

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 230

SEPTEMBER 1993

ALPI APUANE, ITALIA '93

by Tim Francis

After last year's fun and frolics in the Vercors, myself and Julie Hesketh decided to tag along on another Hades expedition. This year's expedition was to the Apuan Alps in Italy. Two other MCG faces on the trip were Pete Collings-Wells and Dave Little, the expedition leader. Camp was pitched at la Piella, Castelnuovo: the only site in the area. All the catering was done by an expedition chef (a Welshman of Italian ancestry!) leaving us to concentrate on the caving. Over the two weeks we tackled Complesso Fighiera Farolfi Corchia and Abisso Paolo Roversi.

Fighiera Corchia System

At 1208m deep and 49800m long this system ranks as one of the worlds most "sporting" caves. Due to limited time and resources we concentrated on the Corchia end of the system. Two entrances, Buce d'Eolo and Ingresso del Serpentè, were rigged.

The first day was spent hunting for the entrances on the limestone scrub of Monte Corchia. Additional inconveniences were the petrol-tanker drivers strike and the famous marble quarries of Massa. We found it extremely difficult passing the quarry lorries whilst perched on the side of a mountain on a steep dusty track. Once found we spent several days exploring the cave from the lower Serpentè entrance, a convenient ten minute walk from the eoad. The gale blowing from this entrance has to be felt to be believed - carbides are rendered useless for the first ten minutes. Once beyond the draught two small entrance pitches (20ft, 70ft) provided a useful introduction to dodgy, badly placed Italian bolts. Mind you it was either the bolts or a slab of knobbly conglomerate! Below the pitches we yomped along a large fossil passage for half an hour. Several traverses are permanently rigged with 20mm rope.

It was then that our somewhat sketchy and out of date survey came into its own. Several pitches and avens were not marked. Matters were not helped by a confusion of colour coded arrows to which we did not have the key. Reverting to bloodhound techniques we took a side route. More rope climbs, monster fossil passage and a picturesque traverse around a lake lead to Pozzo Gronda. In this section the local cavers have a campsite complete with electricity cable and sockets!

Gronda marks the start of the downstream section. This is a serie of 15 pitches, the largest being 150 feet. The lower section contains fantastic formations and cascades. It's very Mendippy in character - a bit like an overgrown Longwood/August. Most pitches hang from naturals making for a classic rigging trip. The bottom terminates in a large blue sump and a grotty series of chokes. Above Gronda the through-trip from Buce d'Eolo emerges (described elsewhere). There are some particularly fine gour pols and stal forests which were well worth the detour.

Abissi Paolo Roversi (OK3)

Though not as deep (-755m) as some of the other caves in the area, its particular claim to fame is a 1000ft pitch. It's difficult to imagine how bad this cave is until you've been there, but I'll do my best to describe it. Having rigged the Corchia I was somewhat obliged to help out with the derig of OK3. I was mildly concerned having seen the glazed eyes and knackered bodies of other returning cavers. *continued on page 4*

MCG BARN DANCE 1993

Chewton Mendip Village Hall, 7.30pm - Midnight

Believe it or not it's that time again, a little earlier this year than of late, and it may even be a little warmer! Saturday Oct. 2nd is that date, the chance to let hair (or beard) down and dance the evening away to our very own Barn Dance at Chewton Mendip Village Hall. Similarly to last year the music is kindly provided by the London Velvet Bottom Band, the caller once again is the ever popular Andy Downing. In addition, as last year, there will be a chance to try more conventional dancing while the band has a welcome respite to rest and recuperate.

The ticket price will remain the same as last year, £6.00, half price for children under fourteen, the bar will be run as usual by Roger Dors, and a coach will arrive at the cottage at 7:10pm and return at midnight - price £2.50.

