

MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 43

MARCH 1966

AN U.L. GENERAL MEETING - 26th. March, 1966

The meeting was opened shortly after 4.00 p.m., with Robbie Charnock as chairman. Thirty-four people were present, of whom 16 were full members, 5 probationary members, and 13 guests and prospective members. The minutes had been circulated previously in Newsletter No. 32, and were taken as read.

Secretary's Report (Brian Lee)

Membership of the Group is now 44, eight being probationary members. As the original planning permission for the Cottage was only for a period of two years, we must re-apply in June. Permission has not yet been formally granted for our dig at Blackmoor; it must be well-fenced to comply with Bristol Waterworks requirements. (This was in fact carried out on Sunday, 27th. - Ed.)

Treasurer's Report (Tony Fitzgibbon)

Balance sheets were circulated to all members. Cash in hand on 10th. March, 1966 was £121. 0. 11½, but it was pointed out that there will be a number of large items of expenditure in the near future. As at 10th. March, the cash in hand in the C.P.F. was £23. 17. 2. The Group still owes £40 to members under the Loan Scheme. Tony announced the Committee's decision that the Cottage Purchase Fund be wound up, and a Land Purchase Fund set up. No expenditure will take place from this fund until such time that we buy a permanent site for the Cottage. The fund will be kept in a deposit account in the bank (as will any amount over £50 in the General Fund) and all interest will go into the L.P.F.

Pete Hunt asked how the L.P.F. will be accumulated, to which Tony replied that the Thursday collections and any other donations will be put into the fund.

Malcom said that he approved of this, and asked if a percentage of cottage fees could be channelled into the L.P.F. There was considerable discussion on this point, and eventually it was decided that the matter should be brought up at the next H.Y.G.M. Meanwhile the Committee will transfer sums from the G.F. as and when available.

Malcom also asked if, as in the case of a lease, we are required to leave the Cottage behind when we vacate our present site. Answer:- No.

Auditors' Report (given by Robbie Charnock)

The written report by Ian Leake and John Banker was to be put up on the notice board.

### Meet Secretary's Report (Tony Hibbs)

A Meet Programme was produced at the beginning of this year. Approximately 40 people have booked to go to Co. Clare on the Group's Summer Meet; Pete Goddard is now in charge of the arrangements as Mig and Pauline are unable to go. Set- of suits and 22 Nife Cells have been bought and resold to members without profit. It is hoped to order another batch of Nife Cells later in the year.

### Editor's Report (Joan Robinson)

Newsletters have been brought out regularly during the past year. Members are beginning to help the Editor by writing articles, and it is to be hoped that this trend will continue. The mailing list has increased substantially and we send our publications to a number of other clubs. The Journal is now at the typing stage and should be ready shortly; when it gets to the final stages help will be required in assembling.

The Group is now a member of the Survey Scheme, and surveys may be obtained from the Editor. The Club is to buy \$25 worth of surveying equipment in the near future. Malcom said he was worried about spending so much out of the G.F. but Joan explained that some of it will be met from profit made on surveys. In reply to another question, Mig and Joan replied that the Group intends to begin a survey project in the near future.

### Tacklemaster's Report (Pete Goddard)

The Group's stock of tackle was reported as follows:-

Electron 12" spacing	-	310 feet
" 10" "	-	230 "
Lifeline, Ulstron	-	450 feet
" Nylon	-	600 "

We hope to gradually replace the old 12" ladder with new 10" ladder.

Mike Brace asked if Pete thought Ulstron rope was the best type for use in caves. Pete replied that there is much argument over this point, but under the conditions to which we subject our ropes it is quite satisfactory. One must be extremely careful when using carbide lamps as Ulstron melts very easily.

### Recorder's Report (Read by Pedro)

Simon Knight apologised for his absence, and expressed strongly his hopes for speedy completion of the library cupboard in the Cottage, in order that the library can be brought to Mendip and made more easily available to members.

