

MCG NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NUMBER 251

FEBRUARY 1996

ITALY 1996

Julie Hesketh

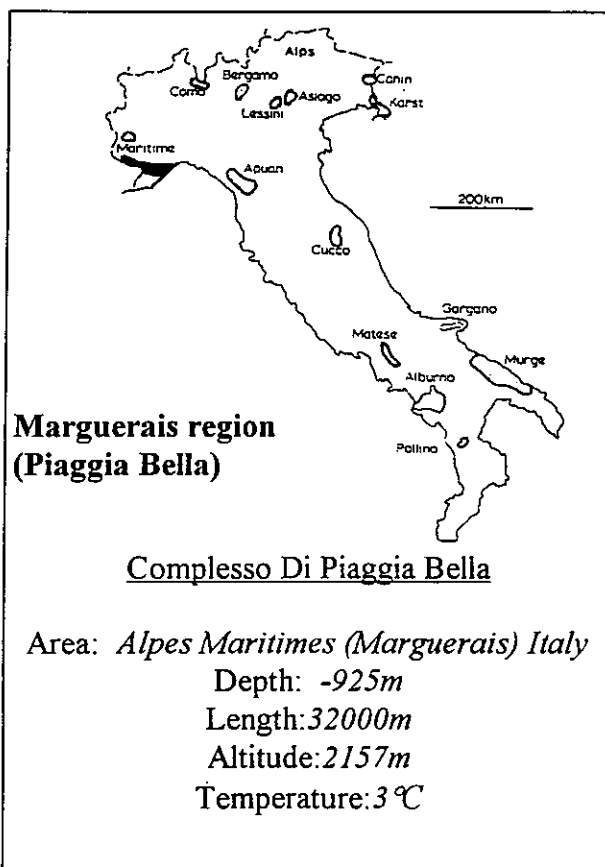
Following the success of last summer's trip to the Dent Des Crolles, thoughts quickly turned to what to do in 1996. France was getting a bit too expensive and Reggie was keen to go somewhere where no-one spoke the language so Italy was chosen for its pasta, wine and, well, its caves. We plumped for the Marguareis region of the Alpes Maritimes, near the French/Italian border. The system is the exception to the rule for the area in that whilst most caves in the area tend to be vertical in nature, the Piaggia Bella is predominantly horizontal although it still manages to hold the depth record for the area at -925m. The system has 8 entrances in total with the Piaggia Bella entrance which gives the system its name supposedly being the easiest to find.

The main aim is to bottom the system down to the sump at -925m although there is potential for a through trip or an exchange trip from one of the other entrances which would involve some SRT (although anyone planning to get to the sump should be prepared to SRT as there are some small pitches).

As agreed at the Half Yearly, the dates of the trip are Friday 26 July - Sunday 11 August 1996. The plan is, as usual to get the ferry from Dover and hack down to Italy as quickly as possible in a Holloway minibus to make the most of the time we have. We will aim to arrive back in

England on Saturday 10 in the evening. The Piaggia Bella entrance is a fair old walk from the main road but there is a refuge just 5 minutes away from the cave entrance so there are a number of options for accommodation. It will be possible to camp (probably for free) outside the cave but there will be no facilities unless we negotiate with the refuge. I will be writing off for more details about the refuge soon. For those who enjoy a good walk before a trip, I will look into finding an organised campsite near the road.

As for the cost of the trip, I reckon on around £250 this year. This is a little more than last year as we must take into account the extra mileage and the possible cost of refuge accommodation. I am looking into setting up an account for the trip and anyone wanting to reserve their place early to ensure a place in the minibus or spread the bill between now and August should send a deposit of £25 to me. Cheques should be made payable to Julie Hesketh.



