

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 217

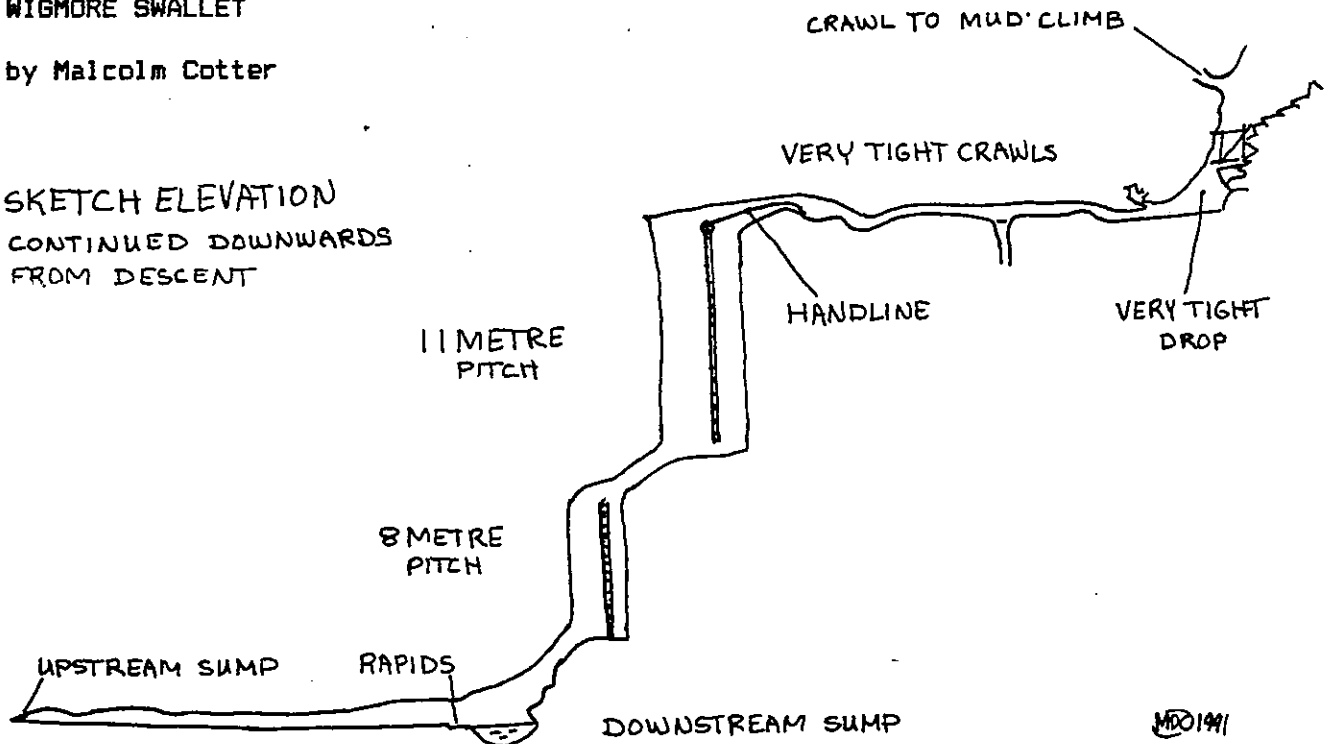
OCTOBER 1991

WIGMORE SWALLET

by Malcolm Cotter

SKETCH ELEVATION

CONTINUED DOWNWARDS
FROM DESCENT



News of a significant discovery in this cave came to the writer from Dave Morrison of BEC when he told me that a stream had been found with a flow similar in volume to a normal winter Swildons at a time of year when all the other caves had very small flow. This was followed by an exciting discussion with Tony Jarrett the following weekend when those present were shown slides of the cave.

Two weeks later on the 21 of September a party made up of Lee Hawkswell, Dave Tooke, Sonya and Malcolm Cotter made for the cave. Not being in an area any of us knew we spent about an hour looking for the entrance, but the diversion was profitable, since we were made aware of the local karst.

The entrance is situated in the corner of a wood to the west of the track signed Wigmore Farm. The swallet drains a boggy area formed in a valley within the main valley.

