

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

ISSUE 225

JANUARY 1993

THE BURREN, COUNTY CLARE, EIRE - JULY '92

by Tony Knibbs and Yvonne Rowe

This caving holiday was enjoyed by Tony and Derise Knibbs, Geoff and Pat Beale, Martin and Yvonne Rowe, Joan Goddard, and Peter Harvey. We tended to cave every other day with walks and day trips in between. Tony dutifully wrote up the caving reports each evening and Yvonne has added some details of our walks and trips on the other days.

The limestone karst of the Burren covers an area of 300 square kilometres. On it can be found many unusual and rare plants, and much unique archaeology.

Amongst the wealth of plants, a special few should be mentioned. We found many white orchids and assumed they were a variety of the purple Common Spotted orchid with which they sometimes occurred. In fact, Eire has its own white spotted orchid, *Dactylorhiza Fushii* spp. *Okellyi* (!). The Burren also has a unique assemblage of five plant species: Spring Gentian, which grows so prolifically it has been used in the Burren logo; Mountain Avens, from the high mountains of Europe; Shrubby Cinquefoil from the colder parts of Europe and Asia; Maidenhair Fern, from the south-west coast of Europe; and the Dense Flowered Orchid, from the Mediterranean Basin. Why these five plants grow together on the Burren and nowhere else in the world is a mystery.

Joan and I spent much of the time on the walks looking for the elusive Maidenhair Fern, finding it on our second-to-last day on a remote part of the limestone pavement. It grows a foot or two down in the grykes (vertical joints) so is hard to spot. Sadly, many people pick the plants when they find them, making the Maidenhair fern even rarer! Bright clumps of Bloody Cranesbill grow everywhere on the Burren. They belong to the Geranium family, similar to Herb Robert but with 2p-sized flowers. There are also many beautiful stretches of high, wild Fuschia hedges along the lanes of Clare and on the Aran Islands.

Besides the flora, the limestone pavements and fields are noted for the richness of their prehistoric archaeology. There are four main types of prehistoric remains to be found on the Burren - ring forts, wedge tombs, portal dolmens and stone barrows.

Poulawack Cairn, amongst a cemetery of seven cairns or stone barrows, consists of a mound of stones over a central cist which contained four individuals. This cairn has been dated to the Bronze Age, c2800BC.

There are many ring forts, the biggest and most complete being Cathair Chonail which still has walls standing to a height of at least 4m. Ring forts are similar to the small, circular, earthen hillforts of Britain, but due to the lack of materials other than limestone, the rampart is a circular wall made entirely of stones. Many of these ring forts contained the remains of stone circular huts and souterraines - underground passages lined with stone, capped along their length with large stone slabs and used for storing food and grain. They also doubled as "boltholes" in times of trouble. Some souterraines are so well preserved that it is still possible to enter them - we "bottomed" the two that we visited. Ring forts are thought to have been built during the Iron Age, c500BC and continued in use up to Medieval times.

Wedge tombs, peculiar to Ireland, are low, rectangular burial cists approximately 1m high at the front, 60cm high at the back, 1m wide and up to 2m long. The sides, back and capstone are each made from single slabs, the entrance being originally sealed by one or more blocks of limestone. The tomb would have been covered by a mound of stones. They have been dated to the Late Neolithic / Early Bronze Age. We saw several wedge tombs, some with slabs missing - in the base of nearby walls were similar sized and shaped slabs of limestone not in keeping with the rest of the wall structure!

MCG Facts & Figures:

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

Cottage Fees: Members, members children £1.50 nightly
SWCC, NPC members £1.50 nightly
Guest clubs, members guests £2.50 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.

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Waitangi, Long Lane, Dinder, Wells.

EDITORIAL:

Welcome to the first newsletter of 1993! I haven't got a lot to say this time, except that I'm now short of articles for the next one, anyone fancy doing some thing controversial or interesting for the next issue which I hope will be out before 1994! There's a lot of extra bumpf with this issue as the AGM is looming at the end of March, as well as the annual dinner. Oh well I'll let you get on with reading it's my logest one yet.

AGM AND DINNER:

The AGM is on the 27th March 1993 at 11.00am in the Hunters. Hopefully the meeting will end at 14.00

The Dinner will be held at Crossways, North Wooton, the same venue as last year. The cost is £12.50, a coach will leave from the cottage and travel there via the Hunters. A coach ticket will be £2.50. Tickets are available by post from Arthur Spain (enclose an SAE or you won't get them), or from the Eclipse on Thursdays. Tickets will be available from 6th Feb. Times are 7.30pm for 8.00pm until midnight. See enclosed insert for more information.

Portal Dolmens are similar to those found in England and Wales. We visited Poul nabrone dolmen which has a huge capstone supported by a pair of uprights on each side and a single (now fallen) slab at the back. This too would have been covered by a mound of

stones, the base of which can still be seen. The bones of 22 people were found inside this dolmen which is only about 1.5m high, 1.2m deep and 1m wide and has been dated to the Bronze Age.

