



Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 125

DECEMBER 1978

EDITORIAL If the end of the year is the time to look back over the past twelve months, a review of the Group's doings leave little scope for complacency. Admittedly, a lot more caving has taken place during the past few months, and readers may be forgiven for thinking that caving is what we are here for. It is, but there is still the outstanding problem of finishing the new cottage.

This project is now very near completion and we ought to be in residence sometime in 1979. But it won't finish itself! Members are urged to put in as much effort as possible over the next few months so that we can really wind up the task in 1979.

I should like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to all who have contributed material for the newsletters during the past year. And I also add best wishes for Christmas and the New Year to all our readers!



FORTHCOMING EVENTS Malcolm Cotter has arranged a series of Thursday evening talks to be given at The Beehive, Brentford, in 1979:

1st February - Caving Equipment and Techniques, by John Miriam and Greg Smith.

1st March - Switzerland 1978, by Greg Smith.

5th April - 25 years of the MCG, by Malcolm Cotter.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING and DINNER. Make a diary note that these functions will help to pass away the hours on Saturday, 28th April 1979.

LONGWOOD/AUGUST SYSTEM continues to receive attention in the Oxbows region. The perched sump is now a suspended duck and work at the far end of the passage is commencing.

MIDDLE FLOOD SWALLET was discovered and explored by the Group after the summer floods of 1968. More recently, Willie Stanton commenced a dig at the top of the spoil bank, 30 feet above the original excavated entrance. Stanton's digging has revealed some interesting machinery dating back to the active mining period at Charterhouse (or West Minery). There was some speculation as to the nature of the machinery which appears to be either a water-wheel or winding gear. This excavation was refilled, but concrete pipes allow access to this interesting industrial archaeological site.

This later entrance has been named Wheel Pit Swallet. WCC published reports state that a chamber has been found. Presumably, this is the same chamber entered by MCG in 1968, under the original name of Middle Flood Swallet. Anyway, what's in a name

OTTER HOLE Access to Otter Hole is now administered by Peter Capper, Dunraven, Clearwell, Coleford, Gloucester. Applications should be accompanied by a £2 key deposit and two stamped addressed envelopes.

FAIRY CAVE QUARRY Shatter Cave and Withyhill Cave are presently closed due to action by an inspector of Mines and Quarries, Fairy Cave and Hilliers Cave are unaffected.

MEMBERSHIP We welcome the following as new members:
Martin Rowe, Flat 2, 47 Effingham Road, Surbiton,
Surrey.
Alan Rarity, 57 Berrylands Road, Surbiton,
Surrey.
Graham Sutcliffe, 80 Hurst Lane, East Molesey,
Surrey.
Glenn Fletcher, 37 St. Andrews Square, Surbiton,
Surrey.

Congratulations to Judy MacMillan who, amongst other things,
is now elected to Full Membership of the Group.

Prospective Members include:

Chris Whittle, 18 Granville Dene, Bovington,
Hemel Hempstead, Herts.
Paul Phipps, 2 Kings Paddock, West Winterslow,
Wilts.
Dave Baxter, 51 Windsor Avenue, New Malden,
Surrey, KT3 5HE.

SUMMARY OF HALF-YEARLY MEETING - 28 October 1978. The
meeting was attended by 17 members and 9 guests. Greg Smith
was in the chair. The main business of the meeting was to
review the current state of progress on the new cottage and
to hear any comments or proposals on this topic.

Pete Mathews (Hon. Sec.) reported that progress during this
summer had been poor, the workforce dwindling to one or two
members occasionally. The work outstanding was estimated
as equivalent to one man-year. At the present rate of
progress, this suggested completion in about 1990! A really
concerted effort could achieve completion in a few weeks.

The Sports Council had expressed concern that we had still
not reached completion and were still withholding the final
grant payment.

After a poor start this year, finances were reported now to
be quite healthy, chiefly due to the £1000 loan received
from the National Playing Fields Association, for which five
members are acting as guarantors. Loans are no longer
required from members, but fund-raising activities need to be
maintained at about £500 per annum. A figure of about £700
should be recovered from VAT refund when the building is
finished.

Ron Saunders (Hon. Treasurer) reported that £8987.31 had so
far been spent on purchasing the land and building materials
for the new cottage. Borrowing amounted to £2834.69. The
figure for recoverable VAT was currently £504.98.

