

Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

Number 292 - September 2000

CAVING EQUIPMENT – YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE!

We renew our cottage insurance every year during January, but every year (it seems) there is a change at our insurers, Eagle Star. Our insurance is basically a normal household buildings and contents policy, but this year, the master policy on which ours is based has been changed, and Eagle Star were reluctant to renew our policy in its current form. It seems that they have lost the original agreements that explained that we were a charity and not a normal household. For a while, it looked as if we would have to negotiate a new policy on a commercial, rather than household basis. Luckily, however, we managed to agree with them that we could renew the existing policy, if a change were made.

The original policy contained a number of items: buildings insurance, contents insurance, and "all-risks" insurance. Under the new master policy, "all-risks" was renamed to "away-from-home". The crux of the problem was that the level of risk that Eagle Star was exposed to under this item was far greater for us with 150 members than was expected for a normal household of four or five members. If we were prepared to drop this item from the schedule, Eagle Star would be prepared to insure the other two items. This did not seem unreasonable, and so I agreed.

The impact of this, however, is that if anyone borrows Group kit, and takes it away from the cottage, the Group is no longer insured in the event of theft or loss of those items. Of course, people borrow Group kit and take it away from the cottage all the time - most caving, for example, requires us to take ladders and equipment away from the cottage! So, to comply with our new insurance (or rather lack of it), please be advised that we are each individually responsible for the safe return of any item that we borrow from the Group. This, however, is not as bad as it sounds. It is, after all, what most of us thought anyway! And anyone with household insurance will usually be insured for the items they have borrowed under their own "all-risks" or "away-from-home" clauses.

However, please be advised of this change, and take due care of our belongings.

Ben Cooper

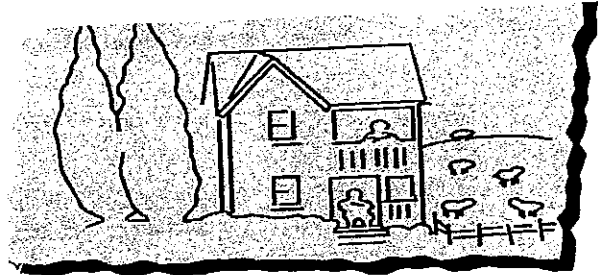
MENDIP CAVING GROUP

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OS 1:50,000 sheet 182

Ben Cooper (Cottage Warden)
Tel: 01256 364199
Or e-mail: ben.cooper@sbs.siemens.co.uk

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 10.00 pm or at the cottage at 7.00 pm 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] 25 nights accommodation	£30.00
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	

THE 2000 - 2001 COMMITTEE:

Secretary	Tim Francis	Flat 6, 16 Lambert Avenue, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4QR	Tel: 0181 392 2572 Timf@bjm.co.uk
Treasurer	TBA	Awaiting appointment of a new treasurer as Richard Carey is out of the country for some time.	
Caving Secretary	Martin Rowe	'Abingdon', 11 Church Hill, Arnside, Lancs., LA5 0DB	Tel: 01524 762664
Tacklemaster	Bill Richards	6, Elizabeth Square, Newton Abbot, Devon, TQ12 4EJ	Tel: 01626 366639
Cottage Warden	Ben Cooper	10 Coronation Road, Basingstoke, Hants, RG1 4HA	Tel: 01256 364199 ben.cooper@sbs.siemens.co.uk
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Social Secretary	Lynn Furneaux	4 Tor View, Wallaford Road, Buckfastleigh, Devon, TQ11 0AP	Tel: 01364 643679

Rescue Warden	Brian Snell	01329 238341
Conservation Officer	Marcus Ward	01252 815112
	J-P Burch	01737 217039
Cottage Extension	Wayne Hiscox	01749 671282
Examiners	Tony Knibbs	0033 5 61858232
	Charlie Allison	0181 224 7591

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MCG news and items from the committee meeting held 2nd September 2000

AREA CODE CHANGE:

Please note that all 0181 telephone numbers now start 0208

e-mail address change for:

Paul Craddy:
paulcraddy@hotmail.com

FULL MEMBERSHIP:

Congratulations to Paul Craddy and Doug Harris on becoming full members.