The Burren karst consists of grey, flat stretches of terraced limestone, yet it is very beautiful. The bareness is occasionally broken by huge boulders of limestone and granite erratics (dumped by the icesheets) and many clumps of varied and colourful flowers, mostly poking up out of the grykes. Occasionally, the karst is covered with meadow and is quite treacherous. Guessing where it is safe to walk, your feet drop into hidden grykes. I was sure someone would break an ankle. There was much stumbling and disappearing of legs. Once, Joan slipped into a gryke up to her hips, another time she disappeared head first!

To the south of the Burren there is a spectacular 3 mile walk along the top of the Cliffs of Moher beginning at an ancient watchtower and ending at a 14th century, square keep-like castle. The cliffs are made up of layers of shale and millstone grit and are very crumbly. There is nothing to stop people looking over, or even sitting on the edge (and they do) and there is a drop of 800ft onto rocks and sea below!! Dangers aside, there are many interesting birds to see, including puffins and choughs. Looking back along the cliffs you can see sea-stacks, arches, sea caves and blow holes. I'm told that whales and seals have been sighted in the waters near these cliffs.

One day was spent by Tony, Denise, Martin and myself on a trip to the Isle of Aran, a 50 minute ferry ride from right outside our front door. We visited Dun Aengus, a promontory cliff-fort. The high cliffs and semi-circular stone walls, at least 4ft thick and still standing to a height of about 20ft, defended a large area. Outside the walls the extra defence of *chevoux-de-frise*, a hotch-potch of vertically placed narrow blocks of limestone, was placed to slow down or maim horses and men storming the fort (a bit like WW2 tank traps).

Aran is noted for the amazing patchwork of small stone-walled pockets of land. The island is only 8 miles long and 2-3 miles wide, but there are 6,000 miles of stone walls!! They are built in a very loose, herringbone fashion (you can see as much daylight through as there is stone) and are also found all over the Burren. We learned the hard way that they are not to be leaned on or climbed over. There are few gates or stiles so you dismantle a small section of stones, climb over carefully, then rebuild from the other side!

There is so much of interest on the Burren (and indeed elsewhere in Eire), that all I saw, and the caves too, only served to whet my appetite - I must return.

Some Irish Yvs'droppings:

YR: "They look like cavers in that car"

JG: "No, they're Germans..."

JG: "...I suppose they could still be cavers"

JG: "The MCG tacklesacks don't let the water out"

MR: "That's because they're French"

YR: "Don't the French have holes in their bottoms then?"

TK: "What do you say when your knicker elastic snaps?"

MR: "Below!"

GB: "Take in slack"

YR: "That's me!"

YR: "I need to put a battery in my bottom"

MR: "Lobster would make good caving food... it comes in its own ammo box"

Roadsigns:

"Albatros Fertilisers"

"Slow" - and 100yds further along -

"Slower"

Instead of "Give way", signs say "Yield", and sometimes - "Prepare to yield"

"Kilmacow fun day"

"Don't drive in misery - stop - and be fed up"

"The Limerick Supply Company" (Could be useful!)

JG: "People haven't started abusing me yet"



NOMINATIONS:

"Nominations for office, and proposals to change the Constitution and Rules must be submitted in writing by first class post to the Secretary's home address with signatures of full members proposing and seconding and at least 25 days before the meeting (i.e. by March 2nd). A nomination for office must be accompanied by a signed agreement to stand for election by the nominee."

The committee may grant a postal vote to any member who applies in good time to the Secretary.

CHARITIES ACT 1992:

"You are a charity trustee if you are a member of the management or executive committee of a charitable association."

Anyone considering standing for election to the committee should read the leaflet 'Responsibility of Charity Trustees', available from the secretary.

PHIL'S RESCUE

I have received a communication from Phil Ingold as regards his evacuation from GB in September last year. The current total now stands at approximately £540. ARMS are delighted to have received the money and would like to convey their appreciation to all those involved in the rescue. Many thanks to all those involved and Phil has said that it was a great day for MS research and for the MCG. The money has been sent to the Central Middlesex Hospital, Multiple Sclerosis Research Department.

CSCC CONSERVATION AND ACCESS:

Tim Francis has been nominated as MCG representative to the CSCC in a conservation and access capacity.

UPPER FLOOD:

Access to Upper Flood is only allowed with an approved MCG leader, a list of whom is on the notice board behind the library door. There have been requests from other clubs to dig in the cave. This can only be done with an MCG Upper Flood leader. All digs in the cave have to be notified to the committee. Action may be taken against persons contravening the access regulations.

SOCIAL EVENTS:

As a charity we cannot pay for other people's pleasure. A separate account will need to be kept for social events. Barrels will only be underwritten if they have been sanctioned by the committee.

OBSERVERS:

Committee meetings are not usually secret. Any person may attend if they wish as an observer, they may not, however, take part in the meeting.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS:

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0761 463143

Richard Carey

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PROSPECTIVE MEMBER:

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0737 767738

THRUPE LANE

DMM hangers have now been installed in the High Atlas area. The rock here is very dodgy, and adequate back up is needed.

UBLEY HILL POT:

The activity here will now take place on the member's weekend in April. Arthur Spain and Wayne Hiscox will coordinate the clearance.

CAVER FATALITIES:

On Saturday 9th January a 21 year old caver was swept to his death in the Kingsdale Master Cave system during heavy flooding. On the same evening a female caver was killed in a road accident on Mendip, there are no further details at present.

BATH UNDERMINED!!

