

Mendip Caving Group NEWS

NUMBER 205

MARCH 1989

AGM AGENDA

The Annual General Meeting of the Mendip Caving Group will be held at 3pm on Saturday 1st April 1989 at Nordrach Cottage.

Chairman to be decided.

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the AGM held on 26th March 1988.
3. Officers reports. Questions and comments are invited to:

Secretary: Neil Hutchinson
Cottage Warden: John Beauchamp
Recorder: Ian McKechnie
Tackle Master: Brian Murlis

Treasurer: Mike Lovell
Editor: Yvonne Rowe
Meet Secretary: Martin Rowe
Ordinary Member: Gordon Lister

4. Election of Officers for 89/90

Nominations should be sent to the secretary, Neil Hutchinson, 19 Station Road, Twyford, Berks, to arrive no later than 11th March 1989.

The following committee members have offered to continue in their posts!

Mike Lovell: Treasurer
Martin Rowe: Meet Secretary

Yvonne Rowe: Editor

In addition, the following nominations have already been received or suggested:

Cottage Warden: Brian Murlis
Recorder: Jon Roberts

Tackle Master: Steve Redwood
Ordinary Member: John Beauchamp

The post of Secretary is vacant and requires a nominee.

5. Election of Auditors for 89/90 - General and MCG Shop accounts
6. Motions should be sent to the Secretary prior to the meeting. Any proposal(s) to change the constitution and rules should arrive no later than 11th March '89
7. Any other business
8. Date and venue of next meeting

Minutes of the 1988 AGM and Officers reports will be distributed prior to the meeting.

1989 MEETS PROGRAMME

18 MAR - 19 MAR	S. WALES	PANT MAWR	STEVE REDWOOD	0934-823867
19 MAR - 19 MAR	S. WALES	AGEN ALLWEDD	DAVE LITTLE	0753-866659
01 APR	MENDIP	AGM AND DINNER	NEIL HUTCHINSON	0734-320665
01 APR	MENDIP	BASIC SRT COURSE	MARTIN ROWE	0252-872006
02 APR	MENDIP	SRT RESCUE COURSE	MIKE HASELEDEN	0703-464491
15 APR - 16 APR	YORKS	LONG KIN WEST	ANDY BEARE	0734-792066
15 APR - 16 APR	YORKS	LANCS/EASEGILL	ANDY BEARE	0734-792066
06 MAY - 07 MAY	MENDIP	ST CUTHBERTS	JOHN BEAUCHAMP	0761-62929
20 MAY - 21 MAY	YORKS	HURNEL MOSS	LESLEY ROBBINS	0734-792066
20 MAY - 21 MAY	YORKS	LANCS/EASEGILL	LESLEY ROBBINS	0734-792066
03 JUN - 04 JUN	MENDIP	GEOLOGY	MALCOLM COTTER	07842-52643
17 JUN - 18 JUN	S. WALES	DFD	GEOFF BARTON	0932-849241
01 JUL - 02 JUL	MENDIP	CHARTERHOUSE	YVONNE ROWE	0252-872006
15 JUL - 16 JUL	YORKS	LANCS/EASEGILL	MIKE LOVELL	0734-663747
05 AUG - 06 AUG	MENDIP	BATH STONE MINES	IAN McKECHNIE	0932-228292
19 AUG - 20 AUG	YORKS	MEREGILL	BRIAN MURLIS	0934-412048
19 AUG - 20 AUG	YORKS	LOST JOHNS	DAVE LITTLE	0753-866659
02 SEP - 03 SEP	CHEPSTOW	OTTER HOLE	GEOFF BARTON	0932-849241
16 SEP - 17 SEP	S WALES	CRAIG A FFYNNON	PETE COLLINGS-WELLS	01-423-5601
07 OCT	MENDIP	HALF-YEARLY MEETING	MARTIN ROWE	0252-872006
07 OCT	MENDIP	PRIDDY BARN DANCE	GORDON LISTER	01-579-3466
04 NOV - 05 NOV	MENDIP	WATERWHEEL	YVONNE ROWE	0252-872006
18 NOV - 19 NOV	YORKS	WEST KINGSDALE	IAN PARRY	0296-434244
02 DEC - 03 DEC	MENDIP	RESERVOIR HOLE	NEIL HUTCHINSON	0734-320665
15 DEC - 16 DEC	S. WALES	DAN YR OGOF	DAVE LITTLE	0753-866659

NOTE! Some dates are provisional, please watch MCG news for up-to-date information.

