

# MCG NEWS



FEBRUARY 1985 No.176

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP

## MUTUAL AID PACT SHAKES BRISTOL CHANNEL

- \* S Wales admits Mynydd Epynt's existence
- \* Severn Bridge closed owing to 'serious congestion on approaches

by our Political Correspondent

' TALKS ABOUT TALKS, and realistic negotiations in front of open bars, have resulted in an amicable and mutually beneficial agreement between the South Wales Caving Club and the Mendip Caving Group, to offer each other's members reciprocal rights", said a spokesman of the negotiating committee in a joint communique published today and initialled by the Heads of State of Penwyllt and Nordrach.

' "We warmly welcome the SWCC to our Mendip base, and hope the exchange results in a continuing expansion of caving and social intercourse between South Wales and Mendip at this moment in time", said President Knibbs at a VM Day state procession from Charterhouse to Hunters Lodge and back again.

' President Knibbs is over 21.

' Unconfirmed sources suggest that a secret annex to the Treaty contains a mutual self-defence pact, and an agreement to discuss the provision of a new Bristol Channel tunnel. South Wales has insisted on private enterprise only for the channel crossing, which would extend the existing 50 km underground workings at Penwyllt to meet the 'Master Cave' at a point somewhere near Barry Island; however the Great Western Railway objected unless the tunnel was built sufficiently wide to run broad-gauge trains through the new link for its celebratory 150th year. EEC intervention has led to a satisfactory compromise whereby mixed gauge will be laid to harmonise with the Transport of Crushed Limestone (Dolomite Alps) Convention of 1967.'

More seriously, the reciprocal agreement will be of lasting benefit to members of each club, allowing access to each other's library and tackle store, and privileged payment of member's rates when staying at the other cottage.

continued on page 10 ...

## MACHO, MAJORCA STYLE



in Cal Pesso

A SUCCESSFUL Christmas expedition to Majorca from 16-30 December 1984 was accomplished by five MCG members: Andy Beare, Adrian Duckett, Neil Hutchinson, Ian Parry and Martin Rowe. Ten caves were visited, 400ft-long pitches surmounted, and a certain amount of sun, and wine, soaked up.

Martin Rowe's write-up of the expedition is reputedly so long (and as yet uncompleted) that a special newsletter or journal will have to be published around it.

One serious lesson learnt the hard way on the trip was the danger of using racks for abseiling without any fail-safe device to ensure they are applied the correct way round. One very experienced member of the team managed a reversed-rack manoeuvre at the top of a 100ft pitch, but the rope jammed diagonally - very fortunately for him, as he wasn't standing or holding on to anything else...

Apart from the fact that we now have an out-an-out front-runner for 1985's Steve Taylor Memorial Prize, if an experienced caver can make that error the rest of us had better look to our racks and change our rack-bars to the safer, fixed 2nd bar, design.



## MCG COMMITTEE

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CAVING ACCOMMODATION is available  
at the MCG, Nordrach Cottage,  
Charterhouse on Mendip, Blagdon,  
Bristol BS18 6XW. OS map ref: NGR  
ST.5147.5606, 1:50000 sheet 182.

Guest groups requiring accommod-  
ation should apply in advance to:  
John Miriam, 44 Chesterfield Road,  
West Ewell, Surrey KT19 9QP.  
01.393.3955.

WEEKLY MEETINGS are held at the  
Mawson Arms, Chiswick Lane South,  
London W4, on Thursday evenings  
from 8.30pm. Close to A4/A316  
Hogarth Roundabout. Nearest  
buses: 290 in Chiswick Lane North,  
and 27,91,237,267,290,E3,E4 in  
Chiswick High Road. Nearest tube:  
Turnham Green.

... Opening my chambers (my 20th  
Century Dictionary, that is) I find the  
following word:

## SUBSCAPULAR

which means 'below the shoulder blade'.

The noun describes 'the subscapular  
vessel or nerve'.

