

# MCG NEWS

May 1985 No 178

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group

## BREAKTHROUGH IN UPPER FLOOD

### The Digger

*by Malcolm Cotter*

The Digger cast a last glance at the end of the cave as he had done many times before. Work had again reached a stage when pounding with hammer and chisel was not removing enough of the ancient stalagmite blockage to warrant continuing. All the material removed and loosened by the last charge had been put into seven containers, each of which took about half a cubic foot of spoil. The face at this stage looked much as it had done on previous occasions. A plug of hard white calcite filled the old cave passage to a position below the surface of a pool of water. You could reach forward a full arm's length into the sump, but that was nothing unusual. Blowing out the sediments, only to bring down more spoil into the water had been the order of work for the last three years.

Thus on leaving the face the digger did not see or sense any indication of events shortly to follow. It is true there had been some promising indications that open space lay ahead, since some two years before when an air current was detected for the first time. This was rather weak, however, and blasting had pushed mud into the vent so that it had ceased to function. There had also been a report that the sound of water was heard from beyond the end during a wet spell in the winter, some four months before. Even so, the Digger left the face without any special feeling of expectation.

Three other people were with the Digger on this trip. One of them had been associated with the cave for many years, particularly in the early 1970s when he had done a great deal of work there. In

recent years he had taken the lead part in another dig, where he had enjoyed with the Digger an invitation to be present at a 'breakthrough'. However at times they had worked together at each other's main sites, giving help without interference. They both knew what the cave digger worked for. The second person had given quiet support to several other digs. He had faith in Upper Flood and backed it up by his presence on digging sessions. The third person was a relatively new member making his second trip. This quartet represented a fairly typical cross-section of workers, although in recent years the old hands had come much less frequently.

The routine 500-foot haul of the seven skips was begun. These containers had been joined to form trains which were hauled and lifted through the cave. The first part of the journey was the most difficult because of a narrow section followed by a rough inclined floor. This floor itself was composed of rock fragments from the face. The low walls of 'deads' on either side of the passage were only the top of an impressive spoil store, the bottom four or five feet of which had been hidden by later dumping. The party then reached a more roomy section where the passage had expanded to form an elongated chamber. The Digger had argued against dumping here for a number of reasons, among them being a desire to conserve the place as found since in the event of no more discoveries, a good unspoiled feature would be left. The Digger also knew that if this chamber was filled with spoil the physical and psychological aspects of working...7

# SPELEODATE

Saturday's  
date shown

Nordrach and Mendip  
& cottage bookings

Other regions

June 1	.....	Tunnel cave (Mike Haselden) SWCC
June 3	.....	.....
June 15	Mendip geology (Malcolm Cotter)	.....
June 22	.....	.....
June 29	Racal Decca (12)	.....
July 6	Eastwater Cavern (Mike Bygrave) Lottery draw for Otter Hole trip Battle of Sedgemoor 300th anniversary	.....
July 13	Adrian Duckett (15)	.....
July 20	.....	.....
July 27	.....	Pyrenees '85 (Tony Knibbs) Arbas
Aug 3	.....	.....
Aug 10	.....	.....
Aug 17	.....	.....
Aug 24	.....	Lancaster Hole (Adrian Duckett)
(bank hol)	.....	Yorkshire
Aug 31	.....	.....

## The Chiswick Armchair Meet

9 pm prompt in the back room of the Mawson Arms!

Thursday June 13 - Please bring all your slides and prints for the AMAZING  
UPPER FLOOD BREATHROUGH SHOW !!!!

(More suggestions and volunteers are required to sustain this regular once-monthly spectacular at the Mawson Arms. Please contact Steve Taylor.



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Spot the white overalls ... yes it's a NOVICE! Miss UK grits her teeth at the camera in Skeleton Pit, Cheddar Caves.

