

# MCG NEWS

November 1986 No.189

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP

To commiserate the coming retirement of our Secretary and to celebrate the rumour that an updated edition of Mendip Underground could appear at any time.

## The Rhyme of the Ancient Speleo

It is an ancient caver, and he drinketh one of three  
The others dribble down his chin, to soak into his knee  
He stopped me in the Hunters, made me buy him beer all night  
As he cried into his tankard, and told me of his plight.

He said, "I fell in with a caving group, full many years ago  
They taught me how to cave and dig, it filled my life with woe  
For Mendip cavers of delight, I couldn't give a toffee  
I'd rather booze, or maybe see the BEC for coffee.

The other clubs are just as bad, the Wessex and the Shepton  
Amalgamated climb up to a place I cannot mention  
And so I hit upon a plan to keep me in the pub  
While gaining great respect (and beer) from members of the club.

So first I sent young Jonathen with compasses and maps  
Exploring every cave and grot, with many other chaps  
Who from Londinium came at speed, with boots and rucksacks heavy  
To leave the Dilly underground, and many high-born lady.

And Trevor came from Birmingham, and Malcolm left his trees  
They soon explored all Mendip, and described it all to me  
Because I had a little plan, it seemed to me quite sound  
To write a little guide to what lies underneath the ground.

One day they found a cavern new, quite close to our H.Q.  
To explore its unknown passage would be dangerous I knew  
And then I called to mind a tale of many years ago  
Of exploring by remote control - I thought it worth a go.

They sent a piper down a cave, to play his lively tune  
And watched him bravely blow his pipes way down into the gloom  
They walked above through field and wood while underneath their feet  
They heard from far beneath the ground the piper's lonely screech.

For three long weeks they tracked him till the piping passed away  
They thought him dead until one day he came to light of day  
At Wookey hole he wandered out and told the rescue team  
Of all the dangers he had met, and marvels that he'd seen.

The cavern went, he said, unto the very pits of hell  
And to prove it, when he blew his pipe there came a sulphur smell  
His hands were burned, his clothes were charred, he'd still be in the void  
But the way out was revealed by the shade of Dr Lloyd.

But I digress, we had a cave to enter and explore  
And pipers brave on Mendip aren't seen much any more  
I wanted a musician bold, the prospect wasn't bright  
Until there came into my mind a Mr Simon Knight.

Cont. on p3

"PUTTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT....."

In April's newsletter I included an article from the Yorkshire Post about caving accidents and rescues. I have since received a letter from Paddy Newman with a 'true' account of one of the incidents. It concerns a piece that said "A woman fell 70ft in Gaping Gill and broke both arms and injured her head.....". This woman is a friend of Paddy and he says in his letter:- This paragraph, as far as I can remember, refers back to the Whitsun bank holiday weekend last year. I was caving in Yorkshire that weekend with Manchester University S. S. (who? I hear you say), and there were several groups of MUSS around, doing their own things!. Anyway, we were down Rift Pot and had a good trip. Returning to the surface in the afternoon, we found cave rescue landrovers out and about. Enquiries showed that the Cave Rescue Organisation had had 3 calls for help already that afternoon.

Firstly, a young lad had fallen into Thornton Force (which was very full) and subsequently drowned. Amateur divers had the unpleasant task of recovering the body from the plunge pool. Secondly, a lady had fallen in Stream Passage - injuries were thought to be bad, but we found out later that this was not so. Thirdly, a man had dislocated his shoulder at the bottom of Juniper Gulf, as reported.

The poor old CRO were running round in circles trying to cope. One of our party went of to Juniper to help and there were plenty of other volunteers. Anyway, returning to the incident involving my friend; I found out from her the following week that she had abseiled off the end of the rope, 30ft from the bottom of Stream Passage, and broken her left arm, a few cuts and bruises, otherwise a lucky escape. She was caving with a MUSS group all of whom were experienced expedition cavers. Although she was rigging the pitch, she had not packed the tackle sacks and due to a slight variation in rigging the 330ft split pitches, the rope was too short and someone (with a very red face) hadn't put a knot in the rope end (what a common cause of SRT accidents, I hear you say). Well, somebody VERY important in the world of SRT has also abseiled off the end of a rope - so even the best can get it wrong if they're not careful.