If this is getting close to the heart  
of things, it is entirely appropriate  
that the VERY NEXT WORD in my Dictio-  
nary is:

## SUBSCRIBE

subscribe, *sub-skrīb*, *v.t.* to write beneath: to  
sign (orig. and esp. at the bottom): to set down,  
declare, in writing (*Shak.*): to profess to be (by  
signing): to declare assent to: to make a signed  
promise of payment for: to contribute: to give  
up by signing (*Shak.*):—*v.i.* to sign one's name:  
to assent: to submit (*Shak.*): to make acknow-  
ledgment: to undertake to answer: to contribute  
money: to put one's name down as a purchaser  
or donor: to make periodical payments by  
arrangement.—*adjs.* subscrib'able; subscribed'.  
—*n.* subscrib'er.—*n.* and *adj.* subscrib'ing.—*adj.*  
subscript (*sub'skript*), written beneath, esp. the  
iota under a Greek long vowel, in α, η, ω.—*n.*  
subscrip'tion, an act of subscribing: that which  
is subscribed: a signature: assent: submission  
(*Shak.*): a raising of money from subscribers: a  
method of sale to subscribers: a contribution to  
a fund, society, etc.: a membership fee.—*adj.*  
subscrip'tive.—subscriber trunk dialling, a dial-  
ling system in which subscribers in W. European  
and N. American exchanges can dial each other  
directly:—abbrev. S.T.D. [*L. subscribere*—*sub*,  
*scribere*, to write.]

Mike Lovell still awaits your 1985  
subs:

£15 for probationary & full members  
£7.50 for associates ...

... Full membership gives easy access  
to the tackle store and library, a vote  
at AGMs, a chance to stand for the com-  
mittee, and all for the same price as  
probationary membership. All it takes  
is a proving trip underground.

Probationary members currently elig-  
ible for full membership are:

Anthony Alston	Peter Haynes
Darren Bartlett	Dave Higginson
Jarrold Bartlett	Steve Lane
Steve Bedford	Simon Leach
Pete Bulling	Carol Nunn
James Chubb	Paul Phipps
Dave Corr	David Punter
Louise Curley	Chris Scrase
James Davies	Graham Sutcliffe
Mike Dean	Andy Tizzard
Dave Edwards	Gill Towner
David Forrow	Peter Whittle

And by March 1985, AGM time, more will  
be eligible:

Linda Gates	Steve Thompson
Peter Johnston	Yvonne Ward
Karen Lewis	Gill Warren ...

... The following members are marked down in a different fashion, by the Hon. Recorder, for having had library items out for longer than he can remember. Ian would be grateful if these could be returned soon-ish:

Andy Beare  
 (Speleology: Study of Caves)  
 Tony Knibbs  
 (Complete Caves of Mendip)  
 Simon Knight  
 (The Heart of Mendip)  
 Chris Martin  
 (Grottos of Majorca)  
 Martin Rowe  
 (Picos do Cornion)  
 Andy Tizzard (mining)  
 Chris Whittle (lots !)  
 Roger Wallington  
 (Lancaster-Easegill survey) ...

...Jo Davies has accused the Editor of being sexist, in respect of an entry in MCG NEWS 174, wherein I stated that two birthday boys were putting on a barrel in December. On close inspection it transpires that one of the boys isn't a boy after all. Sorry, Jubilee Jo ...

... Membership numbers topped 120 for the first time ever, in December 1984, and the current count is 121. As well as our 3 honorary members (Malcolm Cotter, the Marquess of Bath, and Fred Young) we have 34 probationary members, 71 full and 13 associates. The female:male ratio is 1 : 3.4 which is a distinct gain by the females ...

... As a non-sequitur, we still have a 100% male dominated committee despite the narrowing of the girl/boy ratio. Is this a case for positive discrimination? ...

... Why were there no entries in the Cottage Log Book between the end of August and the end of September? It couldn't have been because no-one went caving, not when there are so many of us ...

... But maybe there is an explanation. I'm not sure how you can have four corners on a globe, but wherever they are, MCG members are scattering to them. Not content with Lesley Robbins in the Indian sub-continent and South East Asia, numerous parties off skiing down Alpine hillsides, Greg Smith commuting to China and Japan, a CAVING visit in Majorca (during the same week as Colonel Gaddafi's visit) involving Andy Beare, Adrian Duckett, Neil Hutchinson, Ian Parry and Martin Rowe, and with Tony Knibbs and Denise Samuel in darkest North Wales having recently

returned from South Africa, we have now waved temporary goodbye (and, late January 1985, hello again) to Alan Mellon, away for a few weeks in Australia.

Or did he stop off in South East Asia, I wonder? ...

... Helen & Phil Ingold clearly believe in teaching caving early. Young Simon, 18 months vintage, was equipped with helmet and mini-wellies on 17.10.1984, and chaperoned through the top entrance of Goatchurch and down the Giant's Staircase ...

... 30th September 1984 saw some sort of history in the making, with a South Wales Caving Club AWAY MEET, staying at Nordrach. A very good weekend was had by all and some were even seen underground (St Cuthbert's, Swildons, GB). Pete Harvey did his first ever trip down St Cuthbert's ...