400 houses are in danger of collapse unless 45 acres of shallow mines are filled in to the south of Bath say civil engineers. Residents and environmentalists say infilling in the Combe Down area with fly ash from power stations would be a pollution control disaster. The filling of the mine would require the contents of fifty thousand lorryloads of concrete and ash, over a five year period, at a cost of twenty million pounds. The material to be used in the infilling is classed as hazardous waste in Germany, and banned from being used as landfill. Water and sulphate reducing bacteria can react with the ash, forming acid. Protesters to the scheme are in favour of structural work. For more details see the article in the Observer 22nd November 1992.

WOMEN GOT THERE FIRST:

Anthropologist Robin Dunbar of University College London has claimed that women were the first human beings to talk, while the menfolk were out hunting. The previous theory was that the men talked first as they organised the hunting. The social life of chimpanzees revolves around the females, and professor Dunbar sees no reason why early man should have been any different.

A DIG TO FARR by Joel Corrigan

After many weeks of planning (including numerous let downs and subsequent death threats), seven of us finally made it to the Chelsea hut in South Wales, with the intention of lending assistance to Martyn Farr's digging team down Agen Allwed. Unfortunately our intrepid organiser (erm...that's me) had neglected to include the key in his list of useful items!!! However I shall not bother to go into the details of how I had to search every pud in the area to find somebody with a key, but I'm sure you can appreciate what a terrible task it was.

Anyway, on to the nitty-gritty of the story. Nine am Saturday was due to be the kick-off time, but when no-one had arrived by ten o'clock we realised that something was up. Sure enough there was a slight flaw: Martyn arrived to tell us that digging had been postponed until the Sunday, but that we were still welcome to carry some gear down to the dig site, assuming that we could find it. (We couldn't possibly dig on Sunday due to the ridiculous hour we would have arrived back home on Monday).

Needless to say we were all disappointed as a lot of effort had gone into this trip. None of us, though, had ever been down Aggy before. So some at least decided to at least try to find the dig site.

Armed with a rough sketch drawn by Martyn (could he have felt guilty?), Andy Dennis, Mike Pittman, Andy Legg (MNRC), and myself trudged off towards the entrance with the bare necessities, i.e. enough food to feed an army! I'd forgotten the stories that had been told about the Southern Stream Passage, but it's really not that bad if you happen to be three feet tall! All was going

fine (navigation wise) until we reached the Priory Road area. It was at this point that we made our first error. Instead of the one and a half metre climb that we were expecting, we instead climbed up about fifteen metres to enter what we now know to be the Cathedral. Well, it can happen to anyone, right?! It is amazing how a group of experienced cavers (who should really know better) can convince each other that they are in the right place!! Anyway we continued on, and found a dig site at the end of this area. Time was our enemy (and not a craving for beer!) so we decided to call it quits. We made our escape after eight or nine hours in the cave, and headed for the pub.

Whilst we were down Aggy the rest of the group were digging down Pwll Y Pasg with Geoff Newton. Tim Francis, Julie Hesketh, and Andy Bellamy were all astounded by the potential of even these small digs. In the words of one: "Crikey! It's a real goer!"

All in all we made the most of what had all the makings of a grotty weekend. All of us went down caves that were new to us, and I for one learnt a very valuable lesson. Suffice to say that I will think twice before I organise diggers for someone else's benefit. After all there's Ogof Fynnon Pinetree to think about!!!



ARCHAEOLOGY WALK 6th MARCH 1993: by Yvonne Rowe

Well I know I said that this walk would be a circular walk of the sites in and around Priddy, and that it would be less than 8 miles long - I lied!!! But read on...

The walk will be about 8 miles long but there are two redeemers:

- 1) There will be a PUB break for drinks and lunch.
- 2) This will be a linear walk, all downhill!

It was not possible to make a circular route without re-tracing steps already trodden because all the best sites follow a line from Priddy to Wookey, including Ebbor Gorge. Don't worry about getting back to your cars as we have a cunning plan, details at a later date.

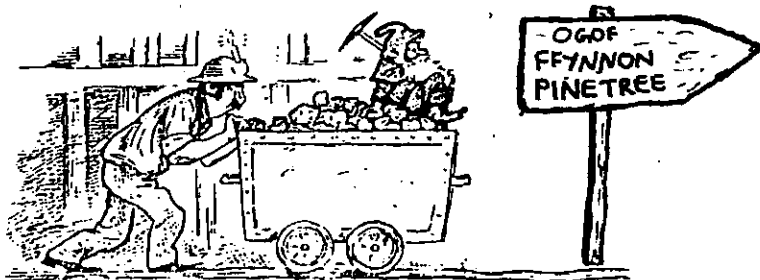
After parking cars at or near the Castle of Comfort, the sites to be visited, in order, are:

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1) Pool Farm Stone Cist (with foot carvings) | Bronze Age |
| 2) Priddy Circles | Neolithic |
| 3) A visible section of Roman Road | Roman |
| 4) Ashen Hill Barrow Cemetery | Bronze Age |
| 5) Priddy Nine Barrows | Bronze Age |
| 6) Swildon's Hole and Roman Site | Roman |
| 7) Glebe Stake Circle Barrow (extremely rare) | Bronze age |
| 8) The New Inn or Queen Victoria | Modern! |
| 9) Deer Leap Stones | Saxon |
| 10) Bridged Pot Shelter | Neolithic |
| 11) Badger Hole | Palaeolithic |
| 12) Hyaena Den | Palaeolithic |
| 13) Rhinocerus Hole | Palaeolithic |
| 14) Wookey Hole | Neolithic |
| 15) Museum and/or pub for well earned refreshments! | |

We will also be walking stretches of Eastwater Drove, the Coffin Road and Pelting Drove en-route.