# MCG doings

## HALF-YEARLY FORUM - BARN DANCE

Due to the success of this event in the past, the formula is to be repeated again at this year's half-yearly (5th October). However if you have any suggestions for improvements or additions, please let me know as soon as possible by phone, letter, or in the Mawson Arms. Steve Taylor.

## CHRISTMAS PARTY 1985

Yes, another club social event has been suggested, currently scheduled for December 7th. As yet, no firm plans have been formulated, so once more suggestions to me as soon as possible please. Steve Taylor.

## CLUB SWEATSHIRTS

Buy now while stocks last! MCG insignia sweatshirts available in maroon or blue, sizes small, medium and large for a mere £6 each. Contact Steve Taylor for immediate(ish) delivery!

## Changes of Address

Mike Bygrave,  
The Coach House, Rowfold Grange,  
Near Billingshurst, West Sussex.  
Tel: Billingshurst 3150.

Dave Higginson,  
11 School Lane, Badsey, Evesham,  
Worcestershire.

Steve Bedford,  
5 Myrtle Road, Hampton Hill, Middlesex.

Peter Johnston,  
37 Cambridge Road, Ashford, Middlesex.  
TW15 1UF.  
Tel: Ashford 43019.

Correction to address:

Grant Shephard,  
142 Mill Lane, West Hampstead,  
London NW6.

## Bob Speleo β



# Annual General Maelstrom

by Tony Knibbs

It was apparent that not all was well with the atmosphere at the AGM. To get to the roots of the problem, I asked the opinion of a small cross-section of members, whose comments I tabled at the last committee meeting as a basis for discussion. As a result, it was decided that we'd consider the following when arranging the 1986 AGM:

- 1 Maybe set a later, but prompt starting time.
- 2 Place some modest control on the consumption of the dreaded brewer's juice.
- 3 Have a few more copies of committee members' reports available at the meeting, and give brief verbal reports.

At the AGM a minority of members apparently felt that the committee is rather authoritarian in its approach - too 'professional' was a term used, and even 'Thatcherite'. For many whose membership extends back a decade or two, it may indeed seem that the MCG has altered, and that committee business has become more serious. Inevitably this is true.

The group has doubled in size over the past ten years and its assets have increased by a factor of 60. The annual turnover is now in the thousands of pounds area and the

importance of maintaining the right level of income - through cottage fees and subscriptions - is very great.

Now, the committee represents a very wide range of age groups and opinions, and should reflect the needs of the active majority of the group. But minorities are important too, and we are concerned when voices are raised in dissent.

There is an unwritten law which encourages those members who have a grievance to air it directly to the committee. In extreme cases, an Extraordinary General Meeting may be convened.

It was unfortunate that the problems a few members had over cottage utilisation were not indicated earlier to the cottage warden, instead of coming like a bolt from the blue into the AGM discussions. Likewise, the 'Thatcherite' criticism.

The committee sees its job as that of serving the needs of the group. If you are dissatisfied about anything, or have any other comments on how the group is run, please tell us. You can talk individually to the committee member concerned, or to me, to promote discussion in the committee meetings.

## Annual Dinner '85

The highlight of the AGM was, of course the annual dinner at The Star Hotel in Wells this year. On one side of the menu card is listed the food.

And on the other side of the menu you wrote limericks galore. This year's theme was DIGGING. (Remember, at this stage no-one knew that Upper Flood was about to come up trumps....)

Selection of limericks as deciphered by Kate Taylor

What this club always needs is new blood  
To venture down caves and in mud  
But especially rare  
Are those who will care  
To give Malcolm a hand down Upper Flood

Cotter didn't give a hang  
Upper Flood was in need of a bang  
Anyone would do  
With an IQ of two  
Which excluded the rest of the gang

There was a young man named Cotter  
 Who wanted to dig from Longwood to Otter  
 He bribed volunteers  
 With cider and beers  
 And I've been digging all night  
 for the rotter!