PROBATIONARY MEMBERSHIP:

Welcome to Sophie Chambers and Robert Fountain.

PROSPECTIVE MEMBERSHIP:

The following have applied for membership of MCG:

Jacky Gibbons of 21 Milton Lane, Wookey Hole, Somerset, BA5 1DG
☎ 01749 677447
e-mail: jackyg@ic24.net

Vicky Landeryou of 12 Moor Villas, West Street, South Petherton, Somerset.

☎ 01460 241287
e-mail: landeryou@bandy.freeserve.co.uk

New MCG e-mail addresses:

Ian McKechnie has registered the domain name: www.m-c-g.org.uk New contact e-mails for committee members are:

Hon. Secretary:
secretary@m-c-g.org.uk
Cottage Warden:
cottage@m-c-g.org.uk

COTTAGE BOOKINGS:

29th Sep - 6th Oct	BCTV	(12)
20th - 25th Oct	Worthing Scts	(10)
7th - 11th Nov	TCI - ED	(12)

BED-NIGHT VOUCHERS:

Please note that only 25 bed-night vouchers are now being sold (see page 2). These cost £30 per 25.

EMERGENCY KEY:

The *emergency* key for Nordrach Cottage is now held 'next door' by Mary Fry. Note that it is for emergency only. If you forget your key and are at all able to find another member at the pub, or can wait to see if someone else will arrive at the cottage, then please do this. If you do have to go to Mary, please don't call round too late.

EXCESS STONE:

All excess stone left over from the dry-stone wall has now been removed c/o Doug Harris and his trailer. About half the lawn still needs digging over, stones removed and re-seeded.

MCG VACUUM:

A vacuum cleaner has been donated to the cottage. The cottage warden and the rest of the committee would like to thank the donor, whoever he/she is.

Dates for your diary:

Peak Cavern, Derbys, 17-19th November, accommodation provisionally booked at the TSG. Contact Martin Rowe 01524 762664

TBA - Exploration of tunnels at Castle Cary (see page 6).

If members have suggestions for trips, contact Martin Rowe and he'll try to arrange some dates and accommodation.

LOST & FOUND

Dates with items lost/found at the cottage:-

Sat	05/06/99	Drill key
Sun	22/08/99	Yellow tee shirt
Sun	22/08/99	Yellow towel
Sun	05/09/99	Two small batteries
Fri	05/11/99	Elec. razor, soap, toothbrush/paste
Fri	05/11/99	Turquoise sweatshirt
Fri	05/11/99	Child's grey cartoon sweatshirt
Fri	05/11/99	Child's light grey tracksuit trousers
Fri	05/11/99	1 white sport sock
Fri	05/11/99	Yale type key
Sat	15/01/00	Medium sized Turquoise towel
Sat	15/01/00	Large Pink towel
Sun	23/01/00	Blue Fleece Hat
Sun	14/05/00	White towel

That which is still unclaimed by the half-yearly will be deemed unwanted and will be binned.

SUBTERRANEA BRITANNICA STUDY WEEKEND
NORTH WALES - 22nd / 23rd JULY

Martin and I had seen this weekend advertised in the Subterranea Britannica newsletter while down at the cottage earlier in the year. We love North Wales and were attracted by the planned site visits so booked our places as soon as we got home.

Bangor University was the base and start point for Saturday's and Sunday's activities. We arrived there late on Friday night where we registered and collected our folder containing the weekend itinerary plus site maps/surveys and notes on history, geology, exploration etc. A coach would be laid on to ferry us all (about 35 people) to and from the various sites. All we needed to take was a helmet and lamp, boiler or oversuit, wellies, and a packed lunch. The organisation was excellent - everything had been well planned and researched.

