

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 247

SEPTEMBER 1995

Pilgrimage to Lair of The Big Mole

Timothy Francis

After all the excitement of the Dent de Crolles trip we were keen to do something a little different than the average Mendip bash. South Wales was selected, the car filled with cavers and grot bags, and we were off to Llangattock. We were turning up at Whitewalls on spec so we packed a couple of tents just in case there were no Chelsea members able, or willing, to let us in. There were plenty of free bunks despite a booking by gang of Dales-loving Rotherham cavers so we were in.

An early start was required for two of us to get some provisions in Crickhowell for breakfast. The other two (guess who!) volunteered themselves as temporary bunk wardens for the morning. A trip had been arranged in the early hours of Saturday morning to help out with a spot of surveying down Ogof Draenen, and we had been lead into thinking that a relatively early start was on the cards. Plenty of tea drinking by the Chelsea contingent meant that we were underground by midday. Seven or eight car loads of cavers were heading down Draenen at the same time so the entrance passages could be examined at a leisurely pace.

The cave is situated on the right bank of a steep valley and is only five minutes walk from the car park. The entrance series follows a heavily scaffolded boulder choke before dropping into a low wet section. A pitch bypass means that only a handline (fixed) is needed to reach the main level of the cave. The two routes rejoin at a large boulder strewn chamber: Cairn Junction. We headed off to the left to cut out ten minutes of caving rejoining the streamway via a small muddy tube on the right. Continuing downstream a large metal pole marks Tea Junction. We turned left here heading along the large White Arch passage which is the main route to the high level fossil stuff and the round trip. Downstream to the right is the way on to Gilwern passage. White Arch is an excellent piece of yomping passage and progress is only hindered by slippy, muddy boulders. After ten minutes a climb up through boulders enters Lamb and Fox Chamber. A small waterfall lands on the floor of the chamber on the left and is a useful marker to the way out on your return.

At the highest point of the chamber, on the right, a flight of steps has been constructed to enter Indiana. This is a bypass to a low crawl and an area that is important for bats. Our task at this point was to continue the Grade 5d survey being done by John Stevens, Arthur Millet and others from the Chelsea. So far they have completed 17km of the 29km of passage discovered in Draenen and its taken them nearly a year! We split up into two teams: one to survey the rest of Raiders Passage and the other to survey a side passage and a few loops which seemed to be trending towards the Canyon area of the Grade 2 survey. The five of us took it in

(cont. on p4)

1995/6 MEETS PROGRAMME

DATE	AREA	EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
04 Nov 95	Mendip	St.Cuthberts	Geoff Beale	01734-722510
04 Nov 95	Mendip	Forum	Joan Goddard	01608-810382
04 Nov 95	Mendip	Disco	Bill Headington	(no phone)
08 Jun 96	Mendip	Wessex Challenge	MCG!!	

MCG - CAVE LEADERS

<u>DYO - closed until further notice</u>		<u>DGOF FFYNNON DDU I</u>	
Geoff Beale	01734-722510	Geoff Barton	01932-849241
John Beauchamp	01761-463143	Geoff Beale	01734-722510
Ian McKechnie	01932-228292	John Miriam	0181-393-3955
John Miriam	0181-393-3955	<u>ST. CUTHBERT'S</u>	
Roger Wallington	01753-433841	John Beauchamp	01761-463143
<u>CHARTERHOUSE CAVE</u>		Malcolm Cotter	017842-52643
Charlie Allison	0181-224-7591	<u>RESERVOIR HOLE</u>	
Nick Gilson	01934-417697	Geoff Beale	01734-722510

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

Yorkshire	Northern Pennine Club	Andy Goddard	01244-570944
South Wales	South Wales Caving Club	Gary Vaughan	01202-679602

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
COTTAGE INFORMATION:	Tel: 01761-462797 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: £12.50
	The subscription includes free day-time access to the cottage by the member, their children, and their accompanied guests



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30 CHURCHILL CRESCENT, SONNING COMMON, NEAR READING, RG4 9RX	
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* CUSTODIAN TRUSTEES *	NON-COMMITTEE POSTS	NAME	TELEPHONE
* JONATHAN ROBERTS *	RESCUE WARDEN	JOHN CROWSLEY	01179-652585
* MALCOLM COTTER *	CONSERVATION OFFICER	GORDON WOODALL	01278-421802
* PAT WALSH *	COTTAGE EXTENSION	WAYNE HISCOX	01749-672081x2213
* PETER MATHEWS *	MCG SHOP	SEE ANY COMMITTEE MEMBER	