I'll stop now and let you draw your own conclusions from my little episode. Bye for now.... Paddy Newman



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from pl

At first he didn't want to know, until I'd promised him  
A barrel full of foaming ale, and bottles full of gin  
And so he put his wellies on, and strapped upon his chest  
An accordian of the finest make, on which his beer to rest.

We took him to the cavern mouth, and sent him on his way  
A merry dancing jig he played and then a roundalay  
The others went to Wookey Hole to wait his reappearance  
While I poked a pitchfork down the hole to ensure his disappearance.

His wheezing tune grew far away until I heard it stop  
I wondered why, until I heard a distant cork go 'pop'  
The music started up again, until a sudden crash  
Was followed by a moan, a groan, and then a mighty splash.

We pulled him out, and told him that he looked a good deal cleaner  
Though his new accordian shrank right down into a concertina  
And the entry in my little book describing our new grot  
Said 'a sloping passage to a pitch, into a flooded pot'.

Now when I'd listed all the caves that ever could be found  
I wrote it all down in a book called Mendip Underground  
For tiger and for weege, a guide to every cave  
They'd rush to buy it, that I knew, my fortune would be made."

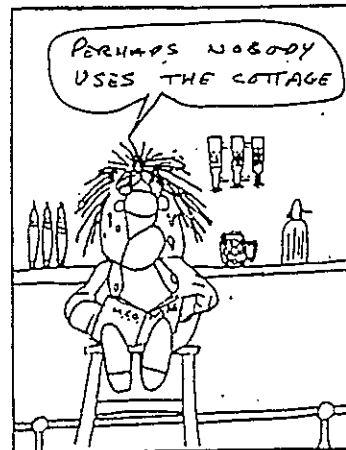
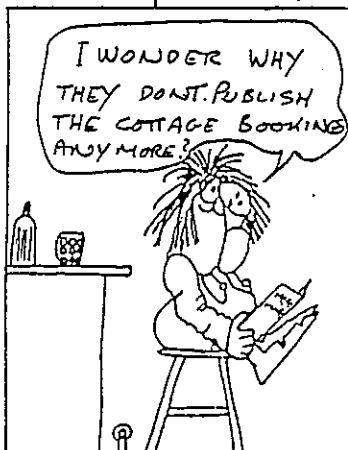
The caver stopped the story of his daring enterprise  
He quaffed his ale, and choked with sobs as tears came to his eyes  
I asked him why it made him sad, his plan for making wealth  
In fact, I nearly said I'd buy a copy for myself.

The caver dried his reddened eyes, and sipped a little beer  
Then told me how his dream of wealth grew fainter by the year  
It seems the club was now so good at going down these holes  
That they kept finding caverns new, like superhuman moles.

So every time the manuscript was coming to completion  
They'd come along and tell our man of this weeks new addition  
And so it seems that publication date grows never nearer  
While all the time it also seems that pints of beer get dearer.

And so, dear friends, take pity on your author's wild frustration  
And if you find a cavern new, keep mum 'til publication  
Pack away your caving lamp, and fill in all your digs  
And place an order for the book to cheer poor Tony Knibbs ■ Phil Hendy

### Bob Speleo β



1. Longwood August	574ft/175m
2. Swildon's Hole	548ft/167m
3. Manor Farm Swallet	520ft/158m
4. Eastwater Cavern	510ft/155m
5. St. Cuthbert's Swallet	486ft/148m
6. Rhino Rift	473ft/144m
7. GB Cavern	440ft/134m
8. Tynmps Barrow Swallet	433ft/132m
9. Thrupp Lane Swallet	385ft/117m
10. Cuckoo Cleaves	250ft/76m

## Diver discovers longest cave system

Mr Martyn Farr, a cave diver, emerged late on Monday evening from a 2,000ft tunnel filled with sludge-coloured water, thereby establishing Britain's longest and deepest continuous underground system.

His dive, for which he enjoyed a visibility of 18ins in water 60ft deep, connected the caves of Ogof Daren Cilau and Elm Hole, beneath Llangatwyg mountain near Abergavenny.

The new system joins entrances two miles apart on opposite sides of the hill and is nearly 700ft deep. It contains in all some 12½ miles of passage.

