



Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

August 1982

No. 155



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CAVING ACCOMMODATION is available at the MCG cottage on Mendip:
Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse-on-Mendip, Blagdon, Bristol, BS18 6XW
The map reference is NGR 5147 5606 (OS 50,000 first series sheet 182).
Guest bookings should be made with the Cottage Warden.

WEEKLY MEETINGS are held every Thursday from 8.30pm at:
The Fox and Hounds and Mawson Arms, Chiswick Lane South, London W4.

NEXT NEWSLETTER is due on 30th September. Copy should reach the editor before
16th September to ensure inclusion. (Please send by post this month as the
editor is on holiday 3rd-17th Sept. Editor's address above.)

MCG MEET PROGRAMME

Meet	Leader	Base
Sep 18 Dowber Gill Passage	T. Knibbs	NPC
Oct 16 Rhino Rift	J. Miriam	MCG
Nov 20 Agen Allwedd	P. Ingold	?
Dec 18 Eastwater (Primrose Pot)	I. McKechnie	MCG

YORKSHIRE MEET 18th-26th September: It's not too late to join the MCG Yorkshire week- a holiday with a difference in Yorkshire and the Lake District. Return on the weekend of 25th September will be via South Wales. Why not combine pleasure with pleasure by not coming home after the Dowber Gill weekend. Contact Tony Knibbs or John Miriam for further details.

A BONFIRE AND RUN are being arranged for the weekend of 5th November. The reason for the bonfire is obvious - and there is talk of a barrel and barbecue too. The run is a half-marathon and is optional - anyone wishing to take part should contact Derek Walsh (Staines 57785) or Roy Kempston (Camberley 34338).

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: John Miriam in Lamb Leer, by Neil Hutchinson.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

No new members this month

The MEMBERSHIP LIST published last month omitted Joan Dowley, Pat Terry, and Judy Macmillan; all Associate Members.

The HALF YEAR GENERAL MEETING is on 16th October at Nordrach Cottage. If you have any business you would like discussed at the meeting, please tell Tony Knibbs as soon as possible so that it may be included in the agenda.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS, please send your written reports for the HYGM to the editor before 16th September, so that they can be included in the next newsletter. (You will have to use the post as the editor is on holiday until the 17th Sept.) The next committee meeting is on Thursday, 30th September at 6.30pm in the Mawson Arms.

BEST WISHES to Derek Walsh and Jane Reynolds, who are to be married in November.

CONGRATULATIONS to Mike Bygrave and Barbara, who were married on 24th July at Backwell, near Bristol.

A BARREL will be making its way to Mendip for 28th August - it's Adrian's birthday.

JOURNAL No 7 is still short of material. When you have written your paper for the journal, give it to Bryan Pittmann, as soon as possible please. Closing date for publication is 16th October, but we need material before then to spread the load on the editorial team.

MARTIN ROWE should now be in Canada, and expects to be away for about a year. Any correspondence addressed to him care of his parents at 32 Oak Street, Windermere, Cumbria, will be forwarded to him.

A WATNEYS T-SHIRT was seen recently in the Mawson Arms - on who - our Tacklemaster?

=====

FOR SALE Morris Marina 1.3 4-door saloon, 'R' reg., excellent condition, full service history, £950 Phone John or Barbara, 01-764-8454.

=====

OVERHEARD in the New Inn, Blagdon, one Sunday night - Bruce Dean to his young lady: "Are you trying to arouse me?"

OVERHEARD in the Mawson Arms - Jane, resolutely: "After November, I've got to behave myself."

COTTAGE NEWS, TACKLE NOTES, etc

SCREWJACK PROPS or similar are required by John Miriam for work on the cottage or underground. Can anyone lay their hands on some?

Please note that NO DOGS or other pets may be brought into the cottage by non-members.

CAP LAMPS are still needed for Tony Knibbs to repair for MCG novices' and visitors' use. We still haven't found the three that went missing from the cottage. Did anyone pick them up by mistake?

