

MCG NEWS

November 1987 No. 196

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP

UPPER FLOOD : NEW ACCESS AGREEMENT

Due to continuing conservation problems with Upper Flood it has been decided by mutual agreement between the Charterhouse Field Centre and ourselves to considerably revise the existing access arrangements. From 1st Oct'87 the following access conditions will apply :-

1. Each trip into the cave to be led by one of eight appointed MCG leaders (names given below). The key only being available to these leaders.
2. Maximum party size of four.
3. Blackmoor Log Book to be filled in after each trip.

Upper Flood leaders:-

M. Cotter	J. Beauchamp
A. Beare	N. Hutchinson
A. Dougherty	J. Mirriam
M. Hazelden	V. Simmonds

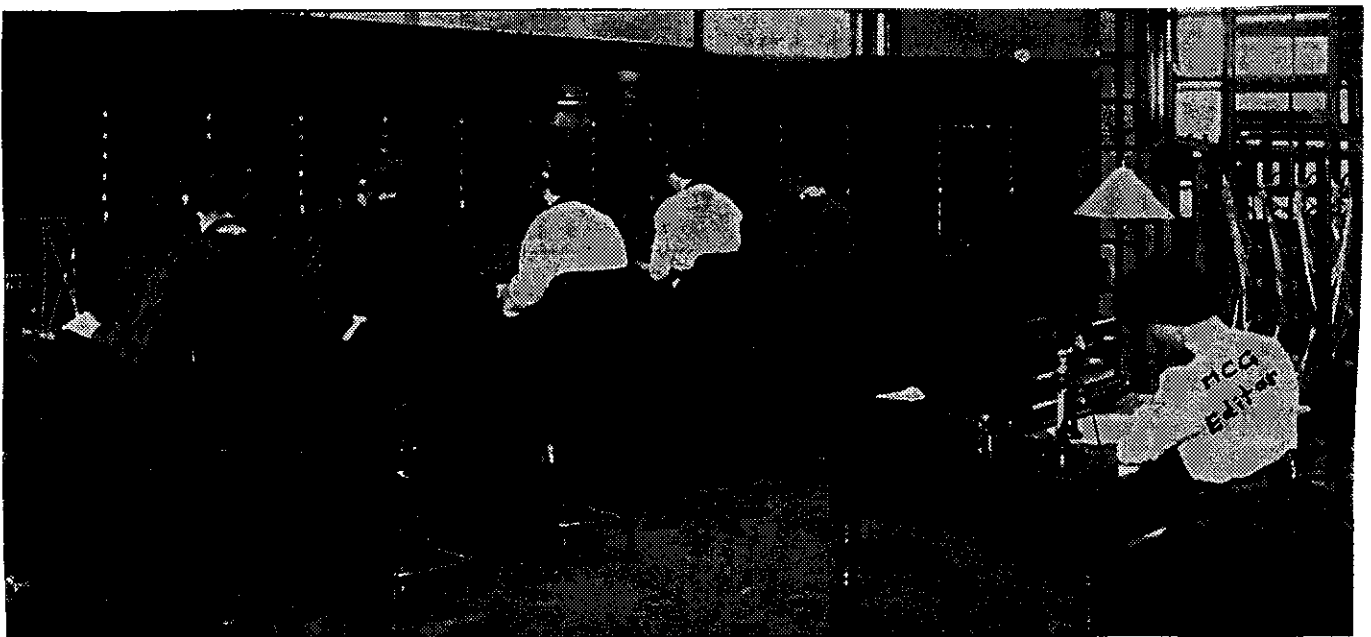
Hopefully these measures will help in preserving what is one of, if not "the" most decorated sections of stream passage on Mendip. *The Committee.*

ON A LESS SERIOUS NOTE

As you will probably notice from some of the pages inside this Newsletter, the group has acquired a word processor. This is to be used not only for the Newsletter, but also for the Journal, minutes of meetings, the address list, etc.

Our thanks go to Jon Roberts who has kindly loaned one of his old computers to the group, and to the treasurer for providing funds for software.

The computer has been installed in the shed at Nordrach, as it was too large to fit in the editor's house. For those who have not been to Mendip recently, here is a photograph of the editor and her team of data input operators busily at work on the next Newsletter.