Mr Farr, who has explored many such flooded passages or 'sumps' in Britain and abroad - including Borneo - said he felt incredible relief on surfacing from the dive.

To reach air at the end of the 50-minute dive, Mr Farr had to swim upwards through a narrow vertical squeeze into the known part of Elm Hole, a manoeuvre which required him to jettison two tanks of air and abandon them on the floor of the sump. From its discovery in an old quarry in 1947 until September 1984, Ogof Daren Cilau was one of the most miserable and rarely-visited of Britain's caves. It consisted of no more than a flat-out, wet and constricted half a mile crawl leading to a small cavern.

But then, Mr Farr and friends from the Chelsea Speleological Society prised a few blocks from the floor to discover a route into a majestic gallery, Jigsaw Passage, decorated with stalactites and crystal formations of the purest white.

In March 1985, further explorations led to the Time Machine, by far the largest passage in Britain, and the subterranean river ending in the sump now connected to Elm Hole.

Hopes are high of further connections to the nearby Ogof Agen Allwedd and Ogof Craig-ar-Fynnon, creating a "supersystem" with a total passage length of 50 miles, one of the longest in the world.

By David Rose of the Guardian.

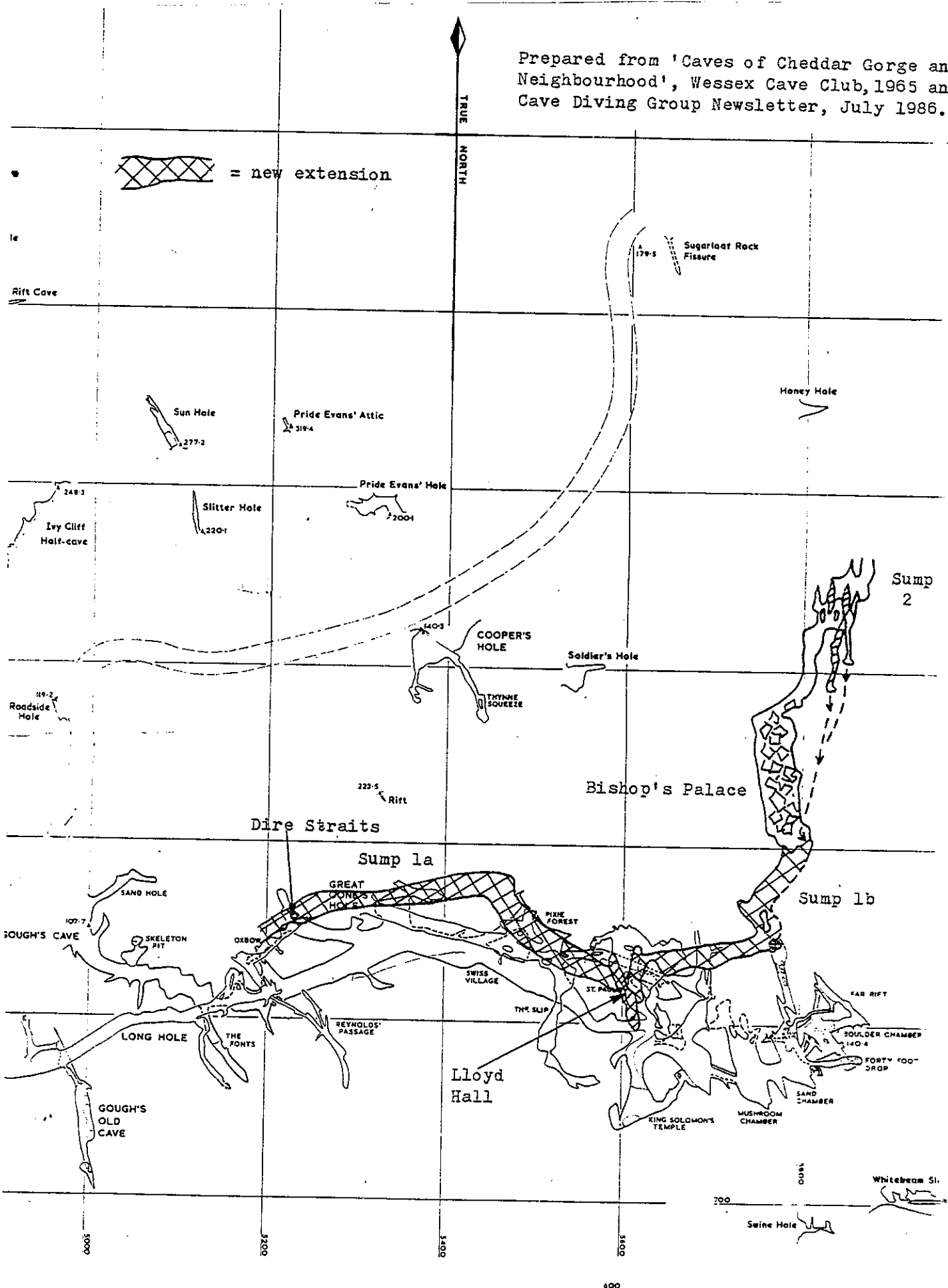
## Discoveries in Gough's Cave, Cheddar Gorge.