The entrance itself is a large excavated vertical shaft, within a fault, carefully shored with drains at the lower end. Vertical crush material and calcite veining can clearly be seen in the plane of the fault and at places throughout the cave. The entire cave so far is in gently dipping Triassic conglomerate and marl so that some walls are knobbly and others smooth. Throughout the cave there is a lot of red clay. At the bottom of the second pitch from the bottom is a thick sequence of banded clay.

The passage leading from the bottom of the shaft is mainly a hands and knees crawl with some flat out sections. This ends at an enlargement where are stacked numerous bags full of spoil. There then follows a mainly flat out section broken by the descent of a short length of iron ladder and a scramble down a clean rift.

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.0761-462797
 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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NEW MEET SECRETARY CO-OPTED

The Mendip Caving Group Committee welcomes, Jean Paul Burch as Meet Secretary, following Dave Took's resignation. Dave has felt there has been a poor response to meet programmes generally and wondered if the post is really necessary today?

Although caving has been becoming more insular as more individualistic techniques have been adopted, the sport can only continue to evolve through active support of group activities in such groups as the M.C.G.

The pinnacle of Dave's achievement was the organisation of the excellent Czechoslovakia trip. Thanks Dave for all you did, and we trust the group will now give its fullest support to Jean-Paul's Meet Programme.

The explorer then comes to a fine vantage point near the top of a deep and relatively wide rift, the way on being a pitch. Fortunately Dave remembered reading that the drop could be bypassed so we backtracked a short distance and chimneyed down to an outlet about half way down the drop, from where it was possible to free climb the rest of the way.

Two ways lead off from the bottom of the rift, a lower one with scaffolding, which was followed by Dave and Sonya and an upward sloping crawl above the shored hole, which was followed by Lee and myself. Our bit of the exploration led to a very muddy chamber ending at a steep slope. We were able to climb up as far as a clay overhang but did not possess the strength to haul ourselves up the rope dangling over the edge.

On return the report from the others was not very encouraging since they thought that there was no way on. At this stage we thought the way was up the clay overhang but wishing to see the bottom of the cave the writer went on down the shoring. At the bottom is a very tight smooth vertical rift where the cavers thoughts speculate on the return!

Leading from the rift a flat out crawl to the left was found to be the way on although the first view at the end looks like an impassable squeeze. The sound of water is faintly discernable at this point and indicates the way. Beyond there are two places of respite from very tight squeezing; the first above a tight chimney bridged by a shoring prop and the second following an upward bend. From this enlargement a handline leads along a sideways squeeze passage, first gently upwards then gently down, towards the top of a black rift.

Not wishing to swing like a monkey by one hand on a thin rope with a tight rift above, I decided to back out and try a feet first approach. This proved successful and it was possible to climb across the top of the rift to the top of a ladder. The pitch was some 35 feet deep.

The continuation down another short tight passage brought us to a shorter pitch of about 25 feet with ladder in place. At the bottom a large quantity of diving gear was seen. Below a short climb led to a wonderful view of a deep pool fed by a stream falling over some rapids. Lee found a way round to the right which did not involve getting wet above the thighs.

The stream passage beyond is almost horizontal mainly a low stoop with one rather lower section. It ends after about 200 feet at an upstream sump. The pool we first crossed forms the downstream sump. The passage has aptly been named Yeo Passage, since the water has been tested to Cheddar.

Having partaken of our chocolate bar we made our return. This proved to be very strenuous since it involved forcing our way, mainly upwards through squeezes. None of the party went underground the next day!

The discovery of this cave is deserving of the highest praise. A great deal of perseverance and excavation skill went into the enterprise.

The source of the stream is presently a matter of debate. The fact that the water reappears at Cheddar is also interesting. I have often speculated on the possibility of a trans Mendip cave system developed at the time of the last glaciation when the ice sheet reached the Bristol Channel. The ice could have acted as a dam to the north west of Mendip with a periglacial lake behind. One outlet for the water has been argued for the valley between Blagdon and Rickford. It is also possible that an escape could have been formed underground, a lake draining through the northern flank of Mendip, perhaps from the Chewton Mendip region, to Cheddar.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT DIGGERS

Members are reminded that all are welcome to come digging every Wednesday evening with local M.C.G. members who meet at the cottage about 7pm to pursue digging activities in the locality. Currently Brian Murlis and Steve Redwood dig in Bone Hole. Otherwise they pursue one of the other alternatives, such as digging in Upper Flood.