SPECIAL DATE

1987 MEETS PROGRAMME

07 NOV	MENDIP	ST CUTHBERTS	BRIAN TERRY	0533-432533
21 NOV	S. WALES	DAREN CILAU	IAN FARRY	0296-87795
05 DEC	BLACKMOOR	MASTER CAKE	HELEN MIRIAM	01-393 3955
23 DEC	MALLORCA	VARIOUS	NEIL HUTCHINSON	01-267 1005

The entry at 5 Dec does read cake, not cave!

Cottage doings

COTTAGE BOOKINGS

2 NOV- 6 NOV	RNAS	(19)
14 NOV-15 NOV	STEVE CONQUEST	(10)
16 NOV-20 NOV	RNAS	(19)
23 NOV-27 NOV	UNICORN LEISURE	(18)
7 DEC-11 DEC	RNAS	(19)

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

COTTAGE FEES per night:	Prob., Assoc., Full and Hon. members	£1.25
	Members children	£1.25
	Reciprocal members (SWCC, NPC)	£1.25
	Guest clubs and members guests	£1.75

CAMPING FEES per night: Charged at the same rate as cottage fees.

DAY FEES: Members using any of the cottage facilities but not staying overnight, 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 9pm. 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.



SECRETARY: NEIL HUTCHINSON	01-267-1005
15H Gloucester Avenue, Camden Town, London, NW1	
TREASURER: MIKE LOVELL	0734-663747
4 Settrington Close, Loddon Park, Earley, Reading, Berks	
MEET SECRETARY: GEOFF BARTON	0932-849241
The Lodge, The Heath, Weybridge, Surrey	
TACKLEMASTER: ALAN DOUGHERTY	0934-863056
"Wynhays", Station Road, Wroughton, Nr Bristol, BS18 7JL	
COTTAGE WARDEN: JOHN BEAUCHAMP	0761-62929
St Hugh's Cottage, Charterhouse, Blagdon, Bristol, BS18 6XR	
RECORDER: IAN McKECHNIE	0932-228292
21 Denyers Close, Marshaa, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, KT12 4NG	
EDITOR: YVONNE HARP	0252-876783
15 Jesse Close, Yateley, Camberley, Surrey, GU17 7AH	
ORDINARY MEMBER: GORDON LISTER	01-579-3466
107 Seaford Road, West Ealing, London, W13	



WELCOME

...to 4 new probationary members:

Ru Wellings, Vonpitt Farm, East Harptree, Mendip, Somerset.

Brian Murliss, 1A Arundel Rd, Weston-super-Mare, Avon, BS23 2QG tel 0934-412048

Stephen Redwood, 11 West St, Banwell, BS24 6DA tel 823867

Date Sampson, 33 West St, Axbridge, Somerset.

ON THE MOVE

Adrian Duckett has moved to:
20 Meadow Court, Anchor Meadow, Cove, Farnborough, Hants, GU14 0HU tel 0252-524102

Janet Curri has moved to:
45 Hampden Rd, London N8

Vince Simmonds has moved to:
Oaktree House, Congresbury, Bristol tel Yatton 876026

Mike Carson's address is:
41 The Poynings, Richings Park, Iver, Bucks, SL0 9DS tel 0753-655143

ARMCHAIR MEETS

November 5th - Video of Gaping Gill
December 3rd - Slide show

Armchair meetings are held in the back room of the Mawson Arms, Chiswick and start at 9pm.

If you have any ideas or requests for future armchair meets, please speak to Gordon Dieter.

DEAR EDITOR,

I have been staying down at the cottage this week, and I have noticed two things- with confirmation from the Navy group.

1. Midweek cavers not paying for cottage facilities (showers and gas).
2. A certain couple sneaking in at iam and not paying for the priveledge.

yours, A. Member

FOR SALE:

New wetsuit, long-john and jacket. 5mm "Shark", size 5'-6" to 5'-8", slim (medium). Excellent value at £55. See Malcolm Cotter.

HALF YEARLY YV'S DRIPPINGS

Talking about competition between floating members....

Bryan T...y: "I'm well down on this front."

Malcolm: "It's not the front we're worried about."

Bryan T...y "ripped off" in the Foremans lounge....

Yvonne: "How can one human being contain so much wind?"

Martin: "It's like the entire committee rolled into one."

