



Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

EDITORIAL NOTE

As some members couldn't attend the AGM in March, here is a chance for them to catch up with some important facts in the day to day running of the club!

1. The meeting voted to keep members fees at 20p per night but increase Guest fees to 30p per night. This seems to be on par with other Mendip Clubs, some of which however have a much greater differential between members and guests (often as much as 50% more).
2. John Macmillan has written to the committee proposing that members may make advance bookings at the cottage for themselves and one guest. Unless a time of arrival is stated, beds still unoccupied by 1am shall be deemed vacant. The committee reserve the right to change such bookings. The meeting agreed to accept the proposal.
3. Subscription rates. Contrary to views expressed by some people it is not unconstitutional for the committee to raise subscriptions (and cottage fees) when they feel it is necessary to do so. The meeting agreed that we charge non-paid up members guest cottage fees.
4. Don Vosper has agreed to be Subscription Secretary and in future all subscriptions and matters arising therefrom will be dealt with by him. His address is:

130 Lewis Trust Buildings
Fulham,
London, SW6.

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CLUB NEWS

Application of membership has been received from Charles Ruddick : 10 Berryfield,
Wexham Court Estate,
Slough, Bucks. Tel. Slough 38494.

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Change of Address: John Macmillan now resides at
43 Thornhill Gardens,
Barking,
Essex. Tel. 01 594 8033.

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Coke The recent delivery of coke made a very fast disappearance. It lasted barely a month instead of the usual three, in spite of warmer weather. Members are reminded that the stove should never be more than half full as that amount will last the week-end.

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Observant members will have noticed that much of the recent Dr. Who serial was filmed in Wookey Hole.

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ABSEILING AND PRUSSIKING.

Following the recent fatality in Gaping Ghyll in which a polypropylene rope "failed", members are reminded that under no circumstances may life lines belonging to the Group be used for single rope techniques.

John Miriam may look into the possibility of buying some "Bluewater" rope for resale to those members who might be interested. A fuller appraisal will first be needed.

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Members are reminded that refuse must be taken to the road, it is not picked up from the front door. The culprits are all probably the same clowns who left their milk bottles on the step. We don't have a milkman.

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BOOKS FOR SALE

Greg Smith is able to supply all the current caving guides at bargain prices. List from Greg.

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The Group has applied for 75L of free paint which are part of the 10,000 I.C.I. are giving away to clubs as part of the Brighter Britain Campaign.

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The South Wales meet was fairly well attended and seven members formed a party to do OFD I (Dan.Yr Ogof was cancelled owing to high water conditions). The stream was high enough to make it sporting. OFD II was visited on Sunday.

Penwyllt has been undergoing a face lift for some time now, but a surprise awaited us on Saturday when we went to change. Upstairs where the old changing room was, is a centrally heated drying room complete with hangers. Downstairs is the new changing room with a section for hosing down muddy gear and a drip-tank affair for sodden clothing prior to removal to the drying room. Alongside the changing room are the showers complete with plastic bowls and a sluice. The fee for the use of all this is a princely 10p. I hope the Meet Sec. books Penwyllt for a lot more trips.

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Singing River Mine.

This is the most extensive mine working still open on Mendip with 3,000 ft of passage. Following rumours of its possible closure the mine was visited by the county archaeological officer. It is now being included on the village development map as a preservation feature and steps are being taken to have the site declared an Ancient Monument.

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As many of you already know, George and Frances at the Royal Oak have retired after an exhausting time serving pints to the MCG.

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BLACKMOOR

The Bank Subsidence Dig:

More work at this site has been done but no satisfactory conclusions can yet be drawn. It is not even conclusive that bedrock has been reached, as the rock forming a "V" at the base of the hole may be detached fragments.

Upper Flood Entrance:

All bags of spoil have now been removed from the cave leaving the way clear for more work. The end of the cave remains tantalising and full of promise. If possible a scheme of excavation producing less spoil than hitherto would be an advantage. This could be achieved by lowering the face to sitting height. Lowering the height in this manner would produce about 1/3 of the amount of spoil produced at present. This is because a void is present at stream level. Spoil could be removed from here by skip.

At Easter work was concentrated beneath the calcite blockage. Probing revealed that the stream bed is composed of soft sediments to a depth of about 4 feet and forward about 10 feet. Should the stream fall to the level seen in 1973, when it was diverted into the floor sediments some 50 feet before the face, it would be possible to progress rapidly without blasting. Whatever the position regarding water level, the spoil storage problem is so critical, that a lower face producing less spoil seems to be the best medium-term option.

Spoil hauling parties are still in greater demand to allow future dumping space.

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FORTHCOMING MEETS

17th - 18th May WASHFOLD POT - Yorkshire

26th May for one week Skye - Camping.

