

# Mendip Caving Group

# NEWS

ISSUE 224

NOVEMBER 1992

## Wells and District News

# 25 years of underground rescue

Mendip Caving Group "fixed it" for member Phil Ingold recently.

Phil, a member for 25 years, can no longer go caving as he has multiple sclerosis.

But he was a willing "victim" for the group's annual cave rescue practice, and was not only brought out by stretcher - he was taken in as well.

Along the way, in the G B Cave at Charterhouse, he tested three different types of stretcher for comfort, and raised around £350 for Action and Research for Multiple Sclerosis.

The whole 600-yard expedi-

tion along muddy passages took five hours and when Phil was at the innermost point - the 75-foot high main chamber - he was unstrapped and treated to a slice of celebration cake.

The trip involved negotiating a section just 12 inches wide and two sheer drops of 15 feet, where he had to be hauled up and down by pulley.

Like many of the club's early members, Phil lives in the south-east of England - Hemel Hempstead in fact.

Members of the 30-strong rescue crew came from all over Britain.

## G. B. Rescue

This rescue was conceived during Yvonne and Martin Rowe's Archaeological walk weekend, way back in the mists (or was it Mendip Murk?) of time. I was chatting with Yvonne during the evening after the walk. As we consumed quantities of lubricant with everyone, Yvonne realised that I really missed caving. She suddenly said, "I know how to get you caving Phil, we could rescue you into a cave and out again!" I said, "it's a great idea, but how do I get into my wetsuit? it's hard enough getting dressed!" Yvonne suggested babyoil could be applied by all the girls!! "What cave do you want to do Phil?"

"Longwood August!" I replied.

"O.K. we'll try for G.B."

The committee and John Crowsly started organising. G.B. was a problem initially an alternative venue sought. But success, G.B. was finally approved and the date confirmed, Saturday 5th September.

I now had to find some appropriate caving gear. My wet suit was out, and so unfortunately was the baby oil!

As this was a unique rescue practice we agreed to expand the benefits to other MS sufferers by making it a sponsored event to raise money for ARMS (Action for Research into Multiple Sclerosis).

On September 3rd I received a phone call from Joan just to check I was still going. Try and stop me! I had been looking forwards to this trip ever since Yvonne initiated it in March.

Saturday morning dawned bright and clear with a very full cottage. Old, young, and new members were all busy cooking breakfast and preparing their gear. There was a lot of fun in the preparations, and in the briefing on the three stretchers I was to test drive.

It was agreed that an advance party would rig the pitches and take me in, and the second group would enter the cave 2 hours later and bring me out, I hoped! (My brother offered to sponsor me in for 80% of his donation and only 20% to bring me out!!) Yvonne and Joan were appointed 'comfort givers' while Helen, Simon and Lyn were the surface security and film crew.

## MCG Facts & Figures:

**Meetings:** Mendip HQ Wed 7.00pm  
Egham Eclipse Inn, Egham Hill Thurs 9.00pm

**Cottage Fees:** Members, members children £1.00 nightly  
SWCC, NPC members £1.00 nightly  
Guest clubs, members guests £2.00 nightly

**Season Ticket:** Exemption from cottage fees,  
members only £10.00 year

**Subscription:** Full, probationary members £20.00 year  
Associate members £10.00 year

The Mendip Caving Group is a registered charity, no. 270088. The trustees are Ron Saunders, Malcolm Cotter, Pat Walsh and Peter Matthews.

**MCG Cottage:** Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse-on-Mendip,  
Blagdon, Bristol. BS18 6XW  
Tel: 0761 462797  
Grid reference: 5147.5606 OS 1:50000 sheet 182

