

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 207

SEPTEMBER 1989

ANOTHER EXCUSE NOT TO GO CAVING!

by Yvonne and Martin Rowe

Alan, Carol and Hannah Dougherty, Martin and myself had planned a week caving/walking/geology in the Assynt district of NW Scotland and a week walking/geology/archaeology on the Isle of Mull.

Alan booked a lovely little cottage at Elphin that he and Carol had stayed in before. From the dining room we had a magnificent view of Suilven (731m), cloud permitting, and in the evening red deer would come down off the hills to graze on the lowland. One evening they came as close as 30m from the cottage.

We decided to spend our first day seeking out the cave entrances. We drove to Inchnadamph and walked up Glean Dubh looking at a deep gorge on the way. The River Traligill below seemed fairly tame but undercut rock and huge scallops indicated that the river wasn't always so timid. The river has taken the least line of resistance as its course and therefore follows closely one of the many thrust planes which is clearly seen in the gorge. We crossed the river further up via a wide, low, concreted ford which had 12" high arches to allow the river to flow under.

Higher up on Knochan Uamh (Hill of Caves) we found a cave entrance. This cave is an open pothole 20m deep, below which a second entrance, Uamh an Uisge (Cave of Water), leads directly to the Water Slide where the stream cascades along the thrust plane. Due to an approaching thunderstorm we sheltered for lunch in the third entrance called Uamh an Tartair (Cave of the Roaring). When the storm was raging overhead we suddenly found our dry shelter invaded by a stream that came from inside the cave behind us, just missing our picnic and spilling out of the entrance. We hastily grabbed everything up from the floor and went outside where we saw a dramatic change in the small streams descending from Ben More Assynt (998m) on the other side of the Traligill valley. Flood pulses could be seen moving rapidly downstream. Having stood a while watching this spectacle we suddenly realised that all this water would very soon disgorge into the only river - the Traligill! THE FORD!! We made haste our retreat but on reaching the ford (or where it should have been) we found the river had risen 5 feet and was now a raging torrent very much wider than earlier. At the gorge the ferocity of the river was so great that where it went through narrow sections it almost reached the top. Looking further downstream we could see people waving us on to where they were by a derelict old bridge. We had seen this bridge on our way up and had attempted to cross here. From the water there was a 5ft climb up a crumbling concrete pier then a "tightrope" walk across the struts that were all that remained of the footway. It was from here that we saw the ford further upstream. By now you couldn't even see the piers and the river was splashing over the footway struts. The people were in fact the Mountain Rescue Team who, thankfully, were aware that we were on the hill and so had laid planks across the bridge and fixed a rope handline. Apparently this situation arises often after a very big storm so the rescue team go to help at the bridge as a matter of course. Their base is at the start of the walk at Inchnadamph so they usually know when people are on the hills or caving.

As we walked back to the car we could hear the deep rumbling of boulders being tumbled along by the swollen river. Looking back upstream we could see clouds of spray rising up at each waterfall. Had we been underground this day we would almost certainly have been caught out by the flood pulse - probably fatally, which led to our decision not to risk caving unless it stopped raining for at least a couple of days. It didn't!

cont. on p4

* * * 1989 MEETS PROGRAMME * * *

07 OCT	MENDIP	HALF-YEARLY MEETING	JON ROBERTS	01-753-9423
07 OCT	MENDIP	PRIDDY BARN DANCE	JOHN BEAUCHAMP	0761-62929
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

