

Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

MENDIP CAVING GROUP NEWSLETTER

No: 119

MARCH 1977

COMMITTEE:

SECRETARY

Pete Mathews: 31, Brevhouse Hill,
Wheathampstead, Herts.
Tel. Home: Wheathampstead - 2521
Work: 96 - 23434 x 3432

TREASURER

Ron Saunders: Rylstone, 21 Rushmoor Ave,
Hazlemere, Bucks.
Tel. Penn - 3487

**MEET SECRETARY &
RESCUE WARDEN**

Bill Jones 91, St. Saviour's Road,
Croydon, Surrey.
Tel. 01 - 689 - 1529

COTTAGE WARDEN

Wayne Hiscox: 47, Lansbury Drive,
Hayes, Middx.
Tel. (Off. Hrs.) 01 - 573 - 3888 x 2940

TACKLEMASTER

John Miriam: 281, Tudor Drive,
Kingston upon Thames,
Surrey.
Tel. Home: 01 - 549 - 7242
Work: 01 - 546 - 7741 x 280

RECORDER

Greg Smith: 16, Nield Road,
Hayes, Middx.
Tel. 01 - 848 - 3340

EDITOR

Steve Conquest: 4, Woodpecker Close,
Edmonton, N9 7ND.
Tel. Home: 01 - 804 - 8621
Work: 01 - 808 - 1050 x 669

WEEKLY CLUB MEETINGS:

Are held at the 'Six Bells' Brentford
High St. every Thursday night until closing.

COTTAGE:

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

ACCOMODATION:

For over 30 people - all essential
services. Guest party bookings through
the Cottage Warden.

EDITORIAL

My job has sprung into life just recently as I have received several articles for the Newsletter and have just completed publishing the No. 6 Journal and Newsletter No. 118.

The last Newsletter contained some interesting articles about recent trips, but, at long last, I have obtained one about Stream Passage Pot in Gaping Gill.

There is more information about Bone Hole, and a survey, which is really supplementary to the journal article.

I would like to thank Helen Ingold, whose help inspired the articles in "Notes from a Personal Log."

After the last two articles about SRT practices, I read in Descent that someone had a nasty experience with a Croll Jammer. You can't win!

Steve Conquest.

CLUB NEWS

DINNER and A.G.M.

The Annual Group Dinner will be at "The Star Hotel," in Wells, Somerset, on Saturday, (7.30 p.m. for 8.00 p.m.) 26th March, 1977.

The cost will be £3.50 per head.

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

NEW MEMBERS

Probationary - Jane Kirby,
20, Swakeleys Drive,
Ickenham, Uxbridge, Middlesex. Uxbridge - 37361

Full - Rob Penn,
"Sunny Bank"
Handleton Common,
Lane End,
High Wycombe, Bucks.

JOURNAL

Journal No. 6 is now available free to paid up members.

A very good journal indeed, this, with exhaustive contents on the group's work in Bone Hole, Ireland, August Hole, and on Blackmoor.

Contents:- The Salt Mines of Wieliczka, Poland.
Blackmoor, Charterhouse.
Digs and Discoveries in August Hole.
Pollcan, Doolin, Co. Clare, Ireland.
A Magneto/Capacitor Shot Firing Device.
Towards Conservation.
Interim Report on Bone Hole, Cheddar Gorge.
First Tunnel under the Thames.

The majority of articles are fully illustrated with detailed maps, surveys and diagrams.

The journal is available to clubs, societies, on application, at a cost of 40p. plus postage & packing (25p.)

Backcopies of Journals 4 and 5 are also available. (price on application to non-members).

ELECTION OF OFFICERS.

The following nominees have been proposed for election to the committee at the A.G.M. The post of which they are nominated is shown alongside.

Name

Post

Secretary

Treasurer

Meet Secretary & Rescue Warden

Cottage Warden

Tacklemaster

Recorder

Editor

* At the time of printing, no names had been put forward.

DIARY DATES

Next club mmet will be in South Wales on March 12th.
The venue is Dan-yr-Ogof and accommodation will be
at South Wales Caving club cottage.

Contact Bill Jones for details.

