

# MCG NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NUMBER 253

MAY 1996

## **CUEVA DEL AGUA '96** by Timothy Francis

After some well lubricated discussions in the bar at the SUICRO conference in Derrygonnelly, Fermanagh and a quick slide show, myself and Julie Hesketh found ourselves volunteering to carry diving kit up and down a 500m deep gorge. Our regular winter jaunt to Mallorca was cancelled in favour of a trip to the Picos mountains in mainland Spain. The rest of the team consisted of Gavin Newman, Dominic Wade, Pat Hall (all SWCC) and the MCG's linguist Richard Carey.

The aim of the trip was to dive the sump at the end of The Road to Wigan Pier in Cueva del Agua (El Nacimiento del Canal). This sump has thwarted previous attempts because of high water levels in the streamway below. The theory of a winter trip was that water would be 'locked' out of the cave system by being stored on the hillsides in the form of snow. Unfortunately the sump lies at the top of a 5m waterfall pitch, Parting Friends, and had only been reached on one previous occasion. The first attempt to climb it was made by Colin Boothroyd on the '87 expedition who fell whilst attempting a free climb. "Somehow he had caught his little finger on a jagged projection and had practically ripped the top centimetre off". We were to be armed with a Bosch drill and a bag of spits.

So it was late in the evening of Saturday 3rd February that we found ourselves arriving at the small village of Tresviso, Picos de Europa. We were to be staying in the somewhat civilised surroundings of the local bar which doubles up as a small hotel. We had all prepacked our kit to allow an early start on the first day. This was vital as we only had five days in the field to play with. The walk into Agua takes about 30 minutes and is entirely downhill with the descent from Tresviso about 500m. In the back of our minds was the long slog back up the Urdon Gorge after the trip. A canal has been constructed along the side of the Urdon gorge which provides the head of water for an hydro electric power station. The water from this canal is obtained from cave resurgences higher up the gorge, one of which is Cueva del Agua. Therefore the cave entrance is concealed by a concrete dam which diverts the water into the canal.

The cave is entered by rigging up a tyrolean with the wet suit clad member of the team (Gavin) swimming across the entrance pool to affix the rope on the far side. Immediately beyond a further traverse is required to pass a flooded pothole. In drier weather the draught causes the pool to evaporate away, and hence its presence gave us an early indication that water levels could be high. A fixed handline then assists a climb down a moonmilk clad rock lip before the main streamway is met. The force of water is too great to walk against and progress can only be made by clinging to the edges and jumping across at the narrower sections. A series of crawls leads off on the left, just before sump one, but the big yomping stuff is soon reached. This has that real sumpy feel which is reinforced by the Black Hole. This passage bores through an extremely dark section of rock which seems to absorb all the light shone on it.

On our first trip we followed the way off to the right and headed upstream. A tricky climb over moonmilk is required to enter the sump bypass. This is a well decorated section with some nice inlets which may provide scope for a further sump bypass. We investigated most of these but none could be pushed for more than a few feet. Another pool soaked the bits of our furies that were still dry before the streamway was rejoined. One look at the huge volume of water flowing past and it soon became apparent that we would be unable to get as far as the sump. A hot chocolate brew was started whilst we took it in turns to splash about in the torrent. I went for an interesting detour up a high level oxbow which rejoins the stream passage high above a meander.

*continued on page 5*

## MCG CAVING AND SOCIAL CALENDAR

DATE	AREA	EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
18 May	Mendip	Rescue Practice - Longwood	Dave Tooke	01784-436800
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 1	Geoff Beale	01734-722510
06 Jul	Mendip	JP's Curry Evening + Barrel	JP Burch	01737-217039
14 Jul	South Wales	Craig-a-Flynnon	Geoff Beale	01734-722510
21 Jul	South Wales	Craig-a-Flynnon	Geoff Beale	01734-722510
26 Jul-11 Aug	Italy	Piaggia Bella	Julie Hesketh	0181-876-1863
12 Oct	Mendip	Half-yearly Forum	Joan Goddard	01608-810382
12 Oct	Mendip	Social Event	Pete Moseley	01458-860524
Summer '96	South Wales	Ogof Draenen	Marcus Ward	01252-876783
14/15 Sep	Sheffield	BCRA Hidden Earth - MCG stand	Tim Francis	0181-876-1863
Winter '96	Derbyshire	Peak Cavern	Geoff Beale	01734-722510
12 Apr '97	Mendip	Annual General Meeting	Joan Goddard	01608-810382
Summer '98	Madagascar	MCG Expedition	Tim Francis	0181-876-1863

