

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 239

JULY 1994

PROGRESS AT UPPER FLOOD

SURVEY Further work has been done at the upstream limit of Black Shale Rift to try and improve the surface location of Rip-Off Aven. We began with a quick survey of the aven to get a good estimate of the depth we need to dig. The aven was measured, and found to be about 9m high. Lee was then brought in to do a levelling operation on the surface, which revealed that there is a closure error of 170cm. A better location of the aven was called for. Tim, Joe and Chris were dispatched into Upper Flood to try and achieve a sound connection with the surface. At 2.45pm we hammered wildly on the roof of the aven. The surface team of Malcolm, Richard, Joel et al, immediately heard our blows. At the same time they thumped on the shakehole floor with a hefty piece of pipe. We heard muffled thuds in the cave, and estimated the surface team to be above and to the left. Eight skip loads of water were then tipped into the shakehole. After a few minutes time lag this reappeared in the cave but not in Rip-Off Aven as had been predicted. The water emerged from a rift at the base of the aven. These pieces of evidence suggest that the aven is slightly off-set from the shakehole; to the left if you are looking at the track. We dug through a tight, muddy squeeze to enter the rift where the water emerged. The way on is heavily choked and further progress would be difficult. Interestingly, a good draught entered the top of Rip-Off Aven. This had not been felt on previous occasions, and was present before the water was tipped into the shakehole. There may be some link with the leat water which sinks less than 10m away. Joe made a body-length of progress at the bottom of the aven by throwing a few boulders around. We'll be back to investigate further. Timothy Francis

NEW ENTRANCE Because of the archaeological history of the area we are required to obtain Scheduled Monument Consent from the Department of National Heritage BEFORE any work is done. To undertake any work before then would be a criminal offence. Using a Hymac would not be acceptable. Yvonne Rowe has prepared a draft scheme for the archaeological excavation of the shakehole, and Lee Hawkswell has prepared a draft proposal for the construction of the new entrance. Joan Goddard

ARCHAEOLOGY The following method of excavation is proposed:

PRE-ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION RESEARCH Documentary references (such as UBSS Proceedings, Victoria Somerset County History, Wells Library/Museum, Somerset Sites and Monuments Record, Bristol Museum/Library) will be examined for archaeological references to the site. Much work has already been carried out by archaeological bodies such as UBSS in Velvet Bottom, and will give an indication of what to expect during the archaeological excavation. This research will be completed by March 95.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK Work will be carried out in accordance with "Responsibility and Safeguards in Archaeological Excavation, 1972, ed: PJ Fowler." Public Liability Insurance will be provided by the Mendip Caving Group. The site will be fenced off in March 95 in preparation for archaeological excavation. To protect the site, shelter will be provided in the case of adverse weather. Turf and spoil will be stored temporarily in suitable containers and will be used to refill and returf the shakehole after the new cave entrance has been completed. Archaeological excavation of the shakehole will take place between 08 April 95 and 14 April 95. Work will be halted if any significant artefacts (such as pigs of lead, coins, human remains, jewellery etc.) are found so that relevant experts may be called in to examine the site. A site grid will be established before work begins, and a drawing frame will be used to record finds. After removing the turf by spade, the soil will be trowelled for large artefacts. All soil removed will then be sieved (5mm mesh) for smaller items. Sections and plans will be made at each stage of the archaeological excavation. Finds will be removed, numbered, photographed and referenced as found. Fragile finds will be photographed and drawn carefully before lifting. Context record cards will be used to record finds, and a site notebook kept detailing a brief day-to-day account of work in progress, observations, etc.

ANALYSIS AND REPORT Analysis of finds will follow the archaeological excavation. A report of the archaeological excavation will be published in the Mendip Caving Group Journal or a relevant archaeological publication. Copies of the report will be made available to interested parties, and copies will be placed in Bristol City Library and Wells Library. Finds will be offered to a suitable body such as Wells Museum, UBSS Museum or Bristol Museum. Yvonne Rowe

NORDRACH COTTAGE BOOKINGS

NIGHTS	GROUP	SIZE	NIGHTS	GROUP	SIZE
29 Jul-30 Jul	G.S. EXILES	12	04 Nov-05 Nov	MEMBERS' WEEKEND	
05 Aug-06 Aug	MEMBERS' WEEKEND		02 Dec-03 Dec	MEMBERS' WEEKEND	
02 Sep-03 Sep	MEMBERS' WEEKEND		30 Dec-01 Jan	MEMBERS' NEW YEAR PARTY	
07 Oct-08 Oct	MEMBERS' WEEKEND				

1994 MEETS PROGRAMME

DATE	AREA	MAIN EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
05 Aug-08 Aug	Forest of Dean	NAMHD Field Meet	Yvonne Rowe	0252-872006
14 Aug	South Wales	Ogof Craig a Ffynnon	Geoff Beale	0734-722510
20 Aug-03 Sep	France	Alps Expedition	Tim Francis	081-876-1863
17 Sep-18 Sep	Newport, Shrops	BCRA Conference	Tim Francis	081-876-1863
05 Nov	Mendip	Half-Yearly Forum	Joan Goddard	0608-810382
05 Nov	Mendip	Barn Dance	Arthur Spain	0749-679358
03 Dec	Mendip	Reservoir Hole	Geoff Beale	0734-722510

