

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 234

JANUARY 1994

THE VIMY RIDGE TUNNELS, NOVEMBER 1993

by Roy Kempston

It was a good opportunity for a short break in Northern France (and a good excuse for a raid on the wine, beer and food shops of the area). We arrived in Calais on Friday, the day after Armistice Day. The French still commemorate the 11th November and have a public holiday. However, on Remembrance Sunday, being British, we decided that it was appropriate to mark the 75th anniversary of the end of the First World War with a visit to one of the large battlefields and cemeteries of the era.

I had heard of Vimy Ridge from films and books, and this was only about 80km away (concession to France!) and clearly marked on the Michelin map with "Memorial Canadien", this was the selected destination. As a diversion, on the way to the Arras area we visited a battlefield of earlier years, Agincourt. I've seen the film (both Olivier's and the more recent Brannagh version), and read the book (Henry V for O Level English Lit), but had never been to the site. There was a small museum (now I've seen the video) and tour at the site and in driving rain a very quick visit was made to the two memorials to the battle fought on October 25th 1415. (England 1, France 0).

The weather had not improved much by the time we reached Vimy, except that because it was a ridge the rain was tending a lot more to the horizontal. After collecting a guide from the kiosk (noting that the young attendant was himself a Canadian) and taking brief shelter from the elements, we noted on the map a reference to "Trenches and Tunnels". The memorial at Vimy does not only mark the battle that took place here in April 1917, but is also the monument to all the Canadians who died in the First World War. It is quite a moving experience to walk around the twin 80m towers carved from 6000 tonnes of limestone from Yugoslavia, which stand on the highest part of the ridge, itself only 61m above Douai Plain. The 11285 names carved on the monument are those who have no known grave, and it is easy to see why, because all around the ground is still pock marked with the depressions of mine-craters, shell-holes and mounds with metal and concrete bits penetrating the grassy veneer. It all has a very gruffy appearance, and there are warnings of unexploded shells all round.

Some of the sand-bagged trenches (part of the honeycomb of multi-level tunnels and trenches here in wartime) have been restored and preserved and can be visited, but if you want to visit the tunnels a ticket for one of tours is required. The tour party assembled in the moist gathering gloom close to an insignificant looking staircase which descended to a locked steel gate. At the appointed time the young Canadian guide unlocked the door and led us down the stairs. The tunnelers cut out 12 subways, a total of 5km long, 9m or more deep under the chalky ground, with the Great Grange Subway over 750m long. The tunnels were electrically lit and were one of the great engineering feats of the War. They allowed the infantry to move under cover to the front line, much closer to their objectives. The subways also permitted the wounded to be brought back under shelter and provided a secure route for communications.

The tour takes in some of the main tunnels, side passages, sleeping chambers, offices and communications rooms. Many artefacts are still in place and others have been collected together at convenient locations. It's all very interesting and shows a very different range of mining (in both interpretations of the word) operations. The tour we went on was given in French, but English ones are also available. The guide quickly realised we were not that fluent in French and filled in a little between tour stops.

The day we went to Vimy was the last opening of the tunnels until the spring, but it has to be remembered that the whole site is a memorial and not a commercial venture, the place is quite sombre and no entrance fees are charged. The battle that took place here marked a turning point in the war, but it's difficult to regard it as a victory over the Germans when the losses are so great.

++++ MCG 1994 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
05 Feb	Mendip	Rescue Practice	John Crowsley	0272-652585
05 Mar	Mendip	Archaeology walk	Yvonne Rowe	0252-872006
05 Mar	Mendip	Reservoir Hole	Geoff Beale	0734-722510
23 Apr	Mendip	ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING	Joan Goddard	0608-810382
23 Apr	Mendip	40th Anniversary Dinner	Arthur Spain	0749-679358
08 Jul - 10 Jul	Mendip	BCRA Rescue Conference		
Summer 94	France	Alps Expedition	TBA	

Accommodation in Yorks & S.Wales can be booked by through the relevant cottage warden:

Yorkshire	Northern Pennine Club	Pat O'Connell	0729-822014
South Wales	South Wales Caving Club	Janice Richards	0985 219111

1994 ANNUAL DINNER - CROSSWAYS, NORTH WOOTON

The MCG's 40th Anniversary Dinner will be at The Crossways, North Wooton on Saturday, April 23rd. Would anyone who has contact with a past member and has their telephone number or address please contact Arthur Spain on 0749-679358.

