



Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

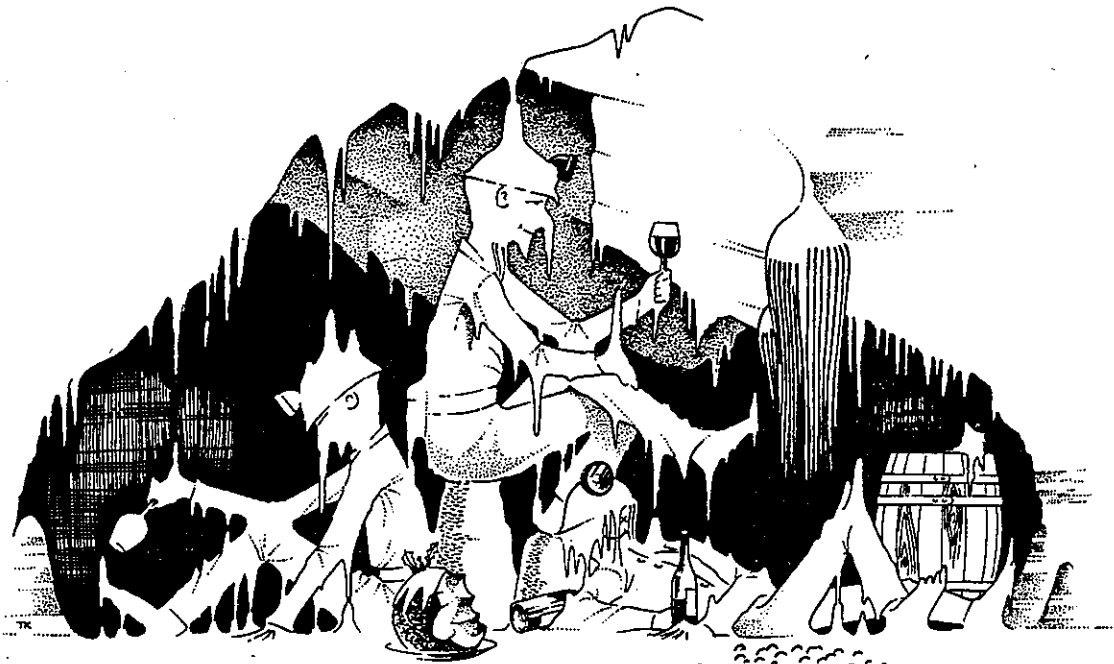
MENDIP CAVING GROUP
NEWSLETTER NO.121
DECEMBER 1977

EDITORIAL Another newsletter so soon? Why not, there are more than enough articles from contributors to fill its pages. Many contributors have already waited long enough to see their efforts appear in print, which is good reason to print sooner rather than later.

The lack of group caving trip reports may perplex some readers. Well, we cannot build a new headquarters cottage on Mendip and still find time to venture underground every weekend. But the building work will not last forever, and the latter end of 1978 should find us groping in the subterranean gloom again. Indeed, caving activities will seem like a holiday compared to the building task; much easier and certainly a lot warmer.

Of course, we still talk about caving, albeit in the past tense sometimes. Many of the topics covered by the current series of monthly lectures will be of widespread interest, and it is intended to publish those which are most suitable. The first to be published appears in this issue - 'Cavers and the Law'.

And just to end 1977 on the right note, we wish all our readers a merry Christmas and a happy, prosperous New Year.



MERRY CHRISTMAS

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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

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 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 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.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Although the AGM is still three months or so away, members are reminded that amendments to the Constitution and Rules must be notified to the Hon. Secretary at least 21 days in advance of the meeting. The same rule applies to nominations for committee members. Talking of committee members, why don't you put your name forward for one of the posts? It doesn't take a lot of time and effort. Make life easier at the AGM by ensuring that there are more than enough candidates for each post. Your active interest is very important.

FUNDS UPLIFTED Subsequent to much pleading for early payment of the 1978 subscription of £5.00 and a special levy of £5.00, members have responded to the tune of over £300. Several members have yet to pay the total of £10.00, but the funds are already at a healthier level. At 3rd December, the figures were:

Current account	£267.62
Cash in hand	£253.34

Total £520.96 (bank and cash)

It is now possible to go ahead and order glass for the windows of the new cottage, and buy a host of other items badly needed. Current income from cottage fees is averaging £10.00 per week: obviously the workers don't mind paying for the pleasure!

