

MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NEWSLETTER No. 78.

SEPT/OCTOBER 1969

Editor's Dilemma

Towards the end of August the editor found to his dismay that he had received insufficient material for the September Newsletter. As a result it was reluctantly decided to combine it with the October issue. It is hoped that members will take heed and remember that the quality, size, and continuity of the N/L is as much their responsibility as it is the editor's. So let's have more news more often.

Yorkshire

On August 30th six members of the MCG and three NPC members climbed up scree slopes, crags etc. to find Tatham Wife Hole, assured that it was quite close to the road. (But it wasn't!)

Our intrepid leader, Mr Smith had a poisoned finger, so he had no caving gear with him. Of course, on the Saturday, Mr Smith decided to go caving. NPC. kindly lent him the gear of one of their members who was killed in Ease Gill recently. To protect his finger, Mr (Ghoul) Smith wore an electronically tested protective. (I must have a chat with that lad).

The four pitches, a 35', 40', and two 25's were all damp. We got a soaking on each even though the stream was much lower than usual. Under normal conditions some call it a sporting trip, though with an extra bit of ladder a lot of water could be avoided. The early passageway although twenty feet high in places, is rather narrow and meandering, making progress awkward but still just a walk. It's pretty easy to find the way as there are no side turnings at all off the clean, highly scolloped streamway. Below the third pitch the cave is at its best, with lofty 60ft high passages and chambers. (It goes without saying that someone ran out of film on the second pitch). The final pitch leads straight into the terminal canal where the water gets higher and the roof gets lower. In at two o'clock and out at seven, Tatty Wife neatly filled the afternoon dead period.

Pete Mathews & John MacMillan

Bahamas

If you could but get down to them, there are caverns 10,000 feet below the surface in the Bahama Islands in the Caribbean. Back in 1947 an oil company lost 8,000 feet of drill pipe down one of the caverns and had to abandon their drilling!

Minister's Decision saves South Hill

The Minister of Transport, Mr Marsh, has ordered that two footpaths crossing the 200ft high South Hill at Bleadon should remain open. This means that Kingston Minerals will be unable to use existing planning permission to extract 1,400,000 tons of limestone by opencast quarrying, and in so doing demolish what is a lovely vantage point for views of the Mendips and across the Bristol Channel to the Welsh hills.

Glastonbury

New facts about the pre-historic 'lake village' at Meare, near Glastonbury, have been unearthed. Digging through the foundations of the Iron Age village, known to have been occupied during the last 200 years BC, archaeologists have found evidence of earlier occupation. A succession of well preserved timber structures existed below the foundations almost certainly of 500-1,000 BC. Even Neolithic occupation at 2000BC could not be excluded.

Merstham Mine, Redhill

This disused 300 years old hearthstone mine fills the caver's equivalent of the old fashioned Sunday afternoon family stroll. It provides a casual and interesting two hours exploration, mostly walking though, unless you are a dwarf, in such a manner that you may emerge with a bent back and a cricked neck. I wonder if our forebears were men of lesser stature than ourselves or if it is just a coincidence that old cottage doorways are the same inconvenient height as the mine passages?

We entered the mine through a collapse in the roof, followed by a short crawl over some of the rubble. From then on the progress was as rapid as a bent posture would permit, except where one or two roof falls required a more prone position.

The mine workings, which in speleological age are only in the embryonic stage, have already produced calcite formations. Flowstone is forming over the mud floor, and some sections of the roof are well decorated with straws several inches long. A crawl into a man made grotto is well worth while. A section through the mud floor, which had been broken off with a clean face, showed fascinating fine strata, in a delicate pattern of browns and creams, presumably deposited by a gentle flow of water. "Plop" holes in the mud have been filled in with calcite and could be eased off to reveal the underside.

Some of the heathstone pillars left as roof supports are showing, the effects of lack of maintenance in the mine generally. Cracks have appeared in them and some large flakes are ready to fall away. Curiously we saw the remains of only one pit prop.

Of particular interest was the signature "A Davies" written with the finger in the mud on Derby Day 1911 after an exceptional cloudburst had brought silt into the mine. The signature is broken by two very large cracks, and although the mud is still soft it is easily legible.

At the bottom of the mine, about 50ft down, there are three large blocks of hearthstone still attached to the working face, just ready to be broken away with wedges.

We speculated shortly on an incomplete collection of bones, probably fox or badger.

Our party was Brian Hillman, Arthur Spain, Helen, Roger, and Ron Saunders, and Sheila Hillman, more or less in that order. Brian provided an interesting commentary throughout, and really put his foot in the 'ssh - you know what' when posing for the party photograph. Happily the photograph bears this out.