... The lamps available for novice use from the MCG cottage tackle store have been modified, writes Roy Kempston. They now use a different type of dry cell.

The battery container has been fixed to the helmet, so avoiding the need for a belt. If you use an Ever-Ready battery type 1289 it will last for about 3.5 hours, while a Duracell type MN1203 will last for about 13 hours. The Ever-Ready costs about 80p and the Duracell about £2 (generally only available from caving shops - eg Bat Products - and French hypermarkets!).

If you do use these helmets and lamps, please remember to remove the battery when you return to the cottage ...

### Bob Speleo β



# 4 OFD + DYO 2

Cyfarfod Cymraey Deau, 16-17 Medi 1984;  
trwy llygaid Ian McKechnie.

Cyfranogwyr:

Geoff Barton, John Beauchamp, Pete Bulling, Adrian Duckett, Neil Hutchinson, Roy Kempston, Tony Knibbs, Ian McKechnie, Joy and Paul Merron, Mike Mintram, Ian Parry, Denise Samuel, Steve Taylor.

Cyfarfod B.O.M i Penwyllt...

What?

What did you say?

You don't understand?

OK, just for you, I'll carry on in 1980s' Anglo-Saxon... An MCG visit to the South Wales Caving Club traditionally includes at least one trip in Dan-yr-Ogof and one in Ogof Ffynnon Ddu. The South Wales meet on September 16-17th, 1984, was no exception. Two parties visited DYO and four OFD.

At about 11 on Saturday morning, with no Bat Products, Caving Supplies or Inglesport to visit, GB, NH, RK, TK and IM disappeared into the hillside above Penwyllt, guided by Bob Radcliffe of SWCC. The planned route was through OFD2 to Smith's Armoury, the upstream limit of OFD3.

Following one of the many well-worn paths through the maze of passages near the entrance soon led to the top of Gnome Passage, and a left turn to the

start of Chasm Passage. A polished climb on the left allows the caver intent on avoiding the Chasm to do so. So we did, aided by a fixed chain, and followed a (-nother) maze of similar body-sized passages for about 150m, to re-emerge at the far end of Chasm Passage.

Beyond Poached Egg and Bhowani Junction is another 100m of passage then the Crevasse. Here a 15ft rope is attached to an eyebolt, to provide protection on the slippery climb down to a 20ft long traverse over the crevasse itself. After a further short walk, a 25ft ladder with 10ft belay is used for an awkward climb in the crack between two rock cheeks - smooth as a baby's?

At the foot of the next chamber, IM chose a tight, convoluted slither down through rocks, while GB preferred an exposed clamber over the top. Then around the next corner, NH (5' 11" long) was observed bridged between the two walls (5' 10" apart) of a short traverse. With a body weight of 60kg and a coefficient of friction of 0.3, this means a force exerted of...well, I'm sure it's not possible. And in an attempt to prove it wasn't possible, GB, RK, TK and IM all used a different technique (and took three times longer).

After an exhilarating climb over a big stack of loose rocks known kindly as 'The Shambles', came the bit we'd all

from  
THE TIMES  
15.11.1984

## Cave-diver starved to death in

Johannesburg (AP) - An amateur cave-diver struggled for three weeks to survive in an ink-black cavern after he blundered into a warren of subterranean streams and surfaced on a sandy island 120 feet underground.

A pathologist said after examining Mr Peter Verhulsel's body that the 29-year-old university student died of starvation and exposure.

The civilian divers who discovered his body on Saturday said Mr Verhulsel walked desperately around his tomb, searching for a passage out or a sliver of light. Footprints from his wetsuit boots criss-crossed the island.

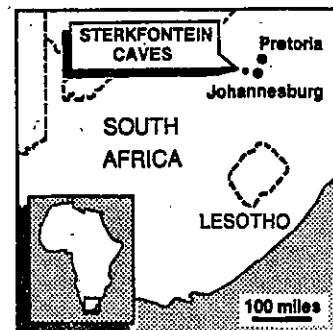
The young man apparently

heard the police divers who banged steel pipes on rocks, hoping for an answer from the missing man.

Mr Verhulsel did answer, the rescuers said, but the dolomite walls of his tomb were so water-soaked and mossy that he was unable to sound a resonant ring. The rescuers found a pile of stones stacked against one wall.

Mr Verhulsel probably agonized over how much air was trapped in the cavern, but the rescuers later found a tiny "blow hole" or passage, leading to the earth's surface.

