



Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

MENDIP CAVING GROUP NEWSLETTER No.110 JANUARY, 1975.

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

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 booking through the cottage warden.

EDITORIAL NOTE

As editor I would like to make it quite clear that I do not necessarily share the views and opinions of the committee and other members, about the articles I print. With decent articles difficult to come by, it is inevitable that occasionally I publish something that some people find not quite as they would want it. However it is hard to find a happy medium of trying to please most of the members most of the time. I hope you will all bear with me in this.

In my experience its usually the people who seldom contribute anything that moan the loudest. If you have any views comments or suggestions about the N/L, please contact me and I will publish them. AND KEEP THOSE ARTICLES ROLLING IN

Bryan Terry.

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CLUB NEWS

The annual Group Dinner will be at "The Star Hotel", in Wells, Somerset, on Saturday 1st March, 1975 at 7.30 for 8.00pm. The main course will be turkey and the cost 2.50 per ticket. (probably).

The dinner will be preceded by the Annual General Meeting to be held at the Cottage, Nordrach on Mendip.

The major items on the agenda will involve the new cottage and the proposal that the Group should register as a charity.

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BLACKMOOR

THE BANK SUBSIDENCE DIG.

This site still remains insufficiently explored to make any decision on its future. As it offers such pleasant surroundings for a fair-weather summer dig, it is extremely doubtful if anything will be done there until well into the next year.

UPPER FLOOD ENTRANCE!

Vigorous activity has continued in this cave and the situation at the face has greatly improved. In the early part of the year a hard massive calcite obstruction was encountered which sapped our energies. In addition, probing forward at floor level for three metres failed to show evidence of any enlargement. The outlook had a noticeable effect on morale, so that following blasting in April, some time elapsed before much further work was done at the face. The discovery, by probing, of a small void ahead, above roof level, failed to arouse much enthusiasm.

When work was resumed in earnest it was found that the blast had achieved a significant effect and allowed the face to be dismantled quite readily for several sessions. On arrival at the face on one occasion the workers found that a good portion of the clay had fallen from the roof, opening the small void referred to above. The space created a comfortable working height of about two metres.

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The mud fill continued forwards so that only the centre portion of the obstruction was composed of stal.flow. This situation continues to the present time, with the face in readily workable condition.

Although the situation at the face is satisfactory, spoil disposal has become a mounting problem. Storage space has dwindled to an insignificant amount, barring any further use of the lower chamber. All spoil from the face is now bagged, at the rate of half a bucket load per bag. The object is to move material in stages up the cave, using a skip whenever possible. A few hours useful work can thus be done at anytime even when the face is neglected. Without more general support from members, the forward advance will probably slow down owing to the diversion of effort from the face to higher up the cave. Work continues,

Malcolm Cotter.

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MORE CLUB NEWS

NEW MEMBERS

Accepted as probationary member

Neil Brooker, 24 Laurel Avenue,
Englefield Green,
Egham,
Surrey.

Membership forms are now available for anyone wishing to join.

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CHANGES OF ADDRESS

Bob Knott now lives at the "POST OFFICE"
Westfield,
Radstock,
Somerset.

its about a mile detour up the "Fosse Way"

Roger Bowden now lives at 14, Ranock Close,
Sundon Park,
Luton,
Beds.

Tony Fitzgibbon has moved but we don't know where.

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Eric Dowley is now recovering well after his road accident.

Six mattresses have been donated to the Group by Dave Hodby.

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MEET PROGRAMME

Bill Jones must be congratulated on producing this fine Meet Programme for 1975:

15/16th February	Mongo Gill Hole (Yorkshire)
1/2nd March	Thrupe Lane Swallet (Mendip Dinner W/end)
29/30th March	Dow Cave (Yorkshire)
19/20th April	Dan-Yr-Ogof (Wales)
17/18th May	Washfold Pot (Yorkshire)
1/6th June	Isle of Skye
5/6th July	Langstroth Pot (Yorkshire)
23rd August / 14th September	EXPEDITION 1975 (CZECHOSLOVAKIA)
20/21st September	Rowten Pot - Kingsdale Master Cave (Yorkshire)
11/12th October	O.F.D (Wales)
1/2nd November	Rescue Practice
22n/23rd November	Out Sleets Beck Pot (Yorkshire)
6/7th December	Saint Cuthbert's Swallet (Mendip)

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"POTHOLING REVOLUTION CLAIMS ITS FIRST VICTIM"

was the headline of an article found in the Yorkshire Post some weeks ago. I am printing extracts from it, because I think it may be of interest to many people in the group. It certainly raises a few questions.

"A "revolutionary" potholing technique claimed its first victim at the weekend - in Britain's most famous pot hole.

David Huxtable, a 24yr old post-graduate student, fell 200 ft to his death in the Main Chamber of Gaping Ghyll on the slopes of Ingleborough.

He was attempting the deepest vertical descent in any British pothole- 365ft from the moor level to the floor of the cavern which is said to be large enough to hold York Minster. The single rope of synthetic fibre which he was using broke. It is believed to have been weakened by heat caused by the fierce strains it had to bear.