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.
 DAVING 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: MCG members, member's children, SWCC and NPC £1
 Guest clubs and members guests £2

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: £20 Full and Probationary Members, £10 Associate Members
 The subscription includes free day-time access to the cottage by the member, their accompanied guests and children.



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ON THE MOVE

Adrian Thomas has moved to 17 Cedar Way, Nailsea, Bristol, BS19 1QZ. Tel: 0272-851095

CONGRATULATIONS . . .

...to four prospective members who have been accepted as probationary members: Isca Howell, Lee Hawkswell, David Tocke and David Walsh.

WELCOME BACK . . .

...to Cate Sampson who has rejoined the Group.

THE DIGGER

We are pleased to record that Malcolm's recovery from surgery continues, with recent visits to GB, Chartershouse Cave and the Bone Hole dig! He will be on Mendip again at Easter.

KEY DEPOSITS

The treasurer has been receiving mysterious cheques for £5. We think they may be uncollected deposits on cave keys loaned out from the library. If you accept a cheque as deposit on a key, please write on the cheque "deposit for xxx cave key", and the name and address of the borrower. The treasurer can then decide whether to cash the cheque or destroy it if he thinks the key has been returned but the deposit not collected.

If you accept cash as a deposit it is your responsibility to ensure it is returned when the key is brought back.

DEADLINE . . .

...for April's Bulletin: 25.03.89
 ...for May's Newsletter: 29.04.89

MEETS UPDATE

18/19th Mar. S.Wales, Agen Allwedd
 Dave Little (tel: 0753-866659) is leading.

19/20th Aug. Yorks, Lost Johns
 Dave Little (tel: 0753-866659) is leading.

19/20th Aug. Yorks, Meragill
 Brian Murlis (0934-412048) is leading.

September '89 Italy/France
 SRT / climbing / walking including preparation for visit to Jean Bernard next winter. Details (yet again) from Dave Little.

COTTAGE BOOKINGS

09 Mar - 13 Mar	Westminster Sch	(12)
10 Mar - 11 Mar	Churchfield Sch	(08)
18 Mar - 19 Mar	Venture Scouts	(08)
02 May - 04 May	Unicorn Leisure	(10)
07 Jul - 14 Jul	Aerospatiale	
22 Jul - 30 Jul	Dave Briggs	(08)

ANNUAL DINNER

The annual dinner will be held on 1st April '89 at The Star Hotel, Wells. A coach will leave the cottage after the AGM, returning to Nordrach at 12pm. The committee regret that the cost of the coach has had to be increased to £2 per person.

Tickets for the dinner, price £10 each are ONLY AVAILABLE in advance from: Mike Lovell, 4 Settrington Close, Loddon Park, Earley, Reading, Berks. An application form for tickets was included with Bulletin no.3. Cancellations will be fully refunded as long as reasonable notice is given.

PLEASE NOTE THAT TICKETS ARE ONLY AVAILABLE IN ADVANCE AND WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE ON THE DAY.

EARWIG . . .

...emergency cave keys acquired... needed! duckboards by door, soakaway, sleeping plod at gate... investigating purchase of payphone, as rental expensive... schemes being considered for better investment... security lock for front door... buy domestic ladder

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE 5

by Tony Knibbs

TROU DU VAPEUR

May 1st found us a few kilometres beyond Tarascon, along the high road to Andora, visiting Trou du Vapeur 50m above a spa hotel at Ussat-les-Bains. A scramble up a scree slope brought us to a small hole in the cliff face, a 10m ladder pitch and a passage descending in steps down to a sump of warm water - hence Vapeur.

WEEKEND ON THE MED IN THE MUD

Ascension weekend, May 12th-15th was spent on the Mediterranean coast at Banyuls, close to the Spanish frontier. It was a "family" weekend, traditionally spent eating, drinking and trying marine pursuits like board sailing (must ask Phil and Helen how it's done!) and diving. Spring can be very wet in southern France and this bank holiday period was no exception. The club would have had a drier weekend in the Pyrénées!

GROTTE DE BEDHEILLAC

Visiting relatives from the Drôme region gave us the excuse to visit the show caves of Bedheillac, to the west of Tarascon. Above the village of Bedheillac the enormous 35m wide x 20m high entrance is difficult to miss. Buying our tickets at a rather spartan "office" within the immense portal, we set off clutching electric handlamps along the partly concrete-covered passage which ran for maybe 800m maintaining its imposing dimensions.