Many of these sites will already be known to you but I think may have unearthed (pun!) some interesting facts about some of them. I have yet to walk the route to check that these sites still exist and have not been destroyed or have disappeared under the plough. I will also probably have to get permission to visit at least two sites as they are on farmland, but all being well there should be no problems (famous last words!!!)

If you have any information or questions please do not hesitate to 'phone me on 0252 872006.



PINETREE POT DIG by Tim Fancis

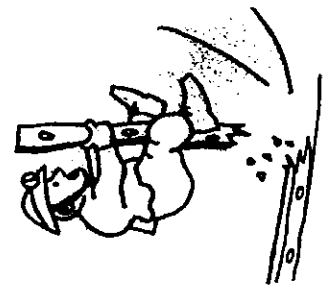
Thinking it was about time we had another insignificant dig on the go, Pinetree was soon selected. This has got to be the most sensible dig site we've had in ages. Five minutes ramble from the Cottage, within stumbling distance of the Castle, and just out of reach of daylight. Mind you it did several prospective trips to the muddy inlet in Easy Street, and a few 'hammer and chisel' epics in Back Passage to decide upon this option.

The theory runs as follows: Many of the avens in Pinetree have evidence of phreatic passages. Examples are the entrance passage and, at a similar level, at the top of the shaft up in Back Passage. It is suggested that such a phreatic network must continue on the other side of Pine Pitch. The stream would have been captured by the pitch route, and the passage back filled. Our only evidence for this stage of development was a small ledge and a dodgy looking mud choke.

After several trips we had revealed a crawling sized phreatic passage with a slight downhill gradient. Joel was volunteered to climb the rising aven, described in Mendip Underground as a '20 foot too narrow aven'. We obtained a sound connection between the floor of the passage and somewhere high in the aven. Digging on we began to undercut a mud roof, and despite a few collapses this refused to reveal solid rock. Matt and Darcy pushed on to find to find a solid roof again, so we just carried on into lower, but wider, passage. A puddle made the passage uncomfortable until Julie's wellie came in handy as bailing vassels! The only other amusement to be had was a small collapse that landed on Billy. The passage was now about fifteen feet or so long.



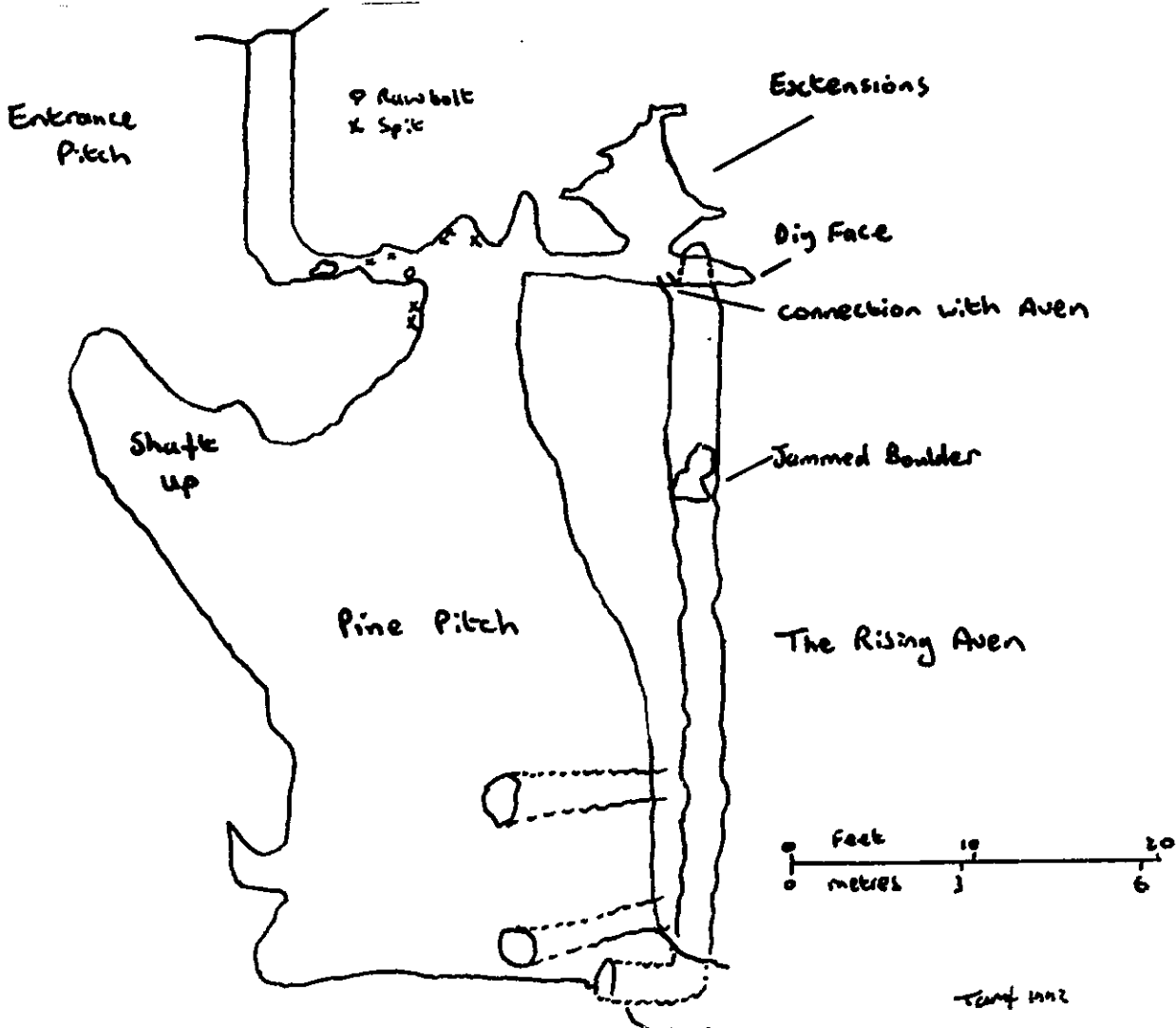
Teamwork takes practice!



