

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 212

AUGUST 1990

MARGAUREIS REGION, ITALIAN ALPS, 1989

"THE ITALIAN JOB"

by Dave Little

Participants: Pete Collings-Wells, Rich Hodgson and Dave Little - MCG
Ed Pearson and Dave Jarman - WUCC

We had a quick, easy journey to within 16km of the Martel hut, then the road ended and became an unsurfaced mountain track where most of the boulders strewn along the track were much larger than the ground clearance of my car. With spectacular drops beside the track a landslide at one point required a very dodgy manoeuvre with 2 wheels on wooden planks wedged in above the precipice. The Martel hut, owned by the CAF (Club Alpin Francais), consisted of a tin shack balanced on top of a cemented boulder pile. Most people chose to camp outside the hut!

Next day, once Pete and Rick had arrived, Jean-Paul Sournier (author of the "Speleo Sportive" guide book to the area) whisked us off for a trip with some GSP cavers (an Italian caving club from Turin) to see their latest discovery, only a week old, already 300m deep and still going. Following numerous pitches in a rift the route entered a shattered fossil passage, muddy traverses, then more pitches. Having lost about half the party up side passages we reached the present extent of exploration, a 15m diameter shaft and at least 40m deep, where they'd run out of rope on their last exploratory trip!

The following day's cave was A11 (not old enough to have a name yet, and yesterdays cave hadn't been old enough to even be allotted a number). I kitted up and descended with Jean-Paul and Greg from Turin (he'd only been caving for a year and had already discovered 3 caves over 500m deep, such is the potential of the area). Pitches on ice and snow slopes led to the squeeze at the head of a 70m pitch, followed by a couple of small pitches and a broken 170m pitch leading to the impressive main chamber. All the rigging so far had been using the Italian minimalist approach which gave some very interesting hangs. Down a couple more pitches then we swung across to an unexplored window in the wall of a 30m pitch. Rigging with 7mm exploration string (very dodgy stuff) this new window disappointingly only gave 3 new pitches before joining in with the old stuff again. Met Pete and Rick brewing up with the other Italians in the main chamber, then plenty of combined tactics saw us all through the squeezes and out of the cave by 10pm.

Next day we set off on the first of many hikes up to and over the Col de Scarasson, our first objective being Gouffre Scarasson. After 3 days effort and a major bolting exercise we managed to rig down to the glacier in the cave, only realising that we'd taken a different route to the one we intended when it took 40m of rope to rig a 20m pitch. Riggged another pitch down the side of the glacier using ice screws then got extremely cold taking loads of photos before exiting. The beauty of the underground glacier is only spoilt by the remains of a camp, empty evian tins, plastic bags and wrappers left embedded in the ice since 1962 when a certain M.Siffre conducted a two month "out of time" experiment on the glacier - I can think of warmer places! I brought out a bin-liner full of tins, and just got it back to the camp before it disintegrated. Not surprisingly the local cavers don't have a good word to say for Monsieur Siffre. Dave J and Ed had a quick look for Gouffre Straldi (our next objective), but didn't find it.

(cont. on p6)

++++ MCG 1990 MEETS PROGRAMME ++++ BANK HOLIDAY WEEKENDS IN ITALICS ++++

DATE	AREA	MAIN EVENT	AND/OR
25 Aug - 27 Aug	Yorkshire	TBA	
08 Sep - 09 Sep	Mendip	Manor Farm	Novice Weekend
22 Sep - 23 Sep	Derbyshire	TBA	
06 Oct - 07 Oct	Mendip	Longwood clean up	East Twin Swallet
20 Oct - 21 Oct	Yorkshire	Hurnell Moss	
03 Nov - 04 Nov	Mendip	HALF YEARLY MEETING	BARN DANCE/BONFIRE
17 Nov - 18 Nov	S Wales	Pwll Dwn	
01 Dec - 02 Dec	Mendip	Charterhouse	GB Cavern
08 Dec - 09 Dec	S Wales	Craig-a-Ffynnon	
15 Dec - 16 Dec	Yorkshire	Alum Pot	Bar Pot
29 Dec - 01 Jan	Mendip	New Year Party	

For further details of meetings, contact Dave Tooke (tel: 0923-241522)
 "Away" meets: accommodation can be booked by telephoning the relevant cottage warden:

Yorkshire	Northern Pennine Club	Steve Thorpe	0532 559214
South Wales	South Wales Caving Club	Janice Richards	0985 219111

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 children, and their accompanied guests



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The Mendip Caving Group is a registered charity, number 270088
 The Group's Trustees are: Ron Saunders, Malcolm Cotter, Pat Walsh and Peter Matthews



ON THE MOVE

Dave Little has moved to: 37 Gadshill Drive, Stoke Gifford, Bristol, BS12 6UU. Tel: 0272 799963

MCG ROPES

A recent inspection of the tackle store revealed that Group rope is being badly treated. Several ropes, mostly the lengths most useful for Mendip, were neither logged out to a member nor were they hanging in the store - the implication being that they have been misappropriated. Alternatively, someone is discarding damaged rope without notifying the tacklemaster. Please remember the following guidelines apply to the use of Group rope. 1 Group equipment is for the use of members and their accompanied personal guests - if you have more guests than MCG members then you should hire your equipment from Bat Products. 2 Rope must not be used for abseiling or prusiking - all Group rope is for lifelining only. 3 Rope must be logged out, and carried in tackle sacks at all times including transport underground. 4 It is the responsibility of every person in a party to ensure that ropes are cleaned and inspected after every trip - there is a rope washing machine in the hosing-down area. 5 After washing and inspection, ropes should be coiled, plaited or hanked and returned immediately to the tacklestore - not left to dry outside. Any damage must be reported to the tacklemaster. 6 Only rope, ladders, belays, tacklesacks, etc, should be placed in the store - no carbide, electrolyte, batteries or personal gear (all this can be left in the shed).

Incidentally, if someone feels they would like a lifeline you must give them one. There is certainly nothing cowardly in requesting a lifeline and remember it is easier to haul a rope than it is to haul a body. It is neither clever nor big to attempt an exposed climb without some form of protection - as can be seen by reading the MRO report elsewhere in this newsletter!

COTTAGE BOOKINGS

23 Aug - 29 Aug	Br Trust Cons Vol	(13)
03 Sep - 07 Sep	Royal Navy	
08 Sep - 09 Sep	Members' Weekend	
17 Sep - 21 Sep	Royal Navy	
01 Oct - 05 Oct	Fosseway School	
06 Oct - 07 Oct	Members' Weekend	
26 Oct - 28 Oct	Bill Headington	(7)
29 Oct - 02 Nov	Royal Navy	
03 Nov - 04 Nov	Members' Weekend	
08 Nov	St Cuthmans School	(30)
12 Nov - 16 Nov	Royal Navy	
19 Nov - 23 Nov	Royal Navy	
23 Nov - 25 Nov	Bill Headington	(7)
01 Dec - 02 Dec	Members' Weekend	
07 Dec - 09 Dec	East Dorset SS	(12)
29 Dec - 01 Jan	Members' Weekend	

COTTAGE CLEANING

On many occasions some (usually the same) members are doing nothing towards cleaning the cottage after a stay. If you use the cottage, whether for a day or a weekend, you **MUST** help with cleaning before you leave. Caving does not make you exempt! If everyone helps it takes no time at all. Leaving early doesn't excuse you either, there are still jobs you can do - eg. sweep the bedrooms, brush the stairs, even DO SOME WASHING UP! Those who are left to do the cottage cleaning are getting fed up - it's their weekend break too - so come on, pull your weight and stop the bad feeling that's mounting. If things don't improve we might resort to YHA tactics and put up a list of cleaning jobs which you initial when you've completed a task. Guest clubs, in particular the Royal Navy, leave the cottage cleaner and tidier than they find it. This could soon change if the cottage is always left in a mess by members and their guests, and it would then quickly deteriorate. Remember too, the cottage is the Group's biggest asset.

EARWIG...

...in on the committee: Charterhouse Centre sale to be reviewed by council Sept. 18th ...revised membership package, to include care of tackle, use of cottage, Charterhouse access, etc. for prospective members ...new map in lounge to be organised by Mike Lovell and Roger Wallington ...industrial waste collection by council to be arranged as bins cannot cope with waste that now accumulates ...YR to contact supplier of "commercial" toilet rolls and dispensers for cost ...the phone will not take the new 5p coin and cannot be converted.