Mr Verhulsel had gone cave-diving with friends at the Sterkfontein caves west of Johannesburg on September



29. Important archaeological discoveries at the caves in 1936 showed that black tribes of hunters and gatherers lived in the region as long as two million years ago.

The group crawled and swam

# = MCG 6

been waiting for: the Traverses ! The first one is only there to whet the appetite for the others: 10m long and twice as deep, a 3m descent brings the walls close enough together to permit a hands-against-the-far-wall shuffle along a muddy ledge, followed by a foot-on-each-side traverse and a short climb back up to a false floor of jammed boulders.

The next traverse is longer; 20m or so, but much better designed, with two neatly sloping ledges never more than 0.7m apart, and only blackness between them. Another jammed boulder to rest on, then the third traverse, the piece de resistance of all the traverses, which includes an adrenalin-generating 'bold shuffle' along one sloping ledge for about 2m, with lots of space beneath and only some delicately-formed rock nodules above for handholds. And there's no paper to wipe the adrenalin off with afterwards.

We were now following the course of the OFD3 streamway, and could hear its first distant roar, ahead and far below us. Several stretches of attractively-decorated passage, and a bridge made from a scaffold pole (thoughtfully left behind by the building contractors ?) led us eventually, after many tantalising glimpses of the cool refreshing water below, to a sudden descent to the streamway, upstream of the second waterfall.

## underground tomb

through a popular underwater trail, but Mr Verhulsel failed to surface at the end of the route.

Those who found his body said he had erred into a previously unknown alleyway that led to the underground lake, which was also undiscovered.

Mr Verhulsel's father, Jan, has complained that police did not do enough to try to rescue his son - he says police believed they were looking for a body, not mounting a rescue.

The father is supported by experienced cave divers familiar with the Sterxfontein area who volunteered to help, but were turned away by police.

After a few initial dives on the day Mr Verhulsel vanished,

police found they were only stirring up mud, and they returned every week or 10 days when the water was clear.

"Peter was living there for six days, and on the seventh day, police returned for a few hours until it silted up. People with more guts were standing on the sidelines," his father said.

Police refused to discuss details of their efforts, saying the death was subject to an inquest, but a spokesman, Lieutenant Henry Beck, said: "Experienced divers were used and everything possible was done."

When the divers eventually found Mr Verhulsel's body, "he lay on his back with his head to one side," said a rescuer.

OFD3 streamway is black, noisy and wet. It doesn't suffer from the potholes of OFD1, but has just enough submerged flakes to catch the unwary. If the flakes don't get you, it's a pleasant calf-deep wade most of the way, with occasional traverses when it threatens to become deeper. At one point, the water just reached g-level (32" for one), but after the initial shock it was quite pleasant really.

The walk up the stream seemed to go on for ever. In fact it was only 800m (only 0.8km ???). After about 700m, the passage closed down among large horizontal rock flakes, grooved and foot-stepped just enough to allow easy passage. A key-hole on the right led up to a low crawl on a flat false floor of rock which ended as suddenly as it began, with a short drop back to the pebble-covered stream bed.

Finally, the stream disappeared among rocks and gravel on the left; to the right, an unexciting boulder-strewn passage ascended gradually for 30m and was Smith's Armoury. Those who recovered from the anti-climax sat down and enjoyed a fun-sized Marathon or two. Strong draughting was heard in the vicinity of BR's shorts and was not investigated.

Just 3 hours after setting off, BR and TK began their return, leaving GB, RK and IM taking photographs and NH acting as model. The streamway, the pretties, the traverses, Poached Egg, were all used as backgrounds for the MCG Shop's Autumn Collection. Photography over, the Chasm bypass (remember - a maze of similar body-sized passages ?) provided a short delay while a number of dead-end routes were explored. Then down the chain and - 45 minutes later - out into the late afternoon sun.

"Why did it take 45 minutes to walk 200m?" asks an astute reader in Chipping Sodbury.

"Because we were temporarily unsure of our exact location relative to the entrance".

But the application of sound scientific principles rarely fails to bring results - by simulating Brownian motion and maintaining an uphill trend, it was only a matter of time before we found the entrance.

continued on page 6 ...

# 4 OFD + DYO 2 = MCG 6

... continued from page 5

In weary retrospect, this was a trip to recommend to others, and even one to go on again! If not for Smith's Armoury itself, then for the journey there: it was an interesting and varied afternoon's caving. Did someone mention a through trip from OFD1 to 3 for next year?

