



Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

MENDIP CAVING GROUP NEWLETTER No112 March, 1975

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WEEKLY CLUB MEETINGS: are held at the "Royal Oak" New Road, Brentford, Middx (Behind Brentford Football 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 Guest party bookings through the cottage warden.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

This year's AGM was fairly well attended and a lot of work was got through. The Dinner seemed to be enjoyed by everyone despite the fact that there were no arrests or serious injuries.

As Arthur Cox or Bernard Reeves could not make it, item 6 on the agenda was not mentioned. However this edition contains an article on the Bone Hole dig for everyone's interest. An article on item 7 is also enclosed.

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CLUB NEWS

Congratulations to Alan Wicks who was married on March 5th and to John Macmillan and Judy Russell who will be getting married on April, 12th. I think a special prayer should go out to John and Judy as Greg Smith is to be their best man.

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The weekend of 4th April will be a Club weekend with the view to marking the site of the proposed new cottage. A barrel will be on tap and it is proposed to plant bushes to mark the site. The bushes will be planted before the barrel is broached otherwise we will end up with most of Jim Fry's yard.

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Forthcoming Club Meets in the near future are:-

19th/20th April Dan-Yr-Ogof (Wales)

17th/18th May Washfold Pot (Yorkshire)

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CHANGE OF ADDRESS:

D. Hill;
133A Mill Street,
Kidlington, OXON. Kidlington 2030

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REMINDER

Some members have not yet paid their Annual Subscriptions which are now overdue. These can be paid personally to Ron Saunders on club night or sent by cheque to his home address (inside front cover). If any member wants a receipt sent by post quickly it would be helpful to enclose a S.A.E to save both time and money. If there is no hurry he will receive his receipt with the next newsletter.

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BONE HOLE, CHEDDAR GORGE

In August, 1967, we received permission from Bristol Waterworks and the tenant farmer of Piney Sleight Farm to dig in Bone Hole.

The aim was to discover if any of the bone deposits, which had given the cave its name, remained after the 19th century excavations of the discoverer - William Long - and others, including William Boyd Dawkins, Edward Cox and Richard Cox Gough.

The early reports spoke of two distinct areas in which both human and animal remains had been found.

It was the work of only a few week-ends to find that a large area of the cave had been disturbed and that it had contained numerous bones, the fragments of which were spread over the entire floor of the inner cave.

A slow and careful period of digging followed, during which we lowered the floor in sections, recording and removing the hundreds of bone fragments from the loose soil-and-boulder debris.

It was not until we had reached a level some three feet below the original floor that we came upon undisturbed clayey yellow mud in which were many complete bones.

Having succeeded in finding this one area of the previous excavations, we then looked for the other, which, since the whole floor of the inner cave had been disturbed, must lie in the outer entrance area.

In the report of the first discovery, it appears that the present open rift must have been roofed-over, and from this report also, it would appear that the entry was gained by "a perpendicular descent" at the East side of the rift.

The only place this could have been is at the East side of the entrance arch where there has been considerable stalagmite flow formation, reaching up to the surface.

Therefore, it is quite reasonable to surmise that the block-ended rift would be, as the discoverer described - "quite another place" where he found more bones.

To discover where these further remains had been, it was necessary to excavate the floor of the rift.

Since this was open to the air and would be subject to infilling, both by water-borne mud and by frost-shattered rock, we thought it likely that, in the intervening 136 years since the discovery in 1838, there would have been a considerable accumulation of material to be removed.

We chose to start the dig at the narrowest part of the rift, since we expected to sink a deep shaft through the somewhat unstable matrix, and wished to reduce the amount of shoring to the minimum.

It came as somewhat of a surprise when we found what appeared to be solid bedrock at a depth of some eighteen inches. We then followed this floor towards the cave entrance, finding that although it was attached to one or other wall at some places, there were gaps filled with yellow clay on the side opposite.

This indicated that there had been faulting and patches of finely ground rock flour confirmed this.

There had also been a considerable thickness of stalagmite floor which had been chopped out, possibly in the predatory raids reputed to have been made by the Goughs in the early 1890s.

No sign of any bones were found, and we then decided to find out where the level floor of the rift ended and whether it sloped downwards towards the arched entrance to the cave.

BONE HOLE Cont/...

