

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 216

JUNE 1991

MOLES AND MUNCHKINS

by Tim Francis

If you happened to have casually browsed through the log book at Nordrach Cottage recently, you may have noticed that a few of the young members have been getting "a bit keen" in the caving department. The reason for all this excitement has been the pushing of a promising (where have I seen that word before?) dig in East Twin Swallet. Enthusiastic digging over three weeks has rewarded us with a minor breakthrough.

Several "Old Moles" (ex. Royal Holloway and Bedford New College Caving Club) have been intrigued by the blank area in Burrington Combe between East Twin Swallet, Lionel's Hole and the extensions in Pierre's Pot. Tracing has proved the hydrological link from East Twin to Pierre's. Despite continuous efforts by the Wessex at the upstream end of Pierre's, this link has yet to be found. Noticing that leads in East Twin Swallet, other than the SBSS (South Bristol Speleological Society) dig seemed to have been somewhat neglected, Tim Francis and Ralph Diment went down the Spar Pot Series to see for themselves. The Long Crawl seemed to be the most obvious choice, but was aborted because the calcified choke seemed pretty final without blasting. After investigating other sites we noticed a choked phreatic passage, directly above the Long Crawl. A quick dig revealed that rapid progress could be made, with plenty of space for dumping the spoil.

Over the next few weeks ten trips were made to the digging face with the passage rapidly growing in length. Several hapless victims were roped in to lend a hand, some more enthusiastic than others. Initially progress was easy with the passage size relatively comfortable. However we were soon hampered by a resistant flake which made digging extremely awkward. Ralph has since taken out a chunk of the flake with his trusty lumphammer. We were also frustrated by bad air for several trips. After one mid-week excursion three of us (Charlie Alison, Hugh Edwards and Tim Francis) exited the cave feeling sick and dizzy. Fortunately this problem was resolved when several inches of airspace were found above a false calcite roof. What air current we had was more the "candle gently flickers" rather than the "blows out your carbide" type. Leaving several feet of calcite for posterity, the passage was quickly excavated with the aid of a good spoil hauling system.

Our recent breakthrough was made on Sunday 12th May following on from a long dig by Tim and Ralph on the previous day. We were able to feel the end of the fill with an outstretched arm, and a hastily thrown spike over the calcite roof confirmed that there was open passage beyond. After several hours pounding at the face with a spike, Tim managed to open up a ridiculously tight squeeze. Trusting that Ralph would dig him out if required, Tim pushed through, breathing out to make the situation a little more comfortable. An hour or so later the squeeze was made larger for Ralph to get through as well.

We have entered a mud choked cross rift, which was initially decorated with about fifteen straws. A vocal connection with the roof of the Long Crawl has been made, but this would only be made passable after a pointless Bosch drill/ blasting exercise. Digging prospects, although less promising, still appear good. A large glutinous cone of mud should be removed without too much difficulty. This extension to the Spar Pot Series, named "M and M Passage" (Mole and Munchkin) currently stands at approximately fifty feet.

Diggers: Ralph Diment, Tim Francis, Andy Bellamy, Charlie Alison, Hugh Edwards, et al.

++++ MCG 1991 MEETS PROGRAMME ++++ *BANK HOLIDAY WEEKENDS IN ITALICS* ++++

Meets and Leaders are published as an on-going programme throughout the year.

| DATE | AREA | MAIN EVENT | CONTACT | TELE. NO. |
|-----------------|-----------|-------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| 06 Jul - 07 Jul | Mendip | SRT Training | MARTIN ROWE | 0252-872006 |
| 06 Jul | Bath | Monkton Farleigh Mine | YVONNE ROWE | 0252-872006 |
| 14 Jul - 28 Jul | Exchange | Czechoslovakia | DAVE TOOKE | 0923-241522 |
| 19 Jul - 03 Aug | S. France | Haute Garrone | MARTIN ROWE | 0252-872006 |
| 17 Aug | Chepstow | Otter Hole | DAVE TOOKE | 0923-241522 |
| 07 Sep | Mendip | Charterhouse Cave | YVONNE ROWE | 0252-872006 |
| 02 Nov | Mendip | HYGM/Barn Dance/Bonfire | ARTHUR SPAIN | 0749-679358 |

Accommodation in Yorks & S.Wales can be booked by through 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



SECRETARY: MALCOLM COTTER tel: 07842-52643
 249 Feltham Hill Road, Ashford, Middlesex, TW15 1LU

TREASURER: POST VACANT

MEET SECRETARY: DAVID TOOKE tel: 0923-241522
 117 Leavesden Road, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD2 5ER

COTTAGE WARDEN: BRIAN MURLIS tel: 0934-412048
 1a Arundell Road, Weston - super - Mare, Avon, BS23 2QG

TACKLEMASTER: ADRIAN DUCKETT tel: 081-568-6211
 68 Roxborough Avenue, Isleworth, Middlesex, TW7 5HJ

EDITOR: POST VACANT

RECORDER: WAYNE HISCOX tel: (WORK) 0749-72081
 3 Keward, Glastonbury Road, Wells, Somerset

ORDINARY MEMBER: ARTHUR SPAIN : 0749-679358
 Waitangi, Long Lane, Dinder, Somerset, BA5 3PQ

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

NEW ZEALAND... ...HERE WE COME!