THE MCG IS A REGISTERED CHARITY No 270088; THE EXAMINERS ARE BRYAN TERRY AND HUW JONES



ON THE MOVE: Joe Frampton
to: 49 Peartree Avenue, Yewsley,
West Drayton, Middlesex, UB7 8DQ
Tel: 01895-431150

Paul Newey, James Allen and Rupert Knowles to: 39 Corby Drive, Englefield Green, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0RX
Tel: 01784-436800

Tom Thomas to: 36 Ash Hayes Road, Nailsea, Bristol, BS19 2LW
Tel: 01275-851286

Domini Knight's (see below) correct address is Claypool Cottage, 28 High Street, Nailsea, Bristol, BS19 1AV
Tel: 01275-852485

WHAT'S HER NAME! Domini Barrett was married recently and is now Domini Knight...

...and Nicky Barrall is now Nicky Robinson.

CONGRATULATIONS to Reg Pain, Julian Flavell and Huw Jones on becoming Full members.

AND CONGRATULATIONS to Nicky Robinson and Huw Jones (MCG Auditor) on their engagement.

THANK YOU to those members who have expressed their approval and appreciation of the new Occasional Publications. Number 3, on the recent MCG Chartreuse Expedition, is being prepared by Tim Francis and should be published shortly...

...LEADING TO a brief note to say that the Chartreuse expedition was a great success. Everything we (11 of us) set out to do was achieved. There will be a comprehensive write-up in the Occasional Publication, including individual experiences, so I will say no more other than it should make interesting reading.

EARWIG in on the committee meeting held 5.08.95... Cottage extension: First

lot of materials received. Built up to DPC level, waiting for contractor to do oversite concrete and drainage trenches... Outdoor Activity Centres law: Legislation is now in force. NCA's view is that there is no problem taking over-18's caving. Members should be aware that the act is now law and it may affect you if you take under-18's caving. Johnathan Roberts is to be asked to get a copy of the act for review... Tackle: It was noticed that identity tags were missing from some ladders so these tags are to be renewed. Tackle bags are to be repaired and may be made wider... Hot water tank: Needs to be drained and descaled. Lee Hawkswell to organise - offers of help will be gratefully accepted.

WESSEX CHALLENGE As you all know by now our gallant MCG team won the 1995 Wessex Challenge. As winners we now obliged to host the next Challenge so Priddy Village hall has been booked for 8th June 1996. Robin Main is to be contacted for permission to use the field and the Parish Council for use of the green. A sub committee is to be formed to cover the organisation. The shield has been sent off for engraving and is to be kept in the Castle of Comfort if the Landlord agrees.

MCG REGALIA Bill Headington has had 9 orders from members for sweatshirts with hoods. He has ordered 12 so could those who put in specific orders please contact him and stake their claims (with money, of course) before they are put in the cupboard on general sale. Bill has also ordered 12 baseball hats which are for sale at £4ea

SWILDON'S The entrance passages have been on the move for some months. On Sunday 10th September the cave was closed so that a particularly dodgy boulder could be made safe. No further details are known, but the cave was open the following weekend, so presumably the remedial works were effective.

CHRIS WHITTLE who joined the Group way back in 1979, is to go into hospital in September for a course of chemotherapy, which is confidentially expected to zap his cancer once and for all. We wish you well, Chris, and look forward to your next visit to Mendip when you have completed your period of isolation from any nasty bugs such as are carried by cavers!

PILGRIMAGE TO LAIR OF THE BIG MOLE continued from p1

turns to help with the surveying and also had the opportunity to go off exploring. Julie, Reggie and Tim went down Indiana following a series of traverses. We then turned right and headed off along Canyon West which begins as a pleasant mud floored passage. Large piles of guano testify to the large population of bats that must exist in Draenen. A scramble over a boulder pile leads to the main Canyon section. This continues for 1.5km and seems to meander on for ever. Keeping an eye out for possible leads we pushed all manner of impossible leads. The highlight was a long crawl down Big Mole Passage, discovered earlier in the year by Hades CC. A brief dig at the end extended this section by all of 2 feet; not bad when you only have a hand sized flake of rock as a digging tool. After three hours we returned to the surveyors to swap over.