1996 MEETS PROGRAMME

DATE	AREA	EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
17 Mar	Avon	Brownes Folly Mine	Geoff Beale	01734-722510
23 Mar	Mendip	AGM and Dinner	Joan Goddard	01608-810382
24 Mar	Mendip	Archaeology Walk	Yvonne Rowe	01252-872006
21 Apr	South Wales	OFD I	Geoff Beale	01734-722510
19 May	South Wales	Little Neath, Genesis Inlet	Geoff Beale	01734-722510
08 Jun	Mendip	Wessex Challenge	Tim Francis	0181-876-1863
16 Jun	South Wales	OFD I	Geoff Beale	01734-722510
21 Jul	South Wales	Craig-a-Flynnon	Geoff Beale	01743-722510
26 Jul-11 Aug	Italy	Praggia Bella	Julie Hesketh	0181-876-1863

WEEKLY MEETINGS:	At the Group's Mendip headquarters on Wednesdays at 7.00 p.m. and at the Eclipse Inn, Egham, Surrey, on Thursdays from 9.00 p.m.
CAVING ACCOMMODATION:	For up to 30 people, is available at the MCG headquarters: Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse, Blagdon, Bristol, BS18 6XW Tel: 01761-462797 Grid Ref ST51475606 OS 1:50,000 sheet 182
COTTAGE INFORMATION:	Through the cottage warden please (address and tel. no. below).
COTTAGE BOOKINGS:	
COTTAGE FEES per night:	MCG members, members children, SWCC and NPC £ 1.50 Guest clubs and member's guests £ 2.50
PREPAYMENT STICKERS:	(Available to members only) 12 nights accommodation £15.00 25 nights accommodation £30.00 55 nights accommodation £55.00
ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:	Full and Probationary Members: £25.00; Associate Members: £12.50

THE COMMITTEE

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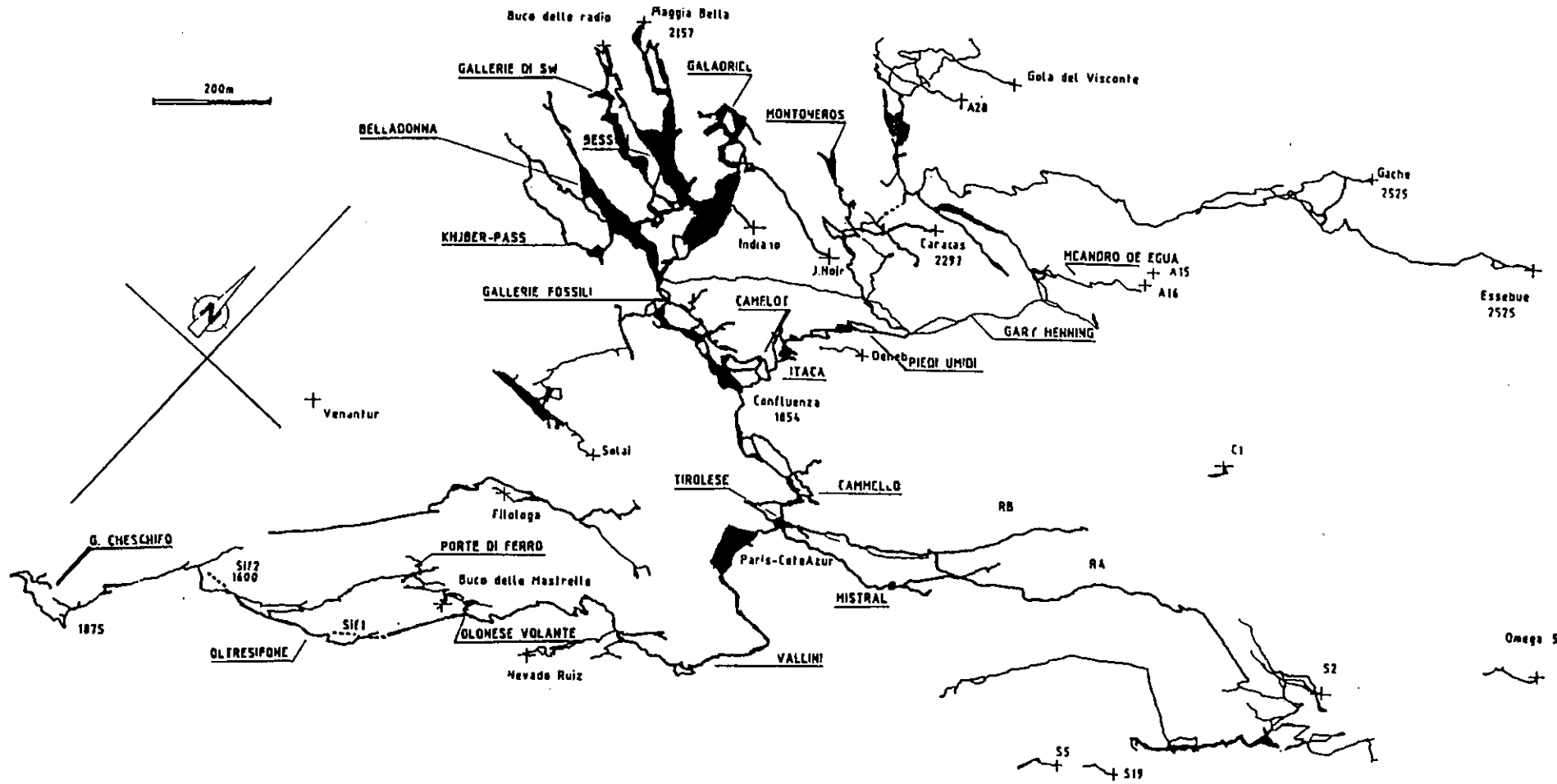
CUSTODIAN TRUSTEES
 JONATHAN ROBERTS
 MALCOLM COTTER
 PAT WALSH
 PETE MATHEWS

