

MENDIP CAVING GROUP.

NEWSLETTER NO. 49.

SEPTEMBER, 1966.

CLUB NEWS.

Jumble Sale. The Jumble Sale took place on Saturday 10th. September, and raised the very commendable sum of £21. 0. 7. to boost Club funds. We are grateful to all the people who turned up to help, and especially to Robbie and Pam Charnock who did all the arranging and stored much of the jumble for the weeks preceding the sale. They also provided most welcome refreshment after the event. A number of odds and ends were gleaned for the use of the cottage, including a camp bed.

Transport Difficulties. Pat Walsh has obtained a quantity of mattresses. If anyone can take one or more to Mendip with them when they go, please will they get in touch with Pat.

Overheard....

.....at Ian Leake's wedding: "An important step towards domestic bliss in your new home is to make sure that the pipes don't leak by well lagging them..."

Congratulations Ian and Jennifer. They will be living at 69 WESTLEA AVENUE, WATFORD, HERTS. An ideal coffee stop at the end of the M.1 !

Congratulations, too, to Trevor Parker and Sarah who were married on Sept. 10th. Their address is 8 BURNHAM DRIVE, BLEADON HILL, WESTON-SUPER-MARE.

The first of three:-

YORKSHIRE - AUGUST BANK HOLIDAY 1966.

Despite some last minute confusion over the choice of camp-site, twenty members and five guests eventually arrived at Goat Gap Farm, Newby Cotes. By midday Saturday almost the entire gathering had dispersed onto the fells for a sedate afternoon's caving (even some potholing). Pete Virgo led a trip to Gaping Gill via Bar Pot, Malcolm Cotter led a descent of Alum Pot via Long Churn Cave (having started down Diccan Pot....), and those of aquatic disposition visited Birkwith and Old Ing Caves via the Crown Inn at Horton. All this caving in the face of 10.00a.m. - 5.00p.m./6.00p.m. - 12.30a.m. drinking hours!

Sunday's caving was again diverse with visits to Sell Gill Holes and Great Douk Cave, whilst ten members of M.C.G. and ten N.P.C. members set about descending Lost John's System. The organisation of the descent was soon shattered by odd bods not finding the New Roof Traverse and a hold-up at Pulpit Pitch from which two members of the Cave Photographic Group

were ascending. Two parties of eight were now united and the descent proceeded en masse. Passing the excellent Cathedral Pitch we took the more laborious and constricted alternative two pitches to bypass Dome Pitch. A sporting selection of passages and small pitches led us down to Battleaxe Pitch where, at last, the system comes to life with a stream entering just above Thunderstorm Depot. The stream offered less than its usual force and the descent from Thunderstorm Depot was most exhilarating with some fine free-hanging climbing in a beautifully clean, fluted shaft. Another pitch and a section of meandering passage soon brought us to Groundsheet Junction and the master cave. A squalid banquet was soon in progress as the party assembled for a rest and a jest.

Of particular interest was the exploration of a new passage previously located by Colin Hall of Northern Pennine Club. In double quick time we moved upstream in the master cave to Lyle Cavern. Passing a delicate climb we reached the B.S.A. extension stream passage and thrutched our way upstream and, taking a right-hand inlet passage, arrived at Colin's Crawl. One Roy Wilkinson, of hairy ancestry, set about demolishing his NiFe battery with some projections barring progress. After a few expensive minutes all the miniature caverns disappeared into the unknown leaving the normal sized (reluctant?) bods in anticipation, waiting. Greg Smith describes his exploration in the following article. In all, a worthwhile contribution was made to an already extensive and complex system - probably nearing three miles by now.

Returning to Groundsheet Junction three of us continued downstream, passing the third and last party, to look at the froth-speckled sump after much walking, wading and swimming. The return to the surface was uneventful. The last men reached the entrance, in the clutches of the dreaded speleothirst, after ten hours of great caving. The standard of organisation persisted until the very end; we arrived at the pub with only ten minutes in hand!

Monday's activities are hardly worth mentioning; weeje visits were made to Ingleborough Cave and Malham Cove. A technical point: drivers of Commer dieselvans are advised to take a spare head gasket for the journey across Malham Moor. Once again the August Bank Holiday has provided an opportunity to enjoy the hospitality of the N.P.C. We look forward to their visit to Mendip next Easter. I wonder if they like digging?