We soon came to the point where the floor ended abruptly and with three more or less solid walls, we commenced to sink a shaft to discover if there were any bones in this area.

The first eight feet of debris contained a few items of quite recent date; willow pattern crockery, a mirror, bottles - wine and Fortt's Bath Spa Waters, etc,

Then there were some four feet of mud and boulders quite devoid of any extraneous matter. At a depth of twelve feet, we came upon patches of wet mud under boulders which showed that water seepage had been at work, with small drainage holes leading downwards.

Air pockets started to appear and at the same time, a number of shaft bones and lower mandibles were found. All were in remarkably clean condition. This layer was only a few inches in depth, and although we continued down for another foot, only a few more bones were found.

It was at this point that the floor suddenly shook down and a small aperture appeared under the south face of the shaft - that is, under the upper rift.

A very strong air-current was felt, but since this had occurred at a late hour on the Sunday evening (29th December, 1974) we decided to cover up the opening and return the following weekend.

That weekend resulted in the discovery of a cave passage leading downwards to the south, with a boulder slope floor on which there were many human and animal remains. This floor was very unstable and it was therefore decided to restrict our enthusiasm for further exploration until we had taken expert advice on the archaeological remains.

To this end, we arranged for a visit to be made to the cave by Michael Bishop, who is engaged on the now well-known Westbury Hill dig, Professor Tratman, Christopher Hawkes and Mr. Harrison.

They expressed the opinion that the bones were of comparatively recent date archaeologically speaking, and that they should be removed and recorded.

This has now been almost completed and the cave entrance has been suitably protected.

The latest position is that exploration work can now be undertaken, although it must be pointed out that it is essential that the entrance shaft must be deepened and the muddy area at the top of the "Skull Slope" must be cleaned up before any other work can be considered. This will inevitably be a long process if a large work-force is not available. In fact, it will be possibly another year if only the two of us are available to do the work.

Although the extension known as West Rift has now been explored, it is our opinion that the way on and down will be found under the Stalagmite floor which forms the end of Skull Slope. This floor has now been found to continue downwards under Skull Slope counter to the slope of the boulders. This will provide a safe roof under which to continue the digging operations, although a vast amount of rock will need to be removed to gain access to the lower part of the rift.

ARTHUR COX and BERNARD REEVES.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA 1975

A group of club members are going to the Moravian Karst area in Czech this year, with the intention of actually doing some caving.

This is a very interesting area with some fine show caves as well as many sporting caves with long pitches and lots of water, with fixed ladders and boats if you want to use them. Word may have got round that the ale is also very cheap and quite drinkable.

Transport is by Dave Hodby, we shall be crossing the channel on Thursday 21st August midnight and returning two weeks later. Unless it can be avoided we will camp in Germany for one night. The following day should see us in Prague where we can spend the complete day and camp two nights. Then head towards the caves.

The cost of the trip is approx £40 - in addition each person must spend £3 per day whilst in Czech. (Some of this will be used for fuel).

Anyone interested contact - - Don Vosper.

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ITALIAN POSTER COMPETITION

In celebration of the first centenary of the foundation of the Sezione "Etna" del Club Alpino Italiano, the member GRUPPO GROTTA CATANIA is organizing an

"INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION-COMPETITION OF SPELEOLOGICAL POSTERS"

which will be held in Catania from August 24 to 31st, 1975 under the auspices of the I.U.S.

The posters, which must evidence the valorization and protection of the caves, must be of edition not earlier than 1st January, 1973 and they should be in the possession of the Organizers within the 20th July, next, completed with the name and address of the senders (Group or Institute) and accompanied by 2 (two) international prepaid coupons.

The best posters received will be awarded on the 27th August by a special Committee, and communication of same will be sent direct to the interested Parties and also given through the Speleological Press.

For the forwarding of the posters or for the request of further information the interested Parties should apply to:-

Segreteria della SETTIMANA SPELEOLOGICA 1975 - C/O C.A.I. / Etna, Via Amore 4 - I-95100 CATANIA/Italy.

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MONGO GILL HOLE

Bill Jones was accompanied by Don Vosper, John Miriam, Greg Smith and Ian Crossley for this trip. It was a bitterly cold day and everybody huddled round the entrance for warmth. Don Vosper shivered, saying that it would be useless to make his caving comeback this weekend - there were just not enough people around to see it.