VALUABLES LIFTED? It seems that some members are willing to risk having their equipment, clothing, etc. stolen by leaving the cottage unattended and unlocked. Just in case you think the insurance will furnish a nice new sleeping bag and caving gear, Pete Mathews has some bad news for you:

- a) the reimbursement insured for is only £10.00 per member, and
- b) the insurance is invalid if burglars are given free access.

The committee is fully aware that the sum insured would only replace your jeans and a pair of socks. However, no adjustment of the policy will be done until the renewal date in July, 1978, due to the impending reappraisal on moving to our new home. By next July, this should be a very real possibility.

The immediate solution is in your hands. Always keep anything of particular value in a cupboard or closed bag. Always lock the external doors and close windows when you leave the cottage - either during a weekend or when you go home afterwards. The best answer is not a more expensive policy, it is to BE MORE CAREFUL.

PROMOTION Jane Kirby has been voted a full member of the group. There is absolutely no truth in the rumour that Jane has defected to the east.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS PETER and JOAN GODDARD,
10 Enstone Road,
Charlbury, Oxon.
Tel: Charlbury 382

ROBBY and PAM CHARNOCK,
30 Bassett Gardens,
Osterley, Middx. TW7 4QY.
Tel: 01-570-4116

COTTAGE BUILDING BULLETIN At last, we have the tiles.
On Friday, 2nd December, four
members amazed their employers by dashing off to Mendip to
unload 6 tons of pantiles, freshly manufactured on Humberside.

During the weekend, a sizeable workforce laid a foundation
for an external gas bottle store, raised the chimney stack
numerous courses (PRM has laid more 'queens' than anyone
else!), tittivated the woodwork and blockwork, and dug the
septic tank hole down a few feet. Tiling progressed no
further than deciding that a 6,000-piece jigsaw is probably
easier. Of course, the roofing felt and battens need to be
put up first anyway.

The need for an external gas bottle storage has arisen due
to a decision in favour of gas as means of heating water in
addition to cooking food. A 35-gallon storage heater which
could supply four shower heads has been selected. It offers
an installation saving of £50.00 because it needs no
thermostatic valve. The search is on for new gas rings,
grill and oven.

Estimates are being obtained for glass: this is the only
major item needed to ensure enough materials will be avail-
able to last us until next Spring. The imposing structure
is now insured for £18,000.

So how about we see a few new faces out on the site over the
next few months? Some of the old ones are looking quite
haggard! Wayne is concerned to get the septic tank finished
soonest. Digging is one of the warmer jobs - until the
roof is finished, that is.

BOOK REVIEW
Steve Conquest

LIMESTONES AND CAVES OF THE MENDIP HILLS
compiled and edited by D. I. Smith. Published by David and
Charles (for the British Cave Research Association), Newton
Abbot 1975. 424 pp with black and white photographs and
line sketches. Price £7.50 (but see Malcolm Cotter for a
much-reduced price!)

This is the second volume published in The Limestones and Caves of Britain series: the North-West England volume appeared in 1974, in identical format.

The contents follow a natural sequence, taking the reader from a description of the country rocks, through geomorphology, subsequent erosion and hydrology to a discourse on the caves themselves. Appendices include a fauna list, a brief account of museums and books in which Mendip archaeological and palaeontological material may be referred to, and a final bibliography.

A competent editor and contributor, D. I. Smith is assisted by D. P. Drew - notably on hydrology - and by Mary Hazleton and E. K. Tratman, on biology and archaeology respectively.

Overall, the book presents a readable and comprehensive account of many years of study. Unlike so many textbooks in scientific fields, this one doesn't weigh down the information with needless jargon requiring the reader to be already an expert in the subject matter. It nevertheless provides a study in depth of the geology, geomorphology, erosion and hydrology, which would only be otherwise obtainable by much research into a host of individual works by over 100 authors.

The chapter on the caves themselves offers very detailed descriptions of the development and evolution of the major systems, classifying them by catchment areas. As in other chapters, points of discussion are well illustrated by maps, diagrams and photographs.

A fairly comprehensive bibliography allows the reader to select material from which further information on particular caves and more specialised study of individual aspects may be pursued.

The book is not a cave-by-cave guide to Mendip, but is a well organised and easily digested textbook. It will appeal to a large number of cavers, regardless of their level of knowledge of Mendip's 'netherworld'.