* * * COTTAGE BOOKINGS * * *

24 Sep - 29 Sep	St Cuthman School (15)	02 Dec - 03 Dec	Members weekend
29 Sep - 30 Sep	Pete Bulling (12)	18 Dec - 22 Dec	Royal Navy (22)
02 Oct - 06 Oct	Unicorn (20)	30 Dec - 01 Jan	Members New Year Party
07 Oct - 08 Oct	Members weekend (HYGM)	06 Jan - 07 Jan	Members weekend
13 Oct	Dave Gibson's sch (11)	03 Feb - 04 Feb	Members weekend
20 Oct - 21 Oct	Lincoln Scouts (?)	09 Feb	Dave Gibson's sch (11)
02 Nov	St Cuthman School (27)	03 Mar - 04 Mar	Members weekend
04 Nov - 05 Nov	Members weekend	31 Mar - 01 Apr	Members weekend (AGM)
13 Nov - 17 Nov	Royal Navy (15)	05 May - 06 May	Members weekend
17 Nov - 18 Nov	Dave Gibson's sch (11)	18 May	Dave Gibson's sch (11)
27 Nov - 01 Dec	Royal Navy (22)	02 Jun - 03 Jun	Members weekend

WEEKLY MEETINGS are held at the Group's Mendip headquarters on Wednesdays at 7.00pm. and at the Eclipse Inn, Egham Hill, Egham, Surrey, 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: MCG members, member's children, SWCC and NPC £1
 Guest clubs and member's guests £2
 ANNUAL SEASON TICKET: Optional exemption from cottage fees, for members £10
 ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: Full and Probationary Members: £20; Associate Members: £10
 The subscription includes free day-time access to the cottage by the member, their accompanied guests and children.



SECRETARY: JONATHAN ROBERTS tel: 01-735-9423
 1 Vauxhall Walk, London, SE11 5JT
 TREASURER: MIKE LOVELL tel: 0734-663747
 4 Settrington Close, Loddon Park, Earley, Reading, Berkshire
 MEET SECRETARY: MARTIN ROWE tel: 0252-872006
 10 Greenleas Close, Yateley, Camberley, Surrey, GU17 7SL
 COTTAGE WARDEN: BRIAN MURLIS tel 0934-412048
 1a Arundell Road, Weston - super - Mare, Avon, BS23 2QG
 ORDINARY MEMBER: JOHN BEAUCHAMP 0761-62929
 St Hugh's Cottage, Charterhouse, Blagdon, Bristol, BS18 6XR
 RECORDER: WAYNE HISCOX tel: (WORK) 0749-72081
 3 Keward, Glastonbury Road, Wells, Somerset
 EDITOR: YVONNE ROWE tel: 0252-872006
 10 Greenleas Close, Yateley, Camberley, Surrey, GU17 7SL
 TACKLEMASTER: STEVE REDHOOD tel: 0934-823867
 11 West Street, Banwell, Avon, BS24 6DA



ON THE MOVE

Peter Collings-Wells has moved to:
104 Rucklers Lane, Kings Langley, Herts,
WD4 8AY Tel: 09277-63912

WELCOME . . .

...to Mark Ward, Andy Goddard, Gof Daine and William Headington who have been accepted as probationary members.

HALF YEARLY MEETING AND BARN DANCE

The half-yearly meeting of the MCG will be held on Saturday 7th October starting at 3pm at Nordrach Cottage. Members are free to raise any subject. John Beauchamp has arranged a coach to the Barn Dance, leaving the cottage at 7.30pm. The Barn Dance (tickets from John Beauchamp or Jon Roberts, price £5), with Caller, Band and Buffet commences at 8pm at Priddy Hall. WE NEED A COUPLE OF MICROWAVES to heat food, and kitchen help - any offers?

NEW COTTAGE LOCKS . . .

...(Ed. I didn't know the old one didn't). The committee are concerned that there may be more keys to the cottage than there are members of the Group. Members who have resigned have often failed to return their keys, and there may also be unauthorised copies in circulation. To prevent unauthorised access to the cottage, and to placate our insurers, the locks will be changed on 01.01.90 and new keys issued on receipt of your 1990 subs. This, incidentally, should ensure that members pay their subs promptly next year.

DEADLINE . . .

....for October's Bulletin: 30.09.89
....for November's Newsletter: 28.10.89

AEROSPATIALE DOINGS

Following a three day stay in London, the group of cavers from Speleo Club d'Aerospatiale (Toulouse) arrived on Mendip in brilliant sunshine and in time for a visit to a "real" pub on Saturday evening. The weather remained excellent throughout (8-17 July) and contributed to a most enjoyable stay.

