

MCG NEWS

NO 101

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WEEKLY CLUB "The Royal Oak", New Road, Brentford, Middx. (Behind
MEETINGS Brentford Football Club Ground) every Thursday night
till ejected.

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COTTAGE Stirrup Cup, Nordrach-on-Mendip, Nr. Wells, Somerset.
Accommodation for over 30 - all essential services - guests
charged at 20p per night (or 20p dayfee).
Guest party booking through the Cottage Warden.

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RESCUE WARDEN Bill Jones; 91 St Saviours Road, Croydon, Surrey.

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Cave Science at Whernside Manor

A number of weekend courses are being arranged at that palacial pot-holing paradise of Whernside Manor, near Dent. The fee for each course, including full board, hire of tackle, lamps etc, is £6. This will almost certainly be worth the money in terms of two long and active days.

26-28 October - Cave Life deals with identification, collection and study of animals, bugs and fungi found underground.

23-25 November- Limestone Geology and Cave Formation

During 1974 it is intended to run similar courses including:-

The Ice Age and Yorkshire Caves
Underground Photography
Archeology - possibly based on Victoria Cave, Settle.

Remember members under 21 can obtain grants for the above allowing full transport costs plus 50% of course fees (see NL No 94)

Much Ado in Devon

A certain amount of storming has accompanied the publication of the first edition of "The Caves of Devon" by A D Oldham.

One's first thought is to congratulate Tony Oldham on getting this long awaited volume into print. But, things are not all they seem as a particularly acidic review from Devon S.S. seeks to point out.

Caving in Devon is not so simple as in other parts of the country, access is generally more difficult as many of the caves are near habitation. Because of delicate relationships with landowners, the Devon clubs, D.S.S. Pengelly C.S.G., Exeter U.S.S. and Plymouth C.G. decided by mutual agreement that a "Caves of Devon" would be an undesirable publication.

In the light of this, the Oldham guide does seem uncalled for, and the indignation of the Devon clubs quite understandable. Perhaps, things would not have been so bad had not there been so many errors in this publication, particularly regarding access.

From a seat on the fence-post, a book of this sort would seem to have been inevitable. One can too readily recall other uncalled for and inaccurate books on Caving. The moral would seem to be if the expert won't write then the egotist certainly will, even if it is a little garbled.

With this in mind we look forward to "The Complete Caves of Devon" even if it is a limited edition.

Pete Mathews

Blackmoor

The excavation at Upper Flood Swallet has progressed well since W Stanton's moderate breakthrough made late last year. Apparently, following Bill Jones' report of what he saw when his glasses were steamed up, tales of great pitches and vast lengths of passage have been circulating on Mendip. In fact the drop was about 6' and passage length 15'.

At the time of this find the water sank rapidly in the floor at the farthest point negotiable. Stanton states that he put a ton or so of fine sediment into the stream just before this breakthrough. So a relatively free way for water must have existed. This freeway could not have been large however, even before the mud was put down, since fragments of vegetation debris (evidently from the 1968 flood) occur on the roof in the new section as elsewhere in the cave.

After work started at the end, water built up as on previous obstructions. It was removed by placing a charge deep under the right wall, water then drained from the bottom. On one digging session we got down in the floor some three feet, and found that the passage was much wider. (The cross section being 'L' shaped at this point) The small stream ran along the back of this wide portion.

On another occasion water made a faint hissing sound as it drained away from the part flooded rift. Greg also reports that on one occasion the rift emptied rapidly and completely, with water sinking some feet before the drop! Greg has reported on the next short extension of about 20', made directly forwards. (It is worth noting that broken stalactites continue to be seen in the new section of the cave)

At the moment the main assault is at the end of this extension. At this point there is a totally calcite filled passage about 1ft 6inches wide occurring on the left of the face. This face has been widened by working in bedrock. The face shelves under and below is soft red clay which may not be a particularly good sign. This may mean that we are not following the course taken more recently by the water, as there are unpleasant black mining tailings present. A few yards back from the end on the right wall, Bernard Reeves thinks he may have detected a current entering a small muddy tube below a calcited passage. After a little clearing and probing the water certainly dropped rapidly to the lowest seen for some time.