NON-COMMITTEE POSTS
 RESCUE WARDEN
 CONSERVATION OFFICER
 COTTAGE EXTENSION
 EXAMINERS

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PIAGGIA BELLA



ITALY 1996 - Survey of Piaggia Bella

MCG doings

ON THE MOVE Andy Bellamy to 2 Ashburton Villas, Lower Chase Road, Swanmore, Hants, SO3 2PB

WELCOME to the following probationary members: Tony Townsend and Tim Souch.

CONGRATULATIONS to Alan Wright on becoming a full member.

MORE CONGRATULATIONS This time to Don and Rosine Vosper on the birth of a daughter Alice on 29th January 1996.

EARWIG in on the committee meeting held 3.2.96... **Upper Flood II:** too cold to fit new lid. It will now be fitted on the March members weekend... **Wessex Challenge:** has been advertised in the Hunters. Interest has been shown from other caving clubs... **BCRA stand:** ideas put forward so far for MCG to sell - Occasional Publications, old Journals, MCG surveys, cards (printed from appropriate photos) with envelopes, framed photos, etc. Any other ideas?... **MRO donation:** of £50 from MCG for the use of their equipment on our rescue practice in Gough's Cave on Feb.3rd, and for their help and advice during the 'rescue'.

MISSING! Does anyone know of the whereabouts of the Bone Hole key? If it is lost or broken could someone please let the committee know so that they can do something about it. If you have just found it in your grot bag or in the boot of your car please return it to the library ASAP.

SWAPPED! After the rescue practice on Feb. 3rd I put my caving gear in the shed. When I went to collect it on the Sunday I found someone had picked up my red belay belt in mistake for theirs. Mine has my name and tel.no. indelibly marked on it so if you find you have it let me know and we can arrange to swap them back. *Yvonne Rowe*

SLIDE SHOW WITH A DIFFERENCE

The committee tried to get Gavin Newman to do one of his amazing computerised multi-projector audio slide shows as our after dinner entertainment on the 23rd March but he has other commitments. But he is prepared to show Tim Francis and Richard Carey how to use the equipment to enable them to give us the slide show in his place. Anyone who saw Gavin's 'Caves of Thunder' at the BCRA conference in Bristol will know that it is visually and technologically amazing, and not to be missed.

