

MCG North Wales Meet, November 1998

(by Joan Goddard, Richard Carey and Julie Hesketh)

Attended by: Graham Old, Richard Carey, Julie Hesketh, Joan Goddard, Tim Francis, Peat Bennett, Les Brown, Martin Rowe, Yvonne Rowe, Marcus Ward and Geoff Beale.

North Wales is an often forgotten caving region. With access difficulties to the major systems and no proper caving accommodation to use, it is one of the least visited caving areas. Access to many mines and caves is possible though with a little forethought and so with a bit of organising, an MCG meet was held at the end of November with the aim of doing Olwyn Goch shaft, part of the Milyr Tunnel complex and some other more natural caves in the Loggerheads valley. Accommodation was an issue at this time of year. Neither the Grosvenor or the North Wales Caving Club, the 2 major local clubs have accommodation so it was a choice of camping (brrrrr..) or B&B. A good compromise was sought through the Colomendy outdoor Centre who let us have use of a teaching unit with enough beds to sleep the entire club, baths, showers and electric blankets. A hardy few camped but the rest of us lived it up in our en-suite bedrooms. Highly recommended!

On Saturday, we split into 3 parties with Geoff and Richard checking out Ogof Hen Fynnhoau (Poachers Cave), Yvonne and Joan walking down the Loggerheads valley to Poachers and the rest tackling Ogof Hesp Alyn. A bit of dodgy route finding by Marcus and Tim "I come from North Wales" Francis meant that the walkers almost beat the cavers to the entrance.....



Poacher's Cave *Richard Writes :*

Having left our SRT kits at home Geoff and I decided to do Poacher's cave. Located 200 yards upstream from Hesp Alyn about 10m above river level, the cave is still prone to total flooding from the bottom up. After opening the unlocked gate we encountered the pitch, 15ft rigged with DMM's. We descended this and found the passageway. At first we were a little disappointed for all we saw was a low muddy horizontal passageway. After much stooping and some crawling we encountered two further pitches, one either side of the path. Both were impossible to freeclimb although one of them had a veritable nest of spits, hangers and DMMs. We had no kit so we pressed on. Shortly we could hear a stream and suddenly we descended out of the mud into the stream passage. Downstream involved a climb down through boulders and then a flat out crawl in the stream. Not very inviting so we pressed on upstream. Almost immediately the roof closed down and it looked like the beginning of a sump. A few yards of hands and knees crawling in the cold water however rewarded us with a walking stream passage. We pressed on a further 500m or so when it eventually did close down and became impassable.

At the end many roots were visible in the roof. On the way back we explored some of the side passages and also noticed a few more of the formations (this is not the Swildon's streamway!). There are some interesting mud formations which I can only describe as very small cauliflower heads (*any explanations?*) After the initial disappointment it turned out to be a very interesting and enjoyable though not desperately strenuous trip.

News in Brief in 1999

Accepted as Probationary Members :

- Doug Harris, Toad Hall & Willow Drive, Hutton, Weston-Super-Mare, North Somerset. BS24 8TJ. Tel : 01934.814676.

- Bill Richards, 6 Elizabeth Square, Newton Abbot, Devon. TQ12 4EJ. Tel : 01626.366639.

- Lynn Furneaux, 4 Tor View, Wallaford Road, Buckfastleigh, Devon. TQ11 0AP. Tel : 01364.643679.

- Elaine Johnson, 21 Silver Street, Cheddar, Somerset. BS27 3LE. Tel : 01934.743211.

Full Members :

- Barry Clements, Simon Fryer & Stephen Green.

Change of address : AEM Alan Clements to : 800 Naval Air Squadron, HMS Invincible, BFPO Ships.

Congratulations : to Dave Tooke & Letti Patte on their engagement.

Time Team : Set your videos for Sunday 24th January at 5pm. It's Malcom Cotter and the Time Team dig at Coopers Hole where the MCG spent many hours digging in the 1960's.

References : *The Mihw Tunnel by Chris Ebbs, 1993.*

Limestone and Caves of Wales, edited by Trevor Ford, 1989.