HOW WE WISH WE HAD GONE IN BY LADDER!

by Yvonne and Martin Rowe

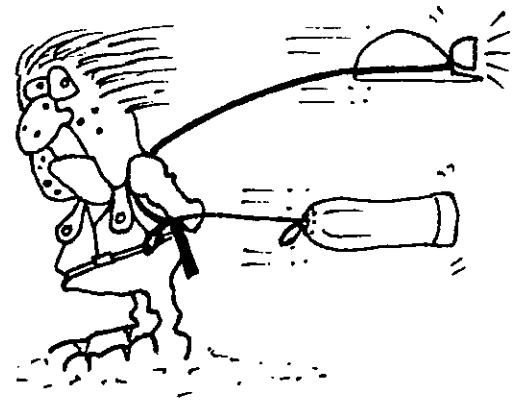
"Quick, blow your whistles and shine your lamps - I can hear someone coming," said Martin. We all blew our whistles as hard as we could and shone our lights in the direction of our rescuers. After a few minutes, their voices became louder and we could understand their conversation. We stopped whistling and started shouting. "Hello... over here... follow our lights..." Our rescuers seemed a little unsure as to our problem. "Are you alright?" they enquired. "Yes, everyone's OK!" we shouted back. "Have you got lights?" they replied. "Yes, we've all got lights!" Obviously this seemed to satisfy our would-be rescuers as we could hear their voices receding. Suddenly we realised they were going away from us! "Come back... WE CAN'T GET OUT!"

We knew it would be one of those weekends when we went through Swansea for the third time on the Friday night. Somehow we had missed our usual way to the SWCC and kept returning to Swansea. We should have taken this as an omen. However, we finally arrived at the SWCC cottage and settled in for the night. The next morning we began to organise ourselves for a trip to OFD but had to change our plans when we were told that water levels were high. So instead we found ourselves hastily preparing for a visit to Tunnel Cave. Our party initially consisted of Martin and Yvonne Rowe, Geoff Barton and Bill Headington. Ian McKechnie was press-ganged into joining us in place of Bill Headington as Ian is a recognised leader. Dave Edwards, the SWCC duty warden, issued the necessary permit to "Ian" and we were given the key to top entrance. Dave checked with another SWCC member about the bottom gate. "Don't worry about the exit gate at the show cave, it will be open when you get there" the second SWCC person said. "But be careful of the fan". A powerful new extractor fan had been fitted next to the gate that exited into the show cave and it could severely mangle anything that got too close (apparently the radon build-up is quite a problem in the show cave so they suck it out into the cave proper!). Geoff sorted out a suitable length of rope for the entrance pitches and quickly put together a harness for abseiling. Bill (or was it Ian?) delved into his personal gear for a figure-8. Suitably equipped, we set off for the entrance to Tunnel Cave. The weather was fine and the walk up to the top entrance from the showcave carpark was quite pleasant. In the heat, we were glad we decided to go in on rope rather than walk back up the hill to de-rig afterwards. But later, oh how we would wish we had gone in by ladder!

Geoff and Martin rigged the 40ft entrance pitch with a double line so that we could pull it down behind us and use it for the second pitch. Martin descended first followed by Yvonne and Ian (or was it Bill?), then Geoff. There is very little passage between the two pitches so Martin climbed out over the second pitch and attached himself to a bolt by his karabiner. Yvonne moved to the head of the pitch with Bill (or was it Ian?) close behind. With all of us between the pitches, Martin called for Geoff to pull down the rope and pass it to him. Our first problem was encountered - the rope jammed and refused to budge! Unable to descend the second pitch, we were also unable to prusik back up the first pitch as we had no ascenders. Oh how we wished we had gone in by ladder! As Geoff was the last one down and there was absolutely no room for manoeuvre, he heroically volunteered to free-climb back up to release the rope - no mean feat as the walls were made up of loose rubble and rotten wooden shoring. Needless to say, a bit of inadvertant gardening was done and a few bruises administered to those cowering below. With the rope recovered we were able to rig the 25ft second pitch and continue on our way, but our problems were not yet over...