During the second world war, this part of the cave was used by the Germans as a factory to build aircraft assemblies. Rumours that they actually flew completed aircraft from the entrance were untrue, but a French aviator managed the feat after the war. Beyond the "aircraft factory" passage the route lay through a large muddy chamber featuring a showerbath, then passing into a roomy passage to a broad bedding chamber in which numerous Magdalenian paintings, engravings and bas reliefs in mud can be seen. It was amazing how the artists of 10,000BC managed to seek out the most confined corners of the chamber to produce their work. Viewing was difficult.

GOUFFRE DU PONT DE GERBAUT

We had been fortunate in making the acquaintance of Mick and Sally Williams, two cavers from Northampton briefly staying in Toulouse (Sally studying French). The four of us arranged a trip down Gouffre Du Pont Gerbaut above Arbas which is the central entrance into the near-100k long Felix Trombe system - our nearest big cave.

Lodging was found in the village of Barat at the HQ of the Groupe Spéléologique des Pyrénées whose ropes we used for the descent.

The approach march starts along the track beyond Laberderque towards Pèneblanque entrance. Easy going eventually gives way to an uphill struggle to reach the huge entrance dolines - two separated by a rock arch.

The first pitch of 43m opens into a wall of the lower doline, awkwardly belayed finally at a hard-to-reach bolt over the huge void. A 23m freehang to a bolt, then 20m to the floor was soon followed by an easy traverse to the head of a 15m pitch. Descending boulder-floored passage brought us to the third pitch - a 30m job in several sections - then a 10m drop into a small damp grotto from which the renowned (awkward - a bit like the drop into Blue Pencil) Chatière Claude led to a 5m pitch and horizontal shuffle into THE BIG STUFF.

This was IT - enormous passage leading each way from a T-junction. Doyen Duchêne had advised going left, so left we went through stroll-along passage to a 10m pitch, then seemingly endless big passage, passing an obvious way down to the river, and on to eventually miss the main route and end up confused in a small complex of passages. We had a set time to retreat and this coincided with our confusion (getting lost).

We had a snack before retracing our steps - cussing Claude and his chat - without incident to the surface. We had the satisfied feeling that the trip had given us another insight into the enormous system beneath the Arbas plateau.

GOUFFRE RAYMONDE / TROU MILE

June 18th saw us back at Arbas, this time dropping into Gouffre Raymonde: 29m entrance, a dusty rift to a 20m pitch into big passage. The main way on was downslope (towards puits Nède, 35m) but we proceeded upslope over breakdown slabs looking for a passage to the left - a connection with Trou Mile. By dint of first taking a hole up to the right, we traversed back across the passage, effectively turning right.

A 3m climb up a wall took us into more confined rift passage ascending steeply with climbs and thrutches giving about 30m height to reach a horizontal flat out crawl to the head of a 15m pitch. The takeoff was hilarious, hanging feet first over nothing and groping around for a muddy handline before emerging fully to find the descent line in the 5m diameter shaft. Progress now alternated between constricted shuffling along at the bottom of a narrow, jagged rift (now with small stream) or ascending two free-climbs of 10m - up, then down to the stream again in each case.

One final tight stretch of stream-level wriggling brought us out into Trou Mile passage. Here, the three short wet pitches (8m, 6m and 4.5m) were more than usually lively due to a thunderstorm upstairs and the presence of a rope was helpful. The 3.5m entrance pitch was dry and free-climbed.

This Raymonde/Mile connection is not the sort of thing one would seek out as a practical diversion - too much hard work is involved for that!

SLIDE SHOW PRESENTATION

On Thursday June 23rd we gave the Spéléo Club d'Aérospatiale a slide show on British caves. Many of them seemed interested in spending most of July 1989 in southern Britain, caving and generally sightseeing. Mendip and south Wales are obvious targets.

CENTENARY OF SPELEOLOGY

To commemorate the hundred years since E-A Martel first explored La Rivière Souterraine de Bramabiau (Camprieux, Gard), French cavers assembled untidily at Millau, Aveyron, for a centennial beanfeast.

Again, we were accompanied by Mick and Sally, arriving just in time to grab a space at a campsite outside the town on Friday night, 1st July. After a quick meal we went to a hall in town to see a series of excellent films - funny, historical, documentary - including a whimsical reconstruction of the original Bramabiau epic.