**Secretary:** Joan Goddard Tel: 0608 810382  
10 Enstone Road, Charlbury, Oxfordshire.

**Treasurer:** Martin Rowe Tel: 0252 872006  
10 Greenleas Close, Yateley, Camberly, Sy

**Meet Secretary:** J-P. Burch Tel: 0737 767738  
19 Raneleigh Road, Redhill, Sy. RH1 6BJ

**Cottage Warden:** Lee Hawkswell Tel: 0923 819103  
4a Hazel Tree Road, Nth Watford, Herts.

**Tacklemaster:** Kevin West Tel: 081 570 6624  
21 Wesley Avenue, Hounslow, Middlesex.

**Editor:** Charlie Allison Tel: 081 393 5910  
69 Cheam Road, Ewell, Surrey. KT17 3EG

**Recorder:** Wayne Hiscox Tel: 0749 437540  
3 Keward, Glastonbury Road, Wells, Somerset

**Ordinary Member:** Arthur Spain Tel: 0749 679358  
Waitangi, Long Lane, Dinder, Wells.

## EDITORIAL

Well here we are newsletter 224. I wonder if people actually read them, as the Half Yearly Forum had a similar number in attendance as the Eclipse on a Thursday evening. It appears that people have been asking Joan and Martin lots of questions about newsletters etc. whereas I have recieved hardly any. It seems silly to me to hassle the Treasurer or Secretary when you should be talking to me instead. I find it irritating that a committee member (or any other member for that matter) is prevented from enjoying a group activity as a result of malicious and hurtful general rumours and back stabbing. I don't know how others feel but this is a caving charity and not a group of political extremists. Perhaps someone will furnish me a report of the Barn Dance as I am now short of articles, and the refusal of people to send me information in their possession is a pain to say the least. Hopefully there will be an Irish Special next time round as Tony Knibbs et al. have produced a fair bit of information! Once again many thanks to the contributors so far, and to Mike Lovell for the printing of this newsletter.

Once we had arrived by the field to G.B. I laid by the cars ready to be loaded into the first stretcher, a 'Paragard'. as I was lifted onto the Paragard, Martin, our MRO warden, asked if I had been checked for a broken back. As no-one at this point seemed sure of what to do in such circumstances Martin proceeded to explain that if you stick your index finger up the anus of the victim and it grips then he hasn't got a broken back! Luckily they didn't try this on me, I'm glad to say.

The first stretcher was pleasant to ride on, but could be made more comfortable with a neck support. I was placed down near the cave entrance in the puddles of cowsh (breathing apparatus would have been useful here), ready to transfer to the second stretcher in a plastic corrugated device. again no neck support which would have improved it. I was lashed in, and lifelines and hauling ropes attached.

I was then lifted into the blockhouse and slowly lowered and manoeuvred through the manhole and down almost vertically into G.B. Cavern, smiling as I disappeared at Helen and Simon, through slightly foggy goggles.

Lots of different knees, hands and sweaty faces passed as I was taken further in and down. Most of the rubble had been taken out of the squeeze so I slid easily through, then down the drop and over yet more knees.

I savoured the rediscovered aroma of limestone, calcite (and Radon!) - a delightful experience. I could also sense that the walls of the caves were very close; hard to see them through foggy goggles.

We continued down over yet more knees (a seemingly infinite number) arriving at the carefully rigged pitch. I was able to admire the Acrow-prop and the pulleys as I passed under them. The faces are getting sweatier now and harder to see through muddy goggles. the cave walls and roof were getting further away and I could hear the stream. The bridge was pointed out to me as we passed underneath it.

We have been in the cave for what seems like 10 minutes to me although everyone assured me it had taken 1 hour 45 minutes to arrive at the waterfall.

Here I was released from the stretcher and presented with two cakes by Joan. One of them said 'Welcome Phil' and the other 'G.B. Cave 1992'. We all enjoyed eating them (a blood test confirmed I could eat some if I had some insulin). The second team had also arrived at this instant, so they could fortify themselves with the excellent cakes ready for the haul up and out.

Before we left several members guided and supported me while I walked along the stream and scrambled up the boulders, which was great. When I became fatigued we stopped and I was strapped back into the third and final stretcher which compromised a drag sheet and tubular frame. This I suspected would be uncomfortable as it was called a 'Major'. This proved to be true, no neck support again.

New knees and sweaty faces carried me along the streamway and under the bridge again. We seemed to be travelling at high speed!! the cave walls and roof started to get closer and we arrived again at the pitch, and I could admire the belay and pulley arrangements.

