



Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

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MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NEWSLETTER No. 128

NOVEMBER 1979



EDITORIAL This newsletter seems to carry an unusual amount of bad news. Not only has the caving world lost Oliver Statham, but two cavers have been killed in a digging accident, apparently poisoned by bang fumes. And as this newsletter "goes to press" (somewhat late), I am hearing reports of two cavers drowned in South Wales. None of which is the kind of news one wishes to read in an Xmas edition.

Still, there is some good news. Progress is continuing on the new cottage although I am sure Wayne would still like to see even more people down on Mendip at Xmas. In fact, Xmas on Mendip last year was quite amusing, what with 6ft snow drifts and near-blizzard conditions. Still, now that the roof is complete, there can be no excuse for not working inside the new cottage, snow or no snow.

I feel I must apologise to all those who contributed to the Newsletter (especially Pete, Bernard and Malcolm) and also to those of you who have been waiting for it to be published. The long delay was entirely my fault. However, now that contributions are flowing in steadily, I can promise another edition in late January. In the meantime, happy caving and a Merry Christmas to all members.



MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Farm.

Martin Rowe is now a full member, having satisfactorily completed a training trip with Wayne and Eric in Manor

a probationary member.

Congratulations to Linda Yeats who has been accepted as

BRIAN TERRY Members will be glad to hear that Brian is well on the way to recovery following a brain haemorrhage received in a horse riding accident. We hope to see him around again soon, and send him our best wishes.

CONGRATULATIONS to Anne and Wayne. They are now the proud parents of a baby girl. Rumour has it that she plays shove ha'penny and sings.

RESCUE CALL OUT An Editor of a well known Mendip club recently had to be rescued from Swildons when a member of his party dislocated her lower leg in a fall just inside the entrance. However, by the time the rescue team arrived, the girl's leg had relocated itself and she was able to walk out unaided.

Have you ever tried to explain to a rescue team, four policemen and an ambulance that they are not needed after all?

OFD v. BILL JONES Bill had a slight argument with the floor in OFD which resulted in him dislocating a shoulder. However, he managed to continue unaided and later drove back to Scotland.

ANNUAL DINNER This year's AGM and Dinner will be held on Mendip on Saturday April 19th. Details will be announced in the next newsletter.

DIARY DATES	8th December	BCRA Winter Meeting, Mendip
	5th April 1980	Caves and the Community (NCA Symposium) High Peak College, Harper Hill, Buxton, (£1.50)
	8th March 1980	S.R.T. Symposium, UMIST, Manchester

LECTURES The Winter series of Thursday evening lectures at the Beehive has begun. Dates and titles are:

4th December	Caving in South Wales (Denise Samuel)
10th January	Gouffre Berger (John Miriam)
31st January	SRT (Greg Smith)

BLAME RON! After Ron Saunder's article on some of the legal aspects of caving, a number of bodies have had thoughts about their own responsibilities. A document based almost entirely on Ron's article was circulated by the N.C.A. This stressed the difficult position of clubs or landowners who provide some sort of fixed aid.

In short many clubs are removing fixed aids such as ladders, chains, etc. So do not rely too much on fixed tackle; your trip may be cut short.

INSURANCE Reg Jones of the Outcasts has asked me to inform CSCC members of a change of contact for 3rd party liability insurance. The man to contact is Mr. D. Worsam (Tel. Botley 81834) or write to him at:

WHEELER WADSWORTH BROKERS LTD.
5, UPPER NORTHAM ROAD
HEDGE END
SOUTHAMPTON SO3 4DY.

Insured activities include: caving, rambling, winter hill walking, rock climbing, camping, horse riding, orienteering and social events. Premium of £25 does not include member to member insurance. Further information can be obtained from the Secretary of The Outcasts, Jim Stone, 12 Portelet Place, Hedge End, Southampton.