Trying to determine the size of an un-labelled wetsuit....

Malcolm: "Try it up against John Mirriam, he's slim isn't he?"

Martin: "Yes, that's because he's just had a baby!"

Filling in Vince's proving trip form....

Andy: "Tell me what the whistle signals are."

Vince: "One stop, two up, three down."

Andy: "Errr... Is that right Neil?"

Neil: "Andy, you've just rescinded your full membership!"

Gordon: "This strawberry jam tastes a bit strange."

Jani: "That's because it's home-made chutney!"

Vince: "I'd be interested in RICH BESH but I've only got 100 metres of rope!"

RAVENS WELL, BRISTOL

By Vince Simmonds and John Beauchamp

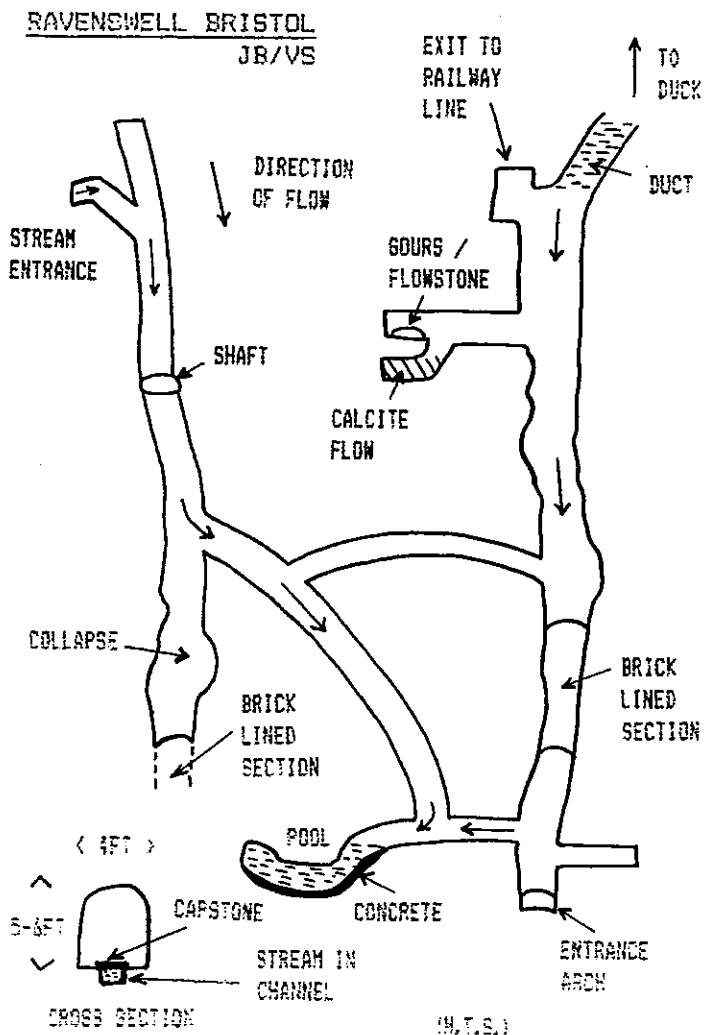
Firstly, thanks must go to the helpful chaps from BUMS who pinpointed the whereabouts of this little oddity. I must say we got some strange looks changing into saving gear in what is not really one of the most hospitable spots in Bristol. The "Well" is located on the north bank of the River Avon, high up alongside a footpath which crosses the river adjacent to the railway bridge to St Philip Marsh. The climb over the wall is straightforward but following the "path" to the entrance would be quite treacherous in wet weather- the bank slopes steeply down to the river some 40ft below.

The entrance is a 4ft squeeze through a silted arch which gains height to become a standing-room passage. Facing inwards there are three options. To the far right a small passage ends in a mud choke after 8ft, presumably an old outfall to the river. To the front a passage carries water flowing towards you. This passage reduces in height at a solid brick-lined section, at the beginning of which in the left hand wall is a small recess reminiscent of a bread oven. From the far end of the brick-lined section daylight can be seen and a passage passed on the left. About 20ft further on another passage on the left leads to a Y-junction, both ways ending after 10ft. The right hand section contains some fine minute gours and clean areas of flow-stone with a few projecting formations. There is also a section of dried cave pearls. The left hand section should not be entered as there is a wafer-thin coating of calcite covering the floor. All quite pretty considering where you are.