I thought the faces were sweaty on the way in: well you should see them now, I could feel the drips!

We then arrived in the chamber below the pitch where the tubular carrying frame was removed from the drag sheet and hauling ropes attached. I was then lifted and hauled back through the squeeze, and then re-secured to the frame and pulled and guided up to the block house. The rockface became very close (5mm!) as I passed through the manhole cover and continued up and out to the surface. Again this seemed like a 10 minute exit, but proved to be 5 minutes longer than the ingoing trip.

At the briefing the rescue warden had stressed that the victim should continually be spoken to and asked if they are OK. I had only gone over the first stile when I had become an 'it' and down the cave the OK's were equal in number on entry and exit.

I had a brilliant trip underground and enjoyed every moment. It seemed that all my birthdays had come at once!!

Many thanks to their help above and below ground, and I'm looking forward to Longwood next year!

Phil Ingold

If anyone has any outstanding sponsorship money could they please send it to me as soon as possible. Please make cheques payable to 'ARMS' and send it to:

31 Spring Lane, Hemel Hempstead, Herts. HP1 3QJ

AGEN ALLWEDD by Joel Corrigan

Some time ago, a rather famous caver of Welsh extraction pleaded with the MCG for digging support down Agen Allwedd, in pursuit of the elusive Aggy-Daren connection.

Knowing that there are so many members who wish to get involved with this little project, I have taken it upon myself to organise an excursion sometime during December. It has been suggested that the digging trips are of a rather demanding nature (approximately 12 hours in duration), and that only the 'hardest of the hard' need apply.

However, I still want to get down Aggy, and it would be nice if we could have a reasonable turnout from the MCG. So why not show these Welsh cavers what an apprenticeship down waterwheel can do for body and soul!

Dates have yet to be agreed with the powers that be, but in the meantime please contact me on 0344 842265 for further details.

EMMER GREEN MINE

This trip was advertised in newsletter 222. The mine entrance is via a brick lined shaft which is conveniently located just behind a scout hut; the scout troop and Geoff Beale set up a pulley system (powered by a car driving backwards to raise people up the shaft, and forwards to lower them down - with human lifelining in case of mechanical failure!)

As well as Geoff Beale, Dan Miles, Phil Ingold, Mike Carson and children, Joan and Simon Goddard ventured under ground, while Geoff Barton and Ian McKechnie and family came along to the top of the shaft but didn't descend - presumably because the queue was rather slow moving.

Once down the shaft, visitors were given the grand tour. It was essential to have small parties and to keep the scouts under control as they had a habit of rushing off in all directions, poking at artifacts and scratching on walls.

As in most mines there were galleries where old 'graffiti' made interesting reading. It included signatures of miners dating from 1867 (and one of 1811 which may also be authentic), mushroom growers (1908), and wartime workers (1941/2). Even the Mayor of Reading has his name cut into the wall; he presumably went there in the war to inspect the 'Place of Safety' which was established for the storage of documents and archives to protect them from possible German invasion or bombs.

The chalk contained regular bands of black flints, and the galleries were mined to a flint roof layer. In a few places small faults could be seen, one particularly persistent one being visible in three galleries and utilised for a short connecting passage between two of them. It seemed to be the reason for abandoning one of the working faces, presumably because of the roof instability. Slickensides and polishing on the fault were well developed.

For many of the visitors, not least school kids currently studying World War II, the wartime activities down the mine were of great interest. Two galvanised steel 'sheds' had been built in one part of the mine, near to a currently capped shaft in which could be

seen the remains of wooden staging. This shaft was used to bring in tea chests of documents etc. from the city council. The tea chests are now in an advanced state of decay. Bottles of ink, an old bus time table and part of a very fragile 1942 issue of the Guardian all help to set the scene. Also present are the tins of Silica crystals which were used to help prevent documents becoming damaged by dampness. The crystals were periodically dried by spreading them on tin trays over a fire that was lit in a grate at the base of the entrance shaft.

Four and a half hours, and numerous guided tours later, we surfaced to welcome grub provided by the scout chefs.