NEW COTTAGE Recent work has seen the completion of the waste water system. Both toilets are now operational, although one seems to continue syphoning after being flushed. Please check to make sure this is not happening. If it is, then flush the toilet again. This should solve the problem. Plastering is now complete except for some tidying up which may have to be done. Work is advancing on the covered building and a start has been made on the bunks. The front and rear outside walls have been vendevied, and vendevying of the south gable is half finished. Tiles are now available for the floor - this work is the main job remaining inside.

FINANCES MCG funds are still low, despite recent generous loans by some members. Eric desperately needs more cash if he is to allow Wayne to continue purchasing materials to finish the cottage work. So, dip into your pockets and see what you can come up with. Short term loans will be accepted (obviously) but the group desperately needs long term loans. At the same time, you can help by paying your subscription for 1980. Subscriptions are currently £5 for members and £1 for asses. Payment is quite painless, just walk up to Eric, open your wallet, and repeat "Help yourself". He will.

And do not forget to complete a Deed of Covenant form. Eric has received repayment of tax for the past two years. This amounts to £85.88, and Eric reckons that there is another £50 to come. Eric is also pleased to announce that he has also received the last instalment of the Sports Council Grant.

CUCKOO CLEEVES The entrance is now gated and locked with two 1½" AF bolts. Please make sure these bolts are tightened down after leaving the cave. The farmer makes a check on odd occasions and if he finds the bolts loose he will tighten them.

SWAN MINE (Bathford) The landlord of the Swan Inn is happy to allow cavers to park their cars in his car park provided they park at the far end of the car park and park parallel to the road. Please inform the landlord of your visit or if the pub is closed, leave a note in the car. For permission to enter the mine please ring the landowner, Sir Charles Hobhouse, on Bath 858558.

BROWN'S FOLLY MINE (Bathford) For permission to enter please telephone the landowner, Sir Charles Hobhouse, on Bath 858558.

BANWELL BONE & STALACTITE CAVES For the key to these two caves please call on Mr. S. Redwood at 11, West Street, Banwell or telephone Banwell 823867. At present there are no day or time restrictions.

SINGING RIVER MINE It is understood that the dry stone walling of the shaft is showing the odd loose stone.

PINETREE POT is closed due to unfortunate circumstances we have lost the key. If we cannot find another it looks as though the cave will stay shut. We certainly haven't the funds for a new lock. Please extend apologies to visiting clubs.

AS the last coats of paint are applied to the new cottage, I hear that Carberus are looking for a site for their new cottage. We know the feeling. Incidentally, they seem to be active in Hunting Lodge Swallet, one of our old digs.

STOP PRESS Latest news on Pinetree is that we have a key again. To prevent losing this one, can members please ask visitors for a £5 (yes, five pounds) deposit.

OLIVER STATHAM It is with regret that we record the death of Oliver "Bear" Statham on September 28th. He took his own life while the balance of his mind was disturbed. Bear was well known in caving circles, and achieved national, and worldwide fame when he dived Keld Held with Geoff Yeadon earlier this year, setting a world cave diving record of over 6000 feet. He began caving in 1969 and was a member of the 1972 British Expedition to the Gouffre Berger. He was a member of the Kendal Caving Club, and was equipment officer for the Cave Diving Group. His death shook the caving world which has lost one of its most experienced cave divers.

BANG FUMES Most people will have learned of the very sad death of Richard Marvel and John Staniforth, members of the White Rose Pothole Club. Apparently they were overcome by fumes after returning to their dig a few hours after blasting in Cote Gill Pot.

Tragically, this accident seems to have been inevitable for people up and down the country have been doing this sort of thing for years. On comparing notes it seems that most keen diggers have experienced symptoms to a greater or lesser extent, and quickly forgotten them. Thus it is that the dangers of explosive fumes have never been given enough publicity. Not so long ago two members were overcome in Upper Flood temporarily losing both hearing and vision, this some 12 hours after blasting.

Early symptoms include a feeling of nausea and a slight dizzy head. You have been warned.

