



Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NEWLETTER NO. 126

FEBRUARY 1979

EDITORIAL The good news in this issue is that we have five new members to whom we extend a warm welcome. They have joined the Group in a year that will see the completion of a new headquarters on Mendip and the return to a full programme of caving activity.

The bad news is that we have to complete the building task by 13th May this year - less than three months from now. If you have seen the new headquarters recently, you will know that this target can be met. But it does require all members to pull their weight in one last frenzy of work to complete the job. There is more at stake than just having a new place to move into. It may sound dramatic, but it must be emphasised that the whole future of the Group will be shaped by the efforts of its members to complete the job on time.

And then we can get back to the purpose for which we exist as an organisation - CAVING. There is a positive feeling of eager anticipation amongst many members, especially those who have devoted so much of their time to building. It is something we shall need to plan for. Which digs to attack, which caves to include in a full meets programme and what new tackle to buy. 1979 will be a most interesting year.

Can't remember what caving is all about? Then read Greg's account of Link Pot on pages 6-9. If that doesn't get the adrenalin flowing, see your doctor - you could be dead.

1979 SUBSCRIPTIONS About half the membership have not yet paid their subscription of £5 for the current year. Hon. Treasurer, Ron Saunders, will be more than pleased to receive your cheque, P.O. or even cash. Send it to him direct or hand it to any committee member. And do it soon, please. **BUT SOON.**

CONGRATULATIONS to John and Judy MacMillan on the birth of their son, James Christopher, on 13th November last year. Better late than never - this announcement, I mean!

NEW TELEPHONE NUMBER for Pete and Joan Goddard:
CHARLBURY 810382

NEW ADDRESS for Bryan and Anne Pittman is:
36 Manor Way, EGHAM, Surrey.
A housewarming party is scheduled for 10th March, so start treading your grapes rightaway.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS Thursday evening talks to be given at
'The Beehive', Brentford:

- 1st March - Switzerland 1978, by Greg Smith.
5th April - 25 years of the MCG, by Malcolm Cotter.

The talk on Caving Equipment and Techniques, by John Miriam and Greg Smith, was replaced at short notice on 1st February by a talk (with slides) on Caving in Malaya, by Malcolm Cotter. No doubt John and Greg will do their thing later.

CAVING - John MacMillan is organising a number of trips to several UK caving areas. Details will be published as soon as these are finalised.

10th March - BCRA Symposium at Adelina Patti Hospital, Craig-y-Nos, South Wales.

9th June - BCRA Summer Meeting/AGM at The Crown, Matlock, Derbyshire.

15/16th
September - BCRA conference at UMIST, Manchester.

LOSEHILL HALL STUDY CENTRE runs activity weekends and holidays throughout the year. Courses range from nature study, bird watching and country crafts to caving. There is a special weekend course on 'Mines of the Peak' on 2/4th March. Younger members may qualify for grant aid and travel costs.

WHERNSIDE MANOR have now published their 1979 brochure biased more towards caving and including a number of SRT weekends. Older members may like to note that a one week course is available on 'The Dales in Retirement'!

MEMBERS SHOULD NOTE that the Group's AGM and ANNUAL DINNER will be held on Saturday, 28th April. The AGM will, as usual, be held at the cottage in the afternoon. The Dinner will be the usual riotous assembly at The Star in Wells. On the menu will be lamb cooked with (or by?) rosemary and sherry. The tickets will be about £4.00. Breakages are extra. Volunteers are required to PERFORM after-dinner ACTS. Naturally, the object is to make people laugh: you'd be surprised what people laugh at during a dinner evening!

As usual, a coach will form part of the evening's survival kit, giving us a place to tune up going down and somewhere to tone down coming up. Will somebody please remember to provide earplugs for the driver.

THE FOLLOWING have been elected to probationary membership on 17th February 1979:

Quentin Cowen,
81 Alderney Street,
LONDON SW1.

Christopher Whittle,
18 Granville Dene,
Bovingdon,
HEMEL HEMPSTEAD, Herts.

David Baxter,
51 Windsor Avenue,
NEW MALDEN,
Surrey KT3 5HE.

Paul Phipps,
2 Kings Paddock,
WEST WINTERSLOW, Wilts.

Denise Samuel,
4 Brent Court,
Church Road,
Hanwell,
LONDON W7 3BZ.