Back in the canal the daylight can be seen coming from an originally blocked entrance which takes you out onto the railway line. This is likely to be blocked up again in the near future. The canal, however, swerves to the right and becomes a 4ft square section. After about 40ft, progress is halted at what appears to be the beam of the railway bridge crossing the duct. This forms a duck (or sump in wet weather?) with about 2ins of air space. As the water in this section was almost stagnant a series of inoculations would be advisable before progressing beyond.

Back at the original entrance the left hand passage separates after about 8ft, the flow continuing around to the left and swinging into a right hand arc before closing down. The left hand wall of this section has 4ft of concrete forming a convenient ledge, the water being 3ft deep. Back at the separation, a short step up to the right follows a passage with a small stream channelled in the floor and covered for most of its length with capstones about 12ft apart. After a short distance a passage on the right curves back to rejoin the canal at the far end of the brick-lined section mentioned earlier. Following the "stream" passage a T junction is reached. To the left a

cont. on p5



cont. from p4

pile of glutinous mud marks a roof collapse and another brick-arched and -lined section is reached on the other side. To the right the "stream" passage passes beneath a 6ft diameter shaft which rises 30ft to what must be fairly close, or in the middle of, the A4! The roof height undulates to a Y-junction. To the left the roof closes down to where the stream enters from under the left hand wall. Straight on closes down after 15ft.

Our educated guess on the purpose of this system is that it must be a sort of flood relief system but the presence and state of the formations in some areas could mean that it is older than it looks.

EXPEDITION NEWS FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS:

Christmas '87

Mallorca is now firmly established as the venue for the winter expedition. This Christmas will be the group's fourth in succession on the Island with ten members leaving England on 23rd December for two weeks. Aims for this year include the continuing exploration of the area around Avenc de S'aigo and Avenc de Banc de Llorrer - the scene of last years find. Plus a further determined effort to find the elusive Avenc de Fonda, our secret weapon this year, however, is a 1:25,000 scale map of the area from which the original cave co-ordinates were taken (although it must be said that initial investigations seem to indicate that we had been looking in the correct place anyway - maybe someone moved it?).

Summer '88

The Sima GESM in southern Spain is the venue for the MCG 1988 expedition. Permission to descend the cave has been sought and although not yet official, we are led to believe that this will be granted. The proposed dates are August 21st to September 4th with September 4th to September 18th as reserve dates.

Due to the nature of this system and the amount of equipment involved, it will be necessary to camp at the cave entrance (altitude 1600m). However, it is hoped that enough interest will be shown in other less serious caving / walking trips, or even a simple holiday to support the second "valley-based" group staying in a villa or farmhouse in the Ronda area.

The main Sima GESM team will, by necessity, have to be limited to about ten, with places being allocated on a first come, first served basis as soon as an overall costing has been arrived at. Having said this, the general plan is to rig the cave quickly enough to allow at least a few days during which anyone staying at the valley base can descend Sima GESM as far as they feel they are capable.

The ten places on the main team are of course open to any member of MCG but it must be stressed that the Sima GESM is 1100m deep and consequently rigging trips in the lower reaches will be long (18 hours plus) and as such will require a high degree of general fitness as well as a fair amount of SRT experience. So if you like the sound of some "sporting" foreign caving or just fancy a leisurely walking or caving holiday with the possibility of a descent of at least part of Sima GESM then phone Neil Hutchinson on 01-267-1005 as soon as possible.

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.

MENDIP RESCUE ORGANISATION

Cave rescues and incidents for the year ending 31st December 1986.

Despite the closure of the major caves at Priddy for most of the year, there were nine call-outs. These are listed below; the figures in brackets to the right indicate the number of cavers going underground to give assistance. Many more will be involved, of course, either controlling at the surface or standing by in case needed.

