

MCG

Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

AUGUST 1981

NO 143

SWINSTO/SIMPSONS EXCHANGE JULY 18

A good day for many reasons, fine weather, pubs open all day for Ingleton Gala, and a trip down two old favourite caves in one trip, all on my birthday!

Bill Jones, John Miriam, and myself descended Simpsons, while four members of the N.P.C. went down Swinsto. A fast pace was maintained to the bottom of Simpsons, each of the first five pitches needing only one ladder, and all having good bolts - a good supply of krabs and spreaders (tacklemaster please note). The floor of the chamber at the top of Slit Pot was awash, with what could be called a heavy drip discharging down the pitch.

An exhilarating climb into Swinsto and we met the other party in Epout Chamber, exchanged the customary oaths, and started out for the main pitch. The pitches in Swinsto came in quick wet succession and our exit to the surface was slowed down only by the crawl which is good for rubbing down your knees. This was really enjoyable, a sporting trip, two caves for the price of one, which took about four hours and is to be thoroughly recommended.

Roger Wallington

BONE HOLE

It has now been agreed with the National Trust that the Mendip Caving Group shall have sole caving rights to Bone Hole, but will leave all further Archaeological responsibilities to the National Trust. We will however be constructing a suspended catwalk over Skull Slope and stabilising the top of the slope at National Trust expense. We now have a key to the entrance gate.

COTTAGE REPORT

Progress is picking up, the car park is now useable but requires more levelling before it can be covered with scalpings. The shower boost switch in the kitchen now switches on and holds on but still cannot be switched off in the kitchen. The switch may be replaced by a time switch in the autumn when cottage heating is reviewed. Due to the prevailing damp conditions on Mendip it is expected that storage heaters will have to be installed in the library and changing rooms if dampness is to be controlled. Cottage heating requirements are expected to be discussed at the Half Year General Meeting.

The chipboard flooring in the bedrooms are now to be covered with heavy duty lino tiles to be purchased in the near future. Some of the bunks need bracing and all the top bunks need 'anti roll boards' as certain members have a habit of rolling off the bunks in their sleep.

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GUEST BOOKINGS:- To be made with the Cottage Warden

Don's sister has very kindly donated the small fridge that is now installed in the kitchen, and we have another new Hover; don't blow it up! A new notice board has been fitted courtesy of Arthur Spain. No further developments regarding extending our boundaries are expected yet and fencing will await the outcome. The Library plans are almost completed and progress expected soon.

There are some items which can be done straight away such as giving the lounge floor another coat of sealer for which a one gallon can is already in the cottage. The old carpets are to be burnt except one for the front of the fire place, and a runner from the doors. The stair carpet is to be replaced. The Toilets and the stair well need paint work finishing. The fire surround has to be tiled with quarry tiles and the spark guard fitted. Also the bunks have to be numbered.

HALF YEAR GENERAL MEETING

As already announced in the last Newsletter the H.Y.G.M. is to be held on Saturday 17th October. Amendment Proposals to the Constitution and Rules must reach the Secretary by 26th September.

ST. CUTHBERTS.

Two St Cuthberts trips have been arranged for the H.Y.G.M. weekend, for further details see Greg.

WESTMINSTER SCHOOL

It now transpires that Westminster School wish to use the cottage on the weekend starting 9th October so there was no problem after all in accepting their booking!

MEMBERSHIP

The following applications for Probationary Membership of the M.C.G. have been received from:-

Michael Bygrave, William Duckling, David Howe, Richard Housego, and Robert Varley.

COTTAGE FEES

It has now been agreed in committee that Members Children under 16 will be charged at the Full Members Rate of 50p per Day. Guest's children will be charged £1 per day as Adult Guests. Fees are chargeable for use of the cottage facilities for a day or part of a day even if the person does not sleep in the cottage.

As the new cottage is far more expensive to run, it is expected that Members will have to consider increasing Fees further at the H.Y.G.M.

GUESTS

Members are reminded that they may only sign in one guest in the Visitors Book, per Member.

M.R.O. DONATION.

Jim Hanwell has gratefully thanked the M.C.G. for the £100 we have donated to the M.R.O.