Notes from a Personal Log

STREAM PASSAGE POT, GAPING GILL,

INGLEBOROUGH, YORKSHIRE 29th August. 76

On Sunday morning we got up quite early and commenced preparing our tackle ready for the trip down Stream Passage Pot, which, had been arranged the evening before in the 'Shoes.' Bill Pybus and Chris arrived at Green Close at about 10.30 a.m. and after sorting out all the equipment we eventually left for Clapham at about 12.00 noon.

We drove to Clapham and left the cars in the car park and proceeded on the long walk up to G.G. Main Shaft with Steve, Pete, Jane and Eric, who were going down Bar Pot and exiting via the winch. At Ingleborough Show Cavern we stopped for a much needed bottle of pop, then continued the trek up Trow Gill and out onto Clapham Bottoms.

We proceeded in the general direction of where Stream Passage entrance should be. After some discussion Bill went over to the Main Shaft to 'book' us in, whilst we searched for the right hole. There was some confusion as to whether we were actually at Frustration Pot entrance. As no-one had been down either before, it led to some considerable discussion.

Bill soon returned and as John M and John Mac had found no other entrance to the south-west, we got changed and entered the pot.

John and John soon reached the first 25 foot pitch after following the stream in a meandering canyon passage. We descended and an easy walking passage leads to the big second pitch after a further 360 feet.

This was the only free hanging pitch and was quite a good climb down of 70 feet. The third pitch was a few feet away and there was plenty of room on the ledge. This pitch proved quite awkward to tackle as it was so broken with no straight drop down.

John Miriam was first down and then John Mac and I tried to rope the tackle down. It took several attempts as the tackle kept getting hooked on the ledges. Eventually John was lifelined down the ladder with the tackle beside him and was able to free it as he went.

I was next to go down and although the book says the pitch is 110 ft it only appeared to be about 75 feet. I joined the two Johns who were already rigging the fourth and final pitch. We couldn't see the bottom and lowered 75 feet of ladder. John Miriam started to descend and on reaching a ledge 40 feet down shouted up that we needed another 25 feet of ladder. He stepped off onto the ledge and while John Mac kept a tight lifeline Chris and I attached another 25 ft. of ladder onto the 'C' links. John Miriam stepped back onto the ladder and carried on climbing until he reached the bottom. Bill and Chris went down next and then myself followed by John Mac, Phil and Greg. At the top of the second pitch we had been joined by Wally and Wayne, but they returned to the surface as they didn't have wet suits and were quite cold.

We now had to find our way to G.G. Main Shaft and after following a very glutinously muddy passage for some way decided we had taken a wrong turning and returned until we found a passage we thought would lead us to Sand Cavern's. Our theory's proved right and it wasn't long before we went past the passage that led to Bar Pot. Here the passage was filled with people having a quick look round after descending on the winch.

As we entered the main chamber the warm air hit us and we wandered over to the queue of people to find that Steve and Co. had been waiting for an hour and a half and still had quite a few people in front of them.

We had a chat and Bill cadged a cigarette from Eric while we were talking. After a short while we said cherio to the others and set off for the long climb back up the pitches. It didn't take us long to get back to the bottom of the fourth pitch.

Greg went first as he was selflifeling himself with a Clog attached to the rope. I went to hold the rope for him as he climbed the first few feet until the weight of the rope could slide itself through his clog. Once at the top Greg belayed himself to the top and lifelined John Miriam up. Phil and Bill went next followed by Chris. I went up next and found the climb not as bad as I had expected, even so I was glad to get to the top. By this time Greg had climbed the third pitch and was preparing to lifeline the next man up, Bill. Johnny Mac was last to climb the fourth pitch and Chris and I then helped to coil the ladders and ropes.

Bill was then trying to throw the lifeline down the third pitch but not succeeding very well as the line kept getting hooked on to the many ledges. Eventually it came down and Phil tied on and climbed up. John Miriam ascended next and this time we got the lifeline first throw. Chris followed and John Mac and myself got all the tackle ready for hauling up. We decided not to put too much on at once in the hope that it wouldn't get caught up. This seemed to work and it was my turn to climb the pitch. By this time I was quite cold and glad to get started.

After about 30 feet I found the lifeline was hooked around a flake of rock to my right. I stepped off the ladder onto a ledge and tried flicking the rope round but this didn't work. I had to shout up for slack and climb back down to the bottom of the pitch from where John managed to free the rope straight away. Again I started the climb up and this time had no hitches. When I reached the ledge 25 foot from the top I was told I could carry on without untying. This I did and joined Phil and Chris on the next ledge. Chris was by now quite cold and also having trouble with her carbide lamp. I tried to fix it, but without much success. Phil had a go in between lifelining.

