

MCG NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NUMBER 267

MARCH 1998

Christmas in Mexico.....again!

by Pete Hollings

The third year running I spent my Christmas in the Purification karst of Mexico, however this year was a little different as I took Jill, my wife, along for her first taste of caving. Following tradition, most of the group rendezvoused in Austin at Susie Lasko and Peter Sprouse's house, before heading down to Mexico. This Year, the house was even fuller than usual due to the large number of international cavers (10) who had taken up temporary residence.

Most of us spent Friday Dec 19 buying food and watching Charley Savvas install the new rear end on the Great Pumpkin, his orange 1953 Powerwagon bus. By evening, everyone was nearly ready, but in order to speed things up Peter decided we should split into mini convoys. Jill and I loaded our stuff into Kevin Stafford's truck and headed south with Bev Shade and Barbara Luke. Despite nearly losing each other five minutes after starting, we eventually straightened everything out and set off.

We crossed the border at Reynosa and made our way up into the Sierra Madre Oriental, arriving in Conrado Castillo late on Saturday afternoon. Gill Ediger, Bernhard Koppen, Jean "Creature" Krejca and Vivian Loftin had arrived a couple of days earlier and were already at work modifying the amazing new extension to the fieldhouse.

Soon after we arrived Bill Mixon pulled up with the British contingent (Dewi Lloyd, Kat Hawkins, Tim Palmer, and Peter Hambly of the NPC). On Sunday morning, Gill took us on an entrance orientation tour which fortunately coincided with the arrival of the Great Pumpkin and its cargo of cavers. Within a few minutes of arrival, Charley was putting on his cave gear and joining Bev, Kevin, Bernhard, Viv and Creature on a trip to the bottom of Cuchilla to map some of the leads above the latest 'terminal' constriction and enlarge the Hurricane Crawl.

An extensively engineered section of passage that finally became passable in 1997 after at least two years of effort. A lot of work is being put into leads beyond the Hurricane Crawl in the hope of avoiding another protracted dig.

The next day a couple of trucks headed up towards Revilla to check a few leads. Jill and I, along with Scott Schreiber and Bev, followed Peter on a trek up the hills and down the valleys in order to check a lead he had identified on some aerial photos, this proved to be a shadow. However, the cavers we left scattered behind us had better luck. Barbara, Kevin and Tim mapped Pozo Nueces in a karst pinnacle near the border between Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon, while Creature, Kat and Viv mapped a small pit below Revilla (Cueva de la Arana Verde). We then continued up to Revilla in our quest for lumber, but were only able to rummage for scraps that could be used to plug the gaps that had appeared as the new boards on the field house dried.

We had two main objectives on Tuesday. While nine of us headed off to the Valkyrie River to map some leads identified earlier in the year, nearly everyone else headed into the Brinco entrance and down into Batwing Boulevard, to continue pushing this extremely promising lead that was discovered last Christmas. Charley, Tim, Kevin, and Dan tackled a series of lead climbs in Batwing. They eventually stopped at a point where the passage changed from a vertical to a 45 ramp. The Valkyrie River crew made our way through the French Entrance, passed the Attic Room (the highest point in the system), onto Kerr Plunk (named after Chris Kerr, who fell and broke his leg there, resulting in the only major rescue in Sistema Purificacion in the last 20 years) and through the very awkward Grimbly Thrutch into the Valkyrie River.

We made our way downstream through a couple of nipple deep wades until we reached the sump. Here, a brief, low airspace duck took us to the start of the sump bypass where Cyndie took Steve and Patrick to one lead, while Creature, Bev and Scott tackled a virgin crawl. Cyndie's lead started at a hole in the floor which was too overhung to be freeclimbed, but led to a low, wet crawl that they mapped for 70m before stopping at a low airspace. Creature's crawls also pinched out, but were close enough to the other group that they could hear them moving around below. Peter, Susie and I returned to the Valkyrie River and took a few photos before heading into a side lead that we surveyed for a while before leaving it going-but-small, in order to check a more promising lead further upstream. This passage, the Embouchure Passage, had been identified by Peter on an earlier trip, but was not pushed since he dropped the hammer that was needed to remove some cave cancer. With some hammering and a lot of digging, Susie was able to get through a clay filled crawl into nice canyon passage. With some more digging, Peter was through and later, even I was able to follow. We mapped the passage to a sand filled crawl, before turning back at a going passage on the other side of the crawl.