COTTAGE BOOKINGS

August

27 Alan Mellon +9

September

3

10 Tony Ingold +15

17

24 Dave Gibson +12

October

1

8 Jon Roberts +15

15 HYCA & Rulmo Rift meet

22 Jonathan Austin +11

29 Steve Conquest +12

November

5 Bryan Terry's barrel, bonfire, run etc

12

19

26 Dave Higginson - Ealing College

December

3

10

17 Eastwater meet

24

THE DERBYSHIRE MEET, 14th - 15th August

The weekend began on an ominous (?) footing with several carloads of MCG members independently searching the more remote pubs north of Hartington for each other and for Orpheus. By midnight we were all together, and by 2am were back at the Orpheus cottage at Parsley Hay setting up the barrel which Geoff and Martin had provided. It was Martin's last weekend before going to Canada, and we meant to give him a good send-off.

By mid-day on Saturday, we had coaxed ourselves into a frame of mind suitable for heading towards Giant's Hole, breaking in gently with a visit to Caving Supplies in Buxton. Ten MCG members were there - Geoff Barton, Martin Rowe, Mike Mintram, Ian Parry, Roy Kempston, Dik Houseago, Mick Dean, Gordon Lister, JP Burch, Ian McKechnie - and several from Orpheus, who were to be our guides.

The entrance series of Giants, which was blasted out by the owner in an attempt to manufacture a show-cave, is a comfortable walk ending with a 25' pitch, Garland's Pot. Here we split into two groups, group 1 heading down the Crab-walk (a narrow, winding streamway guaranteed to remove any protrusions from the incautious traveller) to Geology Pot (an impressive 50' hole) and the final sump. Group 2 traversed high from the Crab-walk to take the direct route to Poached Egg Passage and the link through to Oxlow.

The Oxlow link begins with a tight hole in the floor of a passage, leading to an unpleasant crawl in muddy pools and a restricted duck. That's as far as we went! It had been raining hard the night before, and the first duck was virtually a sump. Back out we came, and headed for Geology Pot, where we met party 1 coming the other way.

When the two parties met, a casual remark led us to realise that someone was missing. "He was with your party". "No he wasn't, he was with yours". A more careful count showed that in fact we had lost three - Mike Mintram, Mick Dean, and JP - who had set off behind party 1, and had become separated from them. They had then been doomed to wander up and down the Crab-walk like some sort of Flying Dutchmen, until meeting a party from Bracknell who showed them the way on.

Both parties having completed the round trip in opposite directions and investigated the Oxlow link, and having found our missing companions, it was back to the cottage, on to the pub (till ?am); and finally back to the cottage again and the barrel. As is normal when cavers get together late at night, thoughts turned to daring and competitive feats of skill, such as the crawl under the cottage stairs; the Orpheus "squeeze box" (two MCG names - Martin Rowe and Ian McKechnie - were

inscribed on the box lid for posterity with only four others who have achieved it in both directions, head first and feet first); and of course, the ubiquitous broom trick.

Sunday dawned with few thoughts of caving in our heads, and it was not until 3pm that anyone ventured underground, to Knotlow Mines - but that's another story.

MCG PUBLICATIONS INDEX

Jon Roberts has been preparing a complete index of MCG publications, and this marathon task is now nearing completion. The final document runs to some 80 pages and fully classifies everything published in newsletters, journals, and surveys from the formation of the club to the end of 1982. It will be available in the new year, price to be agreed. Anyone who would like a copy, please tell Jonathan. The more we print, the less they'll cost.

NEWSLETTER PRINTING

With the doubling of prices at the local printers, and the departure of Martin (a source of free copying), the editor now has to pay £7 per side for 140 of any pages needing photocopying. Alternative sources are being investigated, but meanwhile if anyone knows a cheaper source, or can do it free, please let me know. The snag is that all the material usually arrives just before publication day, so it must be close to Walton for a rapid turn-round. It involves typically 4 or 5 sides, 140 copies of each. Any offers?

YORKSHIRE 1982

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01-546-7741
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John
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or
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18th Sept Dowber Gill Meet

18th - 26th Sept MCG Hols.

If you'd like to join the MCG holiday in Yorkshire...

...take part in the MCG "Inward Bound" course and expedition...

...qualify for the Duke of Edinburgh's pewter award...

...be admired by all your fellow MCG members...

...THEN CONTACT TONY KNIBBS OR JOHN MIRIAM NOW,
AND RESERVE YOUR PLACE ON THIS EXCITING EVENT.

