

MENDIP CAVING GROUP.

NEWSLETTER NO. 40.

DECEMBER 1965.

CLUB NEWS.

Subscriptions. These are due in January 1966. All payments to Hon. Treasurer, Tony Fitzgibbon at 265 Eastcote Road, Ruislip, Middlesex.

Welcome to Christine Jackson and June Seath who have started coming along to our Thursday night meetings.

Change of address. As from 15th. January 1966, Mike and Christine Rennie's address will be 18 Brentham Way, Ealing, London, W.5.

Trustee. Pat has been elected as the third trustee for the club, following the resignation of Pete Munt from the Committee.

Carbide. The Club has received a supply of carbide, and quantities can be obtained from the Tacklemaster, Pete Goddard, price 1/- per pound.

Surveys. Pedro has now heard that the M.C.G. has been accepted as a member of the Survey Scheme. A full list of surveys available to Club members will be posted on the cottage notice-board as soon as possible.

Wife Cells. S.W.C.C. have informed us that they are negotiating for Wife cells at the present moment, so we should be receiving our quota soon.

COTTAGE.

A light has been erected outside the back door so that people will be able to fetch in the coke without groping around in pitch blackness. Please remember to turn it off after use.

An electric grill for making toast has been installed, but it is most important that it should not be used whilst the other electric point is in use.

A tackle cupboard has been purchased.

The electricity meter has recently been returned from the factory where it has been for repair.

BLACKMOOR DIGGING. Dec. 18/19th.

As if by way of compensation for a very wet Saturday, Sunday morning brought blue skies and sunshine. At 11 a.m. the derrick was rigged and ready for use. Following prolonged and heavy rainfall the valley was in flood condition equal to that which followed the melting snows of 1963. Whilst doing some preliminary tidying-up in the shaft I was aware of a very low-pitched rumbling. Questions to Pete Mathews and Tony Ingold on the surface confirmed that no sound was coming from elsewhere in the valley - no motor cars, tractors or the like. Listening more intently I traced the rumble to a small hole off the northern corner of the shaft. Putting my head into this the sound was discernible as being that of a considerable amount of water either falling or as rapids probably 100 feet or more distant. Both Pete and Tony descended the shaft and confirmed the hearing of the rumbling. No such sound could be heard from the chamber entrance and I think it possible that this represents a stream other than that already known to flow in very wet weather in a small rift off the chamber.

More members had now arrived and digging started in earnest; minor modifications to the derrick and pulley system proved effective in increasing the general efficiency and it was only a matter of perhaps two hours before the earth and clay run-in material was giving way to large rocks. Fortunately we had the services of the only human rock-crushing plant in captivity - Pat Walsh - attached to the end of a 14 lb. hammer. As torture for the surface slaves, two particularly large rocks (the largest of which weighed maybe 5 cwt.) were hoisted up on the derrick. No undue strain was noted in the derrick. By dusk the dig was looking most interesting with two holes leading downwards between boulders, and signs that the expected undercutting of the down-valley shaft wall was about to take place. The shaft floor is now two feet deeper and digging is becoming easier as the mud decreases. What with water rumbling and the appearance of the shaft I feel we shall have a prosperous New Year.

DON'T DELAY - DIG TODAY!

Tony Knibbs.

LONDON CAVE RESCUE ORGANISATION.

At a meeting of the L.C.R.O. held on 30th. November, it was decided that no further rescue practices would be held, although it was hoped that individual clubs would continue to give their members some instruction and practice.

The L.C.R.O. would continue to be a means of supplying relief rescuers to any area rescue organisation in

need of help. To this end, each club has been asked to appoint two wardens who are at most times accessible by telephone, either their own or a neighbour's; the list of such people will be notified to Scotland Yard, who will be responsible for passing on any request for assistance from other areas, or from the Metropolitan Police district in the case of dene holes, mines, etc.

The wardens are in turn responsible for calling out the members of their clubs, and will therefore need to be in possession of lists of names, addresses and phone numbers, etc. Information sheets will be circulated, and you are asked to co-operate by completing these and returning them immediately.

The new L.C.R.O. Secretary is Arthur Cox.

M.C.G. RESCUE TEAM.

Although there is to be a lessening of activity in the L.C.R.O., it is proposed to maintain sufficient communication to enable the organisation to be called out should a cave rescue of sufficient magnitude occur. The annual rescue practice appears to have been abandoned.

However there is no change in our Group's policy of maintaining an annual cave rescue practice. Discussions, by the Committee, on a recent suggestion that the Group could take a more active part in the Mendip Rescue Organisation has evoked the decision that a Group rescue team shall be formed. In view of the fact that personnel at the Cottage varies with each weekend it would be unwise to adhere too rigidly to training the recommended number of eight cavers as a set team. Whilst we would put a team of eight into action when required it is intended to arrange that twelve or more members are made aware of rescue techniques. From this number we should be able to make up a rescue team on most weekends during the year. Obviously it is best that as many members as possible should be qualified to take part in rescue work. Hence practices will be arranged to cater for as many members as are interested.

Two rescue team leaders will be appointed who shall be responsible for organising practice rescues and generally co-ordinating cave rescue thinking within the Group. The latter will include the upkeep and improvement of the Group rescue equipment. The chances are that we shall be called out to caves nearest the cottage and it follows that rescue knowledge of Longwood/August System, G.B. Cave, Pinetree Pot and other nearby caves including those at Burrington is desirable. Members are invited to offer suggestions on the matter of cave rescue within the Group to the Hon Meet Sec.

Tony Knibbs.

LECTURE REMINDER.