VALE - JAROSLAV FADINA Those on the various trips to the Moravian Karst will be saddened to learn of the death of our friend Jarek, better known to us by his nickname "Wicks". He had been ill for a long time and suffered a fatal heart attack on the 17th September. He was 32.

PAUL ESSER MEMORIAL LECTURE This year the subject is Cave Diving and will be given by Martyn Farr.

The lecture is to be held on Wednesday, 13th February 1980, at 8.15 p.m. in the Tyndall Memorial Theatre, Dept. of Physics, Tyndall Avenue, Bristol 8. Admission is free but if you wish to reserve a place write to Oliver Lloyd, Withey House, Withey Close West, Bristol BS9 3SX.

THE DARKNESS BECKONS by Martyn Farr is one of the very few books dealing with cave diving. It is expected to be available in February.

GRANDS GOUFFRES DU MONDE by Paul Cowbon, 199 pp. price £17.50. This new revised edition is just out. It contains full notes, history and surveys of all the major caves of the world. Right up to date it gives Easegill as the longest system in Great Britain. Not to be outdone, S.W.C.C. are resurveying Ogof Ffynnon Ddu. If you cannot find new cave, draw it in.

CAVES OF N.W. CLARE is being revised by Dave Draw, Olive Lloyd et al. Publication will not be for a few years.

SOUTH HOUSE MOOR with the afforestation of this area and the resultant 'gripping' a number of caves will carry a serious risk of flooding. The caves in the area include Alum Pot and Long Churn, Washfold Pot etc.

THE RIJCKHOLT FLINT MINES

Ogofwr Ddu.

Flint nodules gathered from the surface following the natural weathering of exposed chalk beds were the first minerals to be exploited by man for the construction of simple tools. The Old Stone Age hunter used flint for making choppers and scrapers. Although he did not realize it at the time, his choice of material was harder than steel, but had a limited life owing to its brittle nature.

Only a few thousand years ago in the New Stone Age surface gathered flints could not meet the increased demands, and it was not uncommon for flints to be extracted from quarries or small mines. One especially interesting site is that of Rijckholt in the Netherlands discovered by Marcel de Puydt in 1881. He was a prominent Belgian archaeologist and while visiting the Meuse valley found a large area incredibly rich in flint implements. The area centred on a natural basin containing artefacts to a depth of one and a half metres.

In 1910 several ancient mine shafts were found all of which were filled with chalk rubble. By 1923 a more systematic study showed that the area could be divided into specific areas. Axeheads had been made at one place, for example, while knives were found at another. A number of shafts were excavated to reveal collapsed mine galleries extending from the bottom. Little further work took place until a major investigation in 1964. A dragline was used to clear away the top soil over an area of 4,000 sq. m. revealing a total of 66 shafts. The site was thus shown to be far more important than anyone had supposed. All attempts at digging out the galleries by re-excavation of the shafts were unsuccessful. And so it began to look as though no one would know what these early mines were like.

At this point a professional geologist and amateur archaeologist by the name of Felder proposed digging a tunnel into the slope of the hill, following the strata of flint rich chalk.

The tunnel was largely dug by members of the local geological society. Success came after a few weekends in the form of carbonized wood, which was later dated at 3150 BC. In order to continue, steel shoving was required, and this was provided by a government grant. The working party met just once a week digging from 7pm Friday evening to 3 am Saturday morning. After 2 years, pneumatic digging equipment was obtained on loan, and in 1967 a conveyor belt was provided by a local colliery. This was powered by belt drive from an old tractor purchased by the group. As the tunnel advanced so smaller teams cleared the rubble from the mine galleries that were revealed on either side.

The tunnel was continued to the planned length of 150 m. during the course of which some 3,000 sq. m. of original mine passage were discovered. From the exploration it was then possible to estimate the size and production of the mine. The total site covered some 62 acres and if the sampling was representative then it should contain something like 5,000 mines each consisting of a shaft and a cluster of galleries. These would have yielded 41,000 cu. m. of flints enough for 150 million axeheads.

If it is supposed that the mines were active for 500 years then production would have averaged 1,500 tools a day.