CAVES ARE WHERE YOU FIND 'EM - PSEUDOKARSTS
Pete Mathews

In South Africa, both in Cape Province and the Eastern Transvaal, there exist landforms showing characteristic features of a karst landscape, although not composed of limestone. Most common are extensive karren fields which show strong solutional features - enlargement of joints, scalloping, etc. Dolines are somewhat rare, but even joint-aligned cave systems exist in some areas. The unusual feature of these areas is that they are mainly made up of quartzite, a normally insoluble rock. It is thought that earlier alkaline soil conditions led to solution by hydrolysis to form the present pseudokarst.

Such areas are not altogether uncommon. Probably the most spectacular example of a pseudokarst is that of the Sarisariñama Plateau in Bolivia. Here, hydrothermal water of high alkalinity is thought to have broken down the siliceous intergranular cementing material. Under high water conditions, the streams would have considerable erosive action, and much of the erosion would have been mechanical. Redeposition would have been quite possible, and a number of unusual and unique cave formations have been discovered, including many of opal or iron oxide up to 10 cm long.

The most impressive aspect of this plateau is the enormous shafts from the surface, first reported by Harry Gibson from flights over the area in 1964. Since then, there have been further reconnaissance flights over the plateau, but no landings until those made by a recent joint Polish/Venezuelan expedition.

The Sarisariñama Plateau measures 35 x 25 kilometres and is at an altitude of 1,400 metres. The expedition descended several shafts including:

Sima Mayor	314 metres deep
Sima Menor	243 metres deep
Sima de la Llavía	202 metres deep

Shaft diameters ranged up to 350 metres and both the Sima Menor and Sima de la Llavía have lower galleries. The longest cave found was 1,350 metres.

An account of the expedition is given (in Spanish) in the Boletín de la Sociedad Venezolana de Espeleología, April 1976, which is now in the MCG library. Some of the photographs are quite impressive, especially one showing a helicopter flying around halfway down a shaft! Another 'first' was a radar survey of the plateau.

THE WORLD'S DEEPEST AND LONGEST CAVES

	DEPTH
1. Gouffre de la Pierre Saint-Martin (France/Spain)	1,332 metres
2. Gouffre Jean-Bernard (Haute Savoie, France)	1,298 metres
3. Gouffre Berger (Isère, France)	1,141 metres
4. Schachta Kilsí (Kirk-Tau Plateau, USSR)	1,030 metres
5. Réseau des Aiguilles (France)	980 metres
6. Sima G.E.S.M. (Malaga, Spain)	940 metres
7. Gouffre André Tonyà (France)	930 metres
8. Abisso Gortani (Italy)	925 metres
9. Grotta di Monte Cucco (Italy)	922 metres

		DEPTH
10.	Sumidero de Callagna - Garma Ciega (Santander, Spain)	916 metres
11.	Gouffre du Cambon de Liard (France)	908 metres
12.	D.C.6. (Vancouver, Canada)	900+ metres

		LENGTH
1.	Flint Ridge - Mammoth Cave (Kentucky, USA)	280 kilometres
2.	Hölloch (Switzerland)	129.5 kilometres
3.	Optimists Cave (USSR)	109 kilometres
4.	Jewel Cave (South Dakota, USA)	88 kilometres
5.	Oyernaja Cave (USSR)	83 kilometres
6.	Organ (Greenbrier) Cave (West Virginia, USA)	71 kilometres
7.	Ojo Guarena (Spain)	47 kilometres
8.	Wind Cave (South Dakota, USA)	46 kilometres
9.	Eisriesenwelt (Tennengebirge, Austria)	42 kilometres
10.	Ogof Ffynnon Ddu (South Wales, UK)	42 kilometres
11.	Cumberland Caverns (Tennessee, USA)	37 kilometres
12.	Reseau du Dent de Crolles (Isère, France)	33 kilometres

The above lists were extracted by Pete Mathews from "Die Höhle", the publication of the Verband Osterreichische Höhlenforscher (Austrian Caving Association).

OGOF CRAIG-Y-FFYNNON Originally called Rock and Fountain dig, this cave has rewarded its devotees with some 4 miles of mostly big passage making a bee-line for Agen Allwedd, Eglwys Faen and Darren Cilau caves.

From the entrance in the Clydach Gorge, the first 2000 ft has a flood-prone duck and reaches the large First Boulder Choke. A 30 ft ascent gains the even larger Second Boulder Choke with 120 ft of tortuous going to the Hall of the Mountain Kings - half a mile long, 100 ft wide and 80 ft high. 800 ft of flat-out crawling opens into the Severn Tunnel - 1200 ft of dead-straight phreatic rift - 30/40 ft high and 6 ft wide. Two huge chambers (the second is 250 ft diameter and 80 ft high) continue the main route to a 50 ft pitch to a lower streamway.

