

MCG NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NUMBER 263

AUGUST 1997

MATIENZO '97 by Kerry Howard

This was the destination of the RHBNC CC for approximately two weeks this summer. MCG members who went along were: Malcolm, Norma and Sonya Cotter, Lee Hawkswell, Kerry Howard and Reg Pain.

We took the Portsmouth - Le Havre ferry, and travelled through France and Spain. We arrived at Pablo's Bar and campsite around lunchtime on the 22nd June. Tents were erected, frisbee played, dinner cooked and sleep had. The next day we went cave spotting. In the morning Phill (who had been there before with his uncle) showed us the resurgence sump from Cueva del Agua - it was very impressive. The next idea was to follow the stream down until a swallet was reached. A cave was only 200m further along from here. However the obvious route down was severely overgrown. Therefore, after two and a half hrs of jungle bashing by Lee, Sonya, Malcolm, Norma and Kerry the cave 'Carcavuezo' was found - part of the Four Valleys system. A much easier route was found back to the campsite. The rest of the group had decided to wade down river, couldn't get very far, and ended up in the bar!

After lunch we decided to take the minibus to find Cueva Lluvia - the Four Valleys System resurgence cave on Juan Corrin's recommended list. The description put us in mind of an extended jungle bashing session, with reports of 3hrs to find the cave, not being found at all, and having to abseil over the limestone cliff from a field above, in order to gain access! But after a mere 10 mins, we found the very impressive entrance. A huge limestone cliff was nestled in jungle, with vines hanging over the side, ferns on floor etc, etc. It took about 15 mins to find the actual entrance (a small muddy hole 3m up from the floor in the cliff), as the obvious holes did not go anywhere. We all donned zooms, and had a quick bumble to the blow hole and pitch, before returning to the minibus with definite plans to return and do the cave proper (which unfortunately was not to be). We found one more unimpressive entrance - Cueva de Riano. This was draughting strongly, due to it being the western entrance to the Four Valleys System.

Now for the actual caving part!

Cueva de carcavuezo (Four Valleys System)

This was the first cave we did, as it was only 10 mins walk from the campsite. We aimed to stagger the party into two groups, as a party of 11 was quite large to take down a cave of which we had no surveys or descriptions of what to expect. The first group (Phill, Reg, Kerry, Andrew, Aggy and Andy) took a couple of ladders and set off. After a short crawl, the cave opened out into a fair sized chamber, with a couple of ways on. The passage to the left was a nice shaped sandy stoop which closed off at a choke. Back in the chamber, we met up with the other group. Malcolm and Norma went down the first passage, while the rest went to explore the second main passage. This passage zig zagged into a rifty climb down, ending at a series of dead-end crawls, which contained some cave shrimps and millipedes. Meanwhile, Malcolm found the way on, while waiting for the rest to climb back up the tight, awkward rift, in the first passage through some boulders on the left hand wall. A climb down using a fixed handline dropped us into the streamway. The stream sumped to the left. Reg, being the only one wearing a wet suit, explored down stream, and advised us that it was not worth exploring, being 'slippery and miserable, with deep bits in places.' All in all a disappointing, scrabbly cave, with lots of flood debris, and not a pretty in-sight! So much for our first taste of Matienzo caving!

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MCG CAVING AND SOCIAL CALENDAR

DATE	AREA	EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
09 Aug-10 Aug	North Wales	Ogof Hesp Alyn & Hen Ffynhuan	Julie Hesketh	0181-378-5495
22 Aug-07 Sep	Spain	Picos de Europa	Julie Hesketh	0181-378-5495
12 Sep-14 Sep	Bristol	BCRA Hidden Earth Conference	Tim Francis	0181-376-1863
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	01688-810382
25 Apr 1998	Mendip	AGM & Dinner	Tim Francis	0181-376-1863
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, BS40 7XW 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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THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP IS A REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 270088

MCG NEWS IS PUBLISHED BY THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP, NORDRACH COTTAGE, BLAGDON, BRISTOL, BS40 7XW

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MCG doings

ON THE MOVE Julie Hesketh to Flat 6, 16 Lambert Avenue, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4QR. Tel: 0181 392 2572.