When walking on Blackmoor one day  
 One member was heard this to say  
 Look here in the ground -  
 A cave, I'll be bound  
 We'd better keep Malcolm away!

Upper Flood ended with a duck  
 Which was filled with a load of muck  
 We banged away  
 For a year and a day  
 Till no-one gave a damn

There was a young man called Cotter  
 Who was thought by many a rotter  
 As the Sabbath did break  
 His approach he did make  
 You said 'yes' in the pub, so you gotter

### Bob Speleo β



There's a cottage on Mendip near Charterhouse  
 I've decided to christen it 'Farterhouse'  
 When Roy and his friends  
 Expose their rear ends  
 You've a bang for a dig that's disasterous!

There was a young lady called Victoria  
 Who invited a young man back to her Trattoria  
 Then, after an hour or more,  
 She asked, what's the score?  
 So he said, I dig you - I also adore ya

Pat Walsh, a notorious prude  
 Thought sleeping arrangements quite crude  
 It could lead to, he suspects  
 ILLICIT SEX - and thoughts most obscene and rude!

The MCG's dig was a bore  
 With boulders blocking the floor  
 A bang was needed  
 So Mike conceded  
 But came out all blood and gore

Enough of this sexual sinning!  
 A new age will soon be beginning  
 To ensure you behave  
 We are digging a cave  
 Which is strictly reserved for the wimmin!

There was an old digger called Knibbs  
 Who was given to telling Great Fibbs  
 When Cuthberts was mentioned  
 He wished he was pensioned  
 Instead he got totally pizzed

The glorious and famed MCG  
 Renowned for their brewing of tea  
 Should keep this in mind  
 At AGM time  
 To 'dig' meetings without beer flowing free

We've studied this limerick verse  
 And found the contents quite terse  
 Were their authors quite literate?  
 Or were they illegitimate?  
 In any case, it could have been worse



# The BOB SPELEO Column

Bernard, after hearing of the Upper Flood breakthrough: 'Just how big is the squeeze?'

## Beat The Tax Inspector ...the covenant game

Yet again the old bug-bear of covenants is cropping up. I can hear you all groaning, 'Oh no, not more forms to fill in'. Now, thankfully, the annual ritual of filling in covenant forms has been removed. The only forms that do require completing are Tax forms R185 (AP) for the first repayment applied for by the group. So for 'current' members who did not complete this form or put an incorrect date on the form (ie dated after 5th April), they will be asked to complete one last form. New members will be asked to complete both a covenant and an R185 (AP) form. These forms will be posted to all those who need them, and I hope you will sign and return them (this is probably all that will be required).

A number of people have asked me what a covenant actually means to them. Basically it means a couple of signatures and that's all. However they work as follows:

Mr/Ms Average earns an honest	£21.49
Taxman deducts an honest	£ 6.49
Leaving Mr/Ms Average with	£15.00

which you covenant to the MCG. The MCG then writes to the Taxman and asks for that honest £6.49 back please,

because we are a charity and as such need the money. At this the Taxman hums and hahs and then (we hope) coughs up the dough. So in essence all we do is claim back the tax that you have already paid on your subs. In future I will be dealing with covenants, so if you get hassled it will probably be because you haven't filled in a form. (Or I've lost it!)

Please remember that if 120 members covenant, that is a total of £779 a year which the club can claim from HM Inspector of Taxes. Thanks in anticipation.

AR Mellon



HURRY UP, JIM, MR. SPELEO'S  
WAITING TO USE THAT!

New from Bob Speleo!

The ultimate in caving batteries - 11750 Ampere hours @ 2 volts - incredible! And just 656 x 365 x 1104 mm! Apparently they have been well proven in Royal Navy Subs, too! For carriage below ground, please contact TK Travel Services (See back issue for luggage label etc.)

...conditions would bring a halt to operations. By keeping the working face as low as possible, the small amount of spoil produced could be removed entirely from the cave, speeding progress.

