

MCG NEWS

September 1987 No. 195

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP



SEEING RED: Old telephone boxes are being put up at Nordrach Cottage by request of the MCG

Phoney Goings-on at MCG

Following a survey of the membership, it was found that 40% of members want a phone at the cottage, 40% do not and 20% dont know. The committee, having given thought to this have acquired 48 ex-British Telecom red boxes which have been installed on the new land. Each member who wants a phone has been allocated a box and a personal number. The committee will monitor, over a period of twelve months, the number of calls made to and by each member who wanted a phone. At the end of the twelve months, 47 of the boxes will be converted to other uses (tackle stores, sheds, showers, family rooms, etc) and the most popular line will be installed in the cottage. The member allocated to this line will be held responsible for all incoming calls and is expected to answer any calls received after 1.00am. For your number phone Bob Speleo on Upper Flood 1234

SPECIAL DATE

1987 MEETS PROGRAMME

26 SEP	MENDIP	HALF YEARLY	YVONNE WARD	0252-876783
17 OCT	YORKSHIRE	RIFT POT	PADDY NEWMAN	-
7 NOV	MENDIP	ST CUTHBERTS	BRIAN TERRY	0533 432533
21 NOV	WALES	DAREN CILAU	IAN PARRY	0296 87795
5 DEC	MENDIP	BLACKMOOR MASTER CAKE	HELEN MIRIAM	01 393 3955
19 DEC	MAJORCA	VARIETY	NEIL HUTCHINSON	01 267 1005

Notes: Entry at 5 Dec does read cake, not cave.

CAVING ACCOMODATION is available at the MCG, Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse - on - Mendip, Blagdon, Bristol, BS18 6XW. Map ref: NGR 5147.5606 OS 1:50,000 Sheet 182.

Cottage fees: (per night) Probationary, Associate, Full and Hon. members £1.25
 Members children £1.25
 Reciprocal members (SWCC, NPC) £1.25
 Guest clubs and members guests £1.75

Day fees: Members using any cottage facilities (tackle, showers, etc) are asked to make a reasonable donation via the donation box.

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 and Fullers Brewery. Nearest buses: 290 Chiswick Lane South and 27, 91, 237, 267, 290, E3, E4 in Chiswick High Road. Nearest tube: Turnham Green.



Committee...

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COTTAGE BOOKINGS

21 - 25 Sep	RNAS	(11)
26 / 27 Sep	HALF YEARLY	
28 Sep - 2 Oct	Unicorn	(24)
3 / 4 Oct	Wolverhampton	(12)
5 - 9 Oct	Unicorn	(24)
12 - 16 Oct	Unicorn	(24)
31 Oct - 1 Nov	A. Mellon	(12)
2 - 6 Nov	RNAS	(19)
16 - 20 Nov	RNAS	(19)
7 - 11 Dec	RNAS	(19)

Cottage doings



COTTAGE IMPROVEMENT

Our present building is the fourth MCG cottage at Nordrach. The original cottage lies derelict close by Upper Flood. Number two can be seen behind the Fry's lorries and is now a workshop. Mark III was built by members on the present site and demolished by a gas explosion on Dec. 31st 1979. The current Nordrach Cottage is almost identical to the third but was contracted out to a builder with the insurance money from mark III. Unfortunately, we seem to have contracted out our willingness to keep Nordrach Cottage in good repair at the same time and after five years of use it is becoming a little untidy.

We are therefore reviving an old MCG tradition - the COTTAGE WORKING WEEK-END. Once popular as the ideal excuse to avoid caving, the inaugural meeting of the Workers Aiding Nordrach Cottage's Environmental Rehabilitation Society (WANCERS) will be held on Mendip on 26/27th September (Half yearly weekend).