A considerable time was spent visiting nearby places of interest, the most expensive of which proved to be Bat Products where considerable sums of money changed hands. Buying so much kit removed any last excuse for not caving. Goatchurch provided an interesting introduction to caving for all the children - even the adult ones. Unusually for a Sunday afternoon, only one other party of four cavers was encountered. A trip to Sump 2 in Swildons Hole provided a taste of Mendip streamway and illustrated the need for electric lamps rather than the more Gallic carbide monsters. GB Cave produced a few appreciative gasps of amazement and proved that Mendip is not all rabbit holes lined with mud. A visit to St Cuthberts was a fitting climax to our caving and was much enjoyed in unusually dry conditions. September Chamber was voted the "decorated chamber of the week", and made the fight up the 30ft rift near the entrance seam worthwhile.

Bastille Day, 14th July, provided an ideal excuse for a party. Suitable revolutionary decorations were draped around the cottage and many people wore some form of patriotic costume. A meal of traditional cassoulet (stew), salad, cheese and a fruit salad was prepared. All this was washed down (or up, in one case) by copious quantities of wine and beer. As is required to signify the storming of the Bastille, a fireworks display was organised with the help of Robin Gray. Dancing and celebrations continued until dawn - these revolutions are very serious and tiring affairs!

Sincere thanks to the MCG and the many members who did so much to make our stay so enjoyable. We leave the guillotined heads as a token of our respect and as an illustration of European cooperation in the long-running battle against liberal democracy. Vive la Revolution - Vive la France!
Citizen Knibbs

cont. from p1 The rest of the week was spent waiting for the opportunity to safely go up the mountains which happened only twice. On the first clear day we decided to go up Quinag (808m). We walked up an easy ridge to Spidean Coinich (764m), the southern peak of Quinag. The walk up the ridge was initially basal quartzite, eventually giving way to Torridonian sandstone. By the time we had reached the top, cloud/drizzle was all around us so we were robbed of the spectacular views that are to be seen from here.

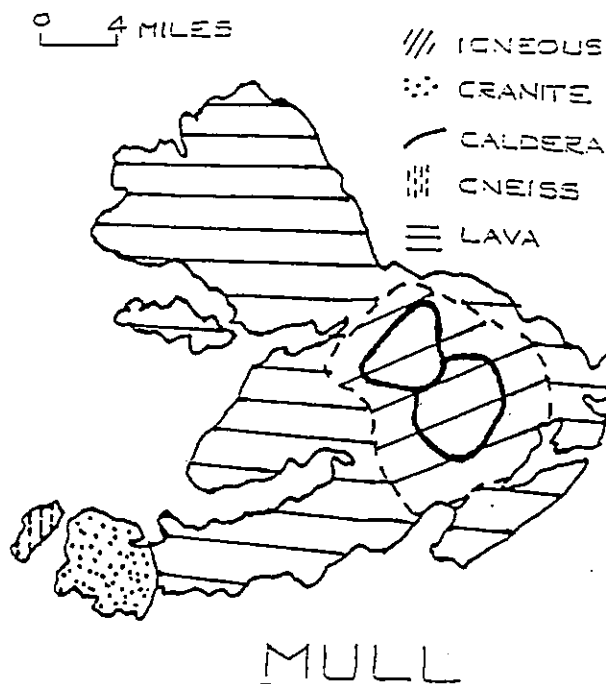
On another fine day we decided to go up Cul Mor (849m). The approach is via a deerstalkers path where we passed pretty lochans and saw many interesting alpine-type plants. On the long steady ascent to the top at about 600m we were startled when the rocks ahead of us suddenly started moving. It was actually a group of 6 or 7 male Ptarmigan that we had disturbed. With their summer gray/brown plumage (lovely plumage!) they blended in perfectly with the surrounding rocky terrain. From the top there were the most breathtaking views of other mountains including Suilven, Canisp, Stac Polly, Cul Bearg and Quinag, also many lochs and the Summer Isles.

