

MENDIP CAVING GROUP.

NEWSLETTER NO. 33.

MAY 1965.

WHITSUN MEET

Pete Munt has organised a Derbyshire Meet for Whitsun, June 4th. - June 8th., proposing to stay at the Cave and Crag Cottage, if possible. Accommodation for about eight people will be arranged, with camping grounds for any more than this. Details of the actual trips are not yet available, but they will be intended for the more experienced cavers.

Please get in touch with Pete IMMEDIATELY if you wish to go to Derbyshire, so that he can make final arrangements for caving trips.

P.S. from Edit. - Short notice I'm afraid, but the Editor is convinced she's blameless this time.

HOW MUCH CAVE PER CAVER?

"If everyone in England and Wales went to the seaside at the same time, each would get a strip of coast three and a half inches across !"

The quotation comes from the "Architects' Journal" (January 20th.) in which there appeared a Civic Trust survey on the problems of leisure. Perhaps we ought to ask ourselves how many inches of cave we should each get if all cavers went underground together ?

The survey is interesting because it presses for more planning for leisure, and even caving does not escape its notice:

"We have to plan for youth, self-assertive, strong, fast, independent - playing fields, cycle tracks, scramble courses, pony clubs, crags, POTHLES, work camps, coffee bars"

I don't know about the strong and self-assertive bit, but fancy us being put in the same group as - coffee bars !!! It seems that everyone wants to plan for cavers - except the cavers themselves.

The survey makes the point that the demand for outdoor recreation will treble by the year 2000 and that the present chaotic system cannot cater for the demand. Their answer is planning: access and preservation orders and the like. Some of these may help us a little, but surely, that's why people are cavers - because they're the type who don't want to be planned.

The answer, my friends, is simple. By the year 2000 you must have dug enough new caves to accommodate the increased demand. To work - or do you want less than $3\frac{1}{2}$ " of cave per head ?

Brian Mee.

REGIONAL REPORTS.

North Wales.

A new cave has been found in the limestone north of the A5 between Llangollen and Chirk by the Wrexham Caving Club. The first major cave discovery in North Wales, it has been christened the unpronounceable Welsh equivalent of "Shortest Day Cave".

It was entered by way of an old mineshaft and there are several hundred feet of well decorated passages on several levels. It is of phreatic origin with vadose modification.

For the time being, it has been gated by the discoverer, a fellow called Schofield, for scientific work to be carried out. The slides shown at the C.R.G. meeting make it appear quite an impressive discovery.

S.W.C.C. descent of Balinka Pit. 1964.

- the C.R.G. meeting reported by Pedro.

The descent of Balinka pit required, it seemed, organisation and money. South Wales Caving Club who explored part of it, wrote some 2,000 letters to make the arrangements for their visit, and manufactured, among other things, 1,000 feet of electron ladder.

The pit is near Lake Blata in Croatia (West Yugoslavia). S.W.C.C. descended to 650 ft. using a cage made of aluminium dexion and a hydraulically controlled winch. From the lowest point reached a caver was lifelined down a 70 degree slope from where he rolled a stone which took 22 seconds before coming to rest. S.W.C.C. is to continue the assault next year. The 200 ft. staging point was formed by boulders calcited to the wall, but in places there was an 8" gap between the boulders and the wall - with a 450 ft. plus drop beneath. The cage was used rather than a ladder system as it was planned to carry out work at the bottom, if reached, and it was hoped to save time and effort by using the equipment.

The party was helped by local partisans, who were interested in recovering the bodies of their friends flung into the pit during the last war. The lecturers at the C.R.G. meeting were the expedition leader, Clive Jones, and his deputy Bernard Woods. For the money-minded, each member of the 22-strong party paid £50 and they earned cash to support the scheme by selling reconditioned miners' lamps and cleaning cars.

Devon - Excavation in Joint Mitnor Cave.

Further excavation of the Joint Mitnor Cave at

Buckfastleigh (the Pengelly Centre) is planned between June 25th. and July 4th. Work planned includes the uncovering of interglacial Hippopotamus-bearing deposits and an attempt to extend the cave using information obtained from the electrical resistivity survey on the surface. Applications to R. T. Thompson, II Sandford Road, Bromley, Kent.

MENDIP.

Fewer Rescues Last Year.