Geoff is happy to take MCG members down this mine - especially if they do a bit of digging down another mine in the vicinity!

# The Berger

THE WET WAY, by Tim Francis

The Gouffre Berger, often considered to be the classic caving trip, is perhaps the most famous of the world's caves. With the recent connection to the Gouffre de la Fromagere the system has a depth of 1271m and a length of 25.957km. Despite being explored way back in the 1950's, the Berger still ranks as the tenth deepest cave in the world. Such facts, combined with the attractions of the Hall of the Thirteen, the Canals, and the exaggerated accounts of the meanders, meant that I jumped at the chance of a place on the Hades Expedition 1992. The opportunity of becoming a fully-fledged 'Berger Bore' was too good to miss.

Leaving aside details of training trips to Yorkshire and how I managed to scrape together enough cash, camp was finally pitched at la Moliere, near Autrans, in the Vercors on Saturday 27th June. As it turned out the drizzle that greeted us turned out to be some of the best weather we were to have in the whole two weeks. Although our booking did not begin until the Monday, we decided to get a head start. We decided to haul all the tackle down to the cave entrance: no mean feat considering half the expedition personnel were still to arrive. The walk-in to the cave takes forty minutes, and is downhill. On the way back it's an hour and a half slog uphill to the campsite. The only water supply at the site is from a natural spring which also doubles up as a cattle trough. The accompanying herd of cows were very inquisitive and for some reason particularly liked Belgian tents.

My first trip was on the Monday\* morning. Our group was to act as porters following the riggers who had entered the cave several hours earlier. With previous meticulous plans altered because of our early start, my job was to carry tackle bags K and L (6kg and 5kg respectively) from the entrance to the Balcony (-580m). Essentially the entrance series consists of ten pitches split up by two sections of meanders. The entrance pitch is 15m and can be free-climbed, if your keen, and is directly followed by Ruiz, a fine 27m free-hang. The take off for this pitch is from an extremely dodgy wooded platform that's been there for ages, so a traverse line is vital. The Holiday Slides (15m0, and Cairn (35m) follow in quick succession. These are both easily negotiated. With hindsight I would of rigged Cairn with a long traverse on the left-hand wall. This would obtain a completely dry hang. Later on we were to discover that Cairn (apart from Aldo's) is the only pitch in the entrance series that is completely impassable in flood.

Our group of six including the expedition leader, John Day, quickly headed off down the meanders. As previous expeditions have noted, this famous twisting traverse is actually dead easy. The only awkward bits are aided by dodgy looking wooden stemples. Most of these lie many feet below, having been dislodged. The next pitch is Garby's, a fantastic 38m drop. It is completely dry, and very

much like a Yorkshire pot. Rope burn from hot descenders proved to be a problem here. A second section of meanders then follows until Gontard's (28m). This has a slightly awkward take-off, and care needs to be taken to avoid rope rub. The three small Relay Pitches (5m, 10m, 5m) follow and the final entrance series pitch, Aldo's (42m), is reached. An exposed traverse gives this pitch a real sod of an approach; not for those with frayed cow's tails.

At the bottom a quick crawl downstream and you suddenly emerge in a massive canyon - The Great Gallery of the Starless River. From this the going is downstream through huge Daren sized passage. We made good progress despite the large tackle bags. The next obstacle reached is Lake Cadoux. At this point we knew the bottoming trip was off as the lake needs to be virtually dry: it was a good 20m wide! A quick dingy ride and more boulder hopping follows through the Bourgin Hall with its large stals. Only Little General (10m) and the Tyrolienne Traverse (5m) break the yomp down the Great Rubble Heap to Camp 1. Bus sized boulders can be fairly disorientating here. One party (not mine I hasten to add!) did a complete circle on one trip. Past Camp 1 its off to the Hall of the Thirteen. The formations here are breathtaking with the huge gour pools particularly impressive. Dumping our gear at the Balcony we began what we thought would be an uneventful exit.