At Easter further exploratory work was done at this site. The obstruction is somewhat similar to the end face, but below the calcite black mud was found. At the end of the digging session there was a suggestion that the passage was turning back up stream to lie parallel to the wet rift. This did not slow work on the end face however, and steady progress was made lengthening the passage.

We had a problem with fumes which did not clear to a satisfactory level, even after 48 hours. When wishing to work a short time after blasting, it is essential to place charges in good shot holes, rather than use other methods. Let me also recommend that all diggers drink plenty of fresh milk!

In recent weeks the situation has become very interesting. While preparing a forward sloping shot hole below water level, bubbles were seen to rise indicating a void. After detonation the end of the cave drained almost completely, for the first time since working this sector. Probing ahead reveals an opening several inches across. A breakthrough of some sort, thus seems imminent.

M.O.Cotter.

M.C.G. Northern Branch Activities 1973

Magnetometer

With the meet proclaiming a Penygent Pot trip, three members decided to take a trip north two weeks earlier with a view to coaxing their caving minds back into vertical sense. What transpired however, took them no more than 150ft beneath the Dales.

The arrival of our three members at Greenclouse caught the Pennine with their caving defences down, for Saturday morning saw an M.C.G./N.P.C. combo heading towards Magnetometer Pot. The entrance was found to be an oil drum in the bed of

Fornah Gill (a charming prospect if the weather turned anti-caver) and an awkward 30ft free ladder climb led to a chamber, the low, narrow exit from which set the tone for much that was to follow. Several minutes on hands and knees led to Four Ways Junction, a left turn, over the Well Pitch and on again on hands and knees to.....Four Ways Junction? A slightly lower passage above the Well Pitch revealed the true way on and a fairly lengthy section of cave, part crawling part flatout eventually gave entrance to Styx Passage.

This wide, arched passage was a magnificent contrast to the low muddy crawls. To the left a thirty degree downward slope led up stream for a couple of hundred feet to the Styx sump (such are the anomalies of Fountains Fell). Downstream several hundred feet of wide passage gave way to a canal section, the River Styx, very reminiscent of the lake in the Lost John's Master Cave. Complete with rock pendants plus a surprising amount of stal. After a final low section, the passage changed character and became relatively dry with very heavily scalloped walls and floor. After several hundred feet of stooping along this winding passage, a higher rift passage was entered and this was followed to Caton Hall, the longest part of the whole cave.

Caton Hall is entered via a 50ft pitch. On arrival at the top of the pitch the ladder was dropped down it (literally) by a person of Scottish origin, who shall remain nameless. A rope was secured to a likely looking boulder and presented to this careless person who, upon seeing many pairs of menacing steel toecaps, promptly absieled down it to retrieve the ladder. The final crawl from Caton Hall looked uninviting enough to warrent a return to the surface.

John Mirriam

Penyghent Pot

The Penyghent Pot meet attended by nine members, some of whom stayed at the B.P.C. cottage, Brackenbottom, and others sampled the hospitality of the M.C.G.'s Lakeland branch.

The descent of the cave went much as on previous trips. Most of the so called ladder pitches in the rift section were ignored, and on reaching the lower levels, the melt water from the previous weeks snow made itself apparent. A laddered descent of Niagra was out of the question, so the bypass route was examined, but lack of lifelines, coupled with the fact that most of the holds on the traverse could be passed around the party for examination, prompted a turn around at this point.

John Mirriam.

In The Dales

With:- Ian and Penny Bramble, Pete Mathews, John Mirriam, Ron & Roger Saunders, Greg Smith, and John Wilcock.

and Without :-John Mac. (who is obviously under someone's thumb) and Tony Buchan, who couldn't find us, but was spotted several times hurtling around the Dales at fantastic speed (there's a lesson there)

By way of a change our party ventured into Wharfedale camping first in Langstrothdale, and later behind the Buck in Buckden. After the various groups met up, the summit of Buckden Pike was conquered with a short visit to the lead mines on the way down.

Thoughts quickly exceeded our ladder, and while Greg and the Johns bought further lengths in Bentham, whilst the remainder wandered around Dow Cave.