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WEEKLY MEETINGS:	At The Beehive, Egham, Surrey, on Thursdays from 9.00 p.m.
CAVING ACCOMMODATION:	For up to 30 people. Available at the MCG headquarters: Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse, Blagdon, Bristol, BS40 7XW. Tel:01761 462797
COTTAGE LOCATION:	Grid ref. ST51475606. OS 1:50,000 sheet 182
COTTAGE BOOKINGS:	Through the cottage warden please (address and phone number below).
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 SUBSCRIPTIONS:	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 (work) 01244 570944 (home) SWCC bookings via Ian Middleton tel:01703 736997 email ian_m@tcp.co.uk

THE COMMITTEE

Secretary	Tim Francis	Flat 16, Lambert Avenue, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4QR	Tel:0181 392 2572 Email t.francis@nopres.co.uk
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Caving Secretary	Julie Hesketh	23, Ashleigh House, Mortlake High Street, London, SW14 8SH	Tel:0181 392 2572
Tacklemaster	Dave Tooke	44, Beech tree Avenue, Englefield Green, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0RS	Tel:01784 436237 email d.tooke@rhbnc.ac.uk
	Marcus Ward	56, Barn Meadow Close, Church Crookham, Fleet, Hants, GU13 0YB	Tel:01252 815112
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Social Secretary	Pete Moseley	Pendle Cottage, Mearway, Westhay, Glastonbury, Somerset.	Tel:01458 860524

NON-COMMITTEE POSTS
RESCUE WARDEN
CONSERVATION OFFICER
COTTAGE EXTENSION
EXAMINERS

NAME	TELEPHONE
Brian Snell	01329 238341
Marcus Ward	01252 815112
Wayne Hiscox	01749671282
James Allen & Ben Cooper	

CUSTODIAN TRUSTEES: Malcolm Cotter, Pete Matthews, Jonathon Roberts & Pat Walsh.

MCG DOINGS

Congratulations.....to Julie Kavanagh on the birth of her son Matthew.

On the move.....Keith and Julie Bryant (ex hosts of the Castle of Comfort) to Bracebridge, Ham Lane, Bishop Sutton, Nr Bristol, BS18 4TZ. Tel 01275 333023. Please give them a call before visiting !

Applications received from the following for probationary membership.....Barry Clements, 73 Trefoil Crescent, Broadfield, Crawley, West Sussex. Tel:01293 547708.

Simon Fryer, 101 Greenbank Road, Greenbank, Bristol BS5 6HL Tel:0117 9519920. Email: duval_fryer@compuserve.com

Stephen Green, 41 Westminster Road, Whitehall, Bristol. Tel:0117 9521672. Email: steve.green@bristolwater.co.uk

Rob Wake, 63 Burwell Road, Exning, Newmarket, Suffolk CB8 7DV. Tel:01638 577431. Email: rob@exningwakes.demon.co.uk

BTCV Dry stone walling.....Julie Hesketh has arranged dates for the BTCV to continue with the wall at the cottage. (Please see forward meets programme) All the dates shown are day visits. If there is enough interest from MCG members they will run a special day's tuition. Please contact Julie for more details. If there are only a few members interested then they can join in on the dates shown.

St Cuthberts Leadership.....Jeremy Gilson has now taken over from Tony Knibbs as the MCG leader for St Cuthberts. Jeremy is planning a club trip for May or June, however if you would like a trip in the meantime please call Jeremy on 01934 515689.

Thank you, thank you.....to Mark Ward who has put in the new shower mixer, so that we now have loads of warm water again!

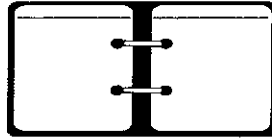
MCG rescue practice.....in Longwood/August should prove to be interesting. The emphasis is on the technical side of rigging and hauling rather than the struggle of getting a stretcher through awkward and confined spaces experienced last year in Tynning's

Barrow. This will mean that we will have to move a lot of gear into the cave and we will need as many people as possible involved. Last year we came up against the problem of potential insurance liability if we used actual people as victims on pitch hauls. The MRO recommended we used bags filled with ballast to simulate the weight. In Tynning's this was not a problem as the pitch haul was just inside the entrance. If this recommendation still holds, then we will have to carry in around 4 bags of ballast weighing about 25lb to 30lb down to the start point of the rescue. This will be at the 'T' junction with the main August stream and the way up into the Dry Galleries. Last year we had 11 team members underground and 1 on the surface as recorder. To get all the gear and ballast in means we will need at least 12 people. This does not allow for suitable teams to be set up for each stage however, so the more able to come the better. There will be 5 stages to the rescue.

