



ARGENTINA 2001 THREE WHEELS ON MY WAGON

We seemed doomed straight from the beginning. We arrived at Gatwick in good time to discover that the BA computer had broken down and that all check-ins were being done manually. We joined a huge queue and finally there was Tim Francis, Pete Bennett and myself waiting to get on the plane to Buenos Aires. It was only two hours late when we eventually took off. After the usual uncomfortable flight we arrived at Ezeiza Airport on Saturday morning, changed some money at the bank and got a taxi to take us to the GEA (Grupo Espeleologico Argentino) headquarters where they had been expecting us several hours earlier. Once the taxi driver had asked several times for directions, we turned up. We discussed our plan of action whilst we were going to be in Malargue and went out to a restaurant to have lunch. We were left pretty much to our own devices and went into the centre in the evening for a look around the centre. We spent Sunday doing the usual touristy things, checking out the sites of interest, monuments, tango dancing etc.

On Monday we went to the government map shop to buy maps of the area we were going to look at. We got to the airport in plenty of time to take the internal flight to San Rafael where we would be picking up the hire car. So far so good. We arrived in San Rafael on time and found the car hire guy waiting for us. We sorted out the paperwork loaded up the car and headed off towards Malargue. We stopped to get some fuel and within moments whilst I was driving down the road I spotted a lorry that was obviously having difficulties. There were sparks coming from the rear axle. It was only then that I noticed that it had lost a wheel and that it was heading straight towards us. There was nothing I could have done to avoid it and it hit us fair and square. It had taken out the radiator. Fortunately the wheel rebounded and did not go over the car (apparently this is not such an unusual event). The police had been called.

We finally sorted out the documents and got the car towed away. Then we called the owner of the car and everything went pear shaped. The damage waiver I had signed apparently allows the owner of the car to take money for the damages regardless of whose fault it is. I would then be reimbursed by the insurance company. I asked for our money back but was told that he hadn't yet received it from the agency we had booked through. The owner told me that he didn't have another car to replace it and we would have to wait for it to be repaired. We managed to find a hostel to stay in and bedded down for the night.

The next morning we set off for the police station to make a statement regarding the accident. By the time we found the right one it was too late and we were told to come back in the evening. I phoned several times to find out the progress of the car. We had not come so far to waste time in San Rafael. We returned to the police station in the evening to be told that they don't take traffic statements in the evening. This was becoming silly. As we stood outside the police station trying to work out what to do, Carlos Benedetto, president of the INAE (Instituto Nacional Argentino de Espeleologia), turned up. He explained that he just happened to be passing. I was feeling particularly stressed by this time and wondered who was this man staring at me. Well it was Argentina to the rescue. They got on the phone to the car hirer. Finally it transpired that he had tried to get money on my credit card for the damages but that it had been refused (fortunately I did not have sufficient credit). He then washed his hands of the whole situation and refused to hire us another car. We went back the hostel and arranged to hire another car and 20 minutes later it arrived. Tim dealt with the credit card damage waiver, which this time was only \$500 instead of the \$1500 I had signed for. Hooray, and we set off for Malargue. We were only one day late.

The journey only took a couple of hours and soon we were reunited with all our friends from the year before. After dinner we went to Ariel Benedetto's house and crashed out. We had finally arrived, we thought. It hadn't rained for 5 months and then it rained non-stop for 3 days. Only the main roads between cities in Argentina have tarmac and it would be impossible to get to Cueva de la Federacion, which had been discovered only last year during the Congress. This was the main reason for our return as there were unpushed leads (caverns measureless to discover) and a survey to make. Transport is a real problem here and the locals hadn't visited it since March last year. There was nothing to do but wait. We made several attempts to visit places. We tried going up into the mountains but could not get through the pass because of snow. The next day we managed to get through and went to see some hot springs and visit Las Lenas (Argentina's equivalent of St Moritz). There was some Gypsum that looked promising. On the 3rd day we attempted to go to Castillos de Pincheira but a dry riverbed had turned into a raging torrent and we felt it was unwise to try and cross.

continued on page 4

2001 MCG CAVING AND SOCIAL CALENDAR

DATE	AREA	EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
IF FOOT AND MOUTH RESTRICTIONS CONTINUE, THEN THESE EVENTS MAY NOT OCCUR				
TBA	Mendip	Archaeology walk	Yvonne Rowe	01524 762664
2/3rd Jun	Mendip	Cottage work w/e	Ben Cooper	01256 364199
Jun TBA	Wales	Gower Peninsula	Richard Carey	0117 986 0945
TBA (n/l 292)	Somerset	Castle Cary tunnels	Martin Rowe	01524 762664
Every Weds	Mendip	Mid-week caving	Richard Carey	0117 986 0945