Wayne Hiscox (Hon. Cottage Warden) stated that cottage bookings had been going very well - too well on at least one occasion - and many forward bookings had been received. Thanks were expressed to Pat Walsh for his very effective repairs to the coke stove and chimney. The committee had decided to increase guest fees to 50 pence per day.

A PROPOSAL that 'A subvention be placed upon the membership to finance sub-contracted labour' was defeated. An unusual amount of activity was seen on the site next day!

A PROPOSAL that 'In the event of the Group being unable to meet its loan repayments to the NFPA, the committee will be empowered to place a levy upon the membership' was agreed. This offers some protection for the guarantors.

FUND RAISING. Phil Ingold had obtained details of 'Bingo Tickets', but there was insufficient support from the meeting to make it worthwhile. The meeting favoured another sponsored walk, to be arranged next spring.

AGM and ANNUAL DINNER. This is to be arranged for Saturday, 28 April 1979. The dinner venue will be The Star, Wells, and tickets will cost about £5.

THREE IN A BED? Visitors to the Cottage may have been aware of very full bookings of late. This is almost certainly a reflection of conditions down at Priddy. Many of the other Mendip clubs are not accepting large bookings, and visiting university club parties are the worst affected.

On the whole, overcrowding has been due to someone or other being silly, e.g. clubs coming on wrong weekends, booking 10 and coming with 20, members arriving with 10 'friends'. Although we are grateful for a high income, our accommodation is not unlimited.

As a reminder, guests may only come down on the following basis:

- 1) The Cottage Warden may book in a single party of not more than 12 people.
- 2) Exceptionally, the committee may accept bookings from larger parties, e.g. on away meets etc. Proper notice must be given.
- 3) Members may sponsor 1 guest while staying at the cottage.

It is intended to keep closer to these rules in future. This will mean some loss of income, and it is therefore necessary to revise the cottage fees, these are now:

Members (and those under 18 yrs) per day 30p
Guests per day 50p

IT'S YOUR COTTAGE. A complaint was noted regarding untidiness and rowdy behaviour by a visiting club (sounds like a good weekend!)

The committee cannot control how the cottage is used on any particular occasion. A set of cottage rules is in existence, and it is more important that these are followed when the cottage is bursting at the seams.

One should remember that smooth running of our facilities depends upon members themselves. On busy weekends, members must accept some responsibility for the education and control of visitors. If you do just a little organising you should be able to get away without actually doing any chores yourself!

Incidentally, the complaint of late night noise was especially ironic. It came from the very person responsible for the abolition of the "One O'clock Silence Rule" a few years back.

The biter bit, indeed.

OLD FACES. Very early members may be interested to learn that Terry Noble looked in at the Hunters the other week. He didn't even know we had acquired our first cottage, let alone were building a third one.

Not quite so long ago was the trip to Poland in, I think, 1970. Our host Zygmunt Kwasniok passed through London recently, but did not have sufficient time to broaden his visit. He will be in England again next year for about six weeks, around June, and will be bringing Krystyna with him. He has expressed a special interest in paying a visit to Scotland. Time for another Sutherland trip?

THE WILES OF WESTMINSTER. Full details of a trip to Norway are given in the latest WSG Bulletin. Their catering officer deserves a house point for overcoming the exorbitant price of beer at a little over £1.50 a pint; he produced home brew kits.

"CAVES IN CAMERA" is the title of an appreciation of the cave photographer A. E. Mc R. Pearce. One of the few amateur scientists, he recently addressed the zoology section of the British Association to wide acclaim.

New Scientist - 21st September 1978.

A FORTUNE IN SCRAP. Pat Walsh has kindly offered to act as a central collecting point for scrap metal which he will sell on behalf of the Group. What he needs is non-ferrous metals - copper, brass, lead, zinc and aluminium being the most common.

Members are requested to go in search of such gems, and give them to Pat: he can be found at The Beehive most Thursday evenings or at home on 01-977-8414.

JUMBLE SALE. Many thanks to all those members who generously contributed their spare time to fish out jumble and who assisted at the sale itself. The profits were in the region of £60.

LIBRARY DESIGN. Malcolm Cotter would like to hear any useful suggestions from members, which will help him arrive at a suitable layout for the library in the new cottage. Accommodation of books and journals will be quite a problem, so, if you have any shelving, cupboards or cabinets, let him know.