Reggie was to replace John on the Raiders surveying team. However John was having such fun that he declined the offer of a yomp down to the end of Raiders. So Rupert and Reggie continued for over 1km to the end. This passage terminates at several tight, muddy squeezes which lie approximately 50m from the main streamway. This would be worth a dig when the more exiting leads (Friday 13th series seems to be the favourite location) have been exhausted. After a couple of hours we all regrouped and headed out to a well earned pint in Crickhowell. John and the Chelsea surveyors remained in Raiders passage for another hour, and should finish this section of the survey on the next trip. We spent about eight hours in the cave.

If you like typical South Wales caves then Draenen is certainly worth a visit. There is plenty of the usual large passage but not the quality of formations to be found in Darren. A trip is easy to arrange as there are plenty of keys available. See Descent for details.

Team: Tim Francis, Julie Hesketh, Rupert Knowles, Reggie Pain, John (RHBNC).

THE MCG HALF-YEARLY FORUM AND DISCO

THE FORUM - The 1995 Forum will be held at Nordrach Cottage on Saturday 4th November at 3:00pm. This will be an informal meeting without motions, where members can raise any subject they like concerning MCG and its affairs. Minutes are not taken but the committee will be happy to look into any issue not resolved at the meeting, if necessary taking it to the next AGM.

THE SOCIAL - Bill Headington has booked CHEWTON MENDIP HALL for 4TH NOVEMBER for A 60s/70s DISCO. We require an attendance of about 100 and posters will be put around all the regular cavers' haunts. We are hoping that a disco in place of the usual barn dance will prove a success as so many members have expressed the wish for a change. We would like everyone to come in "PERIOD" DRESS - flares, miniskirts, kipper ties, psychedelic shirts... Bring along all your FRIENDS AND FAMILY, the more the merrier.

The hall is booked FROM 7:30pm-12:00pm. There will be A BAR and Wayne Hiscox has agreed to do bar duty. There will be A PLOUGHMAN'S TYPE SUPPER provided and tickets will cost £5 PER PERSON.

We need volunteers to prepare the hall, prepare the food, and to clear up afterwards.

MORE MCG DOINGS

UPPER FLOOD — Calling all leaders - there was a suggestion that there should be an annual meeting of leaders to discuss conservation and any other relevant details. NCA have produced a guidance document and Joan Goddard has asked for a copy. Leaders please note that the meeting will be on the half-yearly weekend (4/5th Nov). Please contact Joan Goddard for confirmation or to pass on issues you would like raised if you are unable to attend.

PUT IT IN WRITING This is a double plea:- Firstly, it has been noticed that although local members go on fairly regular caving trips they rarely write them up in the log book. Members who only come to Mendip for the odd weekend are genuinely interested in what local members get up to - so don't keep it to yourselves, let us know what you've been up to...

...and secondly, a plea to all members, local and otherwise, the Editor is desperate for newsletter material. So far the year has been taken up with the Upper Flood II archaeology and entrance digs, and the Chartreuse expedition. This hasn't left a lot of time for anything else. The poor old Pinetree and Bone Hole digs (and other caving doings) have been neglected somewhat as most of the active membership has been involved in the aforementioned activities. Things are settling down a bit now (but there is the library extension...) so if you do, or discover, anything interesting we'd all like to know about it. Send your write up to the Editor, along with any other tit bits - please. Thanks to those who have already sent in articles and snippets - it's resulted in a Newsletter rather than another Bulletin.

NEW S.C.C POST A new AONB officer has been appointed to work from Charterhouse Centre for a three year period. She will be involved in formulating a management strategy for the area, and will be seeking the opinions of various user groups.

CAVE ART! The International Society for Speleological Art (ISSA) are holding an exhibition from Saturday 28th October to Friday 1st December from 10am to 9pm. It will take place, together with a series of workshops, in the Bar Gallery of the Kings of Wessex Leisure Centre, Cheddar. Pictures exhibited will

include drawings and paintings in a variety of media depicting cavers in caves and potholes in the UK and overseas. Running alongside the ISSA event will be an exhibition of cave photography in Cheddar library and an exhibition of caving cartoons. On the Sunday(s?) there will be workshops on drawing and painting both above and below ground and anybody is welcome to join in (only cavers on the underground workshop). Contact Robin Gray, Albany House, Cheddar. Tel: 01934-744957

RADON IN CAVES (see n/1 no 246). The Health and Safety Executive has confirmed to cavers that they are not interested in the radon exposure times for sport/club cavers, even if they are caving beyond the tourist trail in caves. Their concern is only for commercial ventures.