From the foot of the second pitch a long dry calcite slope led to the Wire Traverse followed by another steeper calcite slope ending in a small chamber. The way on was obvious - one of the passages from the chamber contained a fierce draught which we were able to follow up and down the odd awkward climb, along the meandering high-level traverses, eventually arriving at Cross Passage. A final awkward climb down led to the Cross Joint where we became aware of a deep rumbling noise ahead, rather like the sound of a waterfall. As we progressed along the sandy-floored passage leading to the Junction, the noise got louder and the draught got stronger - the noise became so loud

that we were unable to hear each other talking. We realised that it was the fan and we were at Davy Price's Hall - the show cave. The noise and wind were terrific so we were glad to be almost out. Ian or Bill went up to the airtight door next to the fan and tried to open it, but either the vacuum was too great or the door was locked. He turned to Geoff and signed to him for the key. Geoff signed back the equivalent of "What key? We only have one, and it doesn't fit!". We retreated from the noise of the fan to discuss what had happened. Then we remembered the permit given to us earlier in the day. Geoff took it out and read it. "Period beginning 1.6.1990. South Wales Caving Club. To be handed to the Management..."



To be handed to the Management? Er, did that mean before entering, or when exiting? Could this explain why the door was locked? Should we have picked up a second key from the Management so that we could open the door? Or was the door unlocked yet held tightly closed by the vacuum effect of the huge electric fan? We returned to the airtight door and tied our rope to it. We all pulled together, but it would not open. Bill and Ian tried unsuccessfully to pick the lock. Gradually the truth became obvious to us all... the door was locked!!! We didn't have a key, we'd pulled our rope down behind us, it was 3.30pm, our ETA was 6.00pm, and we couldn't make ourselves heard because of that damn fan. Oh how we wished we had gone in by ladder!

We could easily have smashed the lock but didn't want to upset the access entitlements between the SWCC and show cave management. However, every now and then we could see the show cave lights come on through the fan as groups of visitors went through so we'd bang on the metal casing, flash our lights through and blow our whistles simultaneously, but nobody could hear us. We decided that the best thing to do would be to make ourselves comfortable and wait until the fan was switched off at closing time. Surely the Management would check that the cave was empty of tourists before locking up for the night? On their way past the fan we would start our tirade of lights and noise to attract their attention. So we waited for the cave to close... The wind and noise from the fan was almost unbearable - we couldn't hear ourselves speak properly so couldn't even pass the time telling stories. We were also beginning to get very cold but we didn't want to retreat too far back from the door just in case we couldn't reach the fan quickly enough when it was switched off. Wishful thinking had us believing that the show cave would close at 5pm but the fan did not stop until 6.30pm. Immediately, we rushed to the door, blew our whistles, shone our lights and banged noisily on the fan. Nothing happened. The show cave lights went out. After ten minutes we gave up trying to attract attention - we knew there was nobody there. We tried to pull the door open in case it had been held tight by the action of the fan, but it would not move. Oh how we wished we had gone in by ladder! By now we were working out when we might be rescued - the optimists said 8-9pm if the rescuers came via the show cave, the pessimists said 11pm as they would probably come via the pub and/or top entrance.

It was in fact 7.30pm when we saw the lights of the rescue party and heard their voices, which is where our story began. When we realised that they were going away again our hearts sank - the next time they would notice our absence would be after closing time when they got back to the cottage, probably after midnight! We shouted and banged for all we were worth and fortunately they returned. They were a bit embarrassed when we told them we didn't have the second key - we had been given the only keyring without the exit door key! In fact, we should have had three keys - one for the top entrance, one for the airtight door and one one for the show cave exit - it was the third key that featured in the morning's conversation! We also found out why nobody heard us after the fan was switched off. The door and fan are situated high in the show cave roof and there is a long, almost vertical climb down to the floor. The show cave lights we could see were reflections off the wet rock and no-one came anywhere near us. The lights and fan are on a time switch so the show cave staff did not come near enough to hear us.

Once out in the warm sunlight (and in the pub for a meal and a drink) we felt quite forgiving - we could even see the funny side - and can still thoroughly recommend a Tunnel Cave through trip. It has many interesting features, both visual and sporting and if you have three keys it can probably be done in just over two hours!

