

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 232

NOVEMBER 1993

GAPING GILL WINCH MEET - AUGUST 1993

by David & Sharon Gwillim

When we arrived in London from Australia there were only two British caves that we had ever heard of, Wookey Hole as a popular diver suicide spot and Gaping Gill for the winch meet, so when we discovered that Craven Pothole Club was running a winch meet over the August bank holiday weekend, the opportunity was too good to miss.

Sunday morning we were up early, ready for a new adventure. After a soggy stroll up Fell Beck we were greeted by tents, tea shop, equipment and about 100 people waiting for their turn to descend. We signed in, paid our £5 and settled down to a two hour wait, which was closer to three hours by the time our numbers 110 and 111 were called.

There was a time when we would have felt insecure hanging around 340 feet above the ground in a metal cage supported by only two steel cables, but years of vertical work on 10mm rope made the winch seem invincible. Sharon descended first and I got some quick photos of her disappearing into the void. The cage followed a guideline which took it in a free hang just to the side of the main waterfall and took about a minute to descend.

The photos of Gaping Gill Main Chamber do not do justice to the impressive sight that opened up before us. The Main Chamber is very large with two waterfalls, both back lit by the light streaming through the entrance, the constant noise of the water and vast quantities of spray making a terrific atmosphere. The CPC had lanterns along the walls for the non-caver descendees which served to light the whole chamber to give a view that would not normally be available.

By the time we entered the cave we were feeling a bit cold and miserable after such a long wait on the surface so our enthusiasm to explore the cave had wanned a bit. We did a quick trip into Mud Hall, which is another impressively large chamber, into which we emerged about 70 foot up one wall, and followed a traverse line across to the other side of the chamber for a play in some of the most glutinous mud we have ever had the mispleasure of trying to clean off.

After about 2 hours we returned to the queue for the easiest ascent we have ever had, to be greeted by rain and deteriorating light. All up about 250 people were lowered and hauled up that day and full marks go to CPC for a well organised operation.

Although definately a tourist trip, we can thoroughly recommend the Gaping Gill winch meet as a unique experience even for old hands. And you never know, if you are caving in another country, the locals may even have heard of it.

++++ MCG 1993/4 MEETS PROGRAMME ++++ BANK HOLIDAY WEEKENDS IN ITALICS ++++

This list is updated monthly - to add your trip, please phone the Meet Secretary

DATE	AREA	MAIN EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
04 Dec	Mendip	Box Mines	Mike Carson	0753-655143
04 Dec	Mendip	Curry Evening	JP Burch	0737-767738
05 Feb	Mendip	Rescue Practice	John Crowsley	0272-652585
05 Mar	Mendip	Archaeology walk	Yvonne Rowe	0252-872006
23 Apr	Mendip	ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING	Joan Goddard	0608-810382
23 Apr	Mendip	40th Anniversary Dinner	Arthur Spain	0749-679358
Summer 94	France	Alps Expedition	TBA	

1994 ANNUAL DINNER - CROSSWAYS, NORTH WOOTON

The MCG's 40th Anniversary Dinner will be at the same venue as last year (the Crossways, North Wooton) on Saturday, April 23rd. Many members have come and gone since 1954 and the committee would like to invite past members to the Dinner. Would anyone who has contact with a past member and has their telephone number or address please let me know (0749-679358) so that I can assess numbers ASAP. Because of the probable numbers involved, it will not be possible to issue free tickets to past members, only the normal allocation to guests.

In addition, as it is a special Dinner celebration it would be good to have special after dinner activities or guests, if you have any preferences or sensible ideas please let one of the committee know. Arthur Spain

WEEKLY MEETINGS:	At the Group's Mendip headquarters on Wednesdays at 7.00pm. & at the Eclipse Inn, Egham, Surrey, on Thursdays from 9.00pm.		
CAVING ACCOMMODATION:	For up to 30 people, is available at the MCG headquarters:- Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse, Blagdon, Bristol, BS18 6XW		
COTTAGE INFORMATION:	Tel: 0761-462797 Grid Ref ST51475606 OS 1:50,000 sheet 182		
COTTAGE BOOKINGS:	Through the cottage warden please (address and tel. no. below)		
COTTAGE FEES per night:	MCG members, member's children, SWCC and NPC	£ 1.50	
	Guest clubs and member's guests	£ 2.50	
PREPAYMENT VOUCHERS:	(available to members only) 12 nights accomodation	£15.00	
	25 nights accomodation	£30.00	
ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: (1994 RATES)	Full & Probationary Members: £25.00; Associate Members: £15.00 The subscription includes free day-time access to the cottage by the member, their children, and their accompanied guests		