However, all was to change on Sunday 6th of November. Arriving at the dig we discovered the passage to have been almost blocked by a large collapse. Beyond, a large pool of water had been created. Tentatively peering up I saw a rift rising up. We quickly removed the collapse and checked out the discovery. The rift rose about 25' in solid rock rather than the expected doulder choke. Seceral small inlets are choked and nly passable to an ant. After a spot of gardening the sides were made safe. Not quite Thrupe Lane, but you can dream on! There is also a visual connection, some 5" wide with the rising aven. Subsequent climbing of the aven will reveal where exactly this enters. With a spot of bang this could be passable, if desired? The dig continues towards the draughting 4th aven in Easy Street. This is 45' horizontally, and 110' vertically away, and a nice blank area on the survey.

Recently therew has been signs of disturbance/tampering with the lock on Pinetree. Access to the cave is via the MCG, and a key can usually be quite easily obtained. If disturbances continue the lock may well be changed.

Diggers: James Allen, Joel Corrigan, Julian Flavell, Tim Framcis, Bill Headington, Julie Hesketh, and other hapless victims!

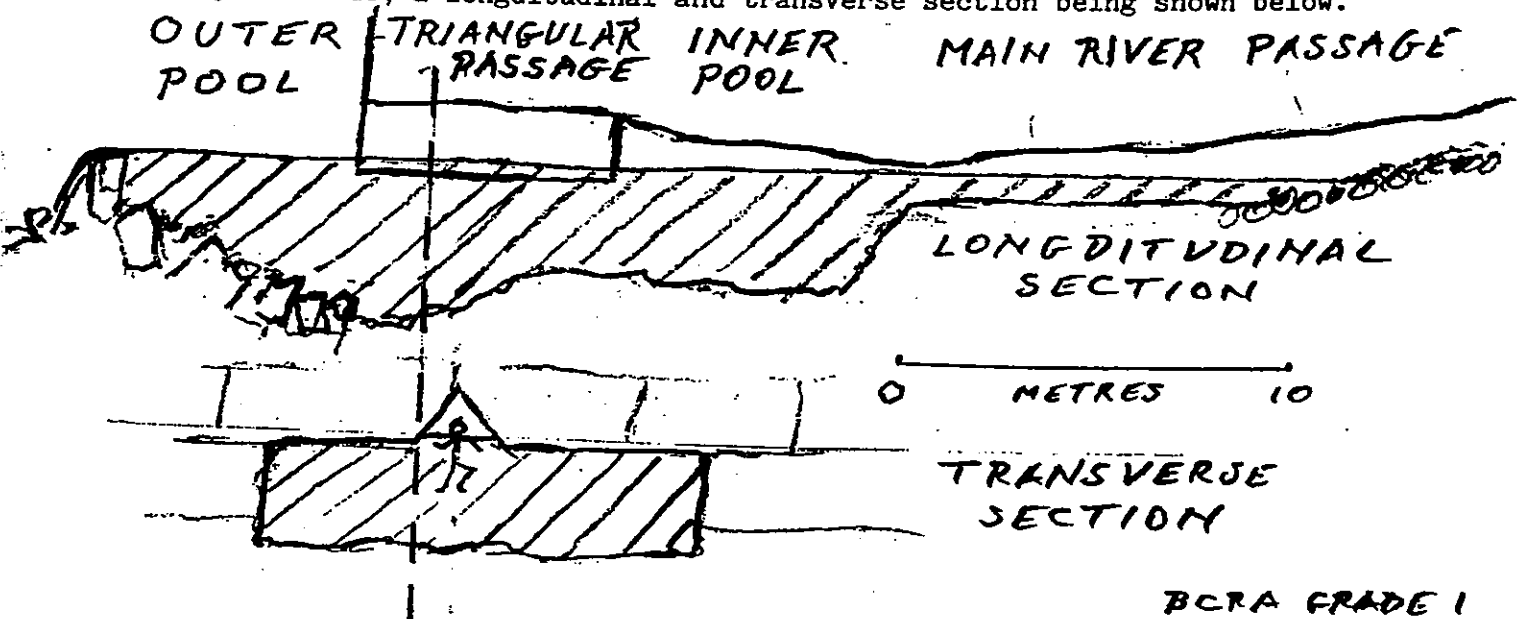


REPORT ON THE SITUATION REGARDING PORTH-YR-OGOF RESURGENCE POOL FOLLOWING THE INQUESTS ON LANCE CORPORAL AMANDA STEAD AND GRAHAM LIPP.