Unfortunately as we made our way back up the Grande Gallerie water seemed to be appearing from all over the place. Great volumes were pouring out of the Petzl Gallery and the stream at this point had developed into a sizable lake. Myself and Richard Hill raced to the foot of Aldo's to find it totally impassable. A dry hang had suddenly become a roaring torrent. Returning to the lake we negotiated a tricky traverse to reach a safe(ish) pile of boulders. Grabbing a mars bar we dived into survival bags - two people per bag for extra warmth. I left several cairns to mark the water level, and checked the conditions as to whether we could get back every hour or so. We estimate that the water rose fifteen feet in under an hour. Despite the cold and rocky bivvy site we were able to catch some sleep. After a long ten hours we were able to pass the lake and headed out. We exited the cave after a 26 hour trip, much to the relief of the others at the campsite. A quick meal and it was down to Autrans for a welcome drink or ten.

My second trip proved to be as eventful as the first. Our 'Crack Team' was supposed to be the bottoming trip, but now we were aiming to get as far as possible. It had been raining all week. Previous trips had made it past the canals in extremely high water levels and rigged to Abelle's cascade (-650m). Carrying camping gear and sleeping bags we made it to the Camp 1 in the respectable time of two hours. Dumping our gear we headed down Balcony (-15m). The highlight of this section is a jet of water gushing out of a hole in the roof - The Elephant's Ass. Beyond, the Calcite Slopes and Vestibule (10m) lead to the famous canals.

Fortunately the waterlevels had dropped and the frayed handlines were two feet out of the water, the day before they had been completely submerged. However the water levels were still very high so the cascades had to be rigged where normally a rope would not be required. The head of Claudines (17m) was reached, but at this point we decided to call it a day (-720m). We knew more rain was due so we rigged as far back as the canals, and took several bags back to Camp 1.

Unlike the previous bivvy the rest at Camp 1 was luxurious. Even those horrible instant foods taste good when you're underground! Several other 'tourist' trips joined us making over twenty people at the camp. In the morning we decided to leave in two waves to avoid congestion. My group wouldn't get out of bed, so I decided to set off on my own at 6.00am. I made rapid progress up the rubble slope and caught up two slower moving Belgians at the Tyrolienne. The three of us arrived at Aldo's to find it again very wet. Not wanting to get stuck again I decided to go for it. With hindsight this was a

took ages to climb the pitch and I was extremely cold. Not wanting to hang around at the top I started to race up the relays. Halfway up the second I noticed a Disconcerting rumble upstream. Realising it to be a flood pulse I quickly snapped my tackle bag onto the rope and jammed myself into a crack. Unsure of my Flemish I yelled a warning in French to the Belgians. Fortunately the last man up had passed the point at which the water hits the pitch.

When the water had subsided I abseiled back down to the small ledge above Aldo's which was relatively dry. After some discussion the two Belgians decided to carry on out while I decided to sit it out. It's amazing how much steam a wet sleeping bag can make! Five hours later I was awoken by the following party who had sat it out below Aldo's at the bivvy site. With lower water levels we headed out together. We arrived at the campsite only half an hour after the Belgians, who had had one hell of an exit. Michel had huge lacerations on his hands from hauling his tackle bag - his hands had been so cold he had not noticed the pain. I made further trips to the Petzl gallery and to assist with the de-rigging. These were uneventful except for a few hairy moments at Cairn which was extremely wet. No fun when the deviation is right underneath a waterfall.

Upon reflection we all agreed that despite the disappointment of not bottoming the cave, the expedition had been worthwhile. We had done well to get as far as we did considering the wet conditions. I would certainly recommend the Berger to anyone looking for that little bit extra. Anyhow, weather permitting, I'll probably return. For as the expedition motto said (in the words of Ken Pearce 1963):  
"If you're not hard Sonny, you shouldn't have come!"

#### ARCHAEOLOGY WALK by Yvonne Rowe

This will be held on the March member's weekend, on the Saturday. It will be held in the Priddy area, and will take in the Castle of Comfort. The walk will be shorter than last year's 10 miles.

#### SRT TRAINING WEEKEND 19/20 SEPTEMBER '92 by Joan Goddard

After an early apparent lack of enthusiasm, the course was finally over subscribed. Thanks to Kev for arranging it, although he was unable to be there in person.