We stopped at Hobson's Choice, popularly supposed to be blocked. Through sheer ignorance we found ourselves on the far side and on to the Waterfalls.

Next day, Ian Greg and the Johns set off for Pasture Gill Pot. As Wilkie said, "This should be a good trip so long as Johnny Mac doesn't turn up". And he didn't, and it was. The entrance pitches were easily dealt with. A pause being forced by a large fissure in the passage floor. This opened out at the head of a 55m pitch. Everyone bottomed this but were halted by lack of a way on. Presumably the route was blocked by a boulder.

Meanwhile, Ron, Roger, and Pete were flat out in Sleets Gill Cave; described as the most spectacular in the area. A steeply sloping entrance passage was followed down to join the roomy Main Gallery. Here we found signs of recent flooding - the entire cave, except The Ramp, floods to the entrance. At the end of the Main Gallery a slot in the floor led to a drop of three metres into a stony crawl. Following a telephone line, first one stream entered and then the crawl turned up another stream, Hydrophobia Passage. After battling on to the end of this very wet flat out crawl, it was acknowledged that the passage was aptly named, and a wetsuit might have been a good idea after all. Thus a return was made without reaching the Ramp, the terminal passage rising at 45° for 250m. Teeth chattering we decided a return was a must.

Pete Mathews.

Why Yorkshire?

It took just one fine weekend in Yorkshire to convince me that although our members profess to go there to cave, there are other reasons which make that 250 mile trip on tedious motorways a worthwhile journey.

Whit Saturday morning was fine, warm, and hazy, with enough light in the sky to predict a good day ahead. I refused to believe that the bird call which I heard on waking was an oyster catcher, it was too far inland.

Pete Mathews had no such doubts about his feathered alarm clock - a clucking cuckoo, at some unearthly hour, woke him, and earned itself the distinction of threatend extinction at the end of a shot gun.

But that is out of sequence. We (Roger and Ron Saunders) had to find the camping cavers somewhere in Wharfedale near (!) the George at Hubberholme.

The ride north from Ingleton to Hawes, and then south through Gayle, over the moorland road was marvellous, both for the views, and the splendid isolation from urbanity.

The village postman at Gayle directed us to Hubberholme. "Keep right on up over the moors till you come to the first church on the left - it's the only one."

Is there any other moorland where a snipe would obligingly sit on a fence post to be identified with ease and comfort from the motor - car which reversed along side it? My infrequent experience of that particular bird had been a streak of brown and white which vanished weaving at great speed into the distance.

The descent into Wharfedale was steep, (it could hardly be anything else after the 1 in 4 climb on to the moor) and picturesque. The stream gradually widened into a small river, flowing over and between its smooth but uneven lime stone bed, beside which, on a wide undulating grass verge we found the tents of Pete, John Mirriam, Greg, and John Wilkinson. The beauty of that spot was such

that they had been enticed miles away from the predetermined campsite at the George - well can you think of any other reason why they'd not camp beside the pub?

On such a glorious morning no-one suggested a caving trip, and by common consent we drove to Buckden (a pub, and a post office shop) where we climbed the Pike, up a lovely steep sided gill with two small waterfalls, where the spotted purple orchid grew on the bank above the first fall, and again beside the footpath further up the valley.

On the way down I stopped and went into a miners adit just as far as daylight would allow. The water was cold and refreshing.

Roger and I completed the remaining part of the descent mostly at the double as it was nearly lunchtime closing. Pete and John took their time, secure no doubt in their greater experience that Yorkshire pubs in common with the Winmill boast the motto:-

"We never closed".

A sandwich and a couple of pints, al fresco in warm sunshine provided excellent refreshment and the conversation eased gently towards caving.

Pete suggested he took Roger and myself into Dow Cave in the Great Whernside area. Just before setting off we were joined by Ian and Penny Bramble, who had come down from Windermere. We drove to Kettlewell, and then north to Park Beck, where we walked upstream to the cave entrance. It was a relief to get into the coolness of the cave out of the humidity.