Two madcap peddle pushers have set off on an incredible 12,000 mile journey to New Zealand. Gill Warren and New Zealander Peter Norris left Frimley Green on an adventure which will take them across three continents - including 1,000 miles across China. Said Gill: "We think it is going to take about a year. It's the trip of a lifetime."

Gill, whose father runs the cycle shop in Frimley Green, gave up her job as a financial analyst to make the trip with boyfriend Peter, who worked at the shop as a mechanic. "He has been in England for a couple of years and wanted to go back to see his family, so we came up with the idea of going by bike." The couple are using specially adapted Claude Butler mountain bikes and are loaded with camping gear, plus a vital repair kit. Said Gill: "We will need to

camp in Europe, but in China we are expecting to get cheap accommodation." The couple caught the ferry to France and will be going on to Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Hungary and into Romania. From Romania they are flying to Beijing, and cycling across China to Hong Kong. From Hong Kong, they will fly to India for another 1,000 mile trip down the east coast to Madras where they will fly on to Bangkok. Malaysia and Bali are next on the list before flying to Darwin. In Australia they will cycle down the east coast to Sydney before flying to Auckland.

"The good thing is that we have plenty of time," said Gill. "There is no definite schedule, but we will keep in touch with home to let everyone know where we are. It's not everyone's idea of fun," she admitted. "And we are keeping our fingers crossed that we won't hit too much trouble."

Camberley News, April 1991

CSCC NOTICEBOARD

CSCC have asked all clubs to circulate the following notices:

SWILDON'S HOLE Cavers (not just from MCG!) are still changing in the open despite the recent refurbishment of the barn. This causes great annoyance amongst the villagers. PLEASE CHANGE IN THE BARN AND NOT ON THE GREEN. Cavers have also been found changing in the school playground. This will upset the villagers even more, so PLEASE CHANGE IN THE BARN AND NOWHERE ELSE.

An additional problem is parking. At busy times large numbers of cars are parking on the Green. This is against the Byelaws. It is difficult to find a solution to this problem but additional parking is always available up by the Village Hall on the "Top" Green. Recently, however, a van was parked across the entrance to the hall so that people could not get in! PLEASE PARK WITH CARE AND CONSIDERATION FOR THE VILLAGE IF YOU WANT TO RETAIN ACCESS TO SWILDON'S IN THE FUTURE.

Cavers are reminded that Robin Maine has asked that novices are not taken down Swildon's under any circumstances.

UBLEY WARREN POT/NETTLE POT The farmer is happy for cavers to visit without contacting him first. Please observe the country code (leave gates as you find them, do not interfere with livestock, do not leave litter...) and park in the layby on the road ensuring that all access points to the farm are left clear.

LAMB LEER There is no access at present and the entrance is locked. Do not attempt to force the lock - damage may result in permanent closure.

GB CAVERN UBSS are checking all parties following a serious breach of the regulations. Parties are limited to six people, each party having their own key and each member having a permit. No novices are allowed in the cave. Be warned the Karst Police will pounce if you don't follow the rules!

REMEMBER... cavers do not own the caves although to see the antics of a minority going down Swildon's you would think they did! We visit caves by virtue of the goodwill of landowners, maintained over many years. Take care to observe access requirements and we will, hopefully, continue to enjoy visits to Mendip caves in the future. CSCC

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE — 9

by Tony Knibbs

In newsletter 215 Tony described his visit to EVENT DE PEYREJAL, 25km south of Vallon Pont d'Arc in the Ardèche. Here, he continues his article beginning with a trip to BAUME CARTIERE.

A day's caving was planned centred on Aven de la Forestière show cave about 9km south of Vallon; the cave manager, André Vermorel, is a caver and welcomed us using his carpark and picnic areas. Failing to find the prime objective, Aven des Neuf Gorges, we set about locating two other nearby caves.

BAUME CARTIERE is 500m SW of Forestière, well-hidden in a wood above a track from the show cave and only visible as you are about to fall into it. A scramble down a bushy gully for 7m led into a cool doline entrance, ideal for changing into caving gear. A few metres of easy passage reached the head of a 30m pitch, with 3 rebelayes, into a 60 x 30m chamber with remarkable stalactite formations - notably some spherical crystalline clusters. Many photos were taken.

BAUME DE RONZE was found further along the drivable track at 1km south of Forestière. It is an enormous doline some 150m in diameter and about 60m deep with a vast daylight chamber. An archaeological dig was in progress about halfway down.

Le Pont d'Arc, the famous natural rock bridge, spans the river Ardèche about 4km SE of Vallon. Following the D290 1.5km past the bridge brings one close to the river (many canoe hire sites) then the road swings uphill. At this bend a footpath leads to the northern bank of the river, rounding a wide horseshoe bend then running up and over a huge, sparsely vegetated, sand bar. Across the river is the GROTTTE DU COLOMBIER, accessible by crossing at some rapids 300m further down stream and following the southern bank upstream to an obvious cave entrance. Colombier is a currently worked archaeological site and contains prehistoric engravings which were almost impossible to discern, even with an expert to point them out. Never mind, the river crossing was fun!