<b>WEEKLY MEETINGS:</b>	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.
<b>CAVING ACCOMMODATION:</b>	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
<b>COTTAGE INFORMATION:</b>	Through the cottage warden please (address and tel. no. below).
<b>COTTAGE BOOKINGS:</b>	MCG members, members children, SWCC and NPC £1.50
<b>COTTAGE FEES per night:</b>	Guest clubs and member's guests £2.50
<b>PREPAYMENT STICKERS:</b>	(Available to members only)
	12 nights accommodation £15.00
	25 nights accommodation £30.00
	55 nights accommodation £55.00
<b>ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:</b>	Full and Probationary Members: £25.00; Associate Members: £12.50

## THE COMMITTEE

<b>SECRETARY</b>	<b>JOAN GODDARD</b>	<b>tel: 01608-810382</b>
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<b>ORDINARY MEMBER</b>	<b>PETE MOSELEY</b>	<b>tel: 01458-860524</b>
	PENDLE COTTAGE, MEARWAY, WESTHAY, GLASTONBURY, SOMERSET	

CUSTODIAN TRUSTEES	NON-COMMITTEE POSTS	NAME	TELEPHONE
JONATHAN ROBERTS	RESCUE WARDEN	DAVE TOOKE	01784-436800
MALCOLM COTTER	CONSERVATION OFFICER	JULIE HESKETH	0181-876-1863
PAT WALSH	COTTAGE EXTENSION	WAYNE HISCOX	SEE ABOVE
PETE MATHEWS	EXAMINERS	HUW JONES AND DAVE TOOKE	

# MCG doings

**ON THE MOVE** John and Allison **Beauchamp** to 226 Monbuck Road, Kallista, Victoria 3791, Australia.

**Joyce Dines** (back) to Stoke House, Stoke Bottom, Oakhill, Nr Bath, BA3 5HW Tel: 01761-232302

**Linda Gates** to 40 Harts Leap Close, Sandhurst, Berks, GU47 8PB Tel: 01344-774589

**WELCOME** to the following probationary members: **Letti Patte** and **Roger Beck**.

**WELCOME ALSO** to **Pete Moseley** our new Ordinary Member who was co-opted at the committee meeting on 4.5.96

**AN APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP** has been received from: **Candida May**, 2 Westend Cottages, Chedzoy, Bridgwater, Somerset. (Proposed: G Woodall, A Wright)

**CONGRATULATIONS** To Alan and Liz Melon on the birth of Kyle Joseph, their third child, born 25th March and weighing 10½ lbs!

**PARTY!!** Don't forget, on the Saturday of the July members' weekend JP Burch is going to have a **curry evening** and Geoff Beale and Yvonne Rowe are going to supply a **barrel**.

**PENGELLY RECORDS** Sets of these technical cave research papers on Devon caves are being offered to MCG members. If anyone is interested in obtaining a set (or two) then contact Ian McKechnie on 01932-854959

**EARWIG** in on the committee meeting held 2.3.96... **Bone Hole key:** The old key has turned up and the new key now works... **Cottage extension:** About £6000 has been spent so far. Felting and tiles to be done end of May bank holiday... **1996 dinner:** 73 people attended and we made an excess of £65.47... **Investments:** these are doing well

enough in our deposit account as it is tax free, no risk and with interest standing at twice the rate of inflation. It has been suggested (rightly) that we don't have the time or the expertise to dabble in the market. As Unit Trusts can go down as well as up, we have decided to play safe and leave our money where it is but we will review the situation again after the extension has been paid for...

**MCG "shop":** Joan has done a stocktake. We have sold lots of items and are left with £640 worth of stock plus £208 worth of T-shirts and sweatshirts - updated stock list included with this publication... **Madagascar '98:** This will be a biggie - a six week expedition to explore an uncharted region - more details nearer the time... **Insurance:** Eagle Star now class the cottage as a 'holiday home' and charge a high rate which keeps going up. Martin has asked Zurich Municipal to quote for the insurance but the application form is complicated - can anyone help him? Joan to ask NCA and Witney Outdoor Centre about their insurance... **Photography**

**Journal:** There is a new journal out on photography which the committee have agreed to subscribe to (£15)... **MCG DYO camp:** A request has been made to the DYO advisory committee for an MCG diggers camp which will be brought up at their next meeting. It will be an open camp for any MCG member to use - they will just need to bring food and a sleeping bag. Cooking utensils will be provided but fuel must be replaced. It will be stricter than Daren Cilau camp. More info later if application successful... **Covenants:** Alan Melon is to organize covenants this year but would then like to hand over to someone else - *any offers?*... **BCRA conference stand:** Stand design agreed on. Upper Flood publication should be ready (plus three other publications already issued), Joan organising surveys, will have videos of Upper Flood II dig and Wessex Challenge (to play on the side), Charlie to be approached re photos for stand and/or competition, Julie Hesketh to be one of the BCRA photographic judges.