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CUSTODIAN TRUSTEES
 RON SAUNDERS
 MALCOLM COTTER
 PAT WALSH
 PETER MATHEWS
 REGISTERED CHARITY No 270088

*** NON-COMMITTEE POSTS**
 * RESCUE WARDEN
 * CONSERVATION OFFICER
 * JOURNAL EDITOR
 * MCG SHOP
 * MCG SHOP

JOHN CROWSLEY 0272-652585
 TIM FRANCIS 081-878-3508
 JOEL CORRIGAN 0344-873613
 MALCOLM COTTER 07842-52643
 PHIL INGOLD 0442-242029



ON THE MOVE

Mark Ward has moved to:
c/o 20 Passfields, Star Road,
London, W14 9LJ

WELCOME . . .

...to Sharon Gwillim, Sue Wood and Dave Wanstall who have been accepted as probationary members.

AN APPLICATION . . .

...for probationary membership has been received from:

Richard Thornton, 14 Albert St,
Blandford Forum, Dorset, DT11 7HY
Tel: 0258-459458
(Proposed by T Francis, J Hesketh)

This application will be considered by the committee when it meets on 8th January 1994.

COTTAGE BOOKINGS

19 Nov - 20 Nov	EDSS	(12)
21 Nov	John Crowsley	(30)
26 Nov - 27 Nov	Joel Corrigan	(10)
26 Nov - 27 Nov	Tim Francis	(13)
03 Dec - 04 Dec	Members' Weekend	
10 Dec - 11 Dec	Sedgewick Spt	(11)
New Years Eve		(almost full)
07 Jan - 08 Jan	Members' Weekend	
04 Feb - 05 Feb	Members' Weekend	

EARWIG . . .

...in on the committee meeting held 6.11.93... Rescue practice: MRO think Swildon's is a good choice and the farmer is happy... Cottage security system: to be installed by New Year and activated at end of January (details to follow)... T-shirts will be ordered soon... Shelving on bunks: no volunteers, so no shelves... Forum: will revert to November members weekend, with fireworks; we tried October as requested but no extra members attended... Forum social event: suggestion that we have a dinner party at cottage in place of barn dance.

BABY BOOM

Belated congratulations to Alan and Liz Mellon on the birth of a daughter in June 93.

And more congratulations, this time to John and Alison Beauchamp who are expecting a visit from the stork in June 94.

LIBRARY LOSS

Cave photographer Paul Deakin visited Upper Flood several years ago and a set of the ensuing prints was purchased for the Library. The 9" x 9" prints, including some of GB, are no longer at the Cottage. Please, whoever has them, we would like them back.

OLD MCG JOURNALS

Back copies of the last 4 Journals are available from Joan Goddard. They are: No.5 (1974), No.6 (1976), No.7 (1982), and No.8 (1984). Price £1.50 each or all 4 for £5.

Journals No.1 (1959), No.2 (1960), No.3 (1962), No.4 (1967) are out of print but photocopies are available at cost plus 50p each, also from Joan Goddard.

TACKLE BOOKINGS

Only a small amount of missing tackle has been returned. As it was neither booked out nor booked back in, we do not know where and how it has been used, or by whom, defeating the purpose of having a tackle log. The tackle is there to be used, all we ask is that you record the use on the log sheets in the store. This will help the tackle master to make an informed decision on its condition and safety (and to chase you when you forget to bring the tackle back!).

E-MAIL ADDRESS

Computer enthusiasts can now access several thousand caving references - some more useful than others! - using cavers e-mail address (NO SPACES!):

earn%"cavers-request@vlsi.bu.edu"

earn% is necessary to connect to the internet network - then contact John Sulter.

TIENSHAN

by Mike Haselden

Ed: Mike and Susan sent me a fascinating 13-page article on an unusual adventure holiday they had in June/July 1993. It is unfortunately too long to publish in full so I have edited the beginning and end a little, but have hardly touched the middle (the best bit as far as MCG is concerned). I have managed to get it down to 3 reasonable sized "episodes" - one is below, and the other two will appear in Newsletters No.233 and 234.