Over the past few months, divers have been making progress in extensions to Gough's Cave, reports the Cave Diving Group Newsletter. A tight vertical tube (Dire Straits) leads from the show cave into flooded passage (Sump 1a). After 150M approx., is an air space now named LLOYD Hall. A further 100M sump (1b) opens into a large boulder chamber, about 100M long. The end of this is Sump 2, where exploration has now started.

The plan on page 5 shows the new extensions in relation to the show cave, the road, and Cooper's Hole.

THE NEW EXTENSIONS IN GOUGH'S CAVE, SHOWN IN RELATION TO OTHER CAVES AND SURFACE FEATURES.

Prepared from 'Caves of Cheddar Gorge and Neighbourhood', Wessex Cave Club, 1965 and Cave Diving Group Newsletter, July 1986.





MCG GETS ME DOWN!

There are still plenty of sweatshirts for sale plus the new 'MCG gets me down' T-shirts, all in many sizes and colours.

If you want to fly the flag for the club then Gordon Lister is the man to see.

He will have a selection of T-shirts at the Mawson Arms on Thursdays but if you want a sweatshirt could you please let him know in advance.

The T-shirts are £3.50 each

The sweatshirts are £6 each.

Re: Club S.R.T. Rope and Rope Testing.

Dear Editor,

It was with a degree of horror that I learnt of the sale of old Club S.R.T. rope. Although the advert in our newsletter said "ideal tow-rope or washing line", I was not convinced that this was how it would all end up.

Unfortunately my fears were realised, as I heard first hand of people buying this rope for use underground as lifeline etc, and even to hang their life on.

These people have been further misguided by some published results of some very unscientific and misrepresentative tests done on the so called MCG rope tester.

I attended an S.R.T. course at Whernside Manor (along with some of the present committee) and it was stressed most strongly that any caving equipment used to support life eg. karabiners, ropes, harnesses, etc be destroyed once its safe working life has expired. Generally the safe working life of S.R.T. rope is three years irrespective of wear, according that is to the manufacturers and reliable caving sources which I trust.

As for the testing of rope by our Club, it is my feeling and that of others involved in serious S.R.T., that merely to remove 2M from the end of a rope length and test it to destruction tells you nothing about the remainder. Which could have suffered serious abrasion of the sheath (the component on which you climb) or a crushing of the core (the main strength of the rope on which your life hangs). Along with a whole host of other types of damage which can occur but not easily spotted until you perhaps abseil past them. Therefore at the end of the day the only answer to rope testing for us is to examine scrupulously by hand the entire length of a rope, looking for abrasions etc, and abnormalities in the core. This procedure should be followed before and after any trip. Boring and time consuming I know but it could save lives.

We have learnt by this procedure of the dangers of Club owned S.R.T. rope and what can happen due to neglect. Some rope could not even be used on the first trip to Majorca, and may have been fatal if we did (where are those ropes now?).

