



Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

MENDIP CAVING GROUP NEWSLETTER No.109 November, 1974

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WEEKLY CLUB MEETINGS: are held at the "Royal Oak" New Road, Brentford,
Midx (behind Brentford Football Club Ground)
every Thursday night until closing time.

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COTTAGE Stirrup Cup, Nordrach-on-Mendip, Blagdon,
Somerset.

ACCOMMODATION for over 30 people - all essential services.
Guests charged at 20p per night (or 20p day fee)
Guest party bookings through the cottage warden
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EDITORIAL NOTE

I wish to apologise to members for the delay between newsletters, but this has been caused by several factors, the main ones being pressure of work and a lack of suitable articles. The latter has now been righted and I have several articles in hand for the next edition.

Quite a lot has happened since the last newsletter and this gives me an opportunity to bring the news right up to date.

As was advertised in the last newsletter an Extraordinary General Meeting was held at the Royal Oak on 26th Sept. 26 people attended but as nothing was really settled, in fact the opposite occurred, it was by and large a waste of time. However since then our registration as a charity has been put forward thus.

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REGISTRATION AS A CHARITY

The committee has made application to the Inspector of taxes for consideration as a charity. They appear to be satisfied provided certain amendments are made to the Groups Constitution and Rules. These amendments will be considered at the next Annual General Meeting of the Group in March. The proposed amendments are:

Para 2. to read,.... the object of the Group is, for the benefit of the public, the furtherance of all aspects of the scientific study and conservation of caves.

Para 11 add No amendment may be made which will cause the Group to cease to be a charity at law.

Para 15 a new para to follow 14, Trustees to read,

After satisfaction of all due debts and liabilities any remaining assets may not be distributed amongst the members but will pass to a body with similar objects established for exclusively charitable purposes or to some other charitable body.

The meeting will then consider the proposal that "The committee shall apply for registration as a charity". Clearly this step being made once and for all needs very careful consideration. There are a number of obvious advantages:-

- 1) Avoidance of corporation tax - although we would not pay this if we have a new cottage.
- 2) We could reclaim tax paid by members in respect of annual subscriptions, ie an effective gain of 33% of subs. from the tax authorities.
- 3) It would widen our choice of trusts to whom we could apply for grant aid.

There appear to be no obvious disadvantages, except that of winding up of the Group, a prospect which the committee would not consider.

The plans of the new cottage were also available at the meeting, thanks to Wally, and I hope to reproduce a copy of these sometime in the future for inclusion in the newsletter.

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GAVEL POT

Sunday 29th September -

Richard Norris
John Macmillan
Pete Lingwood

After Richard had twisted our arms to go underground the day following the Lost Johns Trip, we left Bull Pot Farm for Leck Fell and parked the car at the second gateway near Lost Johns. Although it was a clear day the thought of inserting my nice warm body into a damp cold wet-suit and visions of the rest of the M.C.G. in the Marten Arms dampened my enthusiasm slightly. Having eventually kitted up and staying on the left-hand side of the road

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and wall, we walked across the heather for about 500yds to a large shakehole. The initial sight took me by surprise as it is not obvious until you are almost on top of it.

A climb over a stile and down a muddy footpath leads to the first pitch of about 15ft. We belayed the ladder to a handy-looking flake about 2ft from the drop. This belay was protected by a rope to the tree. This descent was quickly made and onto the second pitch of about 20ft; the ladder for this pitch belayed to the stemple. Part of this pitch is climbable just using the ladder as a handline. Both pitches are in daylight.

A word of warning:- at the top of the second pitch there is a large number of loose stones which can easily be kicked down the pitch. Clearly a case for some judicial "gardening".

Continuing down the slope a neatly stacked wall of rocks has to be stepped over from which descends a chimney climb of about 20ft. The shape is basically triangular one side of which is dig debris which is prevented from falling back down the shaft by an array of beams and scaffold poles, none of which were very safe-looking.