This trip, organised by an expedition company named High Places, was a prototype trek with us as the guinea pigs and, if successful, will become a regular event on their list of worldwide expeditions.

Tianshan - The Celestial Mountains - a name that conjures up eastern mystery and magic. Situated 700 miles north of the Himalayas and five hours or eighty degrees east of Greenwich lies a huge range of mountains on the Kyrgyzstan/China border known as the Tianshan mountains, sporting peaks of up to 25000 feet; our holiday destination this summer.

The journey started straightforward enough with a flight to Paris and transfer on to Moscow, arriving in the late evening and losing three hours of time change. Almost as soon as we stepped out of the plane the atmosphere of the Russian capital hit us. It felt oppressive, dusty and gloomy. We felt some relief when we were met by Sergei, our Russian guide, and two of the three other Brits on this trek, Niki the expedition company leader and her friend John.

We were driven in Sergei's Lada to the city where every car is a Lada, even the Police cars, complete with rust and bald tyres. We were taken to a huge multi-storey hotel, originally built for the Olympics, and advised not to leave our room until morning. A restless night ensued in a very strange place with freight trains rattling past at regular intervals throughout the night. Sergei met us next morning for breakfast with John and Niki, then we were joined by numerous other Russians and bundled into a couple of vehicles for the hour drive to one of Moscow's domestic flight terminals. Here things are handled in a manner to which Westerners are unaccustomed. All luggage, including ours, was concealed in black polythene bags, brown paper parcels or hessian sacks. The need to answer a call of nature took me to the basement toilet where, upon payment of a couple of roubles, I was issued with a ration of loo paper. One sheet! But at least there were signs of an ancient attempt at crude plumbing.

The original plan had been to fly to Biskek in Kyrgyzstan but, as they had run out of aircraft fuel there, a flight had been booked to Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan. However, our visas were invalid here but Sergei did not seem to worry; we must pretend to be Russian nationals who had lost their passports, he said. We hoped this was a joke!

We underwent numerous checks and hauled our considerable cargo, which included supplies and equipment for two weeks in the mountains, to various parts of the building and eventually we headed out on to the tarmac towards a Russian built Jumbo jet. Once airborne all seemed more or less normal and by now my body clock told me it was time to sleep, so I reclined my seat and dozed off. After a couple of interruptions by the stewardess I was finally roused by a shuddering thud. We were landing. As we left the aircraft, in the clear light of day and far to the north, a range of snow-capped mountains dominated the horizon, but these were not for us.

In the normal disorderly fashion we went through the airport complex (Susan found the loos here to be even more primitive - a row of holes without partitions, and she found it a bit perturbing to pee while a queue formed at her side) and emerged with our bundles ready to board a hired coach. This may sound impressive but the coach, like others in this part of Asia, consisted of a converted tipper-type truck, with a crude coach cabin, but without the tipping facility. Due to some design

fault all these coaches had the tendency to overheat in the summer season. The problem was resolved by removing all engine cowlings and covers. It was quite disconcerting to be approached by a coach with pulleys, drive belts and fan blades all spinning at high revs without any protection and at easy reach. The consequences of inadvertently touching the exposed machinery were too horrible to contemplate.

Sergei went off on some negotiating deal and eventually we met up again and drove around the streets of Alma Ata, but all was not well; we could sense this from the tone of their voices and body language. We stopped at a lay-by where indecision and discussion continued. Then we went off again, only to stop at another lay-by where we learned the bad news. The driver was unhappy at British presence and was unwilling to take us across the border in his coach so we had to get out and unload by the roadside. We were not to worry, said Sergei, and he sent off another of the Russians in search of alternative transport. Ten hours later, having endured a long, very hot day by the roadside, another coach turned up. But things were still not quite right. The coach needed fuel and repairs so another delay ensued. These minor tasks completed, apparently illegally, we set off on the long journey across the border to Przevalsk in Kyrgyzstan. As we trundled along through the night we managed to get some much needed sleep on makeshift beds laid out on the floor; sacks, seats or wherever we could. Several times during the night we stopped at check points where we were inspected and, after discussions with the Russians, money changed hands. However, seldom were the guards in uniform so I suspect some of them were brigands or local Mafia.

