

MCG NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NUMBER 262

JULY 1997

MCG Practice Rescue 7th June 1997

Those attending: Rescuers: Brian Snell, Keith Knight, Marcus Ward, Dave Tooke, Lette Patti, Charlie Allison, Linda Gates, Caroline ?, Tim Fancis, Steve Jones, Ian ?, Megaline ? (Volunteer casualty), Jane Baldwin (Surface Recorder)

The venue for this year's rescue practise in Tynning's Barrows Swallet had been chosen for me by Dave Tooke (the previous Rescue Warden), and was clearly going to be quite challenging. Being quite narrow in places (from a rescue point of view) it promised to provide similar problems to that of the entrance section to Longwood August that was achieved very successfully on 18th May 1996. A reconnoitre of the cave on the AGM weekend resulted in a revision of the original plan to start the rescue at Pyramid Pot. I felt this was too far in, risking the rescue turning it into an ordeal rather than a learning exercise. So the distance was shortened to a point just around the bend from the Ardvark Trap. Starting from this point would provide sufficient obstacles for a rescue practise. It would mean that rescuers were not totally dead on their feet on exiting the cave (important as we were all looking forward to sampling the barrel at the cottage and enjoying a barbecue), also an inevitable forced abandonment of the rescue due to running over time would be avoided. For the first couple of hours on the Saturday morning it was beginning to look as if we would have to trim back the length of the practise even more due to lack of numbers. However, by late morning we had a sufficient team of eleven and we got going around noon.

The practise turned out to be a very successful in many ways. A key lesson learned from previous rescues is that you cannot have several people calling out at the same time as this leads to a disorganised effort. With just one person calling, the result is a co-ordinated team all knowing what to do next. The cave is too narrow for any one person to control the procedure throughout so responsibility needed to be handed over to who ever naturally took over at each stage. A good thing, as everyone learns more this way, and that is the whole point. The result was a steady rhythm being maintained and obstacles negotiated quite efficiently as they arose. Another plus was that some team members had not been on a practise rescue before. Even better, they had actually enjoyed it.

Thankyou to everyone who took part, they had every right to feel pleased with themselves.

The report on the Rescue Practise sent to the MRO is on pages 4 and 5.

MCG CAVING AND SOCIAL CALENDAR

DATE	AREA	EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
09 Aug-10 Aug	North Wales	Ogofs Hesp Alyn & Hen Ffynhau	Julie Hesketh	0181-878-5495
22 Aug-07 Sep	Spain	Picos de Europa	Julie Hesketh	0181-878-5495
12 Sep-14 Sep	Bristol	BCRA Hidden Earth Conference	Tim Francis	0181-876-1863
04 Oct	Mendip	Half-Yearly BBQ & Barrel at the Cottage.	Pete Moseley	01458-860524
18 Oct (TBC)	South Wales	Phil Ingold's trip into OFD I	Joan Goddard	01608-810382
25 Apr 1998	Mendip	AGM & Dinner	Tim Francis	0181-876-1863
Summer 1998	Madagascar	MCG Expedition	Charlie Allison	0181-224-7591

WEEKLY MEETINGS:	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:	MCG members, members children, SWCC and NPC £1.50
COTTAGE FEES per night:	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
RECIPROCAL RIGHTS:	MCG (members only) have reciprocal booking rights with SWCC and NPC: NPC bookings via Andy Goddard tel: 01978-812100 (wk) 01244-570944 (hm) SWCC bookings via Ian Middleton tel: 01703-736997 email ian_m@tcp.co.uk

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MCG doings

CONGRATULATIONS! to Fiona Wills and Roy Kempston who married on 17th May.

Linda Gates on her marriage to Alan Milne on 25th July.

ON THE MOVE Bill Headington to 79, Chandog Road, Keynsham, Bristol, BS18 1PW. Tel:0117-986-1399.
Cara Allison 2 Windeatt Square, Totnes, Devon. TQ9 5WH.

INVITATION - Norma Cotter is hosting a party at the cottage on 16.08.97 to celebrate 40 years of caving on Mendip and her 60th birthday. All MCG members welcome.

INTERNET NEWS

The National Caving Association (NCA) Official web site address is now <http://www.nca.org.uk> In particular the National Caving Diary as published in Speleoscene will be online and will be updated regularly. The CSCC "Hand book and Access Guide" will soon be included.

Andy Sparrow has a new web site which includes a newpage for Mendip cavers, the latest on digging access etc. He can be found on andy@ascaveservices.demon.co.uk if anyone has anything they want included. The site is www.ascaveservices.demon.co.uk

Gavin Newman has a new home page at: <http://www.action-photo.u-net.com> it contains some excellent caving shots together with a portfolio of photos covering a multitude of sports as well as Gavin's work for enviromental organisations such as Greenpeace.