- Stage 1, haul/carry the stretcher to the base of the Swing Pitch.
- Stage 2, haul the stretcher up the pitch and through Christmas Crawl.
- Stage3, negotiate the traverse of Longwood Main Chamber.
- Stage 4, haul the stretcher up to the ledge adjacent to the 'Bad Step'.
- Stage 5, haul the stretcher to above the 'Bad Step'.

I would like to get teams with team leaders set up so that specific people will take charge of nominated stages. I have reconnoitred the route and noted where all suitable anchor points are, so it just remains to pass that information on to team leaders. To carry in all the equipment necessary for each stage would mean a much larger team and a lot more gear. So I propose to carry in the minimum required and hopefully the logistics of moving specific equipment forward to be reused for successive stages will be overcome smoothly. Although it can sometimes be hard work it can also be a lot of fun. Everyone enjoyed last years rescue so please try to make an effort to come to this one. If we can organise a barrel and a BBQ then so much the better. In the event that numbers are insufficient we will modify the rescue to start at a more suitable location.

Brian Snell



Forward Meets Programme

Date	Area	Details	Contact
25 th April	AGM & annual dinner	AGM Hunters 2.30pm. Dinner to be held at The Seymour Arms, Blagdon.	Tim Francis ☎0181 392 2572 or Pete Moseley ☎01458 860524
16 th May 1998	MCG Rescue Practice	Longwood/August	Brian Snell ☎01329 238341
17 th May 1998	BTCV	Dry Stone walling	
6 th June 1998	Work weekend on the cottage	Maintenance/repairs on cottage. All welcome!	Marcus Ward ☎01252 815112
Summer 1998	Madagascar	Jungle, snakes, poisonous spiders and if you're very lucky a spot of caving. A 6 week (or so) expedition to the Mahajunga region, probably in Jul/Aug but you could meet them for a few weeks only, if time is a problem.	Tim Francis ☎0181 392 2572
12 th July 1998	BTCV	Dry stone walling	
1 st August 1998	BTCV	Dry stone walling	
21 st August 1998	BTCV	Dry stone walling	
27 th September	BTCV	Dry stone walling	
7 th November 1998	Half-yearly	New Inn, Priddy. Skittles evening	Pete Moseley ☎01458 860524

Library Additions by Joan Goddard

The Caves of Fermanagh and Cavan by Gareth Ll. Jones, Gaby Burns, Tim Fogg & John Kelly, 1997. With 128pp, 27 photos, and 75 maps and surveys, this is the essential reference for anyone visiting the area. Its A4 format means that it is able to accommodate larger and clearer location maps and cave surveys than in the usual A5 books produced for most other caving areas. Descriptions are arranged under three headings - 1. The Tullybrack-Belmore Uplands, 2. The Cuilcagh Mountain Area, 3. Outliers and Miscellaneous Areas. There are 4 pages of references and the usual sections on safety, access, conservation, cave biology, geology, archaeology and PUBS!

Speleo sportive dans le Vercors by Serge Caillault, Dominique Haffner and Thierry Krattinger, 1997. Includes descriptions of 33 caves, each with a plan or section, history of cave development and exploration, access arrangements, tackle required and bibliography.

The Mendip Hills - a threatened landscape by Shirley Toulson, 1984 - 160 pp, some black and white photos. A worthwhile read for anyone interested in Mendip as a whole, with chapters entitled 'Gruffy Ground: Lead, Coal and Stone', and 'The Pressures of Leisure' which includes a bit about caving.

In addition we regularly receive **exchange publications from other clubs**. A recent **Belfry Bulletin** (December 1997) has a well illustrated article on the BEC dig at Five Buddles Sink (Chewton Minery, near Waldegrave Pool) where they have broken through into an old cave/drainage level previously used by miners. The dig involved some major shoring works to avoid the road collapsing into the excavation!. A large number of artefacts were recovered - including a very well preserved wooden skip or sledge used by the old miners. Digging now continues from a re-excavated old shaft on the forestry side of the road, the base of which was initially discovered from the original dig under the road.