### Cottage Warden's Report (Pat Walsh)

The Cottage is now paying for itself, and is even beginning to make a profit. Because of the large bookings which occur for some weekends, the Committee has drafted a Bed-booking Scheme (Details elsewhere in this newsletter). All beds were numbered during the A.G.M. weekend. More cupboards are to be built, but until they have actually been constructed

they will not be included in the booking scheme. In answer to a question from Pete Munt, Pat said that the old rule, that members have the right to ask non-members to vacate beds if necessary, will no longer apply

Work will begin on the porch immediately after Easter, and the whole job is expected to cost about £25. Pat appealed for help to build the porch. Mike Brace asked if the porch would be heated in order to dry caving gear. Answer:- No.

A cess-pit will be started in the summer so planning permission must be obtained shortly. (much reference to stinging nettles was made at this point in the proceedings!)

It has been decided that in the interest of people using the Cottage, there is to be no smoking in bed, and card-playing must be confined to the second table, so that the bigger table can be left free for eating purposes.

In reply to a question from Joan, Pat eventually agreed that the library should be built before the cess-pit is begun.

#### Constitution and Rules.

A draft Constitution and Rules prepared by the Committee was put before the meeting for approval. The following points were discussed:-

Para. 3 (e) "members' wives. On payment of the associate membership fee, the wives of full members may have the status of members at the cottage. They may not vote or stand for election to the committee" - This new membership class was proposed by Geoff Davies, and was passed unanimously.

Para. 6 "Members joining after June 30th. in any year will pay subscriptions pro rata".

Para. 10 (f) "A member may not hold more than £10 of Group funds in the form of cash for more than 7 days".

Para. 18 (b) A proposal by Malcom that "(other than candles)" be deleted was defeated.

With the above amendments the draft Constitution and Rules, proposed by Pedro, was passed unanimously.

#### Any Other Business.

Malcom Cotter suggested that members might like to compete for a 'Digging Trophy' in the form of a pewter mug, which he is prepared to donate. Suggestions were made that it should be awarded on an hourly basis. Further details may be obtained from Malcom who will be drafting a set of rules. Arthur Cox proposed a vote of thanks.

#### Elections

The 1965/1966 Committee was returned unopposed. James Gibb and Robbie Charnock were elected as Hon. Auditors.

#### ANNUAL DINNER, 26th. March

Sixty-two people, looking almost unrecognisable in

their posh togs, turned up at the Cave Man Restaurant on Saturday evening. General opinion is that it was a most enjoyable event and we were fortunate in having amongst our guests Mr. and Mrs. Young from Lower Farm (Longwood). Big proposed a toast to the Guests, which was suitably replied to by Men Dawe. The evening livened up towards the end and a number of our guests returned to the Cottage for coffee.

#### CLUB NEWS.

O.F.D. Leader. The South Wales Caving Club has accepted Pete Goddard as an O.F.D. leader for the M.C.G., in place of Pete Munt who has relinquished his leadership.

Eire 1966. Our bookings are now confirmed by British Rail and the cost of transport across the Irish Sea will amount to £7. 0. 0. per person. This does not include the cost of petrol and Guinness etc. The money MUST BE PAID TO PETE GODDARD BY MAY 1st.

Bed-booking Scheme. Due to pressure of numbers wishing to sleep at the Cottage on some weekends, a bed-booking scheme is to be operated as from 1st. April, 1966. A bed may be reserved by writing ones name in a book which will remain at the Cottage, or by asking any other member to do so. Bookings may also be made on Thursday evenings via Pat. This means that bookings received by post must reach Pat by the Thursday previous to the weekend for which beds are required. Cancellations will be received up to 9.00 p.m. on Thursday; if a cancellation is not made by this time, cottage fees must be paid. This scheme means that all mattresses and inflated airbeds left at the Cottage become part of the Cottage fittings and cannot be claimed by individuals. Members must therefore take airbeds and mattresses (which belong to them) home if they do not wish them to be used by other people. When sufficient food cupboards are built they will be bookable with the beds and will be numbered accordingly.