Unperturbed by this remark, the stalwarts flung the ladder down the Hole. Only after John had fiddled and fussed with it,

did the Party descend an easy 60 foot, to scramble into a large Phreatic Passage. At the far end of this a 10 foot climb led to a series of loose mined tunnels, followed by a succession of muddy crawls and low roomy caverns; some well decorated. The furthest of these reached, according to Bill's tattered survey, must have been very close to one of the upper Entrance Shafts.

On the way back, near Shockle Shaft, a 20 foot Iron ladder was found. This dropped into a Stream Passage of generous proportions. Proceeding downstream, through a dried-up sump, the water could be followed until it sank into narrow fissure. Higher level passages were entered in the hope of finding the connection to the nearby Stump Cross Caverns: the search proved fruitless.

The toughest part of the weekend came on Saturday evening - John drank too much and fell over and Greg honked on Maggie Shaw's front doorstep.

Dregs Myth

Your Yorkshire Correspondent.

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DISAPPOINTMENT FOR BRITISH CAVERS

The future ownership of White Scar Cave, Ingleton, Yorkshire, was decided at a public auction in Kirkby Lonsdale last week (20th Feb, 1975).

Amongst the bidders were groups and individuals interested in keeping the cave open and running it as a tourist attraction as well as representatives from the Yorkshire Dales National Park Planning Committee and also Amey Roadstone Corporation (a subsidiary of Consolidated Gold Fields Ltd.)

Cavers from all over Britain, and residents of Ingleton, have been campaigning for the cave to be taken into public ownership to protect it. Since the news that it was to be put up for auction by the Trustees of T.G.Greenwood, the original owner and discoverer of the cave, was announced.

Cavers feared that unless the cave could be purchased by the National Park Authorities it might be closed by quarrying operations in the valley. Amey Roadstone Corp. own a quarry opposite the cave and have mining rights to within yards of the entrance. This company also purchased Skirwith Cave, in the same area, a few years ago which it subsequently closed and already holds the freehold and mineral rights of White Scar.

In fact, it was a private bidder who finally gained ownership of the cave by paying 23,500 for the 14 years lease on the cave and the free-hold of a bungalow and an acre of land at the cave entrance.

The new owner, who has not been inside the cave, intends to develop it as a commercial attraction.

The outcome of the sale was a major disappointment for the National Caving Association and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Planning Committee who had hoped, between them, to make White Scar a centre of exploration for cavers and geologists.

Comment overheard from a conversation between cavers after the auction,

"It seems a pity that it (the cave) is to be further developed for the crisps and ice-cream brigade."

Steve Conquest.

CAVES ON TELEVISION

The BBC recently obtained a series of seven programmes on European caves made by a specially organised German team under the direction of Dr Ernst Bauer. To go with them, the BBC themselves made three more films on caves in Britain and the whole series is being transmitted this year. They are programmed for 7.05 p.m. on Wednesday evenings on BBC 2 and each film lasts 25 minutes. The schedule as prepared to date is as follows:-

- April: 9th Ogof Ffynnon Ddu. Dr George Bray studies and discusses chemical solution in the cave waters, and Mick Day looks around the cave while collecting samples. Some good shots in the upper series of OFD2, and don't miss the last few minutes of the programme which includes a superb sequence of the main streamway in flood.
- April: 16th Yorkshire caves. Tony Waltham looks at vadose and phreatic caves and relates their origin to the glaciation of the Dales. Filmed in Marble Steps Pot, Long Churn Cave, Sleets Gill Cave, Rowten Cave, Yordas Cave (if you can recognise it). Kingsdale Master Cave and Jingling Pot.
- April: 23rd Wookey Hole. The Mendip superstars gather to examine the cave. Dr Willie Stanton looks at the geology and origins, Prof Tratman examines the archaeological finds, and Oliver Lloyd describes the upstream explorations by the Cave Diving Group.
- April: 30th The German films include: Ice caves in Austria: the
June 11th immense Skocjan Cave in Jugoslavia: Proteus in
 Postojna Caves, Jugoslavia; Painted caves of the
 Dordogne, France; Bear caves in Germany;
 Submarine freshwater caves of the Greek Islands;
 Lava caves of the Canary Isles.

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