The Digger had booked a holiday in the 'island of caves!' (Majorca) for the first two weeks in April. Once, while in the mountains, he climbed up and examined a large entrance. The ascent covered two afternoons, mainly because of route-finding, but in the end the goal was reached. The enormous archway hung with stalactites failed to lead to any passageway.

## Bob Speleo $\beta$



On Sunday the 14th April, the day after the Digger's flight home, he received a 'phone call from the first of his dig colleagues, who said that he had interesting news of developments on Mendip to report. The Digger assumed that either Bone Hole was looking promising, or that the latest cottage project in which he was deeply involved was going well. The composition of the delegation which arrived pointed to the latter being the case. The news they related of their spectacular discoveries in Upper Flood came as a surprise.

About a week earlier, the results of a charge had been inspected by the Digger's closest associate in the venture. He had worked at the site with great fervour since his first trip down Upper Flood in June 1983. His efforts, sometimes alone (and unrecorded due to the absence of the cottage log) had been a great encouragement to the Digger. They had frequently worked at different times, which helped morale because progress could be seen between visits.

The 'new' digger had amazed his old colleague by the speed with which he extracted a full skip from the cave!

He said that when he reached the face, he found an exciting change. Instead of reaching below water level, the calcite blockage stopped short, revealing an air space through which came an air current. He could also hear the distant rumble of water. All these signs pointed to an exciting breakthrough, to be followed by a great exploration.

The two digging colleagues had discussed what to do on such an occasion, if the way lay open, they would proceed to investigate. If this probing revealed the main cave containing the Blackmoor stream, they would retreat after first taking a short excursion for joy and to make sure that the way ahead lay clear. After all, a breakthrough of this sort on its own would constitute a memorable experience. The Digger knew that once the streamway was reached, there was the possibility of unimpeded exploration for several miles; although minor obstacles were also likely. The Digger had given the subject considerable thought and concluded that the main exploration should be a communal occasion, subject to celebration; a sharing of the fruits of labour.

## The Exploration Began...

In the event, however, it was not to be. Being unable to contact the Digger, the 'new' digger asked another of his colleagues where he might be. On hearing the news, he immediately proffered assistance. Thus the Friday night diggers were suddenly composed of different company to those normally present! In the meantime, work had been under way in the cave, so that the assisting members arrived in time to find the way ahead clear. The exploration of the last of the great West Mendip swallet caves was about to begin.

On reaching the streamway the 'new' digger wanted to keep the agreement he had made, but he was overruled. Another member of the party has since said that he was worried that they might damage something by disturbing the stream bed sediments.

When the Digger visited the new find himself, he was accompanied by workers 8

7.. old and new. He was pleased to see that the final 21 feet had followed the best way. The breakthrough had produced a sporting duck, on the far side of which Upper Flood Passage continued for a short, muddy distance, rising steeply over three separate tiered stalagmite floors. The sound of water grew louder.

Ahead was a squeeze past a curtain and then the party emerged into a large high chamber, extremely well decorated. Along one side of this tumbled the Blackmoor stream. The whole party emerged and stood in wonder at the scene. It had taken since 1961 to achieve this.

Most of the chamber was floored by an enormous stalagmite flow which rested on cave sediments. The stream emerged from a low passage on one side of this void and had cut through the infill in its course removing part of the floor which had at one time extended right across the chamber.

### *Pure White Stalactites . . .*

The most obvious exit lay downstream through a portal festooned with stalactites. The floor was composed of a relatively steep rubble jam, with the water passing between boulders. This persisted for a short distance until the floor levelled out and the cave changed abruptly in appearance. A shallow canal lay ahead in a passage some four feet wide, the sides of which were made of well washed black shaly limestone. These moist black walls contrasted with a mass of pure white stalactites stretching onwards in unique profusion into the distance. So long and dense was this array that to avoid breakage the party had to progress by crawling in the water. The canal ended at a narrowing where several small boulders were piled. The stalactite-hung roof continued and the passage widened.