By the time we had registered we were too late to find a campsite and pitch our tent so instead we found a quiet dead-end lane and slept in the back of the Land Rover. You might remember from the last newsletter that we have almost 6ft in the back with the seats folded down and can make ourselves very comfortable. Early Saturday morning we headed back to Bangor University to meet the others and to board the coach for **DINORWIG ELECTRIC MOUNTAIN** in Llanberis. We have passed this mountain with the power station beneath the old purple slate quarry many times and have been curious as to what goes on in there. We were about to find out.

Over 5 miles of tunnels have been mined through the mountain with metalled roads laid along them. Single decker buses ferry visitors around the plant, stopping off at various sites on the way. We were told and saw too much to talk about here but basically there are two reservoirs - one on the top of the mountain and one at the base. Throughout the day, when electricity demand is higher, huge valves open to allow water from the upper reservoir down a mile long tunnel, then a vertical shaft to between one and six turbines (depending on demand), finally ending up in the lower reservoir. During the night, when demand is low, off-peak electricity is used to pump the water back up from the lower to the upper reservoir. When there are extra demands from the grid, Dinorwig can respond by going from zero to 1,320 megawatts of power *in 12 seconds!* The main chamber - Machine Hall Cavern - is one of the largest man-made caverns ever created with a length of 179 metres, a width of 24 metres, and a height of 60 metres, which is higher than a 16 storey office block! *All-in-all an awe-inspiring place and well worth a visit.*

Our next trip was into **SYGUN COPPER MINE** (pronounced **Sugyn!**) in the Gwynant Valley, Beddgelert. The mine, which was finally abandoned in 1903, is a modern-day reminder of the 19th century methods of ore extraction and processing. It has a history of mining for copper, lead, zinc, manganese, silver and gold. Some workings have been dated to the Roman times.

There are winding tunnels and large chambers with magnificent and richly coloured ferrous oxide stalagmite and stalagmite formations. Throughout, each stage of the mining process is clearly explained. The route rises 140ft via stairways, tunnels and colourful caverns to emerge at the Victoria level for a breathtaking view of the Gwynant Valley. On the way are examples of hand-drilled bore holes still evident on the rock faces. Some have been found still charged with black powder, the fuse intact ready for firing! The miners' lights were candles in a ball of clay stuck on the brims of their hats with others placed around the rock face. Some of the original 150-year-old timbers still support deads above. Their preservation has been assisted by the natural impregnation of minerals (especially copper) and the constantly damp environment. Miners worked a 10 hour day, 6 day week, and earned between £1 and £2 per month! *Another site worth visiting.*

From Beddgelert we were driven to Llandudno where we all got on a funicular tramway which took us up the Great Orme to the **GREAT ORME ANCIENT COPPER MINE**. Since excavation began in 1987 over 4 miles of tunnels have been surveyed dating from the Bronze Age between 1860BC and 600BC. Some of the shafts are up to 500ft deep and the 3,500 year old cavern measures about 40ft high, 70ft wide and 45ft long.

The amazing thing is that all this, and the tunnels, were dug out using stone hammers (2,500 found, weighing between 4 - 64lbs) and bone scrapers (30,000 found, mostly from cattle). Where the rock was too hard for the miners to make progress with stone and bone tools, a method called Firesetting was used where a fire would be lit against the rock which would cause it to expand. When the fire eventually went out, the rock would cool and contract causing it to crack thus making it easier to break out with their primitive tools. Evidence of Firesetting has been found at a depth of 220ft below the surface suggesting that a system of ventilation must have been in place. The tunnels were a surprisingly good height under the circumstances - about the height of the mined entrance tunnel in Upper Flood. It has been estimated that up to 1,769 tonnes of copper metal were extracted from the mine during the Bronze Age. *For me, with my love of prehistoric archaeology, this was a truly amazing mine. I would like to have spent more time here so will definitely be going back another day.*