To help you decide what you will be doing to help on this date, here is the list of jobs to be done:

COTTAGE JOBS

LOUNGE:

Sweep chimney

KITCHEN:

Replace broken Knobs on cooker & grill
Clean shelves thoroughly
Reseal around sink
Repair window latch

CHARGING AREA:

Shorten door under charger

CHANGING ROOM & SHOWERS:

Polyfill cracks
Screw down slat on bench

ENTRANCE HALL:

Clean name plate on door
Repair lock on letter box
Clear out under stairs cupboard

JOBS IN ALL ROOMS:

Dusting & spring cleaning
Clean windows
Sweep & clean floors
Wash down woodwork

OUTDOORS:

Clean out gutters
Clean windows
Remove tools from gas store to shed
Clear gulley from hosing-down area

LOFT:

Remove large items to shed

MEDIUM BEDROOM:

Polyfill cracks in plaster
Remove hardboard to shed
Fasten bunks to wall

SMALL BEDROOM:

Polyfill cracks in plaster
Fasten bunks to wall

LARGE BEDROOM:

Polyfill cracks in chimney wall
Fasten bunks to wall

LANDING AND STAIRCASE:

Polyfill cracks in plaster

LIBRARY:

Put up new shelving
Treat wall for damp
Polyfill cracks in plaster
Provide extra support for long shelf

CONGRATULATIONS AT THE DOUBLE.....

go first to Steve and Kate (ex-editor) Taylor on the birth of a daughter who is named Eleanor Kate and was born on June 25th and weighed 6lbs....

... also to John and Helen Miriam on the birth of a son who is named Andrew David and was born on August 2nd and weighed 6lb - 8oz.

WELCOME.....

to a new member - Tim Bethune, whose address I don't know yet but lives somewhere on Mendip.

DEADLINE.....

for newsletter No. 196 is Oct. 20th.

MENDIP RESCUE ORGANISATION

Report by the Hon. Secretary and Treasurer for the Year ending 31st December 1986.

The year will be mainly remembered for the tragic death of Dave Anderson of the CRO who died whilst taking part in a cave rescue at Rowten Pot, Yorkshire, on the morning of Sunday 23rd March 1986. Dave was the first cave rescuer to be killed in action in this country. He was known to many of us on Mendip and his loss cast a shadow over our Jubilee celebrations. It was a bitter-sweet year for caving on Mendip itself as it began with the death of Atilla Kurucz down Longwood Swallet yet ended with happy memories of the fun and festivities of our Fiftieth Birthday Party weekend at Priddy held in September. It was good to have something to celebrate at the time since caving there was at a low ebb for almost eight months owing to the closure of the major cave systems in the village. The long dispute between local landowners and the Nature Conservancy Council was on the way to being resolved by December and we were soon back in business.

Call-outs were unusually bunched at the beginning and end of the year with a summer lull. The accompanying log of each incident gives the details. As traditional on Mendip it includes the names of all taking part in rescues. There are two good reasons for this: first, and most importantly, MRO is not a separate rescue service but part of the local caving community and relies on experienced cavers from the clubs; second, all who go underground to help must be recorded for insurance purposes. It's the best way of thanking and recording the work of the many who willingly support fellow cavers in trouble.

We retain close links with other rescue teams through the British Cave Rescue Council and South West England Rescue Association. I am very grateful to the wardens who regularly attend the distant meetings of both bodies so that our voice is heard beyond Mendip. Our divers also went to a national symposium on the problems of rescuing cave divers arranged by John Cordingley in Derbyshire. It was a useful weekend and we look forward to the publication of the proceedings, particularly as MRO was first in this field with the Normalair Sump Rescue Apparatus in the late fifties. At that time, we were concerned about the problems of foul air as well as the possibility of distant rescues beyond the far sumps in Swildons. Now there are much longer and deeper sumps to contend with, of course. The logistics alone of a rescue from the far reaches of Wookey Hole Caves would be formidable. And now there is the underground river at Cheddar to reckon with. A major exercise through the sumps in Swildons was organised by the Wessex Cave Club on 27th April, whilst Bob Drake and Jeff Price arranged a very successful training session for the CDG with the Kirby Morgan sump rescue apparatus in Wookey Hole over the Jubilee weekend in September. Bob's encouraging report of this practice is appended for the record.