The cave was good fun, mostly walking, either in the streamway which in one place was deep enough to swim comfortably for a couple of yards, or walk on the mud bank, according to one's fancy; Through a boulder ruckæ and on to a climbable waterfall, where Pete directed the taking of a silhouette photograph, which I spoiled by a double exposure.

On the way out we investigated Bowbergill Passage, Knee deep in water and easy going as far as we went. When we eventually emerged into daylight, we walked into a wall of humidity. Lilac coloured birdseye primroses were growing in profusion along the banks of the beck interspersed with a few more orchids.

Later we all relaxed outside the Buck Inn at Buckden, on a beautiful peaceful, hazy evening with the sun sinking up the dale.

On the Sunday we decided to investigate Sleet's Gill Cave, while the others prepared to bottom Pasture Gill Pot. Sleet's Gill Cave was found to be a series of contrasts, similar to Stoke Lane Slocker at the Nutmeg Grater, but without the smell. The wet and cramped conditions got the better of us before we reached the Ramp however. It was a cold arduous crawl back to the main chamber, where we were again able to stand up. Pete looked really frozen and even Roger and I were feeling chilly. I think we all enjoyed lying on the grass outside in the sun recovering our breath and getting warm again.

Even the oyster catchers came down low to look at us!

Ron Saunders

Cave Preservation

Ideal preservation would maintain features in a particular condition forever. In a dynamic environment this cannot be achieved, even without the human factor. For example one can mention the changes brought about in the caves of Mendip as a

result of the 1968 floods.

In deciding on a course to be followed in cave preservation, it has to be decided what should remain undisturbed. The benefits to be gained or lost have to be weighed against the various courses possible. The benefits may be visual, economic, scientific, or sporting. The most difficult problems arise when it is desired to clear a region in the hope of finding an extension.

In regard to pleasing sights, one generally thinks first of calcite formations. Most members of caving clubs are extremely careful with these, and removal of in situ stalactite and stalagmite forms is in most cases avoided. There are other pleasing cave scopes however, such as waterfalls, rock basins, stream passages etc. which can also be spoiled. Even expanses of mud look less unpleasant when not churned up with water filled footprints, and smooth sand banks look better before they are kicked about. Thus where it is obvious that no extensions exist beyond these features they are better left preserved.

These softer features may be of greater spehological interest than calcite formations, although less attractive to look at. They may well be where people want to pass. Consequently less attention is normally paid to them than they deserve. Cave infill deposits may however offer the means of unravelling the history of the cave from a very early period in its formation. It may also give a guide to the best digging possibilities.

In Upper Flood Swallet there are a number of interesting features. For example there is the problem of the broken stalactites found throughout the cave, not caused by early or latter day miners! These stalactites or some remains of them may be found in floor deposits and one may hope to have a lead as to their mode of breakage and the relative time when breakage occurred. Peat occurs widely in the cave, in various relationships with other deposits. In the first down stream chamber broken calcite occurs below it, and sections showing this should be preserved for further study.

Where spoil from digging operations covers features in caves, they are of course preserved. The value of preservation is much greater if the object can still be seen. In this context, it is a pity that a section of deposit from the second down stream chamber in Upper Flood Swallet has not been left exposed. In the same cave, polygonal mud cracks in the first downstream chamber have also been greatly obliterated. If they had been preserved, they would have left a more pleasing and interesting surface as well leaving more evidence about when they were formed. Stanton has pointed out that they probably date back to the mining period, not from the 1968 flood as first thought. They are composed of tailings with later flood deposits tending to fill in the spaces between the cracks.

In the entrance series to Upper Flood, irreparable damage has been done to formations, and it no longer offers a sporting entry. Most of this was unnecessary so far back from the face, as adequate storage for spoil was available.

Following the present route in Upper Flood we expect to encounter a considerable number of blockages such as those passed to date. Thus preservation will tax everyone doing excavation and exploration work there. May I therefore suggest that anyone interested should take personal steps to place notices and tape off areas of specific interest. Any wish on anyone's part for preservation should be recognised and only altered after consultation.

Finally I would like to suggest that :-

- 1) There is no more enlargement of passages away from the working face.
- 2) That any new low passages should be left, providing there is room for a stretcher to pass through.

M.O.Cotter.