Food now - in past years we have had a magnificent spread which a few people have worked hard to prepare. This year I would like to spread the load a bit. Below is a list of dishes which when set out will make a good varied menu. I would like volunteers to prepare smaller quantities rather than one person preparing large quantities, so please get on the phone to let me know what you are prepared to do, all costs will be refunded. Also I shall need help to lay out the hall and clear up at the end, so if you can help...

The food requirements are:-

Chilli	2 lots, each for 15 persons
Veg curry	2 lots, each for 15 persons
Flans	4 medium / large
Rice	3 lots, each for 22 persons
Mixed salad	2 lots, each for 15 persons
French bread	For 60 people
Fruit salad	2 lots, each for 20 persons
Gateaux	4 large

IN BRIEF

Tickets	£6.00
Coach	£2.50
Venue	Chewton Mendip Village Hall
Time	7:30pm till midnight
Coach	from cottage at 7:10pm
Bar	Yes
Food	over to you, please get on the phone to me

Arthur Spain



Committee...

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NON-COMMITTEE POSTS

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CONSERVATION OFFICER
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MCG SHOP
MCG SHOP

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TIM FRANCIS	081-878-3508
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ON THE MOVE

Joel Corrigan has moved to:
2 Windlemere House, Westwood Road,
Windlesham, Surrey, GU20 6NB
Tel: 0344 873613

WELCOME . . .

...to Dave Gwillim who has been accepted as a probationary member.

...and welcome back to Neil Hutchinson, 7 Glade Road, Marlow, Bucks, SL7 1DZ, who has rejoined as an associate member.

APPLICATIONS . . .

...for probationary membership have been received from:

Sharon Gwillim 55 Wellington Court, Mayfield Road, London, W12 9LT Tel: 081-740-4470
(Proposed by C Allison, Y Rowe)

Sue Wood 60 Denmead, Two Mile Ash, Milton Keynes, MK8 8SA Tel: 0908-260841 (B Headington, D Tooke)

Bob Wanstall 4 Alder Close, Marchwood, Southampton, SO4 4YS Tel: 0703-870694 (B Snell, K Knight)

(These applications will be considered by the committee on 6th November)

HALF-YEARLY FORUM

In newsletter no.229, comments were invited on the wording of the Privileges of Membership section in the Constitution. The secretary has received one letter suggesting that we discuss the matter informally rather than call an EGM, with the results of the discussion being put to the 1994 AGM for consideration. Therefore, there will be an informal meeting (not an EGM) of the Mendip Caving Group at 3pm Saturday 2nd October at Nordrach Cottage. There is no set agenda, members may raise any subject they wish. Suggestions so far are the 1994 MCG expedition, the drying room, and (of course) privileges of membership.

EARWIG . . .

...in on the Committee meeting held 4.9.93... Don Vosper, Wayne Hiscox and Arthur Spain have volunteered to install the new access system in cottage by 1994 AGM... Joe Frampton organising the shoring of Bone Hole - further details to follow shortly... Joel Corrigan to edit the Journal, with the help of Charlie Allison and Tony Knibbs - still hoping that publication will be ready for 1994 AGM / MCG 40th anniversary... Joel Corrigan has now become one of MCG's Dan-yr-Ogof leaders... The Group have purchased "uncopyable" keys for Pinetree Pot entrance... Rocket Drop is now a Wessex dig - but we have asked if MCG can still be part of it... MCG is to make a donation to National Speleological Society Mortgage fund (we get regular, good quality, free publications from them and who knows, you might want to stay there sometime)... Tim Francis is to be MCG's official representative at the forthcoming Quarrying Seminar, in his capacity as MCG Access and Conservation officer - report to follow.

CHEQUING OUT

The MCG bank accounts with Barclays Bank will be closed soon. Anyone holding a cheque drawn on these accounts must present it by 30th September. From 1st October the Group will no longer "Bark with Banklays" as Mike Lovell might almost have said! We have opened a new account with Girobank which offers free banking. The new account has a similar mandate to the old account, ie. two cheque signatories required.