In a straight line, 50km SE of Vallon and on the northern side of the Ardèche gorge is the well-known GROTTTE DE ST. MARCEL, an enormous 25km system of mainly large passages with 165m of vertical development. It was discovered in 1838 and explored by Martel (of course!) in 1892. Until about 10 years ago it was open to cavers, but plans for commercialisation led to closure and a ban on caving.

The show cave opened in 1989 but caving was still not allowed. However, a golden opportunity came our way following the making of a TV film, when cavers were asked to help remove equipment. Part of this deal was a day's free caving. Despite inevitable signs of wear and tear by generations of explorers, the show cave is still worth a visit to admire the remaining formations and to marvel at its immense size as one progresses downslope from the artificial tunnel entrance. Our trip started upslope from the tunnel; following the huge passage which is formed occasionally into large chambers and contains a profusion of still-beautiful formations.

After a couple of km is La Grande Barrière, a stalagmite blockage of epic proportions, penetrated in 1976 and leading to similar passage development beyond for another 2km to a large chamber - Salle du Sapin, the fir-tree being a stalagmite. A large hole in the floor confronted us here and; not having tackle, we about-turned to an obvious T-junction where we ascended a few metres into a left-hand branch. Lunchtime was declared and out came the usual mixture of bread, saucisson and wine.

This branch passage was like a huge D-tube 10m wide and again well-decorated in places, and with a fixed ladder ascent of 8m after roughly 1km. At one point we skirted round a gigantic fir-tree stalagmite and, later on, gazed at clusters of tiny crystals looking like localised outbreaks of frost. Eventually the seemingly

impossible happened and the passage closed down in one direction and choked in another. This check to progress happily coincided with the need to return to the entrance to exit behind the last tourist party of the day after an excellent 8 hour walk in a fine system.

The last trip of 1990 was to the GROTTA DU CALEL, 6km long and on the plateau du Causse de Sorèze, near the village of Sorèze 60km east of Toulouse. The plateau forms part of the Parc Naturel Régional du Haut Languedoc (Tarn) and the cave is a monument historique and yet is threatened by quarrying. From Sorèze a minor road signposted "Carrières" is followed through woods up to a farm with space for parking. A track to the left of the farmhouse emerges onto open hillside after 300m and Calel entrance is in a notable shakehole about 150m to the right from the highest point of the track 500m from the farm.

The entrance is restricted by a wall of concrete blocks and the system is developed in almost vertical bedding planes in folded limestone, giving the impression of large rifts. Initially the passage descends steeply, 20m high and with many eroded holes and pockets in the walls. Inviting detours were avoided as we picked our way cautiously across slippery floors and down "toboggans" to reach the impressive streamway with good formations at Salle de Ruisseau.

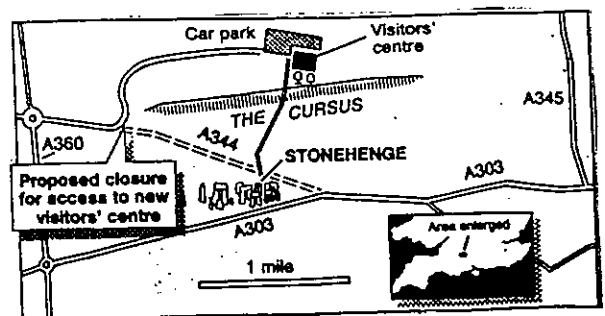
Ankle-deep paddling upstream for 400m reaches a short duck (siphon no.1) passable with 10cm airspace into the beautifully decorated Galerie Pouget, sumping after a further 250m. Downstream, we followed the roomy passage, at one point along square-cut "pavements" either side of a stream trench 1m deep. At two points abundant flowstone provides a false floor with a sporting crawl in the stream below or easier going above. Two major inlets are passed on the left before a very deep lake is met after 600m. About 5m wide, it provided a 75m swim to siphon no.5 (at -115m) and a muddy passage up to a choke.

The return was made via one of the two inlet passages, passing through two good-sized chambers to reach an ascending crawl to a steeply inclined section in concrete pipes and a 5m vertical section with iron rungs to exit in a wooded area from which an indistinct path led upslope to open hillside and the approach track. A rope was more than useful through the inclined concrete tubes.

This limestone area is very reminiscent of Mendip and the day of our visit in December was suitably cold and wet.

ROADWORKS AHEAD FOR LONDON--MENDIP TRAFFIC?