From here onwards over a considerable distance the stream had cut a trench through very old cave sediments, which, as in the first new chamber, were covered by a calcite floor. Here, there was a forest of stalagmites and columns of various shapes and sizes. Some of these forms were coloured deep red. The Digger now saw more clear evidence of age which he was seeking. The sides of the incised cave deposits were overhung by the floor. From the edge and

beneath this feature was a thick calcite flow deposit which continued downwards to ice the sediments. Stalactites hung from the overhanging floor. This all gave the appearance of considerable age. The re-excavation of the cave could thus be correlated with that of the other Mendip examples. It was not the result of flushing by water diverted into the system by miners. The degree of scouring was not as complete, however, as in the other caves - the new find was unique. Because of the slight gradient, low energy conditions prevail over most of the streamway. It may also be inferred that the passage upstream of the known cave in part at least is very restricted, since there is no evidence of the great flood of 1968 within the extension and it is well known that water impounded behind the road forms a pool in very wet conditions. That this restriction is a natural feature within bedrock is hinted at because of the ease with which the 1968 storm waters burst through so many loose fills. (Blackmoor Swallet excepted.) The Digger also speculated that another main drain to the valley exists which took the bulk of the periglacial and postglacial water. The existence of other swallets is known. Another impression given was that the geological history of the new series was basically the same as that of the cave they had worked in over the years. Interesting times lay ahead and the Digger would be writing about the deposits in due course.

### *Squeeze !*

The passage was gradually widening as the party continued on their way and then shortly after passing a massive fallen stalactite an abrupt change was encountered. It was necessary to squeeze through a low section for a short distance before standing height was again achieved. A fine high passage lay ahead reminiscent of the type seen in Yorkshire, the almost horizontal bedding being a factor in making this feature.

The noise of water falling ahead heralded a change and just round a bend the party came into a short muddy section containing tailings from the lead ore dressing days. Above was a chamber with stalagmite floor at head level covering cave deposits. Here also the stream had removed one side of the infill which had at one time continued right across



the chamber. By climbing up onto the stalagmite it was possible to reach a bare low crawl which gave hope of a continuation. Below the chamber the stream tumbled down a fault into a small chamber occurring at the junc-

tion of two faults crossing at right-angles. The water then entered a low bedding plane which came to an end after about 50 feet. Blackmoor had closed on its secrets yet again. But the prospects ahead were excellent.

## Down in the Flood 1985 Breakthrough

by Mike Haselden

In June 1983, shortly after my introduction to the MCG, I was invited to visit Upper Flood, by Malcolm Cotter who has over the years been the main exponent of persistent work in the cave. I happily accepted Malcolm's invitation and that was the beginning of my enthusiastic involvement in the cave to this day.

I have been digging in the Valentine Series of Lamb Lair, which for about ten years has yielded a mere few feet of passage and has now closed in, despite much chemical persuasion. So when my full involvement was accepted in Upper Flood, which seemed to me a prime site with such easy and clean access compared to anything I had tackled in Lamb Lair, well, I thought, 'this is a piece of cake'. In the last two years any visits to Mendip have been combined with a trip or two into Upper Flood digging, clearing spoil or blasting, and quite often solo. I'd made a total of 22 trips in the cave up to the breakthrough.

At Easter this year I stayed home with my family until the Sunday, when we travelled to Mendip for the remainder of the holiday which, for us, included the Tuesday. After lunch at Nordrach, the next priority was Upper Flood. Having already acquired some chemical and associated accessories, I went into the cave with son Oliver and nephew John. As on so many previous occasions I felt mounting anticipation on the approach to the digging site, wondering what results the last blast had produced. The familiar sight of scattered debris was a good sign, but just a little further in and I would see the hard end, or what was left of it. But yes, the choke was still there although a little more reduced. Just below the choke a clear pool of water

was seeping through the stony floor below the surface. I inserted my arm deep under the calcite choke and could feel a rough and cracked bottom to the obstruction. Having given this much thought and discussion I decided to follow Tony Knibbs' and Malcolm's suggestion to place an underwater charge, which I moulded and connected to cordtex before sealing in a polythene bag. Then at arm's length I placed the charge under water into what felt like a crevice in the rock bottom and held it in place with mud and stones. With the charge primed and connected to the safety wire we retreated to the safe end.

