

MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 65

MARCH/APRIL 1968.

NEWS AND INTEREST.

Sidcot Swallet. A pretty grotto has been found near the bottom it involves an exceptionally tight squeeze.

Problem Key. Group members should note that the Longwood August key is now kept in the library cupboard to which all committee members have a key. Please remember that the Longwood key can only be used by club members, and no one else.

New Survey Out. A survey of Read's Cavern is now available from Joan Robinson at a bargain price of 1/6.

Mathematical Note:- To convert metres to feet multiply by 10! Tony Oldham's conversion factor is used for finding the depths of continental shafts: they have a strange habit of underestimating the length of ladder pitches. (perhaps you can remember that frantic call 'Please, I am nine metres short').

Wookey Hole. A new chamber has been found, the 19th, by Dave Savage. From the eighteenth chamber it involved a dive of 250ft It is only 10ft below the level of the resurgence and indicates that open passage may not be far away.

THE COTTAGE AND YOU IN IT.

Members are reminded that the silence at 1 a.m. rule applies as much on Friday evenings as at other times. Members arriving late must get settled in as quietly as possible and they are also responsible for their guests.

Please remove your dirty great vibes before climbing up into the bunks.

It is pointed out that one guest per member is the rule unless special bookings are made.

Urgently required for the cottage ; Mattresses in reasonable condition, and dinner plates.

Dave Hill Hon. Cottage Warden.

LIBRARY ADDITIONS

Mendip Caver(Vol.3 No.12) Notes on digs in Holwell Cave, Notes on the East Devon caving area and the South West Somerset conglomerate caves.

Belfrey Bulletin(239) OFD (4pp+ sketch). Ahnenschacht (4pp + sketch) - during '67 the BEC explored Ahnenschacht to a depth of over 1,000ft. (or should it be under ?) they found themselves at the top of a deep shaft which they plumbed to a depth of 450ft without reaching the bottom - then it rained.

B.B.(240)Notes on digs in St.Cuthberts.

Shepton Mallet CC.(series 4 No.4) Lundy '67 (22pp inc. surveys + bibliography) - vast number of small grotts. 'Fibron Tape a sample of tape was thoroughly tested and found ideal for cave surveying.

Exeter University SS(Vol 5 No.8) A description of 'Stoke Lane beyond sump2 and a completely incorrect version of 'Down Below' (no wonder Exeter are the worst chorists on Mendip).

Westminster SG (Vol.5No.8). 'Caves of the Shepton Mallet District a new series of articles giving details of caves as well as geology and topography (part one consists of 6pp + map + 4 surveys).

Karst Hydrology Expedition to Jamaica (UBSS) - Prelim. Report (120 pp). Brief notes on the Work carried out.

Wessex CC Jnl. No. 155 Rumania '67 (17 pp + photos + surveys) Description of some of the vast river passages.

Peter Mathews

CAVE RESEARCH GROUP OF GREAT BRITAIN.

As the Group is a member of the CRG, MCG members whilst not strictly members of CRG are entitled to attend all CRG functions. Here is a calender of the main CRG meets.

29th June - Southern Meeting - LLANGATTOCK/CRICKHOWELL.
5.p.m. St.Edmunds Hall (church) -
Dr.G.Black: "Caves and the Nature Conservancy".
Dr.H.Lord: "Makeing Cave Movies".

24th. August - 1st. September INGLEBOROUGH FIELD MEET.

9th November - Annual General Meeting - MATLOCK.
Dr.Oliver Lloyd: "Diving in Wookey Hole".

Anyone who would like to attend the above happenings should contact Brian Mee for further details.

MDB.

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DENE HOLE MUNDANE.

The scene parkland with scattered trees. In the centre of this lot is a barbed wire compound, 30ft. square containing a few scruffy dressed members of the human race.

Sound effects. North East wind whistling in trees and human voices crying out in protest.

Could this be another film set or a group of foot and mouth frustrated cavers gazing down the crumbling entrance shaft to the Grays Dene Holes. The latter I feel is correct for on the 4th Feb members of the MCG and VCG gathered to explore these ancient holes.

