

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 203

NOVEMBER 1988

SNIPPETS FROM SPAIN

by Yvonne Ward

As we approached the checkout, I realised we might have a Houston, as Lesley would say. Between us we had filled six very large Asda trolleys with tinned food. At a rough estimate, it would cost £200. "Er, did anyone bring the cash?" I asked. "Ahhh... no, not as such," replied Lesley "but I can pay by cheque." "£201.25," said the checkout girl. Lesley handed her a cheque. "Do you have any ID?" We looked at each other, and knew we had a Houston - Lesley had no ID. The Manager was called. "You do know your cheque card has a £50 limit? Did you intend to buy this much when you came in?" he asked. "No" I replied, as Lesley replied "Yes," in unison. "Look," said Andy, "do you want to put it all back on the shelves?" The Manager ignored this remark. "Going somewhere are we?" "To Spain for two weeks" said Lesley. "They do have supermarkets in Spain" the Manager said, knowingly. "Yes," I said, "but are they Asdas?"

You may be wondering why we were buying £200 of groceries to take to Spain. The reason was the 1988 Sima GESM Expedition. We had decided that it would be impractical and too time consuming to keep driving up and down steep, winding mountain tracks to go shopping every day so Pat Newman offered to purchase a Land Rover to transport food for 14 days for six people, as well as all the tackle and personal gear.

After a fast and hot journey Lesley, Andy, Yvonne and Martin arrived at the Refugio Rodrigues de la Fuente, alt. 1200m in the Serrania de Ronda, on the Saturday to find the Haselden family and the Northern cavers already encamped. The Land Rover, with Pat and Neil, arrived on the Sunday a day earlier than planned. Our mountain campsite met with their approval - the previous night they camped after dark in a ditch and awoke in the morning covered in slugs, 10m from a green field! The Refugio consisted of a three-sided whitewashed concrete shelter with three taps and wood-burning cooking areas. The water came from a nearby spring and although it looked like milk due to dissolved lime and the pressure, it was uncontaminated, drinkable, and reliable. There was an open area for camping but we chose the trees for shade. At first, the shower was set up on the side wall of the Refugio using an up-side-down plastic water container which Mike Haselden volunteered to demonstrate. He stripped down to his white Y-fronts which became transparent when he stood under the water so he promptly took them off and carried on showering. Neil and Andy followed suit - for photographs please send plain brown SAE! We girls decided we needed a bit more privacy so the next day Mike fixed the shower in the trees with a pulley system, and made a modesty curtain with a flysheet - we even had a shower mat and towel rail made from a spare tent pole. To make sure the water was warm we would fill the carriers in the morning and leave them in the sun all day.

Lesley, Martin and myself had worked out menus, and all the the incidentals needed for our camp - everything from cereal to carbide, from Krisprolls to toilet rolls. The cost was £250, divided between the six of us. All the food had to be tinned or packeted as we expected the heat to be quite intense with little respite even in the shade. It was the first time we had organised food in this way so we expected it to be pretty unpalatable. Thanks to Andy the meals turned out to be superb and plentiful which was amazing when you think it all came out of tins or packets. *continued on p5*

UPDATE

1988 MEETS PROGRAMME

04 NOV - 05 NOV	MENDIP	STOKE LANE	MIKE MINTRAM	01-673-2057
18 NOV - 19 NOV	S.WALES	060F FFYNNON DDU	GEOFF BARTON	0932-849241
02 DEC - 03 DEC	MENDIP	GB CAVERN	GORDON LISTER	01-579-3466
NEW YEAR 1989	MAJORCA	AVENCs Y CUAVAS	SUE HASELDEN	0703-464491

WEEKLY MEETINGS are held at the Group's Mendip headquarters on Wednesdays at 7.00pm, and at the Mawson Arms, Chiswick Lane South, London, on Thursdays from 8.30pm.
 CAVING ACCOMMODATION for 30 people is available at the MCG headquarters, Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse-on-Mendip, Blagdon, Bristol, BS18 6XW Tel.0761-62797
 National Grid Reference 5147.5606 Ordnance Survey 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	£2.00

CAMPING FEES per night: Charged at the same rate as cottage fees.
 COTTAGE DAY FEES: Members using any of the cottage facilities but not staying overnight, are asked to make a reasonable donation via the donation box.