The M.R.O. was called-out five times last year compared with seven occasions in 1963.

Among the more serious cases was the rescue in February of a caver with a broken leg from Llethrid Swallet. Two doctors from the Mendips travelled to Wales to stand by. The annual report of the M.R.O. says of this incident: "It is generally considered, now, to be a mistake to ask miners to help in cave rescue work, as they are not familiar with cavers or caving and do not understand the problems. In this instance they took far longer than necessary over their job and by their ill-considered remarks got the cavers a bad "Press".

In June an Oxford University caver fell about ten feet just beyond Barnes' Loop in Swildons and sustained head injuries with a fractured skull. It took 6½ hours after the M.R.O. was summoned, for him to be brought to the entrance. Dr. Lloyd says of this incident: "More planning of manpower is necessary where a subject has to be brought from a point some distance from the cave entrance. All helpers tended to enter the cave at the same time and therefore became tired at the same time."

The M.R.O. thinks that the new nylon-type St. John's carrying sheets get torn more quickly than old type canvas ones which they are now using.

Equipment to effect rescues from Swildons IV by way of sumps I, II and III has been ordered. Rescues from this part of the cave were previously thought to be "all but impossible"

M.C.G. elected as C.R.G. committee member.

The Group has been elected to be a southern area representative to the committee of the Cave Research Group of Great Britain and Pedro attended a recent committee meeting.

Do YOU care about Mendip ?

If you care enough about Mendip to be upset by new houses being built and motorways being driven through it,

you may like to join the Mendip Preservation Society.
The minimum annual subscription is 2/6. Write to:
S.M.Hobbs, Hokerstone Cottage, Priddy, Somerset.

AN INTRODUCTION TO COTTAGE BUILDING.

You all know how it starts:- we get chucked out of one home and have to build another. This basic fact is quite simple, it's when the members appear on the site that the amazing part begins.

People you have known for years as gentle clerks and bookmakers' runners etc. suddenly become obsessed with the need for "double laden upright damping grobbles". Nothing less will do for our foundations. Strange equipment appears, handled by superior-looking people who won't let you lay a finger on it. (Whether they fear that you will damage it or, on the other hand, discover that anyone could use it really, I haven't yet decided.)

Anyway, out of this vast pile of timber and glass and screws and asbestos and creosote and old rubbish there eventually rises a building, which, strangely enough, looks something like the planners said it would.

Oh! the delights experienced by the workers as each part falls - well, nearly falls, into place and Oh! the oaths and epithets that fly between innumerable "foremen" (former friends)! each wondering what the hell the other knows about the positional tolerance of sprocket snugs, anyway. Over the general hubbub of the building area can be heard the coarse cries of the site engineers - "Up your end a bit Fred - up! you stupid?!:?!:!!", and so on; the conversation punctuated now and again by a piercing shriek as a particularly heavy section is inadvertently lowered onto someone's foot. Surviving a weekend's work on the cottage, without injury, is almost as difficult as building it.

There are plenty of laughs of course, like the time a party of visitors from another club were admiring a gable-end, erected by one of our newly erudite members. "Going up well, isn't it?" said one, whereupon, with a splintering crash, it came down. "Ho! Ho!" said the host weakly, "Old _____ features put that up - he's a caution he is." Then another time when, from a great height, someone dropped a length of 3" by 3" onto the cottage-warden's head.

However the cottage is up, and there is still plenty of work to be done inside.

Don't get too depressed when someone scorns your masterpiece of D.I.Y. - forgive them, for they know not what they do either.

Pete Goddard.

FOR SALE.

'Pennine Underground' - Copies of this guide book are now available from the Secretary. Indispensable to those going on the Summer Meet, they are a useful reference book to everyone.

'Caves of Mendip' and 'Speleologist' - Copies of these are still available from Pedro.

Colour Slides of Mendip.-

Spelaeo Services Ltd ., include in their range a selection of colour slides of well-known Mendip caves, priced 2/6 each. We cannot recommend them as we have not seen them, but anyone interested may obtain more details from 34 Combe Avenue, Portishead, Bristol.

Incidentally - has anyone passed on their own slides to Arthur for copying ?

WANTED.

Crowbars, pulleys, etc. - a plea from the Tacklemaster.