English Heritage and the National Trust yesterday (9.5.91) published their plan for a £10 million transformation of Stonehenge. Soon after it was privatised seven years ago, English Heritage said one of its overriding concerns was to free Britain's greatest ancient monument from traffic and the visual intrusion of buildings. The plans now published include closing the A344, which runs immediately past the stones, and creating a new entrance and visitors' centre about five-eighths of a mile to the north at Larkhill, beyond the ancient Cursus causeway. There would also be improved catering facilities and carefully screened parking. Advisors to the scheme emphasized that it was not simply a plan for a new visitors' centre. It called for the enhancing of the landscape, including the removal of all the modern buildings in the immediate vicinity and the restoration of the site to its original appearance. One remaining problem is the A303 trunk road, which the transport department has said it intends to make a dual carriageway. The department has now been asked to consider putting the road in a cut-and-cover tunnel.



John Young, The Times, 10.5.91

WHIT-ICISMS FROM WALES

by Joan Goddard

Warm dry weather, a good campsite and a selection of activities made for a pleasant Spring Bank Holiday weekend for members of the Wicks, Lovell, Pittman, Cotter, Macmillan families and Steve Marshall. They were joined on the Sunday by Geoff Beale, Ron Arkless and Mike Carson and family.

Assorted walks to Vale of Neath waterfalls, Haffes Valley, and Pant Mawr were undertaken at various times by various people, but everyone gathered on Sunday in the Nedd Fechan and Mellte valleys.

Bridge Cave was the first port of call - a small cave just over 300 metres long - which (together with Little Neath River Cave) requires a 20p fee to the farmer at Blaen-Nedd-Isaf Farm. After a low entrance crawl and boulder choke we reached a stream flowing briskly through a meandering passage in unusually pale grey limestone. The stream soon flowed into the large Main Passage at the end of which an upward glance revealed two boulders bridging the passage at a high level. (At this point there was considerable discussion as to whether the cave got its name from these boulder bridges, or from the bridge over the dry river bed near which the cave entrance is located!) From here the passage gradually became lower until it reached the sump which connects with Little Neath River Cave.

On emerging from Bridge Cave, Mike Lovell, Allan, Nigel, Bryan, Michael, Steve, Geoff, Ron, Mike Carson and son went down Little Neath River Cave whilst others walked down-valley to Pwyll-y-Rhyd and White Lady Cave. Although we didn't go into these caves (no wetsuits our excuse) we found the river course fascinating as much of it was probably formed in an underground phase of the river and contained many cave features.

While we were practicing abseiling off the bridge, the caving crew emerged from LNRC and we all moved off to the Mellte at Porth-yr-Ogof. About half a dozen people did the through trip whilst others had fun abseiling into the cave via a hole in the roof.

On Monday, Malcolm, Norma, Andy, Joan, Simon, Sian, Nigel, Michael and Steve walked in hot sunshine up to DFD II entrance armed with a photocopy of the relevant part of the survey. We saw a lot more of the cave than on our previous year's trip, including Bagpipe Chamber, Arête Chamber with its amazing pit, and Gnome Passage, but the connection to Salubrious Passage eluded us this time - which surely gives us a good reason to go back there before too long!

PS. On the way to the Swansea Valley we stopped off at Big Pit, Blaenavon. It closed as a working colliery in 1980 but reopened in 1983 as a tourist attraction. We were taken on an hour long underground tour by a guide who had worked there before the mine stopped production. After a 90 metre descent down the shaft in a cage we were given a brief history of the workings; the original mine was entered via an adit (now the emergency exit) and its purpose was to win ironstone for the iron and steelworks in Blaenavon. Later the Garw coal seam was worked. We were shown longwall working (which was in use when the mine closed) but an alternative tour takes one into older pillar and stall workings. The above-ground buildings and machinery, and the pithead baths were equally interesting, and displays are currently being created to illustrate the latest coal winning methods.

Entrance charge £4 per adult, £3 per child.

IVY COTTAGE HOLE

by Tim Francis

I should think that the vast majority of you will have yet to hear about this "addition" to subterranean Mendip, and scouring the recesses of Barrington and Stanton will bring little joy. However, considering the location of the site, Ivy Cottage Hole could prove quite a significant re-discovery.

The entrance was located on Thursday 30th May, after an interesting chat with a local farmer, Terry Harvey, at the Castle of Comfort Inn. He had tried to show us the entrance on Monday 27th May but we were unable to find it, despite a two hour long search. Following on from this, myself, Ralph Diment and his brother George bottomed the shaft on the Friday morning. Due to extremely conservative amounts of tackle this was done with considerable difficulty. However, a return trip was made on Saturday when I was able to rig the pitches more effectively. This time the descent was made with Lee Hawkeswell, Barry Parker and Bill Platt.

Ivy Cottage Hole essentially consists of a mined rift, 80 feet deep, split into two pitches. The first pitch, 30 feet, can be rigged from two trees and is an easily descended circular shaft. The second pitch, although lifelined as a continuation of the first, should be rigged with a long tether from a boulder. It has an awkward take-off whereby a squeeze drops out over a 45 foot pitch. This second pitch follows a narrow rift and lands on a mud choke. Opposite the squeeze another shaft heads steeply upwards but is blocked near the surface.