Over the years, we have concentrated upon getting our equipment right and ensuring that call-outs are responded to quickly. Active cavers with professional skills applicable to the many facets of rescues make everything work effectively. We prefer this approach rather than one which sets up special rescue teams, for the next step in this direction is a service divorced from those who go caving. The threats in South Wales created by bids from the Fire Brigades there to be called out for cave rescues are ominous even if ludicrously absurd in practical terms. We will support those resisting such changes because, unlike fire services, we have only the best interests of those going caving to consider. Both the Police and Fire Brigade in Avon and Somerset recognise that cavers are the best people to rescue those in trouble underground. We have co-operated successfully over the years on Mendip and are particularly grateful to the Chief Constable, Mr Ronald Broome, and the Chief Fire Officer of Somerset, Mr Nigel Musselwhite for their support in such matters. They regard continuity, commitment and consistency as crucial and cave rescuers must safeguard these standards to remain indispensable.

A good example of co-operation with the Police has been the development of the Search and Rescue Radios now in use; we have provided and serviced the sets and they have covered the necessary licence fees. We must also thank Bob Whitaker and the Wessex Water Authority for great help in up-dating our radios this year and to Eric Dunford for developing the system. Brian Prewer has improved our ability to communicate with rescue teams underground by making "through the rock" cave to surface telephones from plans kindly provided by Bob Williams. Rescuers in Yorkshire have been using "Molephones" for some while; in South Wales they have the "Ogofphone", and now MRO has the "Grunterphone".

A big attraction of the Jubilee Celebrations was the opportunity for cavers to abseil of the High Rock in Cheddar Gorge. Sandra Lee and Chris Bradshaw of Cheddar Caves kindly made the arrangements and over a hundred descents were logged throughout the day. Tim Large and Tony Jarratt provided the rope with welcome financial support from the Bristol Exploration Club. The Birthday Party at Priddy Village Hall was masterminded by Glyn Bolt and his helpers from the Wessex Cave Club. Alison Moody and her team of assistants provided a feast to remember. The whole occasion was well supported and enjoyed; every club took part and letters of thanks were sent to over fifty people who helped to make the weekend a success.

But the passage of time has another side, of course, and I must record the resignations of three long serving wardens; Phillip Davies, Brian Woodward and Mike Palmer. Phil was a warden for over thirty years and was especially active as a cave diver during the fifties and early sixties. Brian succeeded him as one of the leading cavers and divers of the seventies on Mendip. We valued their involvement, and I personally have enjoyed their company on mountains and in caves around this country and abroad over the years. Their influence and friendship remain as strong as ever and they are still willing to help if needed. Recollections of Mike Palmer go back to school days almost shared together in Wells.

I will close with two examples of the support that MRO receives from Mendip Cavers. Over Christmas, Richard Stevenson and Rob Palmer gave illustrated talks about the "Cheddar River" and the "Blue Holes" in aid of MRO funds and the evening was much enjoyed, particularly by Bill Bufton and his family for Bill was one of the original hard hat cave divers back in 1935. The years since then have been enlivened on Mendip by characters such as Alfie Collins and his songs. He has retired but continues to turn up and give us the benefit of his lyrical talents. Such examples show how things can be done without the need for grants. Cave rescue is up to us.

GRUANIAN Potholer lost in river caves

OVERSEAS

NEWS

By David Rose

Cave rescuers were searching for a missing British potholer last night more than a kilometre underground in the Gouffre Berger near Grenoble, France.

Alex Pitcher, aged 17, from Manchester, went missing from a party of 20 British cavers

who entered the system on Friday. A team of 40 French cavers had combed the extensive underground network to a depth of more than 1,000 metres without finding him, a rescue team spokesman said.

