MCG

Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

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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.

COTTAGE	Stirrup Cup, Nordrach-on-Mendip, Blagdon Somerset.
ACCOMODATION	for over 30 people - all essential services. Guests charged 30p per night or day fee. Members Cottage fees are now 20p per night or day. Guest party bookings through the cottage warden.

EDITORIAL NOTE:

Hello! Is anyboby out there! I know I don't give twelve fold green shield stamps for every article I receive or give away miniature plastic replicas of Mary Whitehouse having a bath, nor do I resort to threatening people with Watneys beer, but I thought at least I would still receive the odd article or two. Alas and alack - yes a complete lack of articles of any shape, size, description or form. This is why your newsletter is so irregular; so give it a shot of All Bran in the arm and get it going again. I welcome all articles for the newsletter

Remember.

This is Your newsletter and relies mainly on Your contribution.

THE PENIS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

FORTHCOMING MEETS

20/21 September Rowton Pot - Kingsdale Master Cave - Yorkshire.

11/12 October O.F.D. South Wales.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Penny & Ian Bramble:

New Residing at:- 67 Whernside,
Morton,
Carlisle.
Tel: 34841

HAS ANYBODY NOT PAID THEIR SUBS YET?

HAS ANYBODY MISSED ANY NEWSLETTERS- IF SO, I CAN PROBABLY LET THEM HAVE BACK NUMBERS - PLEASE LET ME KNOW.

G.B. A brand new padlock has appeared on the entrance block-house of G.B. This appeared on the week ending 17th August. It was not locked the weekend previously. Whether our key fits it or not is not yet clear so be prepared for a disappointment.

OBITUARY

DAVE MITCHELL

It is with great sadness that I record the death, on the 15th May, 1975 of Dave Mitchell at the age of 36. Dave had been suffering with cancer.

Dave had a vast knowledge of the entire Mendip region. He was one of the greatest and most energetic cave diggers in the area and was the foremost authority on the caves and swallets of eastern Mendip.

Dave started caving as a boy, making sorties from his home town of Frome on his bicycle. Even later on he opted out of car ownership and when he couldn't get a lift from one of his friends he still made the journey to Mendip on his bike. He regularly cycled to Charterhouse and Cheddar for the day, often doing heavy work between journeys. On one occasion, I [illegible] towing him up Cheddar Gorge behind my motor-bike using a waist sling as a tow rope. Dave reckoned he was the fastest man up the Gorge on a cycle and our recollection of the incident always provided us with a good laugh.

Daves main introduction to digging was at Brownes Hole. He started of as a helper to the Brownes, but after a few years the family ceased work there leaving Dave in sole charge. At least half of the total fill removal was due to Daves organisation and enthusiasm. Throughout his work he maintained regular contact with the Brownes relating his progress to them. Whenever discussing the dig he always played down his own role. His work continued regularly until 1953 when the railway was removed to Coopers Hole. In 1952 he discovered a human skeleton devoid of its skull. A skull had earlier been found by the Brownes. In 1952, together with Alan Cowley, Dave discovered an extension to The Annex a small cave situated close to Brownes Hole entrance.

Daves human approach to digging was a combination of two factors When helping others he never tried to take over, but his expertise and energetic help soon became apparent and his presence was always sought. When running his own digs he never over-dominated, but brought his helpers into his confidence so that they all felt they were on integral part of the enterprise.

Dave always behaved as a gentleman. His visits were always welcomed by the farmers he made contact with and he would lend a helping hand to anyone in need, whether it was a spot of urgent hay making or assisting his ageing neighbours. If all the so-called lovers of the countryside behaved in a similar manner therewould be no antagonism between landowners and users.

Daves interests were not confined to caving although caving tended to act as a focal point. He was a good naturalist and keen observer. For example he knew numerous fossiliferous localities, not just in cliffs but also in fields and along footpaths. He was able to recognise fossils and correlate their distribution in certain rock units, although he did not know their scientific names. He had in fact discovered for himself that rocks can be dated by the fossils they contain. He was not however interested in following a formal line of academic study and could not be persuaded into doing so. He would tend to brush aside the suggestion and would always conclude the discussion with "well theres' no point really". He gleaned a lot of information from reading and liked collecting rather old books on natural history.

DAVE MITCHELL

Daves earliest sites of work were naturally fairly close to Frome. He explored all the many beautiful valleys around and probed into any crevice that looked interesting. He excavated Cheese cave in Vallis Vale, so named because of a cheese-shaped slab of rock at the entrance. He also dug in Asham Wood but without revealing anything more than a badger sett. To walk almost anywhere on Eastern Mendip with him was an education. He would go from site to site relating how he had excavated and what he had found.