Joe Frampton to "Mayfly", Willow Wren Wharf, Hayes Road, Southall, Middlesex, UB2 5HB. Tel: 0181 569 1964.

Reg Pain to Oak Hatch, Reynolds Lane, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN4 9XN.

Nordrach Cottage the post code for the cottage has changed to BS40 7XW.

Mark Ward to 6 Wood Close, Wells, Somerset, BA5 2GA. Tel: 01749 675693.

EARWIG in on the committee meeting held on 02.08.97..... Kerry Howard accepted as a probationary member. Shoring of Bone Hole Reg Pain has volunteered to do this. Water Softener now fitted. Phone now working at no cost to the MCG as the fault was due to BT. Ceiling damage now to be done by the plasterer due to Pete Moseley's argument with an angle grinder. Hope you are recovering well Pete and look forward to seeing you back at the club. BTCV to continue dry stone walling Sun 24th Aug and Sun 28th Sept. We now have a source of stone from Warren Farm which is £25 per tonne delivered, a bargain!

EXTENSION DOINGS

Plasterboarding is now done. Wiring is now to be done during the September members weekend by Don and Arthur.

BCRA Conference 12 Sep - 14 Sep
The Cottage is getting booked rapidly. There may be only floor space left!

Fun for Phil in Ogof Fynnon Ddu - Saturday 18th October

Arrangements have now been made for us to take Phil Ingold into OFD I on Saturday 18th October. The owners of the cave entrance, Mr John Barrows and his family, have kindly given permission for us to go ahead (and they have also given practical assistance with the wheelchair modifications.) 12 beds have been booked at SWCC for Friday 17th October - but I'm sure a few more could be accommodated if necessary. Phil and Helen will be staying nearby in a suitable B & B.

About a dozen sherpas are needed to take Phil into the cave. The entrance ladders will require him to be strapped into a stretcher and lowered down through the gateway, but the main passages should be negotiable with Phil sitting upright in a "sedan chair" modified from a wheelchair donated by an Oxfordshire wheelchair servicing firm. Our goal is the streamway - so that Phil can have a paddle (but no promises, Phil!)

On Phil's previous trips underground he has been the volunteer "victim" in rescue practices and we have had excellent turnouts of about 30 people. This time, because of restrictions on the number of people entering the cave and because it is more of a tourist trip, not so many people are required - but it will be hard work with everyone being expected to take their turn in carrying.

Please will those who wish to take part in the trip phone Joan Goddard (01608-810382) or Brain Snell (01329-238341) well in advance.

Cave sites around Nordrach

Tim Francis

"A large amount of work remains to be done on this area of Mendip, and doubtless further digging at the more promising locations will prove rewarding".
(Knibbs, T. 1962)

The MCG is fortunate in having plenty of potential dig sites within walking distance of the cottage, and over the years I have investigated most of them. The following is a brief resumé of recent digging activity and a pointer to other locations. We have had little success as of late but surely one of the digs will 'go' one day? The caves are listed from the top sinks around Nordrach to downstream as far as the Blackmoor Valley. All waters resurge at Cheddar, and although I am not necessarily suggesting that they constitute an inlet system to the master cave it is an intriguing possibility none the less.

Hazel Warren Farm Area

Starting at Nordrach Cottage a series of shakeholes can be identified running downslope towards Hazel Warren Farm. The water sinking in the soakaway can probably be considered as part of this line of shakeholes, the largest of these can be seen in the field adjacent to the cottage. A line of shakeholes can be followed across the field leading towards Hazel Warren Swallet. This depression is situated just behind and to the North of the farm and would be an excellent Hymac prospect. There is currently no digging access to this site. A shallow dry valley can be traced in the direction of Cow Hole and contains several small shakeholes.

Cow Hole

The infilling of the shakehole in 1990 resulted in the collapse of the boulder choke near the entrance. Pipes have been reinstalled but a considerable effort would be required to safely dig open the cave. Digging at the bottom of the cave was described at the time as being particularly grim. There was not much of a noticeable draft, however its distance from Cheddar makes it perhaps a worthwhile project.