The Dene Holes were originally dug to give access to the underlying chalk which has sixty feet between it and the surface. Three chambers were dug, radiating out from the central shaft until the risk of collapse became apparent, then the hole was abandoned and another started. Between 50 and 60 Dene Holes were dug in the area but no-one seems to know for sure when they were dug. Theories range from pre-Roman to the 16th. century.

During the course of time all but two of the holes have been filled in and so during the past 40 years many people must have spent many hours connecting up a number of these Dene Holes underground by means of short crawly passages.

A round trip is made by following the right hand wall, taking great care to avoid the great heaps of scrap iron and broken glass, which pervade a large part of the system, thus proving that a number of holes have been blocked recently by the local population chucking their rubbish down these conveniently placed 'rubbish pits'.

After about an hour we all assembled at the entrance pitch to commence the gritty eyes down climb back to the East wind and the prison cage, feeling that at least this sporting 60ft. pitch had helped to make the afternoon more interesting.

Mike Nightingale.

PROGRESS REPORT - LADDER.

The old Group ladder was made using Railtor's method, this involves driving a steel pin through the wire. Because of the proposed change romping resin fixed rungs being mooted some jigs have been made to test ladder - this can be done with slow constantly increased strain untill maximum stress is recorded (this can be up to 5,000lbs.).

The old ladder has been found to fail due to breakdown of the wire, as each strand stressed over the pin it snapped each in turn. - none of the rungs tested so far has sustained more than a 500lb. load (this is one side only). Failure occurs chiefly between 400 and 500lbs. One example of rung slip was found, this took place at 300 lbs. - the wire eventually broke at this load. The breaking stress of the wire used should be in excess of 1,000 lbs.

It would be fairly easy to improve upon the aforementioned values using resin fixed rungs. No real difficulties are foreseen in getting a reproducible rung slip at about 800 lbs. per side. This is not only twice as good as the old method but it is easier to make the ladders and is also slightly cheaper.

However, very few people have any experience with resin fixed rungs. Only 5 clubs have adopted the technique (although it was used for ladder on the recent Berger expedition) and only one of them seems to know anything about it and they don't seem to know very much. There are also a lot of people that write about resin fixed ladders, they seem to know quite a lot but none of them seem to have made any quantity of ladder: well not more than 10ft.

Members may be reassured to know that any technique we adopt will be tested first. However practical tests will also be needed. When our first ladder is complete and in circulation it would be helpful if members chose that for their next trip - don't leave it in the cupboard. It will be very important to use a lifeline when climbing on it, and if any rung slip or other fault should occur the ladder should be withdrawn immediately - the matter should then be reported.

Greg Smith.

AFTON RED RIFT CAVE - DEVON.

Dave Hill, Greg, Ron, Terry and two guests visited Afton Red Rift Cave near Totnes. The first part of the cave was a traverse along a narrow rift. After about 100ft the rift can either be descended to take a lower passage to the main chamber, or straight along the rift and down a fixed rope along the upper route, the latter being the most difficult. Greg and Terry took the upper route emerging about 3/4 of an hour later in the main chamber.

The Exeter University 'dig' was examined but did not seem very promising. The return journey was made along the upper route with which one of the party (a guest) on his first trip found difficult.

It was fairly strenuous a trip taking about 3½ hours perhaps

made more so due to the lack of fitness of the party due in turn to the inactivity during Foot and Mouth.

Dave Hill.

RESCUE PRACTICE

A rescue practice has been arranged for Saturday 4th May. It is hoped to hold a full practice from August Hole, provided enough people are present.

The victim has already been selected and has agreed. FREE soup will be provided to the rescuers. Several new pieces of rescue equipment will be tried out.

Please attend this practice, next time it may not be a practice!

Sunday we visit Holwell Cave.

Brian Hilman.