(Both these books are in the MCG library).

Web Site update : the NCA web site (<http://.nca.org.uk>) has been updated. Major additions / changes are as follows :

- National Caving Diary updated.
- Minutes of recent meetings of National Council and Conservation & Access Committee added.
- Various broken url's corrected, including link to Hidden Earth 97 poster.

Note from the Editor thank you to Tony Knibbs for sending me the artwork for the front page headline of the newsletter. As requested by a few people this will be used from now on.

Committee Snippets : Upper Flood Conservation Plan now well on the way, and Marcus is in the process of doing the fixed point photography. **Reminder** : to all members, please note that you are expected to purchase goods such as washing up liquid etc if needs be & deduct the amount from your cottage fees. And also remember that for hygiene purposes, the cottage has to be left in a clean & tidy state on Sunday, cleaning equipments are situated in the cupboard by the stairs for those who didn't know.

Subs, Subs, Subs

It's this time of year again. Please remember that your subscriptions are due **NOW**.

Please send your cheque to Martin Rowe - address on Page 2.

The annual fees are

For Full & Probationary Members	:	£25.00
For Associate Members	:	£12.50

Forward Meets Programme :

<i>DATE</i>	<i>VENUE</i>	<i>EVENTS</i>	<i>CONTACT</i>
30th - 31st January 1999	Mendip	Another beginners' weekend has now been organised for the last weekend in January. If interested please contact →	Julie on 0171 395 8053 (day) 0802 431 1588 (eves) julie.hesketh@cbi.org.uk
1st - 4th February 1999	Nordrach Cottage	BTCV : 12 people will be staying at the cottage.	
6th February 1999	Nordrach Cottage	Committee meeting.	
Wednesday 17th March 1999	Bristol University Chemistry Dept.	Caving and Diving, China and Beyond by Gavin Newman - 7.30pm. A lecture and audio/visual presentation on the 'Great Crack' project in China, and cave diving in France.	
17th April 1999	Hunters Lodge	Annual General Meeting.	
19th-26th June 1999	Nordrach Cottage.	BTCV will be staying at the cottage in order to finish the dry stone wall, if interested, please contact →	Julie on 0171 395 8053 (day) 0802 431 1588 (eves) julie.hesketh@cbi.org.uk
26th June 1999	North Wales	A planned return trip to the Milyr Tunnel to the natural cavern of Powell's Lode. More information Page 9.	Julie on 0171 395 8053 (day) 0802 431 1588 (eves) julie.hesketh@cbi.org.uk
31 st July — 21 st August 1999	Madagascar	Return to the Bemaraha. Tim & Ben have expressed an interest in a three week trip.	Tim Francis t.francis@nopres.co.uk
6th — 7th November 1999	Nordrach Cottage	Half-yearly meeting.	

Library Additions :

- **The Milwr Tunnel - Baghillt to Loggerheads, 1897-1987** by Cris Ebbs, 1993 - 67pp, plenty of black and white photos. Read it if you've been down Olwyn Goch Shaft or if you are planning to go.
- **Two Men O' Mendip** by Walter Raymond, First published 1899 - an old fashioned novel set in the Charterhouse-Ubley-Velvet Bottom areas. (copy).
- **Speleogenesis: the evolution of the Castleton Caves** by Trevor Ford, *from* Geology Today, May-June 1996 - this is probably one for the geologically minded, but gives an interesting overview of the relationships between the various caves of the area.

A quick look in the log book :

Well, if it hadn't been for Steven Jones & Co. spending a few days on Mendip, not many trips would have been written up!!!. Four trips in four days, not bad, even if it involved getting lost & losing friends while caving...

There was always the odd trips down Upper Flood and Eastwater but all in all it has been a fairly quiet month - maybe it was too cold.

This year's first caving trip was down Waterwheel where Marcus Ward, Dave Tooke & Tim Woodhams went naked caving to the streamway way & back. They were looked after by Joan Goddard & JP Burch. Apparently, "formations were good but the views were f*****g horrible".