## OGOF FFYNNON DDU I - 14th APRIL '96 by Geoff Beale

*Team: Tony Bolton, Tony Townsend, Geoff Beale, Andrew Gardiner (SWCC)*

With dismal weather in South Wales we were advised by SWCC that our intended trip into Dan-yr-Ogof might be risky due to high water levels, so we decided to look at some of the not often visited (by us anyway) passages in OFD I. We were asked by SWCC member Andrew Gardiner if he could come in with us, which we all agreed. When we got to the entrance gate we found the padlock missing from the lock. This trip was a follow-up to our last OFD I trip in February when we found our way to the start of Fault Series but shortage of time prevented us exploring this section of OFD I. We also meant to look at all those passages shown on the survey but not yet visited.

**Fault Series** A short climb up a wet calcited boulder ruckle gained two passages at a junction. Left went into a squeeze and crawling to small decorated chamber with some nice gours on the right, but with no way on. Above was a fearful looking boulder choke that looked loose and wanted to drop down on the unwary. The ascending right passage from the junction swung left and ended in a dig into boulders. This would appear to be directly over the small decorated chamber seen earlier. This dig would seem an active one as there is evidence of blasted rock and remnants of bang wire.

This was the end (that we found) in Fault Series so we moved to the main stream via the Step. Here water levels were very low, not at all what we expected. Perhaps our planned Dan-yr-Ogof trip might have been possible after all. Just past the first waterfall a hand-chain on the left wall (going up-stream) was climbed. This leads to several crawling tubes, one going apparently to Eagles Nest although we must have missed it as we did not see it. We did see a small section of traverse wire which was recognised as being at the end of Wire Traverse, which is part of the OFD I escape route.

**Railton Wild Series** We continued up-stream and above the fourth pot was the entrance to Railton Wild Series. This series (again on the left) starts as a slippery climb. A low crawl leads to a junction. Left leads to Gower Passage to a squeeze below a nice looking but vulnerable stal above, to a further junction. Left leads back to a pitch above the main stream but right is a long straight stooping passage with a modest sized stream. A left turn leads to a still sump. The main way on with the small stream continues upwards through twisty sections until the stream was seen issuing from a small hole on the left.

Following on then into Carrot Passage to a t-junction, a well decorated blind passage was seen on the left. At the t-junction right went to a muddy sump, left went to two passages which closed down. A crawling passage on the right by a stal column led to a further t-junction. Left closed at boulders but right down dip opened out to a major passage seeming to run parallel to the passage from the vulnerable stal junction. Going down this passage some quite exceptional but yellow stained formations were seen which we hope to photograph on our next trip. We turned round at this point and made our way out after 4½ hours underground. We reported the missing lock to the SWCC duty officer who already knew about it but said thanks for reminding him.

Our next trip into OFD I will be to snap those formations previously mentioned! A photo trip of course.

## BROWN'S FOLLY MINE - 17th MARCH '96 by Geoff Beale

*Team: Tony and Helen Bolton, Tony Townsend, Richard Carey, Joan Goddard, Geoff Beale*

Having located the first entrance, the gate was found to be unlocked, but still on its hinges. Once inside route finding to the main workings is complex but eventually we found our way to the ruined stone truck where navigation was easier in much more defined mine adits. Our intention was to make for the Steps and then to Clapham Junction, however we missed the turn off Middle Passage by about 300m. We turned round and found the connection with the Steps via the old loading bays and eventually to Clapham Junction where many old railway lines converge to the old main way out. We had a good tour of most of the major passages including some that are not shown on the survey (very confusing!). Near to the old stables we found the remains of an old stone jib crane. We made our way out via the second entrance doing a pottering through trip in about 3½ hours. On the way back to the carpark we checked out a small section of mine workings sealed off from the main mine. The entrance archway is sealed with stone blocks but an entrance behind an enclosing gate through a small slot gives a way in. On the inside a scaffold bar assists entry down about 3m to a large dug chamber. This mine is separated from the rest of Brown's Folly Mine by a stone block wall on the far side. A small hard-to-find second entrance towards the north gives an alternative exit which makes another through trip, albeit a small one.

*CUEVA DEL AGUA '96 continued from page 1*

We decided to head back to Tresviso to discuss tactics. We were given our first taster of the long slog back up the hill. This is no fun especially when it's raining but the walk supposedly gets easier once you get used to it. An excellent meal awaited us back at the bar and we were soon refreshed. It was decided to go for a photo and tourist trip down Agua as the main diving push was obviously not possible. So on the second trip we turned left at the Black Hole and ascended the Ramp. This consists of a series of steep slopes protected by handlines. At the top of the climbs the passage descends gently passing the route to the further reaches of the cave on the right and Bone Passage on the left. The main route, the Road to Certain Death, continues as a series of traverses over the top of a streamway and eventually ends at the base of an imposing waterfall. At the top of this lies a deep sump which has yet to be passed.