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.

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 accommodation	£15.00
		25 nights accommodation	£30.00
ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:	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		



SECRETARY	JOAN GODDARD	tel: 0608-810382
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TREASURER	MARTIN ROWE	tel: 0252-872006
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WAITANGI,	LONG LANE,	DINDER, SOMERSET, BA5 3PQ

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
 MALCOLM COTTER 07842-52643
 PHIL INGOLD 0442-242029



ON THE MOVE

Kat Kaufmann 26a Melrose Ave, Willesden Green, London, NW2 4JS tel: 081-450-9787
Dave Tooke 16 Munden Grove, Watford, Herts, WD2 5EE tel: 0923-238781
Louise Curley 10 Sonning Bdns, Hampton, Middx, TW12 3PL tel: 081-979-2587

New or corrected telephone numbers:
 Lee Ferris tel: 081-889-4961
 Stephen Porter tel: 0934-515686
 Pete Bulling tel: 0903-235431
 Barrie Whitehead tel: 0458-273912

CONGRATULATIONS...

...to Joe Frampton, now a full member.
 ...to Richard Thornton who has been accepted as a probationary member.

APPLICATIONS...

...for probationary membership have been received from:

Pete O'Rourke 1 Boulders Ct, Maybank Av, Wembley, Middx HA0 2SY tel: 081-904-2174 (Prop: C Allison, J Goddard)

Peter Moseley Pendle Cottage, Mearway, Westhay, Nr Glastonbury, Somerset tel: 0458-860524 (Prop: G Beale, M Carson)

Gordon Woodall 37 Elizabeth Way, Bridgewater, Somerset, TA6 4NN Tel: 0278-421802 (Prop: G Beale, M Carson)

These applications will be considered at the committee meeting on 5th February.

EARWIG...

...in on the committee meeting held 8.01.94... Jon Roberts to be a Custodian Trustee when Ron Saunders retires, at AGM if legal formalities completed... Rescue practice: more volunteers needed to make this a worthwhile exercise for those taking part and for Phil... Mr Brown planning to repair the Pinetree gate... Committee considering BCRA public liability insurance; Bristol Waterworks not automatically covered but premium of £5 per cave will indemnify landowner; valid worldwide except USA; includes accidents caused by bang; costs 75p per member, total £90 compared to £437 with Eagle Star... rescue keys now in glass-fronted box, to be kept in library... Upper Flood: process started to obtain permission to dig 2nd entrance; will take time as many official bodies involved.

1994 SUBS DUE

Many thanks to all those who have already paid - your Membership Card and new cottage key are enclosed with this newsletter. If you haven't yet paid, remember that the new lock is effective from 5th February!

EXPEDITION LAMPS

Kev West has asked for all the Group's carbide lamps and generators to be returned so he can service them before 1994's caving expeditions. 1993's trips are long since gone so the lamps should have been returned to Kev. He expects requests for these lamps to be coming in soon so please return them to him (or a committee member) ASAP.

LIBRARY ADDITION

Published in 1984 but new to the library is "The Great Caving Adventure" by Martyn Farr. It has been kindly donated by Roger Wallington. (ed: he didn't get two copies for Xmas, did he?)

OLD PHOTOS

Have you got any interesting old photos of the Group? If you have, Joan Goddard would like to display them at the MCG 40th Dinner. They can be serious or humorous but should be to do with past MCG activities, events, or members. They should be carefully labelled with names, places and dates on the back, and of course with your name and address so they can be returned after the event.

1994 MEETS

Geoff Beale has arranged another trip for RESERVOIR HOLE on 5th March. As usual it will be a night trip (8pm-ish) and will cost £1. This is a leader only cave (Geoff being MCG's leader) with a maximum party size of five, including Geoff. There are only two places left so if you would like a trip down this amazing cave then contact Geoff quickly on 0734-722510. (See article on p8.)

YV'S DROPPINGS

BP: "This waste problem... I'm getting it at both ends!"

JM: "I'm going to admire your big one later."

TF: "They ran into a flock of bats... er... I mean a block of flats."

DV: "There's no point poking it through... you've got open the hole up first."

YW: "You two are getting far too technical with me tonight!"

TIENSHAN - CONTINUED

by Mike Haselden

Ed: In newsletter 233, Mike and Sue had returned to Base Camp in the Karakol Valley, and to an improvised sauna. The adventure continues with the final trek.

