

MCG NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP

Number 268

May 1998

NEWS FROM UP T'NORTH

We have finally settled into our new home with our cats and MGs and are enjoying evening strolls along the coast and watching the sun go down across the Bay. When we can we try to coincide walks with the bore coming up the estuary. Everything is peaceful and still, then suddenly a very loud roar like a waterfall is heard. Within minutes the bore (18ins high at its lowest) comes rushing up the estuary at 12+ miles an hour. *Awesome!* We have been told (by fishermen!) that with a strong south westerly wind behind it, it can be up to 12 feet high.

We have poked around a few caves locally, the best being on top of Arnside Knott which resembles a very short Swildon's without the water. There is a dig going on in there which looks promising as it actually has a reasonable amount of limestone beneath it to dig into! Most of the other caves are very small and tend to be horizontal and phreatic (they are also full of huge spiders and their cocoons).

When we received our last newsletter we were excited to see that there was to be a large gathering of the MCG and Holloway clans in Yorkshire so we arranged to meet them at the NPC hut on the Saturday morning (eat your heart out - it takes us 25 mins to drive there!). We were very pleased to see those that were there but disappointed that there were so few - only Cara, Joan, Marcus, Dave and Letti. Anyway, after breakfast at Bernie's half went caving in Mere Ghyll, while the other half went walking. And of course we ended up at the pub for food and drinks in the evening.

Warning for Cara : do not leave this article lying around where your Mum or consultant can read it! The next day Marcus, Letti and Dave went off to do Bull Pot, while Joan, Martin and I decided to do beyond White Scar show cave. Cara, having just finished a three week stay in hospital with acute Rheumatoid-arthritis could obviously not join us... or could she? She could not bear the sight of us all preparing for our caving trips so decided to join Joan, Martin and I for White Scar but she was only going to do the show cave... or was she? Having got to the end of the show cave she could not resist the lure of the cave beyond but as she had no wetsuit on she would only go as far as the first lake... or would she?

The foolhardy young lass would not listen to sense from us old crusties and followed us into the watery depths. It was a fantastic trip but we spent most of our time armpit deep or swimming in freezing cold water. The lakes were more like rivers, with underwater ledges at either side for much of the time. These helped you to keep out of the water, at least from waist or armpits up, otherwise you had to swim. We had wetsuits on and it was b#####y cold so it must have been excruciating for Cara. Eventually she had to give in so we turned back, but we all enjoyed the trip so much we have decided to go back in the summer when the water will hopefully be warmer enabling us to go on beyond the lakes where you reach dry land again.

Now we have had a taste of 'proper' caving again (with jobs and house moving we hadn't caved properly for 9 months or so) we are keen to do more. Yorkshire is the nearest area with decent caves (sadly our local caves don't come into that category) and when possible we would like to cave with MCG so if any of you are planning a weekend up there do let us know - we'd love to join you.

Yvonne Rowe

WEEKLY MEETINGS: At The Beehive, Egham, Surrey, on Thursdays from 9.00 p.m. See map p. 7
 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 6, 16 Lambert Avenue, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4QR.	Tel : 0181 392 2572 t.francis@nopres.co.uk
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Caving Secretary	Julie Hesketh	23, Ashleigh House, Mortlake High Street, London, SW14 8SH.	Tel : 0802 431588
Tacklemaster	Dave Tooke	44, Beechtree Avenue, Englefield Green, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0SR.	Tel : 01784 436237
Cottage Warden	Marcus Ward	56, Barn Meadow Close, Church Crookham, Fleet, Hants, GU13 0YB.	Tel : 01252 815112
Editor	Letti Patte	44, Beechtree Avenue, Englefield Green, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0SR	Tel : 01784 436237 lpatte@3valleys.co.uk
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Social Secretary	Pete Moseley	Pendle Cottage, Mearway, Westhay, Glastonbury, Somerset.	Tel : 01458 860524

NON-COMMITTEE POSTS :

NAME :

TELEPHONE :

RESCUE WARDEN	Brian Snell	01329 238341
CONSERVATION OFFICER	Marcus Ward	01252 815112
COTTAGE EXTENSION	Wayne Hiscox	01749 671282
EXAMINERS	James Allen & Ben Cooper	

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

MCG doings

On the move..... Alan Mellon to 17, Alfred Road, Feltham, Middx. TW13 5DG.