Home Farm

Just past Home Farm the road actually passes over a significant shakehole. The base of the depression is in small copse to the West of the road. I do not know to what extent this takes water in wet weather. A further depression near to the road, just beyond Hazel Corner, is in fact a gruffy, although it provides a nice exposure of the limestone. The fields in this area are relatively flat and appear to have little spelaeological potential.

Pinetree Pot

This has been the site of a considerable digging effort over the last five years. A phreatic tube above Pine Pitch, a Pock Hole Lips Way, has been dug to a length of approximately 100ft. The current dig face fills up with water to a depth of five feet after periods of heavy rainfall, and has somewhat restricted dimensions. However water above this point drains away with a satisfactory gurgle so perhaps it will be worth persevering still. There are several small shakeholes on the north eastern edge of the field which are undoubtedly related to this passage. All appear unrelated to the current drainage although we have permission to dig one shakehole marked with a tree stump.

The water in the field probably sinks in the valley bottom close to the Treble Chance Dig shakeholes. These were dug in 1969 by the Axebridge. The water is seen again emerging from a small inlet half way along Back Passage. Persuasion would be required to allow the caver to follow the water upstream. Downstream the small trickle can be followed as far as a cobble choke at the end of Easy Street. I think this would still be diggable but there is virtually no stacking space, and the dig has the added disadvantage that most of the potential diggers are too large to reach the end.

Warren Lodge

Just over the road from Warren Lodge there is a deep shakehole, probably natural. This takes the runoff from the road and would be another hymac possibility. Up valley the topography is confused by the presence of gruffys. Nordrach Mine is located in the middle of these gruffys but does not intercept natural passage. Back over the road at Lord's Lot there are no shakeholes evident. The valley then sweeps upwards towards Whitestown Farm and beyond. The two sites of Rocket Drop and St. Lukes (Whitestown Farm Swallet) are worth a mention although are out of the scope of this article.

Maire's Nest Also known as Nordrach Cave this site is at the head of a small dry valley and can only be seen from the road if you know where you are looking. This huge shakehole was dug by the Axebridge in the early 1960s but digging was inconclusive. A definite hymac job if permission could be obtained. This valley and the Pinetree valley join up just over the wall from Ubley Warren Pot.

Ubley Warren/Nettle Pot

This pair of small shakeholes lie right in the base of the valley below the Roman Road. The downstream dig in Ubley has been sporadically dug over the last few years but the water does not drain away fully. Stacking space for spoil is minimal and digging conditions cramped. Access has been improved by the removal of half a boulder and the roof has been shored up. Elsewhere in the choke a few leads have been extended with one nicely decorated void discovered. A strong draft was noticeable during the recent wet weather and I am convinced that the prospects here are excellent.

The main dig in Nettle requires large amounts of bang and is a probably not worth continuing. However some progress was made at a new site in the main chamber with a small bedding plane located. But digging directly underneath the Rock of Danmoces was rather off putting and we have not continued the venture for the moment!

Downvalley there do not appear to be any other sites until the Blackmoor reserve, although I have not investigated the copse on the bank on the North side.

Netherwood Swallet

In wet weather water can be seen to run down the bridleway all the way from the bend on the road at Nordrach as far as the Netherwood Swallet area. This was last dug inconclusively by the MCG in 1983 but the shakehole is now filled in. There is no digging access for this site. There is also probably a further swallet further down the track on the left hand side, just beyond the field gate. Most of the runoff from the track sinks at this point.

Bank Dig

This is located near to the isolated tree upstream from Upper Flood in the Blackmoor. It has long been suspected that the water sinking at this point is associated in some way to the stream which enters Midnight Chamber in Upper Flood. Any new surface digs in the reserve have the disadvantage of having to obtain permission in advance from all the relevant bodies.