GEOLOGICAL CONSERVATION REVIEW. A small working party has been established jointly by the British Cave Research Association and the National Caving Association to produce the review section on caves. Under the direction of Dave Judson, Conservation Officer of BCRA, draft lists have been prepared by the regional councils. It is hoped that it will be possible to plot all cave surveys on the 1/10,000 or 6-inch map, and this work is already well advanced in the Northern Pennines.

The number of areas assessed as of national and/or international importance is expected to total approximately seventy-five; many of these will contain not just a single cave but a number of related systems.

Earth Science Conservation,
No.15, October 1978.
(Information circular of the
Nature Conservancy Council)

ACCESS TO CUCKOO CLEEVES. A stile is now to be found along the route to be walked from the road to the cave. Sorry, don't know exactly where, but it cannot be too heavily camouflaged.

YOUR GROUP NEEDS YOU!

Without doubt, 1979 will go down in MCG history as being the year in which the new cottage was completed. But it could just as easily go down as the year in which the Group went bankrupt. Both possibilities are real and, as members, we have the choice of making either of them come true.

So what is it to be folks, success or failure in 1979? If we succeed, it will be our greatest single achievement: if we fail, it may cost us our whole future as a caving club.

Success is closely linked with getting the timing right and thereby ensuring that we get the sums of money that we really cannot manage without.

The Sports Council are retaining about £400 and will only give us this sum if we finish the new cottage by 13th May this year. This deadline has been agreed between the Council and the Group, and represents an extension of one year on a previously-agreed date. The Sports Council will not give us any more time.

VAT can be recovered on materials purchased for building but, to gain most benefit, this cannot be applied for until expenditure is completed. A sum of about £700 is at stake here.

Today, the total funds available within the Group is about £450. We have outstanding debts of over £2000 of which over £300 will fall due later this year.

In the event of a shortfall in funds, it may be necessary to raise money by another levy on the membership. We want to avoid this.

Morale cannot be measured in cash terms, but is nevertheless becoming an important factor in the Group's fight for survival. It is the chief reason why the building work is still incomplete. Despite repeated pleas for more members to pitch in and do some work, the regular workforce remains as small as ever. And it is becoming more and more aware that it is doing a disproportionate amount of the work. On paper, we have a membership of over 50: on site we have about 5.

It is NOW that EXTRA HANDS ARE MOST NEEDED. We just cannot afford to ignore the 13th MAY DEADLINE. In less than three months time the BUILDING MUST BE FINISHED.

And 'finished' means habitable - plumbing in, toilets and showers working, kitchen fully operational with cooking and washing-up facilities, bedrooms you can sleep in and (dare we say it?) a lounge you can lounge in.

So pick up your diary and make a few notes. A full working week is planned for the period 21st-29th April. And it is hoped that those who cannot manage a whole week will come along on either weekend and put in an extra day. But work goes on every weekend - it occurs whenever we do it. Make a special effort to be on site as much as you can before 13th May. It is very important indeed.

Some coordination of effort would be useful. Wayne Hiscox can use any number of workers, but he would like to know how many and when. Either write to him giving dates for your attendance or contact Tony Knibbs who will collect information to pass on.

Why not elect to spend a week (any week) of your holiday working on the new cottage. So cheap, yet so effective.

IF YOU WANT to see the sort of piggery we ought to avoid getting ourselves into in the new cottage, take a good look at the old one. Any visiting public health inspector would scarcely know which to condemn first - the grotty building or the untidy inhabitants! Members and guests are asked to PAY MORE ATTENTION to cleaning up, washing up and generally making the place less squalid.

FLUSHED WITH PRIDE. Adding insult to hangover, Fuller's Brewery are poised on the brink of a PR exercise on how cavers carry on in spite of (or due to) the effects of London Pride Bitter, ESB or anything else with a Fuller's label. Whether they want an unabridged expose or a 'Through a glass, darkly' account of members antics underground isn't clear. The requirement is to print something in Fuller's magazine related to caving and the MCG. It is thought that free ale may materialise out of the exercise - strictly for punctuation of course.

Did I say 'caving AND the MCG'? My God, its happening already, and I haven't touched a drop. So that's what Fuller's does for you!

CHEAP NEOPRENE SHEET Tony Knibbs recently obtained a supply of imperfect Sorboskin neoprene sheets which he and Malcolm Cotter were selling at a 65% discount on normal retail prices. Predictably high demand has now exceeded the limited stock available. However, further stocks will be obtained from time to time, so don't feel too disappointed if you missed the bargains. To indicate just how cheap it was, the prices were:

	4 mm	5 mm	6 mm
Smoothskin	£6.75	£7.60	£8.70
Sharkskin	£5.90	£6.60	£7.60

LINK POT, CASTERTON FELL. Greg Smith.