Accepted as probationary members.....

- Simon Fryer
- Barry Clements
- Stephen Green
- Rob Wake

Conservation update : Marcus Ward

There are a few things going on at the moment so to round it all up:

- **Charterhouse Caving Company (CCC)** are organising a G.B 'stal cleaning day' on Saturday 20th of June. Meet at the G.B car park at 11.00am. Marcus Ward to raise an MCG team.
- **Longwood / August** clear up again this year, the main objective is to remove the various signs that are in the cave at the moment. A date has not been set yet, so anyone interested either give me a call or it will be in the newsletter.
- **Upper Flood** - Letti & I are currently working on an Upper Flood conservation plan. Anyone interested in helping out, please contact either Letti or myself.

Madagascar expedition is now well on the way. The flights have been booked - at a good price -, contact has been made with a local in the capital Tana and Ben & Letti are being trained on how to deal with crocodile bites and scorpion stings. If anyone is interested, please contact Tim, Dave, Letti or Ben.

Cottage Maintenance Weekend First weekend in June

As mentioned in the previous newsletter, this year's cottage maintenance weekend will be held on the June members' weekend (05/06/98-07/06/98).

There are plenty of jobs that need doing ranging from the easy to the more challenging. On the Saturday evening, we will have a barrel & a BBQ, quite a few people have expressed an interest in helping out so it should be a good weekend.

Some of the main jobs as follows :

- Leak in toilet next to phone needs sorting.
- Guttering needs clearing & repairing.
- Pathway outside front door needs filling.
- Changing rooms need a good clearout.
- Lounge needs decorating.
- Clear out silt from hosing down area.

- Kitchen needs a good clean.
- Front door needs painting.
- Understairs cupboard needs a good tidy.
- Bedrooms need a scrub & clean.
- Rope washer needs to be re-built.
- General spring clean in entire cottage.

This and much, much more...

Marcus Ward - Cottage Warden.

Rescue Kit :

I am disgusted to report the theft of some karabiners from the rescue kit over the past few months. As the previous Rescue Warden, I was responsible for arguing the case that members were responsible and intelligent enough not to help themselves to equipment which may prove important in the event of an accident. It seems that my trust has been misplaced!!! In addition to the theft, the guilty party compounded it by resealing the kit perfectly so that no-one was aware of the act. Were it not for a random check on the AGM weekend the theft would have gone undetected until the equipment was actually needed. The anonymous return of the stolen equipment is now important with the rescue practice occurring shortly. I personally will not be supporting their replacement by club funds.

Finally, I can only hope that the thief responsible is the person lying at the bottom of a pitch with a couple of broken legs - maybe this will give them time to reflect on their selfish actions.

Dave Tooke.

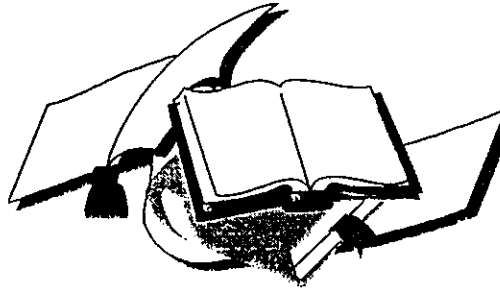
STOP PRESS....

Editor urgently requires a new PC. Any second hand, old or disused donations would be gratefully received. Please contact Letti.

Committee Snippets :

Committee Meeting in April :

- New mobile rope washer bought, situated in the Tackle Store. Please use until permanent one has been rebuilt (hopefully at the work weekend).
- Addition to the rescue kit : it has been agreed that 10 bolts and a spanner will be bought.
- Plaster boarding now done in the lounge, plastering to be completed shortly.
- Dry stone walling : BTCV have booked five weekends in the summer - please see Meets Programme in this newsletter. Anyone wishing to attend the course, contact Julie Hesketh.

