

MENDIP CAVING GROUP

20

June 1963

G.B. CAVERN - Guest days.

Members who wish to visit the cave on our allocated days are asked to inform the Meet Secretary at least 10 days in advance. This will insure that the key is obtained. The key will be handed to the party Leader on the Thursday evening before the week-end concerned.

S. WALES.

A meet at the South Wales Caving Club has been arranged for the 21st-22nd September. The meet Secretary is also trying hard to arrange meets to St. Cuthbert's and Balch's caves. Suggestions for the future programme would be very welcome - also more party Leaders.

BLASTING.

Paul Dye has been granted a blasting licence. The Club will benefit enormously from this. Arrangements for storage of explosives have been made with a local quarry, and we are greatly indebted to the quarry Manager.

HUNTING LODGE SWALLET.

Seven tons of debris were recently removed from this dig, and work is continuing fast! Dave Mitchell reports continuing activity on Eastern Mendip. Some new discoveries have been made, but full details are not yet available.

COW HOLE.

This cave was re-opened during the Whitsun week-end by members of the Wessex Cave Club. The entrance, however, is reported to be very unstable and dangerous! Cow Hole is situated in a deep shake hole in the next field to Ubley Hill Pot.

BLACKMORE SWALLET.

Shoring timbers are to be placed where necessary to enable digging to continue. Mig has kindly agreed to supervise this work.

COOPER'S HOLE.

Work at this site has progressed steadily over the last few weeks, and the tunnel leading from the foot of the stalagmite staircase is being extended horizontally along the line of the rift. Dave Mitchell is being asked to take over the Cooper's organisation.

TACKLE.

The Tackle Master has asked that all Members take more care over equipment, and that any defects are reported immediately to him. Tackle is always available at the Cottage, and a constant watch over its efficiency must be made. The Club now has 495 feet of usable ladder, and more is being made by Tony. We have also recently bought 200 feet of new 'Alstron' rope, and another 500 feet of rope is to be purchased. Six Carabiners are also to be added to the equipment.

RESCUE GEAR.

A hauling sheet is now available at the Cottage - for rescue work. Additional emergency packs, 1st Aid equipment, and food are to be placed at the Cottage.

ANNUAL DINNER.

An annual dinner for the Club has been proposed. Please support this move by filling in the form provided with this Newsheet.

I am very grateful for the following notes from Pedro Mee on the lecture given by M. Siffre at Chelsea recently !

63 DAYS UNDERGROUND.

Have you ever set off on a caving trip in daylight, forgotten your watch, and been surprised when you immersed to find that it was night-time and the pubs were shut ? That is what Michael Siffre did last Summer, except that he was underground for sixty-three days without a watch, or any other means of telling the time, and his calculations were five days wrong at the end of his visit.

He descended the Gouffre de Scarasson, in the Alpes Maritimes on the French-Italian border on July 7th last year, and emerged on September 17th. He had assistance to get his equipment weighing a ton underground, but after that his only contact was through a telephone line to the surface. This he used only to communicate his estimates of time, his going to bed, awakenings, and report to the state of his health. The surface crew were instructed to make no mention of date or time to him.

'Time' was an important feature of this experiment, and the effect of this unusual cave on his health was also very relevant. Gouffre de Scarasson is part of a glacier ! The temperature remained constant at minus 0.5 degrees C. and the humidity never varied from 100 per cent. Condensation was his biggest enemy, and his tent - double thickness - was never dry.

One would have thought in two months underground he would have made extensive surveys, and done a lot of work. In fact, other than two expeditions of a few hours duration, he never left the 10 square yards around his tent. For entertainment he had books and a gramophone, and a log which he kept.

The gramophone was interesting in analysing his sense of time. In the end he could not distinguish between the time it took for a $\frac{1}{2}$ hour LP record to play and the $1\frac{1}{2}$ minutes of a 78 RPM. He added that after two months the musical notes ceased to make any sense at all.