LIBRARY BOOKS

Do you know of any caving books that would be of interest to members, but are not yet available from the MCG library? The committee have funds available to purchase new books for the library, so please pass your requests to Wayne Hiscox or Joan Goddard.

YV'S DROPPINGS

JC: "It's a domestic animal, the camel"
LH: "Not in Watford it ain't"

and the latest excuse for not going caving:
YR: "We can't go caving, we're in the wrong car!"

ALPI APUANE, ITALIA '93 continued from page 1

On our first trip we were to attempt to bottom the cave and heave out 100m of rope each. At 6am four of us left the campsite. An hours drive and we reached the bottom of Monte Tambura. Donning rucksacs, what follows is the most horrendous walk to a cave you'll see: a two hour climb of 2500ft with the last 45 minutes in the blazing sun. A brief rest at the entrance and we split into two pairs - myself with Paul Medhurst, Pete Collings-Wells with Dave Hammond. The entrance begins with an outward section of thrutches - awkward with SRT kits, feels like the West End with tackle bags. The first pitch, Pozzo Saknussemm, is a fine 121m pitch which breaks you in gently! A further 17 pitches of varying lengths, quality of bolts and severity of rub points are descended to -445m to Campo Base. With each pitch we wondered how on earth we were going to get out.

A quick Mars and we started down Pozzo Mandini, 310m. Getting on the rope was a real stomach churner. The first 120m was a free hang but on 9mm rope you are soon wishing you had more than five bars on a rack. Below, three rebelay take you to a final 90m hang in the spray of the waterfall to the bottom. Previously only Dave Little had made it to the bottom. On the way out he had half derigged in case nobody else was brave enough to have a go.

Being the first down in our group I spent half an hour trying to rereg a rebelay out 150m down. I sheared a bolt in an attempt to get it in further than 3 turns. Not wishing to hang on such a belay I called it a day. The others had a go but were also hampered by two factors. The new rope had shrunk removing all the rebelay loops and so preventing an abseil once rigged. Poor Paul had to reverse prussik 60 feet to remove the bolt. Secondly, Dave's rigging may have been a little tight - OK for the first man down, impossible for the followers.

A little dejected we began the derig, a difficult task in itself. All manner of counter balance systems came into play. We cut the rope into four 100m sections, each taking one bag out. On the way out things got a bit monotonous with pitch after pitch. A few hours later it was the final slog up the 121m entrance pitch, a few squeezes, and we emerged in time for sunrise. After a 17 hour trip we were greeted by a magnificent view of the mountains. Two more hours walk to the minibus and it was straight to sleep.

After a day's rest I returned with Paul Medhurst to complete the derig. This involved heaving out 5 bags from the entrance pitches. Not surprisingly, volunteers for this thankless task were a bit thin on the ground! On a previous trip a caver had spent the early hours of the morning sleeping on the quarry road, too knackered to walk down the hill! He was rudely awoken by a lorry load of quarry workers. Surprisingly our derig went relatively smoothly even in the entrance squeezes. We were, however, extremely relieved to see three others walking up the hill to help us carry down the bags.

In conclusion the trip was enjoyed by everyone, despite the awkward logistics of tackling two systems. With hindsight I would suggest devoting two weeks to the Corchia System, as we barely scraped the surface. Mind you, if any of you fancy that little bit extra then Paolo Reversi is a must!

NEW LAMPS FOR OLD

Is your Olhams T3 getting tired? Then convert it to 6V sealed lead acid. It will still look like an Oldhams but will perform like an Apex 17. £60 - this includes bulbs and charger (headset charger), and fitting, etc. Interested? Then ask Richard Carey or phone him on 0272-860945

FOR SALE

Caving Supplies Vari Charger

TWIN £30
SINGLE £20

also...