MENDIP CAVING GROUP - CAVE LEADERS

DAN-YR-OGOF		OGOF FFYNNON DDU I	
Geoff Beale	0734-722510	Geoff Barton	0932-849241
John Beauchamp	0761-463143	Geoff Beale	0734-722510
Ian McKechnie	0932-228292	John Miriam	081-393-3955
John Miriam	081-393-3955	ST. CUTHBERT'S	
Roger Wallington	0753-433841	John Beauchamp	0761-463143
CHARTERHOUSE CAVE		Malcolm Cotter	07842-52643
Charlie Allison	081-393-5910	RESERVOIR HOLE	
Nick Gilson	0934-417697	Geoff Beale	0734-722510

Accommodation in Yorks & Sth. Wales can be booked through the relevant cottage warden:
 Yorkshire Northern Pennine Club Pat O'Connell 0729-822014
 South Wales South Wales Caving Club Gary Vaughan 0202-679602

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
 Tel: 0761-462797 Grid Ref ST51475606 OS 1:50,000 sheet 182

COTTAGE INFORMATION: Through the cottage warden please (address and tel. no. below)

COTTAGE BOOKINGS: MCG members, member's children, SWCC and NPC £1.50

COTTAGE FEES per night: 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



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10 ENSTONE ROAD, CHARLBURY, OXFORD, OX7 3QR	
TREASURER MARTIN ROWE	tel: 0252-872006
10 GREENLEAS CLOSE, YATELEY, CAMBERLEY, SURREY, GU17 7SL	
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30 CHURCHILL CRESCENT, SONNING COMMON, NEAR READING, RG4 9RX	
COTTAGE WARDEN LEE HAWKESWELL	tel: 0923-819103
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 * MCG SHOP
 * AUDITORS

NAME TELEPHONE
 JOHN CROWSLEY 0272-652585
 TIM FRANCIS 081-876-1863
 WAYNE HISCOX 0749-672081x2213
 SEE ANY COMMITTEE MEMBER
 BRYAN TERRY AND DAVE TOOKE

MCG

doings

ON THE MOVE Joe Frampton has moved (again!) to 75A Highfield Park, Wargrave, Berks RG10 8LB Tel 0734-404861

WELCOME to Joyce Dines and Jeremy Gilson, accepted as probationary members

EARWIG in on the committee meeting held 2-7-94... Cottage Extension: Roger Wallington to produce detailed floor plans so that footings can be started. No grant for library extension as yet, committee to look to other charities for help... BCRA Public Liability Insurance: contains a cross liability clause; also covers BCRA members or clubs belonging to BCRA; plus product liability; policy specifically mentions caving; already used by CCC clubs and members, MCG apparently the only CCC member not using it; cost around 75p per member; policy being checked before committing MCG to it... Journal: is being proof read; committee felt each article should then be passed to original author for final proof reading... Group Videos: Two of the Group's videos have been returned. Group to purchase Andy Sparrow's caver training videos (Cave Safe 1-3) for library... GB Access: Bristol Water do not have to sell to a conservation body as was first thought. Possible suggestions put to steering committee are a) a 99yr lease for CCC from Somerset Trust; b) joint purchase by cavers and Somerset Trust; c) cavers to set up a charitable trust to buy caves in the future... Expedition Tackle: on order is 400m 9mm Beal, 150m 11mm Blue-water, 6 tacklesacks, 100 Spitz, rope protectors. Expedition First Aid kit to be organised from the Belize kit and some ex-military kit... Expedition Journal: being planned for next AGM as so much is happening currently. Articles promised so far are: Japan (Digger Hastilow); Belize (Tim Francis); DYQ (Joel Corrigan); Alps Expedition (TBA); any other offers?... New Tackle: buying 5 pulleys (£50) and replacing some of the old lifeline with 200m new dynamic (£250)... Surveying Gear: The Group's compass, clinometer, tape, and altimeter will be kept at the cottage with a log book. For access ask any committee member... Electric Shocks from the showers are still being reported, some of which are quite strong. As we've said before they are not dangerous but earth bonding will be added soon.

(The committee would be pleased to hear members' views on any of these points.)

MEET SECRETARY Our meet secretary, Joel Corrigan, has departed! He accepted an offer he couldn't refuse and has taken up employment in Hong Kong for a couple of years. We thank him for his input for the short time he was on the committee and wish him good luck. We also hope he keeps in touch and continues to send interesting articles and snippets for the newsletter. Geoff Beale has been co-opted as meet secretary until the AGM (he was just pipped at the post by Joel at the last AGM), so welcome to Geoff - we're sure he'll make an excellent meet secretary as he organises so many trips anyway.

AHOY THERE! I have received a letter from Phil Ingold and thought you would like to read what he had to say in his closing paragraph:

"This year's dinner was great fun!! We all look forward to next year and Simon hopes to come too. The (archaeology) walk was fantastic. I enjoyed every moment of the challenge. I am now looking forward to my 8 day voyage from Brixham to Plymouth on the STS Lord Nelson. We must either get lost I think, or perhaps visit Brittany in France!!!"

Phil has also volunteered to be our cave rescue victim again - he really is a sucker for punishment! We hope your voyage goes well, Phil and do let us know all about it.