This climb leads down to the streamway which is followed for some way with a varying ceiling height ranging from upright walking to backbreaking crouching.

Where the Stream takes a sharp left-hand turn we continued straight on up into a well-decorated chamber. at the back of this chamber a passage leads on and into a series of flat our crawls, slightly uphill on a dry silt floor. After the last squeeze a breathtaking chamber is entered. It contained a vast variety of formations - curtains, straws and totem pole-like stalagmites. A few photographs were taken and then we proceeded out.

After we had climbed the first pitch, John removed the ladder, gave the belay flake a few shakes and removed that as well. It was slightly unnerving as very little force was used, to remove it. Apart from the pubs being closed on our return it was a worthwhile trip.

Pete Lingwood

Other Club News

The club meet to South Wales was well attended, the OFD through trip being accomplished in normal water conditions without incident. For some members, this was their first visit to the South Wales caves and the general concensus was that it was well worth the journey.

The bog has now been repaired after a bomb incident by a drunken rival faction. It was this blast that melted the plastic inner and not the after-effect of one of Waynes' Currys.

As most of you know the furniture is becoming somewhat tatty and needs replacing. If you have an old three-piece suite, some kitchen chairs or anything similar that you would kindly donate could you contact Wayne. Give him a few days notice of removal and he will probably be able to organise a van. The mattress situation is still unchanged.

Members are reminded that, when taking friends and guests underground in G.B, Longwood etc, Charterhouse C.C. day permits must be obtained. Full or probationary members are automatically covered but guests without permits are uninsured. The 12½p is only a nominal fee and is designed to offset the high premiums and recoup some

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of the losses. Cooperation in this matter will be appreciated.

The treasurer has also asked me to inform members requiring receipts for subs. etc, to enclose a S.A.E in their letters. This will help to keep the running costs down. Wherever possible I will enclose such items with the current newsletter.

Application for membership has been received from Neil Brooker, and will be considered at the next Committee Meeting.

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CAVE STALKING or an account of the

Group Meet in Sutherland.

The four lairds who lived on haggis and chips for a week were:- Johnny MacMiriam, Bonnie Willie MacJones and Peter MacMathews who drove up from London, and Dave MacStanford who came over from Aberdeen. Sassenachs who didnt go on this trip missed out on a fine meet, vast quantities of whisky, gallons of lager and hellish hangovers.

Activities were based at the Grampian Speleological Society field centre at Elphin, some way north of Ullapool. Facilities at the centre lacked only, running water, sanitation and electricity, and were considered by all to be first class. The first two amenities were available at the Inchnadampf Hotel (15 miles) and we found it less convenient, but more pleasurable to make separate journeys for these.

Being the height of the season, the thing to do, so Dave told us, was to collect Munroes. These are Munroes Tables, Scottish peaks above 3,000ft, and silly drafty places to eat lunch.

Our Munroes consisted of Conival and Ben More Assynt, which are connected by a half-mile long boulder-strewn ridge. In all the walk took ten hours. Other peaks included Sion Gharbh and Creag nan Calman, a double peak within a stroll of the cottage. The spectacular sandstone pinnacles of Stac Pollaidh rising above its steep detrital slopes, however, beat us as the holds on the upper sections were worn away. The nearest caving area to the Grampians hut lies on the hills behind.

UAMH POL EOGHAINN

The large entrance to this cave takes a fair-sized stream, but the cave soon closes down to a small water chute. Tumbling down this we came to a small chamber. From here a choice of routes led further. The dry way descended via two free-climbable rifts to a low passage leading to the terminal sump. The wet way consisted of a 25ft pitch made up of more water than pitch.