The boys were now quite excited with anticipation. I connected the wires, tested the circuit, charged the capacitor and offered the exploder box to John to press the trigger. I detected a slight tremble in his hands but bravely he pulled the lever, with a resulting loud bang and blast which filled their faces with glee.

By Tuesday we felt that the boys deserved a Swildons trip, which was also attended by Alan Dougherty and Jon Roberts. Bone Hole was the next site where I set another charge in the club dig. [On our way back to the cottage, Sue dropped me off at Velvet Bottom for a lightning solo trip into Upper Flood. Luckily I had the key with me! I invited Alan and Jon to join me, but they declined.

I approached the work face on all fours and before I could see the end I was surprised to observe a bank of mud and gravel which had been thrown up by the underwater blast, as if by a tidal wave. Next, I saw a clear water pool right across the passage bottom. And then, as I came closer to the end, my eyes ... 10

9. I was drawn to a deep cavity under the calcite choke. This made my adrenaline level rise, and placing my head in the water, I peered into a small black hole which went beyond the choke.

What I saw was a heart-stopper and I knew we were about to make a breakthrough. I thought about crawling through there and then but I soon realised that the gap was too narrow; the space above the water was no more than a six-inch triangle of air. I then gave the rock face a good bashing with the lump hammer but diagnosed the need for a little more chemical force. During my short stay at the face I was aware of increased air movement and moreover the sound of running water in the distance. All these manifestations produced quite a state of excitement in me.

My journey back to the surface and cottage must rank as a record-breaker. I announced the news to the others but suspect that my word was at first doubted. This is the penalty I have to pay for being a frequent joker! (Note from Sue: Mike was hosing himself down when telling us of his discovery and in his gesticulating excitement he drenched us all!) When the message finally did get through, much discussion ensued about what to do next. To have a good chance of going through the final blockage by the following weekend I felt that one more charge was needed, so Sue and I drove off in search of explosives. Unfortunately as it was Tuesday all my contacts were out, probably at work.

We returned to the cottage before setting off home, resolving to return the next Friday evening to apply a final charge so that we could go through late on the next Saturday if the fumes had cleared. During the week I telephoned Tony about the Upper Flood events. I had also tried telephoning Malcolm but he was out of the country on holiday.

### Had I Imagined It?

On Friday evening, the 12th April, Sue and I arrived at the cottage about 10pm, with a small measure of explosives. The cottage was empty. I soon changed, got the key and gear and set off for Upper Flood.

The face looked just as I remembered it. In my mind I had wondered if in my excitement I had imagined some of the details, but no. However, doubt had been growing in my mind about the need for more explosive. After photographing the scene, I took the lump hammer and applied some vigorous blows to the lower part of the calcite choke and managed to break off some reasonable lumps. After some more effort an encouraging crack appeared, but this needed the steel bar for leverage. The bar was nowhere to be seen and I realised that it was buried in the debris thrown up by the last blast. Extricating it took a fair while but the effort of digging it out was worth it, because with it I was able to exploit several cracks and remove large sections of the obstruction which exposed further cracks enabling me to eventually clear what I thought was enough to crawl through.

### Should I Go Through?

I was tempted to go through but decided it would be unwise to risk it on my own as the top of the newly cleared passage displayed a few unstable looking cracks. I contemplated my next move and temptation got the better of me. I decided I would just try crawling to the other side to survey the way on.

