

MENDIP CAVING GROUP.

NEWSLETTER NO. 54

FEBRUARY, 1967.

CLUB NEWS.

Dinner Tickets. The Dinner will be held at 8.00 p.m. on March 4th. at the Charterhouse Country Club, which you might recall is a convenient staggering distance from the Cottage. Tickets (price £1.0.0 are available from Tony Knibbs or Joan, or via any Committee member. The Annual General Meeting will take place on the afternoon of March 4th.

Journal. At long, long last the Mendip Caving Group Journal is available (at a cost of 6/- to non-members). Copies can be obtained from Joan Robinson and the new Editor.

Longwood/August Springclean. This will take place on March 5th. and provides an excellent way to work off that 'after-the-Annual-Dinner' feeling. In order to do a good job of cleaning the system (Cave system), quite a large number of people will be required; please give your names to Joan if you think you will be available for this worthwhile project.

Battery Charging. A battery charger has recently been installed in the annexe to the Cottage. It has facilities for charging ten NiFe or Voltabloc batteries at 1.5 amps.

A slight technical hitch has arisen which will be overcome later; there is a slight variation in the height of batteries which sometimes causes bad or no contact with the plungers. This can be remedied temporarily by wedging the battery. A later modification will be a layer of neoprene stuck inside each battery slot.

Another complication which could arise, is the possibility of shorting one or more batteries out by incorrect switching. Emphasis must be placed on the statement that **ONLY THE SWITCH OVER THE LAST BATTERY IN THE RACK IS TO BE SWITCHED ON.** If this is not done, permanent damage could be done to batteries and rack. Some batteries have their individual cells placed in the case with the negative terminal towards the catch. Owners of this type will have to use crocodile clips to connect the terminals and the plungers of the rack.

Please read the instructions carefully and all will be well; remember that this equipment would be expensive to replace. Also remember to switch off main switch after use and at the end of the weekend.

Happy charging.

Arthur Spain.

Quote (Gritstone Club Journal) "Thunderflashes may be used to attract attention!"

### Library Additions.

We are now exchanging publications with the long-established Gritstone Club, whose claims to fame include first explorations of Diccan Pot, Juniper Gulf and Swinsto Hole. Their more recent activities are described in their latest Journal (1966) which has just been included in the library. A fine description is provided of the geology of Barbondale and its caves, particular reference being made to Barbon Pot and Crystal Cave (plus surveys). Further articles include Long Drop Cave (Survey), Birkwith Cave and Copy Gill Flood passage, and The Truth about Yordas Pot (Section). The remainder of the Journal is devoted to topics of mountaineering interest; included is a list of names and map-references of all peaks over 2,000 ft. in England.

Westminster Speleological Group have very kindly supplied us with back copies of their Bulletin. We now have a complete set of the new series (i.e. 1965 onwards). The caving reports give full details of ladder pitches etc. and are very helpful (especially in Yorkshire). A series entitled 'Cave Origin and Development' by Dave Irwin and Steve Lee is also worthy of note (18 pp. in 6 parts, unfinished).

Cave and Crag club have started sending us their journal - or maybe it's a newsletter (No. 3 1966). Details are given of an expedition to Speleon Provetina, Greece (qr 'Potholing' by David Heap p. 185), but they didn't descend the cave.

We are grateful to Wessex Cave Club who have sent a number of their journals to fill up some of the gaps in our library. It would be impossible to give a review of the material I have been sent without filling the newsletter. However, recent articles that are of interest include:- Pyrennees, Stoke Lane, Reservoir Hole Dig, and Ladders.

Northern Cave Club are now exchanging publications with us again after a lapse of three years. They produce a quarterly journal called 'the Caver' (approx. 30 pp.). The most recent issue of this (Jan. '67) gives details of an Oxlow-Giants trip, the exploration of Penyghent Pot, 'The Mouth of Hell' (a history of Alum Pot) and Pwll Dwf; all these articles include a survey to about grade 3. In addition there are two series, 'The Caves of North Ribblesdale' and 'Map Reading and Surveying'.

We have received both the occasional publications of SWETCCC. NO. 1 'Grotte Casteret Expedition 1961' (14pp.) is an excellent monograph and contains an introduction, outline of the geology of the area, features of the cave, a bibliography and details of equipment and provision requirements. Much useful advice is given including the access conditions laid down by frontier police. This is a very fine publication in form and is much more useful than the usual condensed accounts of expeditions that are found hidden in club journals. No.2, Swetccc Handbook (34 pp.) is the only publication of its kind and is an introduction to speleology. The book is primarily intended for the instruction of novices and covers all aspects of the subject.