The next morning we set off on the final trek, this time heading up the Karakol valley. The purity of the air, the warmth of the sun, the serenity of the valley and many other intangible qualities made this morning seem perfect.

With our bodies restored the going was almost effortless. At first the gradient was easy. We crossed the river at the usual improvised log bridge then passed through fragrant woods and, as the trees receded, lush meadowlands went on in the distant valley. Here herdsmen tended their flocks. One could not help thinking about these nomads whose lives are so unlike ours. We stopped for lunch on the shores of a small tranquil lake and some of us were lured into its clear water. It was icy cold but the warm embrace of the sun combined to make one feel pleasantly stimulated.

After lunch the snowcapped Mt. Karakol came into view. The lush ground gave way to a barren landscape of crushed rock slopes to either side of the half mile wide alluvial plain left in the wake of the receding glacier. The river snaked its way down the plain, forming many random oxbows, and the rapid flowing water carried tons of fine grit giving it the colour of the local rocks. These water borne minerals would be deposited along the valleys all the way to Lake Issyk-kul. We were witnessing geology in creation.

We had to ford the many branches of the icy river and scramble up steep boulder slopes. Each time I crossed a stream my legs felt like icicles about to snap at any moment. We then reached the moraine. This was a formidable obstacle indeed with huge boulders heaved up in all directions to impede our passage. By now the altitude, the heavy packs and the rough ground took their toll with the onset of fatigue. On an isolated patch of boggy grass, between the glacier and a ridge of boulders, we set up camp with the imposing mass of Mt. Karakol towering above us.

The following day we attempted a nearby peak but, on the final approach, were thwarted by very steep ice and rock. This would have required technical climbing, which we were not geared up for. Then an accident resulting from a rock fall on John, who received a bruised and gashed leg, was an apt warning to us all. We retreated safely back to camp.

Later that day I embarked on a solo excursion of the area. I strolled up to the head of the valley and the very birth place of the glacier. Here millions of tons of snow, ice and boulders cascade down the almost sheer mountain slopes every year. I felt like an alien in another world. There was a strange silence interrupted only by the distant faint sound of melt water flow. Occasionally the ice would give a deep cracking tone as it millimetred its way down towards the moraine. In the fading light of evening I returned to camp with the richness of the experience etched in my soul.

We awoke the next morning to the sound of rain drumming on our tent. Because of the poor weather conditions the group was in disagreement over our route. Some wanted to stay put until the weather improved, others wanted to return the way we had come, and the rest of us wanted to go on over the pass and down the next valley. Eventually we agreed to go on over the next pass. As we were about to set off a break in the clouds came over and a bright sky soon cheered every one up. There was no more doubt about the route.

After a short scramble over a boulder ridge we came to the snow covered glacier. There is no particular difficulty in walking along a glacier but the fear of being swallowed by a deep crevasse made me feel glad to follow in the steps of the mountain guide. Even so, at times we would sink up to our thighs in the snow. We arrived at the end of the glacier only to be confronted by a high and steep boulder slope to the top of a coll. From the top the view was of another and bigger glacier with countless peaks flanking either side of the valley, all of them feeding the huge expanse of snow and ice.

We kept following the steps of the Russians without deviation until, on the approach of the moraine, there was no snow cover, just ice. Rivulets started to form and the ice became slush in places. The end of the glacier was surprisingly sudden, like a truncated wall of rock and ice.

With the glacier behind us, and the loss of height, the valley soon became green and fertile. We saw a herd of wild horses. There were sheep and goats and other signs of civilisation. Much further down the valley we came to an isolated tent dwelling, lived in by a Kyrghyzi family. They offered us their home-made cheese and liquid yogurt.

We crossed the roaring river over a log bridge. The water splashed over the timbers and made them very slippery. Unknown to us at the time, this was where one of the Russians, who was ahead of us, fell in the river but, thankfully, managed to scramble out before being swept away to certain death. He did, however, lose one of his walking poles and received a blow to his head and a few scratches.

It was late into the evening when we finally made it back to base camp to enjoy the delights of our Russian host's cooking, with the personal satisfaction of having accomplished the traverse of a remote mountain pass in the heart of Asia.

There was heavy rain again during our last night at base camp and, although it had eased off by morning, we had to endure striking camp between showers. We were all surprised to see the truck arrive on time and then there was a frenzy of activity. All the tents, equipment, personal gear and the remains of supplies were loaded, the refuse and latrine pits were backfilled and graded over and the whole camp area cleaned and restored back to nature.