ELPHIN POT

This was one we didnt do. It was variously described as west, east or north of Uamh Pot Eoghainn, according to map reference, description and area map respectively

RESCUE CALL OUT

While in the Assynt we represented the Scottish Cave Rescue Organisation. We duly performed our rescue while searching for Elphin Pot. Our victim was a lamb trapped down a deep lamb-sized rift. After getting some ropes around the victim it was hoisted out: frightened it ran off, covered a few strides and keeled over.

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CAVE STALKING

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It was obviously suffering a bit from hunger and cramp. Last seen our victim was doing a lawnmower act on the local hillside.

THE MAIN CAVING AREA, IF THERE IS ONE, IS THAT ASSOCIATED WITH THE DRAINAGE OF THE TRALIGILL VALLEY:

CNOC NAN UAMH CAVE

This is the longest cave in the area. It has three entrances the lowest of which is particularly impressive. This is a wide archway at the base of a low cliff. A river perhaps 20ft across, enters from the left and sweeps rapidly down the 45° passage to the right. There are no good footholds and one needs to pick ones' way with care when crossing and descending the streamway. The lower vadose passages are clearly influenced by the steeply dipping limestone. There are a number of such paralld passages interconnected by very wet enlarged joints. The upper streamway, which is the more extensive, provides some sporting climbs in the stream to the upper entrances.

This section is one of the rare examples of phreatic development in this area.

FIREHOSE CAVE

As its name suggests, this cave is very damp. It was the scene of a fatality a couple of years ago, when a novice slipped into the deep entrance pool and was swept under a rock by the powerfyl deluge issuing from the entrance. Basically the cave consists of a column of water, roaring down towards the entrance at an angle of 45° for 300ft. The water is encompassed by a close casing of rock. At the top the cave levels out for a similar distance, and then comes the wet bit; a duck(!) leading into the final chamber. The descent with assistance of both gravity and current was rapid in the extreme.

We also visited a number of other short wet caves in the valley including Tree Cave and Traligill caves, upper and lower.

MORE SERIOUS THINGS

At the time of our visit, the area was in the middle of deer stalking. Trips to the caves in the valley are not greatly affected, but one must pre-arrange visits to higher ground. We got drunk with Peter McNeill who locks after the Traligill area, most days when picking up water from Inchnadampf and had little difficulty there.

Incidentally, the attractive young lady behind the bar at the hotel was reading geology at Swansea. This may not be so interesting in itself, but does help explain why the Meet Sec. may be seen with "The Boys Own Book of Rocks", and the question as to why there are more forthcoming meets in South Wales than normal.

Pete Mathews.

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COURSES AT WHERNSIDE MANOR 1975

This year sees many more courses than previously, especially those for instructors, leaders etc. Just a few that might be of interest:

Summer School - Karst Studies	AUG 31st - SEPT 6th	22 + VAT
CAVE RESCUE	SEPT 6th - 13th	25 + VAT
CAVERS WEEK (general week of caving	AUG 23rd - 30th	22 + VAT

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COURSES - Cont/.....

There are also the usual weekend courses and these include:-

Cave Photography	JAN 10/12	9 + VAT
Cave Surveying	JAN 24/26	8 + VAT
Vertical Techniques "	31 / FEB 2nd	} 8 + VAT
	MAY 30/ JUNE 1st	

Further details are available from the Secretary: younger members should note that a 50% grant and travel expenses are readily available.

SOME UNUSUAL HAPPENINGS IN G.B. CAVERN

M.C.G.	Steve Conquest	Guests	Adrian Bowen
	Phil Ingold		Dave Foley
	Helen Saunders		

The final weekend of September generally washed itself away in torrential rain and floods in the West Country. Saturday dawned bleak and grey with threatening clouds scudding across a leaden sky.

With Swildons already closed due to heavy flooding and Longwood/August virtually impassable, the above members, not being deterred by the inclement weather, decided to pay G.B. a visit.

The Devils Elbow route was used as the entrance series to the Gorge and main chamber as the flooded streams going into Tynings Swallet would make it fairly sporting. This proved to be the case with a good volume of water cascading and swirling about us as we progressed towards the Gorge.