Upper Flood

There is still potential to follow the water upstream from Midnight Chamber. Work is continuing to remove the huge volume of tailings which block further progress. The streamway gradient has been altered by diverting most of the water down an immature oxbow which runs round the back of the flowstone barrier. Downstream digging has restarted in the choke and one day I'm sure this site will be cracked. The recent Occasional Publication provides a full account of the MCG's efforts so I will not duplicate efforts here.

Upper Flood II

The connection of Upper Flood II to Black Shale Rift has not yet happened but the diggers propose to use more persuasive methods than the hydraulic pacebreaker. Digging will resume once the necessary formalities have been completed.

Waterwheel

The recent dry summers have prompted suggestions of resealing the dam and having another go at the terminal rift. In a prolonged period of drought it should be possible to dig out the floor of the rift. This would be a considerable project to undertake but well worth a go.

Hidden Swallet

It has been postulated that there is an additional swallet that lies between the leet and Blackmoor Swallet. Water levels have been so low in recent years that it has not been possible to test this hypothesis.

Blackmoor Swallet

No work has been done here since the original explorations of the 1960s.

Blackmoor Shaft

Several members have rummaged around in the choke but with little success. The shear scale of the choke and the presence of bats mean that a serious dig here would be a mammoth undertaking.

Grebe Swallet

This is the most southerly swallet known in the Blackmoor reserve although there are old miners rumours of a further swallet downvalley. Digging at the end of Grebe by Willie Stanton and co. has effectively ended for the time being, and trips are conducted only in small groups accompanied by a leader.

I hope this article at least stimulates discussion amongst the armchair cavers and perhaps even encourages more MCG members to dig in the Nordrach area. Although we are unlikely to find cave on the scale of Draenen there are still underground passages near the cottage waiting to be discovered. The sites are there, all we need are the diggers.

Otter Hole : A Sunday bimble by Dave Tooke

Letti and myself were up with the larks on Sunday morning despite a few pints the night before. Arthur and Tony duly appeared at 8 o'clock and we all piled into Tony's car for the drive to the River Wye. Met up with Steve Eddy at the car park and changed into our gear just as our guide arrived. Made it into the cave by 10:30 for our over the tide trip.

The entrance series was tighter than I remembered (I blame it on my fading memory rather than my increasing waistline) but just as muddy. Unfortunately one of the tighter squeezes forced Tony into retirement due to back and neck problems after about twenty minutes. The rest of us carried on undaunted slipping and sliding down to the tidal sump. Arrived there with the water about knee deep - sighs of relief all round - no swimming required.

Up the iron ladder and through the next series of squeezes before washing down in the last bit of streamway before the pretties. Through the next set of squeezes and emerged just as muddy as before - only wetter !! Entered the Hall of Thirty shortly afterwards and from then on the formations just get better and better. Huge stal bosses, stalagmites, stalactites, pristine curtaining, gour pools, straw forests - this cave has it all. Any photos or descriptions just do not do this cave justice - you'll simply have to see it for yourselves. Far more impressive than I remembered it (well it has been ten years !!).

Decided to turn around at 3 o'clock just as we reached the tunnels left / tunnels right junction having seen all the best formations. The return journey was somewhat quicker with less time taken admiring the pretties. Struggled out onto the banks of the Wye tired but happy into the early evening sunshine only to be presented with the final obstacle - a walk up the steep hill to the car park. Fortunately a smiling Tony met us with drinks and chocky bars. After buying our guide Mark a quick drink it was back to the cottage for an early night and some well deserved sleep.

Team : Tony Bolton, Steve Eddy, Letti Patte, Arthur Spain, Dave Tooke, Mark Wilden (FODCC)

Diver Found

Copied from the Telegraph 21st August 1997: "Rescuers yesterday recovered the body of Rob Parker, 35, the cave diver from Bristol who disappeared in an undersea cavern complex at South Andros island in the Bahamas."