ELECTRONIC CAVING

If you have a memory longer than a month you may recall Arthur Cox's, review of an American Journal which included an article on geophysical cave detection; the device described being based on the well known 'Eltran' method. It enables the would-be explorer to discover his cave from the surface. Arthur and I have got together and have constructed a transmitter and receiver from the circuits given. We have not been able to carry out any intensive trials, but we are quite excited with the results so far.

The first cave that we attempted to 'discover' was the underpass at Hanger Lane. Even with a good imagination we were unable to detect it - the reason for this eludes me. It is quite possible that the large quantities of steel used in the construction of the underpass act as a screen. On the other hand, it might be difficult for this instrument with its narrow beam to detect very wide voids i.e. the measured signal may only show up a very broad peak.

Success!! A nearby pedestrian tunnel showed up with surprising ease - we were walking back and forth for ages before we convinced ourselves that the thing really worked. Traverses were made above two other similar tunnels; each time with positive results.

The only disadvantages we here found so far is that it consumes a lot of power - our power supply was an old car battery and this

was completely flat after two hours intermittent use.

Peter Mathews.

(There was an error in Arthurs review " the width of the chamber was found to be only 3' ft. wider than the 157ft. estimated from above ground", not 3ins. as stated.)

NOTES FROM LECTURE ON CAVE FORMATION

It is a pity that many more MCG members did not attend a lecture given by Dr. M. Sweeting at Imperial College on 6th. March, as they would have heard a concise review of cave formation under three major influences - geology, relief and climate. Illustrated by slides from places as far apart as Indo-China and Norway, as well as from British caving areas, the talk provided much information which can be applied to our own knowledge of Mendip.

Caves tend to form most profusely in relatively thin deposits of limestones: the 13,000 feet of pure limestone in South Yugoslavia yield no major caves. Coral reef limestone, on the other hand, is easily eroded into caves as in South Derbyshire. This is because the calcium carbonate in reefs may be formed of aragonite which is more soluble than calcite. In Yorkshire almost all caves began in shale bands which, being soft, were easily attacked by water; only then did the resulting stream cut down vertically to give penetrable passages in limestone. Chert bands in Ireland have had the same effect. Structures within the limestone bands, such as joints and faults, are frequently responsible for the directions of cave passages (see Ford in CRG Transactions Vol. 10 No. 1 "Features of Cavern Development in Central Mendip" and Atkinson in UBSS Proc. Vol 11 No. 2 "The Geomorphology of Longwood Swallet"). In the same way that river profiles can be related to past sea-level changes, cave profiles can show related stages of development. Ford relates Mendip caves to some of the past water levels in the Bristol Channel, which have in turn been studied using raised (fossil) beach levels along the coast.

The influence of relief on caves can be summarised by saying that high relief tends to result in a large vertical factor in cave development. Here Yorkshire pots can be compared with the much more horizontal caves in Somerset and Devon. The Alpine region, of course, has systems such as Pierre St. Martin and Gouffre Berger which consist mainly of pitches.

In the section on climate, Dr. Sweeting mentioned the importance of high Carbon Dioxide content of glacier ice and snow in dissolving limestone to give solution hollows and possibly caves too. Examples of this are to be found in Norway, and some

of the Yorkshire Karst may have been influenced in this way during the ice ages.

Tropical caves tend to be short and near the surface, possibly because of the high rate of evaporation which leads to rapid stal. formation blocking the caves (Corbel's hypothesis). The limestone outcrops on the surface are also stal. covered and this acts as a barrier to further rapid solution. The karst cone-relief of tropical terrain leads to the eventual development of isolated lumps of limestone which are honeycombed with small caves. In between the limestone towers is alluvium which may flood in the wet season. Examples of this topography occur in South China (where Chinese art has obviously been strongly influenced by the weird towers) and in parts of Australia.

Joan Robinson.

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ST.HERZ GYPSUM HOLES.

Eric Hensler is to give a talk on the Herz Gypsum holes. Time:- 8 p.m. Date May 2nd 1968. Place:- Bull and Mouth Tavern, Bloomsbury Way, London. All MCG members are welcomed by Westminster CG who are running the show.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, MARCH 9th 68 HELD AT NORDRACH-on-MENDIP.