Ron Saunders

Meet Programme

Sept 20/21	South Wales Dan-Yr-Ogof and O.F.D.
Oct 5	Findon Well - Sussex (Contact Brian)
Oct 11/12	Half Year General Meeting- Mendip G.B. Cavern.
Oct 18/19	Yorkshire-Peru Ghent Pot, contact Greg
Oct 26/27	Mendip Rescue Practice & Shatter Cave
Nov 8/9	Agen Allwedd (Names to Brian Hillman not later than <u>Oct 8th</u>)
Nov 22/23	Mendip Work Weekend.

Flackmoor Lid

The reinforcing rods for the beams are now at the cottage. Full instructions are given in the log book, so please cast a beam next time you are on Mendip. If three people follow the instructions given, a beam can be cast in just over an hour. A prize will be given to the team casting the most beams between now and the A.G.M. in March.

Rescue Practice

As you will have already read in the Meet Programme, there is to be a Rescue Practice on 26th October in Longwood-August. Please support this practice. If sufficient people turn up, an enjoyable time will be had without too much sweat. By the way there's free soup at the end for all participants!

Calor Gas

'Lanes' of Cheddar no longer sell Calor Gas. The place to exchange cylinders is the Caravan Company in the old cinema building at Cheddar Cross. Alternatively gas can be obtained from 'Whitings' in Wells. The cost will be refunded to members from Club Funds, so obtain a Bill.

Dustbins

It seems that not everyone knows the procedure regarding disposal of rubbish from the cottage. The rubbish should be emptied from the containers in the kitchen and from the dustbin (outside the back door) into the bottom of the quarry. Do not leave any waste in the dustbin when vacating the cottage, as it encourages vermin and besides, it STINKS!

Cottage Work

Some cottage work was carried out recently. The toilet was painted, as well as the shelves in the living room and the front door. The latter requires a top coat, so anyone with time to spare can complete the job. The dormitories were spring cleaned and some of the mattresses were found to require replacement. Anyone who has any old mattresses to spare could put them to very good use by unloading them on to the bunks in the cottage.

Tea Towels

These do not launder themselves between weekends. Therefore the dirty towels should be taken home by members, washed (preferably boiled), and returned, either to the cottage or to Club meeting on Thursdays. Alternatively there is usually a packet of washing powder at the cottage, and clothes pegs (in the cutlery drawer), so the tea towels can be washed before leaving.

Ladder Technique

Following on from recent discussion of methods of ladder climbing in this newsletter, members should be reminded of the following overriding factor. The MRO Safety Code which is embraced in our own Constitution states:-

"A LIFELINE SHOULD BE AVAILABLE FOR ALL VERTICALS AND MUST BE USED ON VERTICALS OVER 20FT. IT IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO HAVE IT JUST IN CASE, THE LEADER MUST INSIST ON ITS USE."

Ogcfwr Ddu

Membership

The applications by Elisabeth Barrett, 28 Belmont Rd. Twickenham, Middx., and Bernard Reeves of 16A Newbury Way, Northolt, Middx. have now been considered by the Committee for Probationary Membership, and have been accepted.

Christmas on Mendip

Once again there are a few people spending the festive period on Mendip. Caving will probably consist of G.B. and a little digging. For Christmas Day there may be a private visit to Gough's and lunch in Wells. It is essential to book early for the lunch - let me know now if you intend coming.

Pete Mathews.

Departed No.1

We were all very sad to hear of the loss of that fine old institution of debauchery, The Belfry, which was consumed by fire a few weeks ago. It had an atmosphere of its own, and many is the cup of coffee we enjoyed there.

Departed No.2

Gone too is Pete Mathews' A35 Racing Van. Sad to say, we will no longer see that fine example of the coach-builder's craft on Mendip again. During a recent drive to Somerset it suddenly, for no accountable reason overturned. The event took place at Wingfield.

Half Yearly General Meeting. Postponed

As there are now to be five resignations from the Committee, the H.Y.G.M. to be held at the cottage on Sat 11th Oct. has now been postponed. A special meeting will now be held in London, not later than 30th Oct at which a General Election of Committee Members will be held. The members resigning are, Brian Mee Secretary, Greg Smith Treasurer, Tony Fitzgibbon, Tacklemaster, Ken Newcomb Cottage Warden, and Bryan Pittman Editor. Members will be informed by letter of the date and venue as soon as they are known.

COMMITTEE

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Crawley, Sussex.
Editor: Bryan Pittman.