From here the group split into two: Gavin, Pat and Dom did the photographs whilst Tim, Julie and Richard went for a wander back down the ramp. I was keen to investigate Bone Passage which heads off into a blank area of the survey so I left the other two to start a brew. Bone Passage begins as a gently ascending passage floored with sand. A large continuation heads off down a hole in the floor to the right. At this point I could clearly hear the streamway rumbling below so chose to traverse around the hole to the left. The ledge appeared quite fragile so caution is required. Beyond this point the walking sized stuff was briefly interrupted by a low sandy crawl. It was in this section that I noticed a low crawl to the left. This had obviously been entered but as I did not recall it on the survey it was worth a look. Amazingly the previous explorers had turned back at a small decorated chamber; no footprints were evident in the passage beyond this point. A low crawl opened up into walking sized passage. I followed this uphill past some excellent mud cracks. The passage turned to the right and began to descend steeply. Alternative tactics were required to attempt the descent of a steep rift. I had to take extreme care as all the sides of the rift were decorated with stal with some particularly fine helictites in the roof. I belayed my hand jammer and footloop to a blob of stal to assist the descent of the first awkward bit. My chest harness was used for the next climb but I was finally beaten about 8m from the bottom. The gradient of the rift appears to shallow out just out of site, and stones dropped down roll for quite a way. Anyone returning would be advised to take a length of rope to continue the exploration.

I returned to the end of the extension and continued to the end of Bone Passage. The passage takes its name from some unusually shaped pebbles encrusted with calcite which litter the floor. The end of Bone Passage terminates at a boulder choke and I was unable to find a route through. The way on would appear to be down in the floor to the left. An extremely fine red flowstone climb can be entered on the left. This can be followed for about 20m until the calcite meets the roof. Back at the ramp we all met up for a quick brew before going for a wander down towards Boulder Hall and Brian Baru's Place. This is the beginning of the route to the further reaches of the system starting at a 22m pitch. The cave was then derigged and all the kit dragged back up that horrendous walk.

Our final few days in Tresviso were spent battling with the weather. The snow fell on most days and we were rather concerned that the minibus would not make it out of the pass. One day was spent fruitlessly hunting for a 'going' cave on the wooded slopes below Tresviso. The cave supposedly contains three or four undescended shafts that LUSS did not have the time to descend. A local villager was unable to find the entrance with the rain not aiding our search. We decided to head out of Tresviso on the Thursday. The minibus was kitted out with a set of snow chains and we were towed by a 4 x 4 on the icy bits.

The last day was spent lounging around Arenas de Cabrales. Dom and Gavin went for a dive in a large resurgence next to a petrol station just outside the town. A return is planned to check out a climb which is believed to lie beyond three sumps. The rest of us went for a walk on the hillsides above Arenas and descended a small pothole. This choked at 13m but was well decorated with stal, two black and yellow lizards, and a toad. Another large shakehole was investigated nearby but we would have needed a hammer and chisel to descend into a narrow meander. We all regrouped in town for a slide show before beginning the long drive back through France. We left the Picos with the feeling that Cueva del Agua is begging for a dedicated expedition as we were barely able to look around. The leads, both above and below water level, are considerable. How about it?

## GIANTS HOLE - CASTLETON, 13.4.96

*by Marcus Ward*

After a treacherous trip on the Friday up to Derbyshire through heavy snow we joined Ben Cooper and the Cadley Hill Caving Club in Grin Low Cottage (approximately 1 mile outside Buxton) at about midnight.

The next morning Zoe Hammersley, Martin Rowe, Yvonne Rowe, Ben Cooper, Ian(?) and myself headed off to Giants, with the rest of CHCC following about an hour later. After paying our 50p goodwill fee and a quick stomp through the recently fallen snow we made our way into the nice walk-in entrance.

We quickly made our way through the easy going passage to the first and only pitch we came across which was into a 30ft deep pot. From there we entered the 800ft Crab Walk. This is a long meandering passage where you have to side step your way along which takes about 40 minutes in all. It gets tight in places towards the end, as my mum (Yvonne) found out by getting stuck in a very awkward tight crawl called The Vice! You then come to a couple of short drops, a fixed ladder and then you are in The Eating House. A short climb up with the use of a hand line and you are supposed to be in Maggins Rift but this took us 20 minutes to find. By this time we were getting very cold what with the cold melt-water, no wet suits, standing around and all the rest of it. Anyway we were determined to do the round trip so carried on.