ABSEILING

The following is a draft of advice prepared by Ben Lyon, for general circulation in the caving world. Before this is done it is being shown to CRO controllers, NCA equipment & Training Committee members etc to try to get general agreement that it is on the right lines.

Please note that this advice is not comprehensive. It is not a review of different descenders and techniques, more a case of 'Hey up lads, think - on a minute, because _____!' It will need to be followed up by separate articles on the Rack and other devices.

If you have any comments on the Draft Advice can you please make them as quickly as possible to Ben Lyon at Whernside Cave & Fell Centre, Telephone: Dent (058 75) 213.

A recent accident in which an abseiler lost control of his descent raises the following points:

1. Unprotected abseils are potentially lethal, and cavers should think carefully about the risks involved in abseiling with any conventional device not backed up by a fail-safe stopping system.
2. Because of this potential danger, cavers should be very careful to learn to abseil in controlled circumstances.
3. Different skills are required to use different types of descender, and cavers should re-learn to abseil before committing themselves to the descent of underground pitches on a device new to them.
4. Because of the variation in the weight of rope hanging below the abseiler, long pitches are considerably more difficult to abseil safely than short ones.
5. Different descenders have very different characteristics, and it is possible to develop skills to put these to good effect, or to fall foul of them by lack of skill. Hence the fact that a skilled caver can use a given descender safely is no guarantee that it is safe for anyone else. As a general guide it is possible to suggest that descenders for general caving use should:
 - a. Be loadable whilst clipped to the caver.
 - b. Not put a cumulative twist in the rope.
 - c. Not put the caver in danger if wrongly loaded.
6. The caver must, by skill or by the intrinsic properties of his/her descender, be able to stop, and lock off the descender if necessary, at any point in the descent.
7. It is suggested that when descenders are offered for sale, they should be accompanied by instructions for use, including the hazards of unskilled use.

THUNDERSTORM FLOOD DANGER

On Sunday 6th June a violent local thunderstorm caused severe flooding and several Cave Rescues in the Dales. The previous week had been very hot and dry, associated with a high pressure system. Thunderstorms had been forecast, but nothing materialised until Saturday night, though they occurred elsewhere. The short-lived but intense storm on Saturday night probably had little effect on the dried out ground. The weather forecast for Sunday mentioned thunderstorms later in the day - it became dark and there were rumbles of thunder early in the afternoon.

Perhaps Sunday's Cavers thought the weather was similar to the previous week, dark and threatening without a downpour, or perhaps that they would not be at great risk. The storm produced very rapid run-off, similar to pouring buckets of water on the ground, so that even the dryness of the ground was probably not all that significant.

Many cavers who have not seen the effects of such a downpour would be quite astonished by the results produced. Thunderstorms are often very local - when some streams were in high flood, a few miles away others were dry. This makes it difficult to be precise, but it would seem that when a flood pulse reached cavers in Sunset Hole and Meregill on Ingleborough, less than 1 hour had elapsed since the rain started, and the caves soon became impassable.

The observant caver will have noticed how water backs up at sumps and constrictions, but many have been surprised to see rising water only a few feet below the lip of the 50' pitch in Sunset Hole. What is perhaps not quite so well known is that water can back up to the roof in seemingly open passages - because of turbulence and changes in passage shape. In Meregill the chamber at the base of the 2nd underground pitch sumped, water rose 30' on the 3rd pitch where a team were trapped, and water had been 20' up the Aven entrance pitch. In Washfold Pot and Sunset Hole the entrance passages effectively sumped or had minimal air spaces. The Sunset Sink, unable to take all the water sent a 3 yd. wide torrent rushing into the dry entrance. At Gaping Gill and on the Allotment Area there is recent drainage by gripping which would make run-off even faster. The Main Chamber of G.G. overflowed into South passage, and it was still sumped around T junction 2 days later. At Ingleborough Show Cave, a six foot deep stream poured out in peak flood. Nine hours after the storm started, the stream in Sunset Hole was little above normal.

WHAT ARE THE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED?