"THE ITALIAN JOB" (cont. from p1)

We returned the next day, spent a couple hours looking for Straldi, but still unsuccessful so as a consolation prize we went down the first few pitches in Gouffre 18C. The following day we returned with Serge from CAF who showed us where the entrance to Straldi was. Hardly surprising that we never found it, on top of an overgrown terrace and covered in undergrowth, it couldn't be seen from more than 10m away although it wasn't a small entrance - 15m x 3m. Lots of messing around and re-rigging on the entrance shaft of 90m, with the added interest of a perched crows nest 40m down the wide, damp shaft. Occasionally the four or five tiny occupants would wake, and almost as one, re-arrange themselves, shit powerfully over the edge, and settle down to sleep again. Consequently the lower part of the shaft, down to the snow-cone at the base, had a smell all of its own. Following this was a climb up, a muddy pitch and then the very tight Fissure du Vent, much thinner than the barrel containing my camera which I had to stand on to force through. A couple more pitches led to the very impressive 80m pitch dropping through the ceiling of an immense chamber. Of the multitude of dodgy looking bolts at the head, predictably the best one gave a drop right down the line of a persistent trickle - a Chinese torture on the long haul up! This enormous, chaotic chamber, about 200m down, did not respond well to our attempts to photograph it - it eats PFSb bulbs for breakfast! The next day saw a long trip to push down a further 60m in rather crumbly rock, before we ran out of time and had to de-rig, eventually surfacing near midnight to a magnificent moon-lit valley, with clouds pouring off the peaks. An impressive place, above and below ground.

A week had passed by by now and Pete and Rick left us. Despite the warnings from the CAF people that we were bound to get lost in Piaggia Bella we decided to visit this the largest system in the region, 25km long and 1108m deep. This amazing system has 11 entrances, 10 vertical with pitches up to 110m and the walk in (climb in) entrance which we used. Through about a dozen huge breakdown chambers we reached the streamway which is followed via various contorted oxbows to a fossil passage, then back to the stream. Eventually a climb up through boulders leads to the enormous Paris Cote d'Azur chamber, 200m x 100m x 40m. It took about 6 hours to get here, with passages all sloping steeply we were at about 600m depth having descended no pitches. CAF didn't quite believe that we'd got as far as we had - if they can get lost in Piaggia Bell they'd have no chance in OFD.

Descending the first four pitches of Gouffre Pentothal we reached the top of a 100m drop. This funnel shaped pitch was lined with precariously balanced loose boulders. Knock one stone down, then there's 10 going down, then 100, then 1000, etc. etc., the deafening echos go on for a couple of minutes. Not a pitch for the faint hearted - we turned around and went out!

Next day we lugged loads of gear over to Gouffre Navella and had a monumental failure so we lugged most of the gear back again. Returning to Navella to collect a sack that we'd left behind I met Remy (from CAF) who was off to have a look at a promising dig he'd found. This dig was a totally different proposition to English digs. We bolted some boulders and set up a pulley system to move them and within an hour we had a gale blowing out of a passage disappearing into the distance. We had no lights with us so we had to leave it.

On our last day we chose Gouffre Fera which turned out to be an excellent cave to finish on - pitches, boulder slopes, snow slopes, formations, everything, even rusty bolts. For a bit of added interest on the way out, after passing a re-belay and getting onto the top rope, it suddenly freed itself from a rock flake around which it had become looped. This introduced a couple of metres of slack rope into the system and I plummeted. Expecting to go all the way down the pitch, my life had only just begun flashing before my eyes when the rope went tight - it had held! I very cautiously carried on out of the cave. An exciting end to a wonderful trip. After dropping Ed off at the train station in Nice, Dave and I headed North to Chamonix for a bit of climbing - but that's another story.

NEW! MCG SWEATSHIRTS!

QUALITY FOR ONLY £9.50! A stock of sweatshirts can be found in the two small cupboards in the Foreman's Lounge. The keys to the padlocks are on the Library door. If you purchase one (or more!) please pay by cheque ONLY, made payable to MCG and crossed "A/C payee only". Leave the cheque in the box provided and fill out the stock form, and LEAVE THE CUPBOARD TIDY. Colours available in large or ex-large are **BURGUNDY NAVY GREY PRIMROSE**



Alternatively, they can be bought by post via John Beauchamp. Please add £1.00 per item to cover postage and packing ie. £9.50 + £1.00 = £10.50 per sweatshirt by mail!