So don't let us be lulled into a false sense of security by the periodic testing of rope ends, and if this indifferent attitude to S.R.T. by certain members of this Club continues and is passed on by a 'sitting with Nelly' training system, someone will die.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Duckett

(The boring old fart who doesn't want a job on the committee next year)

MOVED: Carol Nunn has now moved and her new address is - 3 Bramley Court, Barrs Court, Warmley, Bristol, BS15 7AZ. Tel: 0272 604 344

# OTTER HOLE – third time lucky...

... the previous trips were cancelled at the last minute due to high tides flooding the entrance series.

Ian McK and Geoff B picked me up at 4.30 on Sunday morning and we set off for Chepstow. We had arranged to meet the others at 6.30am in the forest car park above Otter Hole. Pat Walsh, Alan Melon, Roger Wallington and Mike Lovell pulled into the car park only a couple of minutes behind us.

Pat and Co had stopped en-route at a service station and had an extremely greasy fry-up but Ian, Geoff and I had brought sarnies and hot drinks. Breakfast done and caving gear donned we set off to the cave...and got lost! We must have lost an hour finding the cave entrance and had got hot and tired tramping up hill and down dale in wetsuits. When we finally found the right track we met three other cavers on their way back from the cave covered in a thick and uniform layer of mud from head to toe. Oh dear! what have I let myself in for?

I was a bit concerned for Geoff as a few days earlier he'd had an acute attack of appendicitis and was rushed to hospital where they were ready to operate. He managed to persuade them to delay it until the next morning by which time the pain had stopped and as he didn't want to miss the Otter Hole trip or ruin the Spanish caving holiday he talked them into releasing him. He had had a lot of pain, had a very high temperature, lost a day's food and a night's sleep - but you know Geoff! In my work I use a scalpel (no, I'm not a brain surgeon) and I was tempted to put it in my ammo box just in case but decided I wouldn't know what to do anyway.

I thought people were joking when they told of an hours crawl through glutinous, muddy bedding plane - they weren't! but going down is marginally better than coming up as gravity and muddy lubrication helps you on your way.

We reached the sump at about 8.30am. It was filling up fast as, being late, the tide was coming in. It was an eerie feeling once we were through to the other side and the sump had closed knowing we were then cut off totally from the outside world for up to ten hours.

Route-finding is quite easy; at first you follow the rescue tube, then a cable

which you only leave a couple of times when it disappears under a boulder ruckle that you have to climb over or through.

Beyond the sump is a muddy climb up a bank to the right then another muddy passage leads to an iron ladder that having climbed, found it wasn't fixed. I treated it with more respect on the way back! More muddy crawling and a drop led to the stream where we spent a few minutes trying to wash some of the mud off which seemed to be stuck on with super-glue. The streamway was a pleasant treat after the mud.

A squeeze through a choke led to the only ladder pitch which took us back to the stream. Straight on led to Sump 2 which we had a look at then went on upwards. Many more ruckles, squeezes, climbs and rifts finally led us to a large chamber with the most magnificent curtains I have ever seen - absolutely enormous.

I thought this was it but there was even more to come. Not far on past this chamber we came to the Hall of Thirty which has to be seen to be believed. I couldn't take in what I was seeing as there were so many shapes and colours, and so huge. These giant stal bosses came in shades of white, blue, green, red, yellow, orange and black, every one different and beautiful. Climbing up the side of the chamber, following the tapes to the top, you get an even better view.

Going on and picking your way through the various formations via the tapes you come to a watering hole; a collection of buckets and mugs catching dripping water. We stopped here for lunch - corned beef and chocolate bars with lots of water.

Time was running out by now but we decided to go on to Straw Chamber. After two abortive attempts to find the route, Ian, Alan and I decided to use the time to take photos in the Hall of Thirty. The others re-joined us half an hour later after a third attempt had failed to find Straw Chamber. I was a bit disappointed but it's a good excuse to go another time!

We all got back to the sump without mishap to find we'd timed it nicely. The

◁ 7

sump had only a few inches of water in it and was still flowing out. Time for a few more piccies then off to the muddy crawl and out. By this time Geoff's experiences of the previous few days were beginning to tell although by now we were all pretty tired.

Ian and I went to explore a bit and found the old fossil stream passage and about 250yds around the cliff and a steep drop to the River Wye we found the resurgence which for me completed the trip. When we got to the hosing down area (a water pipe which flows into an old bath) we found Geoff, too exhausted to pull his wetsuit off, reclining in the bath, boots, helmet and all. A really funny sight with a look of absolute bliss on his muddy face.