Unfortunately when John Mac got to the the 25 foot ledge he tried hauling the ladder up with John Miriam and realised the ladder had caught right at the bottom. John Mac climbed back to the bottom and freed the ladder and shouted up for the lifeline to be taken in. Phil asked him to hang on as he was trying to fix Chris's light. After a few minutes and some strong language we realised John was standing in the stream and getting very cold and Phil immediately took in the lifeline and John started his second climb up.

By now Bill and Greg had gone up the second pitch and were waiting to lifeline somebody else up. I decided to go as Phil was going to try to fix Chris's light after lifelining John up. I was a little worried that the strength in my arms and legs would go, especially as this was a free hanging pitch. I started off and managed to get a good rhythm and must have climbed 55 feet before resting. It was an impressive sight just hanging in mid air above 55 feet of blackness dotted with little lights. I carried on climbing and this time got within 10 feet and had another rest. Just a few more feet and I made it to the top. I untied and the rope was let down for Chris. The cold seemed to sap her strength and she needed quite a number of rests before reaching the top. Once up it was decided Bill and Chris would go on out. Bill taking my electric cell and Chris with a carbide. This left me with no light but I could crawl a few feet with some tackle as the passage was quite straight forward.

Phil and John Miriam came up next followed by the tackle which John Mac was tying on for us. Phil and I then shuffled the tackle down the winding passage and carried on to the 25 foot pitch.

Here we managed to get some of the tackle up the pitch before the others joined us. It was then decided we would form a chain gang to the entrance to get the tackle out. This didn't take us long and we were pleased to hear Bill had already been over to G.G. Main Shaft to report us out.

It was almost dark and after quickly changing we started the three mile walk back to Clapham. It was quite difficult in the dark as the path was so unstable... Now my arms and shoulders were aching quite badly with the weight of carrying the ladders and ammo box.

When we reached Ingleborough show cave we decided to leave our gear and hurry on to the New Inn in the hope of ordering some food for ourselves. By the time we got to Clapham it had gone 10 p.m. and Bill suggested he drove the four of us to the Shoes where we might get Pie and Peas. We would also try and persuade some one to drive back and pick up the others who must have been quite a way behind us.

At the "Shoes" we met up with Bill Jones, Don, Pete and Judy. It took us some time to persuade Bill to go and look for the others, but he went... By the time he returned to the Shoes after dropping the others off at Green Close it had gone past last orders. The only chance to get a drink was with a glass, which somehow we managed.

We eventually set off back to Green Close where Phil and I cooked some soup and cheese on toast as we had only had crisps at the Shoes. Later on after chatting with Steve and Jane we had a shower and crawled into our tents.

Helen Ingold.

BOOKS FOR SALE

The following books are available from Malcolm Cotter,
at well below publisher's price:

CAVES & LIMESTONES SERIES:-	OF MENDIP	£3.50 each
	OF N-W ENGLAND	£3.50 each
	OF N-W CLARE IRELAND	£3.00 each
THE CAVE OF RIBDASELLA	-----	£1.10 each
(Superb photographs -- Ed.)		

Various other volumes in the Northern Caves Series are available from Greg Smith @ £1.35 each.

Surveys are available from Helen Ingold @ various prices.

BONE HOLE, CHEDDAR GORGE.

Now that we have published a general synopsis of the work carried out since 1967, we can put forward some ideas which have been forming slowly from the accumulation of detailed observations which have been made during our work.

Before we can discuss the details of the cave, it is necessary to have some idea at least of how the cave was formed. It seems that the whole cave owes its origin to an enlarged vertical fissure in which the major part of the enlargement was taking place whilst the cave was under water, or water-filled.

Scalloping is seen, indicating a slow, rather than fast, water-flow during this period, in all areas of the cave so far seen.

Faulting has occurred on a North-South line, which caused great dislocation of the bedrock, both along the bedding-planes and the vertical joints. This affected the whole area of the cave so far discovered.

Most, but not all, of these fractures have been covered with various thicknesses of calcite. The clean fractures may well indicate that settlement is still in progress, since these seem to extend in vertical rather than horizontal directions.