Wed 1st Jan	Thrupe Lane Swallet	4	Floods, alert	(--)
Sat 11th Jan	Longwood Swallet	1	Boulder fall, fatality	(26)
Sat 18th Jan	Swildon's Hole	1	Exhaustion	(5)
Sun 4th Apr	Swildon's Hole	1	Epileptic fit	(--)
Sun 27th Apr	Goatchurch Cavern	1	Fall, dislocated shoulder	(4)
Wed 3rd Sep	Thrupe Lane Swallet	1	Presumed overdue	(--)
Wed 22nd Oct	GB Cavern	1	Fall, bruised back	(9)
Sat 6th Dec	Eastwater Cavern	1	Lost, reported trapped	(8)
Mon 15th Dec	Rod's Pot	?	Presumed overdue	(--)

Below are brief accounts of the rescues and incidents listed above:

Wednesday 1st January - Thrupe Lane Swallet.

An overdue party had entered the cave at mid-day and should have been out at 4pm. It was 5.15pm and very heavy rain had caused the main swallet to pond up. Some of the steeper banks had collapsed. A party from the Wessex Cave Club arrived at Thrupe Lane within twenty minutes. At 5.45pm the overdue party surfaced safely. They had not experienced any difficulties. Even Cowsh Crawl had not sumped or silted.

Saturday 11th January - Longwood Swallet.

Yeovil Police were contacted at 2pm. A 16-year old on a trip organised by Greater London South Caving Committee had fallen when a boulder collapsed in the rift leaving the bottom of the Main Chamber. He had been pinned by the chest and, although extricated and resuscitated, had not regained consciousness. John Dukes and Trevor Hughes were alerted at Priddy. Jim Hanwell was then called at 2.07pm. All three arrived at Longwood at 2.30pm. The victim was keen on caving; he had been down the cave once before and was well equipped having just acquired his own wet suit. The party had decided to descend the Longwood series only; a passage not much over 1000ft long and no more than 200ft deep. The series does not carry the main stream but is extremely constricted in places, notably the tight Bedding Plane Squeeze and awkward Shunting Yard nearer the entrance shaft.

Whilst climbing into this passage on his back and facing upwards, the victim dislodged a large boulder and fell some 5ft with it pinned to his chest. It took all the remaining four in his party to lift the boulder off: a difficult task which took several minutes. They assessed the injuries and began AR and ECM immediately. No pulse or breathing could be detected, however.

At about 3.30pm the rescue party went down the cave with the Mager carrying sheet and hauling gear. Relief teams stood by at the Belfry and Upper Pitts. Good progress was made hauling the victim up the Main Chamber Pitch and the rifts above. A complete changeover took place after the Showerbath below the short drops. Little difficulty was experienced in the hauling through the extremely tight passages at the head of the short drops. The Bedding Plane Squeeze, however, proved a severe problem as anticipated. Over two hours were spent in attempts to pass it. Another changeover of haulers took place at 8.30pm. As further hauling parties would be unable to pass each other in the constricted entrance passages, another relief team was called to take over when the squeeze had been passed. Threading the victim through the Bedding Plane Squeeze and Shunting Yard took a full three hours and proved to be the crux of the haul out.

The hauling teams reached the bottom of the shaft at 9.24pm and surfaced with the victim at 9.55pm. Dr Donald Thomson confirmed that the victim was dead and, after formal identification, the incident concluded at 10.05pm. The Post Mortem found that death had been the result of asphyxia caused by the boulder compressing the chest. No bones were broken. The conduct of the party was praised by the Coroner and a verdict of accidental death recorded.

cont. from p6

Saturday 18th January - Swildon's Hole.

A party of four had gone down the cave at 4.30pm and on returning from Barnes' Loop, a woman, aged 23, was unable to climb the Twenty Foot Pot. The group was led by a non-caver with the other three with little experience. None had experience of wet caves or climbing but claimed to be involved in sky-diving! Maybe this is why they chose to try out single rope techniques with one Jumar, sit harness and foot loops but no chest harness; all to be shared between them. They had little knowledge of SRT and less about the cave.

A Wessex Cave Club party went down the cave at 8.35pm with a ladder and basic hauling gear. At 9.16pm one of the rescue party surfaced to say that the woman had been helped up the pitch and was on the way out unaided. All were out of the cave and on the Green by 9.32pm.

Sunday 13th April - Swildon's Hole.

Brian Prewer had received a call from Yeovil Police at mid-day. A caver had suffered an epileptic fit at the Double Pots. He was a member of a well equipped party of five from Bristol, had been caving for about four years and, although on tablets for this condition, had not experienced an attack for several years. The attack had been particularly severe, causing him to fall face down into the lower pool of the Double Pots. He had been fished out by one of his party straight away and found not to be breathing. Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation had been given immediately and the patient started breathing shortly afterwards and began to regain consciousness.