On Jan. 12th. Dr. G. Warwick is to lecture on "The Origin of Caves", and on Jan. 26th, Mr. A. Watson will lecture on "Bats in Caves". Both talks are arranged by the Pengelly Cave Research Centre in conjunction with the Imperial College Caving Club, and will commence at 7. 30 p.m. at the Dept. of Physics, Imperial College, Prince Consort Road, S.W.7.

REVIEWS.

The Orpheus Caving Club is producing a new series of newsletters, the first two of which are in our library. The descriptions of caving trips show a remarkable keenness; (If only people from the M.C.G. could write reports of their cave trips and send them to me, then our newsletter might make rather more interesting reading. Even those of you who can't write can dictate your articles to one of the literate members - if you can find one.)

But to get back to the subject of the O.C.C. newsletters . . . Vol. I no. 2 contains an interesting description of the part played by O.C.C. members in the rescue of Donna Carr from Giant's Hole in Derbyshire. After so much superlative language in the press reports, it is refreshing to read a first hand account by a caver who was at the scene of the rescue for much of the time.

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The November issue of the M.N.R.C. newsletter is accompanied by a leaflet explaining the purposes of various sub-committees within the M.N.R.C., and outlining a number of projects which they hope to complete over the next year or so. The suggestion has been put forward by H.W.W. Ashworth, that a demonstration centre should be set up at the Badger Hole and Hyena Den at Mooky Hole, similar to that at the Pengelly Research Centre. One wonders if the project will achieve success, as the Pengelly Centre has taken quite a long time to find its feet.

A second interesting project is concerned with a site which Knapp Hill workers will have seen; the Horrington Buddlehouse is to be restored by the Industrial Archaeology section, and a model of it constructed.

The study of thermal geometrics in Lamb Leer Cavern, and an investigation of Dowsing are to be arranged at the M.N.R.C. headquarters when it is finished.

For further details, consult the newsletter and leaflet in our library.

Dial Giant's Hole.

A telephone line is being laid from Giant's Hole to the nearest farm, and it may be extended into the cave itself, in order to reduce the delay in calling for help in case of accidents. This piece of information was gleaned from a short article in "The Guardian" on Dec. 7th. In addition it was stated that cave accidents are rarely fatal, only one death having occurred in 1964 (A man was drowned while swimming in underground waters). The Mountain Rescue Committee's accident report for 1964 states that only six caving accidents were reported in that year, as against 147 accidents on the hills.

J.C.R.

MENDIP MINERIES MISCELLANY - Part One.

The story starts about three centuries B.C. for it is known that the dwellers in the Meare and the later Glastonberry Lake villages had access to locally - produced lead. It is also possible that they had an overseas market with the hardy merchants from the Middle East who brought their pottery and other wares to barter.

When the Roman imperialists occupied Wessex, not without some opposition from the natives, they soon got to work on modernising the existing production methods. Whether or not the natives were paid for the lead which was expropriated and shipped to the continent via Gaul to Rome for the benefit of the Empire is not known, but certainly there must have been some form of paid employment to account for the large number of Roman coins found in the area, especially in places where no Roman legionary would be expected to live.

Also, the quantity of lead produced indicates a far greater labour force than is accounted for by the small Roman settlements on Mendip. These could not have housed more than a century or so of soldiers, and there are no villas or regional governors as far as we know.

Communications were quite adequate for the transport of the large "pigs" of lead, weighing as much as 200 lbs. each. The main highway through Chaterhouse, the most important Roman station in the area, ran westwards to Brean Down where a headland gives ample protection for anchorage. To the east, the road crosses the Fosseway north of Frome and heads straight for Sorviodunum or Sarum, the old name for Salisbury, still to be seen on milestones. From here the choice lies between the

south coast ports of Weymouth, Poole or Southampton, or the Thames at Londinium. Mendip lead has been found at various points along the road in both directions; some has even been dug up in Gaul (Normandy and Brittany).

The Romans were also the first to make use of the small amount of silver present in the lead. Their coins were almost certainly minted locally. Both these and the "hallmarks" on the lead suggest that within three years of crossing the Channel, they had brought the Mendip lead industry from small surface "Gruffs" to efficient extraction of purer lead from deeper veins.

Only the surface skin has been removed from the hidden Roman story of Charterhouse, and principally by the observations of two men, Sir Richd. Colt Hoare, an antiquary of Trowbridge and the Rev. J. Skinner who was rector of Camerton from 1800 to 1839, whose hobby was that of tracing ancient roads.

In the four fields around Charterhouse Green by Manor Farm, they discovered the outlines of a Roman town covering some 70 acres. This may be treated with some suspicion as later writings by Skinner show him to have had a lively imagination, but in 1867 a firm was engaged in recovering surface lead refuse of the old miners in Town Field, on the west side of the road to Paywell Farm from Charterhouse.

They found the soil and grass so impregnated with lead that no animals could survive on it, and also, beneath the surface, there were lumps of lead ore mixed with smelted lead. Further excavation revealed well-made drains, and later the foundations of stone buildings were found.

It appears that the main centre of Roman mining was in the upper part of Fiellet Bothm (Velvet Bottom) also known as Blackmoor. The Romans used the small surface stream for washing their ore, and then carried it to the furnaces, built of sandstone, in the Town Field. Their houses were situated in the Rains Batch Field.

It seems likely that the settlement was known to them as Hidunum, which was later called Hydon. The name Charterhouse was given much later. In 1235 Richard I gave Jocelin, Bishop of Bath, leave to dig for lead at Hidun in the Forest of Mendip. In the reign of Henry II, the monastery of Chartreuse was given lands at Witham and Hinton. Hinton became known as Hinton Charterhouse, which remains still, and Hidun was known as Hidun or Hydon Charterhouse. But in this case Hydon has been forgotten. Before long, the monks found out that their lands were worth more than mere wool and they obtained the right to mine for lead from Edward I in 1283.

To be continued.

Arthur Cox.