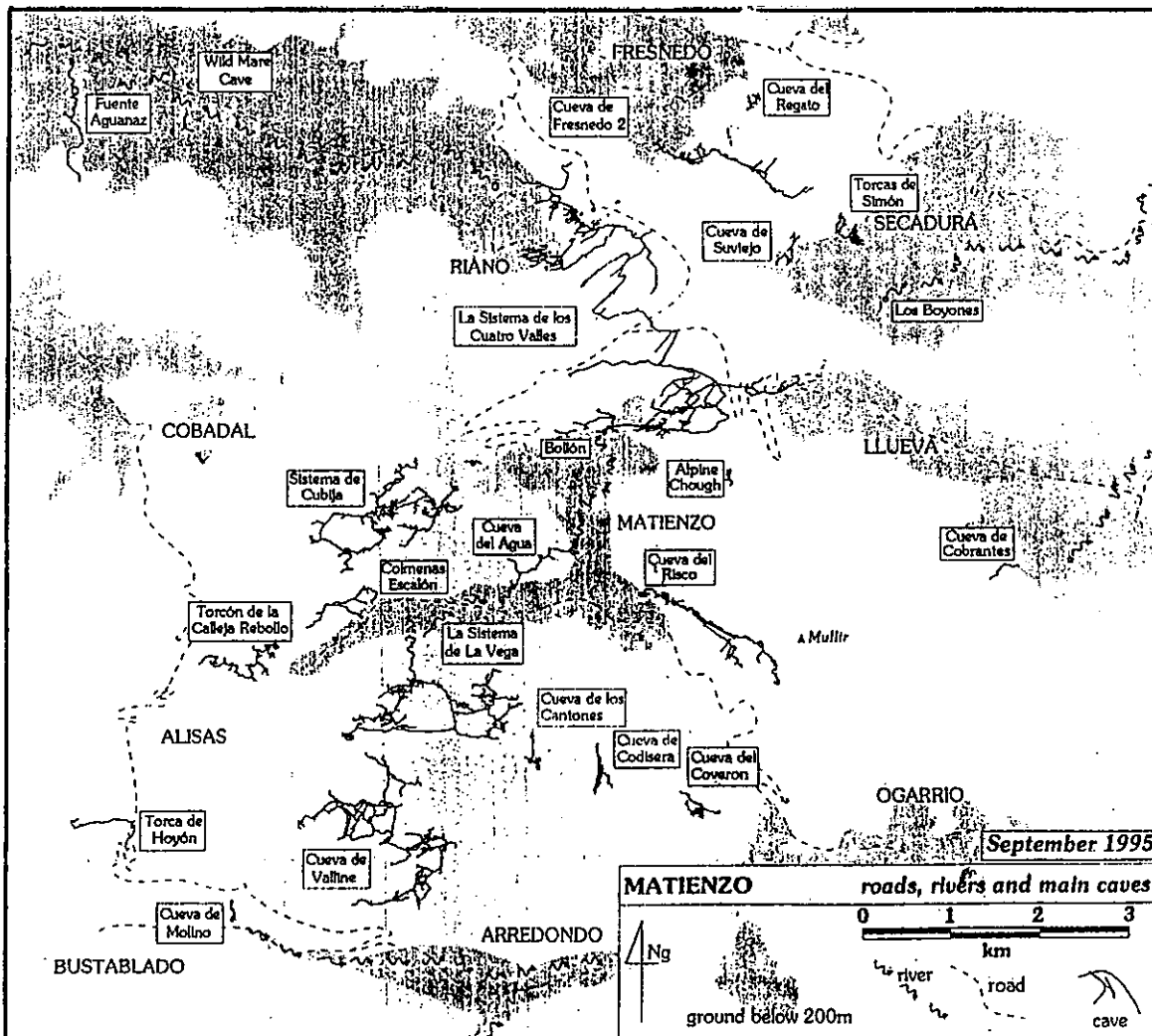
This follows closely Rob Palmer's death while diving in the Red Sea. A double tragedy for Cave Diving. Sincere condolences to their families.