EMMER GREEN CHALK MINES

Geoff Beale will be going down these interesting chalk mines near Reading on Sunday October 13th. There is a 70ft entrance shaft which can be descended by ladder or S.R.T. Those interested should ring Geoff on - 0734 722510

LIBRARY ADDITIONS

Our library has had donated to it, Pyrenees Souterraines, by Jacques Jolfre - an 86 page, beautifully illustrated book with photographs from both show, and sporting caves.

Also, A National Geographic issue (October 1988) with an article on the Lascaux Cave paintings.

BIKERS PROGRESS

Gill Warren and Peter Norris have crossed the Alps cycled through Switzerland over the Glossgackner Pass, which took nine hours to scale 2500 ft! After major servicing was carried out on their bikes in Vienna, they headed for Hungary and Rumania on their way to New Zealand via Europe, China, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Bali, Australia. Good luck, rather than me.

RATS

There have been reports of rats seen recently inside Stoke Lane Slocker entrance. You are particularly warned of the possibility of Weils disease following a visit to this cave, especially if you have an open cut or scratch. If in an doubt about odd flue like symptoms, mention Weils disease to your doctor. It may well affect your alcohol consumption for life, or even kill you if not diagnosed quickly!

Dan Y Ogof

Brian Murlis, Nick Geh, Dig Hastilow, and others, have made quite a few trips into Dan y Ogof, tying up loose ends, (an obsession inspired by Nick). This has resulted in the September 1st discovery of 500 feet of nicely decorated stream passage, ending in an easy looking, draughting choke, and two other good leads besides.

A full report on this and all our other trips will follow in the next newsletter hopefully!

mcg barn dance

at Priddy Hall

Saturday 2nd Nov

bar buffet

lucky ticket
wins

mcg sweater

Tickets £5

Children under ten years old half price.

Tickets available from Bryan Pittman at The Eclipse on Thursdays or Arthur Spain on Mendip.

A coach from the cottage to the hall will be laid on at £2.50. per head.

PYRENEES 1991

by Yvonne Rowe

Sat 20th July to Sat 3rd August was to be a caving, walking and tourist holiday and it was all we hoped it would be:-

DAY 1: Joan and Simon Goddard arrived at our house mid morning and we just managed to get all the caving, camping, walking and personal gear into our Ford Orion. It's a roomy car but this was pushing it a bit! We set off for the 3pm Portsmouth to Caen ferry and after a smooth crossing arrived in France at 10.30pm (French time). After a short drive we found a lovely campsite for an overnight stop.

DAY 2: We set off again at 8am and after an 11hr drive we arrived at Tony and Denise Knibbs' delightful bungalow at THIL, near Toulouse. There we also met Bryan, Ann, Michael and Sian Pittman who had arrived the previous day in their camper-van. We had a long, relaxing meal on the terrace, then - surprise! With the long drive I had forgotten that it was my and Michael's birthday, when Ann brought out a beautiful cake with a fondant helmet and FX2 battery in the centre and three cavers sitting around the edge (one with a beard!). This iced fruit cake proved to be a yummy and excellent source of energy on our walking and caving trips.

DAY 3: After a leisurely breakfast we all set off for our campsite at MANE, 1 hr. drive from Thil. A superb, uncrowded site with a swimming pool which was well used by the three younger members. We put up tents, shopped, and had the first of many communal meals on the "Pittman Pitch". During the night there was a tremendous thunder storm and while Martin and I were watching from our tent we were zapped by a thunderbolt which came too close for comfort!