At the head of the Gorge we were surprised to find that the torrent had washed away most of the glutinous mud flow which for so long has characterised G.B. We proceeded to follow the stream down the Gorge and thence into the Main Chamber.

A very impressive cascade was pouring over the edge of the 30ft pitch in the middle of the chamber and Phil and myself abseiled to the bottom in the full force of the waterfall, thus maintaining the sporting characteristics of the cave so far. The other members joined us after the usual traverse and descent away from the direct pitch.

At the bottom of the Main Chamber we found deep deposits of mud and silt, obviously the transported remains of the mud flow, and the terminal sump backed up quite considerably. The bottom was heavily silted and we penetrated to about waist-depth before the end of the chamber could be seen.

We rigged a ladder for access to the Ladder Dig extension and proceeded along to the once-locked gate. Here Helen called an abrupt halt. The first crawl had flodded and had become a duck!

With careful investigation we decided we could passthrough with the available air-space and continued on amongst obvious flood deposits. Several of the later crawls were quite wet and the final squeeze from this passage into the boulder choke had been sumped.

We had to remove quantities of silt and gravel from the floor to get through and there were obvious remains of foam on the roof and walls. We continued on to Bat Passage for a brief view of the formations.

On the return journey, through the Ladder Dig crawls, I carefully looked for any inlets that could have produced the volume of water which had obviously been present. -I found none.

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SOME UNUSUAL HAPPENINGS IN G.B. CAVERN

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At the top of the ladder we met a party of Birmingham cavers about to enter the Dig series. We briefly discussed the evidence of flooding and the ducks and then continued on down the ladder.

Whilst the rest of the party were detackling the pitch. I made a careful search of the walls around the Dig Extension and the lower part of the Main Chamber and found evidence of residual foam high enough to suggest that the sump had filled to a high level and then overflowed into the Dig series. I pointed this out at the time and the others agreed that it was possible.

Back at the cottage we were greeted by a non-caving colleague who informed us that it had been raining heavily all the time we were underground.

Later that evening we met the Birmingham Cavers again, who related their astonishment on their return, when they found that the bottom of the pitch was about 2ft under water from the rising sump level. They hastily de-tackled and hurried to the surface.

If all these facts do point to the terminal sump filling by this amount in heavy rain conditions, it represents an enormous volume of water, which eventually cuts off entry to, or exit from the Ladder Dig Extension.

I would be interested to hear from anyone who has thoughts, comments or information relating to these flooded happenings in G.B.

Steve Conquest.

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CAVES OF SANDFORD HILL

Both Sandford Levvy and Mangle Hole are open despite an attempt by the landowner to blow in the entrance of the former. He is threatening to block both the caves. Grievances seem to arise from damage to the fences bordering the fields and woodland at the back of the village. Members are asked not to aggravate the situation. The safest route is over the top of the Hill and through the woods. No attempt should be made to cross the fields behind the village.

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AUSTRIAN ALPINE CLUB LECTURES

THE LOST WORLD OF RORAIMA - Don Whillans Thursday 28th Nov. at 7-30 pm, Edward Lewis Theatre, Middlesex Hospital Medical School, Tickets at the door 75p

other lectures held at the more usual place, the Sols Arms 65/67 Hampstead Road, NW1 admis 25p.

Dec 5 Unguided Mid-Alpine Touring (Ski-Touring)

Jan 2 The Black Cuillins

Feb 6 The Cleare View (John Cleare)

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MENDIP RESCUE

The weekend 16/17th November was to be the practice rescue but owing to circumstances this was put off. However, some members found themselves involved in the real thing.

The incident occurred in Swildons on the Saturday, when our party of M.C.G and some guest N.P.C members were doing the round trip. Although the streamway was about normal there was an unusual amount of water in the static sections and sumps.