Verdicts of Accidental Death were returned in both cases. After the verdict on Amanda Stead's death, the jury added a rider that the Army should review its training and equipment procedures for caving during Adventurous Training Exercises, followed by the coroner adding another rider that notices should be placed at Porth-yr-Ogof stressing the liability of group leaders to prosecution for criminal negligence if inadequately equipped caving parties enter the resurgence pool.

Discussions are planned to take place between the Police, Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP), West Brecon Cave Rescue Organisation (WBCRO), Cambrian Caving Council (CCC) and Outdoor Education Centres to discuss the best action that can be taken to try to ensure that there are no further deaths in the Resurgence Pool, Deadmouth Cave section of Porth-yr-Ogof.

Prior to the inquest there was an initial meeting between BBNP, WBCRO and CCC to discuss possible actions to end the sequence of deaths in Deadmouth Cave, which is now seven at least in the last forty years. A partial survey was made to allow an underwater and air space model of the Resurgence Pool area to be prepared for this meeting. Following the meeting a more extensive survey was made, a longitudinal and transverse section being shown below.



Interviews were carried out with near victims in the caving community. These have given clear messages as to the way in which incipient drowning, with and without panic, have occurred to cavers who were not encumbered with others.

The following physical problems have been noted in the Resurgence Pool :-

- 1/ The water is always cold, 8 to 10 °C in both winter and summer, when it is then very cold in relation to river water.
- 2/ The water is deep, over 3 metres in the deepest area. In the normal direction of travel the pool is initially only thigh deep, and the floor then suddenly drops down at a steep slope to 3 metres. This occurs just at the point where novices would be having difficulty in keeping their mouths above the water due to a dip in the roof.
- 3/ There are no handholds in the roof or walls.
- 4/ In the central section there is a triangular air space, roughly an equilateral triangle with 1.5 metre long sides. Just below the surface there are underwater rock shelves on both sides which extend out as far as 10 metres, forming a trap for anyone unlucky enough to go underwater.

- 5/ If a swimmer is not in the centre of the triangular passage, then one arm will hit the passage wall on the return stroke, reducing the power of the next underwater stroke. As a result the unrestricted full power arm turns the swimmer towards the wall, accentuating the problem. Swimming action has to be stopped to push away from the wall, which also forces the swimmer downwards because of the slope of the wall.
- 6/ If the swimming stops for any reason, such as calling out "I'm alright", the feet drop and it becomes difficult to restart swimming and regain the lift that comes from movement through the water.
- 7/ There is a risk of snagging on submerged trees, which may have barbed wire nailed on trailing in loops.

In addition there are psychological problems related to the pool:-

- 8/ The attraction of a through trip.
- 9/ The attraction of the light coming in above the pool which novices equate with safety.
- 10/ The attraction of a quick exit from the cave for wet and cold novices who do not appreciate the dangers.
- 11/ The desire of some leaders to have their group of novices involved in a more difficult or more dangerous trip.

Suggestions already made for modifying peoples actions include :-

- A/ Improved notices, including in particular
- B/ A notice specifically at the underwater ledge warning of high death risk.
- C/ A notice to warn leaders of their legal responsibility to those placed in their care.
- D/ All civilian leaders should entering Porth-yr-Ogof should hold a valid Local Cave Leaders Certificate issued by the National Caving Association.
- E/ Any leader found with inadequately equipped novices in the Resurgence Pool would be barred from leading caving groups in future.
- F/ If a leader is going to take a group into Porth-yr-Ogof equipped for dry caving only, the person in charge of the Outdoor Education Centre or other body must warn the leader together with the group of the risks of entering the Resurgence Pool, and give a firm instruction that no member of the party shall enter that pool or any other deep water or sump.
- G/ The Resurgence Pool should be referred to by the local name of Deadmouth Cave in future to emphasise the separate nature from Porth-yr-Ogof and to give a bad dog a very bad name.

Suggestions for fixed aids in the cave, which are likely to be placed by cavers but be the responsibility of the BBNP, are :-

- H/ A Stainless Steel bar marking the slope to deep water in the Inner Pool.
- I/ A Stainless Steel grab bar through the triangular passage.
- J/ A Stainless Steel anchor to be placed at each end of the pool so that a temporary support rope can be securely fastened in the correct position to assist people through the pool.
- K/ Lowering the water level in the pool (after more accurate survey).

It will be difficult to find solutions that will both be totally effective and have the acceptance of a majority of the caving community. To assist the process suggestions are welcomed from cavers, as well as comments on suggestions already made. In particular Owen Clarke would like to hear from any caver who has been a near victim in the Pool, with a view the discussing and analysing the incident so that any lessons can be learnt. Names of cavers involved would be confidential.