NEW VIDEO "Caves of Thunder" by Gavin Newman has now been added to the MCG video library. If you would like to borrow this or any of the other videos mentioned in previous newsletters, contact Joan Goddard.

GEOLOGY CABINET The geology cabinet in the cottage lounge was found with the lock off and the little figures from the mantelpiece inside. The fact that members wish to put these figures in there that is not the problem, it is that the cabinet is obviously not secure. As a consequence the better quality geological specimens that people had paid for, and other things of interest, like the Bone Hole bone have been removed. It's a shame really as quite a few geologically-minded members wished to have this display cabinet, and it took a long time to get it set it up, but there you go!!

NORDRACH COTTAGE BOOKINGS '96

23 Feb-24 Feb Kingston University (16)
 01 Mar-02 Mar Members Weekend
 23 Mar-24 Mar Members AGM Weekend
 05 Apr-06 Apr Members Weekend
 03 May-05 May Members Work Weekend
 10 May-11 May Lost World Cave Club (08)
 31 May-01 Jun Surrey Scouts (12)

PLEASE, PLEASE, will make sure you deadlock the front door every time you leave the cottage empty, not just when the last person leaves for home. Check other locks and windows too before you leave, especially if you are the last person.

More doings

KEEP EYES AND EARS ALERT! The horrific incident reported in the Cheddar Valley Gazette on February 8th and printed below happened to MCG'S neighbours, Ken Fry and Mary at the Stirrup Cup:

“Blaze kills cow’ Police are treating a blaze which killed a cow as suspicious. Fire struck old farm buildings, being used as a workshop, at Charterhouse, near Priddy, at 4.40am on Tuesday, January 30th. Severe damage was caused to the workshop and two vehicles were slightly damaged. Firemen with three appliances, one from Cheddar, extinguished the fire at 5.55am, using breathing apparatus and two jets.”

We would ask all members and their guests to report anything they see or hear of a suspicious nature going on next door at Ken and Mary’s, at any time of day or night, to the police immediately. They have always been good neighbours and would do (and have done) the same for us.

MCG’s RESCUE PRACTICE Also reported in the Cheddar Valley Gazette on February 8th, and of a more cheery nature, was MCG’s rescue practice in Gough’s Cave on February 3rd. (They have not got Phil’s surname wrong, he chose to call himself Phil Gold for the purposes of the press.):

“Caver welcomes the chance to be a rescue victim’ An honorary member of Mendip Caving Group was a more than willing rescue victim on Saturday. Phil Gold, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, was taken underground, thanks to Cheddar Showcaves laying the wonders of the adventure caving arena at his feet. But as he is unable to go under his own steam, a Mendip caving team supported him by stretcher for the easily negotiable parts, and on a canvas carrying sheet for challenging obstacles such as the 40ft pitch and April Fool’s Squeeze. The

cavers were simultaneously practising their rescue techniques and Phil, from Hemel Hempstead, has been a regular volunteer victim for four years. “He told us he missed going underground more than anything,” said Mendip Caving Group’s honorary secretary Joan Goddard. “A lot of people had put their faith in him during caving trips, and now he was happy to put his life in their hands.”

Phil Gold is pictured on a stretcher at Cheddar Showcaves with members of a Mendip caving team.



LOST KARABINERS - all on the rescue weekend: **Phil Ingold** lost a Snaplink karabiner and **Joe Frampton** lost two karabiners.

AND FOUND - on the same weekend: **Martin Rowe** discovered amongst his tackle a steel screwgate snap-type karabiner which he thinks came off the stretcher (Phil’s?).

