



**Mendip Caving Group Newsletter**

## MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NEWSLETTER No. 120  
NOVEMBER 1977

**EDITORIAL** Together with male models and witch-doctors, editors are perhaps the most maligned and misunderstood benefactors of society. To check out the truth about my temporary appointment, I consulted my dictionary. Its description of 'editor' seemed rather dull, so I backtracked to the verb (transitive, naturally) to edit (ed'it). Just look at the possibilities - "to prepare for publication, broadcasting, etc.: to superintend the publication of: to compile: to garble, cook up: to revise: to censor, expurgate: to make up the final version of a motion picture by selection, rearrangement, etc., of material photographed previously." It says absolutely nothing about writing, begging for articles, plagiarising other people's copy or inventing stories just for fun. Nevertheless, the formal description offers a lot of scope - anyone got any blue movies needing rearrangement?

Unfortunately, Steve Conquest has fallen prey to a popular twentieth century ailment - growing pressure of work - and has had to relinquish the editor's chair. I'm just filling in until a real editor emerges at the 1978 AGM.

No doubt those members who are busily drafting articles will send them to:

Tony Knibbs, 23 Winern Glebe, BYFLEET, Surrey KT14 7LT.  
Telephone Byfleet 43875  
(office hours Weybridge 45522 ext.6125)

Don't stop to worry about your article being too long, too short, too contentious or rather dull. By the time most editors have finished with copy, very few authors can still recognise their work at all. Why not outline your news over the phone? It may give me even more scope for imagination, but it will certainly get your story to print quicker. Go write ahead.

**INSURANCE POLICY** Ron Saunders has arranged insurance cover for operations on the site of the new cottage construction. The policy is with Eagle Star insurance company and is to a maximum of £100,000 for any one claim, applying to both public liability claims and accidents to Group members. Personal injury and damage to property is included, whether caused by a member or not.

It is a requirement that members are acquainted with the terms and conditions of the policy and a memorandum issued with it by the insurers. Both documents are pinned up on the wall of the hut, adjacent to the notice board. Please read them.

Members who bring their young children to the building site are requested to keep them under supervision and out of harm's way. The site can be remarkably dangerous.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**CAVING MEET** December 17th. Trip to Lost John's System, Leck Fell, Yorkshire - a classic pothole.

**THURSDAY TALKS** These are given at the Beehive Hotel, Brentford, on the first Thursday evening meeting of each month:

DECEMBER 1st Cavers and the Law - Ron Saunders.  
JANUARY 5th Ireland - Pete Mathews.  
FEBRUARY 2nd The Diabetic Caver - Phil Ingold.  
The Safety of Equipment - John Miriam.  
MARCH 2nd Bone Hole - Arthur Cox and Bernard Reeves.

**MCG CEILIDH BAND** SMCC Buffet, December 3rd, Priddy Village Hall. Tickets are £2.50 and very scarce. The caller is Pete Mathews.

Ceilidh (with YHA), March 11th 1978, at Heston Village Hall, New Road, Heston, from 8-12 p.m. Bar (Fullers) provided by the Cross Keys. Caller is Hugh Rippon and entrance costs only 70 pence.

**MCG AGM and DINNER** April 15th 1978.

**GENERAL INTEREST** December 11th BCRA Winter Meeting, Mendip.  
February 15th 1978 Paul Esser Memorial Lecture - 'The West Face of Changabang' by Joe Tasker (a lightweight climber) - Physics Department, Bristol University at 8.15 p.m.  
March 11th 1978 BCRA Symposium - 'Cave Photography' - UMIST, Manchester.  
March 11th 1978 William Pengelly Symposium - 'Deposits in Sea Caves' - Flett Lecture Theatre, Institute of Geological Sciences, Exhibition Road, South Kensington.

March 31st-April 2nd 1978 Peak District Mines Historical Society, weekend study course on Peak District mines. This event is being organised in conjunction with the Losehill Hall Centre and will comprise lectures and field trips. Cost (full board) is £25.00. Further details from Pete Mathews.

**FIRST THE GOOD NEWS** The BBC is showing a new series of caving films. There are five films in all, from the Yorkshire Dales: Alum Pot, Pippikin Pot, Providence Pot and Dow Cave, Lancaster/Easegill System. The series started on November 15th at 3.50 pm.

**NOW THE BAD NEWS** The series is only being shown on BBC Leeds!

SINGING RIVER MINE, Shipham. A key to this disused mine has now been obtained via negotiations made by CSCC. This key is held at the MCG Cottage for the prime use of members. The key may only be loaned to non-members against a deposit of £1.00. Note that cavers must not change on the green in Shipham village.