The prospects for this area appear good, with several other surface depressions which look excellent dig sites. Ivy Cottage Hole could be dug but the awkward nature of pitch two will make hauling spoil to the surface very difficult, and labour intensive. Down-valley, both Holes Ash Spring and Vigo Wood Spring have as yet no proved feeders, and no cave has yet been found in the area (*ed: except Hole In The Road Cave beneath the Wells-Hunters road, discovered and filled in during road works.*)

Ivy Cottage Hole can be found by taking the Milton Road from the Hunter's. Park in a small lay-by on the right hand side of the road, just before the road descends steeply round a bend. Walk downhill to a farm track where a small area of woodland marked "Private land, no tipping" is found. Walk diagonally some 70 yards from the corner of the woods following an obvious motorcycle track. The hole is located several yards to the left of this path in a small depression. Please replace the car door and wood carefully as Terry is rightfully concerned about people falling down.

Going down the mine?



Always leave mines safe by replacing gates or lids before you leave.



MENDIP RESCUE ORGANISATION

There were sixteen callouts in the year ending 31st December 1990 with only three actual cave rescues requiring underground parties. Seven callouts were for overdue parties, mostly for good reasons and needing action. Below is a precis of cave rescues and incidents. The full MRO report will be found in the MCG library.

Sat.13th January *THRUPE LANE SWALLET*

A 28yr old man descended to the bottom of the cave with a well equipped party. Of the six, he was the least experienced and it was his first time on long ladder pitches underground. On ascending Atlas Pot at about 2.30pm, he fell about 20ft onto a fortuitous ledge, broke his leg and damaged a wrist. The lifeline only slowed his fall because the incorrectly rigged Stitch Plate belay gave way under the strain. One of the party raised the alarm and Yeovil Police alerted MRO at 3.30pm. Rescuers from BEC and WCC were called and Dr Tony Boycott was informed. The surface controller organised further rescuers and hauling gear. A communications link was made between the surface and underground parties. Rescuers entered the cave at 4.15pm with first aid, hauling equipment and the Grunterphone and the patient was reached by about 4.40pm. He was found to be in fair condition and able to do a lot to help himself. However, he was large and so a long haul was anticipated. The patient was at the top of Atlas Pot by 5.55pm, reached the head of Perseverance Pot at 6.55pm and was out of the cave by 7.40pm. Those left to clear up managed to make the Hunter's just before closing time!

Sun.4th February *CHEDDAR CLIFFS*

Two cows became trapped in the 15ft x 3ft slot between the Cheddar cliffs and the Wishing Well Tearooms. By the cunning use of bales of straw and ropes they were lifted onto the flat roof, tied to metal farm gates and lowered down and constructed ramp.

Sun.11th March *SALLY RIFT, HARLEIGH WOODS*

Bath Police were checking out the possibility that the body of a missing woman was somewhere in woods near Bathford. A thorough two-hour search of every old stone mine shaft and rift was undertaken but nothing untoward found.

Sun.1st April *READ'S CAVERN*

Eleven suitably equipped Venture Scouts descended the cave with two highly experienced members of WCC. On reaching Main Chamber, several decided to return to the surface and were escorted out. Meanwhile, one lad and two girls decided to explore Zed Alley without telling anyone. The lad was unable to follow the two slim girls when they forced several squeezes beyond the boulder ruckle. He stayed to guide their return to the boulder ruckle, but then left the cave ahead. For some reason the girls did not follow and once out of earshot they became lost and scared. The missing girls failed to surface behind the lad and he was unable to describe where he had left them. One of the WCC leaders searched the regular routes in vain. He requested help and MRO received the call from Yeovil Police at 4.15pm. Surface control was established by 4.45pm. and rescuers went into the cave at 4.48pm to search Zed Alley as the most likely location for the missing pair. Two more rescuers went down the cave at 5pm to check out the less likely Browne-Stewart Series. The missing girls were located at 5.15pm at the bottom of the boulder ruckle and reported to be well but rather cold and frightened. All were safely out of the cave by 6.12pm. Needless to say, those concerned showed their gratitude in many ways, not least back at the Hunter's!

Sat.28th April *LONGWOOD SWALLET*

Yeovil Police contacted MRO at 11.20pm to report an overdue party from Keynsham. Longwood was checked in case the cavers were still underground while other rescuers stood by at Priddy. No car was found at Longwood. Meanwhile, the informant contacted the Police again at 11.40pm to say that the party had returned home. After all, it takes about 40 minutes to reach Keynsham from Mendip after closing time!

Thur.31st May *SWILDON'S HOLE*

MRO was contacted by Yeovil Police at 1.45am to report that a party from Dorset was overdue from a trip to Sump 1. They were expected home at 11.30pm. The alarm was raised from a call-box in Beaminster. Priddy Green was checked for parked cars but

none was found. The party concerned arrived home 2.36am. It takes even longer to reach Beaminster from Mendip after closing time, of course!

Mon.16th July EASTWATER CAVERN ENTRANCE

A heifer became stuck in a gully on the cliffs above the entrance. The BEC and a party staying at the Belfry, with a visiting Czechoslovakian couple attended. The farmer had tied a rope from the animal's neck to a JCB - the heifer did not like this. This was replaced by a tape halter over the head and two tape slings around the forelegs, and the heifer was lifted 10ft to safety suffering from surprise, cuts and bruises and a lame leg.