APEX 17 CAP LAMP AND CHARGER

(Cost £117.43 new)

BARELY USED BARGAIN AT £80

Contact Richard Carey on

0272-860945

COTTAGE BOOKINGS

15 Oct - 15 Oct Chris Whittle(12)
 22 Oct - 23 Oct Caswell O.P. (15)
 29 Oct - 30 Oct Airedale CC (10)
 05 Nov - 06 Nov Members' Weekend
 05 Nov - 06 Nov Phil Ingold (14)
 19 Nov - 20 Nov EDSS (12)
 21 Nov John Crowsley(30)
 26 Nov - 27 Nov Joel Corrigan(10)
 03 Dec - 04 Dec Members' Weekend
 New Years Eve (filling fast)

Note: The cottage is fully booked on Sunday 21st November. It is not the committee's policy to accept group bookings in excess of 12 people, but an exception has been made for this night only. The group booked in have been advised that they must give up bunks in the "six room" if members turn up.

ON T-SHELF

There has been a transformation in the changing room at the cottage. Lee Hawkswell found himself on his own for a few days at the beginning of August so he put up some much-needed shelving above the clothes hooks in the changing area - and a splendid job he's made of them too. Well done and thanks to Lee.

STILL ON T-SHELF

Whilst we're on the subject - there have been requests from members for some type of shelving or pigeon holes on individual bunks for storing small personal items. If anyone is willing to help make and install them, please contact Lee Hawkswell.

AN AXE TO GRIND!

Firewood *must not* be chopped on the hearth tiles - they are being wrecked with more chunks missing each month (winter and summer!). Wood should be chopped in the under-cover area outside the back door and only brought into the lounge when it is in usable pieces. Spare wood can be stored either outside the back door or in the shed. The axe and saw should not be kept in the lounge as it encourages people (especially visiting groups) to chop wood indoors. The only safe (and secure) place for the axe and saw to be kept when not in use is in the gas store. A notice will be put up for visiting groups in due course to this effect, meanwhile we appeal to members to respect the cottage - it is our biggest asset.

MCG COVER-UP

The present mattresses are now twelve years old and as several are torn and damaged, the committee intend to have covers fitted. Joan Goddard obtained two types of mattress covers on a trial basis and your comments were sought as to which should be used. Stretch covers have now been chosen which cost £12 each. 15 will be bought initially to cover the torn or damaged mattresses. The remaining 15 mattresses will be covered later.

SHOCKING NEWS!

Several people have reported mild electric shocks from the showers. The likely cause is a leaking immersion heater element. As all the electric circuits in the cottage are protected by Miniature Circuit Breakers and a Residual Current Circuit Breaker, there is little chance of a serious electric shock. However, to minimise the risk, the showers will be earth bonded in the near future. Also on the subject of electricity, low wattage fluorescent bulbs are being tried out in the lounge. If successful, they will be fitted in all rooms.

ENVELOPES

The pre-paid envelopes in the lectern are to be used only for forwarding booking sheets and cottage fees to the treasurer. The envelopes are numbered and the lowest number should be used first (eg. 21/30 is lower than 30/30). So far this year, out of 20 envelopes supplied the following envelopes have not been returned: 7/10, 15/20 and 17/20. Either they have been misused or they and their contents (the cottage fees) have not reached the treasurer.

COTTAGE FEES

There has been a proven instance of cottage fees vanishing from the lectern. It is also clear that not all CCC permit monies reach the treasurer. Members are advised to collect/pay cottage fees by cheque, not cash. If you find cash in the lectern, replace it with a cheque (payable to "Mendip Caving Group"). At the end of the weekend, one person should forward all cheques and booking sheets to the treasurer in the envelope provided. The nearest post box is 100m along the road, towards the Castle of Comfort / Hunters Lodge.

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE — 11

by Tony Knibbs

It's just like caving in the UK really; at first all is new then one begins revisiting caves and there is less to report in "Fragments". After a whole year with nothing new to comment on, at last I've done something worth noting.

A year ago Denise and I had the opportunity to join an SWCC expedition to the Gouffre Berger - an offer one can hardly refuse, even if we couldn't manage to be there for the whole period of activity. Not really fit enough for a major bottoming epic, we chose a more limited objective by visiting the Hall of Thirteen which is about half way to the bottom at a depth of 495m.