The shafts ranged in depth from 10-16 m. depending upon the thickness of the overlay. The diameter of the shaft was between a metre and a metre and a half. Marks on the walls suggested that the shaft was supported by jammed branches. At the bottom of the shaft the passage covered an average area of 25 sq. m. The height of the galleries rarely extended beyond the limits of the flint rich band and were thus only 60 cm. high. Excavation followed the simple practice of leaving pillars at intervals to support the roof. Most worked galleries were backfilled to reduce the amount of chalk hauled to the surface. There seems to have been some slight interconnection of galleries, partly by chance and partly to provide an escape route.

In the excavation of those galleries from the side of the tunnel some 15,000 artefacts were found, suggesting 2.5 million in unexplored galleries. From hollows in the chalk, it is thought that the early miners used axeheads mounted on wooden handles 80 cm. long. It is estimated that 5 heads would have been used in extracting a cu. m. of chalk containing 350 nodules of flint i.e. a reinvestment of 2%. Curiously, no evidence has been found for any form of lighting.

Following a period of great activity the tunnel was left and fell into dilapidation. Fortunately, the site was then taken over by the government. The tunnel has now been improved structurally and fitted with electric lighting, and was recently opened to tourists, who can now marvel at the underground working of Neolithic man and the Friday night club alike.

SMALL ADS.

EUMIG 510D Projector, Screen and Splicer £40.00

CALYPSO Underwater Camera (Old Pattern) f3.5 £40.00

BINOCULARS, PRINZ 12 x 50 £15.00

Rosemary and Allan Wicks
39 Sheridan Avenue
Caversham
Reading.
Tel.: Reading 475628

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DOLOMITE SUPER EGGAR Boots, Size 7. Used
once. £25.00

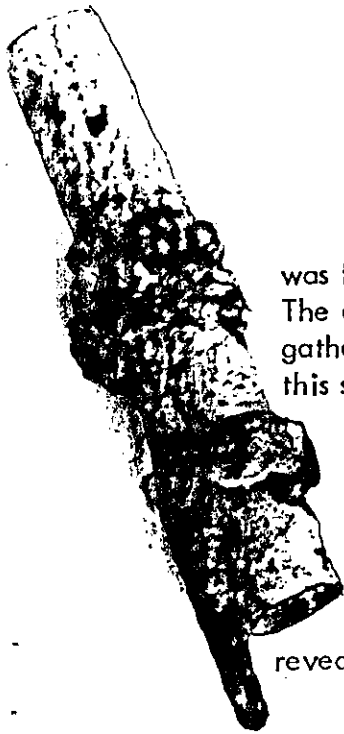
Greg Smith.
Tel.: 01 848 3340

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Anyone else with anything to sell? Drop a note to the Editor. The next newsletter will be published in January.

A PUZZLE FROM BONE HOLE

(Set by Bernard Reeves)



As background information, it can be mentioned that Bone Hole - records suggest - was first dug archaeologically at about 1838. At this time the cave was still roofed over. The cave was subsequently un-roofed by the Gough's and Cox's ancestry in their stal gathering raids for the souvenir trade. Present remains of shot holes amply testify to this state of affairs.

Recent digging in the 'Old' part of Bone Hole under the large perched boulder has revealed a strange find:-