Mr. Huxtable was in a five-strong party from Swansea University Caving Club who were abseiling down the main shaft. Abseiling is normally confined to rock climbing. It is a rapid method of descending rock faces.

Three of the party had already successfully lowered them-
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POTHOLING REVOLUTION etc Cont/....

selves to the floor of the cavern through a waterfall and Mr. Huxtable was nearly half way down the rope when it melted at its anchor point on the surface.

Mr. Jack Pickup, of Ingleton, leader of the Cave Rescue Organisation said last night that abseiling had "burst on the potholing scene in a big way" in the last six months.

"Potholing is now going through a revolution where ladders are tending to disappear. Abseiling saves time. It creates a faster drop. Ropes are comparatively cheap compared to ladders and lighter to carry.

Mr. Pickup added: "People don't understand the sudden stress applied to a rope when you suddenly brake when abseiling".

Mr. Huxtable and his four friends intended to meet underground seven other members of the club who had entered via the Bar Pot entrance to Gaping Ghyll and then climb out that way.

It was by the Bar Pot route that his body was brought out on Saturday night in an operation which involved about 130 members of cave rescue teams.

Mr. Huxtable who was working for a PhD in marine biology, lived in Chambercombe Park, Ilfracombe, Devon. He was described as an experienced potholer and climber.

YORKSHIRE POST REPORTER.

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DIARY DATE

PAUL ESSER MEMORIAL LECTURE.

At 8.15pm Wednesday February 19th 1975 - Bristol University:
D. Robertson on Survival after Shipwreck.

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA

I have had this article for nearly a year now and thought it was time to use it, especially as the Group Expedition is to visit Czechoslovakia this year. Owing to its length I have decided to split it up over two Editions, hoping this will not detract from its quality. I must apologise for the lack of accents on the place names.

An account of a visit made in 1973, a week or two before the International Congress. Last August Bill Jones, Peter Mathews and Don Vosper set off for the middle of Czechoslovakia: a much depleted party from the original one of eleven.

Crossing the Channel at midnight with a brimming tank of petrol, we hurried through Belgium hoping to gain sufficient momentum to carry us through Germany, where we hoped not to discover the cost of petrol. Curiosity about the derivation of names of campsites led us off in search of Camp Monte Kaolino - the last camping place before the Czech border. As we neared the camp-site we rounded a bend in the road to be confronted by an incredible mountain of gleaming, white kaolin clay, at the foot of which lay the camp. It was mid afternoon, very hot and the place was packed.

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solid; a few skiers slid down the hot white slopes of the mountain; and we slid on our way.

And, so we motored on to find a very small, pleasant site listed in none of the books, and which really was the last before the border.

The Land of Knedlicky and Brambory.

Crossing the frontier and completing visa formalities took some two hours; a bit longer than the five minutes flat in the old days before the Russian Invasion, but, by now it was time for lunch and we rolled to a halt outside a sun-drenched restaurace. We found a careful deliberation over the average menu was rather pointless. The only real choice boiled down to whether you have knedlicky (dumplings) or brambory (potatoes) the rest always turned out to be one sort or other of stew.

The first cave we visited was the show cave of Konepruska, near Beroun, a small town on the road to Praha. The cave is the longest in Bohemia, and was discovered halfway up the face during quarrying operations.

And, then on to Praha, or Prague, where we planned to camp and meet up with Graham Gregory; but he never turned up. The evening was spent in the dearest restaurace in town. And, it must be explained here that minimum currency restrictions in Czechoslovakia require one to spend a minimum amount each day. We found it quite difficult to keep up the average just camping and caving. It didn't help much spending our money on beer; it was about two pence a pint!

Moravsky Kras.

From Praha we motored South to Brno before heading to Blansko and the village of Sloup. We stayed in the chalet camp here for one night, and visited the spectacular Macocha Chasm, which is 138m deep.

The following day was Monday, and time for calling in at offices of the Moravsky Kras, who we wrote to before leaving London. After lots of phone calls and trips to various offices round town we eventually met up with Miroslav Cechak, who was better known as Mike and Jindrich Kvasnicka, known as Henry. Henry spoke very good German and quickly organised things; we followed him back to their field centre at Skalni-mlyn, where we camped for the rest of our stay. But, it was Mike, with his painstaking English, who looked after us for most of the time. It took quite a few days for us to appreciate that he was the head warden of the Moravsky Kras National Park - we could not understand how anyone who did so little and consumed so much beer could be in charge of anything, but there it was. As he put it when asked what his job entailed, "I look after conservation... the best way to conserve the country side is do nuffink; and all day long I do nuffink, so they make me head....."

Skalni-mlyn.