Derek Brandon of NPC rang me late one evening last October. "Greg", he said, "I've got some great news - we're into the cave of the decade; forget about North Wales (Poacher's Cave); this is really big and it's in Easegill. We've connected with Lancaster and virtually surrounded Pippikin!"

"Are you pissed?", I enquired.

"Probably, but it's all true", replied Derek.

"Bloody Hell, where's the entrance?"

"Well," babbled Derek, almost unable to contain himself, "it's just to the side of Hairy Fissure - a fifty foot pitch into a large passage like a railway tunnel. It only took about six hours to dig out and there's still lots more to explore. When are you coming up?"

Plans for a visit to the as yet un-named Link Pot (then on the secret list!) were soon made and John Miriam and I headed north on Friday, 3rd November, 1978. On Saturday morning we met Jim Eyre and Jim Newton at Bullpot Farm, and then wandered over to the entrance which lies about a hundred yards upstream from the Mistral. A fifty foot ladder pitch down a fluted shaft, quite narrow for the first twenty feet, broke into the side of a very large dry passage of about fifteen feet cross-section, which ran E to W (parallel to Easegill) and appeared to terminate in boulder collapses at both ends. The downstream end (in wet weather a stream flows) could be followed through some nasty passageway to the top of Echo Aven in Lancaster Hole.

The main route, however, crossed the large passage from the bottom of the entrance pitch into a narrow rift, leading to walking-size phreatic tube-type passage, with undermined false floor in places. The passage terminated near a heavy drip, which was followed down through boulders into a muddy crawl - the start of Night Shift Series. The crawls led to a decorated roof passage and a twenty-five foot pitch into a narrow winding streamway. The downstream direction went for a fair distance and necessitated crab walking and a little climbing, eventually ending at "The Ramp". A little way upstream, an inlet came in from the right about fifteen feet up. This was followed to a large boulder choke and on the way at least three passages went off on the right. The first was a hands and knees crawl leading to chambers with formations. There was an interesting aven in here which we hoped to scale on our next visit. John and I dug out a crawl from one of the chambers, which just led back to the main inlet. Also, from the first crawl leading to the chambers, there was a small scalloped tube leading off. The air was fresh and I crawled along this for some distance until a projection from a corner prevented further progress. The passage continued and looked quite promising, but proved to be a little tight and awkward. I had a lot of difficulty reversing out and John had to pull me out by my boots for the last bit.

The second passage along the inlet was our bypass passage mentioned above, but the third held quite a surprise. It started as a low, arched bedding passage which soon became a nasty flat-out crawl on a cobble and mud floor: there was an easier route to the right-hand side. After some distance, the roof gained height and it was possible to proceed on hands and knees past a clear pool and through some formations. By now, the sound of a waterfall could be heard and soon a great gash in the floor was reached, with a stream tumbling down from the opposite side. By traversing round to the other side, the hole could be descended using a twenty-five-foot ladder. A little further forward from the bottom of the ladder, the stream crashed down a seventy-foot pitch similar to the one in Gavel Pot.

John and I did not descend the pitch, but apparently it leads to a fine streamway, possibly half a mile long, ending in the inevitable sump. Rough compass bearing showed passage to run N-S.

This was a very fine find for the NPC, and the possibility of Link Pot forming a connection between Lancaster/Easegill and Pippikin Pot provided more than enough stimulus for a further trip.

PROVING THE CONNECTION

It was soon time to physically make the now-possible Easegill/Lancaster to Pippikin link. On 23rd December a team assembled for the task: Gordon Batty, Nigel Beatty, Kev Millington, Bill Pybus, Greg Smith. Derek Brandon joined us at Link Pot.

As with many good trips this was arranged at the last minute in the pub. Indeed, considering the number of pints consumed at the Helwith Bridge the night before, it all seemed unlikely that five of us had managed to reach Pippikin's entrance well before noon. It was not so much the fine weather, but a few strong words from Gordon that had driven us out of Greenclose so early.

Armed with little more than one hundred feet of rope, we slithered and rappelled down Pippikin with varying degrees of ease. Within an hour or two we had reached the Hall of Ten, from where we sped to Dusty Junction. Following a brief rest here, we plunged headlong into the Link Crawl.