THE 'PHONE has been replaced. In fact it had been replaced by the time you got your last newsletter telling you it had been removed! It works much the same as the other one. It will also not work much the same as the other one if beer is spilled on it again so please be careful as telephones are not cheap to buy. If you experience any problems then please tell the committee.



WET, WET, WET! The shower tap that was not working has almost been fixed. It still needs a few minor adjustments (to a spring I think) as you have to keep pressing it every few seconds to get water. At least the shower stops now, unlike previously when it ran continuously and drained all the hot water!

ALPS UPDATE With Joel in Hong Kong, Joe Frampton has taken over the financial side of the trip. If you haven't paid the full £150, please forward the balance to him now.

MENDIP RESCUE ORGANISATION INCIDENTS AND RESCUES FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 1993

The GB rescue of 23rd October 1993 was reported in full in Newsletter 238. There were ten other call-outs during the year, and six of them necessitated rescuers going underground. Three of these were as serious as any on record, of which two were the result of injuries sustained from falls. It has come to MRO's attention that some cavers are risking to jump down short climbs, and even encouraging inexperienced people to follow suit! Neither practice is safe, and certainly not the latter.

Ed: I have decided to precis the remaining reports because the full accounts would take up too much space.

SWILDON'S HOLE SAT 23rd JAN 1993

MRO contacted by Taunton Police at 2:00pm to report that a novice caver had fallen off the Twenty Foot Pot ladder and sustained bad back injuries. Four members of the Bastard Squad Caving Club from Crawley, West Sussex, had descended the cave at about 8:00am. Two were on their first caving trip. On reaching Sump 1, three of the party went through leaving one behind. He was one of the beginners, in his late twenties, very tall and weighed over 18 stone. While waiting he got very cold. After reuniting, the party began their return up the streamway, reaching the Twenty Foot about 1:00pm, some 5 hours after entering the cave. The cold caver was exhausted and failed to climb the pitch. On his second attempt he fell off the ladder and the life-liner who was using a "shunt" failed to hold him. Although barely 2-3 metres off the ground, he hit the floor heavily on his back and seems to have been severely bruised by a belay belt attachment. Badly shaken he was assisted upright, but further attempts to climb the pitch were abandoned. He became demoralised and runners were despatched to raise the callout.

A strong rescue party were assembled at the Belfrey (and diverted from a trip down St Cuthbert's). The first group went underground at about 2:10pm with first aid, comforts and the Molefone, followed ten minutes later by a second group with hauling ropes. Medical supplies were taken in the cave at 2:30pm and a further group went in at 2:40pm with the main hauling gear and Mager stretcher. The "baby bouncer" was requested and sent down the cave at 3:05pm. By this time the size, weight and incapacity of the patient became known, with great concern over the extent of his back injuries. To compound the situation, the other inexperienced caver in the original party, fell off the Ten Foot climb near the entrance on her way out. She had been reluctant to leave her injured colleague, and had herself become very exhausted and demoralised. Her back was also hurt and she was in considerable pain. She was secured into the Paraguard stretcher and hauled out to an awaiting ambulance which left for Bristol Royal Infirmary at 3:30pm.

Meanwhile the original patient had given up trying to help himself in any way. The physically demanding haul out thus required relief parties to take over at key points in the cave, especially the more constricted Upper Series. Another rescue group went down to assist at 4:50pm and another two people ferried additional kit into the cave, including digging gear to open-up Binnie's Link as much as possible. After reaching the top of Jacob's Ladder, the first attempt to pass the bulky patient through the cleared out Binnie's Link failed. The alternative attempt to pass him through the Kenny's Dig had to be abandoned at the top of Mud Slide. The only way out had to be forced through Binnie's Link, and luckily, the Mager stretcher coped with this (achieved with £40's worth of damage to the sheet but none to the patient). He was out of the cave and off in the ambulance to BRI at 7:30pm after 11 hours underground.

MRO heard the next day that both patients had left hospital a few hours later, and had not been seriously injured despite all the signs at the time. Indeed, a couple of rescuers appear to have sustained worse back strains as a result of their exertions. No-one has heard from this club since - is there more to names than meets the eye?!

SWILDON'S HOLE SUN 14th FEB 1993

Taunton Police called MRO at 7:30pm to say that a caver had become exhausted and unable to get out of the cave. The informant had reported the person concerned to be "only 20ft inside the cave", but he left the phone so it was not possible to confirm exactly what the problem was.

Six scout leaders had entered the cave at about 3:30pm and reached Sump 1 nearly 2 hours later. On returning to the Twenty Foot, one had become exhausted and was unable to climb the ladder. The others seemed too tired to help him so three left the cave to call for assistance. A rescue party of four went down to help straightaway and were able to haul the patient up the pitch using the scout's tackle. Another two rescuers who had followed with full MRO hauling gear met all concerned making their way out at the Eight Foot climb below the old Forty Foot Pot. The patient was very tired but did

not require medical attention and, with moral support, was able to help himself out of the cave by 8:40pm. It must be noted that three with cave rescue experience plus a visitor achieved what five in the original party had been unable to do for themselves, justifying MRO's longstanding offer to assist clubs wishing to undertake rescue practices and training in appropriate hauling techniques. The latter are very different to the usual methods used to climb pitches, and invariably much more basic; an approach which surprises many wooed by today's high technology "fix" for most situations.

