Cuthberts' Chris Falshaw and his friend Bob Knott and myself along as visitors. So I think to keep the account clear, I shall use the names as little as possible.

A solid wooden lid hides the 15ft. square shored-up shaft of St. Cuthberts', followed by a head first wriggle sideways through some boulders down to the iron bar celay over the ledge of the first pitch. An electron ladder here is climbed down hand over hand for its first half in the narrow rift, there being no room for any other method.

The rift continues but slopes down to a few large rocks sprayed by a small stream from above, speed is needed to avoid a wetting. Now changing direction we pass through some small tunnels and medium chambers the way slopes smoothly to the left. A short iron ladder, 6 rungs, leads to a scramble to a chained 15 rung ladder almost vertical. This has two broken rungs, the break being on the right. Now we find ourselves on a knife edge. A steady climb down to an impressive chamber in which colour really shows its hand.

Here starts the Wire Rift, a narrow and jagged high rift spanned by two wires, one the telephone and one a thin steel

cable with hand grips spaced every 4 feet. This is really only a guide, but it is very useful the first time. Forty feet of cable sees us over. Now we see some fine stactite of large size with a little curtaining.

A huge rock 30 feet long called Everest leers at us like a drunk inviting us to the childish pastime of sliding over its immense hulk this is done in a bowles like manner. A gentle curve is called for if one is not to fall down a small hole.

Having played, a small deviation by our leader took us to the Curtain Falls, a bank of stals glittering above and below us. This spreads to 30 feet wide at least. Being all white this formation is magnificent and there is not its equal on Mendip. Standing on the slope by this we notice plenty of small helictites in the roof an inch or two above our heads, these are in some weird shapes. A strong air current is still in evidence here.

Resuming our path we smole through some more large caverns until, in front of us, appears a huge chamber with roof, floor and walls all loose. The floor consists of large bits of rock all chitting on one another to form the vilest slope to walk on. There is one place underground where one walks alone. Slowly we each made our lonely way across to be joined in turn by ones friends at intervals of three minutes. Here I am going to break my rule and say that for a beginner Bob could have refused, but he did not. I can truthfully say he crossed this like a veteran.

After this, things improved greatly. A short while after the main stream passage appears, we are shown the dining-room. Ah! food at last! That square concrete table looked like a mirage in our hunger. FOOD? Oh no, work first. We phone from here to the surface. The B.M.C. Hut has the other phone.

A dirty great sledge hammer and crow bars are issued to us. The operative word is DIRTY!!!

Our leader Chris then took us to the Rabbit Warren, so named for its maze of tunnels, most of these being water tubes half blocked with stals. After about three quarters of an hour, we are shown the sump and then back into Rabbit Warren for the work. First we tried the stal floor through which one can hear falling water. Soon we find that nothing short of a charge of explosives will clear this place. So, beating a hasty retreat, we arrived at the top of a large sloping dry chamber. The slope is because of the bank of fine lown and small stones that choke it to an angle of forty-five degrees. Every time Chris climbed to the top of this someone brought him out by just taking a spadeful of earth out of the floor. In the end, a crowbar was thrust into the bank to give him a foothold. With a bit more digging an opening appeared, through this he thrust his head and part of his body as well. The net result of our

labours was now apparent, a new system of dry-choked small tunnels. Unfortunately, there can be little doubt that these lead back into the main passages, although this has yet to be proved.

Collecting our tools we now retraced our steps, and had a good meal from some dubious looking tins. According to common practice, we exchanged our new tins of food for the last peoples choice. Washing up completed, lamps re-primed, one more phone call to the surface for the time check, and we set off.

The way back was slightly different, this time we omitted the chained pitch which we all had a bit of bother with coming down, there having been only a cable to hold on to on a completely smooth pitch sloping away, and into a deep drop into the Pulpit Pitch.

Again a nicety in climbing foot-work at Quarry Corner. And just for the hell of it up the Everest arrete, all the ladders were negotiated easily.

Our only concern, the top pitch, went like a dream, we were only seconds behind our leader. The method of getting out being again hand over hand after half way, then feet off the ladder and onto the rock; this is obviously the secret of getting out without any effort. It would seem that the only place that Bob did not trust was the shored-up entrance pitch. This was built on battens and lines.