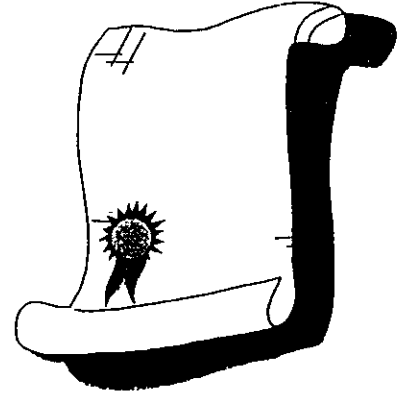


FORWARD MEETS PROGRAMME

<i>DATE</i>	<i>VENUE</i>	<i>EVENTS</i>	<i>CONTACT</i>
15th May	Queens Hall Sedburgh School, Cumbria	Lecture- "Caves of South East Asia" Andy Eavis presents the RGS Cumbria Regional Lecture at 8pm.	RGS Tel : 0171 591 3000 eavis@windcrown.co.uk
16th May	Mendip : Longwood / August	Rescue Practice. This year's practice will concentrate on ropework and rigging techniques.	Brian Snell Tel : 01329 238341
17th May	Mendip	BTCV : Dry stone walling.	
23rd May	Mendip	St Cuthberts. Join our new leader on his first official MCG trip. 5 places available.	Jeremy Gilson Tel : 01934 515689
23rd May	Mendip	Charterhouse. 3 places available.	Nick Gilson Tel : 01934 417697
18th May	RGS London	Lecture- "Sixteen Years of British Cave Exploration in China". Andy Eavis & Gavin Newman are giving a talk for the Royal Geographical Society members and their guests at 6.30pm.	RGS Tel : 0171 591 3000 eavis@windcrown.co.uk
6th / 7th June	Mendip	Cottage Work Weekend. Annual clean up and maintenance session. Some members are doing a long weekend (starting Wed. 3rd). If you fancy arriving early to help, please contact Marcus or see page 3 to find out what you can do to help.	Marcus Ward Tel : 01252 815112 marcus@nichicon.co.uk
4th July	Mendip	Beginners Weekend. More information will follow in the next newsletter. we hope to have a full (!) cottage and plenty of experienced cavers around to lead beginners trips. Gear will be hired for beginners so I need to know numbers well in advance. Social will be organised or we could go to the stomp at the Cavers Fair - see below.	Julie Hesketh Tel : 0802 431588 (eves) Tel : 0171 395 8053 julie.hesketh@cbi.org
4th July	Mendip	Mendip Cavers Fair. A BCRA event with practical training sessions, talks and most importantly, a stomp!	See caving press or contact Andy Sparrow
12th July	Mendip	BTCV : dry stone walling.	
1st August	Mendip	BTCV : dry stone walling.	
21st August	Mendip	BTCV : dry stone walling.	
27th Sept.	Mendip	BTCV : dry stone walling.	
Summer '98	Madagascar	A 6 weeks expedition to the Mahajunga region, in September / October but you could meet them for a few weeks only, if time is a problem.	Tim Francis Tel : 0181 392 2572
7th Nov.	Mendip	Half-yearly. New Inn, Priddy, Skittles evening.	Pete Moseley Tel : 01458 860524

AGM IN BRIEF :

- Half yearly skittles night agreed for the 7th of November at the New Inn, Priddy. Food to be bought at your discretion.
- On completion of the plastering, good quality shelving to be erected as a priority.
- All log books to be returned for photocopying or typing. Jane Baldwin has subsequently volunteered.
- It was stressed that domestic supplies - such as toilet rolls - may be purchased in time of shortage by members & guests and deducted from cottage fees.
- Leaking toilet still needs repairing.
- Lack of parking space noted, possible solution to be considered by the committee.
- Garden to be levelled after completion of drainage ditch & dry stone walling. Lawn to be sown to ensure top quality BBQ and camping.
- Upper Flood II : after a period of relative neglect, connections to be pushed for.
- Cottage usage : advertising is the way ahead to increase bookings & hopefully membership.
- Treasurer fielded all questions magnificently - a blinding performance.
- Rescue practice : plea for more members to attend.
- Date for the next AGM : 17th April 1999, same time, same place after a nerve tingling vote!!!