From some areas we have noted as many as nine layers of stalagmite floor, interspersed with mud, or mud-and grit bands. This grit is thought to be wholly calcareous, being composed of fragments of limestone and calcite granules. This indicated periods of infilling and re-excavation, the last cycle being now in process.

The most recent infilling must have taken place since the bones were deposited, since not only are they found in a brown silty mud, but that mud has even flowed into and filled some of the long bones.

From our observations we believe that the mud infill must have occurred since the last bones were deposited and that the mud filled the old cave almost to the top of the jammed boulder and to the top of the talus-cone. For this to occur, and yet leave the Skull Slope passage relatively free of mud, the talus-cone must have reached the top of the archway entrance to Skull Slope, and restricted the flow of mud to the South. This is borne out by the presence of bones at a higher level in our excavated shaft.

This could possibly have been caused by one flash flood filling the cave with water of high turbidity, such as caused the mud deposits in Cheddar at the time of the July, 1968 flood. The water having been slowed in its progress, would then deposit the silt over the whole of the old cave, and, the water then find its way down, especially at the northern end of the East wall, where the lower regions are mud-free, and also at the niche behind the rock flake which has given its name to Flake Dig.

In the lowest part of the Flake Dig we have come upon an area where the mud has not reached, the rocks being rounded and clean. This, too, would argue that deposition of mud was flood-borne rather than infiltrated over a longer period of inundation.

Further depositing of mud may have occurred in the 1968 flood beneath the stalagmite floor of Flake Dig and at a similar altitude beneath the floor at the base of Skull Slope. In both cases the mud is of a distinctly crumbly consistency and is thought to be deposited at the peak of a flood, the waters of the abating flood having washed clean the boulder-strewn exit route. Similar mud deposits have been noted at the lower levels as though left on ledges and in corners by the receding waters.

So much for the mud deposits which we believe were water borne. Other deposits have been noted which are distinctly different in appearance. In the roof of South Passage, and again in the roof of a small chamber at the lowest part of the southward extension from West Rift, there are domed roofs of flattish, insecurely-jammed rocks, in a matrix of darker soil, appearing grey to black in colour. If this is, as appears, from the surface of the cliffs, there must be some blocked avents which are not at all evident outside.

A further distinct variety of infill is seen beneath a ledge in Flake Dig. Again, flattish rocks, horizontally positioned and well-rounded, in a grey-brown soil: quite similar to the "head" deposits in the Upper or East Twin Brook Valley at Burrington, although hardly likely to be "head" in this location.

Still on the subject of deposits, those of calcite are the most eye-catching. In the Skull Slope passage, every surface is covered in an off-white dimpled covering, whilst the pendants, both straws and curtains are unusual in having indented or serrated edges. There are quite a number of erratics or helictites, with horizontal followed by vertical extensions. The deposits vary from the softest "moonmilk" to several inches of clear crystal flooring.

An oddity which strikes one on entering the new cave, is that the floor is almost completely free of any calcite formation, although the roof above is a mass of pendant formations. The rock forming the sloping floor are not even lightly attached to the walls with which they are in contact.

On some rock surfaces of the new cave, a redish, scaly skin has been noted, which may be haematite. This has also been found in the outer layer of stalagmite. Further investigation will be made to ascertain the identity of this substance.

The origin of the large quantity of small and medium-size rocks in the cave has given us much more food for thought than any of the aforementioned items. The overburden covering the undisturbed bone layers in the old cave can be quite easily explained by the removal of substantial quantities of rock from the outer rift, probably by William Long, William Boyd Dawkins and by the Gough family, as described by Harry Balch.

Thornycroft relates that the rift was enlarged to facilitate the removal of the many tons of soil from inside the cave, and the Goughs are known to have used explosives to remove quantities of calcite formations for the benefit of their visitors. The shot-holes are still visible. There is no other spoil to be seen, so we can only assume that the rock was thrown back into the cave. Several very large sections of the west wall at the entrance had sunk into the talus-cone just inside the entry arch, and these may well have been the newly-fallen rocks which the Rev. H.H. Winwood noted during a visit to the cave by the Geologists' Association in 1889. (At that time the cave was called "The Dawkins Cavern").

The area of shattered blocks in the West Rift area are most surely the direct result of the faulting, and the boulder piles at the southern boundary of this area are the effects of subsequent collapse.