The Gouffre Berger, which is 1,148 metres (3,731 feet) deep, is one of the most popular of deep

Alpine caves among British cavers, who first explored its furthest reaches in the 1960s.

Located on the high limestone Sornin plateau in the Vercors range, the system follows the Starless River — an underground stream whose lower reaches are prone to flooding.

Potholer missing

More than 50 cave rescuers were still searching for a British potholer last night deep within the Gouffre Berger near Grenoble.

Alex Pitcher, aged 17, of New Mills, Derbyshire, was one of 20 cavers from the Stockport-based North-west Pothole Club who went into the cave on Saturday morning. The search began when he failed to return to a bivouac in one of a series of huge chambers nearly half-way down the 3,700ft deep cave.

The Gouffre Berger, no longer ranks as — particularly tough for cavers experienced in deep alpine techniques, but to reach the bottom potholers must negotiate 18 drops by abseiling and climbing on single nylon ropes.

Hopes fading for missing potholer

FRENCH rescuers admitted yesterday that hopes of finding the missing British schoolboy potholer, Alex Pitcher, alive are fading. Alex, aged 17, of New Mills, Derbyshire, disappeared in a 4,000ft deep alpine cavern near Grenoble a week ago.

Another potholer, Mr Raymond Puckman, aged 42, of Yorkley, Gloucestershire, was recovering in hospital yesterday after being trapped by a falling boulder in a cave near Chepstow, Gwent. It took rescuers more than two hours to free Mr Puckman, who suffered chest injuries.

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12/13/14/15 AUG

Potholer search ends

By a Correspondent

Rescuers searching in the French Alps for the missing British potholer Alex Pitcher have stopped scouring the 4,000-ft deep Shepherd's Chasm and are now looking above ground. They will decide this afternoon whether to continue their search.

"There is very little chance of finding him alive now," Captain Nicholas Jal of the rescue operations centre in Grenoble said yesterday. "He had very little water with him and has been without food for eight days."

Alex, aged 17, from Manchester, went missing eight days ago while potholing in the Shepherd's Chasm.

Two hundred rescuers

searched the labyrinth of caves for six days before deciding to move the operation above ground.

A few volunteers will still trek below ground but the main hunt will be above, over terrian dotted by numerous narrow, deep holes.

Everyone is baffled by the disappearance of the experienced and level-headed youth.

Captain Jal said: "All potholers are trained to leave their rucksacks behind of they become separated from the team, to give rescuers a clue. We have found no trace of any of Alex's belongings."

Alex, an experienced potholer and rock climber, was on his first Alpine expedition with a party of 30 Britons.

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE 1.

It seems that we have been here for ages, yet we are still spending most of our time (and money) on equipping and furnishing the first overseas MCG caving villa. We have joined the caving section of the "other" Toulousain aircraft manufacturer, Aérospatiale, and have managed to attend a couple of meets in Ariège.

The first was really a beginners outing on March 15th which began with a visit to the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) laboratories at Moulis, a few kilometres SW of St.Girons. Our host for the visit was the affable Directeur de Recherche, Christian Juberthie. In his company we enjoyed a tourist trip into the underground laboratory of Grotte de Moulis. This rather unremarkable cave, formed in Jurassic dolomite, had been earmarked as a laboratory back in 1948 and seemed to specialise in the breeding and study of the proteus - the only European truly cave-dwelling vertebrate. The visit covered only a small part of the cave which claims +130m of upward development and 2km length.

Following an agreeable picnic lunch we paid a fleeting visit to a local bar before slogging up a hillside to find what we could best translate as "not the Grotte de St. Catherine". This small cave also appeared to be formed in dolomite and was quite nicely decorated; most notable were large clusters of calcite (?) flowers and curved crystalline formations. A pleasant hour-or-so's amusement was had by all.

