



REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL – BY JULIE HESKETH

*“From the day the cave was first opened, Daren Cilau acquired something of an evil reputation”
– Martyn Farr (1997) Dark World*

I had sampled the “evils” of Daren Cilau on many occasions. All have been memorable trips – 12 O’clock High and our fantastic trip to the Restaurant at the End of the Universe and back all in a day, last year. What I hadn’t done, was camp in Daren, or indeed, camp underground at all. Logistics were the problem. It is a case of being able to get to Llangattwg on a Friday evening and undertake the 4 hour, tough trip to the camp without falling asleep whilst caving, dig and then being able to get back to London and be at work on Monday morning, bright eyed and bushy tailed. I was finally persuaded to go for it one weekend in March, by Lee Hawkswell, a Daren regular who has spent more weekends under Llangattwg than I’m sure he cares to imagine with members of the Chelsea CC and others who are digging in the Hard Rock Café area.

The logistics were certainly challenging and involved a 6am drive into Central London to park in order to get away early down the M4 at around 3.30. It was a wee bit tricky explaining to my new boss why I needed to get away that early but it was an original enough excuse to amuse him sufficiently to say yes.

At the Chelsea cottage on Llangattwg, Lee and I packed our Daren drums with our personal gear and communal rations, which are either used or left at the camp for next time. After numerous cups of tea and putting off the inevitable, we finally hit the Daren entrance puddle at about 10pm. Lee, too had got up at 6am. Daren entrance crawl is always daunting, particularly with tackle but we were both surprisingly fresh and made good progress. On through Jigsaw and Big Chamber and down the rope climbs, we reached the ladder when tiredness finally set in. We hauled ourselves up the tricky 70ft ladder in Welly Boy Aven (a nasty climb, not helped by the awkward, heavy fixed ladder) and carefully negotiated the traverses. It was a long walk to the camp from here, but straightforward. Once we had negotiated the rope climbs, it was tackle sacs on backs for the hour and a bit’s track over slippery boulders, through the Time Machine and down Bonsai Streamway to the camp at the Hard Rock Café. Annoyingly, from as far as 20 minutes caving from camp, we could smell supper, which was being cooked at camp, wafting up Bonsai Streamway. As we arrived at camp, bearing 5-gallon containers of water taken from an inlet, we were joined by 2 cavers from Plymouth Uni. With Chris Seal and Adrian Fawcett, that made 6 of us.

If you ever pass by the Hard Rock Café camp on a day trip, it barely warrants a second look. Sure, there is evidence of a camp – kit being stored and binbags containing sleeping bags, but it is surprisingly clean and tidy, particularly compared with the Restaurant at the End of the Universe. What greeted me on this trip though was a “luxurious” set up with fairy lights, music, Karrimat seats and, most amazingly of all, Adrian Fawcett with offering me a G&T in a cocktail glass, complete with stirrer and cherry. This was going to be a good camp!

continued on page 4

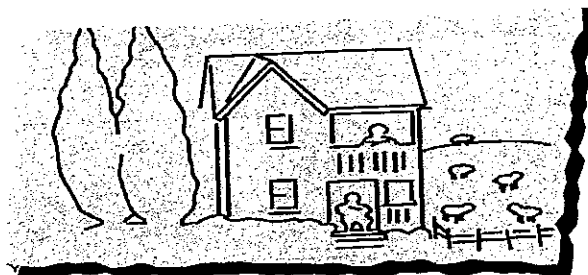
MENDIP CAVING GROUP

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MCG information:- Tim Francis (Secretary)
Tel: 0181 392 2572

High quality caving accommodation available for bookings of up to 16 people. All usual charging facilities, keys etc. Guests £2.50 per night.



WEEKLY MEETINGS:	At The Beehive, Egham, Surrey, on Thursdays from 9.00 p.m. At The Hunters Lodge, Somerset, on Tuesdays about 10pm or at the cottage at 7pm for caving trips.	
COTTAGE FEES per night:	MCG members, members children, SWCC, 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 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 Nic Blundell, tel: 01203 713849 (hm) or 01203 838940 (wk) SWCC bookings via Ian Middleton, tel: 01703 736997 or email ian_m@tcp.co.uk	

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MCG NEWS & ITEMS FROM THE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 6TH MAY '00

ON THE MOVE:- Michael Pittman to
45 Nutley, Hanworth, Bracknell, Berks,
RG12 7HE Tel: 01344-445472

Charlie Alison is in transit but he can be reached on 07974-542013 (mobile) or on 020 8760 3839 (work).