We were joined by another "youngster" Keith Ball, our combined ages divided by three giving an average age of 51, and set off from the campsite at La Moliere at about 11:00am on Sunday 15th August. Bright sunshine and a temperature of about 30C in the shade made us feel glad that the 4km walk to the entrance was mostly downhill through the conifers and beech trees.

Having quickly changed and sorted out our personal sacs, we booked-in at the control tent with Bob Hall and set off down accompanied by Joel Corrigan and two others who planned a photo session at -250m.

At the bottom of the 15m entrance pitch, a narrow passage beyond an open steel door led straight to the head of Ruiz Shaft where some dodgy-looking timbers extended over the 30m pitch. This easy free-hanging dry abseil in a shaft cut through a delightful cream-coloured limestone set the scene for the following 200m of descent.

The steeply sloping Holiday Slides followed immediately, giving a split 10m descent to the head of an impressive 30m pitch at Cairn Shaft with a deviation about 5m down. Crossing the gravelly floor brought us to the beginning of the First Meander, a deep sinuous rift involving bridging or the use of dubious-looking wooden stemples over the "bottomless" bits. About 150m of this led to Garby's Shaft of 38m with a deviation 10m down.

A further 100m or so of shuffling through the Second Meander opened out at the head of Gontard's Shaft of 35m, followed by three consecutive drops of 10m, 3m and 6m to reach the take-off for Aldo's Shaft, a fine 40m free-hang down to a short passage into Grande Galerie at -250m where the aspect of the cave changed abruptly.

Emerging from small passage into huge passage some 30m wide and 20m high, I could imagine the sheer amazement which must have gripped Joe Berger, Aldo Sillanoli, Jean Cadoux and their team members in 1953 as they pushed deeper into their new discovery. Since conditions were so dry, the Starless River which flowed from Mud Passage, on our left, was simply a streamlet.

We followed the stream bed a couple of hundred metres to where Lake Cadoux was temporarily absent, then continued over piles of breakdown beneath which the stream had vanished. Navigation became a question of spotting cairns and trying to keep to the obvious worn paths. Calcite formations were becoming more numerous by the time we reached the Little General Cascade, a 10m rope descent with a tiny stream entering halfway down, where Keith easily won the Men's 5m Free-Fall event.

Continuing downstream, we followed handline (tyrolienne) traverses, first bypassing a cascade, then avoiding deep pools. The stream disappeared once more and we found ourselves gaining a little height as we navigated between the immense blocks and boulder piles of the Great Rubble Heap which seemed to stretch ahead to infinity. After maybe half an hour of this we stood at the top of a 30m boulder slope looking down on Camp 1 nestling beneath the right-hand wall which rose sheer above the sleeping bags and cooking pots. Several coloured balloons hung on the wall above the camp, sharply contrasting with the grim surroundings.

We stopped briefly to talk to two cavers who had just emerged from their bags and were preparing to carry on out of the system. Only a few metres beyond Camp 1 we carefully picked our way across mostly dried-out gour pools to reach the Hall of the Thirteen where the stalagmite formations were much more impressive than in any photo I had ever seen. We ourselves took a few photos here, and I reflected on the fact that the discovery of the Berger and my caving career are both 40 years old this year. How time flies when your having fun!

With almost 500m of ascent in front of us, we took our time trudging back upslope and along the streamway to the foot of Aldo's Shaft. We also dallied somewhat on the various pitches: passing the too-low y-hang at the head of Garby's was a pain, and we found the blue Edelrid Supersoft to be truly abysmal for SRT ascent. Surprisingly, a fine spray of water was coming down Cairn Shaft and the Holiday Slides. It transpires that this resulted from a thunderstorm which had passed over the plateau in the late afternoon.