Present: 12 full members, 6 probationary members, 1 mem wife, 3 guests. Pete Munt in the chair.

1. APOLOGIES for absence were received from Dave Hill & Pete Mathews.
2. MINUTES of the half yearly meeting held on Sep.30 1967 were read and signed as being a true record.
3. REPORTS.

Secretary. Pedro reported that there were 70 members (35 full; 26 probationary; 7 associates and 2 members' wives). 13 of these were on the verge of having membership terminated for non payment of subs. 2 members applications had been rejected; we were liable to pay up £6 for loss of the August key; we had arranged for Arthur Cox to speak on 'caving, in Holland; we were unable to purchase land formerly owned by the Charterhouse Country Club.

Treasurer The statement of income and expenditure dated 4/3/68 was accepted. It had been signed by Rob Charnock and Richard Woolcott, the auditors.

Meet Secretary. There had been more caving, but standards had not been higher. The meet programme will be circulated next month. Tony Knibbs was thanked on his retirement from office.

Editor was still awaiting duplicator 10 newsletters published during the year.

Cottage Warden. Water pipe installed that weekend. Cleanliness of Cottage had improved. Peter Goddard thanked on his retirement.

Recorder. Had done much indexing and was exchanging with 23 clubs.

Tacklemaster. Reported loss of several feet of ladder and 400ft of lifeline. Was making more ladder and agreed to make some nobbly dogs.

4. CONSTITUTION & RULES. It was agreed to add to rule 3(b) 'and who are at least 16 years old'.
5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS On a motion by Pat Walsh, it was agreed that 'This meeting refuses to accept the committee's decision rejecting a training trip report submitted by Pat Walsh in respect of June Walsh and refers the matter back to the committee.'

GELIGNITE The committee disclaimed any responsibility or knowledge of the use of gelignite on private land near Priddy.

THURSDAY EVENING TALKS. Peter Mathews report was discussed and it was agreed that we should seek a hall or suitable place to hold talks etc. near to the Royal Oak, Brentford.

6. NEW OFFICERS. The committee of the previous year was declared re-elected without a vote except that Bryan Hilman becomes meet sec. and Dave Hill becomes cottage warden.

COMMITTEE.

Secretary: Brian Mee. 91 Evelyn Drive, Pinner, Middx. Phone 01 428 1975.

Treasurer: Tony Fitzgibbon. 265 Eastcote Road, Ruislip, Middx.

Meet Secretary: Bryan Hilman. 24 Kidderminster Rd, West Croydon, Surrey. Phone Croydon 8513.

Cottage Warden: Dave Hill. 245. Watford Road, Croxley Green, Herts.

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MENDIP CAVING GROUP: MEET PROGRAMME 1968.

EASTER April 12/15 SOUTH WALES (Ystradfellte)
Camping at Porth-yr-Ogof.

May 4/5 MENDIP Holwell Cave / Rescue practice.

May 18/19 MENDIP Swildons Hole or St. Cuthberts
(not conformed).

WHIT June 1/3 NORTH WALES.

June 15/16 MENDIP G.B. Cave.

June 29/30 DERBYSHIRE (Oxlow - Giants?).

July 13/14 SOUTH WALES (Agen Allwedd)

July 27/28 MENDIP (Box Mines)

August 10/11 SOUTH WALES (Penwyllt)
O.F.D. Dan-yr-Ogof.

BANK August 31/September 2 YORKSHIRE Camping.
Lancaster/Easgill System.

September 21st 22 MENDIP G.B. Cave / Lamb Leer.

October 5/6 MENDIP H.Y.G.M. / Rescue Practice.

November 2/3 MENDIP Swildons Hole.

November 23/24 MENDIP St. Cuthberts Swallet.

December 14/15 MENDIP G.B. Cave / Lamb Leer.

All meets are subject to change and those bracketed above are yet to be conformed. Some meets later in the year may be changed. Keep an eye on the Newsletter for news of changes.
BSH.