One of the first active sinks excavated was Oram Swallet, but this was given up before anything was entered, although a considerable hole had been produced. He was also induced to dig at Tom Tiveys Hole because local legend had it that it terminated at Nunney Castle. I don't think he ever beleived it did go to Nunney but there was that element of romance attached to it.

He started work at Piton Street Swallet before 1960. His work at Hunting Lodge continued over many years and represents one of the deepest shaft excavations in this country. Fill, to a depth of 25 metres was removed. Unfortunately the excavation trailed off owing to poor support before the hoped for streamway was found.

Dave helped in the excavation at St. Cuthberts Swallet but to my knowledge he never went down the cave.

Upto 1965 Dave did a lot of his work with Alan Cowley, their combination producing a powerful caving and digging team. Joint planning with Alan won the local carnival. Their float was a cave with a waterfall.

Dave took part in new exploration in Fairy Caves Quarry, notably at Hilliers Cave. He tried to make a connection with the Hilliers system by digging in Withybrook Swallet. In the process of entering a new passage in withybrook he partly blocked off a known way with spoil. Some members of another Mendip club later did a dig there, uncovering this passage and claimed it as a new discovery before studying the survey. This brought forth a great deal of mirth from Dave.

He made contact with M.C.G. when he heard, I beleive through Mr. Browne, of our excavation at Coopers Hole. When he come to see us, I think he was pleased with our enthusiasm and sobriety of that time and wanted immediatly to join. Membership took a long time to get in those days and he was not a full member until a couple of years had passed. Anyway Dave became a frequent helper at Coopers and introduced several of his friends to the Group. When he started work at blackmoor he was a frequent helper and in 1963/64 he was asked to organise the digging at Coopers hole. With his local friends he laid a railway into the Staircase dig and made a truck to remove spoil. (This has just been removed for renovation). The staircase passage was dug out leaving a high roofed rift, but the object of the operation, that ofproviding an unhindered way to the end chamber was not realised through lack ofdigging support.

During 1962 he dug at Warren Farm after the farmer reported a subsidence at the bottom of a broad shakehole. I remember Dave, Alan Cowley and John Acott reaching a depth of some 15ft in one afternoons work. At the bottom of the shaft which was in clay, a few rocks had started to appear and there was a suggestion of a looser fill. Other digging however prevented the pressing home of the dig and the site is now back to a shallow hole. This introduction to the Warren Farm area however, with its unproven potential never left Daves mind and he frequently spoke of digging there again. Warren Farm was to prove to be his last digging effort but not at his first site.

In 1963 he also turned his attention to knopp Hill Swallet (Biddlecombe Swallet) Don Searl had previously note this when out "prospecting". When work started, therewas a level streambed which did not take the complete stream at that time. Over a period of about 2 years the Swallet was cleared to reveal a narrow rift in the floor (not the rift at the downstream end) at the base of which a stream ran at about 90° to the stream in the valley. Excavation ceased temporarily after a flood washed in a lot of spoil. The dig was subsequently worked by us between about 1965 to 1968 but Dave did not seriously take part in this phase. He did say however that subsequent digging never reached his previous level.

Between 1963 and 1965 he excavated Brocks Hole (Hyatts Hill in W. Stanton's book). He was working with a good team at this time, Paul Dye doing the explosive work. When some other people started work at Brocks hole without consulting him he became very annoyed and complained to them about their poaching.

In the mid-sixties Dave married Glenys Young and they frequently spent the weekend at the cottage and went to dig at Blackmoor Shaft.

Dave was an important member of the team which discovered the big breakthrough in Rhino Rift. Dave and John Cornwall were working together on the shift before the breakthrough. Just before leaving John laid an explosive charge and Dave noted a different sound to usual The following work party discovered the shaft. Dave received the news but never ever went down the cave. He frequently said what a great disappointment the discovery was.

Following their disappointment at Rhino Rift, Dave returned to work at Charterhouse Warren Farm. The site chosen was not at the original shake hole dug in 1962, but another site not situated far away in a dry valley. This site had taken water during the Great Flood in 1968. The undertaking became more difficult as the dig progressed, owing to massive overhanging boulders. Dave was interested to hear that Manor Farm cave followed a major fault system and thought this heightened the chances of finding an extension of the cave via Warren Farm (also lying in a fault).

Dave was cremated and on his request his ashes were scattered around the Warren Farm dig. Glenys has his caving and digging logs and some of his specimens. Eventually many of his specimens will go to a local museum, the Brownes Hole Skeleton for example. Glenys continues to support digging activity at Warren Farm.

Down they went along a valley which became narrow and narrow.....