A brilliant starry sky greeted us at the entrance and we duly reported our return to the new occupant of the control tent. It was 2:30am and we all felt very tired after a 14-hour excursion which we shall never forget - a fine trip, indeed. Once all the kit was repacked, we set off on the last stretch back to the tents at la Moliere, Keith deftly navigating by the odd splash of red paint, an arrow on a rock, or reflective markers in the trees. We made slow time on the walk back -200m downhill yesterday was now the same amount uphill (it seemed more) and I was glad to see the tents once more. After a cup of coffee and a bowl of soup, Denise and I drove back down to our own tent at Autrans, arriving at about 5:30pm; we rose late that Monday morning!

As a footnote on equipment, let me say that my new plastic Alp carbide generator worked well; I was unaware of its presence on a shoulder sling and it provided six hours per fill. On the other hand, my Petzl laser seems to be fitted with a splendid (4.0V, 0.5A halogen) bulb which gave maybe 4 hours light on a new Duracell battery, but it died almost instantly when it finally passed out.

And maybe you wondered what the Men's 5m Free-Fall event was? Well, it involves abseiling down a rope using a descender and going into free-fall mode at some point. The best descender for this is undoubtedly the Petzl Plummet (alias Stop) which opens at the touch of a lever... Yes, I know all about locking-off, but some people are optimistic enough to think that its stop function (i.e the only reason for buying it) needs no back-up when doing such simple things as passing a deviation.

The event referred to was discussed amongst several expedition members with a strong rescue interest - the "Plummet" cachet comes from Yorkshire apparently, where the device has earned quite a reputation. This was the second time I have witnessed this type if accident, so it cannot be that scarce. In short, unless you are into pitch rigging and your technique is flawless, think twice about buying a stop - and certainly don't recommend it to a beginner. A simple two-bobbin Petzl or a rack are much safer.

PREPAYMENT SYSTEM

Cottage fees are currently £1.50 per night for members. You can save money by purchasing a prepayment voucher (£15 for 12 nights, or £30 for 25 nights) from the treasurer.

The unused part of a voucher will continue to be valid after the end of the year - the voucher only runs out when you have stayed the number of nights paid for. Buy now, start saving on cottage fees!

1994 MEETS LIST

Bill Headington is compiling a meets programme for 1994. Is there a particular cave you would like to explore? Or a caving area you wish to visit? Is there is a cave you are prepared to lead an MCG trip on? Then please contact Bill on 0761-419766.

He needs to know fairly soon as some trips need permits and/or accommodation to be organised well in advance.

EXILES CAVING TRIP — JUNE '93

by Geoff Barton

Editor's note: This article first appeared in the newsletter of the Exiles Caving Club. Geoff suggested that I might include it in the MCG newsletter, suitably edited. However, I have chosen to print the article unedited as it reflects another group's experience of Mendip caving, drinking and eating. Prizes for anyone who can correctly identify the two caves visited as well as the pub and eating place!

The things I do for my brother. When Phil Barton suggested that he use my caving club's cottage for a meet, I readily agreed, without serious thought for the consequences. The fateful day inevitably arrived in mid June after some horrendous rainstorms and much flooding in Wales and on the west coast. Six others assembled in the local pub and debated whether the greatest dangers lay in the earlier rainstorms or the liquid that was passing down our throats like streams in flood conditions.

In the morning, Bob Savage, Nicholas Wrosfold, Chris Sharp and David Shore were all up early and claimed to be eager to go despite appearances. Janet Nicholls was talking to Derek Norton about a leisurely surface ramble but was prevailed upon to join the main party. It must have been the usual stories about large, dry and well decorated chambers that did it, along with the still grey clouds. The assembled party set off for the chosen cave and we got underway as soon as I had returned to the hut to retrieve the key. The chosen entrance was deceptively reassuring, a substantial blockhouse with an iron ladder. However this soon degenerated into "typical" Mendip passage and provided the first obstacle. Janet was talked through a narrow hole where the need to lie on one side in a small pool concentrated attention on rapid progress. This obstacle passed, the remainder of the cave presented a series of small vertical challenges and masses of spectacular scenery.