A few weeks later, April 26th, we had a more interesting trip to the Gouffre des Corbeaux situated high up on a plateau near Bélesta, SE of Foix, near the tiny hamlet of Gélât. A few minutes walk brought us to the edge of a sizeable hole in the ground - about 50m x 25m in plan and 35m deep.

A rather nice free-hanging pitch landed at the top of an almighty boulder slope which plunged on down to -92m, terminating the large Salle Martel. A hole between wall and boulders opened at an 11m pitch soon followed by another of similar depth.

More or less horizontal progress ensued through the Salle des Etudiants and into Salle des Chauves-souris with genuine bats dangling from various projections. Avoiding obvious holes in the floor we followed a climb up a 10m chimney. Then ensued a sporting upward continuation to reach a decorated top aven. A small hole in the floor led on down to a 6m pitch followed by one of 17m. Here, we stopped and set off back without descending a further 33m pitch to a lake.

The return trip proved how out-of-condition we were and how very much we needed to brush-up our SRT skills. Ascending the great boulder slope out of Salle Martel was less than easy because the slope had a nasty habit of moving downwards faster than we moved upwards. By comparison, the 30m entrance pitch was rather restful.

By normal Pyrenean standards, the trip was rather sporting. All pitches used SRT methods and two incidents stand out as memorable.

Halfway up the 17m pitch, Tony noticed that the rope had become snagged behind a thin flake of calcite, actually being held out-of-line by a small tooth of rock which looked rather sharp. Equally disturbing was the fact that the rope was being held behind, and only inches away from, a long "Sword of Damocles" stalactite.

The practical solution to the dilemma was to have a line lowered from above, clip on and transfer enough body weight to slacken the main rope enough to un snag it.

A second incident highlighted the somewhat sensitive nature of the Petzl "Stop". Whilst abseiling down the 15m chimney, Denise stopped about 3m off the bottom to look at a feature on a wall. Dangling, distracted, Denise accidentally touched the operating lever of the descender and completed the descent in almost free fall. The result was only a few bruises, luckily, but the occurrence does again highlight the need for 100% concentration in SRT.

Taking advantage of French bank holidays, we spent four days (28-31 May) on the Mediterranean coast at Port Vendres, near Collioure. We were in the company of our caving colleagues but all thoughts of going underground were overshadowed by diving and the protracted nature of the eating arrangements. "First, catch your octopus.." would have been a pertinent start to one recipe enjoyed by (almost) all.

The Med is a highly attractive source of amusement and Tony was lucky enough to "have a go" at diving, being fitted out with the appropriate gear and duly launched under instruction. It was a marvellous experience to spend 15 minutes in the clear water swimming amongst all sorts of almost tropical-looking fish and seaweed - even a cuttle-fish came within arm's reach.

We are beginning to move around more since becoming more established here in Blagnac. The weather is warming up as summer gets into first gear; a reading of 32°C was made on our terrasse only a couple of days ago. Naturally, our horizons will widen as our local knowledge improves, but we are already compiling a mental shortlist of places to see and things to do.

Any group members finding themselves in this district are most welcome to stop over at 4 rue Pecette, although notice of an impending visit would be appreciated a few weeks in advance.

Tony & Denise

NORBERT CASTERET 1897-1987

The famous French caver, Norbert Casteret, one of the founders of modern speleology, died during the night of 20th & 21st July 1987, after a long illness. He was 90 yrs old.

Norbert Casteret was born at St. Martory, near Saint-Gaudens (Haute Garonne) on the 19th August 1897. He devoted his life to the study and exploration of caves.

He was a very recognisable figure. He was a small, slim man. Beneath his helmet and lamp could be seen a stern face and long nose on which rested a small pair of glasses. Casteret became a popular personality not only in France but also around the world.

Norbert Casteret spent all his life studying caves and exploring more than one thousand of them in the Pyrenees, Europe, Africa and America. He did alot of this work at first on his own, then with his wife Elisabeth (one of the first women cavers) until her death in 1940.