We arrived at a mountaineering association building in the shabby town of Przevalsk. As the drains had failed long ago, a shack had been put up over an earth toilet situated a strategic distance from the building. The rest of the structure and its fittings were of similar standard.

Later in the day our next mode of transport arrived; a ten ton open army truck with huge all drive wheels. We set off in low gear through the dismal streets heading towards the mountains and the gradient got steeper as the track deteriorated. We were going up the Karakol valley with its fast flowing river water thrashing through boulders and threatening anything in its path. The track then ended and continued on the other side of the river with only a rickety plank foot bridge for those who dare to cross. The truck continued past the bridge over even rougher terrain and veered towards the white angry water. At this point I must admit that my curiosity turned to apprehension, and then real worry, for it seemed the lorry was out of control, heading for an unscheduled fate in the water, complete with passengers and all. A few tense moments later, to my amusement, we were safely on the other side. Many obstacles were overcome on the journey up the valley, all to the credit of the driver and truck. Eventually we pulled off the track into some woods and dismounted. The goods were unloaded and the truck went off back down the valley. Soon it was out of sight and we were cut off from the outside world. BLISS!

We found a clearing in the woods and set up base camp, consisting of a large stores tent, a large canopy for the mess area and individual tents pitched nearby. The river provided our water though this was a little turbid with fine grit (mountain grindings).

The next day we planned to go on a day walk up the (name unknown) valley but my day was a little marred by an incident which forced my early and solo return to camp. Just above the tree line, on a pedestal sized boulder by the path, someone had placed a horned skull. It was a fine specimen which I thought deserved my attention so I picked it up and tried it on my head for size. The others agreed that it suited me and I was asked to pose for the camera. Unfortunately, during the photo session the decomposing putrid contents of the skull, which I had failed to notice, dripped all over my shirt and trousers depositing an offensive smelling mess, complete with maggots. I made a dash for a nearby river to wash off but water alone was insufficient to remove the smell which eventually got the better of me. I bid the others goodbye and beat a hasty retreat back to base where I stripped off, showered and washed my clothes.

(Their ambitious treks and other adventures continue in newsletter 233)

BARN DANCE REPORT

Well, I am pleased to report that much against my expectations, the event was a success. My thanks go to the members of the London Velvet Bottom Band ably led by John Pudduck, but backed up by Don Vosper, Barbara Dewdney, Tom Hickland (violin/fiddle) and of course Andy (the voice) Downing who got you onto the floor. Incidentally, other than expenses for the non MCG members, and free beer for the band, they gave their services free.

An unfortunate incident nearly marred the proceedings when a certain partially legless individual, who shall be nameless, dropped a speaker box which promptly failed to work, but to add insult to injury, large boots were used to force the face back into the cabinet with injurious results. However, all was well when said nameless person set to and repaired it. The rest of the evening went really well; plenty of dancing, excellent food (it very rapidly disappeared), good beer, good company and surroundings (Chewton Mendip Village Hall seems to lend itself to Barn Dances), so what more could a person need.

Thanks to all who attended for making it a splendid evening, and grateful thanks to those of you who helped with food, etc., but where were the rest of you? A successful event is very dependant on a) willing helpers and b) good organisation, the latter is the responsibility of the organizer, but he/she needs the response from the rest of you.

Which poses the question, is this what the majority of you want next year or should there be something different? One suggestion is to go to a pub/club which has a skittle alley and where a bar meal can be provided. The committee will discuss the subject and maybe take up the idea of including a questionnaire with the New Years subs request, so get your thinking caps on and let your committee know what social events you desire for the future (if any), especially ideas for the forthcoming 40th Anniversary Annual Dinner on April 24th 1994. Arthur Spain

Post script: We received the following fan mail from Anne McKechnie after the Barn Dance. That's Barn Dance 1994 1, Alternative 0 (so far!)

Dear mcg
 I had a wonderful
 time ~~at~~ at the
 Barn dance. it was
 BRILL, thank you.
 very much.
 I hope ~~it~~ I will
 be able to come
 every year.
 I also enjoyed the
 singing.
 Thanks again for
 the loveley time.
 Love from anne

VICTORIAN GEOLOGICAL ILLUSTRATIONS OF CRYSTAL PALACE PARK

Why is there a lead mine and a limestone cave in Sydenham, an area unrenowned for minerals and karst scenery? The explanation begins with the Great Exhibition of 1851.