BCRA Conference in Bristol

Information on the conference can be found at:

<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/nca/bcra/conf97.htm>

HELP REQUIRED! Volunteers are needed to shore the entrance to bone hole. This has been outstanding since 1990 so come on let's stop dragging our heels. If anyone is able to help please contact Tim Francis.

BCRA CONFERENCE IN BRISTOL

Plans for an MCG stand have been abandoned as no new publications are available. However, please support the conference if you can as the MCG are heavily involved in the organisation. Tim Francis is the Domestic Lectures Secretary, Dave Tooke the Stomp Manager. Charlie Allison is responsible for internal/external signing in addition to photographic bits. Helpers over the weekend would be appreciated, contact either Tim or Dave if you can oblige.

EARWIG in on the committee meeting held on 06.07.97... Netherwood Swallet Tim Francis has received a reply from Mr Thomas at Swiss Cottage. Permission for a dig has not been granted. Purchase of Land at Pwll Ddu MCG to make a token donation to help with the purchase of the plot of land that contains the entrance to Draenan. Water Softener to be obtained and fitted by Arthur Spain. Upper Flood II Lid. Lid is completely broken and unsafe repair work is underway. New Entrance to Upper Flood II Trip arranged in August with Tim Francis and John Baker plus representatives of Somerset County Council. Ceiling Damage MCG reluctantly covering the cost for the damage as the culprits can't be found. Pete Moseley to have a go at the repairs.

EXTENSION DOINGS

The front door has now been moved to its new location. Only the deadlock is fitted so Cotag system not currently in use. Cotag system to be moved over the next month. Builder still to complete the rendering. The soakaway has been filled in and the rubble pile moved.

Introduction

This is a report on the recent annual rescue practise held this year in Tynning's Barrows Swallet on Saturday 7 June). In the hope that the report may be of some use to the MRO I have probably been over detailed in some it. But as too much information is better than not enough I have include descriptions of things as locations and types of anchor points used and other possible anchor points that could have been used. The convention of using descriptions of 'right' and 'left' is to be regarded from the point of view of the caver coming out of the cave.

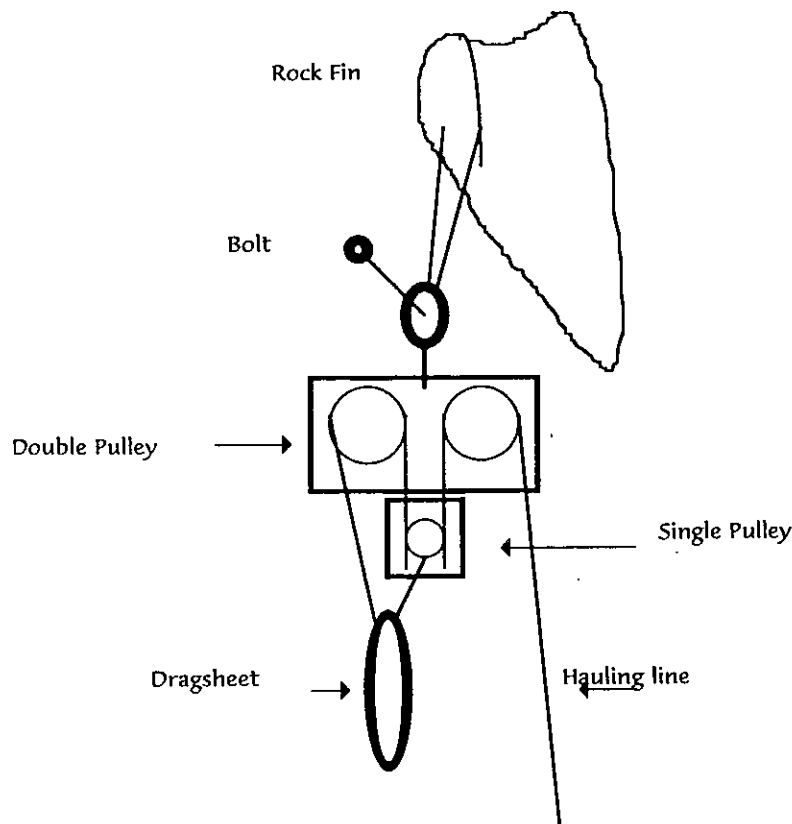
The Stainless Steel stretcher frame and dragsheet were collected from Brian Prewer on Saturday morning. Some sacking was also collected which was to be used to simulate a casualty during main pitch hauls. Brian had warned me that the hauling of live casualties up pitches is now discouraged for reasons of liability of insurance.

