

MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 45

MAY, 1966.

CLUB NEWS.

Cottage Progress. With the coming of warmer weather, Pat, Tony Fitz., and Pete G. were moved to begin building the front porch and changing annexe. The floor has already been constructed and wood for the walls is on order. An appeal was made at the A.G.M. for members to help to build the porch; where are the people who said they'd turn up?

At long last the library cupboard has been completed (by Pete Goddard) and the library will be transported to Mendip as soon as possible.

Secretary Moves. Due to the fact that he is taking that final plunge into matrimony, the Secretary is moving next month to:- 88 Seaton Gardens, Ruislip Manor, Middx. All correspondence should be addressed there forthwith. He will be on holiday (that's Pedro's way of saying 'honeymoon'), and unable to deal with co-respondents from June 25th. to July 10th.

Also. Mick Brace's new address is:- 8 Foxfield Close, Northwood, Middx.

Blackmoor Permission Granted. The Club has been notified that the Bristol Waterworks Company has given permission for us to continue digging at Blackmoor.

Jumble Sale. The Group's jumble sale will be held in the early part of the autumn. Scrounge everything possible from everyone possible. All jumble to Robbie Charnock please.

Film Show. On Thursday 19th. May, Malcolm showed a fine film of Blackmoor in relation to the Cheddar Gorge system. Malcolm intends giving us more of these informal film and slide shows, but we also hope that other members will come forth and show us their photographic efforts (masterpieces or otherwise).

Group Meets in Wet Caves. Newcomers to the Group and to Mendip caves are urged to ascertain their suitability to take part in the longer and wetter trips by asking older Group members' guidance. It is unpleasant for a leader to reject would-be participants immediately prior to embarking on such a trip. Many trips require anti-exposure clothing, an electric main lighting form, and a reasonable degree of caving experience. The lack of any one of these may hinder or even endanger an otherwise safe party.

Tony Knibbs.

G.B. EXTENSION.

A couple of weeks ago U.B.S.S. discovered 700' of new cave beyond the Ladder Dig. The extension consists, in part, of a large (100' high), chamber and contains some excellent formations.

COOPER'S HOLE, MAY 8th.

We spent the afternoon clearing sediment and rubbish from the railway track - a task which was aided by Don's 'Speleological Hoe' which was especially useful for removing smelly mud. The area is now ready for work to continue. The entrance chamber was almost totally flooded, the cart being under water. The terminal dig also had about 3' of water. Very heavy drip throughout the rift had removed top mud and some bones were revealed, which appeared to have been gnawed. A stream disappearing against the concrete wall did not reappear below, so we thought that there could be a way through the carpark side of the wall!

Malcolm Cotter.

BLACKMOOR SWALLET, MAY 7th/8th.

We deepened the shaft against the S.E. wall to a depth of 24' below the surface working ledge. At this stage the debris underfoot became increasingly loose, and working here was rather like working on an escalator. The rumbling continued to 26' depth at which point an opening was made into Don's Chamber.

Steady rain prevented any significant progress on Sunday. There remains little more than a day's work clearing the general debris level down to a depth of about 24', before the second and more interesting phase of work, digging in Don's Chamber, begins. The material seems to consist chiefly of clean rocks; the only mud is that which is slowly slumping into the chamber from the shaft. DON'T DELAY - DIG TODAY.

Tony Knibbs.

SAND ANALYSIS.

A qualitative analysis of sandy material found in the shaft in a large pocket gives the following lines on the spectrometer:- Copper, Cadmium/Arsenic, Arsenic, Antimony, Lead, Aluminium, Silicon, Phosphorous, Zinc, Silver, Iron, Manganese, Magnesium, Molybdenum, Calcium.

For comparison, a sample of black slag showed:- Copper/Arsenic, Iron, Arsenic, Antimony, Lead, Silicon, Phosphorous, Zinc, Manganese, Magnesium, Molybdenum.

Visual examination of the sand reveals what is almost certainly a fair proportion of charcoal. The sandy texture of the sample is accounted for by finely divided Calcium Carbonate (Limestone), as there does not appear to be much coarse Siliceous material. As expected the lines for Lead are very

thick. I hope that a quantitative analysis can be done in the near future.