I laid flat out in the water in my wetsuit and crawled forward, but when my head was nearly at the halfway stage of the crawl, a torso sized boulder fell from the ceiling. My retreat was quicker than the boulder falling! Obviously I needed to do more work. The fallen boulder, although too big for me to move, gave me better access to the remaining choke which I cleared until it looked quite safe. As I cleared the last few blocks and was thinking about another attempt I heard someone approaching from behind.

I was joined first by John Miriam, then Denise Samuel and Tony Knibbs, followed by Jon Roberts. In the presence of these much longer standing members, who had also toiled in Upper Flood, I felt I should at least offer the lead to someone else, but Tony just said 'get on with it'.

16 Surveying the ceiling and way on, I cautiously crawled in. What I saw ... //

10. at first was discouraging, but the sound of running water beyond was music to my ears. I proceeded slowly along a muddy slimy crawl which steepened and impeded my view. I had to move a couple of loose boulders to ease my passage. The way on then levelled and opened up a little and a few muddy formations restricted my movement, but the 'music' was louder and I could see a tight opening into total blackness.

Carefully I passed through the opening and the reality of the chamber I walked into was more like a dream. No words can match the joy and emotion of such an experience, so you will have to imagine the magic of the moment when I stood in the spacious chamber, the first person to do so since its creation, the first witness to a magnificent calcified chamber with a sizeable flowing stream as a bonus.

### Midnight Chamber

The others followed in a state of elation, but sadly one person was absent - Malcolm Cotter. Friday night had just passed into Saturday morning, so Midnight Chamber was thus named. The suggestion was made to leave the stream passage untouched until Malcolm could share in its exploration, but the lure of the unknown was too powerful. Very slowly we went downstream, admiring the beauty of this virgin cave. It was almost a sin to be privilege to this treasure of calcite. An obstructing boulder choke was soon cleared to allow our exploration to continue and still the formations were a delight to behold. On turning a corner, the roar of the stream beyond made us wonder what to expect next. At a point where a side chamber entered the main passage the stream dropped noisily down a 15ft rift and the character of the cave changed. The water levelled off into a nasty bedding plane, thus ending our exploration for the night.

We retraced our steps carefully, estimating the distance but at the same time enjoying a different angle of the cave. At Midnight Chamber we estimated we had covered 600 ft of passage. It was unanimously decided to save the upstream passage for Malcolm upon his return, though it did not seem to be very promising in size and direction.

The following weekend Malcolm visited the new extension for the first time, but regrettably his upstream section yielded no more than 30 ft before dipping down to water level. I have also pushed the downstream bedding plane to its bitter end.

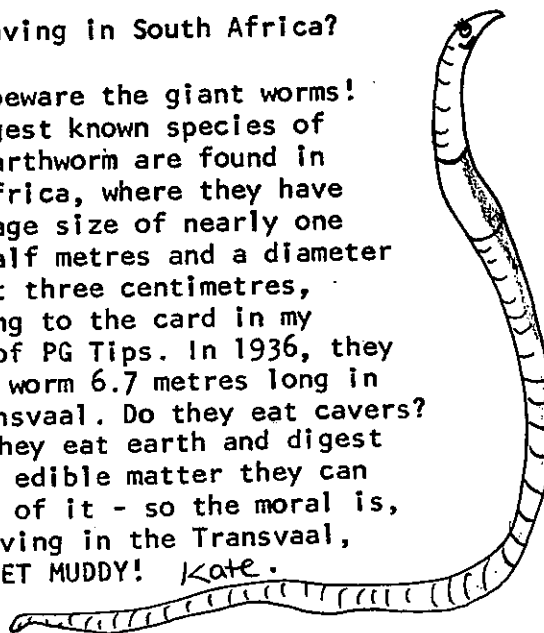
As a relative newcomer to the MCG I consider myself privileged to have shared in this unique experience in Upper Flood. But then to enter a new system for the first time in any circumstances is indeed a privilege. As all who have now seen the cave will confirm, the formations are a real delight, but being low and all around, movement along the passage is a threat to the many delicate formations so preservation is almost impossible and conservation an absolute headache. Experienced wetsuited small parties, each caving with the grace of a ballet dancer, is the only chance of conserving our discovery and we ought to undertake the responsibility to maintain its present condition.