Nordrach Cottage is currently closed due to Foot And Mouth Restrictions

ACCOMMODATION: Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse-on-Mendip, Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7XW
Tel: 01761 462797 Grid Ref ST51475606 OS 1:50,000 sheet 182

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 on Wednesdays 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: £30.00 Associate Members: £15.00

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:

The 2000/2001 committee continues in post until the AGM is rearranged

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Tacklemaster	Bill Richards	6, Elizabeth Square, Newton Abbot, Devon, TQ12 4EJ	Tel: 01626 366639
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	Wayne Hiscox	01749 671282
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THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP IS A REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 270088
MCG NEWS IS PUBLISHED BY THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP, NORDRACH COTTAGE, BLAGDON, BRISTOL BS40 7XW
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MCG News:-

I said in the last newsletter that I didn't expect to have much to report due to the foot and mouth restrictions. How wrong I was! You've been a busy lot as you can see from this edition - caving abroad and snippets of information from various papers and magazines etc. *Thanks*

As you will all be aware by now the foot and mouth restrictions have been lifted from Mendip which must have brought a sigh of relief from leisure seekers and tradespersons alike. (See page 5 for details of the AGM etc.) Hopefully, the archaeology walk that was planned for May 5th can go ahead in the autumn. However, as I live in an area that will be restricted for a few months yet, I may not want to risk walking across un-contaminated countryside if foot and mouth is still prevalent in Cumbria..

A FREE LUNCH

As everybody knows there is no such thing as a free lunch. According to my records there is a substantial amount of unpaid subscriptions.

Would the following members please contact me as soon as possible to let me know their intentions *or this will be their last newsletter.*

1. Dave Baxter
2. Alan Clements (2000 also?)
3. Simon Fryer
4. Jeremy Gilson (2000 also?)
5. Pete Hollings
6. Pete Moseley
7. Paul Nichol
8. Yong Shik Park
9. Michael Pittman
10. Peter Robinson
11. Andrew Shann
12. Don Vosper
13. Rob Wake
14. Tim Woodhams

MCG POLO SHIRTS

Don't forget... you can still order one (or more) of the polo shirts with the new MCG logo (for more info. see N/L 288, p7).

TSG HOSTEL ACCOMMODATION

Even though foot and mouth disease has forced the closure of many parts of the country there is still access available to certain caves in Derbyshire. The following caves in close proximity to TSG such as Peak Cavern, Bagshawe Cavern and certain caves within Stoney Middleton dale are open for caving.

TSG is probably one of the only huts in the country that remains open, (*Ed. end April as this issue is prepared*) mainly due to its being situated in the centre of Castleton - you don't have to cross any countryside/ farmland to reach it. TSG as a club have decided to offer any other club in the country, who have accommodation of their own, the chance to stay at TSG for member rates - that is £2 instead of the normal £3.50 that we charge non-members.

If you would like to take us up on our offer, contact me, Wayne Sheldon, to make a booking on:-

0794 1211209 (day)

01709 875266 (eve)

email wayne@sheldonpeak.freeserve.co.uk.

Access for caves via the following:-

Peak Cavern: John Beck, Glebe Cottage, The Hillock, Eyam, Hope Valley, Derbys., SK32 5RB. Tel: 01433 631732 or email johnbeck@classicfm.net

Bagshawe Cavern: Mr Peter Revell, 12 Bradwell Head Road, Bradwell, Hope Valley, Derbys., SK33 9HD. Phone him on 01433 620540, or Tony Revell on 0780 8584512

Wayne Sheldon, TSG Hostel warden

Argentina 2001 - continued from page 1**Dusty roads**

Yippee! It's finally stopped raining and we, (plus Ariel and Carlos Benedetto) set off to go to Cueva de al Federacion. We got through the pass without any problems and stopped on the way to look at what appeared to be a promising location for caves. The bed was very thin and our walk in the midday heat went unrewarded. The entrance we thought we had seen was nothing more than a damp patch leaking out between the bedding planes. We arrived at Bardas Blancas and the end of the tarmac and headed off down the dirt road. Travelling down these sorts of roads creates an awful lot of dust. The valley runs along the Rio Grande and provides some very impressive views. We reported to the border post at Poti Malal and headed off down the track to where Federacion was. The rain had brought down a lot of rocks onto the track and our progress was delayed by having to clear them away. We arrived, parked the car and using a footbridge that had been built since last year, crossed the river. We spoke to the landowner who is apparently a bit miffed by the number of tourist visits to San Agustin; they feel they should get something if the guides are charging the tourists. It's on their land after all. We finally arrived and it was agreed that Tim and I would survey in whilst Pete and Ariel go exploring. Carlos would stay outside. After two hours Tim and I had surveyed up as far as we had explored last year (The T junction) I declined to follow the right hand passage to the very end as it was very tight and also very sharp in the gypsum. There were some small but spectacular crystal formations. We had thought that the left hand passage closed down almost straight away but Pete found a way through and another 200 metres of passage including a substantial chamber was found. We were running out of time as Ariel had to go to work and we agreed to return to complete the survey. We managed to get off the track before nightfall but although the main roads have tarmac, there are very many potholes that make for a very slow drive.