AGM DINNER :

This year's dinner, held at the Seymour Arm, Blagdon, seemed to be a great success despite the fact that numbers were down on previous years. The smaller (cosier??) venue proved to be much more amenable to inter-table conversation - a major problem at many locations.



The staff were attentive, the service excellent and the food was definitely the best for a long time - it may be worth checking out on Saturday evenings!! J Rat's striptease will certainly remain in mine and everybody else's mind as will the excellent slides from Meghalaya.

Finally, the three different ales and extremely cheap port would also recommend it got a further visit. In closing, I would like to thank Pete Moseley for all his hard work in organising an excellent evening. Hope to see you at the half-yearly skittles!!

Dave Tooke.

A Bit About Finance

Firstly, and most importantly, could all those members who have not yet paid their 1998 subscriptions please do so as soon as possible ! We could put the money to some very good use !

As you may already know, the committee has invested the majority of the funds that were held in the Coif Savings Account, in 1998. We thought you may be interested in exactly what investments were made, so I've set them out below.

Charities Official Income Fund

2961 Fixed Interest Units at a cost of £4,000

NPI Global Care Unit Trust

3,210 Income Units at a cost of £2,625

Bristol Water Plc

32 Ordinary Shares at a cost of £ 472

A total of £875 was also placed in the National Savings Investment Account in keeping with the broad / narrow range investment rules.

There were no charges incurred in making the investments, and I've thanked Broker Financial Services Plc for agreeing to purchase shares on behalf of the MCG with no charge for their services.

You'll be happy to learn that all investments are doing well, and if you have any queries regarding them please give me a call.

Lastly, PLEASE don't forget that we still have shop stock left. T-shirts and Sweatshirts there are a plenty, along with books, repair materials and various other odds and sods. Any committee member can sell them to you, so have a good nose around and help turn at least some of it in to Cash !

Huw Jones - Treasurer.

STALAGMITE LUMINESCENCE REVEALS ANCIENT RECORD OF RAINFALL.

A Faint blue-green glow from stalagmites in caves charts the local rainfall over a period of thousands of years. The information will help scientists to piece together a detailed record of past climates and calibrate computer models that aim to predict future changes.

A team of researchers from the universities of Exeter and Bristol cuts the stalagmites, which are collected from all over Europe, along their growth axes and illuminates the exposed surfaces with ultraviolet light. Viewed under a microscope, the blue-green luminescence forms a series of faint bands.

"It's a bit like tree rings", explained Andy Baker, a geographer at Exeter. "The luminescence comes from humic acids in the stalagmite, which peaks in content once a year in winter due to rotting and decaying plant matter".

Baker and co-workers found that the bands not only reveal the growth rate and age of the stalagmite but also explain the local climate during its life. They believe that the intensity of the luminescence peaks is in a fingerprint of past winter rainfall. Considering that a 20 cm long stalagmite may be up to 4000 years old, it could turn out to be a compact record of climatic data.