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A NEW CAVING SHOP IN WELLS

A new shop for cavers has opened in Wells. It is an extension to Philip Browns' Caving Supplies, no connection with Rock Products at:

9 Colles Road,
Wells, Somerset.

Telephone No. 0749 74382

All items on Caving Supplies price list are available as well as a facility for hiring tackle. A phone call is advised prior to arrival at the shop to ensure rapid service and arrange collection for almost anytime within reason.

Mail order is still available through Philip Brown at

84 Chatsworth Road, Cheam, Sutton, Surrey.
Telephone No. 01 644 2727.

Philip Brown has agreed that on order of over £5.00 he will give a 5% discount to M.C.G. members.

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

For anyone contemplating the use of S.R.T., a look at BCRA transactions Volume 1 No.4 December, 1974 would be in order. In a paper entitled "The Rope in single Rope Caving", Andy Eavis has conducted a fairly comprehensive, although not exhaustive, study of various potential rope materials and constructions with regard primarily to abrasion resistance and tensile strength.

A few facts manage to emerge fairly clearly. As far as abrasion resistance is concerned sheathed nylon seems to be far and away the best (especially when dry) and hawser laid polypropylene the worst (again especially when dry!). Tensile test data is perhaps the most surprising as it seems that even when new, ropes display strengths often well below the manufacturers quoted figures. Ageing and exposure to sunlight and chemicals then all have an appreciable part to play and in this respect nylon is probably the worst.

Although much test data is presented too many overall conclusions are not possible and the aspiring vertical caver would be well advised to read and understand the paper in total.

John Miriam

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ROPE LIFE AND THE UIAA TESTS

(This article was drawn from Mitteilungen, the bi-monthly newsletter of the Austrian Alpine Club, Innsbruck, Heft 7/8 1974, p 112. It has been translated and rewritten by Dick Eastwood who, contrary to popular belief, has no shares in any gear manufacturers.)

For some years the International Union of Alpine Clubs (UIAA) has been running tests on the performance of nylon climbing rope and has been helping manufacturers give realistic information about their products. One of the key results of the tests has been the "Falls-held-number" (Sturzzahl) and recent studies by the safety committee of the Austrian Alpine Club have reduced the interpretation of the figures to a fairly straightforward table.

It has long been realised that the reliable life of a rope is strictly limited. The rope's ultimate role is to stop falls and its ability to do this is restricted in two ways. First, the rope's ability to absorb energy is at a maximum when newly manufactured, so the producer imposes the initial limit. Secondly, this absorption capacity is reduced by stopping falls, by other extraordinary demands and also by normal handling in use. It can even be reduced by storage in daylight instead of in the dark. It used to be thought that normal wear was too unpredictable to be related closely to the falls-held-number, but the latest report from the committee shows that the two go hand-in-hand. Discounting extreme stresses, such as free falls, it can be said with 95 per cent certainty that the following table applies to Kernmantel (Sheathed) ropes:

Falls-held-number	Life	Hour's use per day	YEAR
2	4 months	50	
6	4½ years	50	
2	2 months	150	
6	2½ years	150	

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ROPE LIFE AND THE UIAA TESTS CONT/....

These figures only apply to dry ropes; wet or frozen rope has a much reduced reliability. "Wet-proof" ropes have proved effective when new in overcoming this reduction but it is not known how long the proofing lasts.

2 is the lowest falls-held-number accepted by the UIAA and it leaves little margin for safety; the European manufacturers will probably agree very soon to raise their manufacturing minimum to 3. If the number is not on a rope's label, it is usually given in the makers' brochure. If they haven't submitted rope for test, it probably gives cause for great suspicion.

Whatever the falls-held-number, a rope should be thrown out if it has held a heavy fall or if there is visible damage to the sheath: such visible damage is always a sign of internal damage. Standing on the rope adds to the wear and tear, as do abseiling or the use of tension. If the rope is used in a sandy place, it is worth the trouble of washing it afterwards in a stream or in the bath: this gets most of the grit out of the sheath so it cannot then work its way into the core and damage the strands. Store the rope in the dark when not in use, as some are affected by radiation, particularly pale-coloured ropes. Remember also that your chocks and slings are subject to all the same demands as your rope: they must be renewed from time to time - and so must tapes and harnesses.

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Will covers with the odd ½ pound of bang in the fridge please take note - you could be causing a public nuisance.

EXTRACT FROM THE DAILY MIRROR, TUESDAY 18th MARCH, 1975.

"TIMEBOMB in GARAGE"

An ex-mayor of Reading was accused yesterday of keeping 50lb of gelignite in an old box in his garage for five years. Reading Crown Court heard that a slight vibration could have caused a "devastating explosion."

The ex-mayor, company director, Etienne Barnett, denies causing a public nuisance. The case continues today.

He got off.