Once out we made for Minories pool or lake. Bob came with us but obviously did not approve. I hasten to add its not a dislike of water, but the fact that Chris' friend dived in as he was and it struck Bob as slightly ungentlemanly. A respectable person would, of course, have taken off his socks first. Finally, he lost his socks. Bob and I think they were soluble, but we thought we had better not say so!!!

I hope over the years a lot more of you fellow members will have a go at this remarkable cavern.

Our thanks go out to Chris Falshaw and his friend for taking us with them.

TONY CRAWFORD.

MORE NEW MEMBERS.

We are very pleased to welcome two more new members to our club, They are as follows:-

John Green,
79, Mill Farm Crescent,
Hounslow,
Middx.

Paul Green,
56, Mill Farm Crescent,
Hounslow,
Middx.

18, River Walk,
WATTON-ON-THAMES,
Surrey.

ANTHONY J. KNISES. Hon. Ed. & Recorder

MEET AT TUNBRIDGE WELLS.

JUNE, 1st.-2nd. 1957.

Members present:-

Arrived Saturday and slept at High Rocks:-

Austin Sanders.
Richard Wooliscott.
Robin Charnock.

Arrived Sunday:-

Les James.
Mike Wills.
Gerald;
Tony Clements.
Malcolm Cotter.
David Harle.

Activities.

Saturday: Climbing at High Rocks.

Sunday: Climbing and ladder practice at High Rocks and
Harrisons' Rocks.

A thirty five feet pitch (free hanging) was laddered and most persons present climbed both up and down. Robin did good work in belaying the ladder and successfully arresting two (intentional) falls.

Several climbs were attempted at both High Rocks and Harrisons' Rocks, most persons completing them with varying degrees of exertion.

Everyone performed well, especially the complete novices (but please LEARN THE BOWLINE KNOT)..

AUSTIN SANDERS.

Hon. Committee Member.

TIMBER HOLE

Working weekend: June 1st. & 2nd. 1957.

Voluntary subscriptions totalling £2. 10. 0. furnished the wherewithall to put a lid on our very promising dig in Velvet Bottom. I managed to spend Saturday making the necessary purchases of material for the job.

36 sq. ft. 1 1/2 Elm boards.
 Padlock and Hasp.
 Hinges.
 Bolts and screws.

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Three other members arrived on Saturday night and between us we transported enough wood for a framework from a distant but economical source of supply. The weather was unbearably hot resulting in less work being done than was anticipated but enough to facilitate final erection of the lid and trapdoor. Many thanks indeed to John, Paul and Bob, for providing such stout hearted support at such short notice.

"MIG".

FOOTNOTE

If you have something to say then say it in the newsletter where we can all read it. Articles and reports of caving activities will be very welcome.

18 River Walk,
 Walton-on-Thames,
 Surrey.

ANTHONY J. KNIBBS. Hon. Ed.

MEMBERS' ADDRESSES

This list only includes names of members who are not in arrears with their subs, as we have no desire to become a Speleological Benevolent Society.

Hon. Sec. & Treasurer:-

L. James,
 253, Bonham Road,
 DAGENHAM, Essex.

Hon. Editor & Recorder:-

A.J. Knibbs,
 18, River Walk,
 WALTON-ON-THAMES,
 Surrey.

Tackle Master:-

A. J. Crawford,
3, Hillside,
HAREFIELD,
Nr. Uxbridge, Middx.

Hon. Committee Member:-

A. Sanders,
97, Repton Road,
ORPINGTON,
Kent.

Overseas Rep:-

D. Holmes,
Sgts. Mess, R.A.F.,
EINDHOVEN,
B.F.P.O. 35.

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M. O. Cotter,
88, Cawdor Crescent,
BOSTON MANOR,
W.7.

R. Charnock,
9, Ealing Park Gardens,
EALING,
W.5.

V. P. Law,
25, Agaton Road,
NEW ELTHAM,
S.E.9.

D. Harle,
88, Cawdor Crescent,
BOSTON MANOR,
W.7.

H. Pritchard,
120, Dulverton Road,
NEW ELTHAM,
S.E.9.

D. Searle,
38, Lloyds Way,
BECKENHAM,
Kent.

R. Woollocott,
8, Meadow Bank Road,
KINGSBURY,
N.W.9.