Mon.23rd July SHUTE SHELVE CUTTING

Taunton Police requested assistance in recovering a crashed motor cycle from a disused railway cutting between Axbridge and Winscombe, about 30ft above a sheer cliff. By abseiling down, a hauling line was attached. There was no sign of an injured rider in the vicinity below.

Sun.19th August SWILDON'S HOLE

A party was 4hrs overdue by the noticeboard in the Shepton hut. The party, based elsewhere on Mendip, had called at the Shepton on the way to the cave but left directly for Guildford without cancelling their notice!

Fri.31st August SWILDON'S HOLE

At 5.45pm a party of Wiltshire Police from Swindon were reported overdue. Both village greens were checked but their car was not there. At 6.45pm the Police called to say the trip was not due to take place until the following day!

Sun.2nd September SPLIT ROCK

An abseiler at Split Rock was kept overnight in Wells hospital with concussion. He asked for other members of his group staying at MCG to be notified by MRO.

Sat.6th October GB CAVERN

A party was reported 2hrs overdue. Shortly afterwards the party turned up having been delayed and then unable to find a telephone on getting out late.

Sat.6th October SWILDON'S HOLE

A member of Oxford University Caving Club dislocated her shoulder in Barne's Loop. At 2.50pm a strong BEC contingent was called out from their AGM and a doctor was asked to attend. An advance party with first aid, comforts, the baby-bouncer, lifeline and ladder entered the cave at 3.10pm, only 20mins after receiving the callout. A second party closely followed at 3.32pm. WCC diggers from Cow Hole arrived in support. Entenox was obtained from the ambulance and demand valve provided. At 4.15pm the doctor succeeded in relocating the shoulder and the patient was on the way out, mainly helping herself. She surfaced at 4.50pm and no further treatment was required.

Wed.24th October SWILDON'S HOLE

At 10.25pm Yeovil Police reported an injured caver. They had no details of the injuries or the location in the cave. The informant was found on Priddy Green and explained that a caver had fallen at the Double Pots and injured his ankle. There was some concern because he had a pacemaker. As the rescue party arrived at Priddy Green they met the injured caver limping along the road. A rapid about-turn ensued!

Wed.24th October SPAR POT, EAST TWIN SWALLET

A party of 3 from Swindon were reported overdue at 11.40pm. East Twin in Burrington Combe was checked to see if any car was still parked but none was found. At 00.30am the Police rang to say the party had returned safely to Wiltshire.

Wed.31st October DALLIMORE'S CAVE

The farmer at Ores Close Farm was concerned that a car belonging to cavers who had gone underground the previous evening was still at the farm 16hrs later. To everyone's relief, the cavers had been surveying new extensions the previous evening, had come out late and returned very early the following morning. They had, understandably, not bothered the farmer in the small hours.