Malcolm Cotter.

B.S.A. NATIONAL CONFERENCE.

The date of the National Conference organised by the British Speleological Association is September 9th.-12th. This year it is being held in Bristol and will be easy to attend; more details later from Pedro.

I'M TIRED, PHONE ME A 'COPTER.....

"The police can obtain even helicopters and explosives for cave rescue purposes if necessary" says Oliver Lloyd in the 1965 report of the Mendip Rescue Organisation. Relations with the police are described by him as "good".

The principal rescues of the year included 5 from Swildon's and 2 from Sidcot Swallet. Three of the Swildon's rescues were the result of the removal of the drainpipe at the Forty-Foot Pitch. One of the others involved three parties searching the lower series as far as Swildon's Six to find 4 cavers who had suffered a number of mishaps including being left with only one light between them. They were eventually discovered in Shatter Passage.

In Sidcot the 12 stone six-footer got through the squeeze in the final chamber but could not get back again. After food and benzedrine he was lead back via an alternative route by someone of similar build who had been out that way before.

Whenever possible "do-it-yourself" rescues on the Forty are being advocated. A pulley is kept permanently on the iron bar at Suicides Leap and 100' of rope can be obtained from Mr. Maine. He will also keep an emergency carrying sheet.

Pedro.

C.R.G.

The Cave Research Group (of which all M.C.G. members automatically have membership because the club pays a subscription) has decided to 'pull up its socks' and present a new image; a committee has been set up to organise the following:-

- 1.) More introductory and advanced weekend courses like that held at Keele, but in all caving regions.
- 2.) National and regional symposia on topics of general interest, individual caves, and local problems.
- 3.) Field courses - some in individual caves, others on the surface but all led by experts. Also summer camps at which research may be undertaken and tuition in speleology given.
- 4.) An annual lecture at the A.G.M. given by a leading speleologist as an honour by the Group.

They are also launching a campaign to preserve caves - not by more restrictions - but by trying to encourage a more

responsible attitude amongst cavers.

Other new ideas include more publications, and better liaison with other national and regional organisations. The C.R.G. are also keen to have cavers' ideas for anything new which they have not thought of themselves - if YOU have any suggestions pass them on through our committee.

Pedro

B.S.A. PUBLICATIONS.

The B.S.A. have written reminding us of their publications, the Bulletin, Cave Science, Proceedings, Speleological Abstracts. Details from Pedro.

POSTBAG. The following letter has been received by the Editor; 'Nuff said.

Hon. Editor,
Mendip Caving Group,

Dear Madam,

For several months I have enjoyed reading your excellent newsletter: excellent because I have found it to contain a pleasant mixture of news, views, articles and humour. It was in the last category that I included the paragraph "London Copy of the Cave Register?" by Malcolm Cotter in the most recent issue. However I have since learnt on good authority that this was intended to be serious and feel, therefore, that it must receive a reply.

The proposition made was that a copy of the Mendip Cave Register should be kept in London for the convenience of the likes of Mr. Cotter. But where in London? I believe it is a large place. Would a copy at Wapping Steps Public Library really be any more convenient to Mr. Cotter than the one in Wells? Why only London? It may be the capital of England but it is not the centre of the universe: That, as everyone knows, is the Hunter's Lodge. Why should there not be further copies in other centres of population such as Birmingham, Glasgow and Nempnett Thrubwell? This is, of course, the ideal, but who will pay for these copies? Will Mr. Cotter provide the £25 that each copy costs? Alternatively the caving clubs could pay - but this might curtail their caving activities as they would have no funds left. There is also the labour involved in preparing further copies; will Mr. Cotter provide some of this or will it further curtail his 'caving' time (which at present seems to consist of keeping novices at work in Blackmoor and so away from their well-earned refreshment on a Saturday evening).

To be more serious, the number of copies of the Register is determined by cost and as the one place common to all people caving on Mendip, is Mendip, then this is the

obvious place to keep the available copies. That there are two copies within 20 miles is for the greater convenience of those on Mendip. As it is extremely doubtful that anyone caves for all their non-sleeping-and-eating time, it should be easy enough to organise time for a visit to the County Library in Wells. Many other cavers manage it, so why not Mr. Cotter? Or is too much of his time spent in thinking up ill-thought-out comments for the newsletter?