Saturday morning at Millau Civic Centre was the occasion of much pomp and ignorance - speleo and civic dignitaries addressing an assembly of cavers who never stopped talking amongst themselves throughout the opening ceremony. There were the usual trade exhibitions (caving gear and books) and an interesting display of old photos and memorabilia.

The evening began with an interesting display of quaint table manners at a huge banquet just outside (clever, that) the town; afterwards our coaches returned to the hall in Millau for more films and a monsoon-like rainstorm.

On Sunday we drove out through Meyreux to visit the excellent Grotte de Dargilan show cave in which some additional grottos have been opened to mark the centenary. The trip was also free! The afternoon was spent wandering around the fantastically eroded rock forms on the edge of the plateau at Montpellier le Vieux above the Dourbie gorge.

We are now more or less getting our act together as experience of caves and caving areas builds up. Our circle of acquaintances is also growing and, with it, a feeling of belonging. But it's still very different and we miss the regular Friday departures to Mendip or south Wales.

MCG

digs

RODS POT

19.10.88 Bang laid below Eyeball Rift.
 23.10.88 Removed loose spoil from bang, the rest was difficult just using bare hands!
 20.10.88 Laid alb bang in PJ(1a).
 02.11.88 The afore mentioned bang did the job. Dug out the remains of the boulder to reveal loose mud and rocks, and a good draught.
 05.11.88 Started digging out the very wet loose mud and rocks which has been layed down in layers. The passageway is widening and looking very water-worn. A skip is now required for removing spoil.
 09.11.88 PJ(1) and PJ(1a) were altarad, PJ(1a) was extended by about 3ft and looks good, PJ(1) was extended to a hole in the roof, but with a loose boulder.
 29.11.88 PJ(1a) is looking good, extended to a widening rift with ample loose boulders which tend to be light activated! There's a good draught coming through the boulders.
 11.01.89 Unfortunately the inevitable happened - a very large boulder fell out of the roof (shades of Bone Hole). Some serious engineering work required.

COH HOLE

19.01.89 Lower boulder choke was looked at to see if digging was possible. Vince decided to test every boulder in the very unstable rubble with his little "crow bar"!
 01.02.89 "Breakthrough".
 04.02.89 It appears that we have now broken through a recent collapse gaining access to the final 200ft of cave passage. Entry was through a constricted squeeze - "Suicide Squeeze!". Some fine cave pearls to be seen the other side. The area around Suicide Squeeze is very loose and great care is required.

UPPER FLOOD

11.01.89 Someone waiting at the Lavatory Trap while the rest of the party went through reported mud and rocks falling in as she waited.

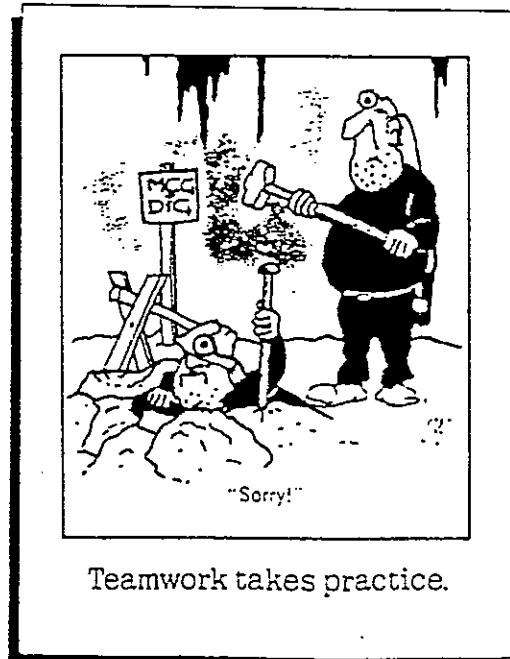
PINETREE POT

09.11.88 (Hades). Boulder choke now loosened, chamber visible at top. Needs small idiot willing volunteer to climb up into it. (Wednesday Chamber).



BONE HOLE

06.11.88 Twas a dry and still Sunday. PJ(3a) boulder constriction banged.
 16.11.88 Previous bang didn't do much. Removed approx 10 buckets of chocolate mousse from main dig.
 01.02.89 The dig is under about 2ft of water.



89 SUBS / CCC PERMIT

If you haven't yet paid your subs please send a cheque to the Treasurer now!