Sudden flooding is a hazard and access is currently restricted.

CAVERS AND THE LAW
Ron Saunders

TRESPASS This civil wrong is committed when:

- (1) you enter upon the land of another without permission.
- (2) you remain on another's land after your right to remain on it has been terminated
- (3) you abuse the right of entry given to you for one purpose by using it for another. Do not go off on a frolic of your own to pick mushrooms if the occupier gave you permission only to go caving.

Remember, it is no answer to an allegation of trespass to say that it happened by mistake. The ordinary rambler in the countryside trespasses by mistake (not by accident) when he gets off the beaten track. You trespass by accident (involuntarily) if, when on farmer Brown's land with his permission, his bull removes you by tossing you over the drystone wall into Farmer Jones' land - your arrival there is an involuntary trespass.

TRESPASS ABOVE AND BELOW THE SURFACE

In general, he who owns or possesses the surface of the land owns all the underlying strata also. Therefore, any entry without permission, beneath the surface at whatever depth, is an actionable trespass. In some localities there are reservations of the right to win and work for minerals below a certain depth and, although you may have the surface owner's permission to enter the land and go below, if someone else owns the substrata then you need his permission also to penetrate into his property.

If a breakthrough occurs below ground which traverses the vertical boundary projected down from the surface, then a trespass is committed when you cross that boundary if the adjoining owner has not given permission. Of course, the probability is that the owner or occupier will have no knowledge of your transgression.

The owner of the surface also owns the column of air space above and within his land boundaries, so that a crossing of that air space is as much a trespass as one committed on or below the surface. There is a special enactment which enables aircraft to fly over your garden without committing trespass.

Remember, if you deliberately deposit a substance on land on which you have a right of entry, in such circumstances that natural forces will carry it onto the land of another, that too, is a trespass. Do you empty your carbide into a streamway?

WATER POLLUTION

Doing something which changes the natural qualities of water (including its temperature) may be actionable as an infringement of proprietary rights, as for example the right to take underground water.

It is no use saying that nuisance by pollution of a stream-way due to effluents separately discharged is caused only to a small degree by you because all the rest of the party offended as well.

OCCUPIERS' LIABILITY ACT 1957

This Act regulates the duty which an occupier of premises owes to his visitors in respect of dangers due to the state of the premises or to things done or permitted to be done on them.

What does the word "premises" conjure up in your mind - buildings? land and buildings? Does it include caves? In my view it does, but that does not mean that caves must be as safe as houses, unless of course they are lived in.

Does the occupier of land which includes a cave have any duty towards the cavers he allows to go caving? Does it make any difference to his obligations that he charges an entrance fee? Can he avoid those obligations by agreement?

The duty owed by the occupier to the lawful caver is "the common duty of care", i.e. such care as in all the circumstances is reasonable to see that the caver will be reasonably safe in using the premises for the purpose for which he is permitted by the occupier to be there.

What is reasonably required to discharge the duty of care is, in the case of a shopper in a shop, very different from that for a caver in a cave. The shopper expects the floor to be level and free from holes, the caver expects the reverse. The shopper expects the roof to be sound and stable, the caver realises that the roof above him may contain loose boulders.

It would not be reasonable to require the owner of a cave, into which he had never been and had no desire to go, to level the floor and ensure that the roof was free from loose boulders before allowing a caving party to enter. On the other hand, if it is a show cave open to the public, then the occupier must ensure that the visitors are safe from the risk of injury from unstable floors and roofs. The payment of an entrance fee does not, of itself, impose any higher duty on the occupier.

The occupier can, by agreement with the caver, extend, restrict, modify or exclude his duty of care. The prudent occupier might consider it worthwhile asking all cavers to sign an indemnity chit. Both sides are, in general, free to make what bargain they please, though the Courts lean

against agreements purporting to exempt a party from liability which would otherwise fall on him.

The Act does not impose on an occupier any obligation to a caver in respect of risks willingly accepted as his by the caver. For example, the caver accepts the risk of a natural roof fall; he does not accept the risk that the occupier will do some blasting on his own account on the surface and bring the roof down on the caver, unless perchance the occupier works a quarry and the caver, knowing that blasting will occur whilst he is underground, nevertheless decides to go into the cave and accept the risks of falls from blasting.