At about the halfway stage we ran into a party travelling quite slowly. They held us up until we reached sump 1. At this point they were joined by other members of their party, including a girl, who had been to the Black Hole series. We noticed for the first time that two blokes who had been in front of us on the round trip did not have wet-suits and were shivering violently. (Some of the M.C.G party, despite wet-suits were also quite cold, owing to the slowness of pace and the unusual conditions we encountered). All the cold people dived the sump and pushed on to the entrance. This left 5 M.C.G members and 2 from the other party including the girl. At this point the girl refused to re-dive the sump to get out. After about 3/4 of an hour of fruitless persuasion and once even contemplating physically manhandling her through, we retreated to the other side of the sump to decide what to do.

Even an attempt at putting a separate lifeline on her failed. The other chap in her party had even sat in the sump with his feet through the other side, but although the girl could hold them she still would not come through. She was taken back to dry land and Neil stayed with her for company.

We decided to call the M R O out, but that left us with the problem of leaving someone with her because everyone was getting very cold, having been splashing about in the sump all this time. This problem was soon solved as another party arrived at the sump still fairly dry and warm. We explained the situation and they agreed to stay with her until help arrived. One member of this party dived the sump to relieve Neil and took some boiled sweets and glucose tablets.

We had arranged that the remaining member of the other party left for the entrance with Steve Conquest and Pete Lingwood to raise the alarm. This left Neil Brooker, Peter Spain and myself to have another last attempt at getting her through. This failed and we decided to push on out going quite slowly, because Pete was quite tired and it was Neils' first trip in Swildons and he didn't know the way on.

We met another party below the "twenty" and explained the situation and suggested tactfully that they might leave the cave and allow the M R O some elbow room. This was a party of the Junior Leaders Regiment. Their leader decided to push on down to the sump. Arriving at the Water Chamber, Neil turned to me and said there was a bloke in front with exposure. It was one of the un-wet-suited blokes in the other party. When we reached him it was obvious that he was in a bad way. He was incoherent and swaying, completely unable to help himself. The remainder of his party had gone on and Neil went after them to bring them back. Pete was unable to help much as he was tired and had just wrenched his leg out of, and back into joint. Neil and I with the help of the others soon pulled him to the surface. Two slings under the victim's arms aided his ascent. After being carried across the fields to the bottom green he was virtually unconscious. He was bundled into a station wagon and whisked away to the Shepton Gorge where he received attention for

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MENDIP RESCUE Cont/....

exposure. Some hot soup, a warm shower and stuffed into a sleeping bag. He revived quickly enough to purchase us a pint in the Hunters later on that evening. His only comment seemed to be about rope-burns under his arms.

Meanwhile the M R O had entered the cave with 2 comfort boxes some hot soup and diving tanks. After warming the girl up and giving her a few instant diving lessons she dived the sump and proceed out under her own steam. The wet suit had saved her from any serious exposure and apart from being emotionally upset she seemed none the worse for her experience.

Thanks must go to the M R O who were very quick off the mark with the diving tanks and to the police for their liason.

Despite the help that some M.C.G members were able to give, in an incident which could have been a whole lot worse than it was, a sad note was struck next morning. It wasn't until then that we discovered we had lost a ladder. John Miriam returned to the cave to retrieve it and found that it had gone. After making enquiries at the Shepton and elsewhere it was not forthcoming.

Whether the ladder was picked up by mistake or stolen remains to be seen, but to date it has not been returned.

Now nobody asks for thanks when they go to somebody's assistance but the loss of a ladder seems a poor reward for helping a fellow caver in difficulty.

Bryan Terry.

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Joke

1st Caver "Whats the difference between a magician's wand and a policemen's truncheon?"

2nd Caver "I don't know"

3rd Caver "Well one is for cunning stunts and the other is for hitting idiots over the head with!"

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MEETING

B C R A Southern Meeting:- Wells on Saturday Dec 7th 1974.