### On With The Dig!

By now many trips have been undertaken, all possible routes have been explored and no further attempts to push a passage should be undertaken except at a designated site. One is already underway which, it is hoped, will bypass the terminal bedding plane. It is unlikely that Blackmoor will release all its secrets easily, which is probably just as well, so that others can have the chance to share in the ultimate pleasure of discovery.

### Going caving in South Africa?

If so, beware the giant worms! The longest known species of giant earthworm are found in South Africa, where they have an average size of nearly one and a half metres and a diameter of about three centimetres, according to the card in my packet of PG Tips. In 1936, they found a worm 6.7 metres long in the Transvaal. Do they eat cavers? Well, they eat earth and digest all the edible matter they can get out of it - so the moral is, when caving in the Transvaal, DON'T GET MUDDY! Kate.



## New Dig for Old

by Tony Knibbs

At a meeting of the Charterhouse Caving Committee on 20th April, I reported on our activities at the two group digs in the Longwood/August System: the Oxbows, off the lower streamway, and September Rift, near Longwood's Great Chamber.

In view of our total lack of activity in the Oxbows area, it was reported that this dig is now officially abandoned. The September Rift enterprise is still alive and well and being coaxed along by Jonathan Roberts.

Almost as a replacement for the Oxbows dig, we officially requested permission to dig at the updip end of Fossil Passage above the lower August streamway. Marked on the new revised survey, this major passage

runs back, above and in line with the notable stream rift, upslope towards an area on the survey which is totally blank.

This blank area is simply waiting to be filled in by the extensive new discoveries due to be made from this part of the system. Work at opening Fountain Passage was directed at getting into this area, as was the digging in the Oxbows. Unfortunately, neither of these came up trumps.

I would be delighted to hear from any member who is interested in taking a personal interest in Fossil Passage Dig. Perhaps a small team could be formed from members who have yet to discover the delights of scratching away in some distant choke in search of The Promised Land.

## Earwig ...

What's the committee up to now? Are they talking about me? Earwig listened in on the meeting on April 12th...



Kate Taylor was co-opted as editor. A cottage handbook has been set up, and the cottage's new fridge has been fitted. There's now a notice in the cottage about cottage charges, and the 'job list' has two additions - a window vent and a vent for the sales cupboard.... The AGM was discussed at length (see page 4), with its late start, drinking problems, and complaints.... All agreed the dinner was excellent, and the manager apologised for the lack of real ale... but perhaps the prizegiving went on too long....

Ian's working on a library list... Roy's working on tackle marking... Steve's asking for armchair meet ideas... Planning permission granted for cottage extension, but Paul waiting for costings... All agreed on Tony's new MCG letterhead... Paul has to evict flies from the cottage roof... Steve to investigate Xmas party & barn dance at the half-yearly... Alan Mellon will pursue covenants... Paul has to persuade someone

to remove solids from cess pit urgently... (any volunteers?)... Tony's increasing the cottage insurance (contents) from £5000 to £10000 as we're under-insured! Tony's also booking the Star for the next Annual Dinner: 22/3/86... But it's too expensive to install a phone in the cottage, so notice about nearest phones will go on noticeboard instead... Malcolm's land purchase plans to be published... We may be able to pay members rates at NPC, but we'll have to check..

Next meeting is on 23rd May at 7pm in the Mawson Arms...

Are you still awake, Bob?



● Have you written anything for the newsletter recently? Why not? Please send all contributions, large or small, preferably legible, to Kate soon!

● Have you paid your subscription? If not, your newsletter will have a red asterisk on it! And it could be the last newsletter you ever get! (Come on, it's not that bad...)