The only way to get clean is to strip off wetsuits and wash everything in the bath (a scrubbing brush is provided) and use the water pipe as a shower, but my goodness - is it cold?! (or words to that effect!)

We walked back to the cars in our undies and carried our gear not expecting to see anyone - but oh no. There was a large party of picnickers and as we passed them I was told by Alan, "Do you know you've got a hole in your knickers?". What dignity I had left (not much) went to the wind so I thought - what the hell! They didn't seem at all bothered by this tea-time treat of motley, scantily-clad cavers.

We dried, put on clean clothes, had hot soup then went to find a pub for a well-deserved drink and a hot meal.

A memorable trip I will never forget and can't wait to do again.

Yvonne Ward.

## NEW ROPES

The club now has a well stocked Tackle Store. All, except a couple of the longest and least used, of the hawser laid ropes have been replaced with a mixture of static and dynamic kernmantel ropes of three types:

1. Troll Aquaguard 10.5mm - Static
2. Beal Speleo Rope 10.5mm - Static
3. Cousin Climbing Rope 11mm - Dynamic

Cut to various lengths (many thanks to Jon Roberts for help with this task), the ropes have all been marked alphabetically.

An inventory has been placed on the Tackle store wall. The ropes are stored from left to right alphabetically, with shorter lengths on the left.

Each rope is marked M.C.G., code letter, date and length. Lengths are in feet and an allowance has been made for shrinkage

The ropes are provided as lifelines for ladder/lifeline caving. One dynamic rope has been kept separate for underground climbing.

Members will be able to select a static or dynamic rope as is their preference.

A few rope slings have been provided and numbered 51 onwards. These are useful for arranging double-lifelines. (WIRE TETHERS SHOULD NOT BE USED TO BELAY LIFELINES. The wire will not take shock-loads and the C-links are even weaker).

A new booking-out system will be found in in the book: Date Ladder Rope Other Borrower Returned Numbers Numbers Tackle.

It is no longer necessary to use the proforma on the back of the destination board tickets. Merely fill in the ladder numbers or rope letters, together with date etc in the Tackle Store book.

We now have an excellently stocked Tackle Store - lets keep it that way. Please ensure:

1. Proper use of tackle underground.
2. All tackle is washed after use.
3. Tackle sacks are used.
4. No ropes put near the battery charger or next to harmful chemicals.

Remember your, or someone else's life could depend on it!

Alan Dougherty  
Tackle Officer

### Bob Speleo β



FROM A RECENT TRIP  
TO SINGING RIVER.



# Are you batty about Bats?

Elaine Davenport -  
The Times 12/1/86

Well, whether you are or not - read on ...

In just three years, a maverick US scientist has virtually rehabilitated the image of bats. If you think that bats are rabid, dirty and blind, and get tangled in long hair, Dr Merlin Tuttle has news for you.

Most bats - order Chiroptera - are harmless and highly beneficial, both ecologically and economically, says Tuttle. They maintain entire ecosystems and sustain hundreds of millions of dollars worth of crops by dispersing seeds and pollinating plants. They eat tons of night-flying insects, such as mosquitoes, and their guano is one of the world's best fertilisers.

To spread his message, Tuttle founded Bat Conservation International three years ago and has, he says, "made progress far beyond fantasy land". He and Zurie, his pet African straw-coloured fruit bat, have appeared on many major US TV network programmes including the NBC Today show and David Letterman's late-night talk show. As the interviewer pets the bright-eyed, furry bat Tuttle puts over his message. "This guy opens more doors," says Tuttle. "When you meet him and see what he's like, you realise how vast the difference between our preconceptions and reality is."

The number of influential people now serving as directors of Tuttle's bat conservation organisation attests to the cause's advance. They include the president of Bacardi, the rum firm, which uses the bat as a trademark, the president of the US National Geographic Society, and a secretary emeritus of the Smithsonian Institute. "A totally different outlook on bats is getting into everything from children's books to college textbooks," says Tuttle.