After a short walk, stoop and crawl up North East Swallet we came to Poached Egg Passage which is full of stal bosses which look more fried eggs to me, but still, you have to see it to believe it. After a brief scout about Poached Egg Passage, Martin and I did a quick recce trip to see which was the way on. We found Ghost Rift which is a small passage that links with the Crab Walk again, except today it was a long, cold, wet duck. As we were only wearing furry suits and were cold we split up. Martin, Ben and Ian went on to find the Crab Walk and Zoe, Yvonne and I turned back.

On our way back we passed the other CHCC party then at the bottom of Maggins Rift we bumped in to Martin, Ian and Ben. They said that they arrived about a third of the way down the Crab Walk very soon after we split so they decided to come and check up on us. It was now very wet in the Crab Walk with icy cold melt water and there was such a torrent you couldn't actually see the fixed ladder that had been clearly seen on the way in. We made good time on the way out and were back on the surface very quickly. This was helped by leaving the pitch rigged for the second group.

Back on the surface we could see that most of the snow had melted whilst we were underground, hence the vast amounts of cold water. This is not usually a wet-suit cave but it is advisable in wet weather! We were underground for a total of six hours before we headed back for showers, then we went into Buxton for a well deserved very hot curry! P8 was planned for Sunday but hangovers put a stop to that so we ended up in the pub for lunch followed by a visit to Pooles Cavern ( showcave). P8 will have to wait until next time!

## FOBBED OFF BY THE COTAG SYSTEM?

There have been reports of members having difficulty with the Cotag access system which was first installed in February 1994. When a key fob comes within 10cms of a reading head, it will be activated, read and checked for validity by the control panel. In order to do all this, the key fob is powered by a lithium battery. However, the fob remains inactive (therefore conserving the life of the battery) if it is more than 10cms from a reading head. In regular daily use, the battery should power the key fob for 8 years (i.e. until at least 2002). When a battery begins to run down the key fob sends a special signal to the control panel via the reading head, and at this time the key fob should be replaced.

So, why has it been reported that at least one key fob has already run its battery flat without warning? Users should be aware that the key fob will be activated by any Cotag system not only the system at the cottage. Do you carry your key fob with you to work, and does your workplace have a Cotag system? If so, every time you pass within 10cms of a reading head your key fob will be activated. Do you carry your key fob with you at all times whilst you are at Nordrach Cottage? If so, each time you enter or leave the front door your key fob will be activated if you allow it to pass within 10cms of the reading head which is located in the electricity meter box by the door. The system at the cottage is set to 10cms, but systems elsewhere may operate over a greater distance - for example, loop systems which activate the key fob from much greater distances to lower barriers to secure car parks. It therefore possible that your key fob is being activated more frequently than you think, resulting in the lithium battery failing sooner than 8 years. A quick calculation suggests that for a key fob to fail after only 2 years, it must have been activated more than 5840 times, or 8 times a day. This could happen if your workplace operates a Cotag system especially a system with remote reading. The solution is, only carry your key fob when you need it.

The other potential problem is one of misuse. Key fobs are robust but not indestructible so don't let the key fob get wet or allow it to be submerged - this will damage the microchip. Don't allow it to get too hot (e.g. on the dashboard of your car on a sunny day) or too cold. Ideally, never take it underground as it is not designed for the caving environment. In practice, you may have to if for example you are going to GB and cannot risk leaving it in your car, in which case make sure you carry it in your ammo box or BDH, not on a loop of string around your neck, or in your oversuit pocket.

If you have always treated your key fob with care, and have only ever used it at Nordrach Cottage, but you still cannot make it operate the lock, are you using the correct procedure to gain access? There are two locks on the front door, and you have two keys - a Yale type key (stamped 'M' if you are a full member or 'G' if you are a probationary member) and the Cotag key fob which is a black resin block approximately 2cms x 3cms with the Cotag logo etched into it. You need both of these to open the front door, and it is important to use them in the correct order. Use the Yale key first. This lock is a combined night latch and deadlock. To unlock it you must insert the key and turn it twice clockwise to release the deadlock and once more to release the night latch, i.e. up to three complete turns clockwise assuming the door was fully locked when you arrived. Remove the Yale key (you may have to turn the key ½ a rotation anticlockwise to do this). You can now release the electronic Cotag lock using your Cotag key fob. To the left of the door is the white electricity meter box. The Cotag reader is located inside the meter box, at the bottom, in the centre. Its position has been outlined in black indelible ink although this has now faded. Your key fob must be placed less than 10cms from this point and ideally should be placed flat against this spot with the Cotag logo on the fob facing you. Please note that you do not have to open the meter box! The electronic signal can penetrate plastic, wood, stone etc. As you place your key fob in the correct position you will hear a gentle click which is the electronic lock on the front door opening. There is a time delay of a few seconds during which the lock remains open. Turn the black door handle and the door should open. You may have to pull the door towards you first as the latch sometimes catches on the striking plate. Remember, you only have a few seconds before the electronic lock resets. If it does so, you will need to place your key fob against the meter box again to re-open the lock. During your stay, you can put the electronic lock "on the snib" but remember to release the snib before you finally leave to make the lock operate again.