Tackle. 100' of Ulstron rope is missing from the Cottage. This is an expensive item, and anyone who knows its whereabouts should get in touch with the Tacklemaster immediately.

The Club has purchased six helmets with adjustable headbands. This brings the total number of Club helmets to 10.

One of our ladders has recently suffered a broken rung, due to its being belayed over a projecting flake of rock .....

Fungi and Algae - No! We haven't got them in the Cottage! but Robbie Charnock would be interested to hear of any occurrences

of fungi or algae which occur in caves. A description of the organism, and of its environment, would be appreciated. Get in touch with Robbie at Thursday evening meetings (at the Royal Oak, Brentford) or at 128 Cavendish Avenue, Ealing, W. 13

#### Novice and Inexperienced Cavers.

It has been brought to the notice of the Committee that novice and inexperienced cavers have been taken on difficult cave trips under wet conditions. There have been a couple of cases of near-exhaustion, and this state of affairs must be remedied without delay. Especially where women cavers are involved the first signs of exhaustion must be watched for very carefully. Also, wet-suited, experienced members may tend to forget the adverse effects on physical ability and morale that cold, wet conditions can produce. It does nothing to improve the confidence of a novice caver when he or she has to be hauled up a ladder pitch by the lifeline or manhandled through the last part of a caving trip. New members on a caving party must be told that they should ask to return to the surface when they know that they are beginning to feel exhausted, and the leader must base the length and nature of the trip on the weakest member of his party. On no account should a party split up so that groups of less than three (but preferably four) people are formed. It should be pointed out that although the entrance pitch of Longwood/August is easy for those who have rushed up and down it many times, it can be tricky for novice cavers especially when tired.

J.C.R.

#### PRIMROSE POT ATTEMPT.

One night, in the Queen Victoria, three of us decided we were small enough to attempt a descent of Primrose - a decision which turned out to be quite unjustified. The friends who accompanied me were John Evans and Alan Wicks.

The weekend we chose was particularly bad, since the weather conditions had turned the usually dry cave, into a somewhat wet one. Also one member, John Evans, was recovering from 'flu and I myself did not have adequate clothing. Not to be beaten, we set out with 200' of ladder and 200' of rope.

We reached the entrance of the cave, and came across some other cavers who were just coming out. They assured us "It be wet down thur today".

Thus encouraged, we could think of no excuses for backing out, and decided to go down. The first part of the cave was quite easy, but after a while we came to a rift, down which we climbed to a small squeeze called,

quite rightly, Hallelujah Hole. Once we got through this, we were on to the traverse. This is a flat narrow rift which we had to cross. Having crossed the traverse we reached the Primrose Path, which is anything but easy. It is a very tight tortuous passage, ending in a small chamber which is the entrance to Primrose Pot.

I had heard that Primrose Pot had a tight entrance, but did not believe it until I tried to get through it myself. We decided that I, being the smallest, should go down first and ladder the first part of the pitch which was 30' to a ledge. I pushed myself down into the hole, through which a small stream also happened to be running, only to find that my shoulders would not go through, try as I might. By this time I was completely soaked and cold, and decided that perhaps someone else should try. Alan Ficks was next. He appears to be larger than myself, but apparently he is not, since after a lot of pushing and squeezing, and much to his surprise, he disappeared through the hole and found himself sitting on an iron bar over the pitch. At this point we were all so wet, cold and hungry that we decided to abandon the attempt.

After John and I had pulled Alan out of the squeeze, we sat down and ate two tins of sardines in tomato sauce between us. We slowly made our way out; bravely deciding to make another attempt at a more propitious time, as we wended our way back to the Queen Victoria.

Tony Ingold

#### A SUGGESTED PROJECT.

A lively discussion in the Cottage a few weeks ago about surveying surprised me by the number of people who expressed interest - but claimed they lacked financial and technical resources to pursue the subject.