Tony Knibbs.

LOST JOHN'S MASTER CAVE DISCOVERY.

We could hear one of the N.P.C. banging away at rock with his NiFe battery, and then someone else yelled out to the effect that he still could not get through. The reply was "Send the smallest member of the party through", so I was duly lumbered!

A small duck under false stal floor led to a narrow tube with pools. After an awkward bend, where some rock flake had been hammered away to make access easier I came to a small chamber with two small passages leading off, which according to the two N.P.C. members I had joined, did not "go". We were all prepared to retreat when I climbed up a small aven as a last resort and spotted a small passage which could not be seen from the floor level. After shouting to the others I crawled along it into another chamber which I chimneyed up to reach an obvious passage. This appeared to be choked so I traversed at about 15-20 feet above the floor across to the other side of the chamber, to where one of the N.P.C., 'Wilky', reckoned he could see another passage. Sure enough there was, and I climbed along it with some doubt as to whether these small insignificant-looking passages could lead anywhere. My doubts were soon dispelled however, as I plainly heard in the distance a waterfall, which speeded up my crawling to a feverish pace.

I emerged into a large chamber consisting mainly of two magnificent pothole shafts, soaring higher than my NiFe beam could reach. After a few minutes of awestruck silence Wilky joined me and we proceeded upstream until, after a short distance, the way was barred by rock. (I believe a waterfall came in from high above, but am not sure). We scrambled to our left over boulders into a low bedding chamber which was choked with mud and silt, in which we scrawled 'M.C.G.' and 'N.P.C.' in large letters. We then explored downstream, through a pool and to the other end of the chamber along a stream passage which was so narrow at stream level, that we had to crawl on the false flooring about 8' above. The roof soon became too low at a point where we could hear the stream falling over a pitch. After backing out we had a last look at the shafts, which Wilky reckoned were 100-150' high, and reluctantly returned to the others.

Greg Smith.

1966 CONFERENCE REPORT.

The British Speleological Association's annual conference is not so much an essential part of one's caving career, as an interesting addition to it. From the attendance at the 1966 conference at Bristol, (a mere 100 out of the country's 3,000 or so cavers) it would seem that few enthusiasts have time for such extra-curricular activities.

The bound volume of papers-presented is in the Library for those who wish to read it, but two features seemed particularly worthy of comment. Both were lectures illustrated by slides - the pictures bringing the subjects more to life than the most colourful of writing.

Caves with "Hairs on their Chests".

'Caving in Australia' by Peter Rose was fascinating because he managed to impress his audience with the immense scale

of the caves and caving regions. He talked in terms of 70,000 square miles of limestone in the western part of southern Australia, where so far only 200 or so caves have been discovered. Some, it was true, had passages 1,500' long and were 80' high and 150' wide throughout their length.

He went on to tell us about caving country where a balloon had to be flown from above the base trucks because from more than a few yards away they were concealed by desert hills. In the mechanical field, the Aussies appear to be ingenious if not always up-to-date. For photographing some of the large caverns, Peter Rose described an obscure machine which ignited flash powder under pressure. It was difficult to fully comprehend, but the essence of its operation was "pumping like mad for some minutes, lighting something, then running like hell". The flash factor was computed at $1/1,000$ of a second at f22.

Describing a cave that "he could really get his teeth into" - river flowing and narrow passages to explore, Peter introduced us to the "down-under" piece of caving jargon of "A cave with hairs on its chest!".

Past the Psychological Barrier.

Beyond the Colour Supplement might have been Alan Coase's title for his slide show on Dan-yr-Ogof. He showed pictures that lacked the right sort of journalistic interest for the press and explained the interesting "psychological barrier that for 19 years had prevented the newly found extension in the cave from being explored." People tried the passage but thought they could not go on. When the successful slim young wench did get through, all manner of "fatties" managed to wriggle after her without serious difficulties.

Ogofwr Ddu.

RESCUE EQUIPMENT?