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COTTAGE BOOKINGS

Cottage doings

05 NOV-06 NOV	ST. EDWARDS SCH.	(8)
07 NOV-11 NOV	RNAS	(19)
12 NOV-13 NOV	WORTHING SCOUTS	(12)
19 NOV-20 NOV	WOLVERHAMPTON MC	(8)
21 NOV-25 NOV	RNAS	(19)
26 NOV-27 NOV	EALING COLLEGE	(12)
17 DEC-18 DEC	WOLVERHAMPTON MC	(12)
29 JAN	SWCC	(15)
07 JUL-14 JUL	AEROSPATIALE	(20)



ON THE MOVE

Alan Mellon moved in March (!) to:
15 Chichester Way, Feltham, Middx.
TW14 0DF tel: 01-890-6000

CONGRATULATIONS . . .

...to the following probationary members who have completed a proving trip and been accepted as full members:

Stephen Saye, Keith Dart, Linda Gates.

...and to the following prospective members who have been accepted as probationary members:

Glen Cooper, David Warren.

PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS

The following applications for probationary membership have been received and will be considered at the next committee meeting on 3rd November:

John Crowsley (proposed by Brian Murlis, Steve Redwood)
12 Acacia Avenue, Staple Hill,
Bristol tel: 0272-650897

Dawn Ward (proposed by Gill Warren, Steve Redwood)
37 Vesey Close, Cove, Farnborough,
Hants, GU14 8UT tel: 0252-516118

1989 AGM AND DINNER

The date for the next AGM and dinner was provisionally set at the previous AGM. As this date coincides with Easter, the date of the 1989 AGM and dinner has been changed to SATURDAY 1ST APRIL. Please note that this is not an April Fool.

Neil Hutchinson, Secretary

DEADLINES . . .

... for December's Bulletin: 26.11.88
... for January's Newsletter: 31.12.88

AN APOLOGY . . .

...to all those who have waited for their contributions to appear in print. This was due to a certain constitutional matter which took precedence in the last newsletter. It is business as usual now so keep the articles and snippets coming please - Ed.

YV'S DRIPPINGS

Alan: "Mendip cavers have an understanding with Mendip farmers - a good wee fee."

Yvonne: "What huge olives, Mike!"

Mike: "Yes, but the stones are big."

Yvonne: "You could get a really good stuff in them though."

Paddy: "This rubber is far more flexible than the other one because I can get my snippet all the way in."

Steve: "I can't even lift the thing... let alone poke anything with it."

BRING A BOTTLE . . .

...Martin Rowe is to marry Yvonne Ward on 17th December in the Lake District. They will be on Mendip on the weekend of 3rd December and invite all the members of the MCG to join them in a celebratory barrel.

UPPER FLOOD

Paul Deakin, well known for his superb cave photography, recently visited Mendip to record the magnificent attractions of our favourite dig, Upper Flood. The MCG has now obtained a set of his colour photographs, which will be made into an album for the library.

INVITATION . . .

...from Hungary. You and your colleagues are most cordially invited to the 10th Congress and general assembly of the International Union of Speleology, 14th - 20th August 1989 at the Technical University in Budapest to discuss the effects of natural and human factors upon the existence of caves. Please note that speleocamping in Budapest is open only to the participants of the congress! Full details and a programme are available from the Editor.

MCG

digs

BONE HOLE

It really needs four to five people as the diggers nearly walled themselves in. A nice fresh draught, but another boulder in the floor needed chemical persuasion - half sausage used in between two solid rocks produced draughting fumes which chased the diggers out, leaving 3ft of very cold water in the dig. Persistent activity is gaining some progress only marred by the fact that the bottom keeps filling up with water after persistent rain. We could not get this to drain away, and it was presumed that the water rises from below! The left-hand wall is belling out nicely. The second dig needs a bang to open up a decent work space.