COTTAGE BOOKINGS

MEET PROGRAMME

AUGUST

- 7 MEMBERS WEEKEND
- 14 ALAN MELLON + 3RD OSTERLEY SCOUTS
- 21 MEMBERS WEEKEND
- 28

SEPTEMBER

- 4 MEMBERS WEEKEND + PETE LINGWOOD'S PARTY
- 11 DROITWICH SCOUTS
- 18 MEMBERS WEEKEND
- 25 D. GIBSON + 11

OCTOBER

- 2 MEMBERS WEEKEND
- 9 WESTMINSTER SCHOOL
- 16 HALF YEAR GENERAL MEETING
- 23 ST CUTHBERTS 2 PARTIES
- 30 D. GIBSON + 11

NOVEMBER

- 6 MEMBERS WEEKEND
- 13
- 20 MEMBERS WEEKEND
- 27

DECEMBER

- 4 MEMBERS WEEKEND
- 11 DAVE GIBSON + 11
- 18 MEMBERS WEEKEND
- 25 CHRISTMAS

See calendar of fixtures for details of meetings and events

BOOK REVIEW 'Subterranean Climbers' by Pierre Chevalier

First published in French 'Escalades Souterraines', J. Susse, Paris 1948, 192pp

First English Edition: 'Subterranean Climbers-twelve years in the worlds deepest chasm, pub. Faber & Faber, London 1951, 224pp.

English Edition reprinted in 1975 by Zephyrus Press, Teaneck, New Jersey - hardback £4.50, paper back £2.50.

N.B. Copies of 1951 edition sometimes available secondhand (typically from A.D. Oldham) at about £7.50.

If I need a reason for embarking on a review of this work, it is my suspicion that many of today's cavers are young enough to have missed the vogue era of this book and may yet be unaware of its merits. The availability of a fairly recent reprint lends this otherwise ill-timed review more currency than it deserves.

The book gives a blow by blow account of the exploration of the extensive Trou du Glaz-Guiers-Mort cave system in the Dent de Crolles Massif, northwest of Grenoble. It covers a period from 1935 to 1947 during which Chevalier and his companions, notably Fernand Petzl and Charles Petit-Didier, achieved what was then a world depth record of 658M (2157ft) and extended the length of the system to 14867M (48779ft).

With the exception of the preface by Norbert Casteret, adorned by the almost inevitable poetic quote, the book is written in simple narrative style. It reads almost as a diary, but so exciting is the exploration and so determined are the explorers that Chevalier's unpretentious style somehow heightens the drama with its modest understatement. Chevalier writes as though he were addressing other cavers of equal experience.

It is hard to realise that France was under German occupation for five years of the period covered. Only two or three allusions are made to what seems to be mere inconvenience when one or other of the team is absent due to evading deportation or some other 'occupational' hazard.

The book contains several photographs and sketch surveys, even so the account occasionally races ahead through such complex parts of the network that the reader can become temporarily lost. It is almost like going on a real caving trip (we've all done it!), where the survey is consulted afterwards to see where one has been, still ending up unsure of some route or other. The inclusion of several charmingly simple pen sketches helps to explain certain manoeuvres for which words alone would be insufficient.

As for the cave itself - well, this isn't just another deep system where one braves a few waterfalls, chucking endless tackle down umpteen pitches until 'le siphon' is reached. It is a complex, multi-storey maze of passages and shafts which is first pushed downwards from Trou du Glaz to reach the Guiers-Mort resurgence then pursued in a vaguely horizontal direction to emerge on the other side of the Massif. And, as if the thrutching and gardening to achieve that were not enough, Chevalier finally sets out to crown his team's achievements by maypoling up to make an incredible link with P40 shaft on the plateau above. Gripping stuff, is this.

For those who enjoy remarkable historical facts, it will be intriguing to note that Henri 'Kiki' Brenot had, in 1934, '.....perfected the metal claws..... by means of which a man might hoist himself all the way up fixed ropes with no other kind of assistance.' Oh, you thought SRT was a recent innovation?

Before concluding the book with some very interesting appendices, Chevalier allows himself a brief moment of nostalgia. I think somewhat wistfully he writes, 'But whatever came our way, we should not live again those superb hours

we had passed far under the Dent de Crolles, and which we shall always treasure as among the most wonderful of our lives." After an epic and gruelling siege lasting 1113 hours, Chevalier, with these words, pays tribute to the cave and to his companions - both of which he has grown to love deeply.