The days between these walks were spent sightseeing and included a boat trip to the Summer Isles, landing briefly on Tanera Mor. On the way we saw seals, porpoises, some rare and some not-so-rare seabirds. On other days we did some geological sightseeing and there was plenty to see. We examined the Moine Thrust which, until the understanding of continental drift, was an enigma of geology with older rock overlying much younger rock. We had a drive to Achmelvich - a lovely white, sandy (empty!) beach surrounded on three sides by Lewisian Gneiss. This rock is the oldest to be found in Britain and is at least 3,000,000,000 years old. Here we saw fine examples of foliation and a superb double reverse fault.

In spite of the weather we had a lovely week and as well as that previously mentioned we saw a pair of otters in a sea loch, Buzzards (inc. a Rough Legged Buzzard), Peregrine Falcons, Eagles, Kestrels and a Red Kite (only recently re-introduced into NW Scotland). We also saw many less common plants such as Field Gentian, Arnica, Northern Hawksbeard, Marsh Lousewort, Alpine Butterwort, Northern Bedstraw, Grass of Parnassus and Dwarf Juniper.

Our second week was on Mull where it rained even harder - a local man said that in 32 years on Mull he couldn't remember a wetter week! We visited Tobermory (was it the Mull weather that drove him to Wimbledon Common?), the main town on the island, had an almost galeforce boat trip to the Isle of Iona, and a trip for bread and milk to our most local shop, about 14 miles away, to find it was half day closing! Nonetheless we enjoyed this lovely island with its beautiful scenery, varied archaeology and most of all its fascinating volcanic geology.

The Island of Mull represents a period of prolonged, intensive volcanic activity some 40,000,000 years ago. During this time extensive plateaus of basaltic lavas were erupted. Varying in thickness from a few feet to 100 feet or more, the lavas built up a plateau over 6000 feet thick. Only a fraction of this plateau now remains, yet the lavas still cover an area of 280 square miles. After the lavas were formed, about 60 square miles of acid magmas were intruded around a central point which shifted at least twice so that there were three volcanic craters, the largest some six miles across. Each of these craters later subsided by some 3000ft producing concentric ring-dykes and cone sheets. Finally, swarms of north-west dykes crossed the island in vast numbers. With so much geology, it was easy to find an excuse not to visit the island's sea caves.



BRITISH CAVEMEN ALIVE 500,000 YEARS AGO

by Paul Stokes

Modern scientific techniques have disclosed human occupation of a West Country cave complex at least 500,000 years ago, making it Britain's oldest identified settlement. Objects unearthed at Kent's Cavern in Torquay, Devon, a century ago have been found to be 200,000 years older than any other remains recovered in this country. Further tests are taking place which could pinpoint the date as 800,000 years ago and bring about a radical re-think about the history of man.

A team from Bristol University has been using a special "uranium series" technique to test 150 items including flints, hand-axes and other tools found under the cavern's stalagmite floor. The uranium tests have a range of 500,000 years compared with the more commonly used radio carbon dating method which can date as far back as 50,000 years.

Experts from Exeter and Edinburgh Universities are also involved in electro-spin resonance processes which can date items up to 1,000,000 years. Mr. Peter Berridge, an archaeologist and co-ordinator of the Kent's Cavern Advisory Committee said: "Our expectation is that this will date the floor deposits at about 800,000 years old, which will by far away make them the earliest in Europe. "We are now trying to find out whether the earliest inhabitants of the caves are either early *homo sapiens*, who lived 500,000 years ago or late *homo erectus*".

The findings are the latest in a series since Mr. John Powe, managing director of the caves which attract 200,000 visitors a year, agreed to finance a major study there two years ago. They include the discovery of two hidden chambers earlier this year and the carbon dating last year of a human jaw bone and three human teeth which belonged to a man alive 31,000 years ago.