Also on Saturday, DS led PB, JM and PM from OFD1 to Cwm Dwr, accompanied by Liz Price of Cerberus/SWCC; while John ? from Crewe C&PC led JB, AD, MM, IP and ST into Dan-yr-Ogof, aiming for the Far North. Most of the party reached the Great North Road before turning back. ST and JB turned at the Long Crawl, and took an early bath.

Sunday, 10am, and white faces stare across the breakfast tables of 1-10 Powell Street through half-open eyes. Gradually mouths open, words are uttered (and breakfast thrust in the opposite direction), and soon the day's plans begin to gel.

GB and NH were planning Cwm Dwr to OFD2, to find perhaps a shorter route out from Gnome Passage than yesterday's. PB, AD, TK, MM, IP, DS and ST followed them half-an-hour later. IM was keen to prove his skills as a recently-made DYO leader. JB and RK were willing to be shown, and Liz Price agreed to join us on a trip to DYO Lower Series.

The lakes were frothier and deeper than normal, and we waded/swam across with all the enthusiasm usually given to a cold bath on a Sunday morning. JB persevered through the Long Crawl this time, though in places it was a tight fit for his large frame. We were all glad of a rest in Gerard Platten Hall.

As this was JB's first visit, a detour to Flabbergasm Oxbow was essential, and the party was duly photographed beside a 10ft straw. Then along the Grand Canyon to Monk Hall. While RK photographed JB and the Monk, IM and LP ascended a steep, muddy passage to the left, in search of the Longer Crawl. But the passage ended in a small, bouldery grotto with no way on.

The Green Canal was as cold as ever; it took a full 5 minutes for IM to lower himself in, inch by half-inch (he's not known for his courage where cold water

is concerned). But it was almost luxury to be swimming without the usual ammo-box full of camera. A quick trip to the Risings where more water than usual was emerging, and back to the Abyss.

Following the passage past the end of the Green Canal, the floor suddenly drops away into the blackness of the Abyss. It is fortunate that a large, enclosed chimney runs down the face of this 40ft drop, providing a relatively safe descent made easier by a fixed rope.

Near the foot of the Abyss is the Camel's Back, a thrutching climb up and down the back of a 25ft high resting dromedary, which has been cut in half lengthways leaving a gap just wide enough to take a human body - but not wide enough to release it again.

Thixotropic Passage takes its name from the texture of its mud. Fortunately we were spared the promised worms, but the little squeals of delight from LP as the mud oozed into her boots and between her toes, were enough to make anyone want to go there again.

Bakerloo Straight is a stretch of classic flying-saucer shaped phreatic passage through black rock, which leads via a number of short climbs and junctions to the Washing Machine. IM, the 'leader', who was not too familiar with the lower series, kept a very close eye on LP who was 'following', for signs that he might be going the wrong way. Little, subtle signs like turning around and finding that there was no one behind him. With a little help from Liz, however, we found our way up to the climb which leads back to the foot of Gerard Platten Hall.

JB led the way back to the entrance; his fourth time this weekend over the route. On a sandbank beside lake 1, he found a rather hungry-looking frog, with very little flesh on its bones and a positively half-hearted hop. As the water for DYO sinks mostly some 10 miles to the north east, the frog must have had quite a tale to tell. Thanks probably to dimly-remembered stories of rescued frogs, beautiful princesses and happy endings, he was taken from his sand-bank and carried out to the safety of a damp, grassy slope, a happy ending indeed to another MCG South Wales meet. ■

# SPELEODATE '86

Thanks to Victoria Arbizu, we have received early details of the revised Ninth International Speleological Congress to be held at Barcelona in 1986. Do I hear whispers of an MCG Spanish trip in 1986 ?? Victoria has translated the following details from a Spanish circular:

Barcelona 16-07-84/0. Issued by the Secretariat-General of the 9th Congress.