DAY 4: We decided on a walk to the entrance of GOUFFRE HENNE-MORTE (1380m). We parked in the carpark above Arbas and set off. The weather was overcast but it was very hot and humid so it wasn't long before we were all dripping wet with the effort of climbing up the overgrown and human-unfriendly footpath. Footpaths marked on the maps don't appear to exist any more, probably through lack of use, so a compass is vital (and long legwear!). Everything around was still but ahead of us was a small area where we could see plants and grasses blowing about. It was TROU SOUFFLEUR, a "blow hole" that is a small cave entrance with ice-cold air blowing out. We all took turns to get a quick cool-off, then on our way again. We eventually found our way to the bouldery doline that contained the entrance to Henne-Morte which had a very suspect (permanent?) rope leading in. Next to this doline was another doline-cum-shaft that saw no daylight. It could just be seen through a slit from our side and in the bottom was a snow plug. Really weird when the temperature on our side was in the 80s! The other thing of note was a clearing in the shrubbery filled with beautiful, head-high, pale blue Alpine Sow Thistle (looks like tall Chickory).

DAY 5: We parked the cars above Arbas again and set off on the short walk to GOUFFRE TROU MILE (1322m). Some used ladders and some SRT but a good trip was had by those who went down. There were a few other cavers down of varying nationalities, some of whom had already rigged the cave for SRT. After 4 or 5 pitches we came to a long fixed handline traverse. The rope looked pretty rotten and when we had got a little way round we found it had snapped and simply been knotted! We weren't happy with this so we made it our point to turn back. Martin and I were first out and while we waited for the others we poked about in the stream that flows into Trou Mile. We found small black Salamanders, the biggest tadpoles I have ever seen and bits of dead shrubbery with legs! These turned out to be Caddis Fly lava which wrap themselves in dead leaves or similar, presumably for camouflage.

DAY 6: We chose a walk to COL DE L'ARRECH. We parked the cars at ARET and walking through this village was like taking a trip back into history. We found the path we needed which was well defined to start with but as we started the steeper ascent up the mountain we had to resort to the compass.

The sight we saw next will be with me for ever (and Joan I suspect); the most lush, colourful and densely flowered alpine meadows. We walked up 3 or 4 of these meadows and each had its own dominant colour - purple, yellow, white and pink. We saw many (but larger) flowers that were familiar and some that were new to us (thank goodness for Joan's Alpine flower book). We reached a refuge so stopped for lunch and decided that as route finding problems had slowed us down, we should cut the walk short and find a quick route back. It was quick alright - I think I slid most of the way! We went straight down through woods with deep gulleys filled with leaves. It was like slithering down on soft snow. We also crossed 2 streams, fought through head-high ferns and nettles and tobogganed down steep, grassy slopes. On the way we saw an area of raked-up earth and rocks - apparently the work of wild boar looking for food. We eventually made our way down to the road, 3 miles from the cars. A wonderful adventure and if anyone tries it could they please keep an eye out for Bryans camera! We later had a huge 4-course meal in Mane - and all for £5 each.

DAY 7: Tony returned to England for the weekend to attend his daughter's wedding so we had a tourist day at ST GOURDENS. We did the pavement cafe bit, wrote postcards and bought some bits in a caving/sports shop. The most interesting part of the day was a visit to the local museum. It was opened just for us and our guide could speak no English. Non-the-less we managed to understand most of what she was telling us (eventually) and said she enjoyed the experience as much as us and refused a tip.

DAY 8: Up to the snow! We headed for LUCHON which seemed high, but still within the tree-line. Then up and up, round many hair-pin bends until we reached the grass-line then up further still until we reached bare rock and snow. We were at a small ski resort at SUPER-BAGNERES (1700m) which gave clear, breathtaking views all round. There is also, a large hotel and ski-lifts. While we pic-nicked we saw many birds of prey stacked (like planes) waiting for a turn to swoop on prey. We even saw a huge eagle saunter past - it turned out to be a vulture! On the way back we took a different route which took us briefly into Spain, crossing at a loop in the border at COL-DE-PORTILLON - just so we could say we'd been.

DAY 9: Time for another caving trip, this time to GROTTTE FRANCAZAL (450m). We thought this was an easy cave so we took Sian along but it turned out to be more technical than the bit of Trou Mile that we did. The cave itself was more interesting, having been scooped out at different levels by fast flowing water. Judging by the amount of debris throughout the cave at all levels we suspect it still floods up to ceiling-high in storm conditions!! A good trip and Sian did well under the circumstances - French ladder rungs are spaced further apart than English ones which is very noticeable when your only 11yrs old.