If all this fails, it could be that your lithium battery really has packed in. If so, send your old key fob to Lee Hawkswell who will arrange to send you a new one. If you are lucky, another member of your party will have their own key fob and you will still be able to get into the cottage. However, if you are the only one with a key fob and you know for sure that no-one else with a key fob is expected then you cannot get into the cottage. If this is the case, Arthur Spain holds an override key to the Cotag system and has agreed that he will come to the rescue of any stranded MCG member. **You must not call Arthur out if you have merely forgotten your key fob.** Arthur will also attend in an emergency situation should the Cotag system totally fail.

For further information on how the Cotag system works please see newsletters 234 January '94 and 235 February '94.

## Priddy Green Sink - A back door to Swildons by Timothy Francis

**Introduction** Recent digging activity in Priddy Green Sink, primarily by the BEC, has led to the probability of a second entrance to Swildons Hole in 1996. As inquisitive as ever we were keen to have a look at this notorious Mendip collectors item. Those of a nasally challenged disposition have traditionally been the only visitors. We also went for a tour around Cowsh avens which makes for an unusually vertical trip in Swildons.

**History of Exploration** Interest in Priddy Green Sink was initiated by the attempts to climb Cowsh Avens in 1958. By superimposing the cave survey onto the surface topography it was soon noticed that Cowsh Avens lay below a small swallet adjacent to Manor Farm. It was thought that digging out the swallet could be an easier means of reaching cave passage above Swildons 4. Digging continued on and off for a few years, and the top of Mains Aven was eventually reached from below in 1964 by the UBSS. Digging of Priddy Green sink ceased in 1964, with only 150ft of passage discovered. Further work in the 1970s resulted in the discovery of El Krapitan, Shit Sump and the Top Avens. This is how it stayed until 1995 when the BEC rekindled interest at both sides. Cowsh Avens have been forced to a point extremely close to the surface and digging access was renegotiated for Priddy Green Sink. Rapid progress has been made at the dig site and a connection with Cowsh Avens is now imminent.

**Priddy Green Sink** The entrance lies about six feet from the road not far from Mains Barn. Access is currently controlled by the BEC but volunteering for a digging session should see you in. A 15ft pitch (diggers ladder in situ) drops into a small continuation. A lowish bit and moderate squeeze lead to the old terminal chamber. This is slightly unstable on the right and has pretties taped off on the right. The 1995/1996 digging effort commenced at this point and the passages trend steeply downwards. The cave quickly gains depth and at one point a 15ft rift is descended. A particularly tight section dubbed The Blasted Bastard required considerable persuasion to pass. Immediately below this sporting bit a junction is met. Straight on leads to the most recent breakthrough which appears to pass over and beyond the perched sump at the previous lowest point. The passage continues to descend and must lie at a similar level to the Top Avens. The passage is a little unstable at present but digging continues.

Heading left at the junction one enters a tight rift which is about 20ft long. At the end a small drop lands at the head of a 20ft pitch. Above the pitch two small inlets enter, one stream comes from Priddy Green sink but the source of the other is unknown. These inlets are currently choked with rocks but clearance of these impediments should provide a bypass to The Blasted Bastard and hence allow access to Big Lads. At the base of the pitch chamber a further squeeze needs to be negotiated to reach the final chamber. This section is called The Four Virgins. Typically for Mendip the stream closes down to enter a tight flood prone bit of passage. I was able to pass the previous limit reached in this crawl and forced the thrutch as far as a sump. A couple of nasty squeezes needed to be passed but luckily I was able to turn around at the sump. This looked more cowsh than water but Jingles assures me that as long as its fluid its diveable. Flood debris on the sides of the tube testified to the potential of flooding. Upon looking at the survey of Swildons it would appear that this sump lies at the same level as the Shit Sump passage at the top of Cowsh Avens. The two ends could lie as little as fifty feet apart.

**Cowsh Avens** Excited by the potential of Priddy Green sink I wanted to have a look at the Swildons side of things. We bumped into a couple of the BEC diggers in Bat Products who told us that the Avens were currently rigged for SRT. Our proposed trip to High Atlas in Thrupe Lane was aborted and a trip to Cowsh Avens substituted in its place. The team was to consist of just myself and Duncan Horn as Andrew, another RHBNC Mole, had accidentally slashed his hand the night before. Whilst we were there we hoped to achieve a sound connection with Richard Blake, or at least his persuasive digging, who intended to be at the bottom of Priddy Green Sink at the same time.