As I stood bouncing in the rear of the truck looking back at the receding scene of our base camp in the beautiful valley of Karakol, I felt slightly sad at leaving all this behind me.

At the town of Karakol we transferred to a coach of the formerly described variety and drove to the north of Lake Issyk-kul. There on the shores of the lake, we camped for a couple of nights in a local "holiday complex". This may sound idyllic but the standards of this peasant country left a lot to be desired, and I for one was not enamoured with Issyk-kul. On the credit side, though, we did enjoy swimming and visiting the local town with its incredibly poor dwellings, shops and market.

This part of the trip was at least educational but I would have preferred to have spent the time in those magnificent mountains. Not that it was of any consequence at the time, but Issyk-kul has the geographical interest of being the second highest navigable lake in the world, second to Lake Titicata in South America. (I must go there one day).

Apart from the wilderness, my brief encounter with the Soviets has made a marked impression on me which I can best sum up with these inadequate words:

The Russians we met had qualities of friendship and generosity which have to be admired. I am saddened when I think of the half century they have wasted time in arming themselves against the west. Such a vast country with so many resources, inhabited by basically sound people, and all they have to show for it is apathy, depression and poverty; but they can fire an ICBM!

For the full version of this article on the expedition, or details of "High Places" who organise these fabulous trips, contact Mike and Susan on 0703-464491

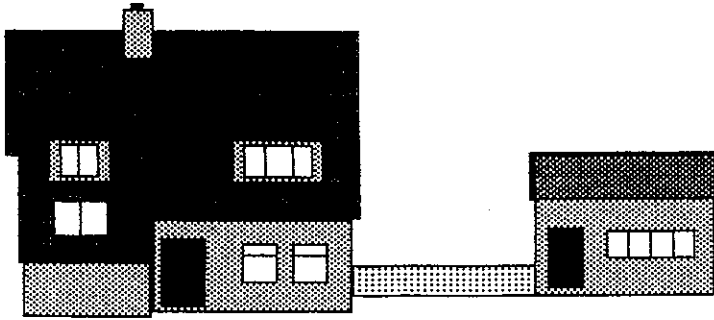
APPEAL — BP OPTION VOUCHERS

Since the last day of 1993, BP Oil is no longer issuing their Option Vouchers for all fuel and oil purchases made at their garage forecourts. If any members who had collected them previously, and have any left which they are unable to redeem, would you please not destroy them, but pass them on to the Group.

Remember, for every 75 Option Vouchers, the Group may be able to collect a £5.50 Voucher that could be used to purchase items that will be useful for the cottage, from selected retail outlets.

Send any surplus Option Vouchers to a committee member or to Geoff Beale, 30 Churchill Crescent, Sonning Common, Nr Reading, RG4 9RX. The expiry date for redeeming these Option Vouchers is March 1994, so act today.

(Ed: perhaps this could be permanent feature, with members collecting all kinds of vouchers, not just BP? So start collecting now, and pass all your vouchers on to Geoff or a committee member.)



COTTAGE BOOKINGS

28 Jan-29 Jan	Westminster School	(12)
04 Feb-05 Feb	Members' Weekend	
11 Feb-12 Feb	Hull University	(6)
12 Feb-17 Feb	BTCV	(12)
18 Feb-19 Feb	Cave & Crag	(20)
22 Feb-25 Feb	Navy	(12)
04 Mar-05 Mar	Members' Weekend	
07 Mar-10 Mar	Navy	(20)
11 Mar-12 Mar	Osterley Sea Scouts	(12)
18 Mar-19 Mar	Chris Whittle (member)	(15)
01 Apr-04 Apr	Members' Weekend (Easter)	
22 Apr-23 Apr	AGM/Dinner	(filling)
08 Jul-10 Jul	BCRA Rescue Conference	(12)

MIXING IN SHOWERS

For reasons explained in an earlier newsletter, the mixer tap for the showers (located under the stairs) must not be altered if the showers run cold. Whether there are a lot of members at the cottage or not, it is a better idea to keep the boost switch (in the kitchen) on all day. It will then automatically trip in when needed, ie. when the hot water begins to run out. (It will not trip in if the water is already hot or no great demand is made on it.) Members are therefore requested to a) turn on the shower boost each morning and b) to turn the boost off if you know that no more hot water will be required that day (eg Sunday afternoon).

SMASHING TIME!