CCC Permits for 1989 were sent to all full members. A few are still outstanding - please return them ASAP.

SINGING RIVER MINE

by Joan and Andy Goddard

On Saturday 4th February, the Oxfordshire branch of the MCG set off to explore this old Calamine mine at Shipham, under the able leadership of Martin and Yvonne Rowe.

Armed with the relevant page from Mendip Underground, and a compass, we descended the 35foot shaft. The compass was immediately required to discover which way was east, but it wasn't much help in the small maze of passages which we encountered en route to The T-junction mentioned by Messrs Irwin and Knibbs (they failed to mention that there are at least ten other T-junctions, all of them apparently fitting the description).

After a number of abortive forays we found the way and set off along the West Series, a lovely watery route which ended all too soon with the stream disappearing into the floor.

In a side chamber we saw a lot of broken material left by the miners, and were able to identify Galena (Lead Sulphide) and Sphalerite (Zinc Sulphide) crystals, as well as some good calcite-lined cavities in the walls. We didn't identify any Calamine (Zinc Carbonate) but we weren't quite sure what it was supposed to look like. Could someone enlighten us please?

Returning to the T-junction we followed some dry passages to a 3-way junction from where a short passage on the right led to a dramatic view of Stinking Gulf. The straight-ahead passage from 3-way junction led across a 20cm wide plank spanning a deep lake to a view of another lake where a darker patch of deep water indicated the presence of a flooded shaft.

Time precluded exploration of all side passages in the East Series, although we had a quick look along a low curved passage, Chocolate Canal, with miners' "deads" stacked neatly along one wall.

We found the mine most interesting and look forward to going back to investigate some of the bits we didn't get to this time. Thanks to Martin and Yvonne for organising the meet.

SUMPING FOR A CAUSE

by Yvonne Rowe (ed.)

An introduction...

I work in a hospital for people with varying mental and physical handicaps. Amongst many other things, we try to give these people as normal and varied a life as is possible. As part of this "normalisation" programme we take them on shopping trips, horse riding, day trips, holidays, cinema, pubs, boat trips, etc, etc. We have two specially adapted mini-buses but with 250 residents there are many who don't get out as often as they should.

Now to the point...

The Lord's Taverners have offered the hospital Social Training Unit a new £18,000 specially adapted bus if we can raise £3,000 towards the cost. We have until June to do this and will do all the usual things eg. car boot, jumble, sponsored activities, raffles, etc. I work in this Unit as part of a team of eight trainers and we were each asked to organise a sponsored activity to do with our particular hobby or sport. My obvious choice was caving. I want to do something that I haven't done before but that might be a benefit to me (and maybe others!).

This is it...

Anyone who knows me will know that I am almost phobic about going under water - particularly murky water - and as such have often tried but never managed to find enough courage to dive a sump. If only for the sake of safety (eg. flash floods) I feel I should break this fear and dive a sump so at least I know what to expect if ever I am in a situation where the only way out of a cave is via a (short!!) flooded section of passage. As there will be a lot of members on Mendip for the AGM on April 1st I thought that this would be a good time to ask you to sponsor me to do Sump 1 in Swildons, there - and back, I hope! This might not sound very daring to most of you, but believe me it will take all the courage I have to do it. I'm hoping that the thought of not letting the hospital down will give me the incentive and willpower I'll need. I trust that you will think this is a worthy cause and support me and my hospital.

Thanking you in anticipation.

THE GREAT LAXEY MINE, ISLE OF MAN

by Dave Briggs

The Great Laxey Mine is located a short way up the valley from Laxey village. In fact the washing floors were in the village. Lead and Zinc were mined, with silver also being extracted.

Much evidence of mining still exists around Laxey and remains of the buildings are still standing but the most outstanding and obvious feature of the Great Laxey Mine is the famous Lady Isabella water wheel. The wheel, built in 1854, is reputed to be the largest surviving water wheel in the world. The diameter is 72ft-6ins and it has a breadth of 6ft. The wheel is of a type called a pitch-backshot with the water entering the buckets on the wheel just before top centre. The wheel was used to drive pumps to remove water from the mine. A crank on the wheel drives rods running along a viaduct to the top of the Engine Shaft. Over the top of the Engine Shaft is a large "Tee Rocker" which converts the horizontal rod movement to a vertical motion. The shaft was approx. 492m deep but very little of this can now be reached and the rods which once descended the shaft are no longer connected to the tee rocker.