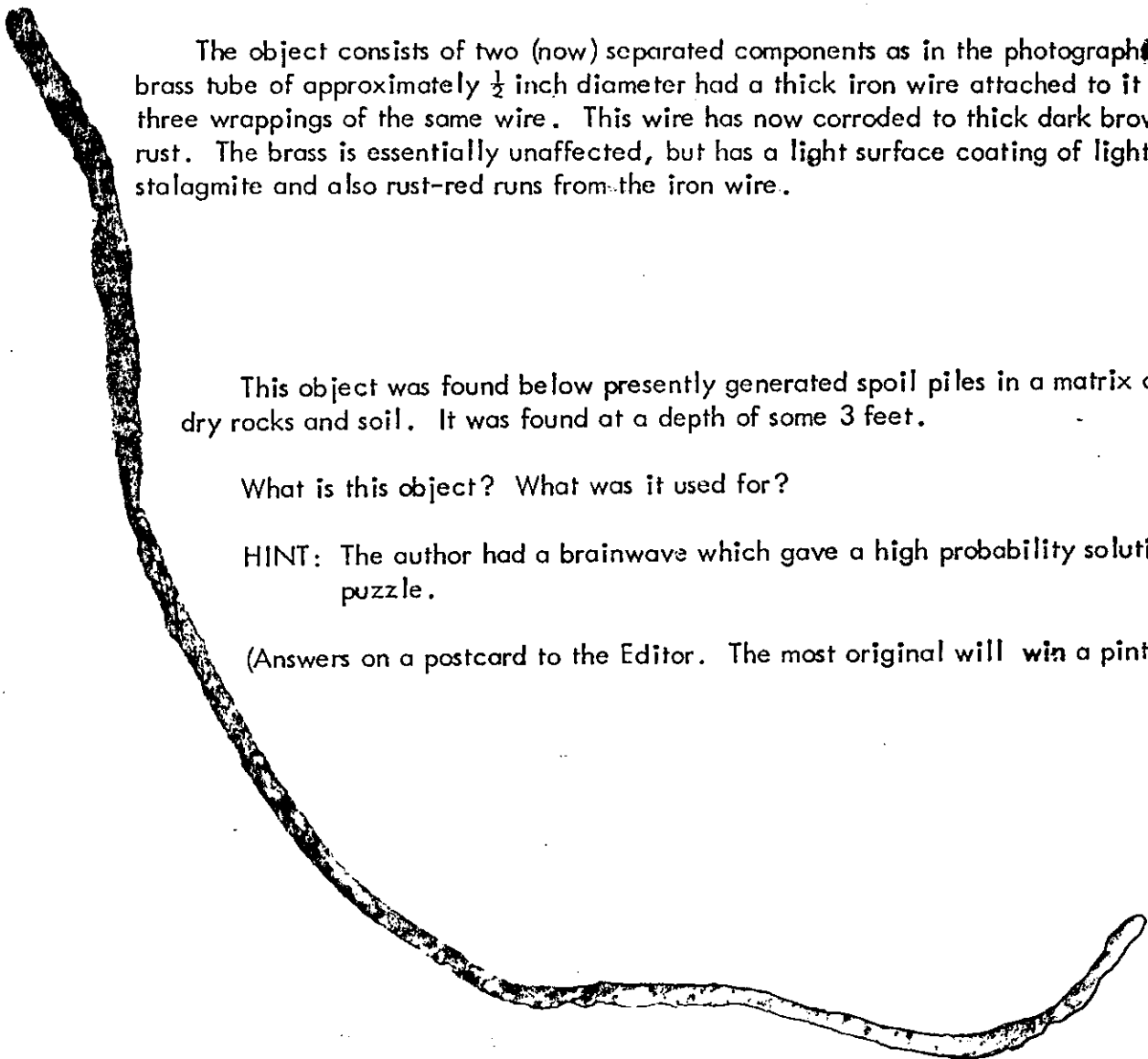
The object consists of two (now) separated components as in the photograph. A brass tube of approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch diameter had a thick iron wire attached to it by three wrappings of the same wire. This wire has now corroded to thick dark brown/black rust. The brass is essentially unaffected, but has a light surface coating of light brown stalagmite and also rust-red runs from the iron wire.

This object was found below presently generated spoil piles in a matrix of essentially dry rocks and soil. It was found at a depth of some 3 feet.

What is this object? What was it used for?

HINT: The author had a brainwave which gave a high probability solution to the puzzle.

(Answers on a postcard to the Editor. The most original will win a pint of ESB)



RECENT LIBRARY ADDITIONS. The following publications have recently been added to the MCG library, and are available for members to view.