CHARTERHOUSE CAVING AREAS. Caves on Bristol Waterworks land at Charterhouse have, for many years, been administrated by the Charterhouse Caving Committee. The administration remains under the same name of organisation, but the situation on the ground is much changed towards laxity and neglect. No longer does a padlock secure the entrance to Longwood/August System and the same comment may also apply to G.B. Cave and Rhino Rift. Even if the CCC seems to have temporarily forgotten its responsibilities, the Bristol Waterworks Company may not have done so. Members are urged to make sure that they have a valid permit and observe the rules of access to Charterhouse Caving Areas.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS

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JUMBLE SALE 1978 Please note that Arthur Spain is considering organising another jumble sale to be held early in 1978. These events rely heavily on quantity of goods for sale. Start collecting now and remember not to throw away all those useless Christmas presents. You may not fancy canary-yellow socks, a wrought-iron tie pin or alabaster slippers, but you can bet that somebody else will!

COTTAGE PROGRESS 20.11.77 With the weather definitely showing wintry tendencies, it is timely to report that the main shell is rapidly approaching completion. Apart from some minor details, both the blockwork and the structural timberwork are completed. During the weekend of December 3rd/4th it is hoped to apply the roofing felt to make the shell reasonably weatherproof. Battening will be done in advance of the tiling, when the tiles finally arrive. Assuming some boosting of the funds, the glazing of windows could be completed by the end of the year. The fitting of external doors will finally keep the snow out.

But if you think that's all there is to it, how about digging the cesspit and beginning the brickwork in the resulting crater? Or there's the external rendering to do. Having done that, you can now go indoors and screed the ground floor, plaster the walls, fit the upstairs floorboards and why not construct the stairs themselves. That just leaves plumbing, wiring, interior woodwork, ceilings and umpteen detail jobs before painting and decorating. If you now think there's a long way to go, you're right.

However, with your help, the new cottage ought to be habitable before next winter. There must be many members who feel they are not skilled enough to help. Well, neither are most of those currently helping endowed with any great skill, but just look at what has been achieved! So come along and try your hand at something - digging a cesspit requires no skill at all, neither does mixing cement or carrying materials. Self-help is a reality: a self-building cottage has yet to be invented. See you there!

READ ALL ABOUT IT Malcolm Cotter offers the following books for sale at bargain prices. This listing only refers to books with a caving flavour: there are many other bargains to be had in other subjects - history, science fiction, cookery, etc. The two books marked with an asterisk are listed at publisher's price, but purchase of these allows the buyer to obtain special discount on other books. Original prices are shown in brackets.

Limestones and Caves of the Mendip Hills	£3.75 (£7.50)
Limestones and Caves of NW England	£3.75 (£7.50)
The Mines of Mendip - J. W. Gough	£2.95 (£3.95)
*Mendip Underground: a caver's guide	£2.95
*Mendip: the Complete Caves and a View of the Hills	£3.50
A Climber in the West Country	£0.75 (£1.50).
The Collector's Guide to Fossils	£0.10

A BRIEF REPORT FROM THE HALF-YEARLY GENERAL MEETING -  
NOVEMBER 5TH, 1977.

At about the time that lesser mortals were setting fire to damp bonfires, twelve members and one guest got on with the business of the meeting. Tony Knibbs acted as chairman and, as you may guess, cottage building was the backbone of the agenda.

Apologies for absence were received from Malcolm Cotter and Rob Penn. In the absence of the 1977 AGM minutes, those of the 1976 half-yearly EGM were read and accepted.

In his opening announcements, Pete Mathews referred to recent committee member changes and asked for a volunteer to fulfil the duties of Hon. Editor. Having complained of the lack of newsletters, Tony Knibbs rashly offered to do the job and was accepted (equally rash!). Members were reminded that the AGM/Dinner would be held on Saturday 15th April - dinner probably at The Star, Wells.

Wayne Hiscox led the way into the main subject with his account of progress on the new cottage. The supply problems concerning tiles had now been sorted out and 3,000 were due to arrive shortly. These would need unloading by club members and a cry for help would be forthcoming: tiles probably arriving on a Friday or a Monday. Types of gas water heating were being examined and it has been decided to instal two shower heads. The 21st November was drawing closer and Wayne underlined the urgent need for greater effort to finish the blockwork and roof timbering to meet this completion date.

Ron Saunders gave a detailed review of financial matters and admitted to having less than £100 in the till, only £1 being in the building fund! The estimate for materials needed to finish the new cottage was £1,300 and a cash flow problem was imminent: £100 was needed immediately by Wayne for sundries to finish the outside shell within the next few weeks. If we miss out on the 10% of grant money (about £350), recoverable if we can persuade the Sports Council that the cottage shell is complete on 21st November, the requirement is equal to £26 per member. Ron stressed the need for immediate cash assistance from members in order to meet the anticipated materials expenditure up to March 1978.