Following our announcement of May 21st, we now give more details about the 9th International Speleological Congress. Currently the basic arrangements have been approved, an economic study has been made confirming the event's financial viability, and a provisional programme of activities drawn up. We should mention that, according to the Secretary General of the UIS (Union Internationale de Speleologie), it has been thought better to advance the venue to July and August 1986, being structured as follows:

TECHNICAL SYMPOSIUM - Madrid TRIP TO THE LARRA REGION	PRE-CONGRESS. 21-30/7/86	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* 5th International Festival of Caving Films, at Barcelona</li> <li>* 4th International Speleo Photo Salon</li> <li>* Individual Lectures</li> <li>* Trips around Cataluna</li> </ul>	Reception, Introduction UIS General Assembly Karst studies, Cave geology Non-limestone caves Biospeleology Anthropolgy, Palaeontology Applied speleology Literature/Bibliography Commissions (?reports on studies) UIS General Assembly (another) Closing Session	MAIN CONGRESS 1-7/8/86
VOLCANIC CAVES - Canary Islands PREHISTORIC ROOTS - Cantabria CAMP AT 'OJO GUARENA' - Burgos TRIP TO THE LARRA REGION	POST-CONGRESS 9-17/8/86	

Although the main Congress' organising manager has been appointed and his principal duties established, the co-ordinating committee for pre- and post-Congress activities has not yet finalised details and costs of these, so it is impossible to set out the precise arrangements. We are quite sure that, in spite of the time delay, the registration fee for main Congress activities will be no more than the fees for the 8th Congress at Kentucky.

Our proposal is to send out the definitive documentation from October 1984, which, using a decimal numbering, will be updated periodically for every programmed activity.

This information will be sent to every person or body that shows their interest by sending back the enclosed card.

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 If you want more information, write to:

9º Congreso Internacional de Espeleologica, ESPANA 1986,  
 Apartado 343 - 08080 Barcelona, ESPANA/SPAIN.

Give your name (nombre) and address (direccion), state that you wish to receive the definitive Congress programme (deseo recibir el programa definitivo del Congreso), state your speciality in caving (especialidad en la Espelologia), and the activities that interest you most - caving camps (campamentos), trips (excursiones), or the main Congress (Acto Central). Any helpful suggestions (sugerencias) would be welcomed. ■

## FOR THE RECORD

SHORTLY AVAILABLE will be the 1984 MCG Journal, edited by Ian McKechnie. This was formerly to be known as the 30th Anniversary Newsletter, but was subsequently considered to have material more appropriate for 'journal' status. So Ian has also put together a replacement newsletter (no.168), which will emerge at the same time.

Talking of MCG Journals, we have spare copies of the 1967 (few only), 1974, 1976 and 1982 editions. These are available on special offer to members for 50p each, non-members £1, while stocks last. Inquire of Mr Honorary Recorder McKechnie, or any other committee member.

The 1967 Journal covers Malaysia, Switzerland 1963, Mendip place name etymology, Blackmoor Swallet/Shaft dig, and many other subjects. 1974 reveals Notes on Faulting, Dartmoor Mines, Belgium, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.

The 1976 Journal has a full study and survey of Blackmoor caves, a major article on Bone Hole discoveries and extensions, Brunel's cave (sorry, Tunnel) under the Thames, and reports of other discoveries and expeditions.

The building (and financing) of Mk.I Nordrach Cottage is covered in 1982, along with Rope Knots, Geological observations on West Kingsdale, Charterhouse Rakes, current news on Blackmoor, Sea Caves of Pembrokeshire, and of course Bob Speleo's contributions.

There are also many MCG Newsletter back-issues available. If you need any to complete your set, then (again subject to availability) our Recorder will be delighted to help.

## SHARE AND ENJOY

THE BRISTOL Exploration Club celebrates its 50th Anniversary in 1985. A programme of hyper-activity has been put in hand by the BEC Committee, and paying guests may well be very welcome - in some cases obligatory - at the various Dos in and around the Belfry. Items to watch out for are:

- \* Mendip summer barbecue in late June/early July
- \* Gouffre Berger expedition in early August
- \* special Dinner in October
- \* fireworks party on November 5th or nearest Saturday
- \* winter social at the Belfry.

## HOME NEWS FROM ABROAD

One of our local Mendip members, Darren Bartlett, wrote from St Etienne a few months ago to Tony Knibbs and Martin Rowe. He's back by now, but it's still a cheering message:

"...A few things have been happening to say the least. In February 1984 I began saving up for a cycle tour of Europe and so was unable to spend out on any caving gear. I am coming towards the end of the tour and it has been quite an experience. No doubt I can tell you more at a later date over a couple of pints.

"...I see that some of us are due to complete the full member's test trip. Obviously my absence may have given you the idea I'd either got bored or turned chicken. On the contrary, I'm still as keen as ever but I'm afraid my absence will be prolonged until I can find the cash to equip myself to a reasonable degree. First on returning I have to get a job (easier said than done) and then take it from there...

"All the best, good caving, and hope to see you in the near future."