YV’S DROPPING

Anon: “I paid for it, now you’re going to suck it!”

MEETS UPDATE Geoff Beale was unable to get a booking for Ogof Craig-a-Ffynnon in April but has secured a booking for July 21st. He has substituted the April OCAF trip with a trip into OFDI on 21st April. He has also tried to arrange a trip into Otter Hole but unfortunately the cave is booked solid for this year. However, he has asked John Hutchinson (booking sec.) to put us on the reserve list in case they get a cancellation which we could take up at short notice. When a trip is offered Geoff will let you know. *Watch this space.*

MCG RESCUE PRACTICE

GOUGH'S CAVE - SATURDAY 3RD FEBRUARY 1996

The practice commenced at 10:00am when an advance party of five cavers entered the cave in order to rig the necessary ropes for the free hanging pitch and fixed ladder climb. At 10:30am team 1 started the rescue practice by carrying on our willing victim Phil Ingold using the rigid stretcher provided by the MRO. No problems were encountered until reaching the pitch head and all that was required was a small section of hauling rope to enable rescuers to pull Phil through some of the lower crawls.

At the pitch head three ropes had been rigged. The first was tied to the head of the stretcher and the second to Phil's sit harness as a lifeline. A third rope was rigged for SRT purposes to enable a rescuer to abseil alongside the victim and extricate him from any nooks and crannies.

After lowering Phil down the pitch the short hauling rope was reattached and he was dragged through a tight low crawl to the bottom of the fixed ladder. Here again the pitch had been rigged in advance. Two ropes were used again - being attached to the head of the stretcher and the sit harness. Using a hand jammer in parallel with the ropes four people hauled Phil up the pitch with one rescuer just above and another just below him on the ladder in order to direct the stretcher through the narrower gaps. At the top of the pitch the ropes were left on the stretcher and Phil was lowered down to the top of the tight squeeze before the traverse.

The squeeze proved too much for the stretcher which was removed and pushed through in advance. On being removed from the stretcher Phil was able to manage it through the squeeze with the help of various team members pulling and pushing. After a quick check on Phil's insulin levels it was back on the stretcher for the traverse. The wire traverse line was tensioned using slings and the head of the stretcher was karabinered into this traverse line. An additional line was attached to Phil's sit harness with two members life-lining - one from either side of the traverse. Two members travelled across the traverse with Phil - one ahead and one behind - ensuring that both head and feet were kept as high as possible. Once across the traverse team 2 continued the practice by lowering Phil down the bottomless pit using a short length of hauling rope. From the bottom of the bottomless pit (?) the victim was pulled back through to the bottom of the pitch using a small length of hauling rope.

On the pitch four people were again used to haul Phil back up once again using a hand jammer as a safety device on the hauling rope while the lifeline was attached to the sit harness and manned independently. As on the way down a team member travelled with Phil using the SRT rope to avoid any possible snagging. At the top of the pitch an awkward manoeuvre was necessary to get Phil away from the pitchhead so he was kept on the lifeline until well clear.

From the top of the pitch it was a short haul and carry through the showcave back to the surface at approximately 2:30pm where MRO members Brian and Dani gave us a debriefing. They observed that all in all the rescue practice was a great success with many members participating, good teamwork and lots of lessons learnt. Small details over rigging were ironed out by Dani in particular concerning the use of hand jammers and the need for rigging to be as far above the pitch as possible. In addition Brian commented on the need for each team to have an appointed leader (i.e. one voice) in order to improve teamwork and communication. Overall though the practice was a useful exercise and can be viewed as an important learning exercise.

My thanks go to Brian Snell and JP Birch for their invaluable help in organising the rescue practice and to Martin Rowe and Joan Goddard for volunteering to man the surface support. Also to Dani and Brian for attending, observing and advising the practice. Final thanks to Phil for volunteering once again to be our victim. *Dave Tooke, MCG Rescue Warden*