BATTERY SWALLET

The course of the stream has been traced using dowsing techniques. Armed with a few pints in the stomach and two welding rods, RM, JB and ML predict there is a large chamber 160ft below the surface 110ft from the entrance. A lot of water has been flowing into this cave and running away quite freely. 1.5 people are needed for the dig and 2.5 for the irrigation project, baling out the water to behind mud dams. After banging for easier access and to shift the mud, SR was sent in to act as a canary - 10 out of 10! A second bang went off at the third attempt. After removing the spoil, we won another couple of feet of passage but another bang was needed. This made quite an impression, too much in fact! The passage sides and roof were left very loose and despite stabilisation, more needed bringing down. A passage could be seen dipping into a muddy pool of water (loadsawater!). The long hoe was rammed up to its full length into the right-hand wall. A determined effort is required to make use of any dry periods!

UPPER FLOOD

Slow but steady progress being made at the stream's upper sink. The way on needed more chemical persuasion as previous bangs had no effect - a misfire due to poor battery condition in the exploder box and the wet getting to the Cordtex. Cleared some gravel but needs a decent wallop! The stream appears to drop away sharply after the next 8ft. Bang required in right-hand wall for more space. Other proddings are going on elsewhere - Wednesday Chamber (Ed: will we recognise it from its name?) being one of the small items found.

ROD'S POT

Some success digging the false floor blocking access to Eyeball Rift. A thin person now has a chance of getting through, but bang would help. NT keeps promising!

PINETREE POT

Attempts to force a boulder choke into motion met with only limited success. Will anyone gullible enough to volunteer please contact JL.

ROWBERRON SWALLET

Inspected on 27th August, the entrance is an 8ft deep lake not draining at all well. We will have to read up more than shoring tactics now!

WEDNESDAY DIGGING

Digging on the Wednesday meets is becoming increasingly popular. We already have a Wednesday Chamber in Upper Flood. Will this be followed by Wednesday Rift, Wednesday Crawl, Wednesday Aven, Wednesday Pot, Wednesday Passage, Wednesday Pool, Wednesday Sump, Wednesday River Mine, St. Wednesday's, Nine Wednesdays Swallet, Eastwednesday, Bleadon Wednesday, Manglewednesday Hole..

LONGWOOD VALLEY SINK

Going well - the race is on with Bone Hole for Cheddar master cave!

EASTWATER

Breakthrough imminent, watch this space...

SNIPPETS FROM SPAIN

continued from page 1

The most popular items were packets of Long Life Devon custard, which we discovered we could barter with hard Northern cavers no longer able to stomach mountains of Meusli. A pint of custard could be exchanged for 1kg of Meusli or half a packet of Bourbon biscuits. We miscalculated with only a few things - we had an abundance of tinned sardines, toilet rolls, branston pickle and powdered milk. We missed out on treats to take underground - the Northern lads had tins of Coke to leave at the top of pitches for their return (when consumed, they can be flattened and deposited in a tackle sack), chewing-gum (short pitch = 1 Hubba-Bubba, long pitch = 2 Hubba-Bubba), and boiled sweets.

To get to the cave we went by Land Rover to 1700m then had a long walk to the entrance. On clear mornings, we could see Gibraltar, the Med, and the mountains of northern Africa. If you exited earlier than the others as Lesley and I did on a couple of occasions, it was possible to walk back to the camp via a steep, wooded gorge. The walk from the cave across open limestone terrain was almost unbearably hot so after dumping our caving gear at the Land Rover we found the one and a half hour walk down through the trees quite a cool relief.