Articles on the true nature of bats have appeared in America's leading newspapers and magazines. In 1983, BBC TV took up the cause with an award-winning Living Planet programme featuring Tuttle's research on Panamanian frog-eating bats. Last year the National Geographic Society produced a TV

special about bats watched by 20m Americans and in May this year National Geographic Magazine is scheduled to run 20 pages, complete with fold-out and cover, on bats. "It's the biggest promotion of natural history they have done in years," says Tuttle.

"They're all coming to us for information. One thing that has always encouraged me was that 80% to 90% of people calling me in panic on the phone go away liking bats out of just being introduced. The problem is simply that we fear most what we understand least."

Bat Conservation International has 800 members in 24 countries, some of which have passed laws to protect bats, Britain among them. Europe overall is more attuned than the US to bats, with bat-houses in gardens a much more common sight here. In Asia bats are often associated with good luck, and the Chinese word for bat, "fu", means happiness. In the US, to Tuttle's chagrin, bats often symbolise evil.

The problems still far out-weigh the successes. "Bats are misunderstood and killed nearly everywhere, and their populations are declining at alarming rates," says Tuttle. At Eagle Creek Cave in Arizona, for example, a 1960s population of 30m bats has been reduced to 30,000. The same scale of decrease has occurred at Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, probably the best known US site for bat-watching. Five species of US bats have been declared endangered, and the same trend is seen in Poland and West Germany.

In Brazil, more than 8,000 caves have been destroyed due to "poorly managed vampire control programmes," according to Tuttle. "The potential for disastrous consequences to tropical forests and their associated economies is enormous.

Tuttle is currently in the South Pacific working on bat conservation. "The mayor of Sydney called to say the flying foxes of New South Wales are in danger unless I come," says Tuttle. In

from p9

Queensland, too, these fruit bats are the major pollinators of Australia's hardwood forest, says Tuttle, yet are being killed because they are thought a menace to the commercial fruit industry.

Bats are hunted as meat for dinner plates in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. In Guam, Tuttle will assist the US Fish and Wildlife Service in controlling the restaurant trade in flying foxes.

Tuttle runs Bat Conservation International at nights and on weekends from the Milwaukee Public Museum, where he is curator of mammals.

This spring he is likely to move to Austin, Texas, where the University of Texas has given Tuttle visiting scholar status and work space. Just south of Austin is Bracken Cave, home to 20m bats. The cave's owners have donated it to the Texas Nature Conservancy with the stipulation that Bat Conservation International uses it for educational purposes.

"I can accept the graduate students from all over the world who want to work with me if I move to Austin," says Tuttle. "If I succeed with bats, there will far-reaching ramifications for conservation in general.

"When I started, conservationists considered bats too unpopular to be helped. If I can succeed with an organisation devoted to one of the least-liked animals in the world, that's going to give courage to a lot of others trying to save other non-glamorous animals."

### MALLORCA 1986/87

The 1986/87 MCG winter expedition will take place for the third successive year on the Island of Mallorca.

The team consisting of: Andy Beare, Leslie Robbins, Ian Parry, Richard Stansfield, Martin Rowe and Neil Hutchinson, will be leaving on December 24th and returning on January 7th.

Aims for this years expedition include the further exploration and surveying of Cova Con Sion, looking at possibly high level continuations of Avenc S'Aigo, and undertaking extended trips to the more inaccessible mountain areas, in order to visit some of the less frequented vertical caves and investigate various areas for new systems.

Also planned are a few lengthy photographic trips so watch this space for details of the next slide show!

Neil Hutchinson

### XMAS PARTY

The Xmas party is still taking place at Nordrach Cottage on December 13th but another party is also being planned for December 14th down a cave that has yet to be decided (possibly Banwell Bone Cave or East Twin Swallett). There will be a barrel and wine boxes at the cottage and some food (the surplus will be taken to the cave party) but as we don't know how many to cater for we would be grateful if those who come could bring some item of party food. We also hope to have some live music but in case our musicians are unable to come perhaps you could bring a few of your favourite tapes. If you have any queries please contact Gordon Lister.

### STOP PRESS

There will be an

ILLUSTRATED LECTURE

on

DAREN CILAU, (and other progress on Uragattock)

by

CLIVE GARDNER

at 8:30 pm, Thursday 8th January 87, Manson Arms.

## BOB SPELIO.β