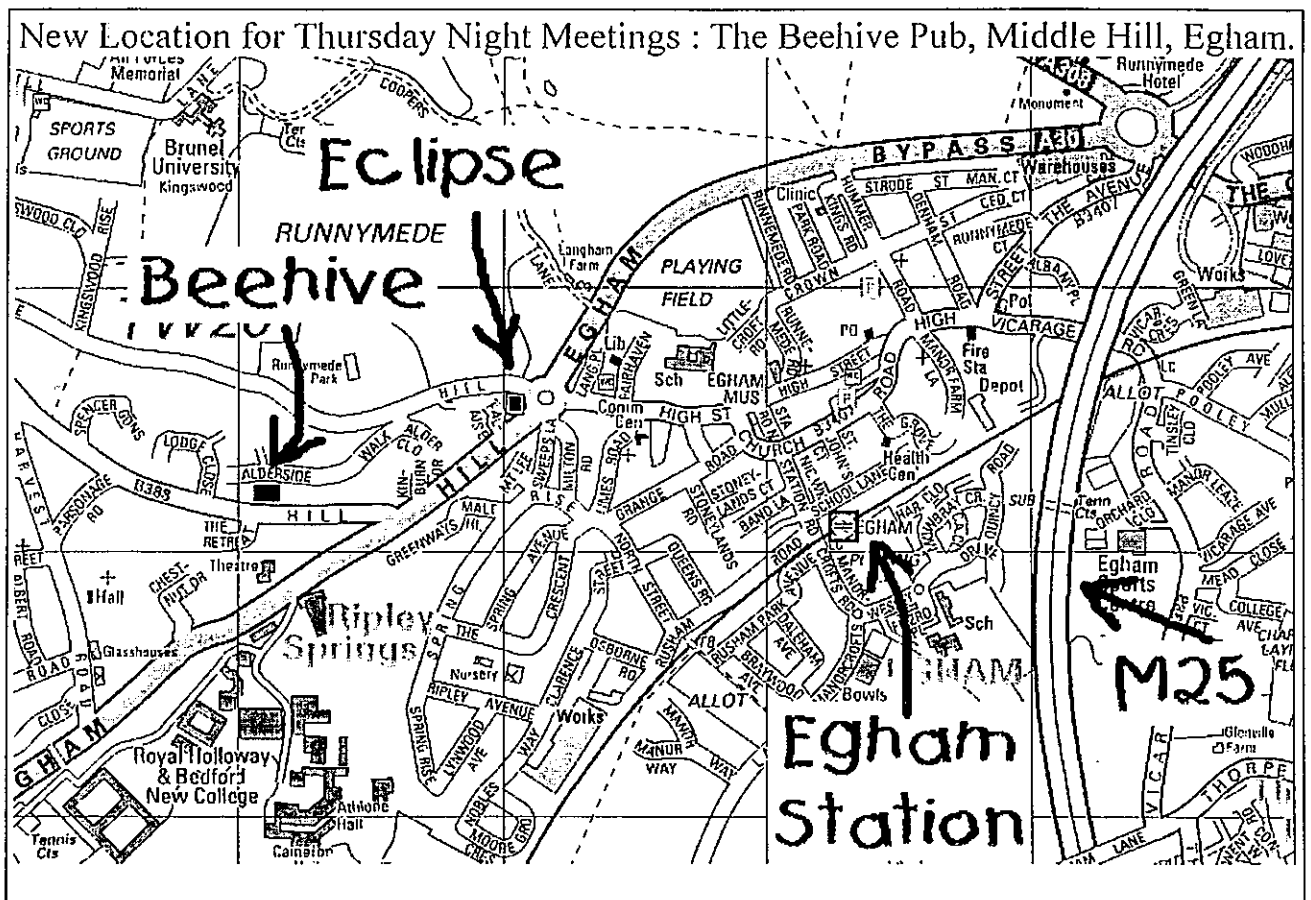
A luminescence band in one Scottish stalagmite is so broad that the team believes that a volcanic eruption in Iceland is the only explanation for the intense rainfall and enormous growth rate that it represents. At the other extreme, some of stalagmites show no banding at all. Rather than being an indicator of a giant drought, Baker says that the "missing" bands could be masked by strong scatter.

Baker would like more precise equipment to improve the measurements. He says that the better fibre optics to deliver a smaller and more intense ultraviolet beam to his samples would help.

Thursday Night Meetings Have Moved to The Beehive, Egham.

By Michael Gould

The Eclipse in Egham, which has long been the location for the regular Thursday night meetings, is to be replaced by a "Café Uno". Since this sudden demise a new location had to be found. So on your behalf a select team of cavers made an exhaustive survey of three whole pubs in the local area before deciding that they couldn't be bothered anymore and stayed where they were. Fortunately, a few pints later they found a soggy old beer mat and wrote down how they got there. Here are the remains of their befuddled doodlings.



The Beehive is a Gales pub. It usually has three Gales ales and three guest ales. They also serve stout and the usual range of largers.