Continues from front page...

Ogof Hesp Alyn *Julie writes:*

What a muddy hole! OHF's entrance is perched perilously 2m or so from the river and only 1m higher than the water level. A 20 foot ladder took us into a rift and on down into stooopy muddy passage. The entrance series is rather Carno-like with almost no rock in sight – just muddy but dry passage with scooped out scallops and muddy, bouldery scrambles. Almost the entire cave is phreatic, drained by mining activity in the area. Route finding was easy to begin with – a rescue telephone line runs from the entrance and can be followed. After an hour or so of muddy stooping and walking and a couple of wet stoops, the passage branches. We took the more obvious way on which disintegrated into a low, muddy flat-out crawl ending in a very tight muddy dig. Couldn't possibly be the way on..... Retracing our steps, Tim mumbled something about not remembering any of this last time he did the trip and more stuff about someone changing the cave and checked out an aven before we went back to the branch in the passage and took the other fork. On to an awkward muddy, slippery climb and a difficult fixed ladder in a very greasy pot which led out onto a mud filled ledge where Tim was sent off to rig the slippery pitch while the others wallowed and wrestled in the gloop.

It got no less muddy at the bottom where a short stoop led to a second pitch which unfortunately was lacking in enough bolts to get Tim to the bottom. Disappointed, we schlooped and slipped our way out. It was only after we exited and read the survey that we realised what we had done – we had gone down the little-visited Fieldmouse series. The proper way on was the extremely unlikely looking "dig" which the guide book recommended taking digging tools to clear out! An excellent trip with a good musical accompaniment by Julie and Les (as always whilst hanging about on SRT rope). We will definitely be back to finish this one off.



Olwyn Goch *Joan writes:*

Sunday morning saw an unusually alert group of MCG, breakfasted and ready to vacate Colomendy Centre by 9.15am. Marcus, Martin and Yvonne headed over to Poachers Cave whilst the others met up with Jerry Dobby, our Grosvenor CC leader and Les and Mark, other Grosvenor guests, on the approach road to Tarmac's Hendre Quarry, approximately 3 miles north west of Mold, on whose land the Olwyn Goch Shaft lies.

A short walk up through woods gave us a view of the concrete capping on the shaft which was constructed when the headframe and winding gear was dismantled in 1987. We entered via neatly landscaped steps, through a padlocked metal cover and down into an access adit which joined the shaft a little way down from the top.

Jerry had a powerful light unit which gave us the opportunity to look down the 12ft x 12ft. 6in. shaft. It was a **LONG** way to the bottom - about 470 feet! Incidentally this power light was to give us some excellent views throughout our trip, views which would have been impossible to achieve with normal headlamps. We descended the shaft using the fixed (non vertical) ladders which provided the emergency route for the miners to use in case of winding mechanism failure. Each ladder was about 20ft. long and supported by a platform attached to the side of the shaft; they were sturdy and surrounded by 'cages' or shuttering, - so no feeling of exposure, thank goodness! The shaft used to run two cages, each carrying two mine cars or 16 men, and the speed of winding was 8mph (or 710ft/minute).

We went down, one person per ladder, for about 200ft and then set off along a series of mined passages containing the remains of railway lines and with a shallow stream flowing along the floor.. The passages were 5-6ft high and about the same width. A short way from the shaft we looked at a large side chamber (c. 80x30ft) with rows of bricks on the floor. This was one of more than 20 storage areas which were excavated during the Second World War for the storage of TNT and the bricks were to support a timber floor.

More from Joan on North Wales...

Soon afterwards we branched off along a smaller passage to a low wall which had been built (by Grosvenor) to prevent the stream going down a hole down which a short fixed ladder led to a lower level. I can't remember the route exactly, but somewhere there was a 30ft fixed ladder (near the base of which were shafts with 2ft long iron stemples inserted in the wall which were used by the miners to clamber out). We eventually found ourselves at the top of a large funnel-shaped chamber with very loose material underfoot. A fixed rope, onto which we clipped our cows tails, led down and around the side of the chamber to a ledge from which a knotted rope led down again and round a corner to a fixed ladder (or rope if you preferred) which popped out half way down the side of a VAST tunnel.