SWILDON'S HOLE SUN 21st MAR 1993

MRO received a call from Taunton Police at 4:45pm to report an overdue party. A party of five cavers from the Three Bridges Scout Group had gone down the cave at 9:30am to do a "round trip", had been underground for over 7 hours, and had not surfaced as expected. Two rescuers offered to start a search in the Upper Series before going on to Tratman's Temple and Vicarage Landing while others were contacted to prepare for any rescue situation. The initial search party met the overdue scouts at the entrance after a trip of almost 8 hours. They were unable to bail out the final duck so were forced to return via Paradise Regained which inevitably delayed them.

EASTWATER CAVERN TUE 23rd MAR 1993

Mrs Gibbons reported to Brian Prewer at his home in Priddy that two cavers who had entered the cave at 3pm, well over 5 hours earlier, had not surfaced after their ETA of 8pm. Some time later the girlfriend of one of the cavers had rung the farm, also concerned that they had exceeded their ETA. Both cavers were in their mid forties, experienced, well equipped and knew the cave. MRO and cavers at the Hunters' Lodge were alerted by 8:40pm and it was agreed that a search party ought to go down the cave as soon as possible. Rescuers would be stood by and the Police informed that an incident was underway. The "Old Cave" was searched first before considering the West End Series but the missing cavers were not found. This ominous news was reported to the surface from the bottom of Baker's Chimney at 9:55pm. The Twin Verticals and Dolphin Pot routes were then checked. A message was radioed from underground at 10:05pm that the cavers had been found and that one had fallen about 10 feet whilst climbing up the Dolphin Chimney on the way out from the bottom of the "Old Cave". He had badly broken the lower part of his left arm, sustaining a bad Colles fracture of the wrist and deeply lacerated fingers with exposed tendons as a result of the impact. This had happened about 5 hours earlier, and he had been in great pain ever since though in a remarkably confident state. His friend felt unable to leave him alone to go and seek help and preferred to comfort him as best he could.

A full call-out of rescuers and equipment followed immediately. It was felt that the patient would still be able to do much to help himself once his injuries were immobilised and pain relief given. Full medical supplies and heat packs went into the cave at 10:30pm, the hauling gear went in at 10:50pm, and hot air, comforts and a canteen were taken in at 11pm. The patient's arm was splinted and he was given both Temgesic and Entonox. Hauling began just before 11:30pm and the patient was reported as being at the top of the Dolphin Chimney by midnight with at least another 2 hours before he would be out of the cave. Difficulties were expected in the more constricted passages so the Mager stretcher was requested and taken down at 1am. The haul out proceeded well and the patient reached the awaiting ambulance at 2:20am. The patient's friend stayed with him throughout the ordeal, and both were underground for almost 10 hours. It appears that the caver fell whilst trying to adjust the position of his tackle bag on climbing up and bridging in the Dolphin Chimney.

SWILDON'S HOLE FRI 9th APR 1993

MRO received a call from the Police at 1:30am that a party of cavers from Newport, Gwent, had not returned home following a trip into the cave the previous day. The informant's phone number was wrong so it was impossible to obtain more details. No unknown vehicles were parked on the village Greens. Meanwhile, Gwent Police contacted Taunton to report that those concerned had arrived home safely. The incident was over by 1:45am.

EAST TWIN SWALLET FRI 16th APR 1993

Nineteen members of a Church Youth Group from Chesham, Bucks, visited Burrington Combe for the day. They split up into various parties to explore different caves, going underground at about 11am. The leader arranged that all would meet up at 1pm. He was unsure whether those concerned had actually gone down the caves intended since they had not been seen after dispersing in the Combe. When one of the parties, comprising of 4 teenagers, failed to make the ETA, they were uncertain as to whether they had gone down Lionel's Hole or East Twin Swallet. MRO was alerted through the Police at 4.45pm from the Burrington Combe Cafe. A search party and gear was at the East Twin lay-by just after 5pm. There was an initial search of Lionel's "Old Cave" to the First Duck, starting at 5.20pm and returning at 5.45pm and reporting that no-one was in the

cave, also that the water in the duck was clear, indicating that it had been undisturbed for several hours. A search in East Twin Swallet and Spar Pot was started at 5:50pm whilst others stood by with rescue equipment. At 6pm it was reported that the missing party had been found. Although the party had been down East Twin before, they had become totally lost and unable to find their way back through the squeeze leading to the Boulder Chamber. They decided to stay put and await rescue and were there for almost 5 hours. They were dispirited but in good shape, and very apologetic for the trouble caused.

SIDCOT SWALLET SAT 1st MAY 1993

At 2:25pm MRO was contacted by Police and asked to ring Burrington Combe Cafe. There it had been reported that a caver was stuck and unable to get through the squeeze at the Lobster Pot. The informant was a climber, but had been requested by the leader of a party of Owlsmoor Group Scouts, Berks, to raise the alarm on their behalf. Such relayed messages are vague and on being contacted by MRO, the climber thought that the stuck caver had injured his chest trying to force the squeeze. A small rescue party reached the cave about 1pm to help and get full details. Others were alerted to the situation and made their way to Burrington with rescue gear and to form a hauling party. However, on arrival at the cave, the stuck caver had been helped out of his predicament by those on the spot. The patient, 11 years old, was taken to hospital suffering from possible cracked ribs as a result of his exertions in the squeeze. No more has been heard from the party to confirm this, however.