1. Be very wary if thunderstorms are forecast. They are particularly likely after very hot weather in high pressure situations, but are often associated with cold fronts.
2. Such intense rain can produce a flood pulse which makes the cave virtually impassable in a short space of time and with no warning.
3. Conventional ideas of which caves are O.K. in bad weather may be no longer valid.
4. If you get trapped, find a high place and wait, (Polythene survival bag useful). The water may recede quickly if you are lucky. This may be a difficult decision, (it depends on the cave) but it is easy to be swept away fighting against flood water.
5. Remember the caves will still be there next time! Do not let the fact that you have a hole booked, persuade you to do something you might regret.

Paul Ramsden Whernside Cave & Fell Centre 21.6.82.

(Thanks to those trapped underground for their Comments)

Threat to King's Spring in Bath

by ROBIN MCKIE, Science Correspondent

FOR SEVERAL thousand years, rain water has been trickling through the limestone rocks deep below the Mendip Hills of Somerset.

Now these prehistoric waters are bubbling back to the surface again—threatening to trigger a serious dispute over the fate of Britain's most famous landmarks.

The centre of the row lies at Bath. The city's hot natural springs—which flow into the renowned King's and Roman baths there—have just been shown by a group of British scientists to have their source, 10 miles away, in the Mendip Hills.

In the first full scientific study of the Bath springs, the group has found that it takes about 4,000 years for Mendip rainwater to re-emerge in the city's baths, having travelled underground through a delicate natural hydraulic system. The scientists say that the network could be seriously affected by any attempt to tamper with it.

Their warning comes just

as Bath City Council prepares to select one of three consortiums' plans for the redevelopment of the city as a major spa centre, proposals that could involve tapping up an extra 100,000 gallons of Bath spring water every day for use in new thermal bathing centres.

One consortium plans a £15 million complex of hotels, water treatment centres and bath renovations for the city. Other proposals, are being kept secret by the council.

The development is of great importance to Bath after its closure as a spa centre four years ago when a deadly amoeba found in its waters was linked to the death of a teenage swimmer.

A test borehole has since been drilled to divert water before it reaches the contamination zone, and this—or a similar well—would provide the extra 100,000 gallons required for the proposed spa development, civic leaders believe.

After closely monitoring both the original and the new artificial springs for

months, the council believes the 250,000 gallons a day flowing from the King's Spring, the chief Bath source, would not be reduced.

This view contrasts with that of the scientists. 'There could be no exploitation of thermal water within a radius of several kilometres from Bath without risk of seriously affecting the spring discharge,' the research team reported in *Nature*.

The group—made up of scientists from Bath University, the Institute of Geological Sciences, and the Atomic Energy Authority—urges that a thorough investigation of geological conditions must first be carried out 'if the intrinsic historical and tourist value of the springs is to be protected.'

The springs—which show evidence of human use dating back to the Iron Age—were used by the Romans as an important religious centre that remains the most remarkable and extensive Roman site in Britain. Last year, it attracted 650,000

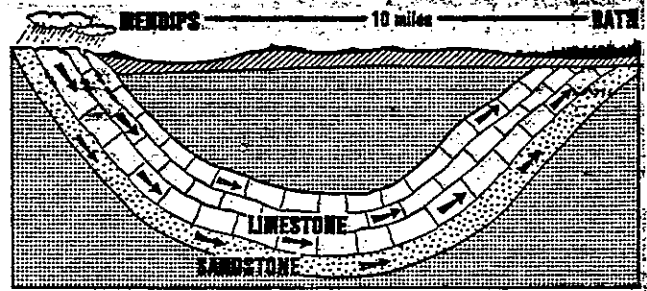
visitors and was a principal source of tourism for the city.

Now its waters have been shown to have an equally interesting history. The scientists have shown that a giant slice of limestone joins Bath with the Mendip Hills. This acts like a huge U-tube. Rain builds up pressure at one end, forcing the water through the rock 'tube' until it spurts out of the ground at Bath.

During this passage—which the group estimates lasts about 4,000 years—the water picks up the special mineral qualities for which it has become so famous.

Miles underground, radioactive gases are dissolved, mineral veins provide rich quantities of calcium, and water is heated—so it emerges in Bath at about 115 deg. F.

Whether these properties are sufficient to account for the spring's remarkable curative reputation—they were even claimed to induce pregnancy—is the subject of a different scientific debate.



How the Mendips waters flow to Bath.

Bob Speleo 8