The team of 11 including the volunteer casualty initially split into two parties. At about 12:00 noon an initial party of myself and two others set off about a half an hour ahead of the main group. The aim was to begin the preparation of pitches both for hauling and laddering and fixing belays at awkward sections like the Ardvark Trap. The intention was to start the rescue beneath a large slab of rock a short distance beyond the Ardvark Trap around a left hand bend. Here a 3 foot metal pole has been jammed vertically in the hope of stopping a large mass of rock in the roof from descending should it decided to do so. Wishful thinking!! The easier or normal route is go underneath this block but if you go over the top there is a steep descent of about 10 feet down through a hole to meet up with the normal route. We began by hauling the casualty up through this hole, as it was considered short enough not to be deemed a main pitch.

Once the rest of the group had arrived the business of putting the casualty into the dragsheet began at approximately 1:30 p.m. First a waist belt and legloops were fitted to give a secure lifeline attachment. The process of putting the casualty into the dragsheet took a little while however, as those involved (some of whom had been on past rescue practises) had actually put someone into the dragsheet and were a little unsure about the straps. I intend that this will not happen in the future by giving some pre-practise instruction. The steel frame could not be used at this stage as it was too long to fit through the hole. So the dragsheet was attached to a main hauling rope, plus one of the dragsheet's hawser lines and the casualty was also lifelined. The hawser was used to initially aid the hauling but also to use at the top when the main hauling rope needed to be detached. The only good anchors here were by using climbing nuts in cracks in a narrow rift above and left of the hole but as a real rescue would not use this route I won't describe further here. The practise began and the haul through the hole achieved without any problems. The casualty was then strapped into the frame and the carry continued to the Ardvark trap.

Anchors had already been fixed for belays at the Ardvark Trap to secure rescuers who need to stand near to or straddle the pot. These were found on the downstream side again using climbing nuts, in a crack 6 feet up on the left wall and about 10 feet from the pot. The right wall is a bit loose here so the use of pitons in cracks would be dangerous. About 3 feet upstream from the pot on left wall at chest height is a very good thread belay which requires a 5 foot length of 9mm. rope which needs to be stiff (like SRT rope) to enable easy threading. Directly opposite this on the right wall at about 8 feet a large stone jammed into a crack provides another thread belay. This needs to be of rope and pulled down hard on to jam it tight beside the stone. It was noticed that on the right wall about 10 feet up directly over the Trap a length of metal bar about 1 foot long could be lodged into a crack to provided another anchor but it was considered unnecessary on this occasion. The transfer of the stretcher over the pot was achieved without difficulty and the rescue proceeded, initially at head height in the rift passage until it became wide enough to be carried at floor level. The next notable difficulty was at the junction with the passage which leads left off to Sheep's Jaw and Dragon Chamber. Here the main passage becomes quite narrow for about one stretcher length and the stretcher need to be lifted into the top of it to enable the frame to fit. It must be noted that our casualty was a small framed person of just over 5 feet in height and by moving her arms and shoulders we were able to negotiate the passage. A large framed person would make this short section very much more difficult and may need to be taken off the frame to get through. The rescue continued to where the passage turned left and became narrow and steep allowing only one rescuer at the head and tail of the stretcher. As the floor of the passage was loose and slippery here, a hauling line was rigged to the stretcher from the top of the passage to maintain security from a possible slip. At the top of this rift passage a climb up through a short bolder choke meant another haul. An almost vertical 10 foot hole leads up through this section and is quite tight. The decision was made to remove the casualty from the stretcher frame again as there was not enough room. Again a main hauling line and one of the dragsheet hawsers was used plus a lifeline to the casualty. The main hauling line was rigged to a short horizontal spike directly over the hole and this was backed up with a wire tether over another block above. The frame was passed though first and made ready. The casualty was then pulled through without problems. After strapping her back into the stretcher frame again the rescue continued without problems to where the passage momentarily opens up before a low section leads to the base of the entrance pitch. It was decided to end the rescue for the live casualty. The dragsheet was taken to the base of the main pitch where it was loaded with two rather heavy bags of stones to simulate a person's weight (about 110 lb.). We could only use the dragsheet for this as the steel frame is too long to fit at the top of the pitch.

At the head of the main pitch there are two opposing bolt placements allowing a classic "Y" hang if needed, or as is usual one for a ladder and the other for lifelining. But above the bolts is a large fin of rock which takes a wire tether over it and on the left of this fin a large jammed stone also allowed a good thread to be used. This allowed a sound anchor for hauling from the left bolt and the tether over the fin. A lifeline was attached via a thread around the jammed bolder and was also backed up to the hauling anchors. As there is very little room at the head of the pitch the hauling would need to be done from below. The MCG had recently purchased some new items of equipment specifically for the group's rescue kit and some of these were pulleys. We were keen to try out one of these, a Petzel tandem pulley, so a double pulley system was set up as indicated in the diagram below.