Any member damaging, or finding damaged, any "fixture or fitting" belonging to the Group is requested to inform a committee member first before disposal. You won't get a ticking off - it is merely to prevent the unnecessary disposal of items that might be repaired or cleaned, or to allow the committee to order replacements when a repair isn't possible. (This does not mean that every plate or light bulb that gets broken has to be reported, only the more expensive or permanent items.)

RUBBISH!

Due to substantial increases in cost, the Cleanaway contract has been terminated. The Cleanaway bin will remain until the contract expires in April when we will revert to the old system of bins and poly bags.

NEW COTTAGE ACCESS

The "Cotag" Access Control System for the cottage is now installed and will be operational from 5th February. To gain access to the cottage you will need a "Cotag" card which is credit card sized. This is an active, low frequency transponder, containing a microchip which stores the card number (there are 9,200,000,000,000,000 possible numbers). The card is powered by a miniature lithium cell which typically lasts 8 years in daily use - a special signal is sent by the card as the cell approaches the end of its useful life. A reading head transmits a low frequency radio signal to the card which is normally dormant, only becoming active when within 10cms of the reading head. The number stored on the card is then transmitted back to the reading head and on to a control panel. If the card is valid, the control panel releases an electronic lock. In case of mains power failure, there is a three month battery back-up. The control panel is programmable, allowing lost cards to be deleted, cards retained by former members to be deleted, or cards issued to guests to be valid on certain dates only. Although cards are robust, there are a few "don't's" to be observed. Don't let the card get too hot - eg. if left in a car on a sunny day. Don't let the card get wet and especially not submerged. Don't bend the card and take care not to sit on it in your pocket. Don't use any solvents to clean the card.

So, how do you get into the cottage? The card reader is in the electricity meter box by the front door, the exact location has been marked by a black rectangle the size of your card. Present the face of your card within 10cms of this rectangle and the electric lock will release. You can then enter the cottage using your existing full or probationary members key, remembering that the electric lock only remains open when the card is being read. The system should be 100% reliable. However, until it is proven, no change will be made to the side door. If you are unable to gain access at the front door, then use the side door and REPORT THE PROBLEM TO A COMMITTEE MEMBER. There is also a manual override key on the electronic lock so that in an emergency the keyholder can bypass the Access Control System. This key will be held by Arthur Spain, to be requested ONLY in the unlikely event that both the access system fails and the side door will not open with a normal key. If you forget your "Cotag" card, do not call Arthur out - do the same as when you forgot your old key - either wait for another member to turn up or go down the pub for a while.

1994 MCG ARCHAEOLOGY WALK

by Yvonne Rowe

This will take place on Saturday 5th March, 1994 (member's weekend). The walk will take in mostly the Charterhouse area but from Blackrock Gate we will walk down Cheddar Gorge to include a few interesting but rarely visited and difficult to reach (don't worry, we won't try!) archaeological caves and rock shelters. Then a pub for a well earned drink, and bar meal if you wish.

As you will probably have gathered, we will require two or three volunteers to take their cars to Cheddar prior to the walk for the return journey (unless of course you feel up to walking back!). Alternatively, you can return to the cottage from Blackrock Gate and simply miss the pub... Good heavens! What am I suggesting?

01. Ancient Enclosure	Nether Wood	Period unknown
02. Roman Fort	Charterhouse	Roman
03. Enclosure	Charterhouse	Roman
04. Iscalis Roman Settlement (Town Field)	Charterhouse	Roman
05. Roman Road	Charterhouse	Roman
06. Raines Batch Earthwork	Charterhouse	Medieval
07. Ampitheatre	Charterhouse	Roman
08. Gorsey Bigbury Henge	Longwood	Neolithic/Bronze Age
09. Black Rock Drive	Black Rock	Very old
10. Bone Hole (Mr Long's Cave)	Cheddar Gorge	Bronze Age
11. Sow's Hole	Cheddar Gorge	Iron Age
12. Pigs's Hole	Cheddar Gorge	Iron Age
13. Cooper's Hole	Cheddar Gorge	Iron Age
13. Soldier's Hole	Cheddar Gorge	Palaeo/Neolithic
14. Sun Hole	Cheddar Gorge	Palaeo/Neolithic
15. Gough's Cave	Cheddar Gorge	Palaeolithic
16. Long Hole	Cheddar Gorge	Roman
17. Old Gough's Cave	Cheddar Gorge	Iron Age/Roman
18. Saye's Hole	Cheddar Gorge	Iron Age
19. Flint Jack's Cave	Cheddar Gorge	Palaeolithic

20. Drunkard's Other Hole... alias *THE PUB!*

As usual you would be best advised to wear waterproof boots and clothes, and although this walk is not as long as others, you still need to take a packed lunch.