DAY 10: For me, the best cave of all - GROTTTE D'ALIOU, a half mile or so of river cave. Tony and Bryan provided boats for the non-wetsuited cavers, and inflated inner tubes and flippers for the rest of us. It was best on your back (hmm!) because you could then appreciate the wealth of big and beautiful decorations overhead, plus a colony of large bats, not too pleased with our presence. A few constrictions in the river called for some acrobatics to get the boats through on their sides without the occupants getting wet! At the end you reached dry (!?) land where you climb up a rift, over a cascade, to a terminal sump. The return was quicker and easier as we swam with the current. Back at the cars we were met by Anne with welcome cups of hot coffee.

DAY 11: Sadly, Bryan and family left us for sun and water-sports at a lake near Bordeaux. The rest of us had a tourist trip down a show cave called GROTTTES DE MEDOUS at BAGNERES-DE-BIGORRE. A beautifully decorated cave and not too spoiled. Quite a long trip, the return route being by boat. Every type of decoration can be seen - well worth a visit.

DAY 12: Our last day in the mountains so we went for a final mid-level walk to say goodbye to the beautiful Pyrenees. Parking in the usual place we walked past Trou Mile and Trou de Vont and up onto a ridge. We saw more wild boar rakings on the way. We walked along the ridge admiring the view and found a few more unusual alpine flowers. We had lunch then headed down to some woods where Tony asked us to look for closed

depression in the limestone. It turned out to be a huge yawning arch (no cave as yet!) which could be appreciated from rocks opposite or above, but especially through a natural rock bridge at the side - an impressive sight. We walked back via a lower level track. Having packed up and loaded the cars before the walk we set off for Tony and Denise's at Thil, arriving mid evening.

DAY 13: Tony had to go to work so Denise took us on a whistle-stop tour of Toulouse with its historic red-brick buildings. We saw some lovely works of French art in LE CAPITOLE (the town hall), built 1759. We visited HOTEL DE BERNUY (originally a palace), built 1504. It has the highest private tower in Toulouse and other unusual architectural features. We also visited LE COUVEN DES JACOBINS, built from 13th to 17th century. It has an architecturally intricate 100ft belltower, beautiful stained glass windows and many other interesting features. So much more to see - must return.

DAY 14: Car packed again (never goes in the same does it?) and off for another 11hrs drive to the ferry. We got to Caen 8.30pm and camped overnight, rose again at 5.30am (English time) then off to catch the early morning ferry. Home by 3pm having had a super holiday, packed with much more than there's room to mention here, and most of all - very agreeable company. Our thanks go to Tony and Denise who did all of the groundwork and planning for us before we went and for putting us up (or putting up with us!).

NEW SWEATSHIRTS

New sweatshirts price £9.50 each, are now available in the Foremans Lounge cupboard. The key is available from the library, and cheques should be made out to Mendip Caving Group and left in the box inside the cupboard.

BARN DANCE VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED

HALL - Preparation and Layout	-	Arthur/Lyn	Spain
Ticket Monitor	-	1	volunteers required
Preparation and Serving	-	2	" "
Washing up	-	2	" "
Clearing and Stacking Chairs	-	2	" "
Floor Cleaning Sunday Morning	-	4	" "

FOOD - Catering for approximately 80

Chilli Con Carni	-	Ann	Pittman
French Bread/Butter	-	A.	Spain
Cold Meats	-	Volunteers	Required
Sausage Rolls	-	"	"
Crisps/Bit Snacks	-	"	"
Coleslaw/Rice Salad	-	"	"
Lettuce/salad ingredients	-	"	"
Quiches (4 required)	-	"	"
Flans (4 required)	-	"	"
Fruit Salad	-	"	"
Gateau (2 required)	-	"	"

All volunteers buying and preparing food will be reimbursed on production of receipts. Many hands make light work, so get on that there phone and volunteer your services to Arthur Spain Wells (0749) 679358 Before mid October.