Kent's Cavern, a horizontal cave network covering 3 acres, was excavated for 15 years from 1865 by William Pengelly, a self-taught archaeologist and former fisherman from Looe, Cornwall. It is his meticulous grid system documentation and preservation of some 70,000 animal and human remains and artifacts which is held largely responsible for the latest breakthrough. Mr. Powe, fourth generation of the family that has owned the caves for the past century said: "It is all rather exciting. I though all the mysteries had been solved, but discovered there was still a lot of on-going interest".

Daily Telegraph 29.08.89

Picture: STEPHEN LOCK



Mr. Powe in Kent's Cavern with a reindeer jawbone

MCG

digs

RODS POT

10.05.89 Brought the roof down!
 15.05.89 The bang on 10.05.89 brought down far more than expected, blocking the chamber completely. Dug our way in, but it's still very loose and spoil dump is full. We need somewhere else to put the spoil, and there's lots of it.
 31.05.89 Nice draught issuing from the blocked chamber. Chamber still blocked.
 07.06.89 Cleared out blockage, about 18 skips. Prodded the roof and blocked chamber again!

BONE HOLE

13.05.89 Key to gate would not fit and key to lid would not turn. Removed locks with large iron bar. Dug a few bucketloads from rather wet dig, looks promising apart from water and mud.
 16.05.89 New locks fitted.

BATTERY SWALLET

17.05.89 Re-visit after long layoff. Removed rotting rabbit (last seen 05.04.89) but found dig inhabited by rats, frogs, newts, maggots, worms and mosquitoes. A lot of rotting vegetation and mud was removed and after a lot of effort a small draught was discernable.
 24.05.89 Tried to smoke the mosquitoes out but only succeeded in smoking ourselves nearly to death. After a great deal of fanning by our fireman we were able to remove vast amounts of spoil (more precisely, alot of liquid mud). Finding some depth seems to be needed as well as shoring up the entrance.

VON PITT SWALLET

24.05.89 Nearly as deep as our new soakaway! Bitten by the mosquitoes smoked out of Battery Swallet. Vee made the earth move! Will need shoring soon (Ed. Vee or the cave?).

UPPER FLOOD

17.05.89 More progress in PJ2(c). Cleaned up some stal.
 21.05.89 Cleared many boulders and 20 skips.
 27.05.89 Tourist trip for CPC. They said it was different to Yorkshire and never realised that before!
 28.05.89 24 skips removed and some large boulders from floor to reveal old streambed. Opening of the rift required to make streambed more accessible.
 29.05.89 36 skips removed, black pebbly streambed in v.tight rift reached. 2.5ins long tibia with butchers mark found.
 31.05.89 Removed large quantity of spoil but the rift is much too tight and needs a bang.
 01.06.89 New drill used for shot hole. Successful bang in "Split Rock Canyon". Some of the best tamping mud on Mendip.
 04.06.89 12 skips removed. The last bang obviously v.good. Excellent progress over the week.
 07.06.89 Pulled a few rocks out making working area comfortable. Successful bang removed obstruction for access along the rift.
 11.06.89 1 skip removed but we put in a bang.
 14.06.89 Cleared bang spoil. Stream in sight! (but it's in a minute rift). Another bang required, and another, and another...
 21.06.89 Bang!
 27.06.89 Removed spoil from last bang, lots more work required.
 09.07.89 V.good draught issuing from entrance. Noted that the stream is cutting back in the opposite direction to our digging. Very slight draught.

WELSH'S GREEN

Not an MCG dig but a recently discovered and memorable cave. The mud in the lower reaches makes Upper Flood look pristine. It also proved many experts wrong by becoming the longest known in Blue Lias perhaps proving the point "caves are where you find them". Some plus points are the fine 2nd pitch, two fine avens and some pretties.

DIGGERS NEEDED...

...to help on all MCG digs. "Away" members are particularly welcome.