NAMHO FIELD MEET 5-8 AUG 94, FOREST OF DEAN

The National Association of Mining History Organisations field meet will be held this year in the mines of the Royal Forest of Dean. There will be a large variety of underground trips for all abilities and several surface visits to mining related sites.

Iron mining has occurred in the Forest of Dean since the early Iron Age (2,700 years ago) and ended with the Second World War. In the years between, an intriguing and extensive series of workings have been created. This is a good opportunity to choose a range of visits to these mines and to see some of the recent new discoveries.

A visit to a working Forest of Dean Freemine is also planned, which will be an unusual opportunity to go underground into a unique type of coalmine.

The event is to be co-hosted by the Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club, Gloucester Speleological Society, Hades Caving Club, and Clearwell Caves. On the Saturday night there will be a Pig Roast and Social at the Rising Sun, Moseley Green, where there will also be a slide and video show throughout the evening.

Registration is on the Friday night or Saturday morning, at Clearwell Caves. Camping and other accommodation is available nearby, details will be sent with booking forms.

For information and booking forms, send an A4 SAE to:

J Hine, The Grottage (*Ed. no, it's not a spelling mistake!*), 2 Cullis Lane, Mile End, Coleford, Gloucestershire, GL16 7QF

RESERVOIR HOLE, CHEDDAR

by Yvonne Rowe

After a short scramble through undergrowth up the side of Cheddar Gorge, we came to a small hole blocked with what I can only describe as looking like a Medieval instrument of torture. Instead of the usual metal gate there was this vaguely star-shaped, evil-looking, jagged metal "thing". It was mid-evening and there were bats flying about so I can only assume it was thus shaped to allow them to pass in and out of the cave (anything bigger trying to get through would end up shredded!). The "thing" was locked in place with a padlock onto a big vertically placed eyebolt in the floor which, as the entrance was quite small, caused the largest of our party some considerable discomfort (or was it pleasure?) as he squeezed through. His belly button is now a long belly slot and his voice is a little higher!

Once inside, the small entrance passage slopes down to a junction where we turned right to Moonmilk Chamber which was lovely and sparkly in our lights. After about 60ft, the top of a vertical drop between boulders was reached. The 120ft descent through these boulders landed us in a small flat-roofed chamber. A short stretch of rift passage and a short climb down took us to Grand Gallery - a fascinating passage of rectangular cross-section. The walls look almost man-built with blocks of limestone of varying depths lying in neat horizontal bands. This area is 20ft wide, 10ft high and takes a small stream for about 200ft until it disappears at a choke.

The way on took us to Topless Aven which is about 60ft high. We went upslope to a well-decorated grotto which had a chain "handline" along one wall to prevent cavers from slipping on the greasy floor into the stal formations. We then climbed up from beneath large slabs to gain entry into Great Aven - the most awe-inspiring thing I've seen in a Mendip cave. It is a wide rift developed along a fault and rises to an unknown height. As we walked up the rift it got steeper until we reached a vertical scramble over boulders with a fixed handline for assistance. A couple of us stopped at the foot of these boulders as we felt the climb was too exposed but the others who clambered up said that the view back down the rift was breathtaking. Also, slickensides could be seen on the left hand wall across a void in the boulder floor. They went on until they reached a 25ft fixed ladder, a final climb of 30ft and H.E. Balch's stalagmite group.

On our return and almost at the exit, we all waited while our larger friend re-lived the pleasures of the vertical eyebolt. As we lay in the small entrance passage we became aware of lots of plum-sized cocoons hanging from the roof. Then as we looked around we found we were surrounded by a large number of big, black, shiny spiders - easily as big as "plughole" spiders. They didn't bother me too much but Martin was getting paler and paler and his breathing was becoming very rapid. I think if he had been there much longer we might have had a crisis on our hands. He exited extremely quickly!

This cave is truly remarkable and quite unlike anything else I've seen on Mendip. It was so unexpected that I need to go down again just to take it all in properly. Next time I will take a 20ft ladder to make the ascent up the first handline assisted climb in Great Aven easier and safer. It was a bit too exposed for my liking.