Regulars to Swildon's and readers of the Speleologist will by now be aware of a new M.R.O. notice in Maine's barn concerning rescues on the Forty. The information gives useful details of the pulley above Suicides Leap and of the organisation of rescues. A smart method of constructing a chair for the victim is described, as well as being illustrated upon a little plastic model caver. However, judging from its size, the latter presents the would be rescuer with the problem of obtaining that essential piece of cave rescue equipment... a two foot long paper clip!

Ogofwr Wen.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE AUGUST MEET.

Everyone appears to agree that the August Meet was a great success, and by the amount of caving that was done this must be so - there was no rush to the Hunters before the completion of a trip, for instance. The standard of personal equipment was very high, the only lighting difficulty encountered

being by the writer whose flint and striker got wet on the penultimate pitch of Lost John's. Most people had wet-suits and there was no serious trouble caused by people getting cold. Everyone did a fair share of load-carrying, also.

Even so there was room for improvement; What was gained in equipment was lost in organisation. For instance in our trip down Alum Pot personal bags got separated and we found ourselves at the bottom without carbide and food. Quite a lot of trouble ensued before the matter was rectified. On both days only two members had used whistles, and in the circumstances it was fortuitous that the pitches did not have more water to drown all the shouting that went on. I feel that party leaders should make sure that everyone going into a cave with pitches has a whistle.

Organisation of parties in Lost John's appeared to be non-existent. Small groups of people got separated from the main groups and it was in fact so serious that after deladdering the third pitch from the bottom, silence was asked for as some sounds coming from below could have been some of the party left behind! We were not certain of the position until our return to the surface.

Another way in which caution was thrown to the wind was by the lack of lifelining. On the way down, most pitches were even without rope. On the way in I found the New Roof Traverse easily as some thoughtful person had put a lighted candle at the start of the correct route, but further down we had difficulty because this had not been repeated. On a trip such as this one where we are not on home ground, and where time is limited, I think that direction indicators are desirable. (both Lucas and Wipac soon available - Tacklemaster). One other impression was that members generally took down insufficient food.

To sum up I think we muddled through well, especially in Lost John's, owing to the experience of members. For improvement I think we should revert to the custom of having a meet leader even if his only task is to know where people are and who leads each party. Also to find out who wants tackle and when. Parties should be formed with leader and end man and the order kept. On a big trip in a complicated system like Lost John's people should book in and out at top and bottom.

Malcolm Cotter.

HINT.

Did you know that castor-oil, apart from its known applications, is an excellent leather preservative and will keep your boots soft and supple, water proof, shockproof and antimagnetic?

Ogofwr Wem

HALF YEARLY GENERAL MEETING.

This will be held at the Cottage beginning at 4.00p.m. Saturday 15th. October. Any proposals should be sent to the Secretary 14 days in advance.

* Remember - a bed booking scheme exists; if you want a comfortable night's sleep, book early!

A SORT OF "FREE ENTERPRISE NATIONALISATION"

The first meeting of caving representatives from all over Britain for "speleo-political" reasons was held recently in Bristol. Members of the Cambrian Conference, Derbyshire, Northern, Southern and Scottish Associations met, and achieved some useful results. Pedro was a member of the four-man Southern delegation.

"The Regional Councils for Caving", as the committee designated itself, is intended as a loose (no comment - Ed.) association for the exchange of information with the possibility of giving national "weight" to local schemes. It is intended to meet only once a year or so.

One of the problems aired was that of the footpath to Alum Pot, where the landlord is charging 6d. per caver to walk to the cave. The Northern Council refuse to pay, but Southern cavers (not begrudging a bob to their own friendly Mendip farmers) had agreed to pay. It seems however, that this path is probably a public footpath and that no right to charge exists. It is this that the Northern Council is fighting, and in so doing is supporting ramblers and others.

The Regional Council for Caving agreed to its name being used to put pressure on the County Council to get the map published and the matter clarified. (As a matter of interest, the footpath does not extend to the Long Churn/Dicken Pot entrance to the cave).

Information on ways of preserving caves was also exchanged. It seems that in Wales a cave has been scheduled an 'ancient monument' by the Min. of Public Building and Works and is now much better protected than if it were a Site of Special Scientific Interest (virtually unprotected).

Pedro.

ST. CUTHBERT'S 17th./18th. Sept.