It is, however, the rocks of Skull Slope which provide the most puzzling feature, and for which we have not yet come to any wholly satisfactory theory.

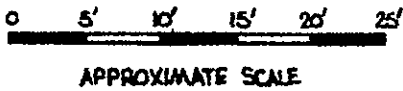
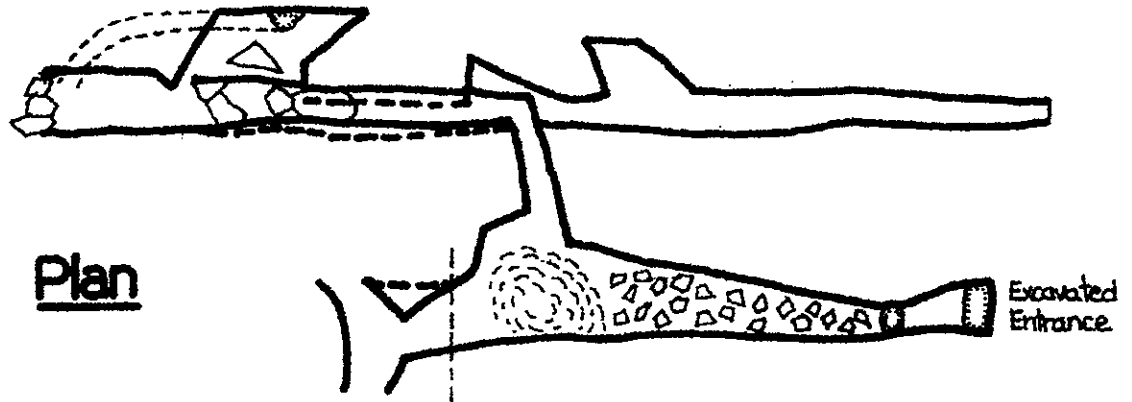
The facts are that -

- a) the bones are intermingled with the rocks in such a way that they could not have been carried in after the rocks.
- b) a large number of the bones have been crushed into small fragments, as if ground up in movement of the whole pile.
- c) at least one human rib-cage, vertebrae and skull were found together at the lower end of the slope, although further rocks had covered the remains. This was close to the Beaker pottery (see below). Otherwise we have found no associated bones of either man or animal in juxtaposition. This pottery appears to have been placed, rather fallen, onto the rocky surface of the slope, and was shattered by further rocks falling onto it, and burying it. Hence, at that time, which is thought to be approx. 3800 years B.P., there must have been a rocky slope and access. (This does not mean necessarily that the top entry to Skull Slope was open, but that would certainly have been the shortest route).
- d) at least four human skulls were on the surface of the slope. This indicates further that either they were placed on the slope, since it is highly unlikely that a brittle skull would reach far down the slope without being smashed to small fragments if carried down by a flow of rocks; or, that the skulls were still flesh-covered and rolled down the surface.