MATIENZO '97 continued

Torca de Mostajo (Cubija System)

We again split up into two groups, this time with both groups doing separate caves. One group consisting of Reg, Kerry, Lee, Sonya, Malcolm, Norma and Big Tim went down Mostajo, which more than compensated for the misery of Carcavuezo. This cave had a 27m entrance pitch, which was easily rigged, with one simple deviation. Immediately after the pitch it was apparent that there were many pretties. A dead end chamber to the left contained many straws and curtains, as well as many fossil flowstones and gower pools. Off to the right were more pretties, and after scrambling over more large flowstones, a huge chamber was reached. This had a finely decorated ceiling, which we could only just see courtesy of Malcolm's spotlight! We emerged in this chamber about halfway up, and the gaping hole at our feet was navigated via two fixed traverse lines along the left hand side of the wall, passing many more fine formations.

After the traverse, we reached a sand covered ledge which provided a magnificent view of the chamber and traverse line. From here, a short hand and knees crawl ended in a sandy chamber, which led to a short flat crawl in sand. This brought us to the first of two very pretty chambers. Some stunning helactites, straws, columns, crystals etc etc, made for a great photo opportunity. This chamber was followed immediately by another of equal beauty. At the end of this, a short fixed ladder brought us up to a very tight crawl (Big Tim had to be dug through!). This split off into two ways. The right ended in a small stooping sized chamber with some excellent crystal formations. The left opened out into a huge passage, with some more stunning stalagmites and columns. What ensued was a case of follow the yellow brick road, a fine sandy trail leading the way. This took us passed many more formations, although the ceiling was too high to fully appreciate them. We turned back at a traverse line off the right which passed over 'The pit', due to time considerations. Reg and Kerry headed out first, digging the tight crawl a little wider for Big Tim to follow. An (almost) speedy exit was made, and every one on the trip agreed it was the best cave we did throughout the two weeks.



Map courtesy
of Juan Corrin

More from
Matienzo next
month!

A Wet(tish) weekend in Wales (or the search for Fwcht-Y-Ffino.)

With the rain teeming down all week it was decided on Thursday night that the proposed camping trip down Dan-Yr-Ogof would probably be a little damp but, seeing as the Croydon hut had already been booked, we thought what the hell and headed for the Beacons on Friday night anyway, pausing only to pick up Steve on the way. After a few beers Dave, Letti and Marcus decided that a trip down Daren to see the Antlers and the White Company was in order. The others thought this was too boring and opted for an all day through trip at Dragons.

As Marcus and Letti had not been down Daren previously it fell to yours truly to try and lead. Surprisingly we made it through the entrance crawl in good time without getting lost - a real test of navigation this. Things took a down turn after such a promising start however as we could not find the entrance to the boulder choke for fifteen or twenty minutes. Having finally located it we dropped through to the top of Jigsaw passage and spent the next half an hour or so yomping down through the big passage looking at the mud formations.

On entering the big Chamber Nowhere Near The Entrance we encountered our second navigational problem. I knew from a previous trip that the way on to Epocalypse Way was to head for the top of the chamber but we still managed to spend over an hour exhausting every possible route until we found the right way on. Another section of large yomping passage deposited us at the White Company - some of the best formations down Daren. Marcus and Letti were suitably impressed and an impromptu decision was made to return in the near future for a photographic trip. From the White Company we quickly poked our nose into the entrance of Urchin Oxbow taking great care to avoid the aragonite formations after which the passage is named. These really are incredibly delicate and the passage is rightly taped off.

From then on it was a quick walk down past the kitchen and onwards to the Antlers before turning round and heading out. The return was a triumph of joint navigational skills - we didn't get lost once and we would have had no problems but for the fact that Letti's back decided to stop working - making the entrance crawl a bit longer and considerably more painful.

Back out in time for a slap up meal and an update on Joe, Tim and Julie's trip to Dragon - I'm glad we chose the boring option !!

Hangovers / sore backs / sore knees / general apathy on Sunday meant that the group was reduced to a short walk from the hut to the various entrances of Porth-Yr-Ogof and the top of the local waterfalls before heading back to London for Sunday evening.

Should anyone be interested in a photographic trip down Daren in the near future please ring me - I think I can remember the way now.

Dave Tooke