The caving began well, with the Northern lads rigging the first 250m. Neil, Mike, Ollie and Andy then took over and rigged the next section while Lesley, Pat, Yvonne and Martin acted as sherpas bringing more rope bags down to 250m. Progress continued in this leap-frog way until the cave was rigged to 800m. At this point the trips were becoming longer and more arduous, with the upper part of the system becoming repetitive. With 800m of pitches to de-rig and a further 200m of rope already in the cave at -800m, we realised that we would easily reach the bottom at -1000m in the next trip or two but that we had insufficient manpower to de-rig over 1km of rope in the time available. Defeated by time, rather than our own inability we decided to start de-rigging.

Meanwhile, events on the surface continued. Two days running there were brief tornado-like whirlwinds that whipped through the camp suddenly and forcibly. With spinning funnels of dirt and debris from ground level up as far as the eye could see, the first took a sleeping bag and deposited it further up the mountain in a tree. The second took Paddy's Karrimat so high it looked like a paper bag blowing around and deposited it fairly close to the camp but Lesley's postcards and my knickers were never seen again.

Although remote we were visited by the Civil Guard who arrived in time to see Lesley shaving her legs but they seemed more interested in our giant container of carbide. Then there was "Nigel", a huge black beetle who first attempted an ascent on Dave Elliot's leg and few days later appeared on the rim of my breakfast bowl. I froze in panic - it was easily twice the size of a stag beetle though quite harmless. Then there were the horses with cow bells round their necks who regularly visited the camp rubbish bins at three o'clock in the morning.

Our last and most memorable visitors were the Spanish couple who arrived weighed down with ruck-sacks, a tent and a huge ghetto blaster - and don't they like the sound of their own voices! One moment we were 1200m up a peaceful, beautiful mountain, the next we were at a very loud disco! Rather than say something straight away, we arranged our chairs to watch them and waited for Dave to arrive. When he did, he was less than impressed, and eventually said something!!! (see MCG Bulletin No.1) and things quietened down a bit. He had his revenge the next day by backing his van up to their tent at 6am, loudly. The girl changed and washed her clothes daily but the lad wore the same thick shirt and wool socks the whole 4 days they were there and the temperature was in the 90s. They were joined on their third by more Spaniards and spent most of their time cooking and eating. Although they had brought a gas cooker they insisted on using the wood-burning cooking area because "it was more aesthetic" which resulted in everyone getting smoked out and covered in ash, especially when

their unattended frying pan of oil caught fire. They must have wondered about us though with boxes of food everywhere, caving gear spread out and ropes hanging in the trees to dry. Not to mention the shower. Peace prevailed at last after they left so we continued to enjoy the last few days of sun, peace and beauty. Woodpeckers, deer, goats and if you were lucky, the odd ibex could be seen. This is a truly breathtaking part of the world.

To break the long journey home, we travelled first to Northern Spain to visit Sima de la Cueto, where we had arranged to meet Bob Marles. Bob knew that we would be in Arredondo on the 18th. As well as caving, Bob enjoys a little wind-surfing so he brought his sail-board along. When we didn't arrive on time, he wasn't too concerned - he just drove around the village checking out bars. When we didn't arrive on the 19th he still wasn't too concerned - he just drove around the countryside checking out cave entrances. When we didn't arrive on the 20th he began to get concerned - he had been driving around a mountain village for three days with a sail-board on his roof-rack, to the amusement of the locals, unable to speak a word of Spanish (he just manages English with a broad Welsh accent). Then he wrote off his front suspension saving a bottle of beer about to explode on his back seat. When we finally arrived, he was demented. The nearest Vauxhall dealer was in France. He had two good wheels, the spare on the third and the remains of a damaged wheel and tyre on the fourth. "Oh God, please let it fit, please let it have 4 wheelnuts," he prayed as he demolished Lesley's boot looking for her spare wheel to replace his patched up tyre, devouring any food he could find at the same time. "IT FITS!!!"