As an innovative building, the Crystal Palace was the masterpiece of Sir Joseph Paxton (1803-1865). Constructed of iron and glass, it was the centre for the Great Exhibition, and sited in Hyde Park. The building was designed to be a temporary structure, but when the exhibition closed after six months, Paxton developed plans to move it to Sydenham, southeast of London.

Where the Hyde Park exhibition had as its intention the promotion of manufactured goods from across the world, the new palace at Sydenham was focused towards providing entertainment. The relocated palace and its grounds were reopened to the public in 1854.

The relocation of the Crystal Palace and the landscaping of its grounds was focused towards the observation of natural history, particularly botany, ornithology and geology, and most notably palaeontology.

Geology and palaeontology formed an important part in Paxton's scheme for landscaping the Crystal Palace grounds. A large area in the southwest of the park was given up to the science of geology.

The Mountain Limestone

Little now remains of the Mountain Limestone (Carboniferous Limestone) which was emplaced at Crystal, apart from a few blocks of limestone around the park which may owe their origin to this part of the section. The Mountain Limestone was destroyed by blasting during the redesign of the watercourse as a rockery and watergarden. The Mountain Limestone was meant to follow on conformably from the Old Red Sandstone, and it probably formed over 50% of the cliff line, being terminated in a fault at the Coal Formation. In many ways the Mountain Limestone was the most ambitious of the reconstructed geological features. A contemporary guide comments:

"In this cliff of carboniferous (sic) limestone the bedding may be very distinctly traced, and systems of fissures, or joints, may also be observed. One of these fissures, wider than the rest and communicating with several smaller ones, is partly filled with spar, and has an opening into a cavern constructed behind the cliff. The main fissure represents a mineral vein or lode, and the smaller ones are strings or feeders. Within the cavern the spectator sees some of the peculiar and interesting appearances of natural limestone grottoes."

Associated with the mineral veins was a reconstructed lead mine, with rake and pipe veins, and surmounted incongruously by a pair of full-sized models of Irish Elks. Upon payment of an admission charge visitors could enter the mine where lead miners' tools were on display to complete the impression of a genuine Debyshire lead mine.

The construction of the cavern or "grotto" was elaborate. Observations in the cave, which still remains largely intact, show that it was constructed by building a brick tunnel in the earth bank of the plateau, parallel to the "scarp" face, with brick arch entrances. These entrances would have been disguised by the Mountain Limestone itself in the completed section. The cave contains an impressive amount of fake speleothems: these were apparently constructed using a thin cement render around iron "stalactite" and "stalagmite" formers, and by creating an uneven "flowstone" surface over the tunnel wall interior.

Fortunately, because the cavern is set back from the "cliff", it has survived the 1962 redesign of the watercourse. A few remaining blocks of limestone still "in situ" are present at the entrance to the cave. It is to be hoped that in future, this part of the original structure could be returned to public display once more.

(Taken from an article by P. Doyle & E. Robinson, Proc. Geologists Association, Vol.104, Pt.3, 1993)

A REAL GB RESCUE

Based on the MCG logbook entries

On Saturday 23rd October, a caver fell and was injured in GB. A 999 call was made but the message unfortunately took 50 minutes to reach the MRO because the call had been made on a mobile phone. The call was routed via a radio mast on Salisbury Plain to the Southampton Coastguard! (See information below).

Eventually, a call came through to Bat Products late on the Saturday afternoon with the message: "Girl with broken ankle at GB Waterfall". MCG member Jonathan Roberts was at Bat Products when the message was received and, knowing there were some keen MCG types at the cottage, he phoned them with the details. Tim Francis, Julie Hesketh, Joel Corrigan, Joe Frampton and Joan Goddard (ed: apologies if I've missed anyone) left immediately for GB to join Jonathan and were amongst the first on the scene to help in the rescue. They were told later that their help was much appreciated.

At some time during the rescue the casualty had breathing difficulties but she was resuscitated by one of the rescue team. Upon reaching the surface, the casualty was taken to hospital and found to have in fact broken her leg in four places, not her ankle as was first thought. Two of the fractures were apparently shear fractures, associated with her walking boots having totally protected her ankle from damage but transferring the stress to the leg.