IT'S WRONG! Julie Hesketh wrote to inform me that I had got her e-mail address wrong. She also thought the others looked a bit dubious too. I'm afraid I am not e-mail literate so just guessed at what all the squiggles were. If they're still wrong will the owners please enlighten me.

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THE WALL:- BTCV have at last finished building the drystone wall at the side of the cottage. It looks good.

FREE STONE:- (Not a plea to get a bloke called Stone out of prison!) There is quite a bit of stone left over from the wall-building. We would like to retain a bit for a rockery at the the cottage, but if anyone would like some to build one of their own, then help yourself.

SINGING RIVER MINE:- We have been respectively asked if we could possibly avoid going down the mine on July 9th as a wedding reception will be taking place in the garden of the adjacent house. (It's only 1 day)

FIRE SAFETY:- The cottage warden, Ben Cooper, is to raise the standard of fire safety at the cottage with emergency lights, stickers etc.

THE COTAG SYSTEM:- Ben has bought 10 new Cotag fobs as we didn't have many left. He is going to buy a printer cable to enable us to use its function for an advanced 'battery low' warning. It will also enable us to check on any use of lost fobs and delete their numbers.

HOSING DOWN HUT:- The committee has received a proposal to enclose the hosing down area. It is suggested that the roof and two sides (the third being the shed wall) are built using corrugated plastic sheets on a frame of something strong like scaffold poles. This should prevent the changing of dirty caving gear in the changing room and will give somewhere suitable to let gear drip before putting it in the shed to dry. It is also suggested that the sink at the back of the cottage be moved to a corner of the hosing down area for cleaning smaller items like karibiners etc.

The proposer has been asked to present plans and costs to the committee for them to consider.

NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING:- The next meeting will take place on the weekend of 10th / 11th June '00.



continued from page 1 - **REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL**

Bed was a Karrimat and sleeping bag plus liner, in an oxbow on the main route through the cave and wearing thermals and a hat, I was surprisingly cosy. Despite being familiar with long trips underground, I was unprepared for how odd it would be sleeping underground – waking up with no watch and having no idea if it were 2am, 4am or lunchtime! Stumbling around in the middle of the night to go for a pee, a 5-minute walk away, contactless-less was also a new and terrifying experience! The other surprising thing I found was just how long it takes to do anything on a camp. Getting changed into dry gear was a chore as kit is stored away from the living/cooking area – bed is also separate and going to the loo is a 15-minute task.

Not surprisingly then, after a very late night, good lie-in, a hearty breakfast of potato cakes and bacon sandwiches (all carried in through the entrance crawl and cooked up!), we got caving on Saturday very late indeed – 4pm. Lee, Chris and I headed over to Half Mile Passage to dig whilst the other 3 went off on a tourist trip to the Restaurant and to start to bring some of the rubbish left there out. Half Mile is about half an hour's caving away from the camp. It is a stunning, high, zigzagging, rifty passage with a fantastic sand floor. We were to dig a small, unnamed site where diggers had previously gained around 30 feet of passage – mainly low and flat-out but through easily diggable, dry sediment. We dug for a couple of hours, putting spoil behind a small retaining wall, which quickly filled up as good progress was made.

After a welcome breather and some food we continued, taking it in turns to dig. The air had got progressively worse as we had been digging and as the last digger before supper, I was really struggling for air. During the second shift however, the air seemed to get much better and spoil seemed to be coming back to me for dumping at a great rate of knots which seemed like a good sign. Being at the hauling end of the dig, it was difficult to ascertain what was going on but it sounded good and so I crawled forward toward the dig face where Lee was hurriedly excavating a small hole in the dig face through which to crawl. We had broken through. The breakthrough was around 30 feet long – a continuation of the passage we had been digging in, past a mud blockage. It was around 8 feet wide at its widest point and 3-4 feet high. Sadly, it turned a corner and ended in a low, too tight phreatic passage. One for next time. We were well chuffed and returned to camp, pleased as punch. The others arrived a few minutes later with bagfuls of rubbish to take out. We changed and started cooking – but it was late, gone 2am and I was more than ready for my bed.

Sunday morning dawned dark and seemed to me, rather like Saturday night still. We struggled out of our sleeping bags though and slowly cooked breakfast, drank mugs of tea, filled in logbooks and started to pack up camp. All this took absolutely ages and I must confess to Lee and I leaving the others to it as we headed out. Camping in style is fantastic but it takes a lot of effort to clear camp and stash the gear tidily. Lee and I finally headed out at around 2pm, a bit stiff but remarkably fresh after 38 hours underground. We exited without a hitch, taking about the same time as it took to come in – in fact we knocked off the entrance crawl, with kit in around 40 minutes – not keen to hang around in the grotty watery crawl. We emerged to a perfect end to a great weekend – a sunny, warm day and pink sunset over Crickhowell.