CUTHBERTS MEET on Sat 4th November (the weekend of the half-yearly forum). Meet at the cottage for an 8am start, leader Tony Knibbs. More details from Geoff Beale.

CHISLEHURST CAVES At a meeting arranged by the Chislehurst Society, Bromley Borough Local History Society and Ravensbourne Geological Society, two interest-lists were drawn up. One list is for a "serious" tour of the caves, the other to found a "Friends of Chislehurst Caves" group to promote interest in and to publicise the caves, to save them from possible closure due to insufficient number of fee-paying visitors through the door. The possibility of a development of the site for housing or a supermarket has been mentioned. The Caves are the only remaining chalk-mining caves with safe and easy public access in Britain, which still have much to yield in the way of geology, palaeontology and industrial archaeology (chalk mining, lime burning and gunflint knapping). If anyone is interested in joining the Friends, please contact John Cooper, c/o The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD. (from *Geologists Association Circular*, June 1995)

VALE Chris Tozer, who was a member of MCG in the early 1990s, sadly took his own life on July 21st near GB Cavern. Those who knew him may remember him as a quiet person, a caver who was also a talented artist and musician. Our condolences go to his wife and two boys.

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE - 13

The show cave GOUFFRE GEANT DE CABRESPINE is situated in the departement of the Aude (11), 25km northwest of Carcassonne. From the D620 towards Béziers, signboards indicate a turnoff onto the D112 and thence to the cave in the clearly visible limestone massif of the Montagne Noir.

Discovered in 1948, Cabrespine became a major cave in 1969 when the Spéléo Club de l'Aude forced a series of crawls and squeezes to enter the spacious continuation - now over 15km in total length. The show-cave potential of Cabrespine was immediately obvious but natural obstacles and ownership disputes ruled this out until 1987 when a short tunnel was blasted into a hillside high above the Clamoux streambed, breaking into the top of an immense chamber, Salle des Eboulis. With a 60m vertical section above a very steep boulder slope extending about 150m down to the stream passage, the estimated 1.5 million cubic metres volume seems reasonable!

The show-cave visitors follow a concrete balcony which runs for no more than 100m around one side of this chamber and some 30m below the highest point. Looking down from the balcony towards the barely visible bottom almost 200m below is an awesome experience. It must be said that even for so short a balcony the formations seen are simply stunning - a worthwhile visit.

Our trip into the main cave took place on the 26th of March and was accompanied by members of the Spéléo Club de l'Aude who control access. We entered via the show-cave, passing through a trapdoor in the balcony to descend 30m of zig-zag "caged" steel ladders. Crossing the upper part of the huge boulder slope brought us to the start of a much re-belayed handline descent which seemed to take for ever to reach the streamway. Here a pair of black plastic pipes plunged into the stream from above our heads, drawing water to the show-cave entrance 180m above.

We set off downstream towards our objective - Salle des Domes 2.5km from the Salle des Eboulis - effectively following the Clamoux stream but resorting to higher-level bypasses where necessary. We had been warned against wearing very warm clothes (i.e no wetsuits) because the ambient temperature is 15°C.

When a cave is broken into distinct sections by pitches, traverses etc. a description can be usefully given. This cave is an exception inasmuch that there were no real obstacles and the whole trip was a succession of walk-past spectacles, particularly along the streamway, presenting an infinite variety of calcite and aragonite decorations begging to be photographed. There were multicoloured stal flows - many with pronounced red and brown hues - white and cream-coloured stalactites and stalagmites, beautiful gour pools with occasional floating calcite, abundant straws and a sprinkling of helictites for good measure.

The higher-level bypasses were principally dry, boulder-floored chambers where the sombre predominance of rock and mud threw the many and varied formations into sharp contrast. Enjoying a snack in the Salle des Domes, sitting on breakdown slabs, gave us the time to admire the two "domes" - huge beehive-shaped stalagmites whose glittering white forms dominated the sombre surroundings and dwarfed a profusion of other stal decorations.

Due to a technical problem, my Konica Mermaid camera was set in panoramic mode throughout the trip, so my photos were a great disappointment. But the fault has been rectified and I look forward to the next opportunity for a trip into this "photographer's paradise."

UPPER FLOOD II UPDATE

Dops!! It seems that we should not have dug a second shaft in the depression as this was outside the area permitted on the consent document. This specified that the dig should be confined to the base of the depression, whereas the second dig was in the side of the depression. This was a genuine error on our part - a misinterpretation of the documentation when we were under pressure to complete the entrance dig in the 10 weekends window available. With the agreement of the committee, Joan Goddard has sent a letter with our apologies and our explanation to English Heritage which they have accepted. It has been agreed to stop all work on the new entrance for the time being, but work within the cave can continue. A level survey will now be conducted on the October members weekend to establish the exact thickness of bedrock remaining between the entrance dig and the cave.