BOX MINES, WILTS TUE 22nd JUN 1993

Wiltshire Police at Chippenham called MRO at 8.48pm to say that an observant local man walking his dog in Quarry Hill Woods had noted two motorbikes parked near entrances to the mines and that they had been there since about mid-day on Mon.21st June. Police checked the ownership of the bikes and discovered from relatives that two men in their mid-twenties were missing. The wife of one of the missing men had little idea where her husband was but thought he could have been in Marlborough and was unconcerned as he often stayed away for long periods without telling her where he was! However, she was sure that he had never been underground, and that neither of the missing men had any knowledge of Box Mines.

Local rescuers were alerted and met Police at the top of Quarry Hill at 9.50pm. A Police dog had picked up a scent at the entrance to Jack's Workings, but not at nearby Lady Hamilton's Hole. Search parties set out to search both the former and latter at 10:15pm for an agreed 1 hour, while others stood by on the surface. Meanwhile, on Mendip, back-up teams stood by, a Doctor was informed, and all awaited news from the Police of the searches. At about 10.45p, one of the search parties located the missing pair just off the main passage, near the old crane, and not very far from Lady Hamilton's Hole entrance. It appears that they had tried to do a "through trip" using only a box of matches! When these ran out, they were stranded, and had been trapped in the mine for over 30 hours with no protective clothes, food or drink. One had vainly tried to dig a way upwards through the roof with bare hands in total darkness! Both were very distressed and thought they were as good as dead. But for the observant walker this could well have been the case as most visits to the mines take place at weekends. All were safely out before 11pm.

SWILDON'S HOLE TUE 12th OCT 1993

Weston-Super-Mare Police contacted MRO at 11:30pm with a report from a Mum saying that her son had not kept an earlier appointment at 6pm with her. She thought he had gone caving somewhere on Mendip with friends from Bristol University and gave a sketchy description of the car being used. The Green at Friddy was checked but no cars were found that were not local. Brian Frewer recalled being told by two cavers earlier in the evening that a party of UBSS had gone down Swildon's at about 5:30pm. Playing this hunch, he telephoned the Hunters' Lodge to be told that three cavers with UBSS t-shirts had been there later in the evening and had left at closing time. One answered the description of the missing son. The Mum was contacted and reassured that her son was alive and well, and she rang back at midnight to say he had returned home safely.

GOATCHURCH CAVERN SAT 27th NOV 1993

Roger Dors received a call from Taunton Police at 8:45pm to enquire on the whereabouts of a party reported to them as being overdue from a trip to the cave. After making all the checks possible in the circumstances, the Police called again soon afterwards to report that the incident was over as the party had been safely located. No further details were known.

The Mendip Rescue Organisation rescue report for 1993, with full details of all these incidents, plus the rest of the MRO Annual Report for 1993, can be found in the library at Nordrach Cottage.

BRITISH CAVE RESCUE CONFERENCE 8-10 JULY 94.

by Yvonne Rowe

The conference, held in a sun-drenched field at Eastwater Farm Priddy, was well organised with trade stands and demonstrations of cave rescue techniques and equipment. Underground demonstrations included: GB Cave for casualty diagnosis, first aid and medical treatment underground; St Cuthbert's Swallet for pitch rigging and hauling on rescues; Eastwater Cavern for stretcher hauling and setting up of communications (Molefone).

Surface demonstrations included: ERA with dummies; hypothermia and the use of Hot Air; hydraulic and compressed air lifting devices; foul air detecting and breathing apparatus; rescue equipment; use of explosives; use of Hymacs to excavate caves and concrete pipes for shoring shafts; use of Aga Breathing Apparatus for sump rescue; use of compressed air through standard fire hose with the damming and pumping out of a flooded cave entrance (St Cuthbert's); a lecture on pain, pain relief and analgesia underground; and last but not least - final thoughts on Butcombe as an analgesic!! (It worked well during demonstration on Saturday night but left victims with twice as much pain the next morning!) An excellent mobile carvery provided day-time snacks and drinks, and a well attended bar sold "Rescue Ale" - Moorlands bottled and labled for the BCRC - it sold well and many people kept unopened bottles for souvenirs (how long for I wonder?).

My interest was the re-Hymacing of Hymac Hole nearby (first dug 2 years ago). What I considered to be a "cowboy" approach to cave digging is in fact a delicately executed operation. I was impressed with the accuracy of the Hymac operator and his machine. After only a morning's Hymacing, a small entrance hole leading to a 10ft long rift was unearthed 25ft down. We noticed that large boulders above the entrance were shifting half an inch at a time, threatening to block the way on. Dave Morrison apologised for the hiccup in the proceedings but I found it a useful exercise to see how the stabilized the boulders. Dave told us how they would secure the entrance once the concrete pipes were in place and the excavated area refilled. By Sunday afternoon the pipes had been lowered by the Hymac, and the 25ft deep hole, excavated only the previous day, was quickly refilled. Not bad for a weekend's work, eh?