Reservoir Hole has controlled access and is a leader only cave, the MCG leader being Geoff Beale. You will also require a valid CCC permit. No daytime trips are allowed - we went in at 8:00pm and exited at about 11:30pm but it was worth missing the pub for.

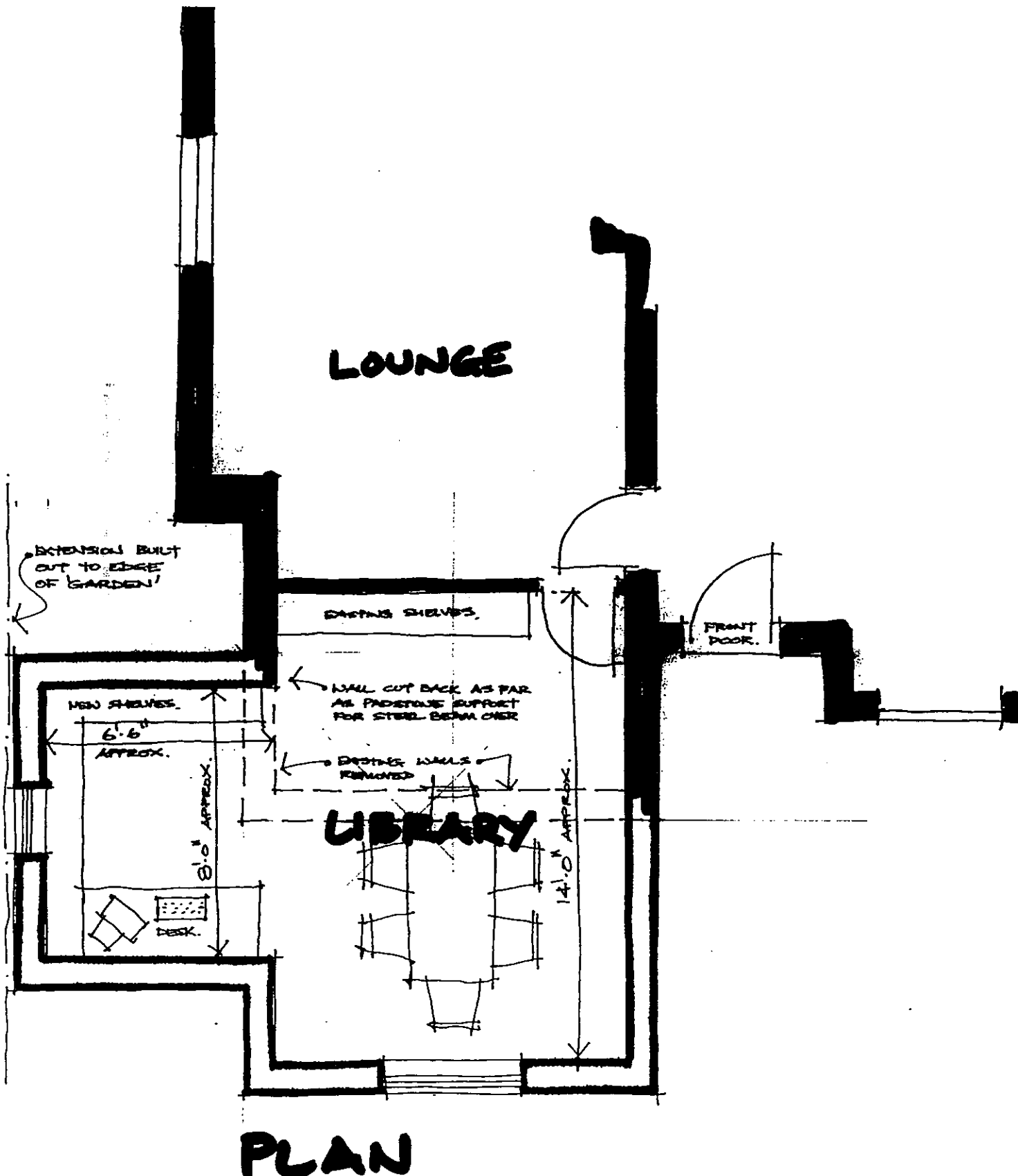
ARE BRITISH CAVERS AT RISK FROM RADON GAS?