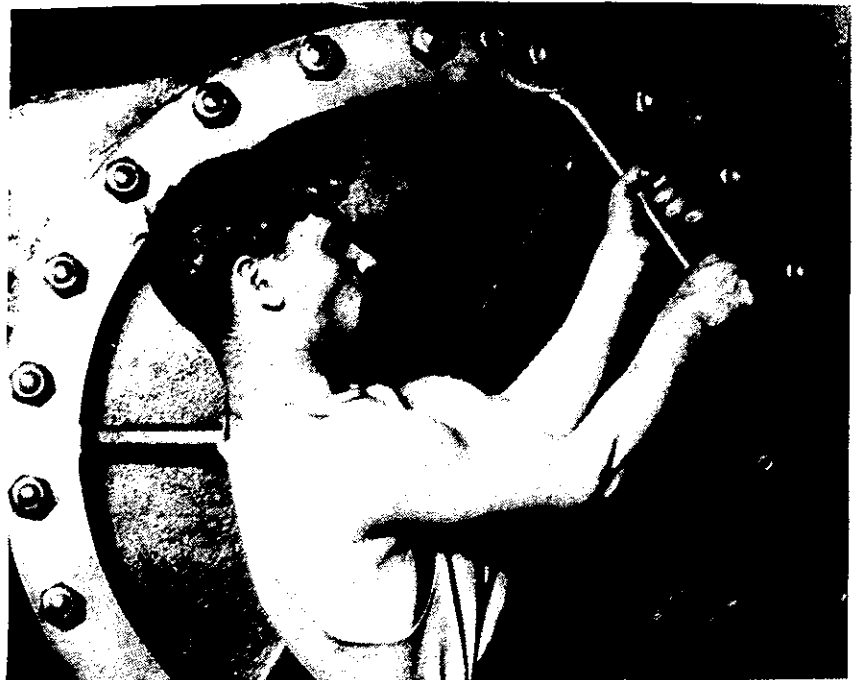
The total cost of the dig so far is £769.85 but a proportion of the items purchased within this amount have been recovered and can be used elsewhere (eg in the library extension, Bone Hole and Pinetree digs etc). These include sand, cement, buckets, lump hammers, large chisels, jemmys, shoring and bracing timber.

Our final task for this season was to fit a secure entrance lid for the dig, which consists of a 3m shaft about half-full of water!! Pat Walsh manufactured the lid which was fitted at the end of the 10 week period. However, on the weekend of 16/17th September the lid was found to have been be vandalised. On the Saturday Joe Frampton and Wayne Hiscox borrowed a 240v generator from the Charterhouse Centre to run a mains drill and worked on the lid for 3½ hours. Eventually they got the lid bolted down and were able to open and shut it, but not lock it. On the Sunday Joe Frampton and Joan Goddard made a few modifications and it now locks.

There is concern that it will be only a matter of time before it is damaged again, and public safety is paramount, especially as children and dogs run around this area. It was therefore decided, after a discussion on the problem by all those present that weekend, that the best solution would be to cement in the lid and surround, cut a circle or square out, and fit an old style lid like the one at Upper Flood I. This type of lid has withstood the test of time, and that includes vandals, dirt and weather (and the occasional key!). Wayne has agreed to organise this as soon as possible. The cost is expected to be in the region of £30.

VANDALPROOF LID FOR UPPER FLOOD

Lee Hawkswell is pictured fastening the final bolt on the latest version of the lid at the second Upper Flood entrance. The previous lid was damaged by vandals soon after being installed. MCG have yet to make a connection to the cave below - the lid was in place to protect the public from the 3m deep water-filled shaft. Wayne Hiscox said "If this doesn't deter the Mendip Mafia from forcing a way into the cave, we've got a real suprise for them inside." Now turn to page 10 to see MCG's ultimate deterrent!



MENDIP MAFIA FORCES OPEN LID TO CAVE
MCG COMMITTEE APPEALS TO NATO FOR HELP
UN TROOPS SENT TO DETER MENDIP VANDALS



A French UN light tank guards the new entrance shaft at Upper Flood II. The Serbs have offered to reopen aid routes used by diggers.