A simplified statement of the current (5.11.77) Building Fund Account was given at the meeting. This is shown at the end of this report overleaf.



A FIRST CAVING TRIP - REFLECTIONS AND IMPRESSIONS  
Mick Woodham

For years, I had wanted to go caving. I had read many books on the subject, but had never met a real caver until joining British Airways Helicopters and meeting Arthur Spain. Next came an invitation to Mendip for a beginner's caving trip and, on the first weekend in November, Arthur and I arrived at the MCG cottage.

It was decided that my initiation should be in the Longwood/August System. There were to be three of us: Arthur, Tony Knibbs and myself. I was relieved to be surrounded by their years of experience, since my own had been only a tourist trip to Wookey Hole, two months before.

Halfway down the entrance chimney Arthur asked if I wanted to go back! No, said I, thinking it couldn't get much tighter. I soon found that it could, stuck in the left-hand bend at the Letterbox and feeling a bit of panic. Tony, in front and having zoomed through, was saying, "Keep on trying". Behind me, Arthur was suggesting easing back a bit and having another bash. Having calmed myself down, I tried again and found that it worked. Tony talked me through the Letterbox squeeze and I felt quite surprised that the body can get through holes that look so small.

Next, to stop me feeling too cocky, came the wire ladder descent down the first 15-foot pitch. To my relief, I remembered what I had read about ladders and didn't fall off or jackknife on the descent.

At the bottom, there was time for me to look about. I was surprised at the contrasts underground - one minute struggling through a tight squeeze, and the next standing in a lofty chamber, hardly able to see the roof. I then realised the difference in temperature and humidity as clouds of vapour rose from myself and my companions. Much to my interest were the layers of fossilised plants and shells. I paused to wonder when they had last seen the light of day as we returned to the Main Chamber from the bitter end of Longwood Swallet streamway.

Ascending now, and having passed Christmas Crawl, I noticed the formations which I had expected to see; on walls and roof, and a thick white bed of calcite was of special interest. I looked with my lamp down the pitch into the start of the lower series of August Hole ..... maybe I would get down there one day.



A welcome stop was made beyond the Drainpipe, and out of Arthur's ammo. box came the Fruit & Nut! I fancied a pint. They didn't warn me that caving was such thirsty work.

Off again, we climbed and crawled in the stream out into Longwood again. Going through the Letterbox and round the tight corner seemed a bit easier this time: perhaps I had lost some weight on the way round! I thought to myself, "Its going to be easy up the last bit". Wrong again. Somebody had taken away the footholds at the start of the chimney! I took about five attempts before I got going up in the right direction. It was a miracle that I didn't kick Arthur's teeth out as I flailed around to get some grip.

Daylight at last - it had been two-and-a-half hours since we descended. I sat at the top feeling rather lost for words, it had been that much of an experience for me. My admiration went out to those who find, explore and survey these fantastic places: my thanks go to Arthur and Tony who showed and shared them with me. Thanks also to all those at the MCG cottage who made my weekend so enjoyable.

MENDIP GRAND PRIX Yet again, another disaster marred the running of this very popular event. Driving his post-vintage thoroughbad Healy-Minor on a wet November 5th, Bernard Reeves decided to improve his position in the westbound Hunters - Nordrach stage by novel tactics.

Working on the basis that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, Bernard tried to fly over Waldegrave Pool, aiming to touch down at the Miners Arms crossroads. Unfortunately the take-off speed was misjudged and the car flew only a few yards before looping-the-loop above the sharp, downhill right-hander.

Bernard and passengers Phil and Helen Ingold disembarked in mid-flight and all three were forcibly deposited into the road. Phil was bruised and shaken, Helen received a scalp wound in addition, but Bernard sustained severe head injuries. All were rushed to Bristol Royal Infirmary - Phil kept in overnight, Helen discharged Sunday night and Bernard is still in hospital but now moved to Acton.

And they say caving is dangerous! Unless the standard of après pub driving improves, our new cottage will need a convalescent wing.

NEW SHOW CAVE Poole's Cavern, Buxton, Derbyshire, has been reopened as a show cave with a new lighting installation and guide book.

MAGNETOMETER POT  
Greg Smith

On a sunny July morning, the author, Bill Jones, Steve Conquest and Phil Ingold rolled up at Neals Ing, and paid the farmer's wife 10 pence each (sounds just like Mendip!). Then, not being content with just finding the pothole entrance, they even went down it.