OGOF CAPEL

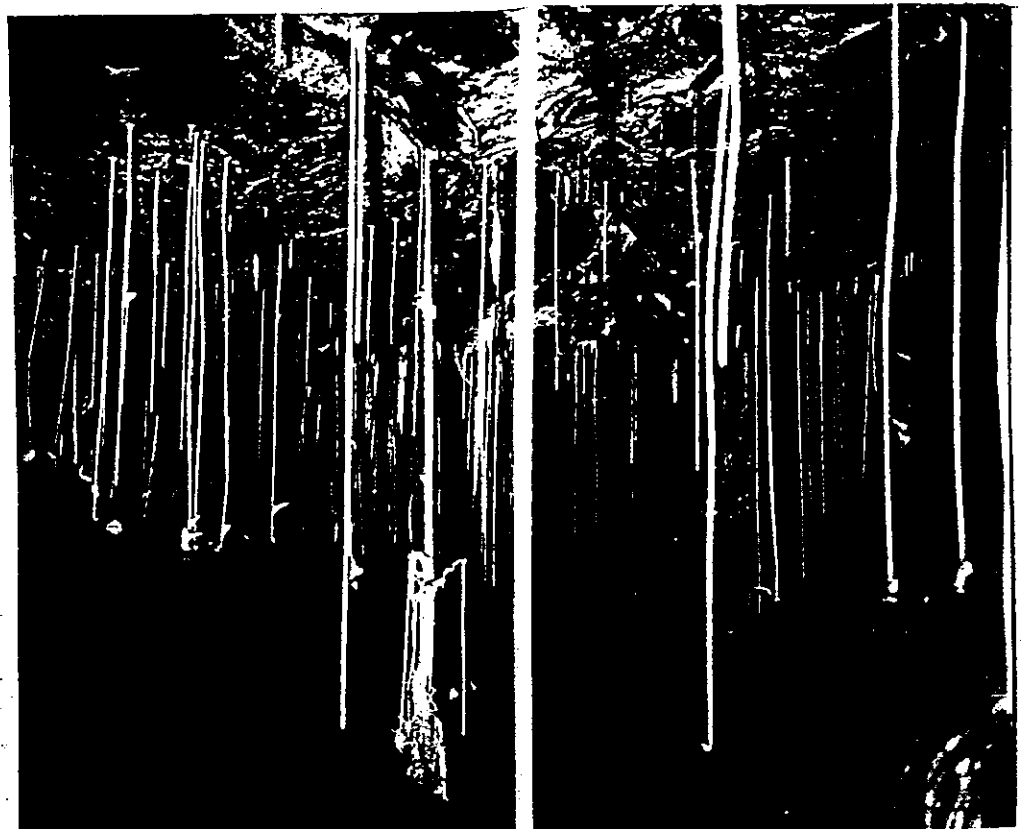
by Brian Murlis

It was 11.30am on Tuesday 2nd April and I was waiting at the car park of the Drum and Monkey in the Clydach Gorge, South Wales. It was tipping down with rain and Dig Hastilow was already half an hour late. A sudden flash of silver Honda on the Heads of the Valley Road below told me that Dig was unable to find the road to the Drum and Monkey, but he did notice my wild gesticulations and eventually managed to turn around and find the right road - the trip was on!

Still in the pouring rain, and under the amused eyes of a minibus-load of school kids, we managed to don our wet suits and diving gear only to be asked by the kids' leader, "Where are you going, OFD?" - well, at least he got the right country! Armed with cameras (a must for this cave) we made the short walk down the side of the Clydach Gorge to the cave, a 3ft diameter phreatic tube, in a small cliff face about 80ft above the valley floor. From the entrance, a short hands and knees crawl leads to a small chamber with a sump pool at its lowest point. The water was crystal clear and I mistakenly let Dig dive first as he had done the sump before. A few minutes later, a tug on the line told me it was my turn to dive, but where was the visibility? The sump starts off quite roomy and goes down at a 45° angle, getting narrower and narrower, to a tight slot where (in virtual nil visibility) you have to find the widest part - which I did not - and after getting my diving cylinder jammed along with the rest of my body, I made a quick exit.

My second attempt at the sump was much more successful. Having located the largest part of the slot I popped out into a roomy passage with better vis and eventually surfaced in a chamber with sump 2 in the corner. This time I dived first and the water was crystal clear in a good sized passage which surfaced after 20ft or so, just below an awesome-looking boulder choke. Here, we dumped the diving gear on a safe ledge out of the way of any loose boulders that may fall from the choke and very carefully, one at a time, we squeezed our way through the boulders to emerge in a hands and knees bedding passage. This eventually leads to a rifty walking sized stream passage, which meanders horizontally for nearly 3000ft. Along most of its length the passage is a breathtaking array of pure white straws, some of incredible length, others with helictites growing at fascinating angles from them. It's a truly spectacular sight. Unfortunately the formations are very vulnerable and considering that the cave has only been open since 1987, with restrictions of access due to the sumps, there has been a lot of damage. The original discoverers have spent a lot of time and effort taping formations and putting in signs showing which way to go to avoid further damage. This often means flat-out squeezes in the streamway and the like, but it's well worth it. Even so, extreme care must be exercised due to the very close proximity of a lot of the formations.

On our return journey down the streamway, especially in the more constricted areas, we noticed how strong the incoming draught was, probably an indication of a link with the big Llangattock caves! After many photo stops (which produced some good results) we eventually re-negotiated the boulder choke and kitted up for the outward dives. The visibility in the sumps had not yet improved since we stirred it up four hours earlier. So, after bumping into several obstacles en-route, we eventually surfaced in the chamber near the entrance. This was an absolutely superb trip...



AN EXPLANATION OF WHY I HAVE RESIGNED

by Martin Rowe

As most people will by now know, the last 15 months on the committee have not been easy. To give a full account here would fill a newsletter, but in essence it can be said that by Oct '90 a majority of the committee no longer had confidence in Malcolm Cotter as secretary, as he was not willing to accept committee decisions as binding. This made the committee's task of running the day-to-day business of the Group difficult as we were faced at every meeting with attempts to reverse decisions previously made. Before the HYGM this was discussed with Malcolm and he was urged to stand down or else be "no confided". As he indicated his intention to stand down at the 1991 AGM due to health reasons, and agreed to accept the decisions of committee meetings as binding unless overturned by a general meeting, there was no attempt to bring a vote of no confidence at the HYGM. However, once the HYGM was over, Malcolm again sought to have binding committee meeting decisions reversed. Furthermore, he began to isolate MCG from other Mendip clubs by (unintentionally or otherwise) upsetting the good relationships committee members had fostered with members of other clubs. A recent example of this was the CCC meeting at which the CCC secretary was elected; the only candidate was Steve Redwood (an MCG member who lives "locally") and he was elected unanimously with one abstention; the single abstention was Malcolm representing MCG thus giving the impression that the Group does not support one of its own members becoming CCC secretary.

At the 1991 AGM, five committee members moved a vote of no confidence in Malcolm as we felt we could no longer work with a secretary who would not abide by committee decisions and who seemingly wished to see MCG isolated from the rest of the Mendip caving fraternity. The motion of no confidence was not voted upon.