We actually managed some caving, too. Sima de la Cueto is 30km long and 600m deep, so is an expedition in itself. We only had time to explore the "ends" - the 302m entrance pitch and the resurgence which we followed as far as the third lake. Parts of the cave are 200m in diameter and others 300m high. At one point in the resurgence cave there is a boulder the size of the cottage precariously wedged about 20m up. Below it are many shattered boulders which threaten to puncture the boat - a little unnerving when there are only two lifejackets between three and one of those won't inflate properly. Other parts of the cave are well decorated especially Salle de Phantomes (explored by French cavers), a smaller version of the Hall of Thirty in Otter Hole.

As this cave is only 1hr's drive from the ferry at Santander, we may have to return next year...

SWILDONS "40" CELEBRATIONS

by John Beauchamp

Twenty years ago, Mother Nature forced a by-pass to the old forty-foot pot. To mark that occasion, what can only be described as a mega piss-up was organised on Sunday 10th July. The only proviso being that sixties caving attire was worn.

True to form the MCG lot got up late but laden with 5 bottles of champers, pounds of strawberries and loads of cream, we didn't really give a There were hoards of people who all paid there 4/- for this pleasure. Tourist cavers from afar must have wondered if Mendip had gone mad. The BEC had piped water from the Water Chamber to the top of the Forty to add an element of realism.

After devouring our picnic supplies Alan Dougherty (who is not renowned for his drinking ability) decided to free-climb the pitch - whilst life-lined (we weren't all drunk!). We tried to kick him back down but his beard acted like velcro on our socks!

On exiting Swildons we realised it was also the 7 month anniversary of Battery Swallet so we were entertained by Jude and Duncan and a barrel of Butcombe at Swallet Farm. Apparently there are more anniversaries coming to Mendip soon.

"CAVE-DIGGING", A SPECTATOR SPORT

by Brian Murlis

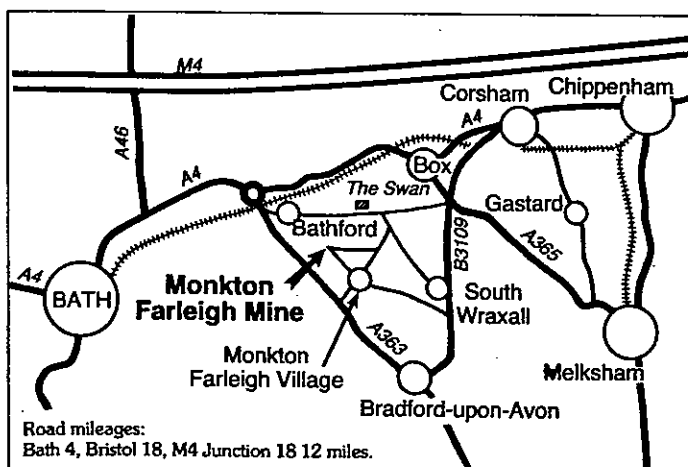
News is circulating that a new sporting pastime is emerging from the realms of the Mendips! It is unofficially recognised as "The Spectator Sport", otherwise known as "Cave Digging". It is expected that this pastime will appeal to the more pessimistic intellects. Already it has attracted quite a following. The true enthusiasts will no doubt wish to participate in a language course which will enable them to understand the argot used by the Spectators. Such phrases range from mumbling and laughing followed by occasional facial expressions of sympathy, to more direct argot such as, "They must be bloody mad"? Exceptional visual skills will be required for this sport to enable clear distinction between cave diggers and surrounding heaps of spoil, and for spotting a piece of limestone from 10ft away! This incredible skill was shown recently by a keen Welsh geologist - well spotted! Uniform for spectators is optional but it is believed that green wellies and wax jackets are the norm, to enable easy recognition, as well as Volvos or Range Rovers being the usual mode of transport. Those who have been courageous enough to participate in the spectator sport are less keen to get involved in the real action. Despite this fact, a slight wince was detected on the face of a viewing Scotsman after hearing that 50p had been dropped in the dig! A local school teacher ventured into the dig once and after looking along the passageway retired to the safety of the surface muttering about a pressing engagement. Another loyal spectator who is a local well known entrepreneur often enquires jokingly if there is a likelihood of a breakthrough before his champagne becomes vintage! As the dig in question is situated in a rather large depression, we have not ruled out the possibility of conversion to an arena (Greek style), by cutting the sides into tiers of seats, ensuring clear, safe vision - tickets available on request.

