

MENDIP CAVING GROUPNEWSLETTER No.76.JULY 1969.Accident Liability

In the June newsletter Bryan Pittman gave a warning with regard to children on caving trips. This I should like to amplify.

Our Club and the leader of a trip have a responsibility to all guests taken on a caving trip, irrespective of the age of the guests. There is no legal magic attached to any particular age or age group; if the Club is negligent in the maintenance or provision of the equipment used, or the leader is negligent in his control of the party and an accident occurs in which the guest is injured as a result of that negligence, there may be a cause of action against the Club or the leader. The problem is, what is 'negligence' in any particular set of circumstances.

If for example the Club uses a ladder which breaks when the guest is using it, the question is, 'Did the Club know, or ought it to have known that the ladder was faulty?' If the answer is 'Yes' then the injured guest is likely to succeed in an action against the club. It will not make any difference to the cause of action if the guest was 6, 16, or 26 years of age.

On the other hand, if a guest falls when scaling a pitch without either ladder or lifeline, the question is 'Was the leader negligent in allowing him to do so? Also did he exercise proper supervision of the party, and the guest in particular?' Here the age of the guest, or rather, his experience as a caver may be relevant. If the pitch was not a difficult one and proper instructions were given by the leader as to the method of ascent or descent there may be no negligence but - should he have seen to it that the guest was lifelined? What do you think? If the guest was inexperienced it would not matter if he was 16 or 46 years of age - the rock at the bottom would be just as hard for both of them. The probability is that the older the guest the greater will be his own experience and ability to use his own judgement. That is where age may be significant.

The younger or more inexperienced is the guest caver, the greater will be the responsibility of the leader to see that he does not injure himself. What is adequate supervision (if any is required) of a guest who has done fifty trips is different from that required for a guest who has done only five trips.

Parents do not have a cause of action because a child is injured on a caving trip. It is the child's action, and so long as he is under 21 the law requires that he must bring his action through a person of over 21, usually Dad, sometimes Mum, rarely someone else.

Our Club members are bound by our Club rules and constitution. Our guests are not.

Obviously in our particular sport we all accept a certain degree of risk of injury, and if the Almighty chooses to let the stalactite curtain drop just as a guest is passing under it, he can hardly blame the terrestrial leader - unless of course the end of the show was expedited by the detonation of 2 lbs. of "bang" in the wings a couple of minutes earlier!

R. J. Saunders.

Flood Changes in G.B. Cave.

The Dry Way is now open, but the passage between First Grotto and Mud Passage is now a squeeze, at the end of which is a 3m. drop for which a ladder is advisable.

There is now a permanent ladder from First Grotto into the Wet Way, courtesy of some other club. The drop at the bottom of the chain in the Wet Way is now much longer and a ladder is useful there.

The Ooze is still blocked. However though there is a large quantity of mud washed down from another swallet, this is being removed slowly by the stream, which has scoured a way through it. It is still possible that more mud may be washed down though. Several boulders have been removed from the bottom of the Pitch, making the present scramble down 15m. instead of 12m. Above the Pitch the bypass route for the water is blocked, so that in wet conditions it goes down the Pitch.

Debris has been deposited in the Gorge below the Pitch, making the climb into the Oxbow 3.5m. instead of 6m., and the bottom 2m. of the fixed ladder is covered. The Bottom Dig is only passable for about 10m. In the New Series there is a sand floor in the crawl to Helictite Chamber, and many of the boulders have moved.

There is a fuller account by Dave Savage in the Jubilee issue of the U.B.S.S. Proceedings.

Marianne Last.

Rescue First-Aid.

The haphazard distribution of rescue first-aid kits over Mendip is to be considered by a committee of the M.R.O.

No Sign of the Sign

One morning on Mendip, some bleary eyed blokes awoke in astonishment to find themselves gazing on a couple of policemen. Worried thoughts about all the traffic offences that they had committed, and all the stuff they had nicked disappeared into gales of laughter when they heard that the 'Castle of Comfort' sign had been stolen.

The sign was found the following week swinging to and fro outside the Belfry - it was planted there by persons unknown.

Shatter Cave

This cave was found during April and is one of the delights of Mendip. It consists of 1500ft of superbly decorated passages. The cave was discovered by quarrying in Fairy Cave Quarry, and like all the other caves there, has a gated entrance, access being strictly controlled by Cerebus S.S. Trips down Shatter Cave may only be made while the quarry is closed, and then only with an official leader.

Caving Gear

A caving mail order service by :-
Dave Sweeting, 68 Broxash Road, Battersea, London, SW11.

