



**Mendip Caving Group Newsletter**

MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 129

JANUARY 3rd 1980

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EDITORIAL As some members will already know, the new cottage was severely damaged by a gas explosion at 11.45pm on New Years Eve. This special edition of the newsletter has been brought out to inform people of the situation, and therefore other news and articles are being held over until later this month.

The explosion (full details appear overleaf) means that the new cottage will have to be demolished and rebuilt. Hopefully, the insurance should cover most of the cost of having the work done by contractors. In the meantime it will be necessary to continue using the old cottage. Members are asked to make a special effort to visit Mendip in the next few weeks to repair and tidy up the old cottage to make it reasonably comfortable again.

The explosion not only devastated the cottage, but also threatens the future of the club. Caving activity in recent years, and building in recent months has not been great. Many members will obviously feel depressed by the situation, which is probably the most serious the group has faced. The next few months will be critical for us. It is likely that in the short term we will be very pressed for finances, and we will need to increase our fund raising activities.

An extraordinary general meeting of the group to discuss the situation will be held this evening, Thurs. Jan 3rd, at 8.00pm in the Beehive, Brentford. Anyone who can't attend who wants news about the situation can 'phone me on 01 549 9961 during the day and early evening.

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**GAS EXPLOSION HITS COTTAGE** A severe explosion, caused by leaking propane gas has severely damaged the new cottage, which will probably have to be demolished.

The explosion occurred at 11.45pm on Jan 31st. The cottage which was nearing completion, suffered severe damage. Both gable walls were blown out. A third of the roof, the library, two dormer windows and the shower room were totally destroyed. The main bedroom collapsed into the lounge which is now a heap of rubble. Only one wall ( a dividing wall) survived intact; all others are badly cracked or completely demolished.

What is left is precariously balanced around the one solid wall and is in danger of falling down at any moment.

The gas leak began somewhere in the kitchen after 10.30pm. Propane gas appears to have filled the entire ground floor before being ignited by the water boiler. The explosion was heard over a wide area and as far away as Compton Martin. The main force of the blast was taken by the gable wall of the lounge. The three entrance doors completely shattered although their frames are still intact. Upstairs, the main force of the blast was taken by the dormer windows at the rear of the building and the roof of the main bedroom.

The stable at the rear of the cottage was shifted four inches by the blast. Debris was scattered up to fifty yards away, and fragments of broken glass up to an inch long were imbedded in trees nearby.

Fortunately, no one was in the building at the time. Most people were in the Hunters celebrating New Year. The damage was discovered about 00.30 hrs. The following is an extract from the log book and describes the events which took place from then onwards.

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EXTRACT FROM THE LOG BOOK 05.00 hrs. Everyone else is asleep. I have just been back to look over the remains of the new cottage. The police arrived at about 1.20am. Phil and Helen had raised the alarm by stopping a motorist who then phoned the police from Burrington. (Fred discovered the damage about 12.15 - 12.30 in the morning. He had just got back from the Hunters and went over to the cottage for a crap. When he saw the damage he thought he was pissed and had to drag Phil over to confirm what he had seen).

The Fire Brigade eventually arrived at 1.50am. We showed them where the gas store was. It was still intact but both bottles were leaking from their rubber hose pipes. (Graham Sutcliffe had already turned off the water and electricity). They turned off the bottles and hosed down the scaffolding on the "outside wall" to prevent sparking.

They had to smash down the door of the gas store as this area was still intact. We showed them around the ground floor. The explosion obviously took place in the kitchen (the only area with burned debris e.g. cardboard boxes), but the probable point of ignition was the boiler. Somehow the entire building had filled with gas before exploding, as shown by the great amount of damage. Both gable ends were blown out. The library went completely, as did most of the showers. The entire back end of the living room i.e. furthest from the road was blown out. The roof was blown off half the cottage and the other half damaged. Somehow John Miriams newly constructed bunks survived although the surrounding walls didn't.

The Fire Officer thinks the entire building will have to be demolished and we will be contacting Eric about insurance as soon as possible (later today?). So far only a dozen people know what happened - the others are at Martin Bishop's party. We thought it best to leave telling them till the morning.

M.R.

Brian Pittman informed me at about 9.00 the following morning. Yes, we do seem to have a destroyed building. We will try to phone Ron and arrange for the insurance assessors to investigate as soon as possible. I have removed my tools from the site. W.H.

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**THE PRESENT SITUATION** The cottage was fortunately insured and Ron Saunders is dealing with the insurance company. However, exactly what the policy covers is unclear. There is a possibility that cover may be sufficient to have the cottage rebuilt by a contractor.