Alternatives are for Mr. Cotter and his like to follow my example and leave the "Big Smoke" for the green hills of Somerset, or to purchase a copy of the Register for himself, or your club, or for a suitable London library. The Registry will shortly be preparing copies of the Register for those organisations and individuals who have requested them. If Mr. Cotter would care to request a copy we shall be very pleased to supply it. The cost will be 23gns. for the complete Register with maps and binder, or £10 for the pages only.

Finally it is very probable that within the next twelve months there will be a copy of the Register donated to the British Museum.

I remain, Madam, your fervent admirer,

Bryan Ellis

Chairman, Mendip Cave Registry.

oh oh oh

NO NEED TO BE STUCK IN SCOTLAND.

Grampian S.G. (Edinburgh) have set up a rescue organisation to operate throughout Scotland. Callout is via Edinburgh police (CALedonian 1212).

The group is also preparing a registry of caves in Scotland (600 already listed) and are seeking information from anyone who can help.

YOUR CHANCE TO SUE.

Grampian S.G. are planning a magazine which they claim will be the "Private Eye" of the caving world. They are optimistic that anyone attacked would be more likely to write a cutting reply than sue - they obviously don't know anything about penurious Southern cavers who would have no scruples about making easy money!

AUGUST BANK HOLIDAY.

Those people attending the club meet in Yorkshire may wish to join a Cave Research Group field meeting in the Castleton area led by Dr. T.D. Ford. Aspects to be demonstrated include geomorphical history, geology and speleogenesis. Meet at Castleton village carpark, 10.30 a.m. August 28th. 1966 accompanied by a packed lunch!

ELDON POTHOLE CLUB have dug a connection between Oxlow Cavern and Giants Cave, the combined system being the deepest in Britain - over 640'

SWILDON'S AND LONGWOOD/AUGUST - April 30th./May 1st.

To avoid being caught out in the midday sun, four members donned wet-suits on the Saturday morning and made for the cool shade of Swildon's. Mick Brace, Brian Pittman, John Evans and the writer entered the cave at 10.30 a.m. and caught up with a party of three from Camborne at the Mud Sump where bailing was in progress. Reaching the first Trouble soon after, we set the siphon pipes going and commenced bailing, assisted by the Camborne group who arrived shortly afterwards. A good airspace of 6 inches allowed easy passage and we were soon at the second Trouble which did not require bailing. Now somewhat filthy, we shambled, slid and crawled along the interesting, and often well-decorated, route to Vicarage Passage and the link with Swildon's II Stream Passage. From here a detour was made to Vicarage Pot where we muttered that we should have brought a ladder; a rawl-bolted handline looked uninviting. Retracing our steps we descended to Stream Passage, another handline giving slight assistance here. Paddling and floundering, a visit was made to Sump II before we halted to consume a squalid nosh of sardines, Verkade biscuits and chocolate. Thus fortified (mortified?) the party was soon through Sump I, almost warm in wet-suits, and on its way upstream. The Forty Foot Pot was in fine fettle despite the preceding few days of fine weather and provided a noisy and sporting climb. The round trip was much enjoyed at a leisurely pace and took 6½ hours.

Sunday dawned bright and hot. Two parties sought shelter in the Longwood/August System. At 11 a.m. Pete Goddard, Joan Robinson, the writer, Phil Ebbage, Peter Virgo and Mike Lovell entered the cave followed later by Mick Brace, Brian Pittman and Mike Nightingale. Both parties had similar intentions of a visit to August Hole Stream Passage; the former choosing the Great Chamber and Christmas Crawl route and the latter manfully pursuing a very wet complete August Hole route. The copious amount of water gave a good sporting character to the Stream Passage particularly at the Pots. We followed the stream to its present limit and then climbed the flowstone cascade into the Oxbow. Our tools and maypole are still surviving storage and it seems time to press our previous explorations in this vicinity. After a brief pause for food we began the return journey upstream and finally emerged into the heat of Longwood Valley after a pleasant 5 hours.

Tony Knibbs.