A fairly comprehensive range of equipment can be supplied. This includes quite a selection of neoprenes and wetsuits, diving equipment, ladders, ropes, and climbing equipment. Particularly interesting, boilersuits are to be had at 7/- each! Goods may also be collected (saving postage, which could be quite considerable) by prior arrangement only. The complete catalogue is available from the Tacklemaster.

Wetsuit Socks

A new and improved pattern appears in the Wessex Journal No. 122.

Mind the Easel

It's bad enough having cave photographers and surveyers cluttering up caves and holding up trips. I've never yet met the cave artist, but apparently they are growing in numbers. Can you imagine the scene when you're on a long trip 'Hang on for a couple of hours, I just want to flash off a watercolour' Further thoughts on the subject occur in Wessex Jnl No. 122.

A description and survey are given from Plantation Junction to the sump. The only side passage is the Pyrolusite Series.

The Caves of Rana Nordland, Norway - C.R.G. Transactions Vol II No.1 (71pp + photos + survey)

Yet another Noresland Saga from the St Pierres. A Detailed description of each and every cave is given together with notes on their location. Six of the caves described are over 2000m long.

Following the similar publication of 'The Caves of Graatadalen' Norwegian caves are becoming extremely well documented. Indeed some of our own caving areas are less well covered. Lack of information should be no problem for anyone contemplating a caving expedition to Arctic Norway (Even the C.R.G. Newsletter contains 10pp on the Caves of Kjøpsvik, and Tysfjord)

Kendal C.C. Jnl No.4 (30pp)

It goes with out saying that the first half of this journal is devoted to an account of various caving areas in Norway (3 miles of passage were discovered). Other than this an expedition went to the Pyrenees and descended Puit d' Anglas (a cave discovered in 1959)

London University C.C. Jnl. No.9

Of particular note is an article 'Tourist Trips in the Trou Du Glay'. A simplified survey of 20km. of cave is given. The 'classic' through trips are described with particular emphasis on tackle requirements and short cuts.

Chalk is the most widespread limestone occurring in Britain. The general lack of caves in chalk is due to the nature of the rock itself, which is quite porous and able to transmit water via intergranular pores and microfractures. In Northern France there are several large cave systems associated with the chalk. The largest is near Rheims and is over 2km. long. Which is the largest swallet in England? It isn't in Yorkshire or South Wales. It is the Mymmshall Swallet just outside Potters Bar. The Total catchment is some 18 sq miles.

Will You Be Sued?

Members asked to lead parties of outsiders - clubs organisations etc - are invited to consult with the secretary to ensure that they are protected against legal action in the event of an accident.

Great Parties

No not the social variety, just large groups of novices lead by too few experienced cavers for the size of the party are frowned upon. Nevertheless this practice has been observed by members to be developing in this club. This practice is both inefficient and dangerous, it must not therefore occur again. Members are reminded that should they wish to take beginners caving, then the party should have an experienced leader and end man, a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 6 persons in the party and no more than two beginners to each experienced caver.

O. B. Server

Horsefire

The C.O.2 fire extinguisher in the Cottage was used in horseplay on two separate weekends the result of which it has had to be recharged. While the club does not wish to inhibit boisterous activities it must be remembered that an empty fire extinguisher is no use at all, and if the hut were gutted there would be no activities of any kind!

While on the subject of horseplay, Mr Fry in the Caravan next to our cottage, found the noise outside the cottage on the Saturday night before last, so unbearable that he has made a complaint to the committee. Please remember to keep quiet when entering or leaving the cottage, and don't stand around talking outside the front door late at night.

Fewer Rescues Now That the 40 Has Gone

With the disappearance of the 40 in Swildon's the number of rescues on Mendip last year decreased to an all time low of six.

There were two rescues in Swildons - one on the 40 before it disappeared - and one in the Troubles Series where a party became exhausted. There was also one non-rescue, a false alarm.

The most serious incident of the year was in Nine Barrows Swallet, where a 34 year old East Somerset C.C. member fell in Crystal Chamber. He broke his tibia and fibia in one leg, and was taken out in one hour by stretcher.

In Sidcot a Kingston scout had to be extricated from the squeeze at the top of the final drop; and in Cuckoo Cleeves a party from Adventure Unlimited found they couldn't climb a knotted rope out of the 13ft pot.

The false alarm was due to the party not telling Mr Maine that they had left the cave. Please don't be responsible for any similar incident.