Having given the matter some thought I consider we could well undertake a GROUP PROJECT incorporating a high percentage of survey work. The effort would involve an investigation of a chosen portion of Mendip Karst. An area which appeals to me from a number of viewpoints is BURREINGTON. The project in its most ambitious form would comprise 1) Surface Survey, 2) Underground Survey, 3) Geological Survey, 4) Measurement of water flow at sinks and risings, 5) Photography, 6) History, 7) Conclusions. Two Aspects - From the M.C.G. viewpoint, I think we should consider it from two standpoints, the scientific and financial. If we could make a thorough investigation as outlined above it would constitute a very useful Karstic study.

A project of this kind, if carefully produced and printed, would cover the costs to the M.C.G. - (not to individual members, of course).

The project would need a considerable amount of

planning and co-ordination, so we would have to set up a team structure; there could be an over-all Director of Operations, and each of the sections outlined above would have its own 'Sub-Director'. In addition we would need an Instrument Keeper and Inspector, a Report Presentation Manager, and a Final Publication Manager.

As far as fieldwork is concerned each individual portion, such as a survey of Rod's Pot, for example, would have shared copyright between the small working team and the M.C.G. project as a whole so that if a member wishes to make any future reference to the work he has done, he may do so freely. The whole exercise would have to be timed in phases for smooth operation.

The above is within our grasp provided that a high proportion of M.C.G. members are interested. The main aspect would be a team one, but with full credit to all individuals concerned.

Malcom Cotter.

#### PROGRESS AT BLACKMOOR - PART I.

A wheelbarrow has been donated by Pete Munt to aid in the removal of spoil from the top of the excavation, and a chain-link fence was erected around the shaft on 27th. March.

Sunday, 26th. February. It was apparent that entry could be made to the chamber and several people took the opportunity to go down. When Pete Goddard told me that the stream was running at the bottom I could not resist the temptation to go down myself - my first underground trip since I have been back in the U.K. What came into view at the bottom held me spellbound for at least 10 mins.; a fairly large stream ran along the lowest passage before plunging down the 7' of excavated shaft. There was no back-up of water which disappeared directly through a mass of clean-washed rocks at the bottom. I had the impression that only about half the water sinking outside actually passed through our part of the cave.

Malcom Cotter.

#### PROGRESS AT BLACKMOOR - PART II.

The rapid removal of debris from the shaft has recently brought about problems of diminishing storage area on the surface. Our first job was to pursue the solution of this problem by completing modifications to the jib and anchor points of the hoist rig. This was to enable a wheelbarrow to be positioned below the skip. A suitable trench had to be cut through the old spoil heap through which the wheelbarrow could be run out to the edge of a nearby depression. The unfortunate combination of thunder, lightning, rain and hail cast over our

labours an atmosphere of "Western Front, 1916". Despite distractions, the problem of debris removal was virtually solved by Saturday evening. The last few minutes of daylight were spent opening the way into the already explored chamber running in a northerly direction from the shaft at -20'.

The very intensive efforts made on Sunday, 26th February, owed its success, in no mean measure, to the valuable assistance of Ken Anstey and the Blackmoor (!) Caving Group, combined with really fine weather. The labour force numbered about 17 and at times the casual observer would have gained the impression that here was an attempt, by a well-trained band of demented fiends, to prove that men and machines could compete on equal terms. For one period of about an hour the loading and raising of the skip was outpacing the removal of spoil by the wheelbarrow. Several very large rocks were battered to death as the shaft deepened. One rock of impressive proportions was entrusted to the hoist rig and took 11 men to raise it. The theoretical ratio of weight lifted to effort required is 2:1. Assuming each man was pulling about 90 - 100 lbs. on the rope and allowing some friction losses the rock was estimated to weigh about 14 cwt. Nothing broke! The sum total of debris removed amounted to approximately 250 cu. ft. weighing close on 5 tons. The shaft is now about 23' deep (18' from the working ledge).