"We began to wonder, whether, after all, it was going to end in a canyon. Without any warning we were suddenly stopped by a high wall of ice which entirely cut off the valley. We made a half to see if we could find any means of advance in order to avoid driving the long distance back again; but the ice was absolutely perpendicular and inaccessible to any being without wings. . . Suddenly it occured to me that somewhere or other the river must have an outlet; there might be a tunnel through which we might pass, and on looking behind a massive snow drift I really saw a big hole, which, on investigation, proved to be the beginning of a very large tunnel which pierced the glacier. A journey through it did not seem very alluring, from the roof were suspended big blocks of ice which might fall at any moment, and indeed a good many had already done so..... which pointed an unequivocal warning to the danger of passing that way..... I shall not forget the moment when we entered the tunnel. I was afraid.....And yet it was not fear that had most hold on me, but rather an uneasy feeling of awe .....Along the walls were grotto after grotto, vault after vault with pillars and capitals in rows like giants in rank; and over the whole shone a ghost-like bluish white light..... it was driving straight into Gloria Moria Castle, the castle 'east of the sun and west of the moon; the most glorious of all.

Stonesfield Slate Mine

As part of European Architectural Heritage Year, the village of Stonesfiled, (12 miles N.W. of Oxford). Staged an 'open-weekend' when various local points of interest were on view to the public. One of these wase a slate mine which closed down in 1911 when the Stonesfield slate industry finally terminated.

The entrance is in a farmyard, and is a circular shaft 22 feet deep which is lined with dressed limestone blocks. For an armchair caver such as me, the descent was easy enough, being a sturdy wooden general purpose ladder lowered down the shaft. At the bottom is a small chamber with one gallery leading off, which is about 100 yards long and a maximum of 3½ feet high. The roof of the mine is formed by hard fossil bearing 'ragstone', with a similar bed forming the floor. Of the intervening mined rock, only about 18 inches yielded good slates.

The method of working was to hammer and chisel the stone from the left-hand wall, remove the useful rock and stack the 'deads' or waste against the right hand wall. As a result the passage continually moved in an anticlock wise direction about the shaft.

The blocks of useful stone, known as pendle, were moved to the vertical shaft on three-wheeled wooden trollies. There were no tramlines but the wheels wore grooves in the floor, and these are still visible in places.

When removed from the mine the pendle was in solid lumps, and only when exposed to frost did it split along bedding planes unlike most other slates, (e.g. Welsh, Cornish) which split along cleavages formed by the alignment of minerals (micas) along 'pressure planes'

Cont/....STONESFIELD SLATE MINE

during metamorphism. When the blocks of pendle reached the surface they were covered with soil or turf to keep them moist, for if they dried out before frosting they would not split, and once dried they could not be rewetted. On nights when the temperature dropped below zero, one man had the job of ringing a bell through the streets, and sometimes the church bells were rung too. Everyone then turned out of bed to spread the pendle in the fields so that the frost could split the slates.

The slates are of Jurassic oolitic limestone and the area where the rock has the right splitting qualities is only about one mile wide and two miles long, the seam being a maximum of 6 feet thick. The slates were used in Roman times, but at that time were obtained from surface outcrops. Adits were probably started in the sixteenth century, but as these areas of easily accessible stone became worked out, vertical shafts were sunk.

Stonesfield slate roofs can be seen on cottages and houses in many parts of the Cotswolds, although with no new slates being produced they are decreasing in number. Further information is available in a book, History of the Stonesfield State Industry, obtainable from the Oxford City & County Museum at Woodstock.

Joan Goddard.

Who does this remind you of?

One night I was awoken suddenly by a sound in the room, the sound of somebody breaking wind noisily..... Then it came again, thunderous, earthshaking the longest loudest and most superbly stupendous fart that I had ever heard in my life, a sound of such magnificent and prolonged volume as to appear utterly beyond human capability. With a shock I realised that it was I who was the author of this elephantine and sonoric flatulence; I put a hand on my belly and felt it deflating like a punctured barrage balloon.

EXTRACT FROM ' Raven seek Thy Brother ' Gavin Maxwell.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MORPHOLOGY AND HYDROLOGY OF KINGSDALE

Just north of the village of Ingleton, in Yorkshire, close to the western border with Lancashire lies a remote and little known dale On one side is the ridge of Gragareth, on the other lies Whernside. This is Kingsdale.

The higher levels of these enclosing ridges consist of alternating layers of Yoredale shales, sandstones and limestones, resting on the Great Scar Limestone which forms the valley floor.

The encircling valley sides are prominently outcropped with limestone benches and the run-off-water gathers into streams on Yoredales and promptly sinks on reaching the limestone.

The main Kingsdale river bed is normally dry along its course,

over the limestone until it reaches the resurgence of Keld Head. The water then follows a normal overland course to become the River Doe.

Kingsdale is unique in that all its drainage goes underground, the Beck losing its water early in small sinks in the bed, and the valley streams sinking into deep potholes and caves penetrating the limestone benches on both sides of the valley.