There will be a full report on this rescue in a later newsletter.

Below is a letter sent to Nordrach Cottage from the grateful casualty:

"Dear fellow cavers,

On Saturday 23rd October 1993 I was rescued from GB. I write this letter to express my gratitude to all those who assisted in the rescue operation. Your drive, determination and courage helped to save my life. I cannot begin to thank you all enough. I am, thanks to you all, on the road to recovery and hope to resume my caving activities as soon as I am able. Once again, a big THANKYOU to you all and I hope to meet you very soon under better circumstances. Kind regards, J.G."

DIAL 999 AND WHAT HAPPENS?

NOTHING FOR 50 MINUTES. That is what seems to have happened, or not happened at the recent GB rescue. At a meeting after the recent St. Cuthbert's practice rescue the MCG was thanked for its members help on the GB real rescue on October 23rd. It was also stated that the 999 call was made on a mobile phone and that 50 minutes elapsed before the MRO received the call-out. Apparently the message spent some time with Southampton Coast Guard.

It was reported that other peoples' experience of using mobile phones for 999 had not been similar and that the message from the caller could perhaps have been better. However, I would suggest that if you ever have to use a mobile phone for cave rescue, you should:

STATE THAT YOU WANT THE POLICE
ASK FOR AVON AND SOMERSET CONSTABULARY
AND MENDIP CAVE RESCUE

STATE EXACT LOCATION INCLUDING COUNTY
GIVE NATURE OF INJURY

Keep the mobile with you and make a second call using a land-line (ordinary phone), this time adding your telephone number to the information.

WAIT FOR THE MRO TO RING YOU BACK

Alternatively, wait for the Life Boat.

John Crowsley

MCG RESCUE PRACTICE 1994

DATE: 5.2.94

TIME: 10:00am

MEET: MCG

CAVE: SWILDON'S

Phil has again agreed to be our victim (thanks Phil, you're mad). To give everyone a chance I am asking for teams of six, with one person nominated as team leader. The more teams, the longer Phil's tour of Swildon's will be.

Each team will be allocated a section of cave to carry Phil through, the aim shall be to make it a round trip. This way everyone should get more of a hands-on experience. The team will be expected to pre-rig the section, take control of the rescue through their section and assist the next team with their carry. After that I hope to be able to organise 1 or 2 underground workshops on hauling and first aid. In any event I would like other teams away from the actual rescue, but on standby in case of difficulty. The whole rescue will be supervised by an MRO Warden and myself.

I would like all the names in by FRIDAY 31.12.93 please. The intention being that on 31.12.93 at 10:00am all the team leaders meet at the MCG for a recky of Swildon's and to allocate sections of cave.

PLEASE, NAMES IN NOW OR AT LEAST A.S.A.P.

If you are clever enough to think of a excuse not to go underground on the 5th, beware, I am also after volunteers for the above-ground carry and "Blockhouse Traffic Warden".

John Crowsley 0272-652585

IT'S ALL HAPPENING ON MENDIP...

MRO STOMP... Saturday 20th November at Priddy Hall. 7:30pm until late. Food, bar and Blues band. Tickets available from MRO Wardens...

MOLEFONES... On Saturday 11th December Nick Williams will be talking about the practical operation of the Molefone to achieve optimum performance of this important piece of kit. Hunters Lodge Inn, 7:30pm...

BRITISH CAVE RESCUE CONFERENCE... July 8th - 10th 1994 at Eastwater Farm, Priddy. Next year MRO plays host to the biennial British Cave Rescue Council Conference. Many people will be needed to make this event run smoothly and it is hoped the Wardens and Mendip cavers will come forward with offers of help. Dany Bradshaw is the Conference Secretary of the BCRC and can be contacted at 2 Haybridge Villas, Haybridge, Wells, Somerset. Tel: 0749-672848

