

MENDIP CAVING GROUP.

NEWSLETTER NO. 42.

FEBRUARY 1966.

ANNUAL DINNER.

The Group's Annual Dinner will be held on Saturday, March 26th. 1966 at 8 p.m. at the Cave Man Restaurant, Cheddar. All members and unlimited numbers of friends will be welcome. Tickets, price 16/- each (including tip - for the waitresses, not Pedro) now available from the Secretary. A chance to drink after closing time not to be missed. Tickets may also be obtained from Tony Fitzgibbon, Pete Goddard and Tony Knibbs.

GENERAL MEETING.

The Annual General Meeting of the Group will be held at the Cottage, Nordrach on Mendip on Saturday, March 26th. (Same day as the Dinner) at 4 p.m.

Items for inclusion on the agenda including any proposals to amend the Constitution and Rules must reach the Secretary by Friday, March 11th. 1966. Nominations for the 1966/1967 Committee must reach the Secretary by the same date.

Brian Mee.CAVING REPORTS.Pinner Flint Mine.- January 9th. 1966.

The ritual of changing into caving clothes generally takes place in surroundings where such things are accepted as normal. The edge of an allotment in Pinner with a brightly lit main highway and cosy suburban houses only yards away seemed a strange place to make our caving preparations. Viewed from a warm living room the sight of Tony Fitzgibbon, Roy Townshend, Tony Ingold and I shivering in our underwear on this frosty Sunday night would have appeared out of place. Suggestions as to how the acetelene lamps could be watered (we'd forgotten the water-bottle, of course) would have been even more out of place; We settled for tapping Tony's radiator.

For security reasons the exact location of the mine entrance shaft cannot be given here. I can, however, say that having a native guide is no assurance of following the shortest route to the small, wooded hollow where a manhole cover marks the forty-five foot entrance shaft.

A nearby hawthorn tree provides a good belay point and the climb, which is free-hanging and easy, begins in the 5

foot diameter, circular shaft. The warmer air in the shaft made the descent more inviting.

The shaft is brick-lined to within about eight feet of the earth slope where a change to solid chalk occurs. The network of mine passages totals about half a mile and is excavated on a right-angled system of main roads and offset headings. The passages are well cut and vary between about 5 and 10 feet wide. Passage height varies according to the local vertical interval between the main flint bands which were worked and shows a further 5 feet deviation where a third flint band has been uncovered. Total variation is from around 8 to 20 feet in height. The chalk walls show extensive fracturing over the surface but not to sufficient depth to provoke any marked collapse; the floor remains relatively free of debris. Perhaps the most striking feature is the passage roof which is near perfectly white and quite flat over long stretches. Where a roof fall occurs the thickness of the chalk roof is seen to be only a few inches. Fallen material consists of a fine silver or yellow sand with well-rounded brown flint pebbles having a black "skin".

One or two of the roof falls look rather suspect and may, in fact, be debris slopes marking filled-in shafts from the surface. A second entrance shaft is accessible from the mine level but is blocked up at surface level. Some fine fungus growths were noted in association with damp wood. One growth was particularly interesting; a piece of wood about 12" long stood on the floor propped upright between chalk fragments. From the top of the wood a fine fibrous fungus extended downwards over the wood and chalk fragments to fan out over the floor in an extending circle. The subject would make a very good photograph.

In view of the close proximity of extending suburbia it would be a useful exercise to make a complete survey of the mine before a block of flats appears over the top of the entrance. This matter is due to receive some attention soon.

Tony Knibbs.

South Wales, 29th./30th. January -
Ogof Ffynnon Ddu and Dan yr Ogof.

A motley crew descended O.F.D. on Saturday, namely, six M.C.G. members plus a party of five from Croydon Caving Club who asked if they might tag on. The trip itself was very interesting and wet though of no great duration - approx. 4½ hours. The newly wet-suited members caused much amusement by leaping into every available pool uttering yells of glee and occasionally of dismay when some pools proved deeper than expected.

We followed the very lively stream and branched off into the Rawl Series. After a stop to photograph the "Bee's Knees" etc. and another, shortly afterwards, for some grub (kindly provided by C.C.C.!) we made our way out via the

Escape Route. Most noticeable of all the comments regarding the Wire Traverse was "hairy".