The Swildon's Pulley To Return

Because even with the Swildon's 40 washed away, it may be difficult to ascend in very wet weather, the iron bar and pulley are to be refixed above Suioides Leap.

Bury St Edwards Mine

A chalk mine has been found recently, undermining several housing estates and part of a hospital, at Bury St Edmonds Suffolk.

We have been invited to assist in exploring this mine, which is known to extend several miles underground. It contains large passages, chambers, and several shafts to the surface, which have been blocked at the top, and built over. It is proposed to spend a Sunday in the near future in the mine, and any one interested should contact Brian Hillman. 01-643.2933.

Brian Hillman.

Findon Well

For the past eight years a party of cavers and archeologists have been digging a Roman well at Findon in Sussex. The well is associated with a nearby Roman villa, and at some stage during Roman times, has been used as a rubbish tip. either by the Romans themselves, or by Saxon invaders who burnt the villa to the ground. The well was discovered in 1961 when a tractor, ploughing a field, got its wheel stuck in the shaft when the top gave way.

Investigation showed that the shaft was 4ft dia and 68ft deep. At this point the local archeologist persuaded Henry Pearman of Chelsea S. S. to dig out the '10 to 20ft' of fill to see what was at the bottom of the well, which was thought to be about 90ft deep. At 78ft a Shipams Paste bottle was found. At 83ft Roman pottery was found and tiles were found, and since then every dig has revealed a wealth of Roman remains, nails, tiles, pots, coins, boxes, etc. At 165ft the shaft narrowed to 3ft dia, and at present stands at 218ft. Descent is by motor winch, and the digging is done under shelter to prevent any accidents should a bucket come free. If anyone is interested in coming down to Findon one Sunday for a picnic in the country, please contact Brian Hillman.

Brian Hillman.

Blackmoor Beams

Transport is required to move reinforcing rods from Pete Munt's house at Kelway, Upper Butts, Brentford, Middx., to Mendip. Anyone who can help please contact Pete.

Funds

The Land Purchase Fund now stands at £232.18s.5d. and the General Fund now stands at £78.8s.4d. +£25. in the deposit account.

Congratulations

We wish to extend our warmest congratulations to Tony and Julie who are getting married very shortly. Are celibate committee members going to become a thing of the past in the M.C.G.?

Newsletter Cover Competition

The committee is very pleased to announce that Greg Smith's entry has won the competition for the Newsletter Cover. The design has been sent for printing, and it is expected to be put on the Newsletter in the early autumn.

Ladder Technique

Colin Green's tragic accident in Kingsdale Master Cave, has prompted a lot of thought and discussion about laddering equipment and its methods of use, in caving circles recently, as you are all well aware. The following paragraphs are a resumé of what has transpired.

Whether or not a lifeline should be used in a given situation depends on the condition of the ladder and tether. Safety factors are generally high, usually 9 or 10 times safe working load, just on rung slip. However it is the responsibility of the user to check the condition of all equipment that he is about to use all the same. It also depends on the character of the pitch and the experience of the caver. If equipment is in good condition and the cavers are confident about the pitch it may be reasonable for them not to use a lifeline, it will save time and energy, which is a very important factor on a long trip. In other words lifelines should be used intelligently. Just because a pitch happens to require a ladder, it does not mean that it should be lifelined. Conversely, because a pitch requires no ladder does not mean that it can be negotiated safely without a lifeline!

Against all this is set possible design faults in the equipment used of which no one is aware. J. Butterworth of the N.P.C. has just written in the latest 'Descent' of the discovery that the tethers used in the accident were hemp cored, and that the rotting of the hemp caused the strands in the tether to twist and stretch causing metal fatigue to ensue.

Tony Giles of Croydon Technical College, has tested some cable and some 'C' links on a 5 ton tensile testing machine. He found that the 'C' links were the weakest part of a ladder. Those tested began to show serious deformation at 4.3 cwt. If the average caver weighs 1.5 cwt. that gives a safety factor of only 5.7! If ladder and equipment be included, then the safety factor was only 2.8! Croydon C.C. are now using thicker wire and 'C' links for their tethers.

You may rest assured that the committee is following these developments with the keenest interest especially with respect to the condition, and standard of manufacture, of Tackle.

Bryan Pittman and Greg Smith.

Meet Programme

July 26/27 Derbyshire-Oxlow-Maskhill Mine

Aug. 9/10 S. Wales- Agen Allwedd

Aug. 30/31/1 Yorkshire

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Printed and published by B.A. Pittman, 39 Boston Gardens, Brentford,
Middlesex. 01-560.6595.