Saturday evening in the Hunters and the usual alcoholic chat somehow got around to the subject of caving. I rashly enquired further and so became involved in a caving trip due to take place the very next day. Thus Sunday found me in the doubtful company of Lorrie Mottley, Pete Munt and Barry Lane, down a thing called St. Cuthbert's. In order to make the descent a little more entertaining I took along an

ammo box stuffed with photographic equipment, a step I was later to regret. Initially everything in St. Cuthbert's was lovely, exposures were flashed off with great rapidity at everything in sight. Unfortunately, this happy state of affairs came to an end after the third exposure, when the winding mechanism jammed. The happy expression on Pete Munt's face, at the prospect of no more stops for snaps, was speedily removed with the appearance of a second camera. This latter piece of equipment was hastily mounted upon a tripod from which it immediately demounted itself, landing gently upon the soft mat with which this cave is so luxuriously carpeted. The camera, being undamaged, was firmly remounted and preparation made for a flashpowder exposure. Happy, smiling faces were again restored upon the production of a broken cable-release, which due to a shutter defect was essential for the operation of the camera. Whilst being a source of some amusement to other members of the party, the huge joke of carrying two useless cameras for the next five hours did not go down too well with the author, who during this time, stretched his speleological vocabulary to its limit. Undoubtedly taking a camera along greatly increases the pleasure an individual can obtain from caving. Of course, not everyone owns a camera and these people will find that a couple of house-bricks make a fairly good substitute.

Pete Mathews.

LENGTHS OF MENDIP CAVES.

G.B. in second place. My note about the lengths of Mendip caves was written before the announcement of the G.B. extension. I said that an additional 1,000' of surveyed passage would earn it 2nd. place owing to the possible error of estimating passage length in Cuthbert's. I have now been told that the G.B. extensions cover 1,400' between stations but that 1,200' would be a fairer length to quote as 200' accounts for an additional traverse across the new chamber. The length of G.B. is now 5,700'.

Swildon's even Longer! The report of South West Essex Tch. College's discovery of North West Stream Passage (1,200') and the Wessex discovery of 100' in Hairy Passage, would put the total length of Swildon's up to 22,800'. The report of the first find in the June/July Speleologist only shows a grade 2 survey so one must class the new piece as an estimated length.

Malcolm Cotter.

KINGSDALE MASTER CAVE.

While in Yorkshire we learned that the much sought-after Kingsdale master cave had been entered via a sump in Swinstow Pot. The Cave Diving Group had previously tried to get in via Keld Head but without success. I believe it was Leeds University C.C. which made the find totalling several thousand feet.

M. O. C.

MEET PROGRAMME.

- Oct. 15th/16th - MENDIP - HALF YEARLY GENERAL MEETING on Saturday.
G.B. Cave.
Nov. 5th/6th. - MENDIP - RESCUE PRACTICE in G.B. Cave.
Nov. 26th/27th. - SOUTH WALES, PENWYLLT - Tunnel Cave, Pwll Pant
Mawr, and probably Dan-yr-Ogof too.

COMMITTEE.

Secretary - Brian Mee, 88 Seaton Gdns. Ruislip Manor, Middx.
Treasurer - Tony Fitzgibbon, 265 Eastcote Road, Ruislip, Middx.
Meet Secretary - Tony Knibbs, 2 Rectory Lane, Byfleet, Surrey.
Cottage Warden - Pat Walsh, 18 Oxford Road North, Chiswick, W.4.
Tacklemaster - Pete Goddard, 11 Lebanon Park, Twickenham, Middx.
Recorder - Simon Knight, 40 Garrard Road, Banstead, Surrey.
Editor - Joan Robinson.

The Committee has accepted the resignation of Simon Knight from the post of Recorder. Nominations for the post (which includes acting as the Group's librarian) should be sent or given to The Secretary to arrive by Thursday October 6th. An election will be held at the Half Yearly General Meeting: Applications for postal votes to the Secretary by October 12th.

MEMBERSHIP.

We welcome Dave Hill and Mike Nightingale as probationary members. Dave lives at 245 Watford Road, Croxley Green, Herts., and Mike lives at 3 Pound Close Long Ditton, Surrey.

Mike Quartermain has been made a full member of the club.

CLUB FINANCES.

On 26th. September there was £46 in the Land Purchase Fund, and £67 in the General Fund.