At the break of dawn on Sunday morning (actually it was 9.30 a.m.) we tottered off in the company of Bill Little (S.F.C.C.) who kindly acted as our guide, to Dan yr Ogof. There was some apprehension as it had been raining quite hard of late and the level of the lakes had yet to be ascertained. The door unshackled by Bill, we made our way through the show cave. It's amazing how dreary show caves look when they aren't flooded.

At the first lake we waited a few minutes while Bill went back for another Nife cell; as he kept bumping into things and couldn't see, he decided that his light was not good enough and went off muttering that he could probably see as well with a flag-end.

Lights in order we plunged into the first lake to the accompaniment of groans from those without wet-suits. The water was icy cold and covered with foul grey scum. The rapids normally flowing between the third and second lakes were not to be seen, as the water level was well above them. It soon became too deep to wade and a vigorous burst of swimming ensued. The roof soon lowered leaving an air-space of only 5 or 6 inches; It was impossible to stand, and this for 60 feet or so! Progress for about 20 feet was made by some members but a conference resulted, very wisely I think, in our going no further. A disappointing trip for it is not until the lakes are passed that the cave opens out. Never mind a', we're all still here to try again another day.

Pete Goddard.

Longwood/August, 12th./13th. February.

A total of 28 people stayed at the Cottage this weekend, 19 of whom helped in the clean-up of the Longwood/August system on Saturday. Pete and Joan donned wet-suits and rushed to the cave as soon as they arrived on Saturday afternoon, but were too late to do anything except help the weary workers up the entrance pitch. Judging from the weight of the sacks which were dragged out, quite a lot of rubbish was removed. Three people, Inglod, Pitman and Brace, also went down Longwood/August on Sunday. Everyone found the 'Operation' a worthwhile idea, and it is to be hoped that next year's assault will have the same excellent support.

Weekend 19th./20th. February.

A diversity of caving trips took place; assaults were made on Goatchurch and Pinetree (by Pedro and scouts), on Stoke Lake (by Tony Fitz and scouts), on Lamb Deer (by John Evans, Judy and friends) and on Blackmoor (by Pete Hunt, Tony Fitz and scouts). Pete Goddard completed laying Vinly tiles on the kitchen floor - a job which was begun the previous weekend by Pete, Pat and Tony Fitz.

KEEP UP TO DATE.

Our library is now receiving "The Mendip Caver". This publication, edited by Tony Oldham, sets out to print up-to-date news of Mendip discoveries, digs, major club developments, and to act as a general gossip column. Particularly useful is its reporting of cave closures, access restrictions etc. The publication is not connected with any one club, and for this reason its content covers a wider field than is generally available in club newsletters.

The first page of the February issue of "The Mendip Caver" is devoted to Blackmoor. In addition, new extensions to Stoke 8 and a possible bypass of Sump I in Stoke Lane are reported. The article written by Raymond Gigon of the S.C.M.N. in their bulletin, describing their visit to Mendip in July, is also reviewed, but no mention of their hosts - Us. Shame!

A copy of the index to Vol. I, Nos. 1-12 is provided with this issue and makes it easier to locate articles, especially those concerned with cave digs, access etc.

INTO THE SUMP JACK -- I'M ALRIGHT.

Increasing numbers of cavers these days wear wet-suits. These are excellent articles, keeping the wearer warm in extreme cold. I think we have all experienced the sudden drop off in strength resulting from immersion in cold water and when clad only in old cast-offs!

There is however, a danger when parties descend arduous caves and some members are wet-suited and others are not. The blissful warmth of a wet-suit can make one quite oblivious to the agonies being suffered by those not so fortunate. In fact, I have seen some friction caused amongst members, the wet-suiters insisting that so-and-so can't possibly be cold!

So please be warned, take care when some are wet-suited and others are not and base the length and difficulty of your trip on the capabilities of the cold and wet members.

Pete Goddard.

YET ANOTHER.

Great activity and shiny black police cars at Priddy Green on Saturday evening (12th. Feb.) indicated that another Swildons rescue was under way. An 18 year old Bristol caver had to be assisted up the 40 ft. pitch after suffering from exhaustion and exposure. Rumour has it that he was wearing only jeans and anorak; as Mendip was saturated and the 40ft. pitch extremely wet, it seems rather silly to have attempted the trip in such meagre attire. It also goes without saying that those blokes who removed the pipe in the first place have another endangered life to their 'credit'.