120 MPH SH*T

not by Joan Goddard

"Imagine a blob of sewage hurtling along at 120 mph", said the guide who was showing us around Monkton Farleigh Mine. We visited the mine on our way back from Mendip one weekend, and he was explaining the workings of the underground lavatories, from which sewage was pumped to the main sewers using compressed air. With upto 9000 people working there more than 0.25 acre of lavatories were required, as well as 25000 light bulbs to illuminate the passages and galleries. (What a load of useless information!). The old mine workings extended over 125 acres of which 80 acres were converted by the War Office in the 1930's to provide storage for vast quantities of ammunition. A tunnel was constructed by the Royal Engineers to link the mine to the main railway line at Box. The first stop on the tour was at an area of workings which are as the miners left it. Various tools were on display and it was possible to see how the blocks of Bath Stone had been cut out of the walls using hand saws. The mine is divided into Districts and we were taken through Districts 14 and 15/16. Each District

had a conveyor system linked to the main conveyor, or a haul system with narrow gauge trucks which were used to transport the really big bombs. The air conditioning system required 9 acres of the mine for fans, radiators, etc. and we were shown a large engine which was the standby electricity generator. On the surface there is an interesting exhibition of photographs, plans, memorabilia and a couple of old army lorries. We found the place fascinating and it makes an easy underground trip for a day when caving seems a bit too much like hard work! The tours last 60-90mins and cost £2-00.



Designed and Printed by Benic Tempest & Co.

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE - 4

by Tony and Denise Knibbs

It is now flaming (unsettled) June and only a few weeks remain before everyone virtually disappears from view as those two magic holiday months of July and August run their course.

Strangely enough, the last trip recorded in these jottings was in October last year. It will not be too much out of place to mention our last trip of 1987.

It was to the Grotte de Sabart, just south of Tarascon, on 12th December. The cave is part of the Niaux - Lombrives system which exceeds 10km in length; Grotte de Niaux and Grotte de Lombrive are prominent show caves in the region.

The short approach walk took us through the local rubbish tip from which a steep path ascends to gain the immense main entrance portal. Since a pitch is involved to enter the system from this point, we chose another, less inspiring, entrance 50m to the right. Sabart commences as a labyrinth of roomy passages beyond which is the Grande Salle, Grande Galerie and an even more "grande" salle. Both chambers are very impressive; the second was immense and we must have spent an hour traversing up to the highest point from which a zig-zag, steep descent beyond led down to a fine, crystalline - decorated grotto at an old water level. There were many fine formations to be seen in the cave, mostly ancient and dry, against which the younger, active ones contrasted well. Bats were noticed in the entrance passages.

In January, we spent a remarkably warm Sunday 17th doing some surface prospecting in the Forêt Domainale de l'Estelas, south of Cazavet and west of St. Girons. This is the region in which the Aérospatiale club have pushed on from the bottom of the 200m entrance shaft of Gouffre de la Coume Ferra to make a 500m deep, 3km long cave. It has many inlets and the prospecting was aimed at finding new entrances, but no luck on this outing.

The Comité Départemental de Spéléologie of the Fédération Française de Spéléologie had a weekend congress at Montréjeau on 23/24 January. It was interesting to meet other cavers from the region and to witness their version of regional administration - it all seemed very familiar, even the arguments! Most interesting was a film and slide presentation by Jacques Joffre. The films included an historical "re-run" of the Norbert Casteret / Germain Gattet explorations of the Gouffre d'Esparros during 1938/9 and a film devoted to Casteret's work on bats in the Pyrénées; both very interesting. The slides were excellent - a coast-to-coast Pyrenean walk, climbing, caving and hang-gliding. On Sunday, a visit was made to the Grotte de Gargas show cave (famous for its "mutilated hands" cave paintings) which was about to close in order to stop the atmospheric deterioration of these paintings.