Further up the valley is the Welsh Shaft. This was about 595m deep and is not vertical, but follows the angle of vein of ore or hade. This shaft can now only be descended for the first 55m to the Main Adit level. The levels below this are now flooded as the Main Adit acts as a natural drain. When the mine closed in 1929 the pumps were stopped so the mine filled to this level. The Manx Mines Research Group (M.M.R.G.) Laxey Division, now called The Laxey Mines Research Group, with assistance from the Isle of Man Government is engaged upon a major restoration project in this shaft.

At about the 12m level, down in the Welsh Shaft there is a large hydraulic piston-operated engine. This was used to drive a Man Rod that descends the shaft. A Man Rod was used by the miners to descend and exit the mine. This was accomplished by a large rod rising and falling about 4m. At 4m intervals there were platforms both in the shaft and on the rod. A miner would stand on a rod platform and descend. He would then get off the rod platform onto one of the stationary platforms in the shaft. The rod would then rise bringing to the miner another platform which he could then get on and descend a further 4m. This was repeated until he reached the level that he required. The engine comprises a large 0.65m diameter cylinder of about 4m in height with smaller control cylinders located beside it. This all sits supported on four horizontal timbers, about 400mm square and 4m long. The engine is now over 107 years old and its support timbers are very rotten. Sometime in the future these will need replacing.

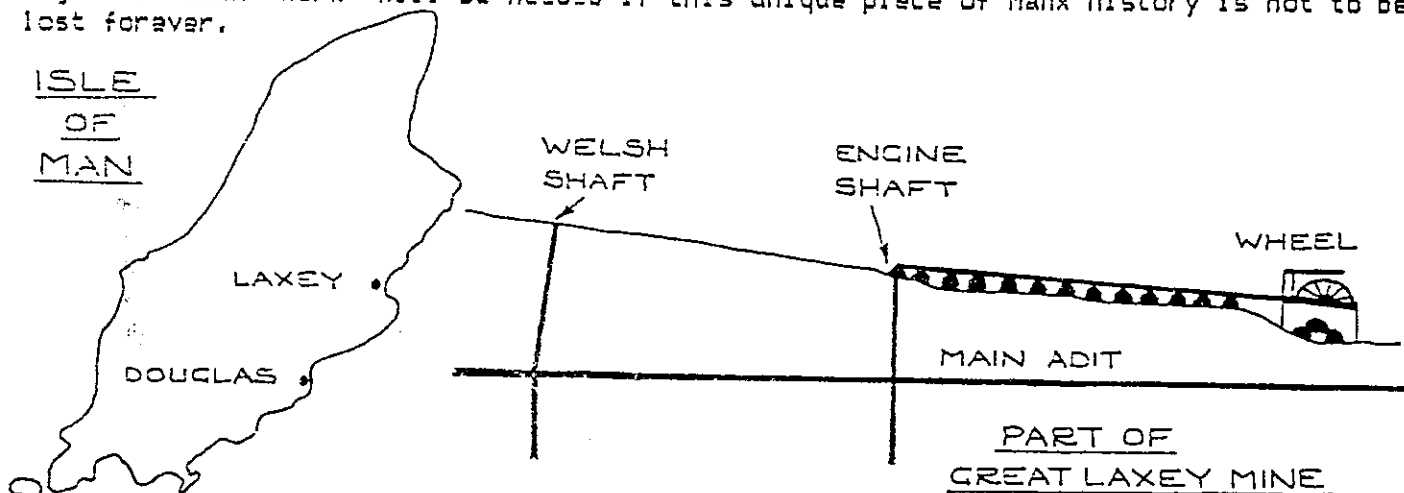
At adit level down the Welsh Shaft there is a very large "Balance Bob". It is similar in appearance to the tee rocker on the surface. This was connected to the engine by the Man Rod. The purpose of this and others further down was to counter balance the rods. The timbers of this too were in a very bad state. An inspection trip down the shaft in early 1988 gave rise to concern that the Balance Bob was in imminent danger of collapse and in doing so could pull the engine down the shaft. There has always been some speculation that the Bob and the connecting rods held the engine in position. However, later in the year this proved not to be the case. The rod was broken by a falling rock hitting it and nothing dramatic happened.