Incidentally to all this, a minor problem arose which has erupted into a major crisis for the Group. Nominations for committee posts were due to reach the secretary by 2nd March, 21 days prior to the meeting. As Malcolm was booked into the cottage on that date, a nomination for the post of secretary was delivered to the cottage, but Malcolm did not turn up that weekend. I phoned him on the Monday to ask for his ruling on whether the nomination was valid. Malcolm said it was, and Yvonne included it in the agenda. Malcolm later reversed his ruling and produced a different agenda. As a result there was considerable confusion at the AGM (and a heated argument at the committee meeting prior to the AGM). Eventually, to resolve the problem I proposed at the AGM that "the election of secretary be deferred, nominations be re-opened and a postal ballot of all full members be organised by the committee, to be completed by the end of May". After the AGM the committee (including Malcolm) agreed the procedure for the ballot. Wayne Hiscox was nominated "returning officer" and conducted the ballot, which was completed on 22nd May when Malcolm was declared the duly elected secretary. My (and Yvonne's) only involvement was to print the nomination and ballot papers using our computer database and mailmerge facilities. All the ballot forms (including mine and Yvonne's) were posted by Wayne and returned to Wayne. To avoid fraudulent voting the ballot papers were printed on the reverse with member's names. This is comparable to parliamentary elections where the elector's identification number from the electoral register is written on the ballot paper. It was felt that Wayne could be trusted not to divulge how people had voted. I (and Yvonne) took no part in the election, did not canvass for either candidate, and did not use Yvonne's position as editor to influence the voting through the newsletter. Despite this, at the committee meeting following the postal ballot, Malcolm suggested that I had sought to influence the outcome of the ballot, that I had printed names on ballot papers solely with the intention of later claiming (if Malcolm was elected) that the ballot was improper because it was somehow not secret.

In effect, he is accusing me of interfering in the election in favour of his opponent. His allegations have so enraged me that I am no longer prepared to serve on the committee whilst he is secretary and I have therefore resigned.

PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW!

by Yvonne Rowe

At the AGM in April, before voting had taken place for the post of Secretary, it was discovered that the postal ballot papers did not have the names of all the nominees on them. It was therefore agreed by the floor that a postal ballot of all full MCG members should take place for the post of Secretary.

A committee meeting was held immediately afterwards in the Hunters and it was agreed that Wayne Hiscox should organise the ballot as he was one of the two committee members who had not no-confidenced Malcolm at the AGM and had said he had no bias one way or another about the matter. The only part Martin and I played in the postal ballot (apart from voting) was to print the nomination and ballot papers and address the envelopes as we have the membership/ mailing list programme on the computer. We then gave all this paperwork to Wayne who posted them, received the replies and counted the votes.

We had no contact with Wayne whatsoever (or the membership on this particular subject) during the period of the ballot until we received, by post, the results of the ballot on the 24th May.

It came as great shock and with disgust at the first committee meeting since Malcolm's re-election when he suggested we had played a dubious and interfering part in the ballot. We asked him to substantiate his allegation but he couldn't.

After a year of Malcolm trying to discredit us at almost every committee meeting in some way or another, this was the final straw so we have resigned from the committee. I personally am deeply hurt and disappointed as up to a year ago I enjoyed being on the committee and have always thoroughly enjoyed being editor, more so recently as I had finally "got it all worked out" with the computer and such.

For a good while I have felt that Malcolm has no respect for me or my role on the committee, in fact I feel that the committee as a whole is not shown the respect and credibility it deserves - if a majority vote goes against what Malcolm would have liked he does his best, both on and off the committee, to get it overruled. I know this from the amount of enquiring phone calls I have received after Malcolm has been complaining to members and turning them against committee decisions. Sometimes it is a good thing, I agree, but all too often it causes a great deal of ill feeling and lack of confidence in the committee, who make decisions in good faith and after much discussion (and two or three months notice in the newsletter).

Anyway, although I resigned reluctantly and with regret - I did, so it just leaves me to wish the next editor lots of luck and fun and to thank the members for their support and votes of confidence over the past five years.

Since I became editor in April '86 I have produced: 33 10-page newsletters, 13 2-page Bulletins, 4 sets of AGM minutes and 41 sets of committee minutes. I have also put onto computer the Constitution and Rules and all the Group's standard forms (application form, proving trip, etc.). I have also created a database of members details which can be used for address lists (as printed in the Newsletter twice per year), address labels and creating annual CCC permits. A quick "back of an envelope" calculation reveals that altogether this amounts to some 350,000 words! Not bad for someone who originally said they would only do the job for one year!

As this is my last newsletter I will now look for other ways to contribute my energies to the Group. I have one project that was started with Ian McKechnie that I will now complete with Joan Goddard's help - a display of Mendip geology in the display cabinet at the cottage. I already have a good selection of fossils, rocks and minerals. Martin and I have also got a little project going that we have almost completed, a 10-page membership introductory package which we will complete soon.