"I am trying to build up the Club stock of digging tools in preparation for the upsurge of digging enthusiasm which will, no doubt, take place this summer. Will any member who has digging tackle he no longer uses donate it to the Club please ? Trenching tools, hammers, crowbars, chisels, pulleys and small shovels are the main items required. This notice applies particularly to members no longer active, but if anyone has a supply source for any item, will he please contact me."

Wanted - People who are able and willing to DIG at Knapp Hill, Blackmoor and Cooper's.

Caving Publications Wanted.

The Editor has received a notice from the Mendip Cave Registry concerning the Central Collection of Caving Publications.

Bristol Central Reference Library has agreed to accept donations of caving publications and to house them so that they are readily available for reference by anyone interested. The success of the Collection depends on gifts of publications from clubs and individuals. Hence the plea by the Mendip Cave Registry for one copy of every issue of each club publication, including back numbers if available, and for any other papers and articles which individuals can be persuaded to relinquish.

Donations should be sent to the Mendip Cave Registry's Literature Registrar: Mr. R.W. Mansfield, 158 Coronation Road, Bristol 3. After inclusion of the references in the

Mendip Cave Registers, they will then be forwarded to the Central Reference Library and will pass out of the control of the Registry.

MEET PROGRAMME.

June 4th. - 8th. Derbyshire. See page I and Pete Munt.
June 26th./27th. Sat. Longwood Swallet / August Hole. (P)
Sun. G.B. Cave. (P)
Digging at Blackmoor, Cooper's and
Knapp Hill.
July 10 - 18th. Visit of the Speleo-Club des Montagnes
Neuchatelloises to Mendip.

(Note - (P) means that you must be in possession of a permit to visit this cave.)

SOME NOTES ON CAVE LEADERSHIP.

Proper regard to the responsibilities of a party leader can play an important role in the safety and efficiency of caving within the Group, and it may be of some interest to itemize some of these.

Firstly the leader must ensure that members of his party behave above ground in a manner which will not offend the farmer or landowner on whose property the cave or pothole is located, as an increasing number of complaints and access difficulties are at present facing the whole caving movement. Disposal of litter, closing of gates, care of drystone walls, and the parking of cars in sensible places are typical points to be borne in mind. The leader should ensure that permission is obtained before visiting the cave, and should adhere to any special instructions included in such permission; keeping to a certain footpath across a grouse moor, for example.

Before entering the cave the leader should satisfy himself on two points; that the members of his party are physically and mentally suited to undertake the proposed trip and that each member is properly equipped. The first point is largely a matter of observation and common sense. With a party of novices or cavers unknown to the leader it would be inadvisable to aim at bottoming a difficult pothole or completing a protracted exploration in a severe cave. The capability of each individual party member should be known before a really severe trip is undertaken. Without medical or psychiatric training the leader will be able to recognize only the simplest of physical or mental defects likely to affect a caver underground. In

this matter considerable responsibility rests with individual cavers to signify any potential affliction which may affect their movement in the cave. The leader should ensure that all members of the party have eaten before going underground, and that food is carried in the party where the trip may last more than a couple of hours. Lack of food may account for many cases of exhaustion especially under cold and wet conditions. It is wise to make a personal habit of carrying some form of energy-giving food for emergency use, for example chocolate, glucose, dried fruit and Horlicks fudge bars.

Small First Aid packs contained in 2-oz. tobacco tins are available for use underground. They contain: surgical gauze and lint, 1, 2, & 3 inch bandages, safety pins and a few 'Codis' tablets. Although these do not cater for serious accidents they enable small wounds to be given temporary treatment immediately. It is a Group rule, and therefore a responsibility of the leader, to ensure that a First Aid pack is carried in the party. The Meet Sec. is responsible for maintaining the packs and any useage of the contents must be notified to him as soon as possible.

The wearing of a safety helmet underground and provision of an emergency lamp are essential and a leader should refuse a caver into his party who is not in possession of either of these. Head injuries from falling objects can be minimised by using a correctly fitted helmet in good condition; many cavers owe their lives to their helmets.