CAVE MANAGEMENT MAKING WOOCKEY

by Quentin Letts

The city turned its attention yesterday to a haunted prehistoric cavern near Wells, Somerset. Wookey Hole, a dank network of caves which stretches under the Mendip Hills, was the unusual object of a £2m management buyout. The caves, which attract 334,000 visitors a year, were sold by the Tussauds Group, owner of the famous London waxworks and a subsidiary of Pearson, the publishing, banking and oil services group.

The buyout team is headed by Peter Haylings, general manager, and Barney Butter, administration manager. Included in the package is a nearby Victorian paper mill, re-opened in 1976, and an on-site ghost, reputed to belong to a crazed witch. Her figure may be seen by those who dare the descent of Hell's Ladder to the Kitchen.

Wookey Hole, inhabited in prehistoric times, was bought by Tussauds in 1973 for £300,000 from a local widow, Olive Hodgkinson, whose family had owned it since 1848. Tussauds has spent a considerable amount of money on improvements, mainly on a 50m access tunnel allowing visitors to proceed in a single-flow direction (Ed. in other words, a through trip).

In the past 16 years the number of caves (chambers) open to the public has increased from three to nine, leaving at least 11 more to be developed. The caves, once illuminated by candle, now have electric light. In the last century the caves were vandalised by workmen, who sold prehistoric relics as trinkets to early tourists. Another early asset stripper was the 18th century poet Alexander Pope, author of *The Rape Of The Lock*, who happily shot down some of the stalactites to use as decoration for his home.

Mr. Michael Herbert, chairman and chief executive of the Tussauds Group, said: "Wookey Hole's visitor numbers are relatively low compared with other Tussaud attractions. It seems more appropriate, therefore, for it to revert to private ownership". Tussauds, he said, would use the proceeds of the sale on a number of on-going developments, including those at the Chessington World of Adventures and the Rock Circus Exhibition at the London Pavillion.

Haunted, prehistoric caves, it seems, still have their uses: Pearson shares closed at 785p, up 3.

Daily Telegraph, 05.09.89

UNDERGROUND FOLLIES MAY DRAW TOURISTS

by Nigel Bunyan

Tunnels dug under Liverpool for a 19th century philanthropist are being proposed as a tourist attraction. Some are 600 yards long with a height of 50 feet. In the first half of the last century James Joseph Williamson took on hundreds of local unemployed to build tunnels for nearly 20 years. They emanate largely from his home in Mason Street, Edge Hill. Williamson had an obsession with tunnelling, once emerging from beneath the floor of a neighbour's home during attempts to alleviate damp. His tunnelling passion and desire to help the unemployed also led him to hire gangs to dig holes and then fill them in. Williamson, who was born in poverty but married into a wealthy family, was nicknamed the Tunnel King of Edge Hill. Now, almost 150 years after his death, the Merseyside Tourism Board believes his tunnels could become the centrepiece of an exhibition on Liverpool eccentrics. Mr. Sammy Rihani, the board's chief executive, considers the social history of Liverpool is rich enough to throw up several characters worthy of inclusion in an exhibition. Three companies have expressed interest in developing a subterranean chamber near Williamson's home as well as the 25 or so tunnels which radiate off it at different levels. They have already encountered a major problem. As Mr. Rihani put it: "Nobody has been down there since the 1860s, and there don't appear to be any maps or plans. We don't even know who owns them".

Daily Telegraph, 29.08.89

RATES AND CAVING COTTAGES

Everyone will be aware of the community charge which is already levied in Scotland in place of domestic rates, and will be applied to England and Wales from April 1990.

But are clubs south of the Border aware of the implications for their finances, from the simultaneous introduction of a new national non-domestic rate (NDR) for business premises, caving cottages, storage buildings etc? Even if clubs just rent their premises, they may well have to negotiate with their landlord about the financial implications of the new NDR. There will be a further revaluation for non-domestic premises in Scotland, too.