This was the Quarry Area where high grade limestone was worked by Halkyn Mines in the 1950s and 1960s, output reaching 70,000-80,000 tons per annum. The creamy white, very pure limestone was all raised via the Olwyn Goch shaft, crushed at the surface and sold for use in agriculture and for glass making at Pilkingtons on Merseyside, until the operation became uneconomic. In the main passage of the quarry we saw abandoned mine cars, shovels and stretches of rail, some of the mine cars still containing their loads of broken limestone. Side galleries, up to 80ft high and 30-40ft wide, had been excavated at right angles to the main passage and smaller passages led off these. The ceilings of the galleries were sloping, as they followed the bedding of the limestone which in this area dips 5-15 degrees to the east. One gallery was bridged half way along its length; while I stayed at 'ground level' the rest of the party traversed diagonally up the side wall to stand on the bridge, and the line of moving lights was quite spectacular. Efforts to zap me with a dislodged piece of limestone failed, I'm glad to say. (Better luck next time?)

Round about now we stopped for luncheon - hot tea and mince pies for the Grosvenor lads but basic caving grub for MCG. Here some of us examined a couple of front loader cars which were used for scooping up the broken limestone at the quarry face, while Julie examined the remains of a 1967 newspaper!

We left the limestone workings and almost immediately arrived at the Milwr Tunnel which had quite a strong stream flowing along it. We crossed carefully to the other side of the tunnel, stepping only on the rails and not on the intervening wooden planks which were rotten and would give way without warning. A short passage led to the base of the Olwyn Goch Shaft where we could see the heap of guide wires where they had fallen when severed when the shaft was closed. Nearby was a small cabin, now flooded but complete with old desk, billy can and 1977 girly calendar. On the other side of the shaft was a charging area for lamps and loco batteries, and a workshop for maintaining the rolling stock. The work benches had collapsed but tools and spare parts lay where they had fallen. Also a canoe! (brought down by Grosvenor members to assist with transporting equipment further down the tunnel; their first vessel had been an old plastic bath which is now apparently abandoned further downstream).

At this point we discussed whether to carry on down the Milwr Tunnel towards Powell's Lode which is about three miles downstream. Time was short, however, so we just went far enough to see one of the old locos. The rails on which we had to walk were well below water level and difficult to locate with our feet and the thought of three miles of this sort of progress was somewhat daunting. We decided to return to where we had first left the shaft and visit the Hendre Flat Workings, but vowed to return at a later date to visit Powell's Lode Cavern which is a natural chamber measuring 130x220ft and containing a lake over 200ft deep.

This time when we reached the small dam above the fixed ladder we carried straight on into the Flat Workings (in the Hendre Vein, I think). These passages have been mined along the ore bearing vein or lode which is nearly vertical and generally 3-4ft wide. Some of the passages were wellyfull of water, others were dry, and at one point we climbed up a short roped pitch into a higher level which continued up slippery scree material to where an old winch lay abandoned. There was a little bit of 'hanging death', typical of mines, where quantities of 'deads' (waste rock) were stacked above rotten looking wooden beams jammed across the passage just above head height. I was surprised to see quite a bit of Galena (Lead Sulphide) and Sphalerite or Blende (Zinc Sulphide) - also known as "black jack" - in the passage walls. I had expected the ores to have been completely worked out as in Singing River Mine on Mendip..

Last words from Joan...

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We retraced our steps to the shaft and set off, one by one, to climb the 200-odd feet to the entrance adit. Tim and Pete raced up, I plodded up (with only one short rest stop) and the rest followed on behind until we had all reached the surface after a most interesting and enjoyable trip. Our thanks to Jerry and Co. for their excellent and patient leadership, and to Julie for arranging the Olwyn Goch visit and the comfortable accommodation at the Colomendy Centre, Loggerheads.



