

## The Caves of North-West Clare, Ireland

by the University of Bristol

Speleological Society.

edited by E. K. Tratman

David & Charles, 256pp., 105s

In the minds of many people, speleology is more than a posh name for foolhardy exploits by young men (those thoughtless students again!) in caves, who shamelessly endanger not only their own lives, but also those of their rescuers, and so on. It is pleasant, therefore, to welcome this well-produced volume which admirably shows what the study of caves is about. It does so by focusing upon the interdisciplinary activities of the University of Bristol Speleological Society in a small limestone area of western Ireland, which they have studied in depth continuously since World War II. If any book can dispel the popular misconception of what cave explorers do, this is certainly it.

Separate chapters deal with the geology of the area, its geomorphology, the geomorphology of the cave systems, their possible mode of formation in terms of solutional erosion, a study of the cave sediments, and detailed descriptions of the caves themselves. There are appendices on the methods used to survey the caves so that they could be accurately related to the surface features and those used to trace underground water flow. By limiting themselves to a small area only—less than eight miles square—the authors have been able to undertake a really detailed study over several years of the relationships between the underground and the surface geomorphology. In any case, the overall lengths of the cave systems are sufficiently large to occupy one caving club fully for several seasons' work: the Poulmagollum-Pouelva system is over seven miles long, the Coolagh River Cave two miles, the Doolin Cave six and a half miles, and the caves of the Poulacapple region total several miles.

One interesting conclusion may be singled out from this comprehensive survey, namely that the majority of the caves seem to have been formed remarkably quickly, perhaps in the last 10 000 years, since the end of the last glaciation. This view finds support both from the relation of the caves to post-glacial surface features and from calculations of possible rates of limestone solution. Although British geomorphologists have been reluctant to accept that

large caves can be so "young", this view is gaining ground on the Continent.

It is a pity that the book will be priced in the pocket of many speleologists when it goes up to £6 in 1970. David & Charles have produced technical archaeological books more cheaply, and one feels that this too could have been made cheaper, perhaps by sacrificing some plates. None the less, it is well worth buying, and one hopes it will inspire other caving clubs to produce comparable interdisciplinary studies of English and Welsh limestone areas.

Michael Walker  
New Scientist 11.16.69

...sary clarity and the  
virtuosity to do more than  
merely rough justice to Stravinsky's "Three Scenes from Petroushka." R. L. H.

## CHALK WORKINGS

Members of Chelsea Speleological Society exploring tunnels under Jacqueline Close, a housing estate, at Bury St. Edmunds. Suffolk, where 14 homes have been evacuated in the past four months because of subsidence, discovered another maze of old underground chalk workings at the weekend.

April 1969  
Daily Telegraph