The present route into the Cowsh Aven Series is located on the left hand side of the Swildons Four Streamway, looking downstream. A drippy 30ft pitch has been rigged from a couple of solid(ish) naturals and is backed up from a handline. We replaced this 9mm handline, which had a bad rub point, with a double length of 11mm. The handline assists a steep 30ft free climb with easier scrambling above. Three pitches: Little Pot(20ft), Boss Pot(30ft) and Bladder Pot(55ft) follow immediately. The first two pitches are rigged from naturals with Bladder Pot, a particularly fine ascent, rigged from an old raw bolt. At the top a phreatic tube, Ken's Crawl, leads to the top of Mains Aven. From here we mislaid the route upwards to Shit Sump and the Top Avens; it was behind us! A sound connection was attempted but we found out later that we had arrived an hour earlier than the diggers in Priddy Green Sink. We returned back via Bladder Pot rather than the traditional round trip descent of Mains Aven.

On our two trips to the Priddy Green/Cowsh Avens area water levels were low. The caves were relatively clean and trips were pleasant. A subsequent trip by Malcolm and Norma Cotter was done in wetter conditions and the volume of cowsh washed into the cave was considerable. It is also worth noting that Priddy Green Sink is subject to flash flooding as it acts as the storm drain for the Priddy road.

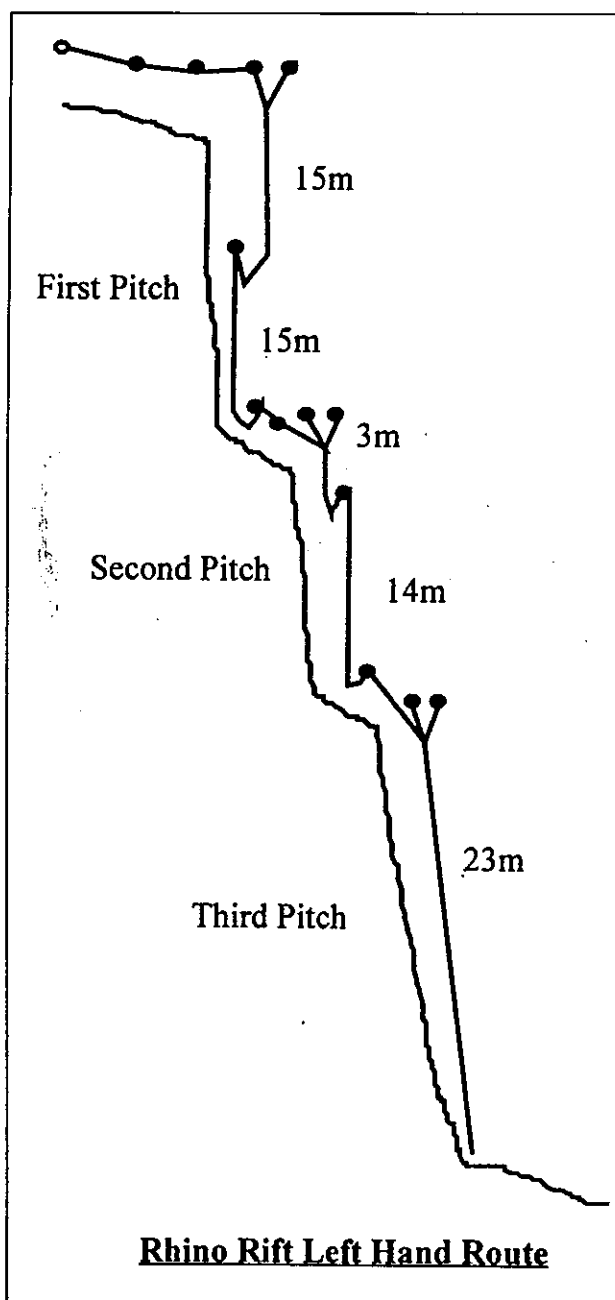
**Access:** For Priddy Green Sink see the BEC diggers, for Swildons a 50p goodwill fee should be left at Manor Farm (opposite the field gate). Change in Mains Barn rather than on the Green.

**Teams:** Priddy Green Sink: Richard Carey, Tim Francis, Julie Hesketh.  
Cowsh Avens: Tim Francis, Duncan Horn.



## PROPOSED REBOLTING OF RHINO RIFT

This document is a proposal for the rebolting of the Left Hand Route in Rhino Rift with ECO hangers. Currently the route is not complete since some 8mm spits have failed. The cave walls need tidying up since there is bolt rash at the pitch heads, especially the first. Replacing the spits with ECO hangers will make rigging safer because ECO hangers are considerably stronger. ECO Hangers cause less damage to the cave walls since dead hangers can be removed and new ones placed in the original hole.