Having “missed” a couple of days, being underground, we emerged to find that Ian Drury, lead singer of the Blockheads had died. It seemed fitting, funny and in the tradition of silly names for Daren passages, for Chris and Lee who had been involved in the dig prior to this trip, to call our breakthrough “Reasons to be Cheerful”, one of Ian Drury's greatest hits.

Having camped in Daren now, I would truly recommend it to anyone looking for a fun weekend. True, it is entirely possible to undertake daytrips to dig in Half Mile but it is possible to get a good, long dig in if you camp and the camp itself is fun and cosy. Definitely worth doing once, at least and it makes a change from digging Pinetree!

ASHES WEEKEND

22nd JULY 2000

Saturday 22nd July - Cave Rescue Practice

Brian Snell will be organising a rescue practice on Saturday morning. If you have never taken part in one of these practices before then now is your opportunity to learn some new techniques (some of which are special to cave rescue), to work as part of a team, to get absolutely exhausted, and to have some fun.

Brian puts a lot of time and effort into organising these rescue practices so your support would be greatly appreciated. If you can help set up (eg. rigging, carrying etc) and/or take part, please give Brian a ring on 01329-238341.

Brian would like to start at 9:0am as practices can take a long time (as do the real thing), and the cave will be decided upon on the day depending on the number of people who want to take part.

Saturday Evening - Barbecue and Barrel

The Wessex have been invited to the barbecue before the rounders match. The contents of the barrel should help make the evening's events go with a swing!!

Members are expected to bring their own offerings for the barbecue (and cook them themselves). Salad, baked potatoes, crusty bread and the like will be bought and prepared by willing volunteers while the rescue practice is going on. A small charge per person will be made for this. Likewise, there will be a charge per person/pint for the beer. No other drinks will be provided so if you would prefer some other tippie like wine, or something stronger, then please BYO.

Saturday Evening - Rounders Match

Lynn thought it would be a good idea if we were to burn an old group T-shirt and retain the resulting ashes as the 'Ashes of the MCG' (ed: pity we didn't keep some of the original cottage ashes!!!). This will make the rounders match more interesting and give us something special to put up a good fight for.

We can't let the Wessex win 'our' ashes.

We need all the support we can get so come along and help us to keep them where they belong. It will be good, clean fun (but the First Aid kit will be on hand just in case!).

Lynn Furneaux, Social Secretary

MCG BILLBOARD

MENDIP CAVING 2000

A weekend of events and entertainment for Mendip cavers. 9th, 10th 11th June at Priddy Village Hall and other venues.

- BCRA regional meeting
- Training sessions
- Wessex Challenge
- Car boot sale
- Barbecue
- Stomp
- Rescue training
- SRT at Split Rock
- Slide and digital picture show
- Digging with J-Rat

For further details visit the Mendip Caving 2000 Website

www.mendipnet.co.uk/2000

or contact Andy Sparrow (training officer) on 01749-677192

FOREST 2000

Royal Forest of Dean Caving Symposium III
16th - 18th June 2000

- ◇ Bar
- ◇ Rope testing
- ◇ Trade stands
- ◇ Surface walks
- ◇ Static displays
- ◇ Underground trips
- ◇ Talks and lectures
- ◇ Price includes simple meals
- ◇ Camping (no extra cost)

Saturday evening entertainment

Paul Taylor 01452-505673

forest2000@fod2000.freemove.co.uk

Further details will be circulated nearer the time, or visit our web site www.demon.co.uk/stoneweb/css

BCRA CONFERENCE hosted by DERBYSHIRE CAVE RESCUE ORGANISATION

On 16-18th June 2000, Bull lth' Thorn, A515, 6 miles south of Buxton - real ale, free camping, stomp. Contact Alan Gamble on 01298-71683 or e-mail ag@buxton157.freemove.co.uk

THE PEAK DISTRICT CAVERS FAIR 2000

Hosted by Derbyshire Caving Association on 7th - 9th July, Pindale Farm Outdoor Centre, Pindale Lane, Hope Valley, Derbys, S33 6RN OS Grid ref. SK 163825
Tel: 01433-620729 Fax: 01433-620729, <http://hostel.com>

- ◆ SRT introduction
- ◆ SRT intermediate
- ◆ SRT advanced
- ◆ Ladder & line / abseiling
- ◆ Practical first aid for cavers
- ◆ Cave rescue part 1
- ◆ Cave rescue part 2
- ◆ Introduction to cave diving
- ◆ Explosives demonstration
- ◆ Cave video
- ◆ Divining for caves
- ◆ Hydrology of the White Peak
- ◆ Aid climbing
- ◆ The mining legacy
- ◆ Cave photography
- ◆ DCA Cave Conservation Roadshow
- ◆ Slideshow
- ◆ Competitions and quizzes
- ◆ Grand auction
- ◆ Stomp

Accommodation:- Bunkhouse and camping at Pindale Farm; caravan sites nearby.