We got back to Bangor University at about 6:30pm so had time to find a camp site, pitch our tent, have a shower and change, and find a pub for a drink and meal. On Sunday morning we headed off to meet everyone at Bangor University again and to board the coach for **PARYS MINE** in the Parys Mountain at Amlwch on Anglesey. This mine, along with another nearby called Mona Mine, produced copper that dominated the world's markets in the 1780's. It was used to sheath the admiralty's ships of war in order to prevent the growth of seaweed and barnacles and to prevent boring by worms. This increased their manoeuvrability and made possible Nelson's victories. Competition and cheaper ores from abroad led to the decline of the mines in the 1880's.

The ore was initially worked on the surface from shallow shafts, then by open-pit mining, and later underground from adits and from shafts up to 300m deep. The 18th century miners recognised that they were following in the footsteps of much earlier workers with the discovery locally of copper ingots bearing Roman inscriptions. Recent excavations have enabled surface debris to be dated to nearly 4,000 years ago (the early Bronze Age), and access has also been regained to sealed underground workings of Parys mine revealing evidence for this ancient mining. At its peak in the 1780's, a workforce of several thousand was employed at the mines. We were taken underground in groups of five or six by two members per group of PUG (Parys Underground Group). They had kindly given up their Sunday to take us on this trip and were extremely informative and very considerate (some Sub. Brit. members were inexperienced). The mine has the feel of a cave, the tunnels and caverns mostly being rough-hewn rather than neatly squared-off or rounded. Deposits and beautifully coloured formations have grown or covered areas of the rock, adding to the cave-like appearance. There is much to explore above ground also, including the Great Opencast, the mineyards, the precipitation ponds, the Pearl enginehouse, Charlotte Yard, The Windmill and Oxen Quarry, and the modern mine. *PUG members helped make this trip very enjoyable and whet Martin's and my appetite for more. Another 'must'.*

There was an alternative trip to Parys Mine on the Sunday. Members of the Grosvenor Caving Club were to lead a trip down Milwr Tunnel which, as I remember, has a large number of consecutive 20ft ladders and is not for the faint-hearted or unfit. However, this was cancelled earlier and substituted with an exploration trip down Hendre Spar Mine, again led by GCC. We had been down Milwr Tunnel about a year ago so had already opted for the Parys Mine trip, but we were more than happy to stay with this choice.

We thoroughly enjoyed this weekend with Subterranea Britannica and found them to be a most welcoming and friendly group of people. *This was a good exercise in inter-group intercourse!* All the sites were extremely interesting, made more enjoyable by all the prior arrangements for talks, leaders, special trips etc., and, as I said before, the overall planning and preparation was faultless. Our thanks to Malcom Tadd who I believe was responsible for most, if not all of this (if not, my apologies to those concerned).

If anyone is interested in visiting any of the sites I have talked about above, I have all the contacts, brochures, exploration notes, maps/surveys etc. etc. Just contact me on 01524-762664 and I will be happy to send you photocopies. Or, if there are enough of you, perhaps Martin can organise a weekend in North Wales to take in as many of these sites that members want or is practicable

by Yvonne Rowe

LIBRARY ADDITIONS

In spite of the fact that I haven't reported recently on new acquisitions, exchange journals have been coming into the library as usual and are being filed in the relevant places on the shelves. We have a new exchange with an Argentinian group and have recently received Cambridge and Oxford University journals as well as publications from our usual exchange clubs on Mendip and elsewhere.

The *Wessex Journal* for May 2000 has an article listing the fifty longest and deepest caves on Mendip. The top ten lengths are Swildon's, St Cuthbert's, Wookey, Eastwater, Stoke Lane, Goughs, GB, Longwood, Thrupe Lane and Shatter-WL; Upper Flood comes in at No. 21 and Pinetree doesn't make it onto the list (come on, Tim and Co - dig harder!).