The event that had everyone aching with laughter was The Cave Rescue Game (not unlike the Wessex Challenge). The course was set around Eastwater Valley. There were 4 heats with 3 teams of 6 cave rescuers, then a final (if you can call it that!). Teams dropped through a "cave entrance" of wooden planks and scaffolding at one side of the valley and down the valley side to a sump at the bottom (that T***or H***s had urinated in to ensure it was realistic!). They then scrambled up the other side to a "squeeze" containing manure, rocks, thistles etc. As cavers thrutched through, they were drenched with water from above. (Lots of cheating here with teams preventing others getting into or out of the squeezes.) A rescuer foolishly wearing shorts had them ripped to shreds in an effort to stop him progressing - the sight of him trying to protect his modesty as his pink bottom disappeared into the squeeze was hilarious! A "greasy slope" followed - a metal ramp, coated with washing-up liquid to make the ascent difficult - leading to a v-shaped "rift". Teams had more water poured on them as they struggled through the rift. All that could be seen were legs dangling out of the bottom as cavers got wedged in the bottomless "v". The final two obstacles were long "ducks" made from a tarpaulin over shallow channels, and "passages" through vertically placed car tyres. At the end the teams found their victim, prepacked in a dragsheet, waiting to be "rescued" all the way back through the "cave" to safety!!! What these poor victims had to endure - it was incredibly funny and only a matter of luck that they didn't end up as real casualties. During the final, the BEC "kidnapped" the Wessex victim before he could be rescued and dragged him across the next field; the huge water container over the rifts was tipped over, and the drencher at the squeezes was dumped in his water container. Along the course bodies were strewn everywhere; victims were pushed headfirst down the drop from the rift onto the metal slope; they were prohibited from exiting the squeezes and pushed headfirst into the sump; and much more. The only team that didn't cheat yet finished the cave rescue course was the BEC Girls - but needless to say they didn't win.

Finally, a well-attended Pig Roast and Stomp was held in a huge marquee. Two very complete (urgh!) pigs had been spit roasted and were the most succulent pork I have tasted. - There were large helpings with crackling, stuffing, apple sauce, rolls, and a splendid selection of salads (a meal in themselves for veggies). The stomp was to live music and seemed to be enjoyed by all ages, though a bit loud for some.

The Conference was a successful event, and although above ground there didn't appear to be many delegates, the underground trips were oversubscribed. 14 MCG members attended which isn't bad and they'll agree that it was both informative and fun.

NSS CONVENTION

by Pete Hollings

Last June I was lucky enough to attend the NSS Convention in Brackettville, Texas. In order to make the most of the trip I joined a preconvention trip into Coahuila, Mexico. I met my first US cavers in Austin where work was being completed on our transport to Coahuila, a 1954 four wheel drive school bus. The bus had been used by Texan cavers for 20 years and is probably the perfect caving vehicle, capable of tackling any road and carrying up to a dozen cavers and their gear in comfort. I was set to work doing a few last minute jobs but just like cavers in the UK it took ages to get everything organised and we didn't leave 'til midnight.

The next day Peter Sprouse, the trip leader, wanted to rig H.T. Miers cave so that it could be used during the convention. The cave consisted of a series of short drops reminiscent of Ireby Fell, but without the water. The people I was with were among that enlightened group of American cavers who rig in the "European" style. Consequently we had great fun bolting our way down the cave, Peter taking full advantage of the presence of a real European. Perhaps the most amazing thing was that the cave is probably visited by only 4 or 5 groups a year!!!

The following day we were due to meet the rest of the group at the convention site, but in the morning we found time to visit Four Mile Cave, a 30 maze cave. The cave was clearly often used by the local kids, a fact evidenced by the graffiti, trails of string leading into the cave from the entrance and a large number of beer cans, mainly Budweiser!

On Monday morning 21 cavers left Texas for northern Coahuila where access had been arranged to 25,000 hectares of private ranchland, consisting mainly of virgin limestone. Our convoy; the bus, four 4wd vehicles and a camper van raised a few eyebrows at the border. The drive to the camp took 7 hours on progressively poorer dirt roads, which proved hard on the vehicles. We had to replace two tyres and mend the distributor on the bus. We camped next to a 600,000 litre water tank that was the only source of water for the ranch. Everything was very well organised and within minutes of our arrival we even had a shower set up! We settled in for the night to be greeted by very strong winds which whistled through the camp blowing a healthy dose of dirt and dessicated manure into our food.

For the rest of the week the group split into teams to investigate a variety of leads. Much of the time was spent examining entrances high in the sides of cliffs. This was generally very hard work with the temperatures in the 100s, no shade and vegetation equipped with a variety of vicious thorns. Unfortunately none of these entrances led to extensive caves, however some of them were notable for the Indian artefacts they contained. These included pictographs, a shaman stone and a part-buried wicker basket.

Another project was a dig which, when first investigated, had been a small hole with a fierce draught emanating that would move the leaves on a bush 6ft away. Chemical persuasion applied on a previous visit had opened a low crawl into a small chamber. It was from here that we continued to dig. By the end of the week we had progressed some 50ft with the passage dropping vertically but needing further chemical persuasion.

The major finds of the trip were two sotanos. The first of these, "Pit of the Crystal Stairway", was surveyed as 69m deep with three pitches rigged in the US style with some appalling rub points. The cave was fairly well decorated and contained numerous bones; including an intact deer skeleton, a bear skull and what may have been human remains. The other pit was a two hour drive away, it too was around 70m deep with no way on.