The article below is an attempt to outline the effects of NDR for caving clubs, and to suggest ways of making the financial changes work to their advantage. The information is based on helpful advice from the Department of the Environment (DoE) - and also relies on sample studies carried out by the Inland Revenue, and on a notice from the Central Council for Physical Recreation (CCPR). Thanks also to Pat Cronin and Blitz from the BEC for stirring me to put my thoughts on paper! Any errors are my own responsibility.

PROPERTY REVALUATION

The background to NDR in England and Wales is that the property valuations on which rates are based have not been revised since 1973. During the past sixteen years there has been much inflation, and most property values have risen faster. Any alterations to assessments since then have also been based on 1973 values. In the same period, Scotland has had three revaluations. The government has now authorised revaluation of all non-domestic premises throughout England, Wales and Scotland, to 1988 values.

The DoE reckons there could be an average 750 per cent increase in England, and 800 per cent in Wales. Since the revaluations are being made locally, there could be greater increases in the south of England (eg Mendip, Devon), and possibly in South Wales, amounting to 800-1000 per cent. Even higher local increases have been rumoured. There could be lower than average increases in North Wales and the North of England, perhaps 500-700 per cent. Unless caving cottages appreciate in value at a lower rate than other properties, such increases may also apply to caving clubs.

RATE POUNDAGE

The DoE wants to know the aggregate sum for all revalued non-domestic premises in England: £x billions. The Welsh and Scottish Offices require similar figures for their own territories. These government departments must then set rate poundages which, multiplied by the three aggregate revaluations, will produce national NDR income in the 1990-91 financial year equivalent to that in 1989-90 plus inflation.

The government has decided not to allow local councils to fix non-domestic rates as has been done in past years. The DoE will set one English NDR, based on aggregate figures for England. It will not take into account the local variations in revaluation. The Welsh and Scottish Offices will follow suit.

LIMITS ON RATE BILLS

The government has accepted that rapid changes in rate bills are undesirable if applied all at once. It has formally suggested that there could be an overall limit for rate bill increases, of 20 per cent year-on-year, as a transitional measure applying for at least five years. Inflation would be added yearly, on top of the 20 per cent.

For small non-domestic premises revalued at under £7500 in London, and under £5000 elsewhere, there would be a maximum 15 per cent rate bill increase per annum for five years, plus inflation. (Ed: This concession should cover most caving cottages - but what about the SWCC 'street'?) There would also be a limit on the yearly percentage reductions for any rate bills. These could be 15 per cent for small properties (as defined above), and 10 per cent on larger properties.

The fact that the government has proposed this transition suggests that there could be some very dramatic changes in rate bills. Indeed the government has decreed that current attempts by ratepayers to have properties revalued will not count against the 1990-91 rate bill. Appeals against the 1990-91 rates will only be permitted once that bill has been sent to the ratepayer.

The final decision on the transition arrangement has not yet been announced by government. It may mean a higher value threshold for classifying large properties, rather than varying further the suggested yearly limits for changes to rate bills.

BILLS FOR CLUBS

Club Treasurers may now already be sitting uneasily in their seats! Let's have a look at some figures to see what all this could mean. Take as a hypothetical example two caving club cottages, one in Mendip and one in Yorkshire, the Mendip one being assessed at 1973 values at £300 and the Yorkshire at £150. The DoE estimates the average English non-domestic rate poundage in 1989-90 is 258p per £. So this year the two clubs may be paying respectively £774 and £387 in rates.

Next year revaluation and aggregate rate poundages will take effect. The 258p in the £ could be increased for inflation by, say, 8 per cent, and then reduced by 750 per cent to compensate for average revaluation in England. That would make the English NDR rate poundage for 1990-91 about 37p per £. (The DoE suggested up to 35p per £ in February, but inflation has increased.)