Topics are extremely varied and cover such aspects as, how to charge an accumulator, camping underground, advice for leaders, and a list of useful addresses.

Sydney Speleological Society send us 'Stop Press' each month. Amongst other things this contains an excellent series 'Adaptations to a Life Underground' by Gleniss Wellings, dealing with all aspects of biospeleology (6 parts so far).

Cardiff Civil Defence Caving Club inform me that they hope to be sending us a monthly newsletter. This will replace their previous publication which has been produced spasmodically over the last three years.

The 1964 and 1965 supplements to the Mendip Cave Bibliography have just been published with the Mendip Caver (Vol. 3, Nos 2 and 3).

Pete Mathews.

Library Non-Additions. Chelsea Speleological Society have sent us their newsletter regularly every month for over 9 years. However, for the past two years these have not been reaching the library. If the person concerned is still in possession of C.S.S. newsletters from April 1965 to November 1966 and has finally finished reading them, then perhaps he would care to let me have them. The inclusions of these publications in our library would be most welcome.

By way of coincidence C.S.S. have just sent us their 100th. newsletter (Jan.); it consists of extracts from preceding newsletters.

Pete Mathews.

Slide Show. On Saturday evening (18th. Feb), members and guests at the cottage were given the opportunity of seeing some slides of previous club expeditions, floods at Byfleet, and Simon; the first category being the most interesting as a few good photographs of cave formations were included.

We hope that more such informal shows will be arranged; they make a pleasant change from the usual type of post-Hunter's entertainment.

J.C.R.

Overheard Recently - "You should take up caving professionally, Dave. I'm sure there are plenty of people who'd pay you to stay underground".

#### CHEDDAR GORGE ROCKFALL.

The contours of Cheddar Gorge, in the Canyon Cave area, are now slightly changed, due to a recent fall of rock brought about by a civil engineering firm who had been called in to make the area safe. The Gorge was closed for a day or so whilst this work was in progress, but is now open to traffic again.

### NEW LIFELINE TECHNIQUE.

W.S.G. are currently experimenting with the use of a wire tether between the end of a lifeline and the waistloop. The purpose of this is to prevent rope being melted by carbide flames. So far they claim to have met no snags with this technique.

### U.B.S.S. MAKES NEWS.

Not satisfied with the now-famous rescue of Oliver Lloyd from Stoke Lane Slocker on Jan. 28th, three more U.B.S.S. members were trapped for nine hours on the 20th. Feb. in Little Neath Cave at Ystradfellte. They didn't need full rescue procedure but were required to wait for flood waters to subside.

Also on 20th. Feb. a caver was trapped in Perryfoot Cave, Castleton, and earlier in the month five Imperial College students needed rescuing from Disappointment Pot.

This recent spate of cave mishaps can only bring adverse publicity to the sport.

### SEEN IN SWILDON'S.

A caver ascending the Forty Foot with no helmet, and a torch with spent batteries (his only source of lighting). The person lifelining had not bothered to pass the rope around his body, and was not even belayed to the rock.

### CAVE PHOTOGRAPHY.

Apart from any other dubious uses it might have, cave photography comes in quite handy for padding out the newsletter when its contributors feel that well-known reluctance to venture below ground. One aspect of the subject which is given very little thought is the question of lighting, although aesthetically this is of the greatest importance. The advantage of things like flash bulbs is their obvious convenience, but for close-up work the results are unpredictable and usually of excessively high contrast. Bounced flash methods are essential and even these are rarely completely satisfactory. The cheapest and one of the finest illuminants for these, as well as many middle distance subjects, is magnesium ribbon. The advantage of this form of illumination being that it is wholly under the control of the photographer both before and during the actual exposure. The effects of various lighting arrangements can thus be evaluated before releasing the shutter, an impossibility with flash methods. A necessity of the exposure, however, is that it must last several seconds, during which movement of the source will lead to softer shadows. This has the effect with an otherwise dead white formation of giving a feeling of greater stability and sculptural solidarity. The extended tonal range achieved, using such lighting, is a great improvement upon the results obtained from flash techniques which characteristically contain sooty shadows, burnt out highlights and very little else. Long exposure times however, necessitate the use of a firm camera

support such as a tripod or a friend suffering from rigor mortis. It is often found that the high temperature of burning magnesium is sufficient to melt unburnt ribbon causing it to come apart. The remedy is to slightly wet the ribbon prior to ignition causing it to burn more slowly but more steadily.