**Giving.**—N. giving etc. v.: bestowal, donation; present-ation, -ment; accordance; concession; delivery, consignment, dispensation, communication, endowment; invest-ment, -iture; award.

alms-giving, charity, liberality, generosity; philanthropy etc. 910.

[Thing given] gift, donation, present, *cadeau*; fairing; free gift, boon, favor, benefaction, grant, offering, oblation, sacrifice, immolation.

grace, act of grace, *bonus*, *bonanza*, allowance, contribution, subscription, subsidy, tribute, subvention.

bequest, legacy, devise, will, *donation*, appanage; dowry; voluntary -settlement, - conveyance etc. 783; amortization.

alms, largess, bounty, dole, sportule, donative, help, oblation, offertory, Peter's pence, *honorarium*, gratuity, Maundy money, Christmas box, Easter offering, vail, tip, *douceur*, drink money, *pourboire*, *trinkgeld*, *backsheesh*; fee etc. (*recompense*) 973; consideration.

bribe, bait, ground-bait; peace-offering, handsel, giver, grantor etc. v.; donor, feoffer, settlor; almoner; testator; investor, subscriber, contributor; fairy godmother; Santa Claus, benefactor etc. 816.

V. deliver, hand, pass, put into the hands of; hand - , make - , deliver - , pass - , turn-over; present, give away, dispense, dispose of; give - , deal - , dole - , mete - , fork - , shell - , squeeze-out.

pay etc. 807; render, impart, communicate, concede, cede, yield, part with, shed cast; spend etc. 809.

give, bestow, confer, grant, accord, award, assign.

entrust, consign, vest in, make a present; allow, contribute, subscribe, donate, furnish its quota.

invest, endow, settle upon; bequest, leave, devise.

furnish, supply, help; ad-, minister to; afford, spare; accommodate - , indulge - , favor-with; shower down upon; lavish, pour on, thrust upon; tip, bribe; tickle - , grease- the palm; offer etc. 763; sacrifice, immolate.

Adj. giving etc. v.; given etc. v.; allow-ed, -able; concessional; communicable; charitable, eleemosynary, sportulary, tributary; *gratis* etc.

See  
page  
2 !!



# Telling Talk from Rutter

by Jonathan Roberts

HISTORY IS QUALITATIVE; a faculty for judgement is the historian's primary skill. So I don't envy anyone who wants to write a history book. There is always more 'new' history to write up; while everyone else seems to be busy rediscovering and reinterpreting yesterday's 'new' history; in the third place, most history is (or should be) about evaluating unevicenced attitudes, allegories, allegations and anecdotes, instead of merely authenticating bare facts; and in the fourth place some historians let their side down with ragged research and appalling analysis.

The history of holes on Mendip has suffered from these various syndromes no less than any other transliteration of topological phenomena; legends of caverns measureless to man but now lost, exist from centuries past. Unresolved to anyone's satisfaction remains the story of 'Cheder Hole', referred to by Henry of Huntingdon in 1135. Closer to living memory, we have the Lost Cave of Burrington, now revealed by patient research to be a classic writing-up howler by John Rutter in his 1829 'Delineations of North West Somerset', which grossly distorted the story of an excavated long barrow at Butcombe.

Dave Irwin of the Bristol Exploration Club has now rendered the Mendip community a considerable service by offering in the December 1984 BELFRY BULLETIN a wholly plausible and generally sustainable analysis of the reputed Lost Gulf of Sandford Hill, which supposedly, according to Rutter, lies:

"80 fathoms, or 480 feet below the plane of Sandford Hill; they [miners] also affirm, that they have let down a man, with a line 240 feet deep, without his being able to discover top, sides or bottom".

Irwin has commented that Sandford Hill has been the site of more or less continuous speleological interest and many shafts have been opened including Triple Hole (1973) and Mangle Hole (1970). Sandford Levvy is a mined level which intersects a number of natural cavities. "Part of the reason for digging in this area", he says, "is to locate the illusive [sic] 'Gulf', though little documentary evidence exists and may have been, in part, legend".