Lunch was taken on a massive calcite balcony in a chamber hundreds of feet long, 80ft high and 40ft wide. This was made more impressive by being able to observe a second party making their way along the main chamber beneath us.

Two routes were available for the return to the surface. JN and DN took the sensible decision to retrace the route used on the way in. The remainder faced a more challenging experience. At the second attempt we found an awkward 10ft climb into a small wet tube, after DS had climbed above to fix a hand line. The tube was relatively dry, as indeed the whole cave had been, and this was put down to the ground being in a spongy condition due to the unusually large quantity of rain in the preceding months. There was a strong odour in some of the narrower parts of the cave but no-one else seemed to notice this. On returning to the cars we were relieved to find that we had just managed to miss JN and DN cavorting about in their underwear, much to the amusement of the local sheep.

The next imperative was to eat and drink. The F-----n is a truly magnificent eating place which we don't want too many people to hear about. The range of wine is extensive and the local dishes often unique. Only the best of ingredients are used and the owners take particular care with the choice of meat and fish. Two volunteers, CS and DS, happily reserved a table by drinking beer whilst the remainder did the shorter tour of Wells. This strategy proved correct as by a quarter to seven there was not a seat to be had.

Janet earned a million brownie points by allowing me to persuade her to drive my car (it was fun, can we do it again sometime?). The drive back to the cottage was via the same pub as on Friday when once again the beer flowed like water. The stragglers finally crawled to bed around 2am, feeling no pain from the previous day's excursion.

Although the weather had improved on the Sunday, it was a subdued group that gathered over breakfast. Conversation hovered around the advisability of drinking for eight hours and could anyone remember if we were in double figures. JN and DN decided they would definitely try and keep their heads in the clear, claiming the need for an early return.

Surprisingly, none of the remaining six wanted to admit to being incapable, either mentally or physically, of not enjoying an opportunity for sporting contact with wet rock in the dark. Accordingly, a plan was made for a cave with a challenging set of difficulties. Once again the key was a problem but eventually we set off with a party we had met in the pub the previous evening. Our party sped well and passed the others on these occasions when perhaps they took a more prudent approach to the obstacles. The cave was no wetter than average, quite wet, and again an unusual presence seemed to hang in some passages. I could now detect that the trace elements seemed to be related to the previous night's beer, apparently a feature all Exiles are familiar with. The other major surprise in the cave was Phil's attire. Whilst the old jeans seemed to be alright on the way in, they very rapidly aged once inside. By degrees, a small vent near the crutch started to spread. Large expanses of white thighs began to affront members in both parties. Finally, both legs were only held by the outer seams and Phil spent much time hoisting up the legs and trying to keep his seam straight to cover his embarrassment. The final indignities came when he needed a foothold on the other party to adequately maintain upward progress towards the exit.

On returning to the surface, spirits seemed high and I should have asked "can we make it an annual event?"

TACKLE LOST - STOLEN - MISSING

A recent audit of the tackle store has revealed that a fair amount of tackle is missing again. If you have any of the following items, please return them, or at least tell the tacklemaster where they are.

<u>LADDERS</u>	<u>ROPE</u>	<u>OTHER ITEMS</u>
No. 2 - 16ft	G - 80ft	1 8mm bolting kit
No. 3 - 20ft	O - 220ft	Lots of hangers
No. 8 - 33ft	U - 230ft	Pulley No.3
No. 9 - 20ft		4 wire tethers
No.12 - 30ft		Spreaders Nos.4 & 7
NO.24 - 30ft (new)		
No.25 - 25ft		

Please try to clean tackle you have borrowed before returning it. Do not leave the ladders tightly done up as this stresses the end wires unduly. Please keep the tackle store tidy. Thanks. Kev West, Tacklemaster.

RUB POINTS

Do you have any hints or tips about caving that you would like to pass on to other members? Write them down, pass them to the editor and they will appear in this new monthly column.