There is no intention to place ECO hangers on the Right Hand Route. It is one of the most technical SRT routes in the country and receives less use. The spits are still in a good state of repair as they are being used by more experienced cavers. There is therefore no over tightening of the anchors, which is the main cause of failure.

The Left Hand Route is the normal direct route that begins on the left hand wall of the first pitch. See diagram opposite.

It is proposed to rebolt using ECO hangers under the NCA bolting scheme. This scheme defines how the bolts should be placed. It also defines a regular testing program and provides indemnity insurance for the bolt installers. Detailed documentation on exactly how the ECO hangers should be installed, tested, documented, etc. is available from the NCA. Much of this documentation is also reproduced in "The Cavers Guide To The ECO Anchor" by Les Sykes, available in most caving shops.

The approximate location and number of hangers required can be seen in the diagram. The exact location and number of new hangers required will depend on the condition and shape of the rock. This is a matter that is best assessed at the time of installation.

All existing spits on the Left Hand Route and dead spits elsewhere are to be removed. The holes will be filled with resin and dressed with stone dust to blend them in with the rock.

11/04/96 Charterhouse Caving Company Ltd

## WESSEX CHALLENGE 8TH JUNE

**The challenge:** Tyre rolling assault course Kick-off 2:30pm. Teams to register 2pm. Spectators welcome.

**The stomp:** Pig roast. Real ale bar. Very loud R & B band. From 7:30pm. £7 in advance or £8 on the door. Tickets from Dave Tooke 01784-436800

## COTTAGE BOOKINGS

31 May - 01 Jun	Surrey Scouts	(12)
14 Jun - 15 Jun	Keith Jennings	(16)
21 Jun - 22 Jun	Reading University	(16)

## More MCG doings

**MCG (MASONIC CAVING GROUP!?)** It would appear that some members are suspicious of the committee. They think it closes ranks and keep secrets - only letting members know what they need to know. *How hurt the committee are!* Committee minutes often run to 4 pages of A4, but everything is summarised in 'Earwig' except those things that are carried over unchanged for months on end, for example the shoring up of Bone Hole. Bigger or current issues are written in more detail as an item in 'MCG doings'. The only things that are excluded from 'Earwig' are confidential membership details, e.g. requests from members for reduced subs for personal reasons like low pay etc.

A request was made for committee minutes to be published with the newsletter but it would be unfair to ask Mike Lovell to do more than the current 10 pages of newsletter. However, the committee minutes are placed in the library and can be read by any member. Once the extension is finished committee minutes will be back in the library again. In the meantime you can request the current minutes by sending an SAE to Wayne Hiscox.

Perhaps members are not aware that they are entitled to sit in on any committee meeting as observers - that is, they can be present but they should not join in the proceedings or pass comment unless invited to do so by the committee. It would be a good idea for those thinking of being on the committee to come along and get a feel of things (if you know what I mean). Committee meetings have been held openly in the Eclipse and the Hunter's, and more recently in the Cottage lounge - hardly secretive - but with the general bustle of a busy weekend it is unfair to monopolise the dining tables and conversation is difficult so the committee meets somewhere quieter.

We hope this makes you all feel a bit more comfortable about the committee as it really isn't the MCG Mafia. It *always* has the Group's best interests at heart.

**SINGING RIVER MINE** The owners, Mr and Mrs Smith, of Northwood Mill, Folly Lane, Shipham would appreciate a courtesy call before you go underground. Their house is on the right, a little further up the lane from the entrance to the field with the mine in it.

**CCC ANNUAL PERMITS** expired at the end of April, the anniversary of the date on which CCC was replaced by CCC Ltd. Unfortunately, CCC Ltd. underestimated the number of annual permits that would be required and these are now out of print. New permits will be issued as soon as CCC Ltd. can supply MCG with new stock. In the meantime, CCC Ltd. have assured us that you may take your expired permit with you to GB, or wherever, and it will be accepted. If you are requested to show a permit, produce your old permit and explain the situation.

**ECLIPSE MEET** Don't forget that the Group has a regular weekly pub meet at the Eclipse, Egham, every Thursday from 9pm. If you can't make it every week, why not try to attend on the third Thursday of every month? At least that way you should meet some familiar faces.

**WORK WEEKEND** took place on 4th, 5th, 6th May. Twenty five members and guests attended (where were the other 100 members?). Amongst other things, the following work was completed: wood on dormer windows replaced; windows cleaned and window frames treated; cookers and surrounding areas were degreased; exterior lights repaired, infra red switch added; silt trap improved; shed lock repaired; shed, under-stairs and gas store cleared. Thanks to those who helped - the rest missed a great barbecue.

**BCRA** now has many sub groups producing special interest publications such as Explosive Users Group, all with different subs and different renewal dates. From 1997 BCRA hope that renewal forms will allow members to join or renew subs for these sub groups at the same time as renewing their main BCRA membership.