SCALING IN TEMPURONG. (Continued from M.C.G. Newsletter No. 41)

The rotten ladder which we had chanced upon led up an exposed vertical rock face which I attempted to climb. However, after a few tries I considered that it could not be done without some preparation in the form of scaling gear. In fact, that evening I said that I did not think we could make it, but Norma said that if the guano diggers could get up, so could we. This

comment increased my determination - but not my confidence!

Next morning we again attempted to climb the rock face. After breakfast we made a 10 mile round journey to Gopong to buy some wire which I thought could be useful. The $\frac{1}{4}$ mile trek to the cave entrance through blazing sun (about 105 degrees F.) and very high humidity was not as tiring as the previous day when we carried a number of wooden scaffold poles; none the less we were relieved to reach the cool 77°F. of the cave. We followed the streamway much depleted of water due to being diverted by tin-mining operations; then up a rock climb between stal formations, and across an immense chamber to our vantage point. Having rested, we assembled our gear and scaling poles at the foot of the decaying ladder. Firstly I took a roll of wire to the vertical face as I had noticed a number of solution holes which went into the rock several inches, then curved out again a few inches away. Five or six loops of wire were passed through. I anchored myself by means of snap-link and waist loop whilst removing some of the rotting wood. A firm tug broke a mooring and the whole structure started to creak, crack and fall outwards. One strut brushed close by and momentarily I thought I would overbalance. However I avoided being dragged with it and the whole structure plunged downwards with a great roar. Once cleared of the old ladder the climb was much safer and easier. I was standing on a 12" ledge and the rock in front was curved to make an open chimney which was not circular enough to back up. There did not appear to be any good handholds at head level, and in order to gain a few feet it was necessary to place one's hand in a crack ahead and lay back. The guano diggers had put in a cross strut, and I resolved to do the same. Where the old scaffolding had collapsed a natural posthole was revealed and I decided to reuse this as it would enable my pole to lie directly beside the route I wish to follow. To increase stability I wired my cross strut to the upright pole. It was also possible to put several loops of wire through some small solution holes to make a running belay for the lifeline. The cross-member enabled me to reach a chokestone handhold which I did not know about, and this, combined with a foothold some 18" above the wood strut, led to easy going just above the pitch where I found a platform.

This was in fact a recess beneath an enormous boulder which at first appeared to be a difficult obstacle as it caused an overhang. Fortunately a number of solution holes were available to give hand and foothold. Once over this mass I found myself on a steeply sloping shelf with the wall to my right and a dangerous looking incline to my left; about this time a distant flash of light showed that I was in another enormous passage, for an entrance was illuminated by lightning and the walls of the cavern were faintly lit by a bluish light. The lightning was followed almost at once by a clap of thunder which echoed round the cave and gave the feeling that the whole lot was falling in. This violent storm lasted about 5 mins. before the peals of thunder died away.

Once silence reigned I was able to communicate with Norma who said she wanted to come up. She was as surprised as I had been to see how large the continuation was. We could only go upwards alongside one wall because of the large drop on our left; this drop continued the length of our climb and prevented us from entering the passageway which led to the new entrance. All my efforts to get into a forward continuation failed, which was disappointing as we had a tantalising glimpse of a stalagmite above in the middle of our way. Near our terminal point we found a couple of bottles which had probably been used as candle-holders. There was also a small adz which I decided to keep for my collection.

Our exploration and last journey into the great cave had ended as it began, with more cave having to be tantalizingly left behind for speculation. We often muse on trips we had within, and remember the sound of the stream rushing over the pebbles and the strange music produced by water falling onto resonant calcite deposits.

Malcolm Cotter.

STOP PRESS.

'Stop Press' is the title of Sydney S.S. monthly newsletter. Some of them have superb drawings on the covers and all offer something to interest even the most patriotic 'pom' caver. Did you know, for example, that a shepherd boy leaving his cheese in a limestone cave in Southern France was unknowingly the inventor of Roquefort cheese - see issue dated Jan. 1966 in our library.

MEET PROGRAMME

WHITSUN - May 28th.-30th. DERBYSHIRE (camping).

June 11th/12th. MENDIP - Longwood/August System; rescue practice.

June 25th./26th. MENDIP - Stoke Lane Slocker.
Lamb Leer (Sunday).