Christmas in Mexicoagain! continued by Pete Hollings

The trip out was not a whole lot of fun for me as I soon discovered that occasional soccer games in Saskatoon were insufficient preparation for a 13 hour caving trip. Still we all made it out safe and sound.

The combination of tired cavers and Christmas Eve made for a very lazy day, although Susie did manage to take Jill on her first trip into the goat filled Apprentice Cave. Dewi and Charley led a group to re-examine a possible resurgence near the monument that Bev, Dewi and I had attempted to open a couple of years ago. However, they never made it that far and instead worked on another dig. This led to a short drop, which they left undescended. For Dale, Bev, Cyndie, Melanie and Dan, Xmas Day was spent mapping the remainder of the leads in the bottom of Cuchilla. Just when they thought they had them all wrapped up and the only place to go was the 'terminal dig' dig, Dale spotted a small side lead, leaving Bev with one last chance to avoid numerous mud hauling trips. Charley, Bernhard and the other Brits returned to the lead of the day before, Pozo Weihnachten (German for Xmas) and dropped the pit, but were unable to push the cave any further. Instead, they headed up towards their original target and dug their way into Cueva Avispa Arana Viuda Negra (Black Widow Spider Wasp Cave) to the top of a short pit which they were unable to descend as the rope had already returned to the vehicle.

On Boxing Day we packed the vehicles and headed off for the Tinajas valley. As we travelled over to the valley the clouds rolled in and the weather turned nasty, leaving those outside the trucks scrambling for warm clothes. While we pitched camp, and Dale Chase kept himself warm by opening up a small drafting hole a few metres from his tent. It started to drizzle so we all went to bed early.

The first order of business on the 27th, was to continue the exploration of Sima Chupacabra. This is a very promising lead found earlier in the year by Charley and Bill Russell. Despite having a cast on his leg Charley had managed to push down to a second drop where he ran out of rope with the bottom nowhere in sight. Charley, Bev, and Bernhard loaded themselves up with ropes, drills and assorted metal ware and headed off, closely followed by two survey teams consisting of Creature, Steve, Kev, Barbara, Kat and Tim. They managed to get most of the way down the second big drop but were left hanging in space when they ran out of rope at -250m. Two other teams led by Peter and Cyndie, dropped a couple of pits up near the abandoned Sofia Mine above the village. One of these Cornish Pit, was only 50m deep but another, Pozo del Lantrisco, was mapped to over 100m with a possible dig at the bottom. Jill and I comprised the low land reconnaissance team which trekked north along the valley, where we located a number of small pits all less than 5m long.

The next day the same push team returned to Chupacabra with Susie, Peter and Creature taking over the survey. Due to the amount of rope being swallowed by the cave it was becoming known as Chupacable (Chupacable is Spanish

for Goatsucker, a mythical vampire-like creature that is reputed to stalk rural Mexico). The survey team reached a ledge at -340m while the push team dropped another 50m drop into a muddy canyon leading to yet another drop. Despite being tired and sick, Cyndie led Steve, Tim, Pat, Kev, Jill and I on a trip to the hillside near the Sophia mine with the hope of locating a couple of pits that had been found by Bill Russell, but never mapped. We never did locate them, instead spending the day aimlessly wandering the hillside.

On Monday new arrivals, Troy Lanier, Cheris Casselli and Christy Rogers, headed into Chucacable, along with Melanie and Kev in order to get a feel for the cave and refresh their vertical skills. Meanwhile Dan persuaded Scott and Dale to return to Lantrisco to work at the dig at the bottom of the 100m shaft. With the aid of pulleys and a z-rig they were able to remove a large obstruction. This led to a 50m pit with no obvious way on at the bottom. Peter led a group of us on another hillside quest for pits. While Barbara and Kat dropped a virgin 20m pit, Dewi impressed us all with his ability to impale himself on every available cactus.