The annual dinner (midday lunch) of the Aérospatiale club was on Saturday 30th January. Afterwards we set off to the Groupe Spéléologique des Pyrénées' (GSP) cottage at Arbas. It snowed overnight and the drive along the track beyond Labaderque towards Pêneblanque made a good start to Sunday morning. The objective was Puits des Fuxéens, in a wood to the right, about half way along the driveable distance.

We floundered around in the snow for a few minutes before reaching an easily missable hole between boulders wedged above the first pitch - a nice free-hanging 40m. This was followed by more - a narrower 10m and a better 15m - to reach the head of a final 40m pitch. Here, a small stream was dropping into the black void, and it was decided to leave this for a drier day. At the foot of the first pitch, Tony found a salamander which had survived its entry fall. It was duly popped into a tackle bag and returned to the surface to start a reptilian caving club.

At Easter we went to St. Pons, in the department of Hérault, about 120km east of Toulouse. The objective was to spend the weekend in the company of another Aérospatiale club, from Mariguane near Marseille.

Lodgings had been reserved at the town's Maison de Jeunesse (municipal youth club). Despite much feasting, we managed two caving trips.

Grotte de Trayolle was the first, its entrance arch opening into a hillside no more than 500m south-east of the tiny hamlet of Usclats le Bas, just south off the N112, some 4km west of St. Pons. Roomy passage continued beyond the entrance arch, and was only briefly interrupted by a hands-and-knees crawl before reaching a 10m pitch into a large passage with a fine lake. The pitch was virtually free-climbable, but a ladder was used to assist younger members of the party. Crossing the lake was not attempted by our immediate group (but others did it without getting a soaking), and we ambled off in the opposite direction, crossing several fine, water-filled gours, the passage finally becoming choked. Many photographs were taken!

Réseau Artenac-Ponderatz provided a good through trip. The entrance was "somewhere" about 750m south of St. Pons, approached by driving south-west along the N112 for 1km, and turning sharp left and up a track whose surface left much to be desired. A steel lid protected an easy scramble down to a boulder-floored passage descending to a confusing chamber where a 3m slither down a fixed rope was called for. Route finding was not easy but we soon arrived at a fissure in the floor of a large passage, which offered a squeeze down into a very varied, steeply descending passage where a handline was useful. The occasionally precipitous descent brought us down into a large horizontal passage where we stopped for lunch.

Having swept away the crumbs, we set off along the very roomy and well decorated passage, heading for la Salle du Throne. On arriving there we wished we hadn't. It was a classic "decorated - chamber - ruined - by - vandals" situation; what possesses some of these "cavers" remains a mystery, but vandalism is very common throughout France. Leaving the ruins, we pushed on down to a rope pitch which gave access to a magnificent streamway. We followed the main stream up, passing some beautiful formations (some smashed, of course), for about 1km to a sump. The return downstream took us through bigger and bigger passage until we swung away to the left of the river to exit via a normally locked entrance in a hillside overlooking the town football ground. Even more photographs were taken.

Before leaving St. Pons, we located the local natural history and archaeological museum. It was small, beautifully layed out and enthusiastically run by an ex-caver - well worth a visit.

The arrival of an Australian visitor, Jocelyn Davies, gave us an excuse to spend a weekend at Tarascon, 9/10 April. On the way down we detoured west of Foix to visit La Rivière Souterraine de Labouiche. This is another of Casteret's old haunts (with Jo Delteil) and is about 4km long. The three-stage boat trip of about 2km, up to a cascade, was unusual and interesting. Being out of season and in pouring rain, our visit was not as part of a 1000-strong mob of tourists, and all the more enjoyable.

The guide - cum - boatman was hilarious. Part of the Sunday was spent visiting another show cave - Grotte de Lombrives south-east of Tarascon at Ussat-les-bains. A jolly "train ride" provides an easy way up the hillside to reach the enormous entrance arch. The cave is mostly horizontal and the visit consists of wandering along roomy passages and through huge chambers, listening to the guide expound on dark deeds of the local brigands and of Pyrène, mythical princess. Formations varied from dry and dull to damp and impressive, and the trip ended half way along an enormous passage, the guide saying, "Well, that's it folks", but with old electric wires disappearing on into the gloom...