He discovered six prehistoric caverenes in the Pyenees containing paintings and drawings. The best known of these is Montespan which has the oldest known statues in the world.

Also attributed to Casteret are the discovery and exploration of the following caves; la Cigalère with its 52 waterfalls; the Gouffre Martel in Ariège; the Gouffre Fregato in the Moroccan Atlas Mountains. The exploration of the Gouffre de la Henne-Morte and Pierre-Saint-Martin (in which Marcel Loubens died in 1952);

the exploration of the Reseau Trombe at the Coume- Ouarnède, in the Arbas Massif (this system is now more than 60km long). In 1931 he discovered the true source of the river Garonne in the Maladetta Massif on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees. Casteret also spent many years studying the lives of bats.

This many talented figure was also the author of thirty books, translated into seventeen languages. Casteret's many achievements were due to his intelligence, love of adventure and his courage.

In 1915 he volunteered to fight in the Great War and the helmet he wore then also served as his caving helmet for many years. This famous caver has left his mark on his time, and his many talents were well recognised. During his lifetime he received many awards for his work in cave exploration, scientific research and for his writing. In 1975 he was awarded the honour of Commandeur dans L'Ordre de la Légion d'Honneur, which is one of the highest honours a Frenchman can receive. But it is said, that of all these awards, the one he cherished most was the one he received for cave rescue.

The simple funeral service took place on Wednesday, July 22nd at Saint-Gaudens and he was buried at the cemetery at Auzas.

This report was compiled using some extracts from the reports of his death in La Dépêche du Midi and Radio France Toulouse.

SAFETY NOTES

Now that we all know how to care for group rope (see N/L 194) here is a brief note on care of other items of group tackle.

WIRE LADDERS

These are robust, being constructed from steel and duralumin. This does not mean that they are maintenance free. In use, bad technique can ruin a ladder. To avoid this, always rig ladders so that rungs and wires are not damaged:

- a) always use a spreader when the ladder is belayed from a krab or bolt. This avoids overstressing the end tails of the ladder.
- b) never support a ladder by a rung.
- c) always avoid passing the ladder wires over sharp edges or too small a radius - this causes kinking.

MAINTENANCE

All that is required is careful washing and drying after use to remove mud. After cleaning, inspect for damage and corrosion.

COILING

Any method which is neat, simple and does not stress the wires is OK. For caving, a 'tight coil' is best to avoid snagging. However, repeated flexing of the tails will damage them and it is better to take a loosely coiled ladder and carry it in a tackle sack.

STORAGE

The only acceptable way of storing a ladder is loosely rolled into coils with the ends unfastened.

TETHERS / WIRE BELAYS

WARNING: NEVER USE WIRE TETHERS AS PART OF A LIFELINE SYSTEM - USE ROPE BELAYS.

The only use for wire belays is to belay a ladder to an anchor point.

In use, avoid sharp points and bends over too small a radius which will permanently kink the wire. Belays for ladders are rarely if ever backed up - using a kinked wire belay in such a situation can be fatal.

After use, wash and dry wire belays and inspect for damage or corrosion. Withdraw any damaged or kinked wires and pass to the tacklemaster.

There is only one way to store a long wire belay-- wound into coils of about 15cm with the free end wrapped around the coil a few times and the C-links joined. Very short wire belays should not be coiled - hang them up by the eye splice.

Tightly coiling a wire belay will permanently kink the wire - it will then be of no use.

SPREADERS

Used to anchor ladders to a point belay such as a bolt. Washing and drying and a quick inspection is all the care and attention they require.

TACKLE SACKS

These should be washed after use. If hung upside down they can be returned immediately to the tackle store.

ACCESS TO GROUP TACKLE

Only full members have access to tackle. Always keep the tackle store locked.

Tackle is not to be loaned out to non-members under any circumstances.

Probationary members may have access to tackle but must be advised by a full member.