RUB POINTS - 1 PETZL STOP

Used correctly, the Petzl Stop is a very safe abseiling device. Its great advantage is its ability to stop or substantially slow down a caver who lets go of the device when abseiling and it is therefore far superior to the Petzl Bobbin. When using the Stop, the speed of descent is controlled with the right hand on the free rope below the descender. Never try to control your speed by gripping the

release lever more (or less) firmly since the instinctive reaction when nervous is to "hold tight"; hence incidents of the "clutch and plummet" type. The free rope should emerge from the Stop then pass through a steel krab attached to the main Maillon Rapide. The rate of descent should be controlled by lifting or lowering the rope, with the right hand, against the steel krab. Raising the rope will increase friction against the krab and lowering will decrease friction. The "autolock" function of the Stop should be regarded as an additional option, not as a substitute for direct control of the rope. When stationary, lock off by passing a loop of free rope through the Stop's attachment krab and over the Stop (see next month's Rub Points).

PINETREE POT - DIG UPDATE

by Julie Hesketh

Digging trips have continued at a respectable rate (summer holidays aside) with a good 200 or so buckets of spoil removed over the past couple of months. By the end of July we had reached passage with 5 or 6 inches of air space. Beyond this, blackness was all that was visible. Water which accumulated at the dig face could now be tipped into the downward trending hole (saving diggers much bailing back to the pitch and a good soaking in the process) and could be heard trickling down a small drop and on into the depths...

A couple of trips followed with only Tim and myself present and as spoil hauling was getting a bit tricky with only the two of us, we adopted the rabbit burrowing technique of excavating out only a body sized hole. More help arrived and so the floor was once again dug out. The dig had now hit a thin false floor of calcite underlain with layers of clay and sandy deposits. Bashing this out, the black hole seemed to enlarge and after a few minutes of frantic hammering on the calcite by Tim, a body sized hole appeared leading off into the blackness. A minor scrum ensued as all 5 members of the digging party raced for the squeeze. Tim made it first and disappeared headfirst and downwards into the virgin cave squealing "Passage!!" Three other diggers hurried down the 5ft drop headfirst in pursuit of fame and glory and landed in a muddy heap in a small chamber (if you can call it that!) 7ft high and 5ft wide, with no way on.

The new chamber has solid rock walls but has a coarse gravel floor and obvious downward trending bedding. Digging will now be concentrated in the floor, excavating the bedding plane, but we can foresee future bad air problems. This brings the length of the dig to approximately 55 feet.

Diggers include: Tim Francis, Julian Flavell, Julie Hesketh, Joel Corrigan and Joe Frampton.

QUARRYING SEMINAR

The debate for and against quarrying will be addressed at a major seminar to be held at the Royal Bath and West Showground, Shepton Mallet on Saturday, 23rd October. The conference, which has been jointly arranged by the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Bath and West of England Society, will be chaired by Sir John Quicke CBE, with four leading speakers leading the debate. The panel will include Dr. William Stanton, of the National Rivers Authority and Angela Yeoman, of Somerset quarrying company Foster Yeoman, who will be offering their alternative viewpoints. The organisers are keen to ensure an open debate from all sides, and already there is considerable interest from those involved in mining and quarrying throughout the country, as well as from the general public. The environmental issues are certain to attract representatives of the major bodies.

Tickets, which include a full buffet lunch, are available from the Royal Bath and West Showground and are priced at £15, or £10 for RGS Fellows or RBW Society Members.

ROUND BRITAIN UPDATE

Phil Ingold reports that his trip to view the four cardinal points of the UK mainland was a great experience with good company, good drivers and good planners. Phil says that, on arrival at the Hunters Lodge after 2.00pm on the Sunday, Roger Dors said it was too late to buy a drink. He returned a few moments later with four pints saying "but I can give it to you instead." £652.60 was raised for Multiple Sclerosis research, thanks to the support of MCG members and friends.