Progressively during his stay underground his reactions slowed down. This is illustrated particularly by his estimates of the duration of two minutes which he reported over the telephone. On the 25th day they had increased to 150 secs. and eventually reached 300 secs. This test is apparently closely related to the rate at which the heart beats.

Generally his periods of sleep and activity totalled 24 hours in each day, but not in the usual proportions. If he slept for 4 hours he worked to 20, and vice-versa. But his average sleep was 9h. 5m. An estimated period of activity of 7h. 5m was, in reality, 14h 14m. After 35 days his own estimate of time underground was 1 day behind, and after 63 days he was 5 days behind.

Landslides of ice and rocks near his tent caused ever-increasing emotional tension and on one occasion he was so scared that he talked for a total of 10 hours on the telephone.

His stay underground caused no permanent ill effects - on the contrary he was cured of some minor complaint. But he lost his notion of colour for some time, and had to wear protective goggles for the first few weeks of his return. He concluded that the absence of solar radiation had no ill-effects on the phosphorous and calcium constituents of his body.

What were his greatest desires while underground !!!!!
Cheese and a woman !

COTTAGE IMPROVEMENTS.

New calor gas rings have been added recently. The cooking bench has been covered with a washable heat-resistant surface, and the Elsan put on a more stable foundation. A new system of bed numbering has been evolved by Pete, so that on busy week-ends, available beds can be easily noted. Members are reminded that when a shortage of beds occurs, non-members must be prepared to relinquish beds in favour of Members.

PROVING TRIPS.

At the Annual General meeting the question of the Club Training Trips was raised. This system has never been completely satisfactory, and the Committee was asked to make it easier for applying members to qualify for membership.

The name of these trips has now been changed to 'Proving Trips' since this is more descriptive of their purpose. The list of Members who can lead Proving Trips has been enlarged. It was decided that a major factor contributing to the failure of this scheme in the past has been that it was run on very informal and unofficial lines. In future all Proving Trips will be arranged in advance with the Meet Secretary who will issue the Leader with a special report form which has been designed to make his report as simple and factual as possible. In the case of a comparative novice there will be two trips, one without tackle, one with. Caves will be selected to suit particular cases, and it is emphasised that trips are not in any way intended to be endurance tests. The Leader will merely be checking that the applicant is a safe caver, and that he or she is familiar with basic caving requirements such as basic knots and whistle signals etc., In the case of the more experienced caver the idea is the same, but only one trip will usually be necessary.

There are about 17 people awaiting Proving Trips, and with the help of the Leaders, these can be cleared quite quickly. Members introducing new potential members should see that they complete Proving Trips as soon as possible, preferably before they even fill up membership application forms. As a general practice, the Leader of a Proving Trip should not be the introducing member, and if possible not either of the proposing Members.

With all Members co-operating, the system can work, and perform it's original purpose of raising the standard of caving in the Club.

LEADERSHIP.

The Committee has revised, recently, the list of Members eligible to lead proving trips, which are an essential prerequisite to membership. This list will be found in the newsletter.

Some laxity has been noted in the filling in of the blackboard provided for caving parties at the Cottage. This is a very important and basic safety measure and must be adhered to, and it is important also to remove data on return.

SWILDON'S HOLE.

A copy of the survey showing the extensions of Double Trouble and Vicarage Passage has been received by the Club. This shows the connection into Swildon's 11 bypassing sump 1. We are greatly obliged to Dr. C Lloyd for this survey.

CLUB FUNDS.

The General Fund now stands at £46.19. 7½ - and the Cottage Purchase Fund at £220. 9. 1½d (as at 1. 4. '63).

MEET SECRETARY'S NEW ADDRESS.

2, Rectory Lane,
Byfleet, Surrey.

ARTHUR AND LINDA SPAIN'S NEW ADDRESS.

73, James Hill,
Burgess Hill, Sussex.

PENGELLY RESEARCH COMMITTEE.

Mike Rennie has been appointed to the Editorial Board. This organisation has been formed for the furtherance of scientific research in Speleology with permanent facilities in Devon. Membership will be open to all cavers, and it is hoped that further details and membership forms will soon be available.