THE MCG ANNUAL DINNER

BURRINGTON INN, BURRINGTON COMBE - SAT. 8TH APRIL

The venue was booked, the menu sent to all 150 members, the entertainment was organised, bunks were being booked; nothing left to do but wait for a full house... *but only 34 members and 7 guests replied!* A shame as it was a chance to support the Group, meet old members and new, and it was a good night out.

Glasses sparkled, cutlery gleamed, tables shone and Burrington Inn were about to do us proud. Hot meals arrived, and plenty of it too, so bellies were filled and ready to pop. There was music in the main bar for those of us who wished to dance, a late extension on the bar, and the drinking was about to commence.

Tim Francis opened the evening by saying a few words while stood on a chair (*Ed: so we could all see him!*). Jon Whitely came up from the Devon Spelaeological Society to give an exceptional A.V. slide show on DSS's expedition to India. He only had 3 days to put it all together so 'well done' Jon. Bill Richards organised a raffle which went very well. Thanks to all the members who gave prizes for the raffle and to Tony Jarrat for his kind donation of a signed book.

I would like to thank everybody for their help and support in organising this dinner, and look forward to seeing more members next year.

Lynn Furneaux, Social Secretary

WHY THE LOW TURNOUT FOR THE DINNER?

It was suggested to me that the low turnout for the dinner might be that for many years the Burrington Inn was the Burrington Cafe, the main meeting place on Mendip for a good cooked breakfast and a mug of tea before a hard day's caving.

You will find that the old 'cafe' image has long since gone and the Burrington Inn is now a fine resaurant with a varied menu and good food. Those who went to the dinner this year generally thought that the venue, food and service were good, but if you didn't, or if you have somewhere else in mind for next year, please let me know.

Lynn Furneaux

CAVE RESCUE A LA FRANCAISE - II

You will have noticed that cave rescue in France has been getting more exposure than usual over the past few months. Richard Carey's article in Newsletter No. 286 gave a useful précis of the dramatic rescue of seven cavers from the Rivière Souterraine des Vitarelles, near Gramat in the Lot département (46), and a further article on this event appeared in Descent No. 152.

Also in this very same area, and immediately prior to this rescue, another call-out had been made concerning five cavers trapped by rising water in the Saut de la Pucelle, an active river cave affected by similar freak weather conditions. About 48 hours sufficed for this drama.

Only the Vitarelles event hit the headlines by reason of its longer duration and the greater effort and matériel required. This epic involved cavers, gendarmes and sapeurs-pompiers (SP) who are basically firemen but have a wider responsibility than in the UK. The aftermath to this ten-day rescue has been marked by a high level of public acrimony, chiefly between the Spéléo Secours Français (SSF) and the SP. This has highlighted a problem which stems from the SP in several regions having been encouraged to extend their skills to include cave rescue. Usually this has provoked no more than a few short-lived local problems, but the SP in the Lot have proved exceptionally resistant to accepting the importance of the cavers in cave rescue!

From the start, the Vitarelles rescue was run by three different command structures: SSF, the gendarmes and the SP. An early attempt by a senior SP officer to assume overall command was only avoided by the head of the département himself naming an SSP caver to coordinate the process. This duly put le chat well and truly amongst les pigeons, setting the scene for procedural strife. Luckily for the seven cavers trapped underground the SP waited until after the event to take revenge upon the cavers with accusations of making false claims for travel and daily-rate attendance expenses. They also embargoed a lot of the rescuers' equipment such as ropes which had been rigged in the cave or left under the surveillance of the SP; the cavers then billed these as 'lost' equipment, which attracted more flak. The SSF bill for the efforts of 86 cavers, their travel expenses and loss and damage to equipment was roughly equivalent to £80,000 of which £9,000 concerned equipment not recovered. The SP charged some £45,000.

The ability to claim for rescue expenditure is associated with the fact that French regional administrators are empowered to 'conscript' helpers to deal with such events as rescues and natural disasters. Recovery of all reasonable out-of-pocket expenses is made possible by this idea of temporary conscription. Money for this is paid by the state which, in turn, will try to recoup as much as possible from specific and local sources. It can therefore easily be understood that such expenditure will be resisted and resented at local level, leading to the imposition of access restrictions following a major rescue in such caves as the Gouffre Berger.