A fairly obvious limitation of flash powder is its inability to cope with bats in flight, blokes leaping off ladders and other such fast-moving subjects. It is here that high speed maphiflash really comes into its own. Maphiflash or, as it is sometimes called, flashpowder consists of a mixture of equal parts by weight of finely powdered magnesium (or aluminium) and something such as ammonium perchlorate or potassium nitrate. The intending user of this mixture should remember that flash-powder is about as liable to be explosive as wet carbide is of giving off acetylene, and should thus handle it with corresponding care. In the interests of safety the components should be powdered and stored separately, in sealed containers, until required. The mixture must be kept dry and this is conveniently done by using a number of small airtight containers of known capacity. A piece of aluminium foil makes a useful tray on which to ignite the powder. Slow burning fuse for this purpose can be made by soaking blotting paper in a 30% solution of potassium nitrate, This when dry should burn with a strong fizz. Flash powder produces alot of smoke and large quantities burnt in small places before being crawled through by the rest of the party, is apt to be met with disapproval.

Both the illuminants described suffer from variability of performance (i.e. light output and colour temperature) and would normally only be considered for use with monochrome materials. However, the use of such forms of lighting in conjunction with colour film is somewhat justified for subjects of inherently high contrast as is frequently the case in cave photography. The use of side or angled lighting tends to increase shadows (and contrast) but reduces mistiness due to scattered light.

The following exposure guides may be of some value:-

1) Magnesium Ribbon (200 ASA. ; f/16 ; 45° lighting).

At 6 ft. the writer finds 2 lengths of 5 inch ribbon enough. This is about 3 stops more than minimum for ideal, flat, front lit subjects as would be indicated by an exposure meter.

2) Flash Powder (200 ASA. ; f/11 ; 45° lighting).

Distance in feet      6 8 10 15 20 25 50

Wt. of powder (gms.)    1 2 3 8 15 25 120

Note that large piles of flash powder are more inefficient than small piles and that the largest values given are only estimates. (Useful hint: 1 gm. of flash powder will evenly cover a penny to a depth of  $\frac{1}{8}$  in.)

Both of the above guides give exposure conditions for good general illumination. Low key lighting effects will

involve drastic reductions in exposure, this apart from being cheap gives a more cavelike atmosphere.

As is usual with articles of this nature, the author would like to point out that he cannot be held responsible for his own actions let alone those of people dim enough to follow this article.

(The information for the above article was very kindly supplied by the Technical Services Dept. of Pete Mathews Enterprises).

#### SWILDON'S FORTY.

On a recent trip down Swildons the climb down the 40 ft. Pitch proved to be decidedly wet and uncomfortable. The siting of the pipe is not satisfactory; water is allowed to pass over the pitch around the pipe as well as through it, and this results in a good quantity of water cascading down the ladder. This trip was not in abnormally wet conditions, the stream level was only an inch or two above normal.

On the return journey from the sump a long wait ensued at the foot of the 40 ft., the holup being a member of another party who just could not get up the ladder after several attempts. The result was, he had to be hauled up bodily in a fireman's chair by another party at the top. None of these people had any experience so it remained for us to organise things; he was none the worse for his experience. Several people were visibly shattered after the climb.

The moral of this story is that the 40 ft. pitch is not to be taken too lightly in semi-wet conditions, especially if a hard trip beyond is contemplated.

Arthur Spain.

#### 29th. January 1967. STOKE LANE & BROWNE'S.

As the Lamb Leer party consisted of more people than could be counted on two hands Glyn Jones, Howell Isaacs and Colin Carson decided to attempt Stoke Lane. The stream was flowing just below the cattle grid and thus, as we had read in the 'Speleologist', the sump was passable. Howell led the way by lying in the swollen stream and floating down out of sight. Colin and Glyn followed and emerged into a small chamber with chest deep water. In front of us was a large oxygen cylinder with a lighted NIFE cell attached - this was the M.R.O. sumping equipment used the previous day to rescue O.C.L. A quick debate followed and Colin cast the vote in favour of retreating. After much struggling and swallowing of water, which walled up as we retreated through the tight entrance fissure leaving virtually no air, we emerged dampened in body and spirit.