The most common source of illumination is an acetylene lamp attached securely to a lamp bracket on the helmet. This lamp, in the hands of a novice, under falling water and through sumps, is not the most reliable. Emergency lighting should be in the form of an electric lamp fitted permanently to the helmet, or a reliable pocket torch (with an attached lanyard) carried in a protected position. This latter form is not advisable where the cave is a sporting one requiring the use of the hands. Candles and matches can easily be carried in a pocket or haversack, and can be used as necessity directs despite the unimaginative bias against their use. A spare jet, prickers, and possibly a rubber sealing ring should always be available for the acetylene lamp user, and a supply of calcium carbide should be carried when a period of use exceeding 4 hours is envisaged. For an electric lamp, spare batteries and bulb are required. The leader should cast a critical eye over helmets and lamps before the party sets off.

Adequate clothing is essential; it is better to wear too much than too little. Unless a wet-suit is to be worn

plenty of woollen underclothes and sweaters are required; a boiler suit is advisable but not essential. Boots with stout uppers, normal lacing, and stiff soles with either a climbing nail pattern (tricornis, clinkers, hobbs etc.) or a serrated cleated rubber sole, are strongly advised. A stiff sole is especially desirable where ladders are to be climbed. The leader should explain these requirements to novices as far as possible in advance of the commencement of the trip. It is somewhat annoying to walk 2 - 3 miles to a cave entrance only to be told that tennis shoes are not suitable for caving. An abseil sling and karibiner are very useful and often essential on pitches. These are required under Group rules, as also is a whistle for signalling on pitches where conversation is impossible. The leader must see that his party can use the whistle correctly and tie a bowline knot.

The recent Group ruling that caving parties shall not consist of less than three members should be regarded as an absolute minimum; four is a much safer number. An injured caver should never be left alone so this means that one person, at least, must remain with him while 1 or 2 others fetch help - two are essential when ladder or rope pitches have to be passed.

In all matters concerning the progress, order of march, and conduct underground, the leader's instructions must be complied with. While underground the leader should ensure that the party is moving at a pace acceptable to all members and is kept together under the eye of experienced men as far as possible. No doctrinaire placing of the leader or experienced men is obligatory within the party. As a leader may not know the cave in order to lead the party, he may wish to place someone who is acquainted with the cave at the head of the party to act as guide. The system of making the rest of the party follow behind the leader continually is not good practice and tends to breed a type of caver who has confidence to follow but never to lead. No mystic power is needed to lead a caving trip and this must be demonstrated from time to time; set one of the novices to find the route back. He'll come to no harm if you keep an eye on him, and it will add to his confidence and enjoyment. Point out the hazards to be negotiated, direct where caution is to be exercised, demonstrate how manoeuvres are safely carried out and dangers minimised. Always use lifelines where required and encourage care and confidence on ladder and rope pitches. Leaders should demonstrate overall method, not every single handhold and foothold: novices need confidence and basic instruction, not wet-nursing.

Signs of strain or exhaustion in party members are

difficult to ascertain. Many cavers, novice and experienced, are unwilling to admit to tiredness and thus make the leader's job more difficult. A simple attack of "Opening Time is not difficult to detect: it is usually accompanied by consultation of wrist watches, and may be linked with sudden lamp trouble, groans and violent swearing. True exhaustion is not very obvious until it becomes advanced. Some symptoms are rambling conversation, ill temper at trivial cause, unnatural silence, repeated stumbling, and falling asleep during a short halt. Obvious exhaustion should be dealt with immediately although the leader should suggest a return to daylight in some other form than, ".....because So-and-So is shattered and can't go on."; hearing this will not reassure the exhausted caver. The end of the cave may be only 20 mins. walk away but the leader must stand firm, consider the weakest link as his prime concern, and order an about-turn. The exhausted man should be given special, but not too obvious, care unless in a bad state. A short halt will provide an opportunity to get him to eat something energising before the return journey.

A trip for novices can be made much more interesting by using the cave as a natural classroom in which to point out features of interest. Cave formation - Speleogenesis - is best illustrated by actual examples, which may introduce some absorbing problems and studies. A good leader should consider his position as that of instructor, and should strive to cultivate a safe technique and an intelligent attitude to caves and their conservation.

The writer has attempted to describe leadership requirements in the handling of novices and those of limited experience. Modification is required for a party of experienced cavers but in all cases the necessary leadership should be given confidently and quietly.

Antony J. Knibbs.

(\$\$\$) For further details see Pedro..... (Edit.)