Mad dogs and Englishmen

As it was such a hard drive to Federacion we decided that we would have a look around the limestone area of Bardas Blancas. This is where Caverna de Las Brujas (the longest limestone cave in Argentina) is to be found. The cavers are not allowed to enter Brujas despite the fact that they discovered, explored and mapped it. Bureaucracy is a many-legged octopus in Argentina and it appears that we were only allowed last year because the then new governor didn't know what the score was. Unable to explore within the park itself we had to satisfy ourselves with looking around the outskirts. This area is a fossil-hunter's dream. The ground is absolutely laden with fossils and with a little bit of patience perfect ammonites could be found. Despite the midday heat we push on up valley towards Brujas and soon found some limestone. We quickly found a hole high up on a cliff face but were unable to climb up to it. Thus thwarted we carried on up valley and finally were rewarded by a huge entrance (about 5m wide X 3m high) high up the hillside very near the top. The sides were quite steep and although I could see it, it took a long time before I could actually reach it. Tim was there first, closely followed by Pete who both waited for me to arrive before entering. This cave still remains to be named and although it is probably not a new discovery we surveyed all 20 metres of it. It was becoming evident that outside of the park there would only be fragments such as this so we decided to call it a day. On our way back we spotted another entrance and duly climbed up to explore it. Once again Tim was the first there. This cave was formed on a bedding plane and was very narrow. Tim duly climbed up to enter it and reported that he could see light. A possible through trip! I walked round to the other side of the hill and could see the hole that Tim was trying to get through (about 10" X 4"). On the way back round I spotted a large descending passage. This was a through trip and after 20m exited onto the shaded side of the hill. We did not survey these two. We were told by the local shop owner that a man he knew, knew of a cave beyond Brujas and if we would like to hire some horses from him he would surely take us there. Unfortunately he wouldn't be around for 2 weeks.

Back down the dusty track to complete the survey of Federacion. Thankfully there weren't so many stones to clear this time although we did have to wait for the local gauchos while they brought their cattle down to pasture. We completed the survey and checked out all the leads but without digging in the boulder chokes we had found it was impossible to find any more cave. There are several other sites of interest near Federacion. There was Dona Palmyra, a short phreatic tube with a vadose trench complete with what looked like a passable sump at river level. A bit nearer Federacion a resurgence was found which apparently only runs in wet weather and an old resurgence under the entrance of Federacion was also found. This area is becoming increasingly interesting as it appears that there may well be a system waiting to be discovered.

The next day we went for a return visit to Cueva del Tigre to give Pete a taste of a larva tube. This time I fully explored it as last year I had only gone downslope. Tim checked out the end of the passage to see how much had been dug since last year. Tim and Pete returned the next day along with Gustavo to pursue the draught. This has now increased but still no breakthrough. I don't particularly like digging so I went to the local school to help out with their English classes. Our final caving visit was to Castillos de Pincheira.

The river was dry once again. This is an incredibly photogenic site with some very impressive cliffs. The caves were a bit further on in a gypsum quarry. These, although quite pretty, were fairly short and not desperately stable. Four of them were visited covering a total of 80 metres in length. We were told of a newly discovered larva tube in the vicinity of Tigre but the description and the map we had been given were conflicting and we were unable to find it. We had hoped it might be the continuation of Tigre we were looking for.

We were very well looked after by our Argentine friends and despite the setbacks of the car and weather it all went fairly well. Although it turned out to be desperately expensive, I am sure we will return as there is much work to be done in the Federacion area as well as the dig at Tigre. In terms of limestone caves, until the locals can sort out the bureaucracy I don't think there will be many major discoveries.

Many thanks to the GEA for putting us up during our stay in Buenos Aires and especially to Ariel Benedetto who looked after us during our stay in Malargue.

The Expedition members were Pedro Benedetto alias Pete Bennett, Tim Francis, Richard Carey - MCG, Ariel and Carlos Benedetto, Gustavo Cerdo, Diego and Ruben - INAE.