THE DIG

There can be, and often is, a dual responsibility which arises when the occupier gives the cavers permission to carry out a dig. The occupier has his duty of care imposed upon him by the Occupier's Liability Act to see that invitees, possibly ramblers, are reasonably safe on his land. But what of the cavers who opened up the hole? They are not occupiers, but none the less have a duty of care. Whoever creates a source of danger, even on premises not in their own occupation, are bound to use reasonable care by fencing, warning or otherwise to preserve from harm those self-same ramblers and anyone else whom they may reasonably expect to be affected by the dig.

Cavers must not, by their activities at a dig, impose a liability on the occupier of the land by failing to fence a dangerous dig. If a Rambler falls in and is injured he will be entitled to sue both the occupier for breach of his statutory duty of care and also the cavers at common law for their negligence in failing to fence a danger which they created.

The cavers' responsibility is not ended simply by fencing and leaving it at that. The fence must be maintained so long as the dig remains a danger - a daunting thought, relieved only by the fact that most digs are not easily accessible to the general public.

WHO IS LIABLE?

Those who actually create the danger are personally liable to persons injured by their activity. Does this impose a liability on all members of the Group? If it was a Group activity the answer is a qualified "Yes". The Group's Trustees or its Committee, if they can fairly be taken to represent the body of club members, can be sued.

To what extent can the Trustees or Committee be personally accountable for payment of damages awarded to an injured person?

If they are sued in a representative capacity, then their personal assets are not at risk and they are entitled to indemnity by the Group out of the Group's assets. However, if apart from any representative capacity a Trustee or Committee

member has personally created a danger which results in a successful claim for damages, then he is liable to the full extent of his personal assets. It follows therefore that both the Group and the actual wrongdoer are jointly and severally liable for payment of the damages.

CAVER TO CAVER LIABILITY

It is impossible to lay down a formula which will cover every eventuality and determine the extent of the duty of care which one caver has towards another caver.

In order to succeed in a claim for damages, it is not enough for one caver to establish that he suffered injury from the acts of another caver. He must go further and prove that the caver causing the injury was negligent, i.e. that his conduct fell below the standard established by law for the protection of others against unreasonable risk of harm. The required standard of conduct is a question of fact in each case - what is the size of the risk to which others are exposed; what is the likelihood of injury; was it reasonable in a general way to foresee the kind of thing that occurred; were adequate precautions taken?

The leader of a party of novices will be expected to exercise greater care for their safety than if he is the leader of a party of experienced cavers. He has a duty to see that his tackle is free from defects of which he should have known. If a ladder breaks, the obvious question is why did it break and when was it last tested?

If a caver falls from a ledge and injures another, the question to be answered is was his fall caused by his own negligence - should he have been lifelined? Of course, the injured caver may be partly to blame if he was standing immediately below, rather than to one side of the caver who fell. If that was the case and both were negligent, it is for the Court to apportion their respective degrees of negligence.

Remember that you have a duty not to injure your companions by your acts, so exercise reasonable care to ensure their safety and you own.

This is not a full exposition of the law of negligence, or of trespass, and I shall be most interested to have the views of any reader who disagrees with any of the principles which I have propounded.

EDITOR'S FOOTNOTE Readers should be aware that Ron Saunders is a practising solicitor and, therefore, has a very good insight into the workings of the process of the law. However, this should not deter readers from offering their comments. Offers of fence posts should be made to.....!

GROUP ORGANISATION

COMMITTEE

- Secretary - PETE MATHEWS, 31 Brewhouse, Hill,
Wheathampstead, Herts.
Tel. (home) Wheathampstead 2521
- Treasurer - RON SAUNDERS, Rylstone, 21 Rushmoor Avenue,
Hazlemere, Bucks.
Tel. (home) Penn 3487
- Meet Secretary - JOHN MacMILLAN, 11 Whitehouse Way,
Iver Heath, Bucks.
Tel. (home) Iver 652339
(work) Slough 33611
- Cottage Warden - WAYNE HISCOX, MCG Cottage, The Stirrup Cup,
Nordrach-on-Mendip, Blagdon,
Somerset.
- Tacklemaster - PHIL INGOLD, 31 Spring Lane,
Hemel Hempstead, Herts.
Tel. (home) Hemel Hempstead 2029
(work) Hemel Hempstead 42233 ext. 304
- Recorder - MALCOLM COTTER, 249 Feltham Hill Road,
Ashford, Middx.
Tel. (home) Ashford 52643
- Editor - TONY KNIBBS, 23 Winern Glebe,
Byfleet, Surrey KT14 7LT.
Tel. (home) Byfleet 43875
(work) Weybridge 45522 ext. 6125

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.