With the reopening of the known cave, several people made short trips down to the lowest rift where a strong stream was running. This may account for the earlier report of a dull, distant rumbling sound being heard when weather conditions were rather similar. Holes and cavities are still very much in evidence on the down-dip sides of the shaft and, at one spot in particular, the wall is deeply undercut. Once we are able to walk upright into the chamber it might be worthwhile considering some alteration to the policy of clearing the full area of the shaft. Conditions found during the next two digging sessions will dictate any decision of this nature. The necessity for shoring and a reduction in room for hammer work would not be gladly welcomed.

DON'T DELAY - DIG TODAY!

Tony Knibbs

#### LIBRARY ADDITIONS.

Severn Valley Caving Club Newsletter, Vol. 4 Nos. 1 - 4, are now in our library. These newsletters are very ambitious and yield interesting and frequently amusing information. Especially for the regular visitor to Mendip and 'The Hunters', Paul Allen produces a wealth of snippets and plenty of mud-slinging.



### A Cave Called "Mendip"

"We had learnt alot that weekend, about a cave called "Mendip" somewhere near Bristol with a bewildering number of pitches, about another somewhere up north called "Pennygint", about a place called "Hunters" which was apparently a great caving centre, about electric lamps called "Knives" ..... about wet-suits and dry-suits (why did anyone buy wet-suits when they could keep dry? we wondered)".

Read this treatise on initiation into the delights of caving in the Exeter University Speleological Society Newsletter Vol. 2, No. 1, Now in our library.

The two most recent issues of the Plymouth Caving Group Newsletter and Journal contain a number of articles on mines, and descriptions of numerous small caves in the South-west including Napps Cave, Ilfracombe and Bickington Pot. A detailed report of the William Pengelly Cave Research Centre 1966 Symposium, "Living in the dark", makes worthwhile reading to those of us who were unable to attend in person.

An extension to Swildon's Hole, North West Stream Passage, was mentioned in the national press (Daily Mail, 7th. March, 1966) and described in detail in "The Mendip Caver", March, 1966. A grade 2 survey using the same grid system as in Stanton's survey is also included in the Mendip Caver's report. The new extension was discovered and surveyed by members of South West Essex Technical College Caving Club. Apart from this article, and some reviews of old Somerset literature, the March issue of this publication contains little except anti S.V.C.C. propaganda.

"Studies in Speleology", published by the Association of the William Pengelly Cave Research Centre (Vol. 1, Parts 2 - 3) contains the following articles:-  
Kowalski, K. - Cave Studies in China Today.  
Schmidt, V.A. - Problems of Cave Conservation in the U.S.A.  
Franke, H.W. - The Theory Behind Stalagmite Shapes.  
Mason-Williams, A. - The Growth of Fungi in Caves in Great Britain.  
Watson, A - Observing the Natural Behaviour of Bats in Flight.  
Sutcliffe, A.J. - Planning England's First Cave Studies Centre.  
Rennie, M.A. - The Presentation of a Cave Survey.  
Brothwell, D. - On the Accidental Discovery of Human Remains in Caves and Rock-shelters.  
Deraniyagala, P.E.P. - Some Present Day Problems of Cave Research in Ceylon.

Riley, W.D. - Caves and the County Naturalists Trusts.

For those people intending to take part in the proposed M.C.G. surveying project, Mike Rennie's article comes at an opportune moment. This issue of "Studies in Speleology" contains a number of articles of interest to the general caver as well as to the more specialised reader. Well worth a couple of hours reading time.

J.C.R.

#### CARE OF THE NIFE NC113C CAP LAMP.

Whilst the exact age and condition of the recent supply of cap lamps is unknown there does exist a set of maintenance instructions which should be observed. The N.C.B. employs a team of experts working under rigidly controlled conditions for the purpose of lamp maintenance. The caver would do well to ensure that his cap lamp is regularly maintained to the best of his ability.