The joys of "potholing" - as Britons call messing about in caves like Gaping Gill Hole - may mean hazardous exposure to radon for cavers who spend a great deal of time at their hobby. Radon, a gas created by the radioactive decay of radium, seeps naturally from rocks and soil and has been found to accumulate in basements. Long-term exposure to high concentrations can cause lung cancer. A year-long survey of 40 British caves by University of Huddersfield geographers found an average radon level nearly 15 times higher than the maximum safe exposure recommended for homes by the British government. Ventilating fans have been installed in some caverns to disperse radon, and potholers are warned by caving associations to limit their time in certain caves. In the US, Jeanne Gurnee, president of the National Speleological Society, says, "We have conducted radon studies, as has the National Park Service. The study has found no problem in caves with natural ventilation, unless a person spends extended periods of time down under."

National Geographic, May 1993

MCG LIBRARY EXTENSION DRAWINGS

Roger Wallington has now produced drawings for a single storey library extension with a pitched roof. The extension is shown in plan here, and full drawings with elevations can be seen at the cottage, or at the Eclipse on Thursdays (sometimes). The next stage is to obtain planning consent, after which building can commence. The AGM agreed to commit up to £10,000 to the project, which is enough to include having some skilled work, such as plastering, done for us.



ACCESS TALKS

There have been 2 proposals put forward by the Mendip Warden and the Burrington Commoners:

1. Goatchurch - to close the Goatchurch carpark to discourage the tipping / dumping of rubbish and cars being broken into whilst leaving possible access for rescue purposes, etc.

2. Fox's Hole - due to problems there, eg. the disposing of hypodermic needles, it is suggested that the site be gated. Access will be available to cavers on some sort of key basis. Gating will also allow undisturbed and free access to the roosting bats that have been seen there. If there are no objections, these plans are likely to come into operation in the new year. Comments are welcome and should be addressed to Les Davis, Mendip Warden Service, Charterhouse Centre, Charterhouse, Somerset.

BEWARE !

Cars are now being broken into on Priddy Green! Don't leave anything valuable in the car and if possible have somebody stay with the car while you are underground. Unfortunately this applies to *all* the caving areas on Mendip.

CHEDDAR GORGE

The Gorge has been closed for a month to motor vehicles during operations to remove loose rocks from the Cliffs.

THERE IT WAS GONE!

If anyone discovers that they have accidentally picked up a black poly bag with a wetsuit in from the barn on Priddy Green (an easy enough mistake - one black poly bag looks much like another), could they please contact Les Horton from Weymouth on 0305-761118.

CALCIFIED ADS

Ads found in a US caving magazine:

American caving helmet-
Comfo-cap \$19.90
Chin strap \$ 3.25 extra

New club for gay cavers...
...join Lavender Cavers

Spare bottom \$7.70
(with lid)

Found in a Sunday magazine:

New York has a free 24-hour pothole telephone line: 1800 POTHLES

STOP PRESS

Boulders are on the move in Pinetree Pot. The large boulder on the traverse to the dig at the top of Pine Pitch is now at the bottom of the pitch. It has been joined by the boulder used as a backup belay for Pine Pitch?! Bolts will now be needed.

ARCHAEO / SPELAEO SPEAK

An occasional series comparing entries in the Archaeological dictionary with their Spelaeological equivalents.

Archaeo

DEMOTIC: The term "demotic" has been adopted by modern scholars to describe a form of cursive script (letters that run together) used by the Ancient Egyptians. The script is engraved on the Rosetta Stone. The vast majority of our demotic texts are legal documents and official and private letters. In general, elegance has been sacrificed to speed, especially in documents; but the finest hands have rhythm and dignity.

Archaeo

ROBBER TRENCH: A word used in excavation to describe a feature created by the robbing of its original filling material. A good excavator should be able to reconstruct a plan of the original structure from careful examination and recording of the robber trenches.

Archaeo

CAVE DEPOSITS: Scree, breccia and stalagmites are common in caves.

Spelaeo

DEMOTIC: The term "demotic" has been adopted by modern scholars to describe a form of cursive script (letters that run together) as used by the MCG membership. The script is engraved in the MCG Log Book. The vast majority of MCG demotic texts are committee documents and Log Book entries. In general, elegance has been sacrificed to speed, especially in the Log Book; but the finest hands have rhythm and dignity.

Spelaeo

ROBBER TRENCH: A word used in excavation to describe a poached dig created by another club robbing its original filling material. A good excavator should be able to reconstruct a survey of the original dig from careful examination and recording of the poached dig trenches.

Spelaeo

CAVE DEPOSITS: Mars wrappers, carbide and neoprene are common in caves.