On the 15th May 1988 a project was started to "save the Man Engine". There was a large choke of rocks and mud, on and around the engine. This was precariously balanced on the edge of the shaft and needed to be cleared. Before these could be moved some support was needed for the Balance Bob down at adit level. A team of nine, cut and then lowered large support timbers down the shaft and fitted them into position. This was a risky business for all concerned as vibrations caused by the lowering of the timbers freed large stones from the choke above. With that job completed, the next stage was to tackle the choke.

It was decided that a large depression at adit level could be filled with the "spoil" and the rocks could be broken up and sent down the shaft. This would be much easier than hauling to the surface. After first removing some old pipes that were in the way using a winch and pulling them out to the surface, rocks were broken up into a size considered suitable to send down the shaft. This was easily achieved by the use of a large percussion drill, one of which we managed to break within the first week. Other smaller stones and mud were washed away using a pump and a high pressure hose. As the choke was depleted, support timbers were required to be fitted in place to prevent the whole place falling in around our ears. The choke has now been completely removed and two stagings have been constructed across the shaft. An electric supply has been installed and a floodlight fitted, pointing down the shaft. This can illuminate all the way to adit level and was very helpful in clearing out the remaining loose rocks jammed in the shaft. There is much more work required to be done near the top of the shaft to prevent loose rocks falling and there is also some small passages that need clearing. The Manx Government have already opened up a small part of the mine for public access and eventually it is hoped that this area will be opened up as well, but that will be some time in the future.

The Group's future plans on this site is to start a dig down at adit level and to clear away a few rockfalls as well as produce detailed drawings of the machinery and some accurate, up to date surveys.

As well as the underground work, there are many old buildings in a serious state of neglect. Much work will be needed if this unique piece of Manx history is not to be lost forever.



RAT DISEASE



by Dr Hugh Goddard, Wells, Somerset

- 7 Following the recent confirmation of a case of leptospirosis (Weil's disease) in a 17-year-old patient of mine, a caving enthusiast, I feel the public may be largely unaware of the risks from the present widespread contamination of fresh waterways with rat urine. The infecting organism in the urine can enter the body through the nose or mouth or through skin abrasions, and can lead to a flu-like illness with fever, muscle pains and conjunctivitis. Early treatment with antibiotics is curative, but if the infection is not recognised, it may lead to jaundice and kidney failure with possibly fatal consequences. About 100 cases of Weil's disease are reported each year. It used to affect mainly sewage workers and farmers, but the majority of cases now reported are linked to freshwater activities such as caving, canoeing, water-skiing and raft-racing. Until effective rat control measures are instituted, the number of cases is likely to increase. People participating in such sporting activities who develop severe flu-like symptoms should seek prompt medical advice. *Sunday Times, 22.1.89*

EXTRACTS OF MRO REPORT FOR 1987

Nineteen incidents were recorded, two more than the previous "bad year" 1972. Fractures and other serious injuries were the highest ever, and the 17th/18th's of the month were strangely jinxed.

10.01.87 Swildons. Party overdue from "short round trip". The party concerned had been seen making slow progress in the cave for 4hrs. They were set crossing the fields, and had been delayed by a large weaver at the squeezes. No information left on surface about trip/ETA.

19.01.87 Swildons. 19yr old well-equipped caver wearing wet suit, dived through sump 1 but lost his nerve for the return. One rescue group made contact while second assembled sump rescue gear. The reluctant caver was reported to be "very cold and distressed". The arrival of detained rescuers worked wonders.

25.01.87 Eastwater Cavern. Industrial action at BT prevented caver phoning his mother to let her know he was staying on Mendip an extra day for another trip down Eastwater. Mother phoned police when son failed to return home.

22.02.87 Cheddar Cliffs. Stranded goat given quick course in SRT.

15.02.87 Blackocor Swallet. Dog fell down shaft.

20.03.87 Sough's Cave. Digger became stuck in deep mud in Far Pit, with air becoming stagnant. 30 air bottles taken to cave while digger extricated.

25.04.87 Rod's Pot. 15yr old on first trip slipped and broke ankle. Injured leg was plastered and patient hauled out on stretcher. The upper passage was used to avoid right-angled bends in the lower route.

17.05.87 North Hill Swallet. Cows leaning against the entrance pipe caused the iron bar across the top to come loose. When the first caver was 5ft from the top, the belay failed and he fell, followed by his ladder and lifeline. Unfortunately, no-one was at the far to realise they were overdue because of an unrelated accident resulting in a visit to Bristol. A 4hr wait ensued until their return. The injured caver was eventually hauled out in a harness and taken to hospital.