But we have to allow for the effect of the transitional arrangement for small premises. The average figure for rate poundage will need to be higher to compensate for this loss of income, perhaps with a 1990-91 rate poundage some 10-20 per cent greater. If we adopt 40p per £ for argument's sake, and if the Mendip cottage is revalued upwards 10 fold to £3000 and the Yorkshire cottage up 6 fold to £900, then the new targets for rate bills for 1990-91 would be respectively £1200 and £360. A small step down for Yorkshire but a big step up for Mendip.

Over succeeding years the rate poundage would rise to take account of inflation, with a compensatory reduction as more rate income was paid under the transition arrangement. So we might be looking at an annual net increase in rate poundage of 5 per cent, starting from this notional 40p per £ as the new base.

The target rate bills for the Mendip cottage would then be £1260 in 1991-92, £1323 in 1992-93, and £1389 in 1993-94. Meanwhile the transitional maximum rate increases would be taking effect, with the actual bills paid being £935 in 1990-91, £1129 in 1991-92, and £1362 in 1992-93, with £1389 reached in 1993-94. Who'd want to be a Mendip (or Devon or South Wales) Treasurer, when 1989 rates are already 10-20 per cent of most clubs' annual costs.

The Yorkshire club shouldn't run too fast to the bank, either, as any savings in the first year could well be cancelled out by inflation in 1991-92.

HOW TO SAVE MONEY

Before the next AGMs vote to increase subscriptions and cottage fees, there are many things caving clubs can do to keep their rate bills down.

* While rate poundage is relatively immutable, being set as a national average by government, the opportunity for *local discretionary relief* exists with every local council (who will be collecting the rates) - to allow rate relief of up to 100 per cent. This is a case for national and local lobbying: to see that the government encourages councils to offer relief to sporting groups; and for local clubs to persuade their local council officials and council financial committees that they are a deserving cause for relief. Are there already local precedents? And which councillors do you know?

* Revaluation is the key to the overall rate bill. So consider *appealing against the new valuation*. The valuation process is already under way. Clubs (or their landlords) should by now have received a blue coloured form headed "Notice requiring a return for rating purposes". These have to be filled in, signed and returned to the local Valuation Officers, who work for the Inland Revenue. In reaching their new assessment, Valuation Officers are also entitled to inspect the premises and take notes and measure anything they want to. (They are not authorised to ask questions, so the CCPR is advising that if the Valuation Officers come round, insist on questions in writing for subsequent considered replies.)

You will find out what the new assessment is after 1st January 1990, by visiting your council offices. You cannot appeal against the new assessments until after 1st April 1990, when you receive your new rate bill. You must appeal, stating your grounds for doing so, by 1st October 1990 at the latest. The CCPR has made arrangements with a firm of rating surveyors and valuers to advise sporting clubs whose wish to appeal (obviously the firm charges for this professional service - they are Wilks Head & Eve at 9 Harley Street, London W1N 2AL). Or perhaps you know a chartered surveyor or valuer yourself?

* Become a charity. This may take a number of years, and there are clearly some restrictions which must be complied with. But a number of caving clubs do operate as charities, to the satisfaction both of the club members and the Charity Commissioners. Once a charity, your club is legally entitled under the new rating law to a mandatory 80 per cent OFF the rate bill - an increase from the present 50 per cent concession. There are also other benefits from being a charity, such as covenanted subscriptions and tax-refundable interest.

If they were charities already, the example Mendip and Yorkshire clubs would be paying rate bills of £387 and £194 respectively in 1989. The transition arrangement for percentage changes to rate bills takes precedence over the mandatory rule, so charitable clubs can expect to see some years of phased reductions in the bills.

* Seek grant aid from councils or recreational bodies to help cover the extra costs. Not a route that I guess many clubs would wish to take, as members might feel it would compromise their independence. But it is another avenue to consider.

* Take legal advice about the scope for being a domestic property where someone is deemed to live there and it may therefore be possible to pay only the domestic community charge, eg as a second home. I do not know the legal complications of such a change, or whether it is permissible to the valuation authorities. It is also too late before appeal because the valuation process is already in hand. Nevertheless it is a fifth, perhaps desperate, way of trying to meet those bills.