The haul was found to be very easy with only about one third of the effort required on the hauling rope and the simulated casualty was easily pulled to the top. In addition the load on the hauling anchors would have been reduced to a approximately 140% of the dragsheet weight. The major difficulty came when the dragsheet needed to be transferred off of the main pulley system to a haul line from the other side of the 'Letter box'. Here it needs to be lifted up enough to rotate the head onto the sloping slab which forms the 'Letter box'. There is only enough room here for one person on a ladder, one at the top of the pitch and one the other side of the 'Letter box' for lifelining. This means that initially only two people are available to negotiate the awkward lift of the dragsheet onto the slab. Consequently a major struggle developed just to make any sort of headway. One of the big problems here, apart from the lack of room, is that the dragsheet when being hauled from above falls quite naturally into a vee slot at the end of the slab. A tackle sac filled with packing material and hung into this vee slot to pack it out would probably make life much easier. In the ensuing struggle the stitches of one of the straps on the dragsheet was torn. After much effort and some pulled muscles we eventually managed to get it to the base of the concrete pipe entrance shaft. Here it was found that rescuer fatigue and the weight of the dragsheet was too much to haul up and the two sacs of stones were hauled up separately. A sensible solution for this last section would be a tripped arrangement of scaffold poles rigged up over the entrance to give clearance for a useful pulley system. The rescue team were all out of the cave at about 5:30pm.

Conclusions

The rescue was considered a great success with every one learning a lot from it. The major problem experienced was in the last 40 feet of cave especially the main pitch. On a future rescue more thought would need to be put into giving aid to the two people who do the main hauling in this section.

Best Regards,

Brian Snell (Mendip Caving Group - Rescue Warden)

Voyage on STS Lord Nelson to Gran Canary

by Phil Ingold

Voyage 345 13.01.97 Island Hopping in the Canaries. A memorable voyage with super "Buddies", thanks to everyone, I do not have the vocabulary to thank them all.

Following a clear journey on the M25 to Gatwick Airport at 5.45am (thanks Helen!) and breakfast in the airport services I was "Sack Barrowed" to my aisle seat, a good way to board. The flight was uneventful and I enjoyed a 5+ hour rest. On arrival at Gran Canary we boarded 3 mini buses after reclaiming our bags wheelchairs etc. I met and chatted to some of a large jolly group from the 3H Holiday Fund who were also waiting to join the Lord Nelson.

After a drive across the island the Lord Nelson came into view its masts and furled sails neatly waiting for us to arrive. Once on board Watch details, Watch cards, harness, clamps to secure the wheelchairs, bunks and bedding were allocated. The "crew" were introduced and we were given a pre-sail briefing. My "Buddies" Julie, Heather & Ken helped to store my possessions and prepare my bunk. An excellent cold buffet was enjoyed followed by a small lager in the bar after which I retired whilst the others sang folk songs in the bar.

The next morning I was on "Mess Watch" so was woken before breakfast. "Mess duties" were helping serve breakfast and clearing away. We were now departing from Gran Canary. Those on deck admiring the scenery as the sun rose, setting the sails and keeping the deck clear kept us busy.

A new day, 4am is too early! Seeing dawn on a cloudless sky was delightful compensation. After breakfast, setting sail was hard work. The watch was now more used to climbing the mast and more competent, so unfurling or stowing the sails was easier?! My wheelchair was taken off the boat despite tides causing severe level differences. Lunch at "Valentin Playa" in Peurto Rico was excellent. My next watch was 8pm - midnight.

Early start again! We were asked who would like to be hauled up the mast. "Yes please", I said. A team of haulers were assembled, the lifting beam was positioned under the wheelchair. I was hauled aloft. A great view across the Island and a brief wheel across the platform. I was then asked if I would like to climb the mast. "It has to be all your own effort", "great" I replied. The safety line will not be used to pull you up!! My feet were guided up the ratlings, the climb was exciting and gave me a fantastic buzz. My feet were helped into the correct position. A wonderful day, and a good shot of adrenalin as a bonus. I rested in the sun before my next exertion.

Achieved a swim via a wheel chair with wide wheels which was floated into the warm sea, Wendy swished me around and I managed to sweep my arms to propel myself a little. What a fantastic memorable day!