17.05.87 Rod's Pot. Serious injuries following a slip near the entrance, requiring 4hrs of surgery, three metal plates, a bag full of self-tapping screws and a bone graft.

21.06.87 Rod's Pot. A novice slipped near the entrance breaking an ankle and becoming unconscious. After plastering the leg, the patient was taken to Weston hospital and surprisingly, not detained for observation.

22.06.87 Swildons. Ladder reported on 20ft Pot just before midnight and cars still on Priddy Green. Party emerged shortly after midnight following a late evening trip.

25.07.87 Cheddar Cliffs. Goat with short seacry given second SRT lesson.

17.07.87 Swildons. Caver fell and injured back at 20ft Pot. The patient was quickly hauled up the pitch and out in just over 1hr. He was wearing trainers and had been down the cave 4hrs when the accident happened. No lifeline was used on the pitch and the patient showed signs of hypothermia.

06.08.87 Swildons. Overdue party emerged after delay underground.

17.09.87 Soatchurch Cavern. Novice wearing trainers twisted and tore muscles in his side and abdomen. A nerve was trapped causing considerable pain and he was unable to assist himself. He was put in a "baby bouncer" and hauled out. The MRO later received a letter of thanks for their prompt turnout and expertise.

10.10.87 Singing River Mine. Overdue party quickly located, lost 50ft from the entrance. Their lights had failed. Mr Mitchel who lives near the shaft kindly provided hot drinks and changing facilities.

17.10.87 Swildons. An experienced and well equipped caver dislocated a shoulder in Blue Pencil Passage. Whilst the shoulder appears to have reduced on its own accord he experienced great pain and requested assistance. One person remained with him whilst two made a rapid exit to alert MRO. In the circumstances, they did all the right things and both returned underground with the rescue party. As time was going on and the Wessex annual dinner was imminent the support party also went underground and set the first party making good progress at Trantsans Temple. All were out by 7.10pm. The patient had badly torn muscles as a result of the dislocation.

08.11.87 LONGWOOD SWALLET. Experienced caver fell 25ft attempting to climb Swing Pitch without a handline, sustaining fractured wrist, concussion and facial bruises. A pain in the ear and right hip suggested a fall on the right side. It was fortunate the patient was wearing a good helmet with secure chin-strap. Despite the discomfort she was able to help herself with assistance and encouragement. A Doctor agreed to stand by. The patient was taken to hospital where she spent 5 days with a hairline fracture of the skull, indented cheekbone, temporary paralysis of one side of the face owing to nerve damage and a broken wrist. Doctors told her she was lucky to get away so lightly.

NOTE: The original callout came by phone at Burrington Cafe. MRO notices at cave entrances give details of the nearest telephone. At Longwood, the nearest phone is at Longwood Grange nearby where the family are always extremely helpful during emergencies even if they do not want to be bothered with routine caving traffic.

18.11.87 Wookey Hole Cave. During a sump rescue practice, a well rehearsed technique, something clearly went wrong. The divers surfaced at speed and it was obvious that one was not breathing as the sask had flooded. The diver had cyanosis, no carotid pulse, the pupils were fully dilated and did not react to light. EAR and EDC were started; the patient had stopped breathing for several minutes. After 3mins the patient began to recover and after 20mins he was able to recognise his helpers. He was taken to hospital and has recovered fully. The prompt action of those with him was clearly crucial. CDGs report on the sask's malfunction is awaited.

GRANT SHEPHARD

It is with great sadness that I have to report the death of Grant Shephard in a traffic accident, not far from the MCB cottage on Wednesday, 01.03.89. Grant was about to announce his engagement to Victoria Arbizu. Victoria has flown over to England, and is staying with Grant's parents.

His funeral will be held on Friday, 10.03.89 at 2.00pm at the West Herts. Crematorium, High Elms Lane, Garston, St Albans. Grant's family, and Victoria, have asked that MGB members should attend the funeral. If you can attend, please tel. Martin Rowe (0252 872006) so that we know approx. numbers.

Messages of sympathy can be sent to Mr & Mrs Shephard, and Victoria, at 1, Lower Tail, Carpenters Park, Watford, Herts. (tel. 01-428 0083). The family have requested no flowers at the funeral. Donations can be made to a charity, to be announced. *M. Rowe*