Directions:

- From the M25 Junction 13, Take the Egham Bypass (A30). Go straight over the roundabout where the Eclipse was and head up Egham Hill. Then take the first right into Middle Hill. The Beehive is on the right a couple of hundred yards further on.
- From Egham Station, turn right towards the town centre. At the traffic lights turn left and follow the road round to the next roundabout which is where the Eclipse was. From here go up Egham hill, take the first right and the Beehive is on the right.

How ministers broke their promises to one of the most beautiful parts of Britain.

EXCLUSIVE

BY Michael McCarthy
Environment Correspondent

The Government is refusing to fulfil a firm election pledge to give special protection against quarrying and other harmful development in the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire.

The forest, lying between the valleys of the Wye and the Severn and the most ancient hunting forest in England, is facing the threat of giant limestone quarries which may have to be dug to meet the Government's massive target for crushed rock for the roads and construction industries.

The adjacent Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is also at risk.

The specific and unambiguous promise of special protection was given personally by the then shadow environment secretary, Frank Dobson, at a meeting in the forest one month before the election last year.

Mr Dobson's pledge was put out on an official Labour Party press release and featured prominently in the election literature of the Labour candidate for the Forest of Dean, Diana Organ.

Local campaigners feel it helped her capture, with a lower than average swing to Labour, what had been a Tory-held constituency (as Gloucestershire West) for 18 years.

However, Mr Dobson switched briefs to health after the election and at two meetings in the past six months the environment department's planning minister, Richard Caborn, has made it clear the Government has no intention of setting up the special protection regime Mr Dobson promised.

A spokesman for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions said yesterday: "Richard Caborn has met Diana Organ and local delegations. There is no immediately available one-off solution for the forest."

Instead, campaigners against the quarrying threat are being told to work through the traditional planning process. Local people, who last month delivered 8,000 postcards to Downing Street asking Tony Blair when the promise was going to be kept, are now talking hotly of betrayal.

Bill Hobman, Labour chairman of the Forest of Dean district council, said: "I do have to say I am extremely disappointed that what was a categorical statement made without us asking, which I take to be an election pledge, is not being honoured by the minister."

Ken Secrett, a resident who founded Hewelsfield Against Quarrying, one of the number of pressure groups, said: "The Labour Party gave a simple straightforward promise of custom-built special planning status for the forest, which undoubtedly won many votes and influenced the election result in a

marginal constituency. Now the Government seems determined to renege on its promise and I think it is a disgusting betrayal.

"It reinforces the cynicism in which politicians are held in this country."

The Forest of Dean, which was considered for designation as Britain's first national park in 1938 but was left for the Forestry Commission to protect, was once notable for coal mines and other industrial sites. But tourism now underpins its economic future.

The threat to the forest and Wye Valley comes from the Government's policy for minerals planning, still based on the outdated "predict and provide" approach - work out how much you think you will need and then try and provide it, whatever the consequences - which John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister, abandoned for housing policy earlier this year.

"Predict and Provide" means the Government is chasing a target of 1.9 billion tons of crushed rock for the roads and construction industries by 2006 and Gloucestershire County Council has been told to find 22.4 million tons as its share by that date - which it cannot do at present extraction rates.

Six months before the election the county council selected several parts of the forest as areas of search for limestone quarries, sparking a protest from residents who feared not only massive new scars on the landscape but pressure from lorries on the forest's minor roads.

Mr Dobson responded at a public meeting at Clearwell Castle in the forest in April last year. Accompanied by Mrs Organ, he said: "Today the Forest of Dean is faced with proposals for mineral workings, in particular limestone quarrying on a scale which poses a major threat... the time has come to offer special planning protection to the Forest of Dean. We don't propose simply to apply any of the existing special categories of protection. We propose instead to offer the Forest of Dean a new 'custom-built' special status appropriate to its unique status and character."

There were precedents for Mr Dobson's promise: such custom-built planning status has already been given to other areas, including the Norfolk Broads and the New Forest. Mr Caborn, however, has shown no interest: Mr Dobson also promised a sweeping consultation exercise about the plan after the election - which has not taken place either. Mrs Organ has led two delegations of local people to see Mr Caborn about Mr Dobson's promise and received, in effect, a dusty answer. She was not available for comment yesterday.