Nigel Atkins and Becky Smith (from Pennine National Caving) arrived at the cottage in time for a workshop session at 10.00am. Nigel demonstrated various items of personal SRT gear and explained the advantages and disadvantages of particular pieces of equipment. Rope specifications, and the importance of correct care, usage, and storage were explained in some detail.

At about mid-day all present set off for Wells Blue School. Some of us attempted to stop at the Hunter's for a quick bite to eat but were persuaded to get back into our cars, still hungry, so as not to miss any of our booked time at the gym. What sacrifice!

Once there Nigel rigged up various ropes, traverse lines and re-belays, and tuition and practice began in earnest - with Becky and Richard Carey helping those who needed assistance. Novices spent much of their time on basic techniques and gaining familiarity and confidence with the various pieces of equipment, whilst the improvers spent more time on the re-belays and deviations. There were opportunities for more advanced manoeuvres, such as SRT rescue, for those who, were at that stage. By way of a mid session we sat outside in the sunshine and tried out various knots. The indoor session finished at about 5pm and I think we all left with more confidence than when we arrived.

On Sunday we were in the capable hands of Martin and Yvonne Rowe. They set off bright and early to rig Hunter's Hole, the rest of us following later when we had digested our breakfasts. Yvonne did a sterling job in giving us confidence with the first abseil which was down a sloping pitch. By the time we reached the main pitch we were able to get on the rope with relative ease.

It was half way down this pitch that I learned my first big lesson - to look where I'm going! because I suddenly found myself sitting (!) in a loop of rope at the re-belay which I had not realised was there. A more experienced person would have had no trouble extricating himself, but for me it took a long time, accompanied by much fruity language, before I could sort myself out and get onto the second rope. Although one is not supposed to use one's arms I would have found life a lot easier if I had more strength in mine. After this hiccup I found the following deviation relatively simple, although the second one was more awkward. However Martin modified it with a longer sling for the ascent, which made life easier.

We looked around at the bottom in the Railway Tunnel and Mud Series before starting the return trip, which I found easier - this may have been partly because Martin was at the re-belay to give me confidence! But I didn't enjoy getting off the rope at the top of the pitch.

However when we finally we all surfaced everyone was pleased with their achievement and expressed a wish to 'do it again'. Thanks to everyone concerned, especially to Martin who stepped in at short notice to rig the cave single handedly and to give some of us our first real taste of SRT. To Yvonne too, and Nigel, Becky and Richard all of whom pitched their help at just the right level.

At ten pounds (for Members), this weekend proved to be real value for money. Similar weekends will be arranged according to demand, so let Kev know if you are interested.

those present were Steve Eddy, Pete Harvey, Bill Headington, Wayne Hiscox, Mike Lovell, Graham Old, Bryan Pittmann, Michael Pittmann, Arthur Spain, Roger Wallington, Joan Goddard.

#### MEMBERSHIP

Fiona Wills and Julian Flavell have been accepted as probationary members.

Phil Eliot and Ian Parry have been accepted as associate members.

#### COTTAGE BOOKINGS

Nov 27-28	Bob Wanstall
Nov 29	Upper Flood booking, Bracknell and District CC, Upper flood leader Charlie Allison.
Nov 29-Dec 3	Royal Navy
Dec 1-2	Pennine
Dec 4-5	Curry Weekend
Dec 7-10	Royal Navy
Dec 11-12	Sally Rodgers
Jan 22-23	Leicester Uni
Jan 29-30	Westminster School
Feb 12-13	Reading Uni
Feb 19-20	Leicester Uni

#### MEETS PROGRAM

Dec 5	Curry Evening and Ubley Hill Pot clearance
Jan ?	South Wales Trip, see J-P
Easter ?	Derbyshire, see J-P
May ?	Otter Hole 2 trips have been asked for more details will be published as soon as the powers that be decide the dates.
July/August	Summer trip to France. Tony Knibbs has volunteered to organise a trip to the Ardeche, Gard, and Vercors areas. J-P has further information of these spectacular areas of France.