French cave rescuers have erroneously been described as 'professionals'. In their application of skill and dedication to the task in hand they certainly score high marks, but unless 'conscripted' in exceptional circumstances they receive no payment.

The dust had only just settled in the Lot when another rescue saga in the Savoie found its way into the headlines. The cave concerned is the Tanne des Crolleurs near Aillon-le-Vieux, 15km northwest of Chambéry. It consists of a series of tight pitches, rifts and crawls, and is regarded as being a difficult cave. On Sunday 27 February Sylvaine Martel, A 30-year-old local caver, was hit by falling rocks and suffered a broken arm and spinal injuries.

The constricted nature of many parts of the cave made it necessary to enlarge them by blasting to allow the stretcher to pass; over 1000 mini-charges were used. During the rescue process a caver fell onto another who sustained spinal injuries and, in turn, became a second stretcher case. The caver concerned was described as 'more corpulent' which meant that further enlargement was required. Sylvaine was brought out of the cave on Sunday 5 March.

A total of 300 cavers had been involved, assisted by gendarmes and local sapeurs-pompiers.

On this occasion the rescue was coordinated by the SSF, and newspaper reports of this event spoke of exemplary cooperation between the different groups. If this article has any kind a moral it should surely be, "If you must have an accident underground, make sure it's not in the Lot".

Tony Knibbs, Toulouse, 17 March 2000

COTTAGE BOOKINGS

<u>WHO</u>	<u>WHEN</u>	<u>BEDS</u>
Gloucester Guides	9th - 11th June	16
BTCV + BBC	16th - 18th June	12
Bill Richards	23rd - 25th June	14
Dave Briggs	18th - 19th July	3
Lost World CC	9th - 10th September	6

MCG BILLBOARD

(CONTINUED)

NEW GROUP POLO SHIRTS

(Ed: No, not that sort of group!)

You might have noticed that Bill Richards and I were wearing the new group polo shirt at this year's AGM. Ours were navy with gold lettering on the top left hand side (see N/L 288 for logo). If you would like to order one, please send a cheque for £14.50 payable to Lynn Furneaux.

I cannot order any shirts unless paid for in advance, and I can only order 11 shirts at a time. Orders will take up to 3 weeks to be delivered.

Colours are navy, white, black, red, yellow and green.

Sizes are S, M, L, XL and XXL.

Richard and I will be wearing our polo shirts over the Ashes Weekend (so we won't get mixed up with the Wessex!).

Orders to Lynn Furneaux at 4 Tor View, Wallaford Road, Buckfastleigh, Devon, TQ11 0AP

MCG FLEECE

Here is the latest on those MCG fleeces I told you about:-

Nigel, my contact up t'north, is going to put a package together of samples of the different types and qualities of fleece available to him. He will also include approximate prices (dependent on complexity of logo), sizes and colours. The latest MCG logo (cave view) is quite complex but he can modify it so that it can be embroidered on the fleeces, without the overall style being lost. Alternatively, the climbing caver logo would not present the same problems as it is 'less fussy'.

I hope to have this package at the cottage over the weekend of the 10/11th June if anyone is interested. *Yvonne Rowe*

SUBTERRANEA BRITANNICA ANNUAL STUDY WEEKEND 2000

To be held in North Wales from 21st to 23rd July.

Saturday:-

- ◆ Visit to Dinorwig Power Station
- ◆ Visit to Sygun Copper Mine near Beddgelert
- ◆ Visit to the Great Orme Bronze Age Copper Mine
- ◆ Explore abandoned mines between sites
- ◆ Expert after dinner speaker

Sunday:-

- ◆ trip down Olwyn Goch, toward Wrexham (must be very fit)
- ◆ Trip down copper mines at Parys Mountain, Anglesey (need to be quite fit)
- ◆ Alternative over-ground trips...
- ◆ If it rains... nearby geological museum

A coach or mini-bus will be provided for the weekend (except for Olwyn Goch). There will be low cost accommodation provided at the University of Wales at Bangor.

Registration and admin. fee £15

For registration form, and cost of coach, accommodation and meal prices, or for more details or info. contact Malcolm Todd, 65 Trindles Road, South Nutfield, Redhill, Surrey, RH1 4JL Tel: 01737 823456

(an information sheet is at cottage)

CAVERS CAR BOOT SALE

Sunday 11th June at Priddy Village Hall. Now is your last chance to get rid of all that old caving and walking clobber (eg. wetsuits, fleeces etc), camping gear, caving books etc. etc.

Bring any stuff to the cottage or to the Thursday meet at the Beehive to pass on, or phone Joan Goddard on 01993 882 446.