The drive out was uneventful until we were around an hour from the border. It was then that we drove past a Mexican wearing nothing but a sheet, which was pretty weird as we were still in the middle of nowhere. Within a hundred yards the truck at the end of the convoy stopped. The differential had broken and the truck wasn't going anywhere. While the mechanics among the group proceeded to take the rear of the truck apart in an attempt to fix things, the rest of us sat around drinking tequila amazed at the sight of a man sitting with his gears in his lap on a dirt road. We were on our way within an hour and it was only later when we found out that one of the group had been stung by a scorpion that had got into their truck while we waited. Someone suggested that the man in the sheet had been a witchdoctor who'd placed a curse on us gringos. Our belief in this was strengthened when three people went down with a fever the next day, myself included!!

We were back at the convention site in the early hours of Saturday morning allowing us to pitch our tents under one of the few shade trees and enjoy the pool for a couple of days. The first day of the convention concentrated on US exploration. This included talks on lava tubes in Hawaii, exploration in Carlsbad Caverns, Lechuguilla and the Fisher Ridge cave system where a 70 mile cave has been explored on the neighbouring

ridge to the mighty Mammoth Cave. However perhaps the most impressive talk was about the deepest pit in the US, a volcanic crater in Hawaii. This 810ft pit was bottomed by rigging a tyrolean traverse across the 500ft wide crater anchored to two cars. The main rope was then rigged from this to avoid contact with the extremely loose walls, a truly amazing sight!!

That evening saw the Howdy Party at the Alamo Village, a movie set/amusement park used in numerous westerns. The beer was plentiful and the food an excellent mix of Texan and Mexican dishes. Entertainment came in the form of a gunfight in the main street, a re-enactment of the battle of the Alamo, and best of all a band which played a mix of modern and country and western music late into the night.

Tuesday was the day for geology talks, however I missed this in order to visit Devil's Pit, a government owned cave closed for 15 years and opened specifically for the convention. It had required a 14 page legal document to make this possible, but the effort was well worthwhile. The pit was 140ft deep and extremely impressive. Seven ropes were rigged, all with an appalling rub point protected by pieces of carpet. This meant that over 100 people were able to visit the cave and explore the large chamber at the bottom.

Wednesday saw the international exploration session with most of the talks about Mexico and Central America, although there were also talks on Iceland, China and Australia. The talks suggested that Mexico is one of the hottest caving areas in the world, with three systems having the potential of being the deepest in the western hemisphere and possibly the world.

The talks the following day concentrated on cave fauna, cave history and equipment and techniques. However the highlight was undoubtedly the photo salon in the evening, though this was a little disrupted when we received a warning that a tornado was about to hit Brackettville. While people frantically took down tents we gathered in the bus for a tornado party. Fortunately the tornado missed us!! Chris Howes won the black and white section while the slide salon contained some stunning photos. Urs Widmer of Speleoprojects showed a multi projector slide show from Lechuguilla, this was extremely good although perhaps not equal to Gavin Newman's Caves of Thunder.

The final day saw the biology and palaeontology talks, but with temperatures reaching record highs and no air conditioning in the lecture theatres I spent the day by the pool. The convention ended with a banquet beside the pool.

Throughout the week there were trips to local and not so local caves, trips to Mexico and the chance to see a number of bat flights, including the one at Bracken Cave where there is said to be the largest concentration of mammals anywhere in the world (but I only have a Texans word for that!). The convention itself was extremely well organised with 24hr registration for the first two days, an excellent guide book on the caves of Texas and even a caver built hot tub and sauna to help while away the hours of darkness. Although why anyone would want to visit a sauna when daytime temperatures were over 100F and the humidity over 50% is beyond me!?!

With a few days to kill before my flight home I caught a ride into Mexico to a post convention field camp near San Luis Potosi. A fourteen hour drive found me sitting by the side of the road at the village of Valle de los Fantamos. A few hours later some Americans arrived, followed shortly by our Mexican hosts, much to my relief. We set up camp in a field next to a huge doline and it was this we visited first the following day. Sotano de Don Cuco consisted of a 30m pitch that dropped into a large sloping chamber with no way on at the bottom. The cave was notable for the cave pearls, salamanders and snakes it contained. As we climbed out our Mexican hosts appeared and took us to another pit 20 minutes walk away. This 80m pit, Sotano de las Llantos, so named for the truck tyres found at the bottom and since removed, consisted of a 6m wide blind shaft with no horizontal development at the bottom. Third cave of the day was Resumidero de los Madranos, a sporting horizontal cave with some challenging climbs and crawls.

That evening we sat around the campfire swapping swearwords and tequilla with our hosts, much to everyone's amusement. The next day saw two more pits bottomed, both no more than 15 minutes from camp. The 90m Sotano del Tepozan was truly spectacular, particularly when the sunlight hit the bottom of the shaft at noon. Finally we visited Sotano de los Chivatas, a 54m pit that served as a nesting site for owls.

The area was truly amazing with numerous other pits being pointed out to us. One 50m deep sotano was only 20m from Tepozan but with no connection between the two. We were also told of spectacular river caves, - 200m pitches and large areas as yet unexplored. The area is the site for Mexspeleo '95 - well worth a visit.

On our last night we visited some local pubs which brew their own bitter: pleasant, but Americans know nothing about real beer. Everyone was friendly and once over the language barrier, cavers prove to be the same everywhere. Full of tall tales and a love of beer!