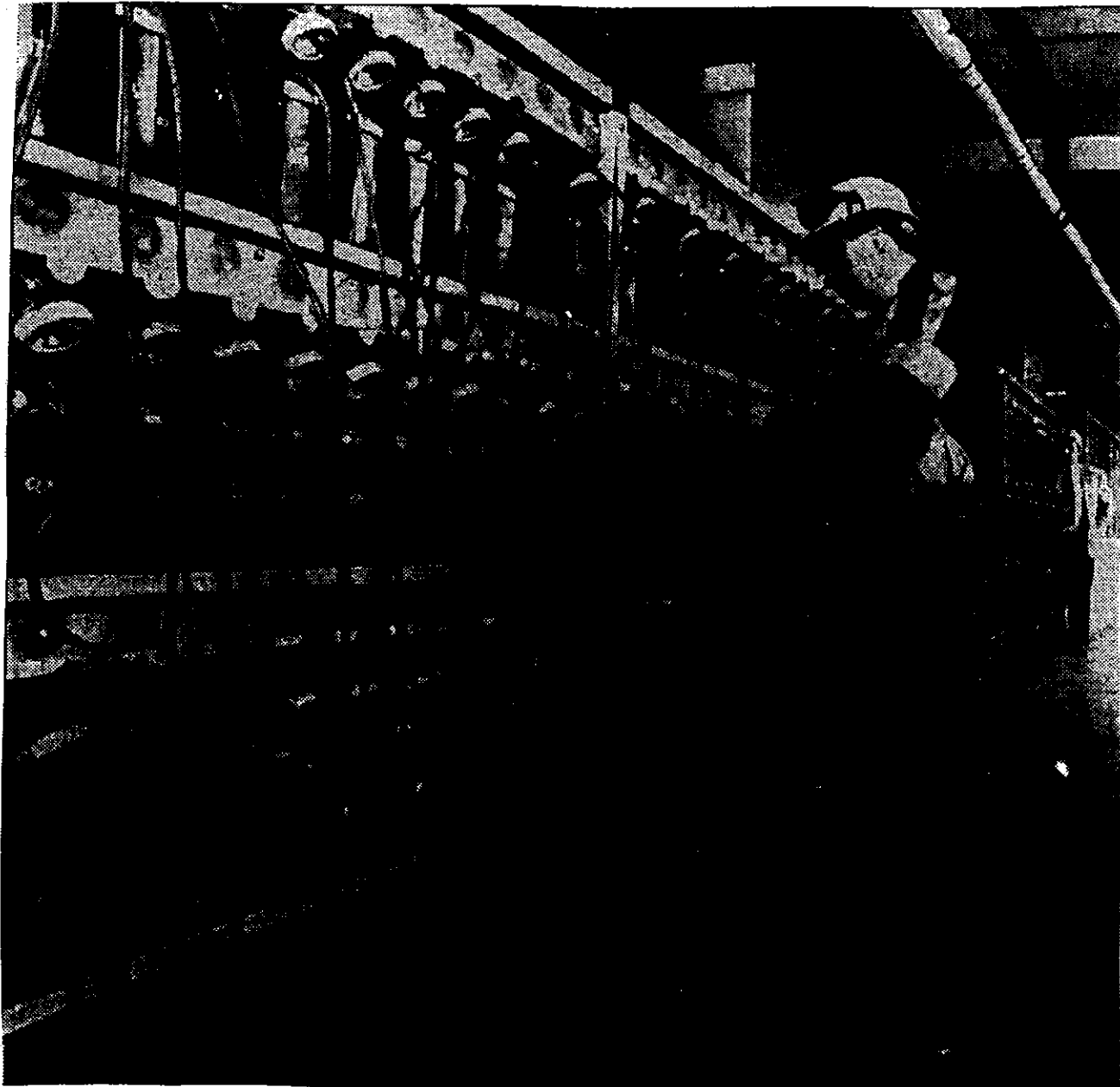
Suggestions and Comments on proposals for modifying actions should be sent to Eric Hoole, CCC Training Officer, 3, Gwernyfed Avenue, Three Cocks, BRECON, Powys LD3 0RT.

Suggestions and Comments on proposals for modifying the cave should be sent to Owen Clarke, CCC Equipment Officer, 11, Pentwyn Heights, Abersychan, Pontypool, Gwent NP4 7TN Tel 0495 773175.

Owen Clarke

29th November 1992

Cottage doings



MCG BATTERY CHARGING FACILITY

The accompanying photo shows the now defunct battery charging facility, until recently used by miners at the Easington Colliery in Yorkshire.

Not slow to miss an opportunity, an MCG representative on a caving trip to Yorkshire, visited the colliery with a view to acquiring the charger for MCG use. There has been much muttering recently about MCG's dearth of battery charging facilities and although new-style chargers have been installed for FX2's, there are still an awful lot of cavers needing to re-charge their old style lead acid batteries - more than the MCG can cater for with ever-increasing busy weekends.