The translator, E.M. Watts, acknowledges the assistance given by E.E. Roberts to get the caving terminology right. In this he succeeds very well a minor irritation is his use of 'story' where he means 'storey'. I wonder if Watts was ever tempted underground by the infectious enthusiasm of the author's style.

'Subterranean Climbers' is without doubt, the finest of all the caving books I have read. It is also the only one which I have felt inclined to read again.

Tony Knibbs.

REVENGE IS SWEET

To get my own back on Eric, for a fortnights hard slog in Wales where I was made to climb mountains clinging for dear life, taken out for short walks that turned out to be thirty miles, and for having to search for pyrite on a tip that was going to cullapse at any minute, and being told it was almost as exciting as caving, I've composed the following poem of how your treasurer 'Splutters and Mutter's' when doing his accounts.

Oh bloody hell I've done it wrong
Blast where did that bill come from
When will Wayne learn how to write
The balance is going to be rather tight
The insurance is more than Ron last said
I think we'll end up in the red
Old So and So's not paid his dues
Now wheres that paper I said not to lose
This Book-Keepings a proper sod
I wonder how I got the job

Top That Eric

Joan

MENDIP GEOLOGY FIELD TRIP REPORT

Saturday 4th July most of the time was spent above ground. In the Burrington area during the morning, and the Longwood area in the afternoon. The main rocks of this part of Mendip were seen to comprise of:-

- Superficial Deposits Upper Longwood Valley
- Conglomerate West Twin Brook Valley (loose blocks)
- Longwood (Bedrock)
- Carboniferous Limestone Burrington and Longwood
- Limestone Shale Sequence " "
- Portishead Beds " "
- (Old red sandstone)

The effect of these rocks on the topography was also demonstrated. The sandstones comprising the highest land of rounded profile, the shales eroding into flat marshy regions, and the limestones forming high deeply incised features.

MOG CAVING

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Phil Ingold 31 Spring Lane, Hemel Hempstead, Herts.
Phone (Day) 01 902 6011

Measurement of dip was made in both areas and it was seen that dip was to the north at Burrington and to the south at Longwood. This structure affects the form of the valley. The north slope of Burrington Coombe being more steep than the south. There is also a low lying region of shale between limestone and Portishead beds surrounding the anticlinal structure. Most of the upland streams run on the shale and sink when they reach limestone. In Rhino Rift the cave is strongly aligned to the structure. The entrance runs down dip but is mainly influenced by a fault likewise the other passages in the cave.

At Black Rock Quarry an interesting feature in the limestone was examined. This was a sand filled rift in the limestone which may represent a cave dating from about the Triassic Age later filled in when the sea level rose. Alternatively it could have been a washout between reefs in the limestone.

On the Sunday a visit was made to Manor Farm Swallet. This cave is almost entirely fault aligned. In parts of the main passage, displacement is clearly visible. At the far end of NHASA gallery good slickensides are seen on one wall and also in the fault calcite itself. This indicates movements over a long time period.

The upper parts of the cave show deep trenching with potholed floor, signs of vadose development such as dry stream acting on the surface. The lowest parts of the cave show rounded features indicating development in water filled passages known as phreatic development. NHASA Gallery is formed as a result of collapse. Other features in the cave are shattered calcite formations and thick ill sorted sediments. These features were possibly formed during the last glaciation when frost penetrated to considerable depth. The sediments beneath the floors are probably solifluxion deposits accumulated at times of thaw.

Calcite floors are seen throughout the cave, and indicate a stable period without significant water flow. At the end of the last glacial period the cave was again invaded by a stream leaving a number of fragments of floor high and dry.

Malcolm Cotter

NEW TACKLE PURCHASE

At long last a start has been made on re equipment of the club tackle. None too soon if one goes by comments such as those printed earlier in this Newsletter.

200 metres of 11mm hauser laid caving rope, some tethers, spreaders, and belays, plus a 25ft ladder have been purchased for immediate use. A 150ft hauling rope has been purchased as well for rescue use.

The caving rope has been divided as follows:-

Two 50' lengths
Two 100' "
One 150' "
One 250' "

The ladder is a trial purchase and is idented M.C.G. 1981. More purchases of this ladder will follow subject to it proving satisfactory in use.