J.C.R.

..... AND ANOTHER.

An Exbridge caver had to be rescued from St. Cutnbert's Swallet on Sunday, 20th. February. It was reported that he received head injuries after a fall.

START MOONING AROUND.

Some vacancies will soon occur for an out-of-this-world caving trip. The area is very new and almost completely unexplored, and there are high hopes of spacious systems. Main qualifications for members wishing to attend are a liking for cheese (Cheddar of course) and if possible the possession of mouse-like features.

Pete Goddard.

QUOTE: by the Hon. Recorder, Simon.

"I did some work on the library last night" !

LECTURE REPORTS.

Cave Photography.

The last lecture in the 1965/66 winter lecture programme of the Pengelly Research Centre was well attended. Dennis Kemp of S.W.C.C. spent the first part of the programme in describing general 'above ground' photographic methods. The second part consisted of a series of stills and tape-recordings of the S.W.C.C. Balinka Pit Expedition of 1954. A few technical points were raised during the post-lecture discussion, but emphasis for the most part was on how to choose one's subject, and how to make best use of the transparencies after they have been processed - lecture presentation etc.

J.J.R.

CAVE COMMUNICATIONS - Notes taken at the November Lecture given by Dr. H. Lord.

Under certain circumstances yelling and whistling is a fairly satisfactory method of communicating underground, but sometimes, as in Gaping Gill, all sounds are rendered inaudible due to great depth and the sound of falling water

Sometimes instead of being amusing, lack of communication can be extremely dangerous. One instance of this occurred recently. A caver descending a mine shaft on a chair winch suddenly found himself rapidly being immersed in icy cold water. When the mineshaft was depth probed the week before, it was found to be 300 ft. deep. The cavers when they made the descent did not take into account rising water due to recent rainfall. To his detriment the man in the chair found that the water level had risen 50 ft., and by sheer luck he escaped with a soaking. Another person might not be so lucky.

There are several fairly cheap methods of communications available to cavers. These can be divided into two

categories, (a) Methods incorporating a conductor (b) Methods using no conductor. Those using an insulated conductor give probably the cheapest and fairly adequate communication. The most widely used of these is the G. P. O./and Army Field Telephone. In dry caves this gives excellent results for distances up to 13 miles, using a single cable and earth pegs. It has the added advantage of having a "calling-up" system (90 volt hand generator and bell). It has two major disadvantages, weight and liability to corrosion after being used in wet caves. This is mainly due to its being waterproof, which means that once the water gets in it cannot get out. Corrosion is prevented by baking the telephone in the oven after use.

Many cavers use the D.L.R. ex-Army earphones. These have a range of up to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile using 5 amp twin flex, and are cheap ($\frac{3}{6}$) and easy to carry, weighing only a few ounces. They can also be made completely waterproof, but lack a 'calling-up' device. This means that if this system is used, one man each end has to be listening-in continuously.

Possibly useful in big digs is the system now in use in modern coal mines. This consists of a "miner-proof" telephone handpiece, and a transmitter-loudspeaker, which can easily relay messages to several people.

Systems of communications using uninsulated conductors i.e. radios, have limited application in caving, due to the absorption of radio waves by rock. However for use on medium-length winch pitches they are ideal. One of these radio transmitters/receivers is marketed under the name of "Inductaphone" - working at 450 K/cycles. The cost of this is approx. £4.

Method of communication using no conductor consists of two 150 watt amplifiers, housed in ammunition boxes, and connected at their respective outputs to a large amount of wire arranged in as large a circle as possible. This sets up a magnetic flux field in a vertical plane which, with a wire coil diameter 40 ft., can be detected at distances of 600 - 800 ft. above. Variations in amplifiers give variations in flux field, and therefore can be detected by the other amplifier. Unfortunately the power required is proportional to distance cubed. This means that rather large amplifiers are required for any larger distance. This would prove very expensive and therefore could not be widely used.

Tony Ingold

MEET PROGRAMME.

Mar. 12/13th St. Cuthberts Swallet
Mar. 26/27th, A.G.M. & Dinner; Cottage maintenance.
Easter Ystradfellte, South Wales.