(Ed. The sizes / proportions are good, the quality is excellent and they wash well!!)

MCG HALF-YEARLY GENERAL MEETING

FOLLOWED BY FIREWORK PARTY AND BARN DANCE



General Meeting

3pm Sat 03.11.90

Nordrach Cottage

Informal - no agenda

Firework display

5.30pm (Cottage)

Barn Dance £4.00

8pm Priddy Hall

As the HYGM falls on Guy Fawkes weekend there will be a "bring-a-firework" party at the cottage at 5.30pm. No boxes of bangers please, we would like everyone to bring one or more good quality firework(s). The Barn Dance at Priddy Village Hall will commence at 8pm (sorry, no coach). Music and calling will be by Simon and Val. As in previous years we would like MCG members to prepare the food for the buffet (cost to be reimbursed on the night). Please let John Beauchamp know what food you can provide, he will co-ordinate so that we have more than just sausage rolls and lettuce. Cost £4 per ticket (cheaper than last year) available from committee members.

Spot the balls! One free go per MCG member! Mark your entry on the picture above and send to the Editor. Prize for most ridiculous suggestion!

EXTRACTS FROM MRO ANNUAL REPORT 1989

SUNDAY 29TH JANUARY -SWILDON'S HOLE

16 year old caver fell down a 12ft drop in the Wet Way and broke his leg. Alarm raised 4.05pm and cave entered by MRO team at 4.20pm. Patient was given pain killing tablets and leg was immobilised in neoprene splints. He was hauled out within the hour including being carried across the muddy field. The caver was wearing trainers.

THURSDAY 2ND FEBRUARY -SWILDON'S HOLE

Army party of 21 reported missing at 5.45pm. Within 15 minutes HTV gave news flash that a "major search" was under way. Party went as group to Sump 1 but on return above 20ft Pot 10 strayed off ahead of the rest and became lost in the Dry Ways. Unaware of this the other half of the party surfaced about 4.30pm having come out via the Wet Way. After waiting an hour they raised the alarm. MRO arrived about 6.10pm. Meanwhile, the lost party was chanced upon by another caving party who escorted them out safely.

SUNDAY 26TH MARCH -CHARTERHOUSE-ON-MENDIP

Mrs Fry's Labrador dog crawled under the grill protecting Rakes Shaft No.14 on the Mineries and fell about 20ft. She raised the alarm at MCG Nordrach Cottage who alerted MRO. The dog was trussed up and hauled out un-injured.

TUESDAY 28TH MARCH -SWILDON'S HOLE

A caver suffered an asthma attack at the Double Pots. One of the party raised the alarm at 9.57pm. When MRO arrived at Priddy Green they found the patient had surfaced safely with assistance from her own party.

SATURDAY 8TH APRIL -GB CAVERN

A caver fell 25ft from the top of Ladder Pitch and sustained a badly fractured jaw with lacerations and severe bruising to his head, legs and arms. He was wearing slip-on type Rigger Boots and the single chin strap of his helmet broke during the fall. The alarm was raised at 3.10pm. The MRO team went underground at 3.28pm (18 minutes after receiving the call). Medical supplies went down at 3.36pm. Stretcher frame, carrying sheet, bag of splints, radio contact equipment, heat packs and a hot air breather were taken down. At this stage the MRO had been told that the patient had "multiple injuries". The patient was safely out of the cave by 6pm. The rescue involved 25 people underground with additional cavers standing by on the surface.

SATURDAY 6TH MAY -DRUNKARD'S HOLE

The alarm was raised at 7.15pm with the news that "someone was stuck down the cave". There were two adults and four 12 years olds and on the return one of the adults had difficulty keeping up, exhausted himself and got stuck in a tight passage. The MRO had the stuck caver out by 8pm.

THURSDAY 18TH MAY -GENERAL SEARCH

Alarm was raised at 12.30am by a worried wife. Her husband had gone caving straight from work and had not returned (ETR 11pm). She did not know which cave, which area or who her husband was caving with, only that they might have been driving a green and white Citroen 2cv. A Police patrol car went out to search likely sites, Nigel Taylor checked the Burrington area, Brian Prewer did a tour of Priddy and John Beauchamp did likewise at Charterhouse. Twenty minutes later, the wife rang again to say that her husband had returned. He had been down Manor Farm Swallet and had been held up by another slow party in the cave. He had tried to contact his wife but found the payphones only took 999 calls.