We have purchased a short video of Swildon's to Sump 1 (produced by Wessex members), and a book by Penny Stokes and Mendip District Council with the title *Mendip's Past - a Shared Inheritance*. This covers the local authority area of Mendip - which is much more extensive than the limestone area which we tend to refer to as Mendip. It gives an overview of the archaeology and history of the area from Palaeolithic times to World War II, is well illustrated, has a list of scheduled monuments and suggestions for further reading.

In the *Wells Journal* of July 20th there is a photo and article about the re-enactment of 'the world's first cave dive with breathing apparatus' which was made 65 years ago by Graham Balcombe who died earlier this year. A plaque was unveiled in the Witch's Parlour where the original dive began.

There doesn't seem to be as many new caving books published as in recent years but if any member knows of a publication which he/she thinks should be in the library, please let Wayne or me know its details.

Joan Goddard

CASTLE CARY TUNNELS

There are some pretty strange and mysterious tunnels running under Castle Cary which members of MCG might be interested in exploring. Tim Francis contacted Stephen Membery, the Somerset County Council Development Control Archaeologist, expressing an interest, and he in return has sent MCG some photocopies of some pretty old hand-written notes and sketches, and some almost black photographs. I will try to interpret the notes and sketches, but unfortunately the photographs are too dark to interpret or do anything with.

The tunnels were excavated about 1966-7 by Nick Pratchett using caving equipment. The main shaft is a well which is unlined and cut into sandstone. It is about 20 feet deep but roughly half way down are two tunnels leading off; one tunnel goes to South Cary House, and the other, opposite and slightly lower, leads to a scarp across the field. From what I can make out in the photographs these tunnels are fairly substantial and well made. The top of the well was sealed by reversing capstones. In the bottom of the well was found leather buckets, wooden trenchers, staves and crockery.

Stephen Membery has informed the owners of the land and they are happy that MCG are interested. He has also expressed a wish to accompany MCG if/when they go into the tunnels and is hoping that we can give him some idea of their purpose as he has no idea himself (and he says: "and that is something you will very rarely hear an archaeologist say"). I will bring all the paperwork I have to the Half-yearly for anyone who is interested in having a look.

Yvonne Rowe

THE ORKNEYS - AUGUST 2000

another exercise in intergroup intercourse

Martin and I had often thought about a trip to the Orkney Islands but it seemed such an epic journey from Hampshire. However, now we live up north we are a lot closer so decided to go this August. When we started making plans we found out that it would cost over £300 to cross with the Land Rover by ferry from Scrabster (near Thurso) to Stromness on Mainland Orkney which was more than we could justify (or afford) for just two people. It was going to be cheaper for us to fly but that would limit what we could carry and we had intended camping.

We had almost abandoned the idea when we were browsing through an MNRC newsletter at the cottage earlier in the year. It had a two-page advert for a trip to the Orkneys this August. It was to include everything we wanted to do - archaeology, botony, ornithology, caving, geology etc. When we got home we rang Steve Shipston, the trip organiser, to see if MNRC would mind a couple of MCG members tagging along. Steve said they had a bit of a problem in that they had five people interested but no suitable transport, so he didn't know if the trip would take place. Well... they had no suitable transport, we had a 12-seater Land Rover which we couldn't afford to take on our own...

We met the 'Orkney' MNRC members when they were up north on a Yorkshire trip and found a familiar face in Sandy who used to belong to Ben Cooper's Cadley Hill Caving Group. She has also caved with MCG a few times, in particular on one of our rescue practices in GB Cavern. They were a nice bunch and we now looked forward to the holiday.

Paul Gladman and Steve drove to Arnside and the four of us set off in the Land Rover for Thurso where we were to meet the others. Steve and Paul had been put on the Land Rover insurance for the two weeks to help with the driving and to allow some independence while in the Orkneys. Dave (Droid) Drury caught us up at Newtonmore and followed us on his motorbike, and Sandy and Bruce met us at a hostel in Thurso where their car and Dave's motorbike were to be left for the duration. Now we were ready for the trip to Orkney. The last time some of them had travelled in a Land Rover it was in an old Series type with leaf springs which was very uncomfortable and slow so they were not looking forward to the rest of the journey much. However they were surprised to discover how comfortable and fast (well, relatively) modern Landies are. We managed to get seven people plus all their luggage in and it was only moderately intimate!