As you may imagine, we are getting more knowledgable about the French caving scene and things are beginning to build into a very interesting picture. A crying shame is the many instances of vandalism much of which can only be the work of cavers themselves. Several caves are now gated and virtually denied to cavers because of vandalism - what a pity, in a country where so many beautiful caves are located.

THE WESSEX CHALLENGE '88

by John Beauchamp

Armed with the Cerberus chariot, clothed in old sacks and coated in blue wode the team set off for the Belfry. Amazingly, the chariot reached a top speed of 45mph on the way. Perhaps the method of towing had something to do with that. The event (on Saturday 9th July) was down on numbers from the previous years but a warm-up game of "fetch the log from the Shepton and plonk it on top of the Woodhenge at the Belfry" got everyone going. About 7 or 8 teams entered and the MCG came second! The chariot race was more of a letdown, only three chariots. And we came third! Our excuse is that because our team was by far the prettiest and our chariot the best built, we had to stop regularly for photographs. Anyway, well done to the Axbridge who won and have the (mis)fortune of hosting next years event.

**NOTICE OF AN EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,
NORDRACH COTTAGE, SATURDAY 3 DEC. 1988, 5PM**

At the AGM on 26th March 1988, the Committee was tasked with proposing a system of payments for cottage use which would (a) reflect the general feeling of the group that it is the responsibility of each member, whether they use the cottage or not, to contribute towards its general upkeep, and (b) give a fair distribution of income between members staying overnight at the cottage (who currently pay cottage fees) and those visiting during day-time or evenings (for whom there is no formal method of payment). Proposals were published in the Newsletter, and were discussed thoroughly at the Half-yearly Forum. The Committee has considered this discussion, and proposes the following:

1. The Annual Subscription for Full and Probationary Members will be increased from £15 to £20. In addition to the current benefits, this will entitle members to free access to the cottage at any time by the member, his/her accompanied guests, and his/her own children aged under 18. No additional "day fees" will be expected from members for day use of cottage facilities.
2. An "Overnight Fee" of £1 will be charged for members booking or using sleeping accomodation. This replaces the current "night plus day" fee of £1.25
3. Members' Guests and Visting Groups will be charged an overnight fee of £2 (increased from £1.75 at present)
4. Associate Members' annual subscription will be increased from £7.50 to £10.

In accordance with Rule 6 in the MCG Constitution and Rules, any changes to the ammount of the Annual Subscriptions must be agreed at a General Meeting. To allow these proposals (if agreed) to take effect from 1st Jan. 1989, a General Meeting will take place at 5pm on Saturday 3rd Dec. 1988 at Nordrach Cottage. The purpose of the meeting will be to consider and vote on the proposal, without ammendment, that "the Annual Subscription to the Mendip Caving Group shall be £20 for Full and Probationary Members, and £10 for Associate Members, with effect from 1st Jan. 1989"

Please bear in mind that the Annual Subscriptions have not been increased for 4 years now, and that an increase is due in any case to take account of inflation and to "balance the budget". You are, therefore, asked to agree this resolution, for the future well-being of the Group. In case you are unable to attend on 3rd Dec. a postal vote form is attached. This should be completed, signed, and returned to the Secretary prior to the meeting, allowing adequate time for postal delays.

STOP PRESS! CUCKOO CLEEVES PADLOCK CHANGED; LONGWOOD LOCK NEEDS RESPECT & WD40; LONGWOOD VALLEY SINK GOING WELL; RACE ON FOR MAIN CHAMBER IN BONE NOSE; EASTWATER BREAKTHROUGH STILL IMMINENT; CAN'T BE AT THE BGM? - REMEMBER TO USE YOUR POSTAL VOTE!!