The field centre at Skalni-Mlyn was an odd looking construction. Essentially, it was a timber building made up almost entirely of a high steeply pitched roof. Here Mike lived in the upper steeply pointed room. Two other wardens lived here with him - "Wanker", who spent his entire time working on his motor bike and "Willie Stanton" who didn't do much at all and knocked off to go home on Wednesday morning. Henry lived a little way away on his farm. I suppose I should apologise by the confusing names given to these guys. We simply called them after whoever they reminded us of.

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA - Cont/.....

what else do you call a fat little chap with a crew cut and glasses whose name is Wankel? In addition to these there were also two divers staying there in preparation for the International Congress.

Somehow, our original party of eleven had swollen to thirty, but, there were only three of us! So heavily outnumbered by our guides we set about planning our stay.

The Abseiling Record

Mike took on an air of authority and spoke about drawing up lists and time-tables and programmes and guides. We looked on silently, but amongst ourselves we began to grow a little worried by all this paper work.

Time at Skalni mlyn often stood still. Sudden unexplained pauses seemed a frequent event in Czech speleological circles and proved something of a mystery to us. Although they were an excuse for a beer or two everyone poured beers down their throats all day anyway. During these lulls everyone waited around and looked out of the window or up at the trees and then at their watches, (if they had them) as if something important was about to happen, but it never did. Then just as sudden everyone would leap up and rush around, tackle and odd items of clothing would be thrown about. We would be late, we must meet our friends and off people would rush in all directions.

It was during the first of these lulls that Mike told us about his skill at abseiling.... "My friends, I am champion abseiler of whole Czechoslovak.... fantastic.... in winter for two years.. with my wife I make abseil... ONE THOUSAND METRES... fantastic!.. experience!... fantastic!... I have big story in Czech newspaper!.. abseil took twenty seconds... really fantastic". At this stage Bill was beginning to look decidedly worried as admiration for Mike's exploits became clouded by the uneasy thought that we were going caving with him the next day. Mike continued, "fantastic, experience, fantastic.... I was unconscious forty days and have seventy five stitches.... fantastic, we only had thirty metre rope.. and land in snow drift... big party... much beer... fantastic". We quickly found that Mike's super efficient image was just a front. The paper work on his desk was thrown away and Mike revealed himself as the very model of disorganisation and one of the biggest drunkards we had met for a long time.

A Tour of the Caves.

A sudden flurry of activity found us setting out for a tour of the local show caves. There were the three of us and Mike, and Henry, Wanker, Willie and hordes of odd pods. We were completely outnumbered by guides. But, on reaching the first show cave we found we were suddenly alone, with Mike. The rest of our 'guides' went no further than the refreshment stall where they stopped for beer. After a leisurely tour of the cave enlivened by an unfamiliarity with the lights we emerged to pick up our 'guides' and set off for the next cave. Here we left our 'guides' once again at the beer stall and went on our way.

Sloupsko -Sosuvske System

This cave was visited twice, one through the show cave section and again when we descended Steps Chasm (90m) to visit the lower streamway. This was very dry and we were able to penetrate

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some way into the sumps.

The next caves we visited were Balcarka Jeskyne and Katerinska Jeskyne.

Punkevni Jeskyne

This was the finest show cave we were to see. The tour followed some 800m. of passage, then surprise, surprise we came out into daylight just above the lake at the bottom of the Macocha Chasm. From here we went back to see the rest of the show cave, travelling mainly in battery driven boats.

Our visits to the various show caves have not received the full description they deserve. But, it should not be thought that these tours were uneventful. We found our own way around and had one awkward moment in Sloup Cave when we were caught without lights after the power supply failed during a thunder storm.

13C

There are so many caves in Moravia that it was obviously difficult to think up names for them all, many such as this one just have a number.

The cave of 13C is near the hamlet of Holstejn. The entrance is at the bottom of a small cliff face just inside the edge of a thick wood. A dark gloomy hut used by the early explorers and digging parties stands close to the entrance.

Entry was gained down a wide tube closed by a vast iron lid getting on for five feet across. Essentially, the cave consists of a dry shaft 100m. deep at the bottom of which one meets the Bila Voda River which sinks close by. The shaft is broken up into a number of pitches the deepest and last of which opens out to the streamway. This is a fixed ladder of 45m mounted at 70°. Now this is not quite so simple as it sounds because it seems the thing to do is to have everyone on the ladder at once. And, if the blokes above you hasn't got his boot in your face it's probably because he's standing on your fingers. Added to this the natural resonance of the ladder takes some getting used to. A swing of two to three feet about once a second after a few beers can have far retching effects.

Once in the streamway, we inflated our rubber dingies and set off at a brisk paddle downstream. This cave was once the scene of intensive digging - friend Henry was a member of the professional group that used to work here. In those days the cave was fitted out with fixed electric lighting and a pneumatic air line. The lighting cable had long since suffered the effects of water. But, we found the airline useful for propelling ourselves along the stream. We floated through high lofty passages, and passed stalagnite grottoes separated by smaller sections, once sumps, blasted by early digging parties.

The streamway is about 1½ km. long and disappears in a sump. The stream of the Bila Voda reappears in the vast Amaterska Jaskyne.

End of Part One.

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