After a couple of hours, the floor of Caton Hall was reached - once the end of the pot. All of Phil's spare food was scoffed, enabling the intrepid quartet to drop down into an evil little passage known as Rough Crawl. Scalping on the floor here tended to cut into the knees: also the water was bloody cold!

The aim was to get into the Labour Exchange - a series of passages discovered by PCC in 1972. Finding the entry to this series proved tricky. It was eventually located, starting as low bedding cave on a bend 50 feet downstream of some deep, flooded potholes in the streambed. Steve and Phil decided that their knees had had enough at this point, leaving Greg and Bill (who started moaning!) to stoop and wriggle their way to a duck. This was bypassed by an excavated crawl on the right-hand side, to enter the main series at Sump Junction: this is the downstream end of the terminal sump in Rough Crawl.

Striding downstream, it soon became obvious that this was really the main continuation of the cave beyond Caton Hall. The formations were clean and the passage quite unspoilt, indicating that the place is seldom visited. Unfortunately, the streamway soon terminated at The Whale - presumably named after a large flake of rock which lays in the watery bed of a large chamber. Here, it was decided to forsake the pleasure of further crawls and aqueous passages, and return to meet the other two in Caton Hall. From here, the party made their way back to the surface and the flesh-pots of Ingleton.

DOUBLE ROPE TECHNIQUE  
Pete Mathews

First SRT, and now DRT; a double rope technique which, it is claimed, is fail safe. Certainly two ropes are better than one, and that fact alone must improve the safety of the climber. Essentially, a Clog, roped into the harness, is used for self-lifelining on the second rope. Before being used in this way, the edges of the cam should be filed smooth to avoid cutting the rope on descent: a trigger is also a sensible addition. Descent and ascent are then made on the main rope, as in SRT using a fairly normal method.

Apart from the obvious gain to be had from using an additional

rope and belay point, there are one or two other advantages. In the event of equipment failure, it is far easier to transfer from abseil to prussik or visa versa on a second rope. Also, the rescue of a climber rendered unconscious is somewhat easier.

Westminster Speleological Group have always been on the ball when it comes to caving hardware, and this looks like another of their good ideas. They have been using DRT for some time, and full details appear in a WSG Bulletin.

**CAVE RESCUE!** The Southern Council is setting up a contingency fund for the emergency rescue of caves. The CSCC will build up funds by a £1 levy on clubs, together with profits from sales of surveys and other donations. It is also planned to build up stocks of building materials such as blocks, fence posts etc., and especially concrete tubes.

It is planned to put tubes down one or two of the less stable swallets which had either slumped in or were being filled by farmers. These include Flower Pot and Hollowfield Swallet.

The CSCC is also to take over the Cave Registry and bring this up to date.

**THE BRITISH STANDARDS INSTITUTE** is to draw up a standard for caving rope. This is perhaps long overdue, but has taken on more importance with the trend towards single rope techniques. The job will probably take about five years - look for the kite mark.

**GOOD HUNTING** A suggestion has been mooted (by the Wessex) that the Mendip clubs organise their club trophies for presentation to Roger Dors. The idea is that the trophy should be suitable for hanging on the wall in the back room of the Hunters. The Committee would be interested to hear from anyone with thoughts on the subject.

**NOT SO GOOD HUNTING** With the Hunters still in mind, they have Old Timer again on tap at 46p a pint: a free glass is loaned with every pint.

**MOLES ON THE HILL** When a caving organisation christens itself Mendip Original Limestone Expedition Society, it risks many a joke - MOLES indeed! However, it has a serious aim: to provide cheap transport for caving trips in Britain and Europe. MOLES News Sheet No. 1 refers to plans for providing Transit vans equipped with long-range tanks, safari roof racks, jerry cans and rescue kit. Just right for a trip to Burrington via Inverness for a rescue in Goatchurch.

But it is a serious venture. Membership costs £1.00 p.a. and a hire charge for overseas trips is estimated at £2-2.50 per head. This unbelievably low costing is to be subsidised by sales, lotteries, sponsorship and any other rip-off possible. The society is supported by CSCC. If it is a joke, it's a very serious one.

## GROUP ORGANISATION

### COMMITTEE

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WEEKLY MEETINGS of the Group are held every Thursday evening  
at the BEEHIVE HOTEL, 227 High Street, Brentford,  
Middx.

CAVING ACCOMMODATION is available at the Group's Mendip  
headquarters cottage:  
The Stirrup Cup, Nordrach-on-Mendip,  
Blagdon, Somerset. (NGR ST55/5150.5605).

29 beds are available, together with cooking  
facilities and other amenities including  
caving library. Guest bookings must be made  
to the Cottage Warden.