FURTHER READING

Caving Practice and Equipment (ed. JUDSON) especially ppl9-29 and pp59-67.
SRT Elliot pp45-54.

Cavemen may have been cannibals

EVIDENCE OF Stone Age burial rituals — possibly including cannibalism — have been unearthed by archaeologists in a cave in Cheddar Gorge, Somerset.

Human bones with cut marks, discovered last week inside Gough's Cave, are being examined microscopically by scientists at the British Museum.

Recent excavations by Lancaster University and Natural History Museum scientists at Gough's have yielded an almost complete human lower jaw and part of an upper jaw — both probably from a 12-year-old boy — the base of a human skull, and various other human bone fragments, all thought to date from 11,000 to 16,000 BC.

Scientists using powerful microscopes have found cut marks inflicted with stone tools at the base of the skull and on the upper jaw and lower jaw fragments.

It is the first time that cut marks have been found on human bones in Britain.

Archaeologists believe the marks indicate that the skull's Stone Age "owner" had his head removed after death, and that the child's tongue may have been removed — again after death.

There is also the possibility that the flesh was systematically and ritually removed from the bones after death.

Whether these activities were for ritual cannibalistic purposes or were part of some pre-burial ritual practice — possibly involving a skull cult — is now a matter of speculation among the archaeologists.

By David Keys

Relatively modern parallels, with probably very ancient origins, exist for both ritual cannibalism and pre-burial ritual flesh removal.

The latter practice was an important feature of body disposal rituals where the flesh and broken bones are left for the vultures and the elements.

The former activity is believed to have occurred in many parts of the world, while the latter practice occurred in some North American Indian cultures and in Tibet.

The practice of ritual tongue removal was reported to have been practised on some Pacific islands until the last century.

The new Cheddar discoveries come 60 years after other human bones of similar antiquity — including a four-year-old child's skull — were unearthed in 1927. No cut marks were found on the 1927 items.

The new bones were discovered last week on the north side of the cavern in an area passed by tourists visiting Gough's Cave, and were found together with a mammoth ivory rod — probably a javelin head.

Bones found now and earlier this century indicate that at least four people met their deaths or were ritually dismembered after death within the cave.

The cave was used seasonally for tens of years, and perhaps for more than 100 years, probably by a small group of family units who

(Independent — Wed 15th April 1987)

lived by hunting animals and gathering roots and berries. Scientists at the Natural History Museum, London, are analysing the animal bones found alongside the human remains.

Results show that the cave's inhabitants were hunting horse, red deer and antelope for food and skin clothes, and Arctic hare — probably for gloves and moccasin-style slippers.

Geological analysis of the dozens of Stone Age flint implements found near the human and animal bones show that the cave's inhabitants obtained the flint for their tools from the Vale of Pewsey, 50 miles away.

Flint scrapers and sewing equipment made of bone discovered previously at the site indicate that the cave was a base for hunting animals, who were probably attracted by a nearby spring and waterhole, and for processing animal hides and occasional ritual activity.

The gorge was probably of great importance for hunters as it served as a funnel through which herds of wild animals passed on their way through the Mendips.

Referring to the discovery of cut-marked human bones at Gough's Cave, Jill Cook, the British Museum's top expert on the Stone Age, said that "on present evidence, it's impossible to prove that human flesh was actually eaten".

"All we can say is that the corpses were dismembered after death and that there was a particular interest in the skull," she said.

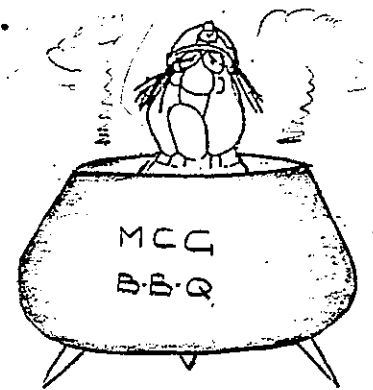
STONE AGE WITH A TOUCH OF MISCHIEF.