Cavers at Upper Pitts and the Belfry were alerted and they entered the cave at 12.28pm. A doctor suggested that, after the fit was over, the victim ought to be able to help himself the cave. This proved to be the case. With a little assistance, he was out of the cave by 1pm.

Sunday 27th April - Goatchurch Cavern.

Weston-s-Mare were alerted at 11.30pm that a woman had slipped and dislocated her shoulder down the cave. The woman, aged 26, from Bristol had gone down the cave with two other cavers and had slipped and fallen at the Coffin Lid, dislocating her shoulder badly. Fortunately, a strong party of four members of the Army Caving Association were also in the cave and able to assist. The shoulder was strapped securely with a belt and the ACA helped the woman to make her own way out without too much discomfort. All were stood down at 12.30pm.

Wednesday 3rd September - Thrupe Lane Swallet.

An over-anxious mother of a caver from Cheddar called Police because her son had not returned home from a trip to the cave by 5pm as expected. He turned up only ten minutes late!

Wednesday 22nd October - GB Cavern.

A call was received from the Police at 8.40pm that a caver had fallen from a climb somewhere in the Main Chamber and injured his back. It was learnt that five students from Bristol University (not UBSS) had gone down the cave early in the evening. On climbing down the wall below the Forty Foot Waterfall, a man had fallen the last 10ft, landed on his back and lay injured in the pool at the bottom. The fall had smashed his battery case; a lucky break since it probably took much of the impact and saved him from more severe back injuries. He was removed from the pool to await treatment from the rescuers. An examination revealed that he was able to move all his limbs, even if somewhat painfully. With assistance, he was able to stand. He was put into a polar suit to warm up and then helped on the way out. An examination by a doctor confirmed that the patient only had severe bruising of the back. All were out of the cave by 10.50pm.

Saturday 6th December - Eastwater Cavern.

All that was known was that a caver was stuck somewhere in the system, maybe neay Hallelujah Hole. A party had entered the cave at 1.30pm. It transpired that they did not know much about the cave and for some reason the leader became separated from the rest of his party and got hopelessly lost in the Lower Traverse near the Primrose Squeeze. He did not know the route to the Canyon. The others surfaced to raise the alarm at about 5pm. A search party from Upper Pitts entered the cave at 5.45pm. They located the 'stuck' caver and started to escort him out via the old Boulder Chamber route. The search party surfaced at 7.05pm.

cont. on p9

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE 2.

A wet Saturday, 20 June, maybe 20km NW of St. Girons High on the list of the Aérospatiale Caving Club's priorities has long been the Gouffre de la Coume Ferrat which is located near Balaguères. It pierces the limestone (Jurassic dolomite) 1030m up in the Forêt Domainale de L'Estelas, a short passage leading to a long pitch - 204m long - followed by not much more, ending in a low sumped passage. But about three months ago the sump 'evaporated' and a tight rift led into a big passage beyond, soon dropping via a succession of 'puits' down to a major river course leading towards the resurgence Grotte d'Alion six kilometres away, near Cazavet, at 450m altitude.

Plans for a summer seige included erecting an enormous tent and equipping it as a base camp, only a ten-minute walk from the entrance. A grandiose scheme by British standards, but the French idea of a seige is a month long bout of caving activity - pushing downriver, exploring leads and surveying.

Accordingly, we had driven up the 10km forestry road up from Cazavet, spattering the Alfa in dirty yellow mud to make the rendezvous at 10.30am. The brief respite from the rain ended as we set off on foot towards the cave, about two kilometres away, carrying two canteen tables (no, not the collapsible sort) numerous stacking chairs, bloody great tent, two weighty bags of poles and assorted hand-baggage.

Denise sensibly latched onto a couple of chairs but I got lumbered - first with the smaller bag of poles, then with a table and finally exchanging that for the big bag of poles, so heavy that my legs visibly buckled when the going deteriorated. Somehow we reached our goal - an isolated group of barns. It peed down as we eventually set up the tent having taken well over half an hour to straighten bent poles (it was not exactly new) and assemble the frame by trial and error.