MICK BURKE AWARDS. The award is a tribute to the memory of Mick Burke, the BBC cameraman who lost his life while filming the ascent of Everest in 1975. The competition makes awards to expeditions and is organised by the BBC Natural History Unit in Bristol and the Royal Geographical Society.

There were some 90 applications for the 1979 award of which six were successful. Each of these will be lent two super 8 movie cameras (a Braun 801 and a Braun 148), and a tape recorder together with sufficient tape and film for 90 minutes filming. It is intended to show the films on BBC's Sunday evening TV programme series 'The World About Us'.

ARE THERE BATS IN YOUR BELFRY? Everyone knows that bats live in caves and occasionally in belfries. The percentage of the total bat population of Britain, which actually lives in caves is probably very small indeed. Like the original cavemen, bats have probably decided that a cold, damp cave is not as comfortable as a modern, centrally-heated house.

They certainly did at New Haw in Surrey. During the summers of both 1977 and 1978, local council exterminators moved into a 15-year old detached house to tackle a colony of bats. Using a powder spray, 140 bats were evicted in 1977 and a further 80 in 1978. So it may be that the very few bats we find in caves are merely the drop-outs from the rigours of suburban existence.

AN EXCURSION TO MANGLE HOLE.

G. Fletcher, A. Rarity, M. Rowe

After chatting to some of the other Group members, I discovered that not many members of the club appear to have been to Mangle Hole. Possible reasons for this are the distance that has to be travelled (7 miles) and, by Mendip standards, the long walk from the car (approximately 700 yards). However, Mangle Hole is an interesting cave and we thought it was worth a visit.

The cave itself is not particularly strenuous; the main problem we had was finding it. "Mendip Underground" gives accurate directions, but unfortunately the route you have to use is a private lane leading to a riding school (so permission has to be obtained from an authoritative-looking person to use the spacious car park). "The Book" also directs you along a footpath through the woods, more difficult than it sounds when all the ground is covered in leaves - the moral of this is "don't go in Autumn". After meandering about for forty minutes, and sweating heavily, we found the not overlarge entrance.

The first part of the entrance shaft is 45 feet deep, it is an inclined rift and quite tight, especially at the top where there isn't enough space to turn a helmet round. There are lots of ridges on the way down (and even on the way up), but it would be difficult to free climb because, at the bottom of this section, you have to move to one side to avoid falling down a further 35-foot drop. A ladder has to be put down anyway, not only for climbing back up but to attach more ladder onto for the next stage as there are no suitable belay points at the bottom of the 45 feet section.

The 35-foot ladder is also inclined and lies against one side of Main Chamber. At the top of this section is a rock ledge (or flake, depending on your terminology); we discovered it was far easier to put the ladder over the top of this. Putting the ladder around it means that, on the way up, it is pulled into a crack under the ledge, so you have to climb up and over the lip which entails leaving the ladder altogether and proves very awkward.

A 10-foot long muddy slope at the bottom of the ladder bring you to the top of a series of very large jammed boulders which form the floor of Main Chamber. Halfway down this chamber on the right is a 20-foot hole, "The Well"; two of us visited this but were not overimpressed by the mud formations.

The maze is an entertaining little section at the far end of Main Chamber, mostly mud covered and with a variety of routes to Mud Bank Chamber (which is to the left when facing the Maze). The mudbank is very obvious, and large enough for a bit of fun sliding down it.

At the far end of the mudbank is a squeeze lined with liquid mud, which leads to Aldermaston Chamber. The squeeze is 10 feet long, slightly inclined - and aided by the lubricating mud - very easy to move into. That is until you get your chest stuck. We decided that at least two people ought to go through because of the mud pools in Aldermaston Chamber, which could cause some difficulty. The problem was that only one of our party could get through with relative ease, so nobody actually went though, but we got exceedingly muddy in trying.

- Notes.
1. When de-tackling the entrance shaft, it is much easier if the last man up takes up the lower end of the ladder, so avoiding catching it on innumerable snags.
 2. When attempting to find Mangle Hole, a useful marker is Sadford Levvy, a partially-blocked mine entrance with a strong draught exuding from it. Thinks why the draught? Is there a through-route or is it just the heavy breathing of the few bats in residence?