The remaining bits of the building will have to be demolished. Many items can be salvaged (e.g. rafters, tiles, gas rings!). Demolition can begin as soon as the site has been inspected by the insurers.

Wayne hopes to start this work this weekend. The major Mendip clubs have offered storage space for materials and individuals have offered to help with the demolition.

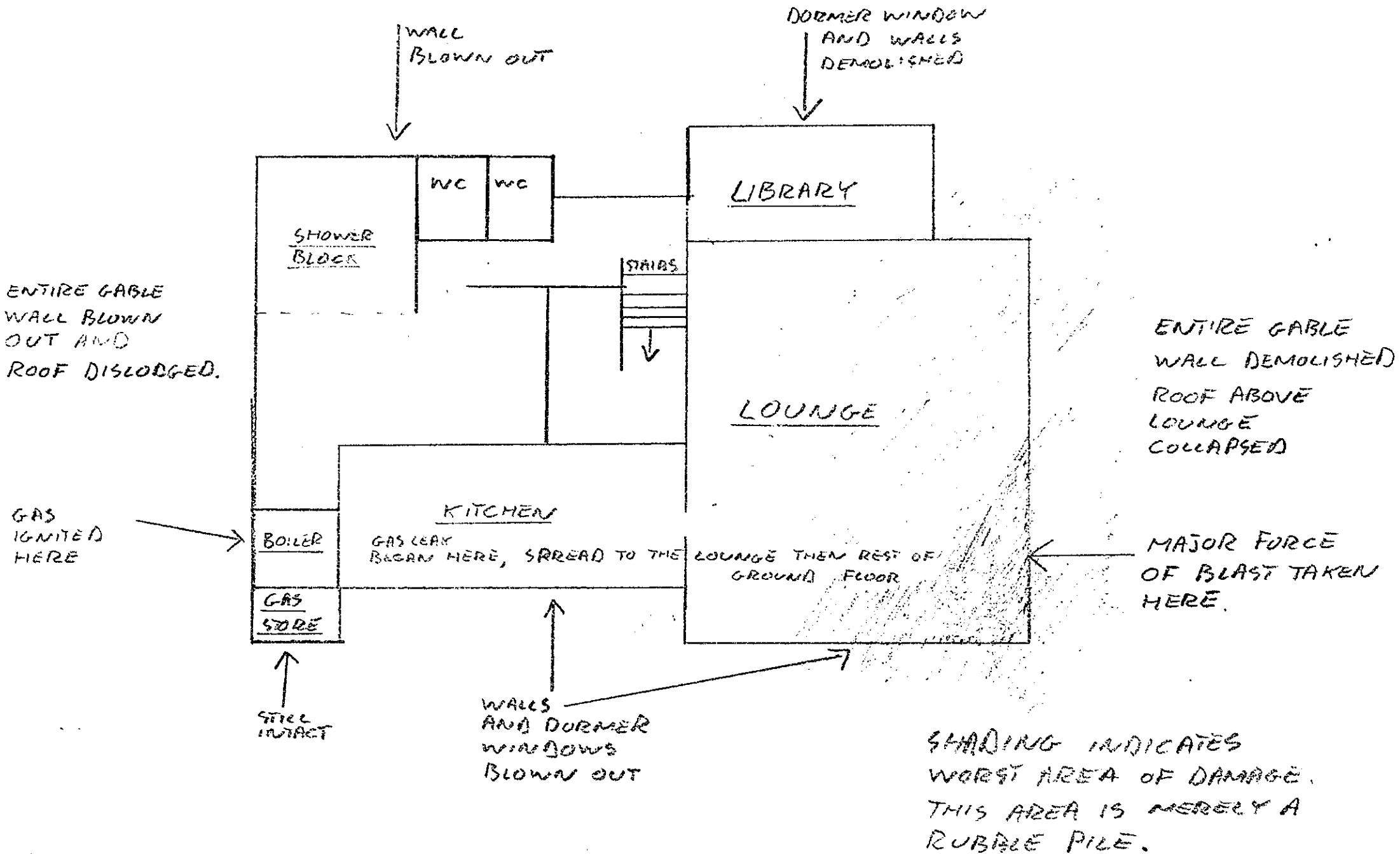
The group will have to remain in the old cottage for the present, and a few weekends will have to be spent making this comfortable again. Windows and doors need to be fixed, and there is a lot of tidying up to do.

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**EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING** This will be held on Thursday, Jan 3rd 1980 at 8.00pm in the Beehive, Brentford.

**FURTHER DETAILS** About the situation can be found by contacting any member of the committee. A further edition of the newsletter will be published at the end of January.

PLAN OF DAMAGE



(N.B. NOT TO SCALE)

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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.