"Cassing one's Croûte" is a popular passtime amongst these chums and it took only a few minutes to instal tables, chairs and copious quantities of plonk and grub. Two hours later, much replenished, we retraced our steps back to the cars - enjoying the lighter loads - then driving off down past St. Girons to pitch our tents in the tiny hamlet of Loutrein, beyond Manlis.

Needless to relate, it being the feast of St. Jean, the evening gave way to much feasting and drinking, so much so that caving was 'impossible' on Sunday, but a mushroom hunt and subsequent pique-nique were thought to be viable alternatives.

Revenge was swift because, on the following Sunday, 23th June, we visited Gouffre de Peillot which had been planned for the previous Sunday. Explored by Casteret in 1934 this cave is quoted at 4381m length. It is situated near Cazaret at an altitude of 444m and opens as a large tree-fringed depression in pasture.

The passing of seven days had brought a change in the weather and the sweat rolled off us as we changed into our gear at the roadside at 10.30am. Luckily, the walk to the cave was of only five minutes duration but it was a relief to get amongst the trees in the cool depression. A steep descent led down to the steeply inclined entrance pitch of 15m, into which a ray of sunshine was inquisitively peering.

Easy going brought us to a 10m pitch amongst a variety of stalactites, 'mites and columns, dropping into an elongated chamber where we skirted the head of a 60m pitch. Moving on down through somewhat bouldery passage, we dropped down another couple of pitches (10m, 15m) to reach a roomy fault rift carrying a small stream referred to as "la rivière". Following the stream involved some muddy antics and eventually we passed beneath the 60m pitch before being stopped by an impenetrable wall of breakdown into which the stream disappeared.

On the return journey, I grovelled through an obvious squeeze near the foot of the second pitch, accompanied by a callow youth Didier, to enter an area which showed few signs of previous visitors. The squeeze opened downslope to a crumbling 5m climb down into a big chamber. On the right, a 20m pitched marked a continuation of the chamber, but a boulder slope to the left could be ascended to look over into a yawning chasm which appeared to be well over 30m deep.

cont. from p8 (Fragments from France)

Before ascending the entrance pitch, another roomy passage could be followed upslope opening into a large chamber with a long, muddy slope down to the floor. A muddy slope continued up the far side to gain a bedding-plane from which a good air current was emitted. There was obviously more in this direction.

Nothing special, the trip had given us a much-needed spell of caving, but emerging from 13°C into the late afternoon temperature of over 30°C was quite stunning! On the journey home we all visited the resurgence of Grotte d'Aliou which we shall return to with rubber dinghies one fine day.

Tony Knibbs

cont. from p7 (Mendip Rescue Organisation)

Monday 15th December - Rod's Pot.

Someone in Bristol found a note to the effect that a party from Waldorf School might have gone down the cave. It requested that MRO should be called if they had not returned by 7pm. The informant had allowed 25 minutes and done as requested. In fact, the party had not gone caving at all because of bad weather on Mendip!

SUMP RESCUE DEMONSTRATION AT WOKEY HOLE CAVES ON SEPTEMBER 27th 1986

The Kirby Morgan Bandmask 10 apparatus was demonstrated at the resurgence pool outside the caves. About forty people attended throughout the day. Many of the divers who came were from other caving regions, which gave them a good opportunity to try out our sump rescue equipment and techniques. Several non-divers tried the mask on land and were shown how it works. A few divers experimented with the full apparatus in the resurgence pool, testing it for buoyancy and air consumption.

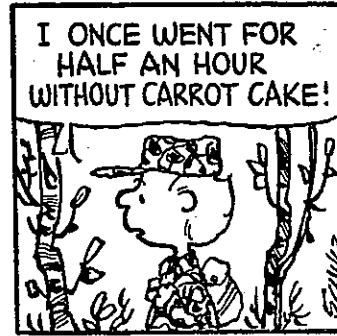
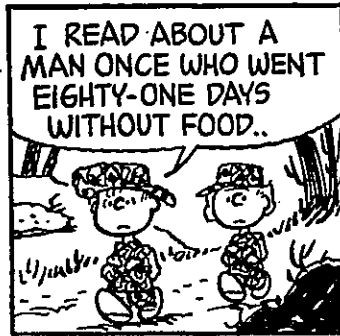
We then did a rescue dive through the resurgence sump as Owen Clarke from South Wales volunteered to be a victim. The mask was fitted and the air supply belted around his waist. He was lowered into the water face upwards. I then took hold of him around the chest and under his arm so that he could grip my hand for communication and leave my other hand free to hold the diving line and guide him. Richard Bartrop from Derbyshire took his feet and had enough freedom of movement to enable any snags we encountered in the sump to be freed with comparative ease. This worked very well, and it only took us about four minutes to tow him through to the mud bank in the First Chamber. About 10 cubic feet of air was used. The support divers were swapped around and the procedure was repeated on the return trip to the entrance.