Orpheus Caving Club Newsletter Vol 14, no. 7/8, 9, 10, 11/12
Vol 15, no. 1

Wessex Cave Club Journal Vol 15, no. 173, 175

Belfrey Bulletin Journal of B.E.C. Vol 32 no. 7, 8, 9, 10

British Cave Research Association Transactions Vol 5, no. 1,2,3

Caves and Caving no.1, August '78, no. 2, November 1978

Westminster Speleological Group Bulletin Vol 8, no.5

Boletín de la Sociedad Venezolana de Espeleología Vol 8 no.15 Apr.'77
no.16 Oct.'77

Western Australian Speleological Group
The Western Caver Vol 17, no. 4 March '78
Vol 18, no. 1 May '78

British Caver Vol 69, summer '78
Vol 70, autumn '78

Cerberus Speleological Society Newsletter
Vol. 18 no.5 Sept/Oct '78
Vol. 19 no.3 May/June '79

Cambridge Underground, Journal of the Cambridge University Caving Club
1977-78

Chelsea Speleological Society Newsletter Vol 20 no.7 Apr.78
" 8 May 78
" 9 Jun 78
" 10 Jly 78
" 11 Aug 78
" 12 Sep 78
Vol 21 no.1 Oct 78

Sydney Speleological Society Vol 21 no.11

Plymouth Caving Group Newsletter & Journal no.75,76

Shepton Mallet Caving Club Journal Series 6, no.5

Swindon Speleological Society 10th Anniversary Publication 1968-78

Severn Valley Caving Club Newsletters, 1978

Appin Cave Guide, Special publication of the Grampian Speleological Group no.1

Caves of Fermanagh and Cavan, Gareth Llwyd Jones

Speleologica Emiliana 1978.

This list is not up to date, but hopefully the next issue of the Newsletter will contain further information.

GROUP ORGANISATION

COMMITTEE

- Secretary - PETE MATHEWS, 31 Brewhouse, Hill,
Wheathampstead, Herts.
Tel. (home) Wheathampstead 2521
- Treasurer - ERIC DOWLEY, 32, Chequers Orchard,
Iver, Bucks.
- Meet Secretary - JOHN MacMILLAN, 11 Whitehouse Way,
Iver Heath, Bucks.
Tel. (home) Iver 652339
(work) Slough 33611
- Cottage Warden - WAYNE HISCOX, 3 Keward, Glastonbury Road,
WELLS, Somerset.
Tel. (work) Wells 72995 ext. 41
0749.
- Tacklemaster - PHIL INGOLD, 31 Spring Lane,
Hemel Hempstead, Herts.
Tel. (home) Hemel Hempstead 42029
(work) 01 902 6011 ext. 100
- Recorder - MALCOLM COTTER, 249 Feltham Hill Road,
Ashford, Middlesex.
Tel. (home) Ashford 52643
- Editor (co-opted) - MARTIN ROWE, 37 St. Andrews Square
SURBITON, Surrey
Tel. (home) 01 399 1841
(work) 01 549 9961

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

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.

ANSWERS TO
THIS WEEKS

"SPOT THE MISTAKES
COMPETITION"

- 1) Rendering should be spelt with an R, not a V (as in Vendering)
- 2) Thursday Dec 4th should in fact be Thursday Dec 6th

Sorry folks!

PS Merry Christmas

MENDIP CAVING GROUP



PATRON: THE MARQUESS OF BATH

A P P E A L

A rush of spending on materials to complete the Cottage has left our funds in a very serious position despite recent loans.

A drastic solution is needed in the short term. We urgently need approx. £300 for about three months. This we can raise by, say, 15 loans of £20 or a subvention of £5 a head. The former is much preferred.

We also need people to help organise fund raising events.

Please return the slip below, together with your loans.

Return to the Treasurer, Eric Dowley, 32 Chequers Orchard Iver, Bucks.

I am prepared to help the Group by:-

- i) offering a loan of £.... for a period of
- ii) organizing a Barn Dance/Jumble Sale/Lottery

Signed

Date