Link Crawl, lying almost opposite the passage from the Hall of Ten, is undoubtedly the filthiest passage to be encountered on the trip. For much of its length it was a flat-out or hands and knees grind in a passage half-full of glutinous mud. A small chamber was reached about half way through and a descending phreatic passage joined a cross-rift. Hidden behind a boulder in the floor, the crawl continued as a flat-out duck, then the passage height gradually increased before meeting one of the main routes of Link Pot at Squid Junction.

The way to the left led to the Night Shift Series and Serendipity, whilst by turning right (virtually straight-on) a phreatic walking-size passage continued past some false stal floor to end at a slot in the floor. This dropped into Hylton Hall, an impressive tunnel perhaps fifteen feet by fifteen feet in cross-section, running parallel to the Easegill Beck. Almost opposite the point of entry from the slot, the fifty-five foot entrance shaft of Link Pot entered from the bank of Easegill.

The head of Echo Aven lay downstream from Hylton Hall. The wide streambed soon degenerated into a clean, cobbled crawl beneath some very loose boulders: great care was required in this section. One boulder in particular resembled a loose fang. Ignoring the initial holes in the floor, the route became a familiar winding vadose passage to the head of the pitch. Once descended, we found ourselves in the far reaches of Stake Pot Series (Earby Extension) in Lancaster Hole.

Having never set foot in Stake Pot Series before, the team found themselves in a unique position. However, we were confident that Maple Leaf Pitch (one hundred feet) had been laddered for us, so we plodded downstream along Wormway, which eventually lowers to a hands and knees crawl. After approximately thirty minutes from Echo Aven, we found ourselves at the foot of a ladder hanging down from Maple Leaf. The top part of the pitch was found to be narrow and awkward: one of the wooden aid stemples at the top is now missing.

The correct way on from the top of the pitch was to turn right and traverse in a rift which led almost immediately to Rat Pit Chamber. From here a climb upwards of about twenty feet led to a decorated roof passage which was followed to reach the floor of Long Gallery. Various climbs led up to the next level, where an ascending crawl connected with Brew Chamber, a low sandy cavern. Turning right here, the passage increased in height and a pit in the floor was reached. A climb up on the right-hand wall, beneath a small trickle of water, gained Bridge Chamber. By clambering over the boulder bridge, access was gained to a number of interconnecting sandy chambers with fine formations. From the final chamber a strong draught could be followed up a crawl to the right to reach Canuck Climb. Another short crawl followed the fixed ladder descent to meet a narrow, walking-size stream passage. Turning left led to Razor Aven, and from here the streambed could be followed until holes appeared in the floor. By not following the stream down these, but keeping at a higher level, a maze of roomier passages eventually connected with Stake Pot.

We had originally intended to go out through Top Sinks, but uncertainty that Walrus Pitch was laddered led us to choose County Pot as our exit. This was not laddered, but presented no serious problem to free climb out of, although we did have to use combined tactics and a borrowed stemple for the pitch nearest the entrance.

After nearly eleven hours underground the last man surfaced and we stumbled back to Bull Pot Farm through freshly fallen snow, tired but elated with having completed the first through trip.

NEW COTTAGE WORK OUTSTANDING 1st MARCH 1979

INTERNAL 1st FLOOR	INTERNAL GROUND FLOOR	EXTERNAL BUILDING	EXTERNAL OTHER
1. Improve plasterboard fixings on ceilings.	Finish plasterboard and insulation.		
2. Finish rendering	Fit timber boxes to air vents.	Point eaves and verges.	Finish cesspit brickwork, chamber base and trenches.
3. First fixings.		Prep. and varnish all exposed timber (3 coats).	Lay remaining soil pipe and cesspit vents.
4. Plasterwork		Fit rainwater goods.	
5.	Syntheprufe and screed floors.		
6.	Render walls	Improve rooflight leadwork, pinch lead into blockwork in other areas to prevent leaks. Seal around window frames with mastic where necessary.	
7.	Fit first fixings, floor/shower tiling.		
8.	Plaster ceiling/walls.		
9.	Fit basins, toilets, gas supply, incl. plumbing and shower extractor fan.	Finish gas store.	Connect sinks to drainage system.
10. Paint ceilings and walls.	Paint ceilings and walls.	Paint window frames and door surrounds.	Cast cesspit lid.
11.		Render blockwork roughcast finish.	Render inside cesspit.
12. Fit bunks.	Fit kitchen work-tops.		
13. Fit floor covering.			
14.			Clear site, lay out parking, landscape.
15.	Make strong tables and benches.		

GROUP ORGANISATION

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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.