BOOK REVIEW: Tony Knibbs

GROTTE ET CANYONS - Les 100 plus belles courses et randonnées.

Author: Pierre Minvielle

Publisher: Editions Denoël, Paris (1977)

Size: 260 x 225 mm (10¼ x 8¾ in.) 230 pp.

Price: about £12.00

As its sub-title suggests, this book sets out to provide a guide to the 100 most attractive routes and excursions in French caves and (with sporting originality) a few gorges. The reader's first impression is that this is no ordinary guide book. It is beautifully printed on heavyweight glossy art paper and copiously illustrated with photographs - both black and white and colour - simplified surveys and several line drawings. A nice touch is the inclusion of numerous photographs, lithographs and gravure prints of historical interest. The book is sturdily bound within a substantial hard cover and is one of a series produced under the direction of Gaston Rébuffat. The other titles take climbing and hill-walking as their theme, describing 100 excursions in each of the areas covered.

The text is in French but is written with considerable economy of style - particularly the descriptions themselves - and printed in a clear and open typeface. It positively invites the reader's attention and should provide little difficulty to anyone armed with 'O' level French and a knowledge of caving.

Before embarking on the descriptions, the author devotes a few pages to bringing the uninitiated reader up to speed. And he does so in truly Gallic style. One can almost hear the subdued strains of "La Marseillaise" in the background as one browses through the first four short chapters:

'Why go caving?'

'Conquest of the chasms'

'How to go caving'

'The ten most famous French cavers'.

Stirring stuff indeed, but it does indicate some fairly basic differences between the British and French views of caving.

The author's views on 'Why go caving?' are concerned with the aesthetic and spiritual appeal of the pastime, its marvellous combination of things philosophical and things practical. A touch of national pride creeps in as he concludes that France is the best place to go caving; a veritable caver's paradise indeed. As it happens, this is no idle boast. Having drooled over the photographic evidence, I am inclined to agree!

'Conquest of the chasms' is a charming potted history of caving in France. E - A. Martel is duly lionised as the father of modern speleology, but 'la gloire' is spread fairly evenly over numerous other equally famous names.

'How to go caving' shows commendable brevity in dealing with caving equipment and the 'dos and don'ts' of caving. A few words on technique are chiefly aimed at underlining the safety aspect. Notes are given qualifying the use of the cave descriptions. Sure to raise a smile is the remark - "Indications of recommended equipment assume that a lamp is used when you go underground"!

A grading system is used to indicate the degree of difficulty of each trip. These range from 'easy' to 'very difficult' in five stages (based on an interesting 'points' system) with additional suffixes indicating 'slightly less than' and 'slightly more than'. Since Gouffre Berger (and several other epics) is classed as 'very difficult', the gradings should not be translated literally. The author's v. diff. seems to be our severe, or super-severe standard.

Who are 'The ten most famous French cavers'? Armand, Bourgin, Casteret, Chevalier, Fournier, Gèze, de Joly, de Lavaur, Martel and Trombe. Alphabetical, you'll notice. It would take a brave man to rank them otherwise.

Each excursion has an introduction which immediately places the cave or canyon in context with local topography and gives a précis of the excursion, mentioning particular highlights and dangers. This is followed by a brief history of exploration up to the present day. Statements of grade of difficulty, duration of the trip and equipment recommended

(including clothing) are followed by useful advice on location and approach, but no grid references or altitudes are given.

The actual descriptions are of the usual 'blow-by-blow' variety with enough adjectives and dimensions added to give a clear enough impression of the nature of the trip. Starting with a relatively easy 16 km walk through the spectacular Grand Canyon du Verdon, the excursions increase in difficulty - No. 100 is the descent of Gouffre Berger to the sump at 1122 m depth. Caving trips vary in duration from 1 hour (Grotte de Saint-Pierre) to 60 hours (Padirac).

Choosing a trip which I remember very well - No. 51 Grotte de Gournier - enabled me to test the usefulness of the text. The topographical notes gave just the right amount of information to relate the cave to its prime feeder sink (Grotte de Bury) and its neighbouring resurgence caves (Coufin and Chevaline) in the Cirque de Choranche. The historical notes seemed adequate. The grading of rather difficult and a 6-hour trip duration would be about right for a party with moderate experience.