TO THE WILD MEN OF DENT

We met them in Kingsdale Master Cave, upstream in waist deep water and made our introductions. They had funny names (which caused us some concern). We explained that we were a couple of Aussies who had entered without tackle and were therefore dependent on their ladder for a safe exit. Fortunately they agreed to wait for us at the top of the pitch, so we started our exit (our concerns relieved). When we arrived at the bottom of the pitch, "they" had already climbed up the pitch, pulled the ladder up and were singing Waltzing Matilda (our concerns returned). After some negotiation we convinced them that we really were OK (despite being Australian) so they lowered the ladder and we climbed out. On exit, "they" invited us to cave with them that afternoon, to which we agreed (concerns aside). A stop at the Sun Inn, Dent on a lovely sunny day created reluctance to return to the cold and wet, but after a drink, bravery returned and it was off again to Crystal Cave. Enroute, our party increased to include two adults (??), a young boy and two dogs (two dogs? - our concerns reappeared). Fortunately the promised wet duck was (almost) dry and we (and the dogs) had a most enjoyable trip.

Our thanks to Stuart, Col and Geoff whose hospitality and friendship was much appreciated.

David & Sharon Gwillim

CAN I USE YOUR UNDERPANTS GRANDAD?

by Martin Rowe

In 1994 we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Mendip Caving Group. The year before MCG was formed, "British Caving" - the forerunner to "Caving Practice and Equipment" - was first published, with the stated aim of giving an accurate and detailed account of the technical aspects of caving. If a member of the newly formed MCG had taken British Caving down from the library shelf in 1954, what advice would he have been given? And would that advice be as good today?

In 1954, British Caving stated that ladies vests with ribbon shoulder straps are not suitable for caving. Under garments should be of wool, and should stay in place without repeated adjustment. The caver wears ankle length underpants, half-sleeved vests, bathing trunks, woollen shirt, a pair of shorts or trousers, a long-sleeved and high-necked sweater, waterproof golfing jacket or smock, and one-piece overalls. Provided there is to be no crawling, the woollen underpants can be dispensed with. Overalls should be rolled up during paddling.

Hang on a minute - what if a new member could not afford this high-tech clothing? British Caving has the answer: ask elderly relatives for cast-off woollen underwear, substitute any old jacket for the golfing jacket, and use a discarded raincoat cut off 3 inches above the knees in place of the overalls.

Having acquired his first set of caving clothing, our new member is ready to set off down Swildon's and consults British Caving for advice on keeping dry. He binds his sleeves tightly at the wrist to prevent water from trickling inside, and duly reaches Sump 1. How does he dive the sump but remain dry? Referring to British Caving he is advised to take a change of clothing which should include everything except the overalls. It is worthwhile to include a small towel and to keep all this dry in the innertube of a motor tyre with the ends clamped. (No change there then, man has travelled to the moon and built the channel tunnel but 40 years on we still have the same basic design for a cavers' pig.)

The best footwear is hobnailed boots, preferably old and not watertight so that after paddling they drain naturally. Rope- or felt-soled boots are also excellent. The best head covering is a compressed fibre helmet but a good substitute is a beret or felt hat with crumpled paper packing in the crown. Tin helmets must not be used; if they come off and fall onto anyone the result can be serious.

Lights are of two types: good and bad. Electric lamps work well under water and can be focused if desired. Nife cells are expensive but can be re-charged. Carbide lamps are reasonable in cost but are useless in very wet caves and care must be taken not to burn lifelines. Whatever the type of lamp, spares must be carried; bulbs and batteries or carbide, prickers and jets. Spent carbide should be well buried (so much for conservation). Everyone should carry candles and matches. Users of carbide lamps should carry a torch tied with string to a buttonhole.

In addition to clothing and lighting, our MCG member might wish to take a few sundry items mentioned by British Caving. A karibiner is very useful. Each member is to have his own whistle and two members of the party should carry some string, a pocket knife, a bandage, adhesive dressings and aspirin.

Food should always be carried. For short trips of three or four hours, chocolate, boiled sweets, biscuits and sandwiches will suffice. Over four hours, a good quantity of meat, cheese or jam sandwiches and cake should be added; and for wet excursions, a saucepan and some solid fuel to make hot coffee and heat tinned soup should be packed (no mention of a tin opener!). In an emergency, grate the chocolate bar into a tin of water and heat over five or six candles. British Caving warns against attempting to pack all this into overall pockets - and says to carry a small haversack.

Next month: how to pack a change of clothes, underground kitchen, first aid kit and picnic hamper into a small haversack...