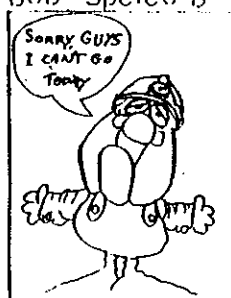
He has now identified two letters from the Reverend David Williams, a cleric of that period, one addressed to John Rutter and the second to a Reverend W Patterson of Shaftesbury, the letters being dated January 4th and February 16th 1829 respectively. The first is clearly the source of Rutter's commentary, so both letters are an earlier, more original source than Rutter's historical repetition, which is at least third hand. Facts vary between Williams' two letters, in detail but not in spirit:

- \* The distance entered within the cave is either "upwards of 300ft [down]" (January 1829 letter) or "240ft deep" (February 1829).
- \* The miner could not see "any sides or termination to it" (January) or "top, sides or bottom" (February).
- \* The cave entrance lies 80 fathoms or 480ft below the plane of Sandford Hill.
- \* "Near" the "Gulph", an elephant was found in 1770 (January) - this is varied in February to read "There is another extensive cavern [additional to the Gulf] further westward in this hill, near which the skeleton of a full-sized elephant was found in 1770".

Irwin concentrates on the first three items which focus specifically on the location of the Gulf, though the fourth, February, reference hints at a second cavern, which may still await rediscovery. He states that as the plane (top) of Sandford Hill is itself only 420ft above sea level, a vertical depth of 240ft combined with even a moderate height for a cave entrance on the hillside would put the nether regions of the Gulf substantially below sea level !

continued on page 10 ...

Bob Speleo β



Accordingly, he infers that the cave distance of 240ft (possibly a more precise reference than "upwards of 300ft", though this is not stated explicitly by Irwin) refers not to vertical depth, but to the distance paid out on the line attached to the miner. Descriptions of being unable to see any top, sides or bottom are credible with a dim light and distant walls, if either hanging in a wide rift or standing on a steeply sloping floor of a large chamber. 240ft, if correct, is probably the slope distance in from the cave entrance, or the slope distance plus wandering-around distance.

The slope distance is also, in Irwin's opinion, the vital clue to the statement about the cave entrance being 480ft below the plane of Sandford Hill, which if taken too literally could mean the entrance itself would be 60ft below sea level. Before the mid 19th Century, surveyors commonly measured height by the slope distance. Thus the Reverend Catcott in the mid 18th Century described Blackdown as one mile high.

Dave Irwin and Marie Clarke have traced, and walked, the 480ft 'slope contour' of Sandford Hill, and find that Sandford Levvy is 530ft below the plane of the hill, and Mangle Hole 470ft (Triple Hole is far too high, by either method of measurement). Mangle Hole also fits the general description given in Williams' accounts, with a steeply sloping rift and a large chamber with pits in the floor.

Irwin rounds up his analysis with the comment that "The evidence is not conclusive, nor is it ever likely to be unless further contemporary information still survives. It is the author's opinion that there is a very strong case that Mangle Hole could well be the lost Sandford Gulf. If it is not, the possibility of finding another shaft at the same level is extremely good. A further search to the west may well reveal another lost cave near where the elephant's remains were uncovered. Good Hunting." Amen to that.

MUTUAL AID PACT  
SHAKES  
BRISTOL CHANNEL

... continued from page 1

The reciprocal arrangements extend beyond this generous basis, as there are privileged rights also to use each other's cottage on members' weekends. Commonsense is the best policy to follow - one carload should cause no difficulty on most weekends, at either establishment, but it is strongly advised that members should book in advance in the usual way once expected numbers in the party go beyond half-a-dozen or so. The telephone number for the SWCC headquarters is 0639.730613.

South Wales Caving Club have been issued with an MCG full member's key; MCG members heading in the direction of Penwyllt will probably find the SWCC cottage open during normal weekend hours, but anyone visiting mid-week or expecting to arrive early for the weekend is advised to contact Tony Knibbs or Denise Samuel (01.997 2032) for details of how to gain access to the SWCC cottage.

... Oooops. Alan Mellon assures me that the 'Otter Hole' photograph in MCG NEWS 175 is really in OFD. So imagine it juxtaposed with Ian McKechnie's epic write-up in this issue, will you, and please, please, name the photos when you send them to the Editor for use in the newsletter ...

... Croydon Caving Club write to say that they are organising regular trips to Mertham Mines during 1985, where all-comers are very welcome. The proposed dates are: March 24, April 21, May 19, June 23, September 8, November 17 and December 15. Meet at 10.30am at Bedlams Park, Rockshaw Road, Merstham, Surrey, map ref. OS 187, NGR 308 537. For further info, contact Ron Smith, 5 Grenaby Avenue, Croydon, Surrey, or telephone Pete Burgess on Redhill 69015 ...

... LATE NEWS DEPARTMENT:  
The February 14th video-show at the Mawson Arms will be supplemented by the first slide show by the Majorca Five.

DON'T BE LATE, we shall definitely start promptly at 9pm ...