ARNSIDE ANECDOTES : October '98

from Yvonne Rowe

Not a lot to report really as we have been concentrating on our garage for a couple of months - sealing the floor, whitewashing the walls, putting up shelves, putting in a sink, etc. etc., but we have had a couple of nice trips in between the garage work and the rotten weather.

The first was a lovely day's walk up and across Dow Crag and Coniston Old Man. As we were climbing Dow Crag we thought we heard someone calling in distress. We stopped, as did another party of walkers, and as we listened we were sure we could hear someone calling every few minutes. Martin had his monocular so he scoured the sides of Coniston Old Man where the cries were coming from. After about ten or so minutes Martin could see someone scabbling about on the rocky slopes of the unfriendlier side of the Old Man, but thankfully it turned out to be a shepherd with his dogs calling for and rounding up his sheep. The forecast for later in the day was for heavy rain and high winds so we guessed he was bringing his sheep down to the pens at the base of the hill for their comfort and safety.

It was a lovely sunny day (so far) and from the top of Coniston Old Man we had a clear, uninterrupted view of Coniston Water stretched out before us, with Lake Windermere further behind it, then in the distance we could see part of Morecambe Bay with the Kent estury and Arnside Knot (we can see Coniston Old Man from Arnside on a clear day). Of course we could see many familiar and lesser known hills in between too.

We dropped down from the Old Man via some interesting looking old mines but the weather was closing in fast by now so we thought it best to leave any investigations for another day. On our way back to the car we deviated slightly so we didn't walk paths we'd covered on the way up. The alternative path brought us quite suddenly and unexpectedly to a huge water-filled quarry- bigger and much prettier than Hodge Close (a very dark, sinister looking hole, for those who don't know it).

Sometime in its history a stream had been diverted away from the quarry workings, but close to its upper rim. The quarry has long since been worked out and abandoned but the stream has broken through the rim and now cascades in a beautiful waterfall down into the deep, open quarry. The water escapes through an old adit lower down in the quarry wall and meets up with the original streambed a bit further down-valley. This must keep the water level at a regular height, except, I assume, in extremely prolonged wet weather. The site is fenced off due to the steep and slippery slopes into the quarry but there are trees, grass and flowers all around its edge, and with the occasional glimpse of sun (fading fast) it looked quite picturesque.

Our second trip was down Alum Pot with Geoff Beale and Graham Old - See MCG News No. 274 for details of the trip.

Baker's Pit - Xmas '98**By Ben Cooper.**

Despite several abortive attempts to get away for Christmas and the New Year, it looked as if I would be spending Christmas with my parents in Torquay. But then Lynn and Bill, our new probationary members from Devon, casually suggested that the next time I was there, they would take me caving. And so it was arranged that on Bank Holiday Monday I would meet them in Buckfastleigh. I knew the journey would take the best part of three hours from Basingstoke, so set off at 10:30 for a 1 o'clock rendezvous, thinking I would have time to go shopping in Bristol, and, if I was lucky, I could stop off in Exeter too. What was I thinking of? I arrived half an hour late.

Buckfastleigh is a charming narrow-laned Devon village on the South edge of Dartmoor, and Lynn's house is conveniently situated at the top of a stone walled lane, barely an inch wider than my car. As I parked the car I saw a red apparition in my mirror - no, it wasn't Father Christmas, just Lynn in a very bright red over-suit. Later, Lynn admitted to washing her over-suit in the washing machine. I found this incredible, particularly after seeing how muddy we got in Baker's Pit. I did consider asking my mum if I could do the same with her washing machine, but thought better of it. It took half an hour to hose my suite down!

Baker's Pit is just a few minutes drive from Buckfastleigh, at the top of a cold windy hill next to the ruined remains of an abandoned church. Spooky. I could get changed there, or if I preferred, I could use Lynn's house. Easy decision, Lynn's house it was, and Bill drove us to the cave.