OTTER HOLE, 17TH AUGUST 91

by Joan Goddard

An early start ensured that I was at the car park at 7.30 a.m., where I was soon joined by Bill Platt, Paddy Newman and Dave Little, who was to be our leader. No other members turned up, so we set off for the cave entrance, which was just a few feet above river level. I must admit to a little apprehension as we entered. The first section was through slightly dipping bedding planes and included a couple of muddy puddles. Once we reached walking size passage the floor became exceedingly muddy - this was the tidal sump at low tide and there was only a clean shallow stream flowing through!

After climbing up a fixed ladder at the end of the sump area we progressed through a variety of minor obstacles eventually arriving at a stream passage which was impressive, but which sumped after a short distance. Before the sump we turned right up a narrow passage which lead on and up and over, and on and on through boulders, squeezes and a large fault-controlled chamber, until we came into a boulder floored chamber which was the beginning of the well decorated part of the cave.

The formations were beautiful, there being examples of all types - curtains, cascades, columns, long translucent straws and any number of helictites. The Hall of Thirty is magnificent, with its large stalagmite bosses (all shades from white through orange, and even black (zinc?)). Also memorable are Long Straw Chamber and the gour pools, some of which had strongly ironstained rims. We took our time through these passages, and then retraced our steps to admire the formations from different viewpoints.

On our return to the sump, we waited 20 minutes or so for the air space to become 'comfortable' enough for me to pass, although braver souls would have gone through earlier. The entrance series seemed much shorter on the way back, but it was good to see daylight again. Then came the hard part of the trip - the climb back to the car park, which was relieved only by a stop to clean our gear in a strategically placed bath halfway up the hill.

It may have taken seventeen years for me to go down Otter Hole but, as an Old Fogey I would like to say that it was worth the hassle!

PROBATIONARY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS

The following applications have been received for probationary membership:-

Robert Whalley,
55 Pinner Road, Oxhey, Watford, Herts, WD3 4EG
Proposed by Lee Hawkswell and Bill Heddington

Chris Tozer,
187 New Bristol Road, Worle, Weston Super Mere, Avon.
Proposed by Brian Murlis and Steve Redwood.

PROBATIONARY MEMBERSHIP

J. Dearing, and L. Cotter, have all been elected probationary members.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

Simon Hewlett has been accepted as an associate member.

FULL MEMBERSHIP

Congratulations to Tim Francis, on being accepted as a full member.

BOOKS/PUBLICATIONS WHICH APPEAR TO BE MISSING FROM THE LIBRARY

- 'The Mendips - a report', Roger Clifton, YHA Feb. 1965
- 'Mendip - the complete caves and a view of the hills', Barrington and Stanton, 3rd. Edn. 1979
- 'Mendip Underground - a caver's guide', Irwin and Knibbs, 1977
- 'A history of the exploration of Swildon's Hole', O.C.Wells (Ed), NSS Press 1960
- 'Box Quarries', Vol. 1, 1974, Repr. 1986 (???)
- 'The Spelaeodes', Alfie , 1969
- 'Alfie's Songbook', 1983 (3 copies missing !!!)
- 'The Baker extension to the Banwell Bone Cave', P R Baker and J H Tucker, 1979
- 'The caves of North Wales' Oldham and Oldham, 2nd. Edn. 1980
- 'Caves of the North Outcrop 1982', Bill Gasgoine, Camb. Cave Registry, 1982
- 'Potholing: beneath the Northern Pennines', David Heap, Routledge and Kegan Paul
- 'The Shell Book of the Pennine Way'
- 'Mines and miners of Swaledale', A Raistrick, Dalesman, 1955
- 'British Regional Geology: The Pennines and adjacent areas', Edwards and Trotter, 3rd Edn.
- 'Cave formation in Northern England', Brian Paul Hindle, ?1980
- 'Limestones and caves in N.W England', A C Waltham, David and Charles, 1974
- 'The caves of Scotland', Oldham, 1975
- 'Scotland underground', Jeffries and Oldham, 1984
- 'The Wemyss(?) caves', Mackie and Glaister, Uni. Glasgow, 1981
- 'Caves of County Clare' C Self (Compiler), UBSS, 1981
- 'Ten Years Under the Earth', Casteret, 1939

(3.10.91)