We reached our accommodation in Evie which comprised of two clean, comfortable and well equipped two-bedroomed flats (converted from stables), one above the other. Evie was such a small village (as are most) that it only had a Kirk, a farm or two and a few houses. There was a post office-cum-store with a very basic bar above which is where we spent most of our evenings drinking and playing pool. We shared the cooking, all eating together in the downstairs flat, and each taking turns to cook their speciality. *We ate very well.*

continued on page 8

The Orkneys - continued from page 7

Martin and I had taken our bikes on the Landie four-bike rack bought for the holiday. The others hired five bikes in Stromness and, believe it or not, we got four bikes on the back and three inside, as well as the seven people and their day-sacks! For the majority of our stay we toured the mainland by bike, plus a few of the smaller islands (some of which are connected by causeways - Churchill Barriers built in WW2), and the isle of Rousay which was an hour's trip by boat. We visited all the usual sites - Skara Brae Neolithic village, Maeshowe chambered cairn, the Iron Age Minehowe with 39 steps (not a mine), Rings of Brodgar and Stennes (stone circles), the Iron Age Brochs of Midhowe and Gurness, the Tomb of the Eagles; plus many lesser known sites such as Midhowe Stalled Cairn, Brough of Birsay Pictish and Norse remains and Viking Longhouses, many unusual chambered cairns, some with beautiful corbelling, one with a small satellite cairn, another smaller stalled cairn etc. etc.

Some of us did a spot of birdwatching and I myself saw Red Throated Divers, a Great Northern Diver, Whimbrels, a Short Eared Owl, a Hen Harrier, a Ring Necked Plover, a Twite, Arctic Skuas, a Spotted Flycatcher, and (female) Eider ducks, to name but a few less common ones. A treat on Rousay while having lunch on a cliff overlooking the sea was a family of grey seals who played and entertained us for almost an hour. Flowers on Orkney are the types you find anywhere in Britain except that they are much bigger and with more intense colours. For example, white clover had flower heads that were well over 1" across, red clover flower heads were the size of fircones, purple vetch was almost indigo in colour, eyebright flowers were between ¼" and ½" across. Other flowers that were huge and/or in abundance were various types of scabious, angelica, sneezewort, ragged robin, sea campion, grass of parnassus, corn marigolds, various campanulas, common centaury, and much more. Perhaps its all got something to do with a lack of pollution and human interference!

On the way to Thurso we had travelled up the east coast taking in Clava Cairns, Hill o' Many Stanes (stone rows), Camster Long and Round Cairns, and Walligo Steps (365 of them). On our return we travelled down the west coast stopping at Smoo cave but because of the lake we couldn't get far. We had clear skies then an incredible sunset, we saw lots of red deer, and I finally got to see Suilven, Cul Mor, Quinag and Stac Pollaidh (they had always been lost in mist and cloud before). Sandy and Bruce had gone straight down south from Thurso due to impending work commitments. The rest of us stayed over at the Grampian caving club hut in Elphin for one night, my first time in their new one which is really nice. From Elphin, Dave went home to Birmingham and Steve, Paul, Martin and I headed for Arnside.

We were so glad we finally got the opportunity to visit the Orkneys, and the MNRC members that we went with were good company, like-minded and lots of fun. We did most things as a group which was nice because we all had something to give be it information, a joke or quip, a story, or ideas and suggestions, but once or twice one or the other went off in the Landie or by bike for a few hours to do their own thing. The weather was warm and sunny so all-in-all it was a very successful holiday and Martin and I will certainly be going back sometime but with an added diversion to the Shetlands. *Anyone interested?*

by Yvonne Rowe