All taking part were impressed with how well the system worked, including Owen who quite enjoyed the ride! We also proved that the Kirby Morgan apparatus can be used quickly and simply without the use of a full stretcher. In deeper sumps, there would still be a need for a buoyancy aid but the technique used would be just as effective.

Jim Hanwell, Honorary Secretary & Treasurer, Wookey Hole, February 1987.

PEANUTS

by Schulz



CLIMBING THE "SHOWERBATH"

by Alan Dougherty

During 1986 Tony Knibbs suggested it would be interesting to ascend the aven above the "showerbath" in Longwood Smallet. My immediate reaction was to think the top of the aven to be too close to the surface to be of any interest. However, a close inspection of the survey showed the entrance series to run towards the left side of Longwood valley, with the slope rising above. Mike Haselden and I made our first attempt from the bottom left-hand corner of the chamber. Here, an alcove gave the belayer some protection from the force of falling water. An ascent of four metres enabled me to gain an horizontal crack which led out, under an overhang, into the centre of the face. Due to the cold, and difficulty of looking upwards into the falling water, I retreated at this point. We pulled the ropes through and Mike was able to add a couple metres before he, too, retreated.

We tried again, in the company of Gary Fairaudeau, hoping to find lower water conditions. Unfortunately, the spray from the "showerbath" was still filling most of the chamber. I climbed first, finding it too difficult to look upwards under the water in the centre of the wall, whilst the drier corner was loose and muddy. Mike and later Gary, were able to force a further two metres up the centre of the wall before also retreating. Just to the left of this highpoint we could see a ledge behind a large, unstable-looking boulder. A small ledge to the right appeared to be the key to the climb....

Mike and I found much drier conditions on our third visit, on 30th Aug '87. It was Mike's turn at the sharp end. This time I was able to belay in the centre of the chamber with a good view of the climb. Mike was able to gain the small ledge, previously seen, but could not see over the jammed boulder. Protection was poor and the moves blind, so I virtually insisted that Mike placed a bolt runner. With regained confidence Mike climbed over the jammed boulder by bridging. The ledge was, indeed, very loose and Mike pulled down several large blocks of rock. To the right of the ledge an overhanging corner barred progress to a lower-angled ramp, down which the stream thundered. Again, the loose rock, blind moves, and lack of protection, necessitated a bolt runner. With this placed, Mike rounded the corner throwing down various flakes of rock. He ascended the ramp for several metres before retreating for a conference. Ahead of him was much loose material which because of the angle of the ramp would have fallen onto me. Consequently, I moved well up-passage to belay Mike as he climbed the last few metres of the ramp. A shower of rocks landed all around my previous stance, and I was most grateful for Mike's considerate warning.

Mike placed a pair of belay bolts and, after I had warmed up, I climbed to join him. Having Mike tethered to two bolts was too good an opportunity to miss, so I led through a further five metres up a slime-coated rift to a point where the water entered from a too-tight horizontal tube. This area was well decorated but with silt and vegetation coating the walls. The tube must fill completely during winter floods. Mike also had a look, before I climbed down to recover the gear and he abseiled off. Two bolt runners (no hangers) and a "Y" hanger on the abseil bolts were left, but all will be subject to rapid corrosion. Alloy krabs which we left at our earlier high-points had corroded over only a few months so that they could not be opened.

The total height is some 23 metres, all of which is climbable, but requires a steady leader because of the loose rock. We decided against the idea of "banging" the tube because of the danger to cavers on the trade-route below. Indeed, having seen what lies above, I shall certainly treat this area with caution. The same can be said for the region above the traverse in Main Chamber.