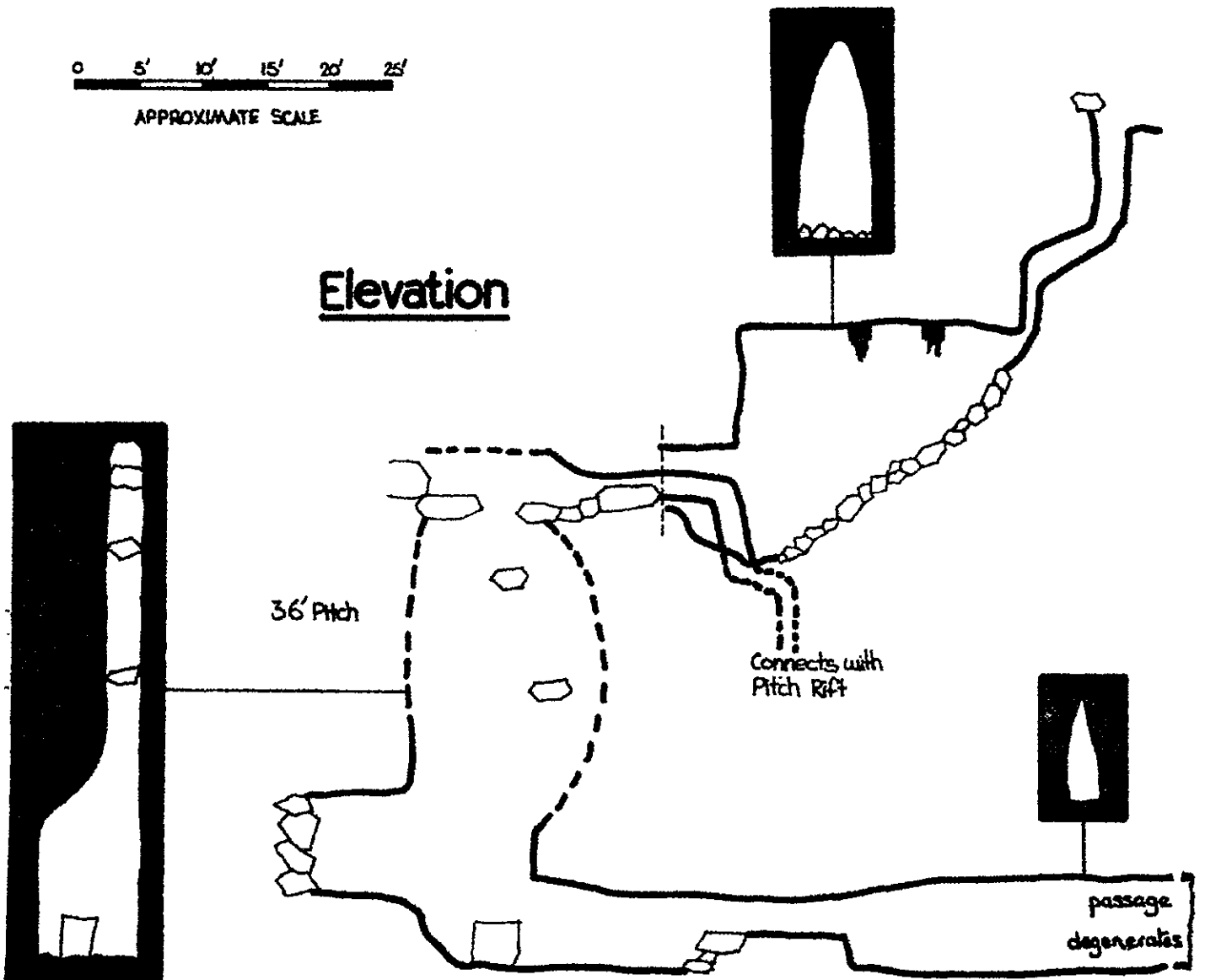
BONE HOLE – A Preliminary Survey

Extension discovered by ARTHUR COX & BERNARD REEVES, January 1975

Surveyed & drawn by G. Smith C.R.G. 2-3



Elevation



In that state they would stand a fair chance of coming to rest with the minimal damage as found. However, the lower jaw would still be adjacent, if not subsequently moved. In one case, the upper jaw and palate has been smashed into the skull although the fine nasal bones are still there. In this particular case, it could be true that the head, if not the body, had been dropped into the cave and the head had rolled into Skull Slope. A lower jaw was, in this case found nearby.

- e) as remarked before, the rocks forming the slope are almost completely free of calcite and not cemented to the walls which are well-lined with calcite. Only two patches of stalagmite formation, measuring a few square inches in area, were found on the whole slope.
- f) one animal skull, and a few bones were cemented to the walls the skull being above the level of the floor.
- g) the base of Skull Slope terminates in a thick stalagmite floor, completely precluding any possibility of recent movement in a downwards direction at that point. On the northward slope of this floor was found the second part of the Beaker pottery. Hence there cannot have been much movement in the region since 3800 B.P. or thereabouts.
- h) in the edge of the floor, a small pocket in the calcite contains bones. These are not, however, cemented to the calcite.

This last item was noted at the Christmas/New Year 1976/7. It may well be the clue to the problem of the rocks in Skull Slope. For these bones to have remained free of the calcite pocket containing them, while others are firmly engulfed in stalagmite, one thought occurs to us - namely that the pocket was filled with mud, which has only recently been washed out, leaving the bones free.

And, if the pocket was mud-filled, how about the slope itself, if that had been covered with mud or even a thin covering of fine silt, until very recently, there would be the explanation for the lack of floor formations.