The problem is not purchasing it, God knows there is now plenty of dosh in the coffers, the problem is housing it! The present charging area is no more than a recess in the wall. The

answer is to incorporate a battery charging area in the new cottage extension, if necessary taking precedence over the new library and climbing wall. Because the building of the cottage extension is quite a way off yet, we have the added problem of where to store it in the meantime. The obvious place is in the shed as it seems to be empty part of the time.

Another problem we foresee when the charging facility is finally installed is that of MCG's struggling electricity supply. We plan to overcome this by buying a suitably powerful generator especially for the purpose. This in turn will be housed in the shed which will have to be insulated to help reduce the noise it will undoubtedly create.

We're sure members will see the sense in all these plans, especially those who have complained bitterly about not being able to get a turn on the present battery charger in time for a caving trip.

COTTAGE EXTENSION AND LONG TERM INVESTMENTS

As most people know there have been problems in finding a suitable plan for a cottage extension, for reasons of cost, lack of available land for purchase, and the structure of the present cottage. Recent thinking has revealed that the solution is under our feet, literally. No we are not proposing to move into Upper Flood, rather we propose to excavate our own 'cave' (cellar) underneath the present cottage. We have had a very reasonable offer to excavate a cellar under roughly the present lounge area and to reinforce the foundations so affected. With the help of members as well as the contractors the work should be completed in a few weekends. The cellar will enable an easily maintained artificial atmosphere to be created for the long term preservation of our library material. Power for this will come from the generator for the new charger, above. This will release the present library for other use. Yes this will be fairly expensive, however there is a long term solution to the financial problem caused by the excavations. Mendip is composed of a large amount of limestone, with some decent well drained south facing slopes. Yes we have decided to plant a vineyard. This is not as hair-brained as it may first seem. England is the most up and coming wine nation, and with the advent of the single market, and a pilot quality wine scheme as outlined in EC Council regulation 823/87, and a MAFF consultative document means there is a definite potential market for Mendip Wine. To this end we have decided to purchase about 2 ha of land and plant Bacchus, Seyval Blanc, Muller Thurgau, and Reising to start with, and experimental plantings of Chardonnay, Dornfelder and Huxelrebe in a couple of years. The vinification equipment will be installed in one half of the new cellar, the library occupying the other half. Power will again come from the new generator. The first vintage will be in about four years, with an anticipated yield of 25hl/ha, producing around 30 to 40 thousand bottles by 1997. A sub committee will be formed to administer the vineyard.

CHANGING ROOM HEATER:

This has now been replaced with a working model by Arthur Spain.

BLAST FROM THE PAST: Newsletter no.5 1961

Redundancy system, a theory. This will rely on at least four members of the group being unemployed due to a slump. The members should be offered free lodging at the cottage, and a collection made from the still earning. The amount being up to 5/- per week. The cash would pay for food and beer (not too much beer!), and materials for cottage improvements. Digging should also be done at Cooper's. With Dole this would retain them at the standards they deserve.

MCG

Abroad



ALBANIA:

The biggest caving expedition to visit Albania was an all British affair with a 22 strong team from Bradford Pothole Club and the Derbyshire Caving Club. Permission took five years to get and 2.5km of passage was discovered. The country is all limestone and there is excellent potential for divers.

MCG VERCORS TRIP:

There will be an MCG holiday to the Vercors from 31st July to 14th August. Details are available from Jean Paul Burch or Joan Goddard. It is hoped to stay in a Gite or Gites, depending on numbers. The Vercors area is about 850km from Calais, roughly between Valence and Grenoble. The scenery is absolutely stunning, and offers some fantastic caving and gorge running.

GOUFFRE BERGER

Recently there have been rumours circulating that the MCG ought to book a trip to this cave for a few year's time. Well how about it? There is plenty of superlative caving talent and experience within the MCG, and an expedition to the Vercors to bottom the cave is a definite possibility. If you would like to participate in such a venture please inform the committee ASAP so we can get an idea of the level of interest. There are already a few interested people, and the involvement of other clubs is also a possibility.

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE 10 by Tony Knibbs

Gouffre de Genat, Tarascon, Ariège (march 1992)

This interesting pothole is located 3km south of Tarascon as the crow flies, and is reached by turning off the N20 towards Videssos on the D8. Turn right in the village of Niaux, cross the river Videssos and drive up through the village of Alliat on the D508 to reach the tiny village of Genat after some 5km of zig-zag ascent, turning left just beyond the village Mairie.

The entrance is a locked, square, manhole cover set in the tarmac road surface. A key is available at the Mairie, or from the Speleo-Club du Haute Sabarthez, in Tarascon.

Gouffre Genat was discovered during road construction in 1944, and pushed to its 200m depth in 1967. Its character is close to that of a classic Yorkshire pot - Lost John's springs to mind - and is a popular trip for local and visiting clubs.

A 10m rope is useful on the steep entrance passage (toboggan) and can be belayed to the nearest car! A flat out crawl to the right quickly opens into a small chamber from which a second 'toboggan' requires 17m of rope belayed to bolts. A roomy passage is followed for about 10m where a 4m climb up the right hand wall (fixed rope) gains a small passage to the head of a 29m pitch (32m rope).

The first 5m are in a steeply sloping rift to reach the pitch proper, with descent against the wall in a large shaft. At about this point in the trip, tiny gold coloured, pin points of reflected light are noticed - iron pyrites - and seen almost throughout the cave.