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NEWS NORTH

Whernside Manor

Once again the question of the existence of Whernside Manor is being raised. It already obtains a large grant from the Sports Council through the N.C.A. The annual deficit of around £10,000 per year is currently being met by the Scout Association? They are to withdraw their support and the centre is now due to close later in the year.

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Pikedaw Caverns - CNCC have fitted a new lid (unlocked) and access is freely available without permission.

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NEWS NORTH Cont/.....

FAIRY HOLE - WEARDALE

A temporary entrance is being provided to allow access for an accurate survey of the remaining 1 3/4 miles of passage. Hopefully, a new entrance beyond the limits of the present quarry can then be opened up.

STOP POT (LANCASTER HOLE)

Several large boulder movements have occurred, the area should be treated with extreme caution.

The Hill Inn, Chapel Le Dale, is up for sale at an asking price of £36,000, while just down the road the 14 year lease to White Scar Caves has just been purchased for £23,000.

Some folk just never learn, a single piece of string was seen dangling down G.G. during the Easter Holiday.

Mistral Hole - Pippikin's Back Door to Easegill

It was a depleted team that found themselves in the depths of Pippikin at Easter. After the confines of the entrance series and the horrors of Wally's Bowels it had been a pleasure upon entering the lofty "Hall of the ten" to follow the cool draught to "Dusty Junction".

We continued still following the draught, through passages knee-deep in mud to reach "The Hobbit". From this low cavern we crawled beyond into a boulder filled rift, where a small hole descended into another rift much narrower. A small horizontal fissure could be seen overhead, but the squeeze upwards to reach it look tight: This was the connection with Mistral Hole.

Now with the lure of the surface in Easegill less than 100 ft away. There was a great incentive to get through. I tried and after considerable effort twisted into the fissure on my back - a foolish move which turned out to be irreversible, my only option was to squirm horizontally for about 6ft to reach an enlargement.

By the time I reached it the others had cleared off, but I managed to gain an audible contact with Danny from Red Rose C.P.C who had been through before me and was now presumably in Easegill. The rift continued for a short distance as an awkward sideways thrutch, ending on its junction with a cross-joint. After casting aside John Mac's Jumper (not an easy decision) I entered the joint at floor level and proceeded to inch forward: although the crawl could not have been more than 30ft long, the process was slow. It therefore came as a great relief upon rounding the final bend, to spot chinks of daylight ahead from the Easegill shaft. A few feet further on I was able to squeeze upwards into the shaft, where an easy scramble led to the surface.

THEORETICAL SPELEOLOGY

The speleomathematical reader will be fascinated, no doubt by a graph appearing in a recent issue of the Venezuelan Journal "El Guachara". The author, Francisco Perey, plots the deepest caves in the world against the year of their discovery. What is quite surprising is that the rapidly increasing depth curve is really quite smooth for the type of data plotted.

The immediate thought that flashes through the mind of every theoretical caver is that the data is open to mathematical analysis. If we replot the original values on a log-log graph we obtain a good straight line, from which we can readily derive the equation:-

$$D = 1.351Y^{47.4} \times 10^{-153}$$

where D is the depth in metres of the deepest cave in the world, and Y is the year (A.D.) of its discovery.

Inserting a few figures into the equation we see, for example, that in 1947 the deepest cave should have been - 160m. This compares fairly well with the Reseau de la Dent de Crolles, which was explored in that year to a world record of - 630m. Presumably the explorers missed an inconspicuous side passage containing the extra 7 metres of depth!

By contrast, the Pierre St Martin was explored in 1953 to a new world record of - 737, whereas it should theoretically have been only 705.97m deep. If the survey figures are to be believed then it shouldn't have been discovered until nearly the end of the following year.

Of course we are not restricted to examining the deepest caves of the past years, and it is perhaps more exciting to take a glimpse into the future. In the year 2000 the deepest cave in the world should reach a depth of - 2179 metres.

It is also of interest to put $D = 6378.3 \times 10^3$ metres, which is the radius of the Earth. Doing this we find that the worlds ultimate cave system reaching the centre of the globe will be explored sometime in September, of the year 2366 AD.

It is already apparent that explorations seem to take place at an increasing rate. Clearly, major improvements will need to be made to vertical techniques in the next few hundred years. Cavers tackling the worlds ultimate systems will probably use personal rocket powered helicopters. And such powerful exploration aids will account for all the really deep systems being explored in a relatively short space of time.

Presumably, there will be several caves approaching the centre of the Earth around this date so that a connection will seem to be only a matter of course. This poses an interesting, albeit philosophical question, as to whether the depth of the system is equal to the radius or the diameter of the Earth. In any case, the 23rd and 24th centuries should truly be the Golden Age of caving providing the acme of through trips with the explorers emerging in the antipodes.

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I would be very interested to hear from anybody who has back copies of Descent that they would wish to part with. The numbers I am interested in are 17, 19, 21, 22, 23 and 26.

Editor.