We spent the last day looking around a very touristic resort. Getting some pressies was my next priority. The only item to impress me were some olives in brine. The Duty Free shop had to be my salvation!

Arrived at Gatwick Airport after a turbulent flight wearing shorts to find snow on the ground. A stark contrast to the Canarie sun and warmth so recently left. It was lovely to be met by Helen and Simon at the airport.

Recent Book Aquisitions

How to Shit in the Woods by K Meyer - a serious book written in a lighthearted manner - worth reading if you are the expedition type.

Thrupe Lane Swallet, a survey and history by A Legg - 26 pages of text and diagrams accompanied by a BCRA Grade 5 Survey. This a MUST for anyone interested in Thrupe Lane. The story began as a large collapse in 1967 which was dug by Wessex, Westminster S.G. and Axbridge. The first 5m of open passage was entered in 1974, and at Easter Atlas Pot was descended. The cave description is arranged as short sections of text illustrated with explanatory mini-survey diagrams. The survey took 220 man hours for a total length of 1605 metres and was drawn up using the computer program "Survey." There is a short section on hydrology and suggestions on what to do if flooding occurs.

Dry stone Walling - BTCV Handbook The club is providing a site and the stone for BTCV volunteers to practice their skills building a boundary wall between our land and Mr Brown's field; we thought we'd buy the book in case members have to continue the job at some time in the future!

Cave Passages by Michael Taylor - Published in 1966, this is a 285p hardback book covering various expeditions to Mexico, Jamaica, China and various regions of the United States. I have to admit that I found the book rather egotistical, but once I got used to the style of writing it made good armchair reading.

Joan Goddard

OUR NORTHERN CORRESPONDENTS

As members already know, Yvonne and Martin are moving up t'North and I would like, via the newsletter, to thank them for all their hard work over quite a few years (I'm not keen on sums so haven't calculated exactly how many years!). Yvonne's newsletters have kept members in touch with the club's "doings", and while on the committee both she and Martin could be relied on to turn up and support club functions and projects even when it required juggling of other commitments and a special journey.

Arnside is near to Yorkshire and fairly close to Derbyshire so I'm sure Yvonne and Martin will become part of the caving scene up there - and will be able to join us on MCG meets. Also, they'll have to give their cars a workout now and again and where better to aim for than Nordrach! On a more personal note, I shall miss the regular walks I enjoyed with Yvonne - where our average speed was severely restricted due to the surrounding archaeology, geology, plants, bugs, beasties - and even bears! (but not on Mendip)

Good Luck to you both! Can we look forward in future newsletters to "Arnside Asides," "News from t'North" or even "Broad sides from Arnside" to rival "Fragments from France?"

Joan Goddard

MENDIP CAVE REGISTRY

Tony boycott

In 1994 the Mendip Cave Registry (MCR) was reformed following its demise in the late 1960s. It is manned by volunteer Registrars who form the membership of the Group. The MCR receives no financial aid from clubs, regional or national bodies based upon the premise that "he who pays the piper calls the tune".

As an independent organisation it can operate freely without constraint from external bodies. The aim of the MCR is to record all available information relating to the caves and stone mines of the three counties from whatever source and make it available at cost to bone-fide cavers, national and regional caving organisations.

At the moment the group is compiling a register of sites of spelaeological interest in the counties of Bristol, Somerset and Wiltshire in addition to comprehensive bibliographies of published works, articles and surveys all of which are assembled as separate databases.

The first edition of the Mendip Cave Register is planned to be published at the BCRA Conference being held in Bristol in September, 1997. The Mendip Cave Bibliography and Newspaper Catalogue which is being published during July 1997 currently comprises over 11,000 references and the newspaper list of accounts relating to Mendip caves from 1675 to the present, contains a further 1800 references. Future updates are planned.

The Hon. Secretary is:

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(telephone 0117 950 7336 e-mail. ABDr@compuserve.com)

The Database Recorder is:

Dave Irwin, Townsend Cottage, Priddy, Somerset, BA5 3DP
(telephone 01749 870 369 e-mail. DJ12@compuserve.com)

Any information that may be of interest to the Registrars should be sent to Dave Irwin. Offers of help relating to a specific area or help of a general nature should be made to Tony Boycott.

The Registrars are:

Dave Irwin (BEC/UBSS) & Ray Mansfield (UBSS) - Central Mendip and Burrington Combe.

Tony Boycott (BEC/UBSS) - Bristol area.

Chris Richards - Western Mendip and North Somerset, including Cheddar.

Graham Price (CSS) - East Mendip (north)

Jonathon Roberts (MCG) - North Mendip.

Chris Smart (BEC) - Wiltshire

Richard Witcombe (WCC - East Mendip (south).