Cavers relying on remote telephones must beware of this situation.

THURSDAY 6TH JUNE -SWILDON'S HOLE

Roger Dors received a call from the Police at 9.20pm with a report that a caver had fallen somewhere beyond Sump 1 and sustained serious injuries. A major operation followed during which it became apparent that two experienced cavers had been on a trip to the bottom of Black Hole but had belayed their ladder to an unsound boulder. The first to descend tried this unprotected and fell about 35 feet with all the tackle when the boulder pulled out. His distraught partner was unable to go to his assistance so he had to leave him and go for help. Upstream of Sump 1 he met another party so he sent some to alert MRO and the rest accompanied him back to Black Hole. They discovered that the fallen caver was composed and able to assess his injuries coherently. The two cavers had gone down the cave at 7.15pm and the fall occurred at

about 8.30pm so the injured caver was stranded and unattended for about 90 minutes until MRD arrived at 10.10pm. The patient had wrist and back injuries but seemed to have had a remarkable escape from such a fall. Neoprene splints, hot air kit, heat packs and hauling ropes and harness, Grunterphone, sump telephone, sump rescue apparatus and medical equipment were taken down by 11.30pm and good 3-way communications with control were established by 1.14am. Throughout the night the long haul continued: 1.22am through the sump; 2.53am at Barne's Loop; 4am at the Twenty Foot; 4.25am at the Eight Foot; 4.53am in the Water Chamber, and 5.23am at Jacob's Ladder. The patient was brought out of the cave to the waiting ambulance and press at 6.03am, over 9 hours after falling so badly.

NB. This was the longest distance that MRD has had to carry someone injured out of a Mendip cave. It is a tribute to all concerned that it ran so smoothly and relatively quickly in the event. Thirty cavers were involved underground and ten more directly on the surface. Many others stood by in case they were needed.

SATURDAY 2ND DECEMBER -GENERAL ALERT

MRD was contacted by the Police at 12.50am because someone from Bristol had been reported as overdue from a trip with a party of scouts to a Priddy cave the previous evening. The Green and Eastwater Lane were checked but news came that the caver concerned had turned up at 1.35am.

SATURDAY 23RD DECEMBER -GOATCHURCH CAVERN

The Police called at 6.30pm to report that a 15-year old scout had slipped and dislocated his right knee. Nigel Taylor was alerted and at the cave to help within 10 minutes of the call-out. The party of four adults and nine teenage scouts had been coming out of the cave when one slipped on the polished rock below the cut steps in the main entrance passage. His knee was badly dislocated and he was in great pain. The fall occurred at about 6.30pm. The scouts rigged a handline to the surface while awaiting MRD. The patient was soon evacuated on a stretcher to await an ambulance which was delayed until 8.15pm due to industrial action.

GB CAVERN THE PAINFUL WAY - a tribute to MRD by the caver rescued on 8th April.

I have vivid memories of what happened the weekend of Saturday 8th April 1989.

As my wetsuit and caving boots seem to get smaller each time I dig them out, I decided to go comfortable caving in a dry cave. I therefore went down GB as far as Ladder Dig Extension, comfortably dressed and wearing boots not designed for caving. They had no ankle support and not much grip. "First mistake".

I think there were seven people in our party. After reaching the top of the Ladder Dig climb, four of us decided to sit it out while the others continued on to Bat Passage. As one of those staying had never been left in the dark before, we decided to do the traditional thing and turn our lamps out. Two shuffled their feet as if to move and as I was already standing I thought I would move behind the rock that I was leaning on. "Final and almost fatal mistake". I was much closer to the ledge than I realised and my boots didn't help save me from slipping.

It's amazing how much goes through one's mind when falling in total darkness! My first thoughts were that I was actually dreaming. Then I realised that I wasn't dreaming but actually falling. I then couldn't understand why I was falling as I couldn't remember a hole being near by. I then realised where I was falling but by this time it was too late to panic. It was fortunate that I didn't stiffen up.