Luckily some itinerant cavers pointed out Browne's Hole, telling us there was almost 1000 ft. of passage. After wading through the entrance passage we climbed into the Main Chamber which is quite well decorated with muddy stalactites and stal floor. The drainpipe series beyond sumped after 20 ft. thus cutting off almost 500 ft. of passage. Downstream in the streamway

the two wet-suited Welshmen discovered and negotiated a duck which the non-wet-suited member declined to pass. After surfacing we spent 5 minutes in Stoke Lane stream washing off thick clay and mud, realising that the cave was aptly named.

Colin Carson.

11th/12th. February. TUNNEL CAVE.

After an exhausting clamber up the hill above Dan-yr-Ogof five cavers (Skip, Mike Nightingale, another Mike, Bryn late of the Gower C.C. and myself) stopped for a rest at the top entrance of Tunnel Cave. Then in a moment of weakness all entered the dark abyss. Whilst negotiating the entrance we were entertained by two incidents, the first being Mike Nightingale's agility in dodging a two ton rock while standing at the bottom of a pitch. I don't really think the rock weighed two tons but Mike moves just as fast from a 12 lb. rock. The second was the interesting spectacle of Bryn traversing above the second pitch and getting the rawl-bolt stuck in a hole he didn't want it in. I think everyone will agree that his language at this point was really (for a full-blooded Welshman) quite genteel.

Bryn by the way has this leadership bit off to a Tee, for a start he actually knew the cave. When one is used to people like Pat who has time immemorial led parties straight down a choke at the Crossroads in Eastwater, Bryn appears quite excellent. A large section of high-level traverses whilst unlike the Escape Route in O.F.D. (hands, elbows, feet and Hell look at that drop) was nevertheless highly entertaining.

The traversing seemed to endlessly stretch out in front of us but soon our party, intact, came into the large main chamber and the walk out entrance, well nearly walkout. So the end of another excellent trip.

Mike Brace.

No news has been received of the O.F.D. trip which took place the same weekend - Editor.

18th. February.

The Swildon's I - II meet was well attended, and a report of the trip should appear in the next newsletter. Also on Saturday Pete Munt led a party round Eastwater, whilst Malcolm, Norma, Roger Wallington and Joan introduced Bridget Moberley and Steve Smith to the joys of caving in Goatchurch, Sidcot and East Twin.

J.C.R.

HUNTER'S HOLE. 19th. Feb.

A night of heavy rain meant that all major wet systems on Mendip were likely to be flooded and Malcolm Cotter thus invited David Oliver ("Olly") and Colin Carson to accompany him to Hunter's Hole. A rather loose fixed ladder led down the entrance shaft, and with the addition of an electron we reached the squeeze that leads to the pitch. Malcolm led and laddered the pitch as an 80 ft. However there were two ledges to rest on during the

descent. We explored the various digs leading off the main cave and now apparently abandoned by B.E.C., discussing possible continuations. 'Upstream' (the pot is virtually dry) we clambered through a number of chambers with ruckles of huge boulders to discover that the cave ended in a series of high rifts, some covered by flowstone cascades. This part may have been Sanctimonious Passage or we may have missed it. The ascent of the pitch was done in two stages - a 35 ft. ascent followed by a traverse onto a 15 ft. pitch from the ledge.

On return to the Cottage we passed two would be rescue cars full of M.C.G. members as we were 2½ hours overdue. Black looks followed.

Colin Carson.

#### THE GROWTH OF CALCITE IN CAVES.

This is the title of the last in the present series of Pengelly lectures. The talk will be given by Mr. A.W. Wells at 7.30 p.m. in the lecture theatre of the Physics Dept. of Imperial College (Prince Consort Road), on March 1st.

#### MEET PROGRAMME.

March 4th./5th.

MENDIP. A.G.M. and Dinner (Sat).

Longwood/August System - Operation

Springclean (Sun).

EASTER March 24/27th.

DEVON. Buckfastleigh area. Reed's Cave,

Baker's Pit, Pridhamsleigh Cave. Visit

to Pengelly Cave Research Centre. Camping.

April 8th/9th.

MENDIP. St. Cuthbert's Swallet (Sat.)

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