The description of the underground trip corresponded almost exactly with my own recollections: this implies that the author is giving attention to salient points, not cluttering up his description with trivial details. The accompanying survey elevation and colour photographs considerably enhanced the description.

For the minority who deplore guide books to caves, in whatever form, this book will offer a prime target for abuse. It definitely encourages the reader to go caving. It also suggests where the best 'pretties' may be found, by word and by photographic illustration: some French caves enjoy a level of vandalism that we can scarcely imagine. Ever looked for the gypsum flowers in La Cigalère? I wonder if Casteret's publication of their existence has had anything to do with their demise?

Putting aside philosophical arguments, this book is a gem. As a field guide its use is limited, being too large and of such high quality that it is unlikely to be moved very far from its owner's bookshelf. But, as a high class menu to a truly ravishing choice of dishes it succeeds without reservation. If you cannot read French, just read the pictures, they are superb.

I have often wondered why British cavers insist on travelling thousands of miles for a caving holiday when France is just next door. Having reviewed this book, I am even more perplexed.

I am indebted to Denise Samuel for being kind enough to loan me her copy of this book for review.

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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.

MENDIP CAVING GROUP



PATRON: THE MARQUESS OF BATH

REPORT ON COTTAGE REBUILDING 1980

Six firms were asked to submit tenders for the work, two withdrew, and four quotations were received based on drawings MCG/6E and 7C and written specification; the project to be administered under a Standard Form of Agreement for Minor Building Works.

The four tenders were as follows:

1. £22,460.00
2. £23,736.00
3. £25,350.00
4. £26,759.00

The prices fairly accurately reflect the relative sizes of the firms from the 'one-man band' (1) to the larger firm of contractors (4). The difference between the highest and the lowest is £4,299.00. The difference between the second lowest and the lowest is £1,276.00.

In considering the lowest tender it was borne in mind that he (P.D. Bryne of Wookey) was not an 'established' contractor, having been in business on his own for only one year. References were checked from two sources other than the one originally recommending him, and samples of his work currently under construction were inspected. Fears were expressed by members of the committee as to the tenderers credibility bearing in mind the length of time the firm had been operating.

From visual inspection his work appeared satisfactory, and from a personal view the Contractor showed genuine enthusiasm for the project and eagerness to comply with any reasonable request. With regard to the unestablished nature of his business it was decided to ask him to obtain a performance bond for approximately 10% of the contract sum - and this he has agreed to negotiate.

Following this research the formalising of the contract began based on a starting date of 23rd June and completion by 7th November. Money will be paid to the Contractor at approximately four weekly intervals, after a valuation of the work done has been undertaken.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that while the building is under construction, control of the site is the Contractors responsibility, and any unauthorised access by club members will be entirely at their own risk.

P. D. Bryne

MENDIP CAVING GROUP



PATRON: THE MARQUESS OF BATH

Dear Member,

The contract for the reconstruction of the cottage has now been sorted out, and work will begin on 23rd June. Completion of the shell is scheduled for the 7th November as the latest date. In all probability we shall retain the builder for finishing work.

Our financial position looks healthier than it has been for many years, and might even be described as comfortable. Loans from Members are being reduced to a maximum of £100

A few Members are thinking about spending our surplus funds. Sorry, but the insurance money will cover our bills, but only just. In fact we will probably be in debt at the end of the year. The only way of acquiring surplus funds in hand would be to take on some of the work ourselves. The costings are as follows:-

	£
site preparation	200
rebuilding contract	22,460
fittings to contract	300
painting	600
fire protection	250
floor covering and fitting	500
fitting out	2,000
landscaping and hardstanding	700
bedding	500
extension	1,200
heating (if necessary)	1,000
outstanding loans	3,400
Total	<u>33,100</u>

Income

	£	
Insurance	30,000	(1,000 paid to G.P.F.)
Interest on above	1,800	
Total	<u>31,800</u>	

These figures will be greatly revised at the end of the year. But if we retain some of our loans in hand, as we plan, then we can complete the whole thing. Outstanding loans should be paid rapidly from the first year's income.

As a final point the outline given to Members is for information only, and is regarded as confidential. Already, there has been open discussion of our finances on Mendip, much of it erroneous. I suppose we have to put with the odd loud mouth, but, this has proved to be an embarrassment to those carrying out negotiations on a professional basis. Such gossip may also prejudice future plans for the Group.

Peter Mathews
Secretary