But there we come to another problem. For at that same period, the dawn of 1977, we made a further discovery. (Something new seems to happen each New Year).

Messrs. Jones and Smith did some work in the lower part of West Passage and removed some of the rocks which appeared to support the base of the Skull Slope at the point. Far from burying themselves under tons of rock, they made the discovery that Skull Slope is lying upon a stalagmited boulder floor, under which there is a chamber or passage. So far we have only a restricted view of it, but it seems well-decorated and with massive boulders forming occasional supports for the roof. The floor of this lower chamber appears fairly clear of mud.

Our theory of a mud-covered slope is now difficult to maintain, since to wash away the mud in considerable quantities, and fairly evenly over the whole surface, and also fairly recently would require something in the nature of a stream or very heavy drip from the roof formations. This mud would then have been carried down to the lowest part of the floor, or through holes into the lower chamber, where the floor would have been covered. Since there is no possibility of a stream having run down the slope (it would have removed the bone fragments) and a heavy drip has not carried down any mud, we are now back to square one. The Skull Slope enigma remains.

This chamber beneath the Slope is not far from the level of the base of Flake Dig, and may well connect with a putative stream passage which also was discovered at the New Year, running slightly West of South at the bottom of Flake Dig.

The Beaker Pottery noted above, is now in the hands of Dr. N. Cook at Wells Museum. It is a very fine piece of workmanship as all that have seen it have remarked. In U.B.S.S. Proceedings published in December, Prof. Tratman describes it as Middle Beaker period. That would put the date of its manufacture somewhere in the region of 3800 years B.P. and yet we have in the upper levels of the excavated shaft and again in the lower levels of Flake Dig, Iron Age artefacts. If our own conjecture that the most recent potsherd is of Samian ware, then we have a period of use for some two millenia, however, intermittent it may have been.

A. Cox.

National Caving Association Equipment Committee

Fortunately, or luckily serious accidents as a result of equipment failure are quite rare. This does mean however, that it is extremely difficult to study actual practical causes of failure. The N.C.A. are, therefore, recording details of all events of failure, analysing them and publishing their findings. It is important to realize that from this point of view, accidents in which no one is hurt are of just as much use as those involving a fatality. In this way possible hazards can be pin pointed and help prevent further instances. Everyone should be quite aware now of the abrasion risk to rope using S.R.T.

During the summer the 30-ft fixed ladder in Otter Hole snapped as a result of corrosion of the wire inside one of the upper rungs.

Fortunately the man was lifelined and so escaped injury. As the cave is sealed by the tide, it would be easy to envisage a rescue taking a minimum of twenty four hours - quite nasty if you are on the way out after the ten hour trip! MORAL - never trust fixed tackle and always use a lifeline. Would you have used a lifeline on that pitch?

Members should report all equipment failures to the Tackle Master with as many details as possible. This includes digs, which are one of the more popular places for seeing out doubtful tackle.

Ed's Note: See two articles in latest issue of Descent for some tackle failure and accident reports.

M E N D I P C A V I N G G R O U P

The Annual General Meeting of the Group will be held at the Cottage, Nordrach on Mendip on Saturday, 26th March starting at 4.00 pm sharp.

A G E N D A

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the 1976 A.G.M.
Minutes of the previous general meeting.
3. Hon. Officers' Reports :-
 - Secretary - P.Mathews
 - Treasurer - R.Saunders, including Auditors
 - Cottage Warden - W.Hiscox
 - Meet Secretary - W.Jones
 - Editor - S.Conquest
 - Tacklemaster - J.Miriam
 - Recorder - G.Smith
4. Election of Committee 1977/78
There being no other candidates, the Committee remains as above with the exception ;
Meet Secretary - P.Ingold
5. The Cottage
 - a. Progress and plans for Summer 1977 - W.Hiscox
 - b. Financial Position - P.Mathews
 - c. Fund Raising - A.Spain

It is intended to call some form of meeting towards the end of the summer to discuss progress.
6. Any Other Business.
7. Close of Meeting.

The coach to Wells is due at the Cottage at 7 o'clock. There are still one or two dinner tickets left at the modest price of £3.50, available from the Secretary.

Announcement

The next Annual General Meeting of the Group will be held on Saturday, 11th March 1978.

The Group is to hold a St.George's Day Barn Dance, guess what, it's going to be held on 23rd April in Brentford.