The valley drainage is more pronounced on the flanks of Gragareth due to the topography of the Yoredales prodiving a greater catchment area of limestone than on the slopes of Whernside. Both sides of the valleycontain deep potholes but those on Gragareth provide the main clues to the hydrology of the area as they are proven feeders of the resurgence at Keld Head.

The most important hydrological factor in Kingsdale is the Master Cave, into which the streams feeding the main caves and potholes on the fells all unite. It is a complex system containing phreatic passages and a classic vadose trench with a domed phreatic roof. The trend of the main vadose passage and water flow is southerly and eventually terminates in a downstream sump, which is a direct but choked connection with the Keld Head resurgence, which is at the same level.

Upstream the passage gradually becomes wholly phreatic, although not now fully flooded and the main tributary streams unite in a flooded passage.

Further upstream are the sumped connections with Rowten Pot and flooded, chockedconnections with Yordas Cave, Jingling Pot and a small inlet tributary possibly flowing from Bull Pot.

Above the downstream sump at a high level is an abandoned phreatic passage, Roof Tunnel with several connections and a dug connection to the main valley, Valley Entrance.

The development of the caves and potholes in Kingsdale is closely linked with the effects of glaciation.

The limestone was possibly first exposed by uplighting in Tertiary times and the river began to form the classic 'V' form valley, but already sinking in joints in the bed and later developing open bedding planes, although cave development is unlikely at this stage because of the limited exposed limestones.

The climate then changed with the beginning of the Pleistocene era and the succeeding colder periods formed glaciers which removed the earlier cave fissures and also eroded the Yoredale strata to form the characteristic limestone benches.

The original valley form modified, to become deeper and more straight with succeeding glaciations and drainage from the Yoredale strata, above glacial level sank into the now exposed limestone scars thus preventing erosion of the valley sides, resulting in the classic 'U' shape glacial valley.

During glacial retreat periods temporary lakes were formed which altered phreas levels in the surrounding area and thus the developing caves consisted of deep catchment shafts leading to near horizontal phreatic passages. Several lake levels have been apparent causing phreatic passages to be abandoned and vadose passages to be formed corresponding to high or low lake levels. These types of characteristics dominate some of the feeder potholes such as Rowten or Simpsons.

The roof Tunnel in the master cave was once a phreatic resurgence early in the Pleistocene before the valley was lowered to is present level

Subsequent lowering of the valley floor by glaciers caused the phreas to drop and the drainage to flow out to other resurgences. The connections in the Roof Tunnel contain heavy flow marks emphasising this drop to alternative outlets. The Roof unnel outlet was subsequently

blocked by glacial infill. When the last lake level dropped below the phreatic upstream in the Master Cave, the erosion of the Vadose trench began to start the Master Cave as we know it now.

Evidence in Keld Head shows that it was once a short vadose cave fed by a shallow phreatic network, indicating that the valley floor has been lower than its present level and the subsequent drainage system has now been drowned by the rise in the level of the valley floor.

This apparent raising is possibly due to the eroded material from Kingsdale Head being deposited by the wonderings of the Kingsdale Beck.

Many of the caves and potholes contain melt-water debris deposits and thus would indicate that the majority of Kingsdale caves began to develop under the earlier ice sheets and developments continued during the interglacials and into the post-glacial period with strong formation characteristics imposed by the temporary lakes during glacial retreat.

Thus the hydrology of Kingsdale represents a massive underground system, some of it known, some still to be finally descovered, but that discovery is of major importance and interest to the sporting caver and the geomorphologist alike.

Steve Conquest

BOOK RIVIEW

Limestones and Caves of the Mendip Hills.

Compiled and Edited by D.J. Smith
Published by David and Charles of BCRA - Price - £7.50

This volume is the second in the Limestones and Caves of Britain series to be published and embraces a similar format to the first volume.

The chapter follow in a natural succession by introducing rock types, through geomorphology, hydrology, cave development and biology to more recent archeological and palaeontological discussions.

One of the main contributors, as well as being editor and compiler, is D.J. Smith who has achieved a very com volume. The knowledge he himself has contributed is exhaustive on the geomorphology of the area. The knowledge comes from first hand active research he has been pursuing with the geography department of British University.

Overall, the book represents many of the results of study that has been undertaken over a long period and as such presents comprehensive knowledge of the development evolution and natural history of a karst area.

All the chapters are extremely well presented in a relaxed, readily understandable manner and are well documented with maps, diagrams and photographs. The chapter on the caves themselves is particularly explicit upon the evolution of the systems, tracing origins to the Ice Age and earlier.

This chapter cannot be regarded as a uide, although the description of the caves cover most of the recognisable features.

The volume can be accepted as a valuable record and explanation of the scientific results that have been achieved by both professional and sporting speleologists. It is a comprehensive source of information which any caver who knows Mendip, whether sporting or scientifically motivated, will want to read to widen his knowledge of the 'Netherworld'

Steve Conquest.