The entrance shaft is about 30' deep, like a sewer inspection shaft, with metal steps buried in the wall. Exciting Boy Scout stuff. The cave itself is made up of a series of large interconnecting chambers - or so it appears on the survey. In reality, each chamber appears more like a complex series of small chambers of shattered rock, connected by interesting low rocky passages. I was completely lost within minutes.

Descending deeper, we climbed down to a passage flooded to a height of 10'. The water had that inviting turquoise-blue look of very deep cave water. Bill and Lynn were excited to see this, as the flooded passage drains via a waterfall into the lower series - and it was a rare occurrence for it to flood. I was excited to see it too, because such water is truly beautiful. Moving on we passed a series of inviting chutes, but I was warned away from these, as they open into an exposed grade II climb down to the lower series. The route continued past a bold step, and down to an attractive stream canyon and the aforementioned waterfall.

The way on is closed for the winter bat hibernation season - but does come to an another entrance in the base of a quarry. Instead we doubled back up the canyon to a point where we could climb into the high level series. The climb is vertically up through a tight chimney, reminiscent of Slit Pot in Thrupe Lane Swallet. This series has only been opened recently, and is still new to Lynn and Bill. From the head of the climb, we followed a low passage into a large chamber with deep rifts in the floor. We did not explore the rifts - presumably any direction downwards would rejoin the lower series - but continued over the boulders, through a tight squeeze to the Jam Jar - a useful, if temporary landmark. We continued on through two or three further chambers, until we eventually came to a large chamber with a number of possible ways on. In fact most of these seemed to be blind, but a small passage lead off to the right and up. We followed this through small gaps in the boulders to a beautifully decorated chamber. The formations here are crystal clear, like ice, which is amazing considering the cave is extremely muddy. The route seemed to continue but we were out of time. Bill and Lynn were also concerned about finding the route back - rightly so, as it turned out. I had not noticed any side passages on the way in, but as we retraced our steps, I realized that each chamber we had come through was actually more complex than I had noticed. There are potentially many ways on. We eventually came to a large chamber, which we couldn't remember, but thankfully, with the concerted effort of the three of us we found a tiny and unobvious crawl. This opened onto a large exposed slippery slope (short arms and legs proved a disadvantage for Lynn).

Before leaving the cave we made a detour to the old entrance. Originally the cave had a large walk-in entrance, but over the years this was buried under rubbish. The authorities had to keep the cave open, so as the rubbish piled up, the entrance shaft was built. To this day, there are large metal items lying around in this part of the cave.

The final pièce de résistance is a stunningly beautiful stal flow in the floor of a narrow passage by the old entrance. It is only six inches wide and snowy white, and flows for several meters along the passage floor. For future reference, I would recommend viewing this on the way into the cave, before getting too muddy. It would be tragic to spoil it.

We climbed back out of the cave after an interesting and fun three hours caving, absolutely covered in mud. Bill drove us back to Lynn's, and there we thawed out in front of the fire with cups of tea and Christmas cake. After transferring the mud from my face and hands all over Lynn's snowy white bathroom, I continued on my way to my parents.

The Milwr Tunnel by Julie Hesketh

Although I had vaguely heard of the Milwr Tunnel, the trip to Olwyn Goch encouraged me to find out more. Lead was first mined on Halkyn Mountain by the Romans. As the shallower veins were worked out the mines were deepened and by the late 18th century the miners ran into severe water problems. A series of drainage tunnels was excavated, culminating in the ten mile long Milwr Tunnel which was started in 1897 at the coast of the Dee Estuary. By 1919 the tunnel extended about 4 miles in a southerly direction: in 1928 it was extended towards the Olwyn Goch shaft and then on to its furthest point, between Loggerheads and Mold, in 1957. The tunnel slopes at a gradient of 1:1000 and during its progress a number of previously unknown mineral veins were discovered. It's average water flow is 23 million gallons per day (36 million in wet weather). Two thirds of this issues from the River Alyn and the Halkyn Mountain cave systems which are intersected by the tunnel - Ogof Hesp Alyn (visited on Saturday) consisted of water filled phreatic passages until intersected and drained by the Milwr Tunnel.