The next thing I remember is someone saying something alongside me, I partially opened my eyes and saw a great deal of blood. I wanted to say I would be OK but I was unable to do this. I learned later that I had broken my jaw in two places. I was thinking how worried everyone must be because I couldn't move, couldn't speak and was bleeding awful! I was fully conscious from then onwards. It didn't seem long before there were two nurses from another party snuggling up to me to keep me warm. They stayed with me for over an hour, talking to me and trying to keep me warm as I was shivering excessively.

The MRD was soon on the scene with bandages, heat packs and a stretcher. This letter is a tribute to all concerned for doing an excellent job by getting me out fast under very difficult circumstances.

DIVERS FAIL TO FIND LOST CAVERN

by Ben Fenton (Daily Telegraph, 21.5.90)

An underwater rockslide 60ft from the end of a 1,000ft passage deep inside the Mendip Hills at Cheddar Gorge forced the end of an attempt by two divers to find a fabled cavern. Rob Palmer was near the end of his air supply as he tried to negotiate the "boulder choke". His depth gauge indicated he was close to the surface of the passage. "It was enormously annoying, but I think we all agreed it was a successful expedition because we had gone significantly further than we had ever gone before," he said. Rob Palmer and his partner, Richard Stevenson, had led a 30-strong expedition. They had been hoping to find at the end of the rising passage, the legendary "Cheddar Hole", a cavern known to medieval historians but "lost" with the passage of time. Richard Stevenson had earlier been forced to pull out of the dive when he had problems with his equipment during a descent of a 200ft vertical "sump" more than a mile inside the Mendips. "I am going to have a bath and a beer and then think about whether we will have another go," said Rob Palmer.

FACING DANGER IN THE CAVES

from the "Wells Journal", 12.7.90

Awe-struck visitors to Wells Museum are marvelling at the bravery of past cavers who faced danger with just a candle and a rope. The Museum's exhibition, Candles In The Dark - which ends on November 18 - covers the history of the sport over the past 100 years and some of the threats, including quarrying, facing it now. It was opened by 85-year-old pioneer caver Stephen Morland, an associate of museum founder and caver Herbert Balch. Balch, a former Wells post office messenger boy who gained the Freedom of the City in 1944, is one of a group of sportsmen featured in the exhibition who "searched out the secret ways into the heart of Mendip." Some of their equipment is displayed, with pioneer divers' home-made suits and masks, and cavers' tin hats and heavy boots, shown with their modern hi-tech and light-weight equivalents.

Photographer Harry Savory's heavy glass plate camera and glass jar of magnesium powder for flash shots show how some of the stunning cave photographs in the exhibition were achieved by him and A E Pearce around 1910 and 1911. An uncomfortable-looking early stretcher is a reminder of the risks early cavers ran - and of the work of the Mendip Cave Rescue Organisation. And due attention is paid to how cavers spend their time out of caves, with a photograph of the Huntera Lodge, Priddy - "one of the spiritual homes of Mendip cavers," and a copy of Alfie's Manuscript Collection of Mendip Caving Songs.

POTHOLES AIM FOR RECORD DEPTHS

from the "European"

A joint Soviet-UK expedition is to explore a cave that could prove to be the worlds deepest. The cave is in the Pamirs, a mountainous region in the Tadzhik Soviet Republic north of Afghanistan. Rival teams from around the world are trying to thwart the expedition by locating and conquering the cave first. They are led by the French and Italians, two of Europe's leading caving nations. But the Soviet-UK expedition, which reconnoitred the area last year, is ahead in the race. It has already discovered the site of the cave and has estimated its depth at 2,500 metres. The leader of the British team, Paul Vale, said: "This could be the greatest challenge ever in international caving. It needs the planning of an Everest expedition - there are more dangerous factors than mountaineering in the open air. An accident doesn't bear thinking about." The Soviet team will be led by Vladimir Kisselyov. He has the title of Master of Caving and heads the Soviet caving co-operative, Polarax. Apart from high temperatures and water scarcity, one special problem the expedition will face is bears. During last year's trip to reconnoitre the area, bears pushed boulders over the edge each time they approached the sheer rock wall of the mountain plateau. Paul Vale said: "The bears seemed to resent our presence." British team member Adrian Gregory, said: "The Russian scene will be jumping this year. Cavers are coming from all over the world."