The following day the customary Chupacable push team returned ready to scoop booty in the borehole they were sure to find and Cyndie, Susie, Pat and Steve were going to survey (yeah right!). Dan led Carlos, Barbara, Dale and Tim back to Lantrisco to survey the new pit while the rest of us headed back up the hill to relocate Charley's pits and hopefully find some other pits we had heard about. We left Troy, Melanie and Creature to map Tiro Limon (Lemon Drop) which was only 13m long. Peter, Kevin and Christy wandered further up the hill and relocated Sima de las Malas Mujeres which had originally been dropped by Bill Russell and Charley. Peter rigged the pit and the rest of us then surveyed while Peter went to rig another small pit nearby (Pozo Punchado, which was named in honour of another Dewi cactus incident). Mujeres proved to be a beautiful pit with a 50m free hang down an awesome shaft. The only down side was watching the rig point, a large tree, move alarmingly as everyone climbed out, making the Jingling tree look positively safe. We surveyed Punchado and then ran a surface survey down to Lemon Drop.

As it was getting dark Peter abandoned us to go and locate the Lemon Drop crew who were working on another pit Dewi and Kat had located (Tiro Chocolate). This proved to be a good idea as the rest of us would never have found it in the dark. We settled down around a fire at the entrance while they mapped the cave. The chupacable push crew were back at camp and looking distinctly muddy when we returned. The cave had indeed flattened out but it had also sumped in the process. The sump itself being on the cleaner side of a liquid mud duck, affectionately known as the Mud F#*k. The survey crew returned at dawn having stopped on the cleaner side of the mud.

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On New Years Eve Dale, Tim, Dan and Carlos went into Chupacabra to derig. Susie and I gave Jill some vertical training and then took her into Pozo del Epidote where she descended her first pit. Back at camp the rest settled down to welcome in the New Year, Gill, Bev and Bernhard earned two hero points by returning to Chupacabra to help the derig team carry rope back to camp, even more importantly perhaps, they took beer to the tired cavers.

The alcohol abuse and deep caving left many people looking for projects around camp. Bev led a crew to map a small pit near the site of the old sawmill (Cueva del Monto de Madera), which not surprisingly was sawdust choked. Meanwhile Peter, having tired of wandering the hillsides aimlessly arranged for Oscar, one of the locals, to show us some pits. The first of these was named Pozo sin Sexo, where a 15m entrance drop led to steeply dipping rubble slope in a winding canyon to another drop. It took seven "interesting" deviations to reach this point, so Kevin, Christy and I decided to return another day with the hammer drill. Kevin and Christy then surveyed Pozo de Dos Ojos, a short pit originally dropped by Bill and Charley. Kat, Dewi and Susie had perhaps the best lead of the day, a horizontal cave north of camp (Cueva de Katarina) that they mapped to a restriction. They returned later that night to enlarge this and were able to squeeze into a sizeable room with a way on in the floor that was never descended.

On Friday it was time to leave the mountain. Some of us prepared to traverse the new road across the mountain to Zaragoza. Despite this being one of the better roads I have travelled on in the Purificacion area it still took about six hours to travel the 30 miles to town. On arrival we invaded the only restaurant with enough chairs to seat us all and proceeded to drink their entire supply of Coronita, while they figured out what on earth they were going to feed 17 noisy gringos. The rest of our trip was spent touring in Zaragoza and Saltillo, as well as visiting one of the deepest gypsum caves in the world (Pozo del Gavilan). This is a 50m deep pit some 30m across with a lake at the bottom which has been plumbed for another 20m. Finally it was time to return to Austin where after a few short hours of sleep, we boarded a plane for Saskatoon, ~~1/1/98~~



COTTAGE MAINTENANCE WEEKEND

This year the cottage maintenance weekend will be held during the June members weekend (5/6/98 - 7/6/98) as there is too much temptation to go elsewhere on a bank holiday weekend.

There will be a barrel and a barbecue on the Saturday evening, so please come down even if only for couple of hours. There is much to do, there will be a full list of jobs to do pinned up at the cottage but as a taster I have listed the main jobs that need completing.

- Kitchen needs a good clean.
- The shed needs to be creosoted.
- Lounge needs decorating.
- Front door needs painting.
- Camping area needs a good sort out.
- The understairs cupboard needs a tidy.
- Bedrooms need a scrub & clean.
- Rope cleaner needs to be re-built.
- General spring clean throughout entire cottage.