Snippets of news By Joan Goddard.

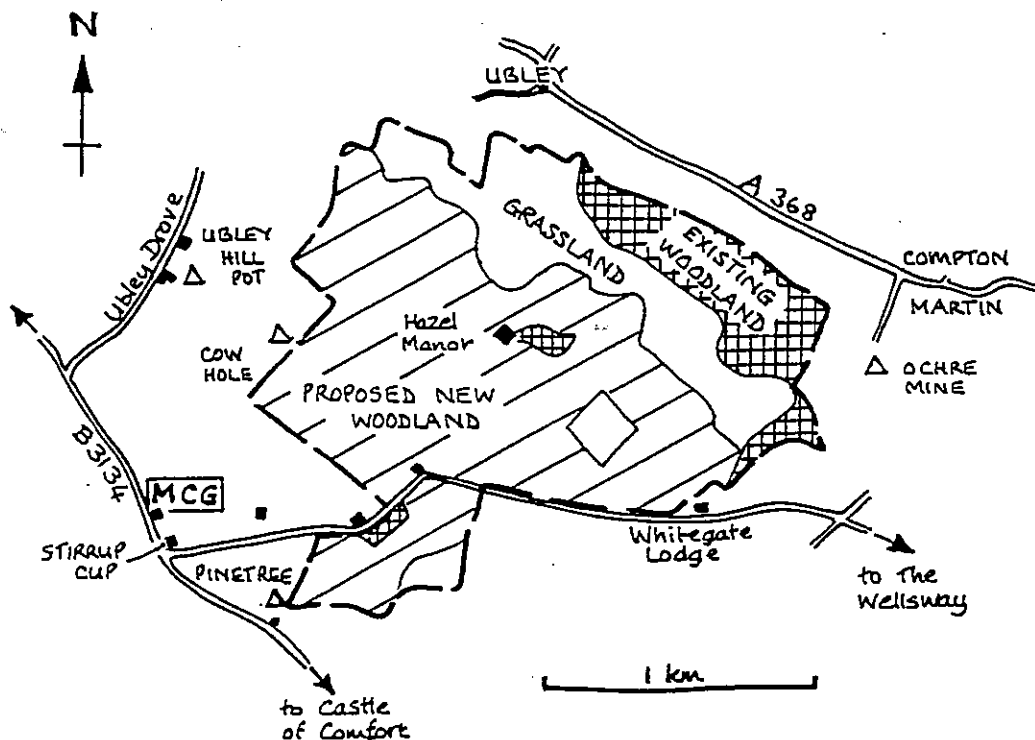
Somerset Wildlife Trust is buying Longwood and Velvet Bottom nature reserves. They have managed the sites (home to dormice and greater horseshoe bats) for a number of years.

Mendip woodland scheme unveiled :

The charity *Will Woodlands* has revealed plans for Hazel Manor Farm which they purchased recently. On the main plateau area a new broadleaf woodland is to be created, which will be separated from the existing ancient woodland along the scarp above Ubley and Compton Martin by a belt of grassland. Currently the area is crossed by several rights of way and the new woodland "will provide great opportunities for public recreation and education. Potential exists to create a small car park and visitor centre in the future".

Reactions have been mixed. The Mendip Society would have preferred the farm to have remained as grassland for grazing (but not for pig farming). It welcomes public access but doubts the necessity for a visitor centre. However, a Somerset Wildlife Trust representative is generally happy with the proposed planting as he feels that woodland habitat is generally under-represented in Somerset.

What do YOU think? How about walking some of the footpaths now - before the changes take place. On a good day the views of Chew Valley Lake and the Yeo Valley are quite something!



Reminder

To all members

*Last weekend in January - 29th to 31st
is the Beginners Weekend.*

*We are expecting lots of beginners
so we need leaders.*

Also, on the Saturday evening :

The BEC has organised a stomp.

Live band at Priddy,

Fancy Dress - Wild West Theme,

*Tickets are £6.00 in advance,
or £8.00 on the door.*

So,

BE THERE.