MINIMAL IMPACT CAVING CODE

The General Cave Visitation code, as used in Australia, was included in Newsletter 238, courtesy of Dave Gwillim. Here is the remaining part of the code, relating to discoveries.

New Cave or Extension Explorations

1. The existing microbiology of the new cave, both fungi, bacteria, and a world of protozoa, will almost certainly be irreversibly contaminated on the first trip into the cave! If you consider cave microbiology has not been investigated in the area of this new cave, if microbiologists are available, then please consider including them on initial explorations so that they may collect uncontaminated samples.

2. Do not enter a new area if you do not have the equipment required to undertake the minimal activities. Surveying equipment and in-cave markers.

3. The minimal activity should be in-cave marking and surveying. Not purely exploration.

4. Ensure that all alternative routes are examined, by completing the cave survey, prior to crossing sensitive areas. It may not be necessary to enter some areas as they can be by-passed.

5. Having determined that a sensitive area is to be crossed it should ALWAYS be marked. Reduce future damage by defining a distinct, minimal width track.

6. Discuss in-cave marking within the party and ensure that all ideas are evaluated before marking is undertaken.

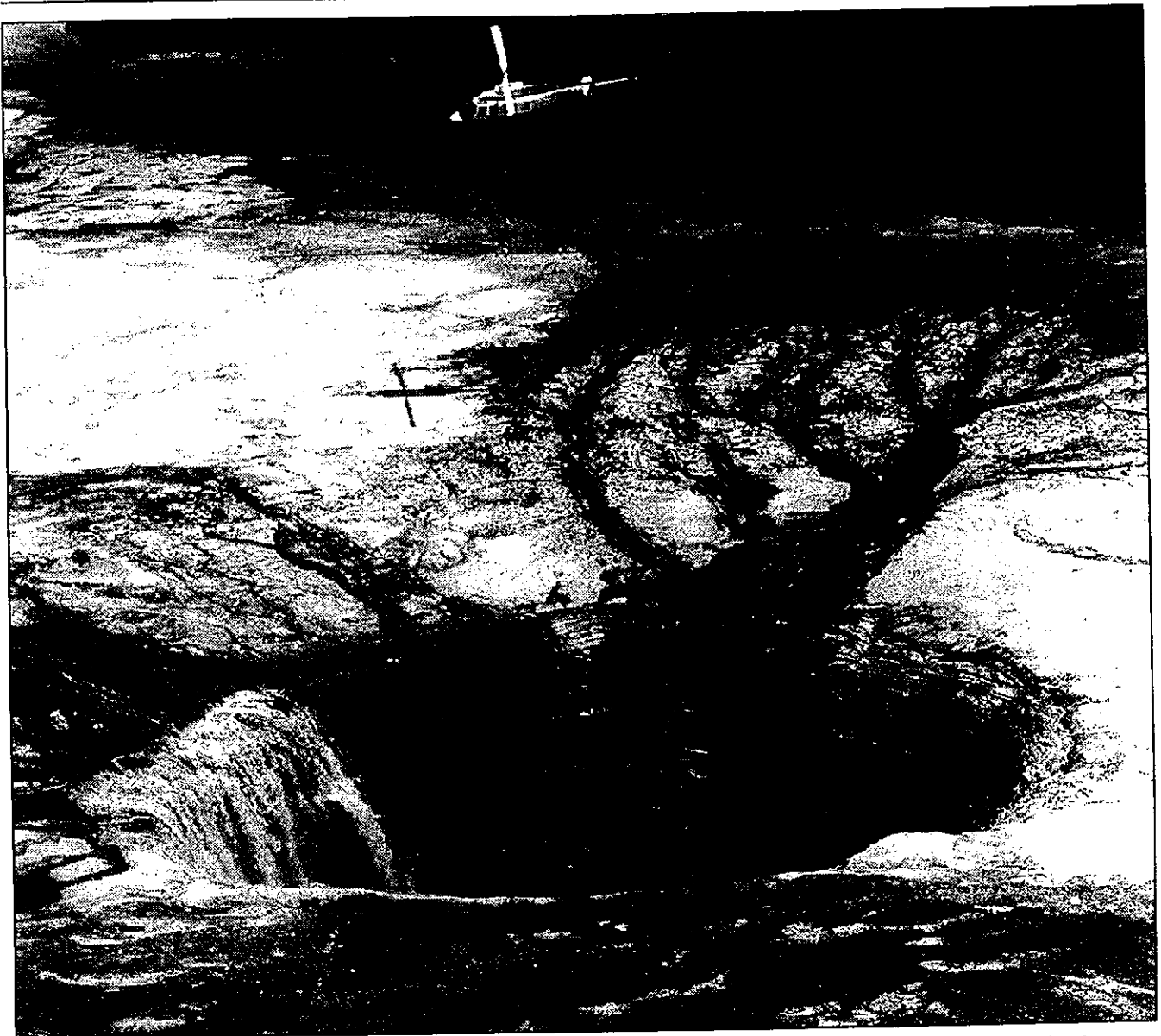
7. CAVE SOFTLY!



THE INDEPENDENT

FRIDAY 1 JULY 1994

The day the earth caved in and created a new natural wonder



A helicopter is dwarfed by a gigantic sinkhole, measuring 120 feet across and 180 feet deep, which appeared on land owned by a fertiliser company at Mulberry, Florida. The environmental impact is not yet known

Photograph: Reuter