Charging - The NC113C cap lamp should be charged at 1.75 amps for 8 hours from a discharged state. The makers recommend a charging voltage of 4.2 to 5.4 volts. A general purpose 6 volt battery charger if a current of around 1.75 amps is available. Many such charging sets deliver 1.5 amps and, using this charging current, the charging time should be extended to 9 hours. Trickle charging at around 0.5 amp is not recommended and should only be used in emergency; the time should be extended to about 30 hours. If the lamp is put out of regular use it should be given a charge and discharge cycle at least once per month.

Electrolyte - The battery contains an electrolyte solution of caustic potash (Potassium hydroxide - KOH) and is, as the name implies, a strongly caustic alkaline solution. Any spillage should be washed off clothing or skin immediately with clean water. Burns should be treated with a weak acid such as vinegar (or Boric acid in the case of eye contamination). The electrolyte must not be contaminated with lead battery acid or damage may result. When mixing fresh electrolyte, always add the KOH crystals to the distilled water whilst stirring gently. Never add water to KOH crystals or spurling will result.

Topping Up. - The cells should be topped up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch above the plates with distilled water every fourth cycle of charge and discharge, or before the liquid falls below plate level. The condition of the electrolyte may be checked using a clean hydrometer - not one which has been used for acid batteries. The specific gravity should be between 1.150 and 1.200 measured after a charge has been given. If the specific gravity falls below 1.150 the electrolyte should be renewed. Dump out the old liquid and immediately replace with fresh liquid of 1.200 specific gravity. The battery should then be charged at 1.75 amps

for 16 hours before normal usage is resumed.

Headpiece - The headpiece is fitted with a 3.6 volt 1.0 amp main bulb and a 4.0 volt 0.3 amp pilot bulb. Use clean hands to change a bulb to avoid damaging the reflector. The reflector may be cleaned by wiping carefully with a soft cloth - never clean with metal polish or abrasive material. Check occasionally for ingress of water. Dry out headpiece and wipe contacts as necessary. For normal caving use the special bezel locking screw should be discarded.

General - Every three months, or more frequently as required, remove the battery cells from their rubber jackets, clean and dress with french Chalk and reassemble. Check that cell vent washers and sleeves are in good condition and replace as necessary. The cap lamps as supplied are fitted with nylon cell vents. These should be replaced by steel vents (Part No. 67416) to minimise the risk of leakage under caving conditions. Keep the cell-tops clean and dry. Renew fuses as necessary, first ascertaining the cause of a fuse failure - for example, a short circuit due to damage to cable or battery lid. Keep all contacts clean and bright using a light smear of pure petroleum jelly (vaseline). Do not use abrasives for cleaning contacts.

This cap lamp is not unbreakable or infallible. Always carry a spare main bulb and a fuse with you underground. For spare parts contact the Tacklemaster, Pete Goddard, who holds a spare parts list for the NC1130 cap lamp.

Tony Knibbs

#### MEET PROGRAMME.

Easter, April 8th. - 11th. SOUTH WALES.

A camp site is to be arranged at Ystradfellte, near the entrance to Porth Yr Ogof. In addition to a visit to this cave, we hope to explore a number of other caves in the Hepste and Mellte valleys. For the lazier ones amongst us, there are ample opportunities for walking amidst impressive river and moorland scenery - waterfalls galore! For further details, contact the Meet Secretary.

April 30th./May 1st. - MENDIP: Swildon's Hole, Vicarage Passage.

May 14th./15th. - MENDIP: G.B.Cave (Saturday).

#### COMMITTEE

Secretary - Brian Mee, 12 Cranbourne Drive, Pinner, Mdx.  
Treasurer - Tony Fitzgibbon, 265 Eastcote Rd., Ruislip, Mdx.  
Meet Secretary - Tony Knibbs, 2 Rectory Lane, Byfleet, Surrey  
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Recorder - Simon Knight, -40 Garrard Rd., Banstead, Surrey.  
Editor - Joann Robinson, 68 Cole Park Rd., Twickenham. Mdx.

The Editor apologises most profusely, mainly to herself,  
for this atrociously long newsletter. Rest assured I  
won't allow such a thing to happen again - my two  
typing fingers are worn down to tiny stumps.

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