It is a rare occasion indeed when I do not believe everything I read in the daily newspaper. However, the article about our Stone Age ancestors practising cannibalism proved impossible to stomach. There are very few truths in this life that can be held as self-evident; one of them is that Englishmen do not eat one another, Except under the most severe provocation. The idea that a bunch of our compatriots sat around Gough's Cave eating beavers on Wednesday, Saiger antelope on Thursday and, just for a change, people on Friday, is really not on. There is a perfectly obvious explanation for it all. First, let us examine the evidence: a pile of mixed animal and human bones, all cut in the same way, several defleshed skeletons, one detongued skeleton, one human skull with scratched eye-sockets.

Now let us travel back in time to Gough's Cave 12,000yrs ago. Mrs Gough is stirring the pot. Mr Gough is fast asleep after a particularly frustrating day chasing Saiger antelopes. Rodney Gough, 16, a precocious lad, idly chewing on a bear bone, has just finished talking. "I didn't catch a word of that, Rodney," says Mrs Gough. "How many times have I told you about talking with your mouth full?"

"I said, mother, that as life goes, this is a teeny bit tedious. All this huntin', shoutin' and fishin'. I'm bored with sitting staring at the fire night after night, waiting for iron to be discovered. And all HE ever does", says Rodney, gesturing dismissively at his slumbering pater, "is lie there and give the occasional grunt".

"That is no way to talk of your father. When I was your age," says Mrs Gough, "we made our own amusement. If you're that bored, what about these bones I've been on at you all week to get buried." Rodney slouches off, gathering up the pile of bones as he goes. Mrs Gough turns to her husband. "I'm worried about Rodney, he's always reading those dreadful tablet newspapers with all those awful stories about werewolves and foreigners eating each other. If only he could find some direction. Perhaps he should move out and find his own cave. There's a very nice new development at Wookey." Cont. on p10



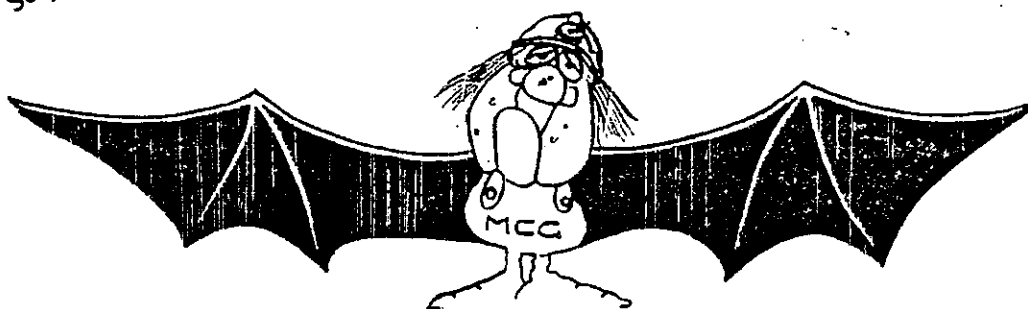
from p9

Mr Gough opens one eye, grunts, and goes back to sleep. He is dreaming of something easier to catch than beavers, hares, deer, horses and those accursed antelopes. Something slower, heavier would be nice.....

Outside, Rodney is passing Bonehenge, Grandfather's failed Theme Park which sought to make a quick profit from the remains of an unsuccessful raiding party from Manchester. Rodney, with a glint in his eye, produces his trusty stone axe and approaches the circular group of swings constructed from the unfortunate Mancunians. A short time later he is to be found outside the cave leaning on his stone shovel and wearing the beam of a momentarily-contented adolescent. "That should give those Archaeological johnnies something to think about".

Bob Speleobat
says....

GO BATTY...



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We would be very grateful for some volunteers to help with the food. If you could give your offers of help and ideas to Yvonne Ward (0252-876783) then she can make sure we don't end up with a mountain of lettuce and millions of sausage rolls!