Richard M Carey

FOOT & MOUTH, THE AGM AND DINNER



...to the tune of 'The BEC, the Wessex and the Shepton...'

There have been emails galore to and from committee members, all trying to come to a decision on when to open the cottage and under what conditions, and when to have the AGM and dinner. The committee has agreed the following:-

THE COTTAGE - Many of the foot and mouth restrictions have been lifted from Mendip so we have agreed to open the cottage, but take care as there is still no caving on Mendip.

MEMBERS' WEEKEND - the next members' weekend will be on 2nd / 3rd June. This is also the planned cottage work weekend - so you see there will be plenty to do!

AGM

The AGM of the Mendip Caving Group will be held on 7th July 2001 either at Nordrach Cottage or the Hunters (venue to be confirmed). Don't forget to bring along all the paperwork you received for the original April AGM - nothing has changed.

MCG DINNER - It was agreed that it might be a bit risky, numbers-wise, to have the dinner after the July AGM or during the summer months as many members are likely to be on holiday. The members who were going to the dinner in April were few in number so it hoped that if we hold the dinner after the half-yearly meeting in October or November more members might be able to attend. The date to be confirmed at the AGM.

LIBRARY ADDITIONS

The International Caver 2000 edited by Tim Stratford - a quick glance through the pages gives the impression of an attractively produced publication which includes expedition reports from Africa, America, Asia, New Zealand and Europe accompanied by clear surveys and location maps.

I found Dark Life by Michael R Taylor a difficult book to get to grips with and haven't read it to the end. Written by the author of 'Cave Passages' it follows the discovery of organisms deep within cave systems such as Lechuguilla, which may be linked with nanobacteria found in a Martian meteorite in 1996. I would like someone else in the Group to read this book and let me know what they think about it!

A Cave and Mine Conservation Audit for the Masson Hill Area - compiled and edited by David Webb and commissioned by the Derbyshire Caving Association. Full of useful facts, references, contact names, cave/mine descriptions, access information etc. An annoying oversight is that many of the maps have no scale shown. Nevertheless, a good reference for anyone caving in the Masson Hill area.

Australian and New Zealand books, booklets and leaflets.

Bungonia Caves - Sydney Speleological Society Occasional Paper No.4, 1991 reprint.

Jenolan Caves (Three tourist booklets and a video)

Wee Jasper Caves by Julia James & A P Spate, published by The Speleological Research Council

Directory of Caves in Australia and New Zealand by Kate Henderson & Dennis Rebbeschi (show caves)

Waitomo Caves (guidebook and video)

The New Zealand Glowworm by V B Meyer-Rochow

Rock to Stalactite by R G Lyons

Rumbling Gut by Ray Hollingsworth - a children's educational book about caves with a cave rescue theme

The Dig - a story of live exploration in Ogof Draenen - video by Tim Guildford, Ben Lovett and Lou Maurice which was highly acclaimed at Hidden Earth (BCRA Conference) last year - well worth watching.

Videos of Cueva del Agua, in the Picos, and a dive rescue in Florida.

The Caves and Mines of Anglesey by Tony Oldham, 2001

MCG Newsletters and Bulletins, 1994-2000 have been bound to match the earlier volumes.

Cave Photography Group Newsletter, March 2001 - this second newsletter by the newly formed UK Cave Photography Group has a variety of articles - including one on *How to find your flash guns again when you have taken your photo!* as well as more serious contributions. Individual membership of the CPG costs £12 and future newsletters are planned to be full colour productions. They will also be available through caving shops at £2.95 each.

Joan Goddard

WHEN BORROWING ITEMS PLEASE SIGN THEM OUT IN THE LOANS BOOK AND RETURN THEM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (six months should be ample time to read them). When you bring them back sign them back into the loans book and put them in the wire tray on the shelf to the right of the door; this enables me to check them off in the book.

Thanks, Joan

SNIPPETS

GARDEN DISAPPEARS INTO A CHASM
 Engineer Michael Whittaker got home from the shops to find his garden had become a 40ft hole. Experts blamed the chasm on a block of ice that melted 20,000 years ago. Michael, 49 - who lost an 18ft hedge and most of his front lawn - said: "I only popped out to the shops for an hour or so. The lawn was perfectly solid when I left but now it is a gaping pit." Council officials say the collapse was caused by a "kettle hole" - an underground chamber formed when a block of ancient glacier ice melts. Michael said: "There was a cavern just waiting to collapse. If I had been sitting there in a deckchair I'd probably be dead." He now faces a huge bill for filling in the 20ft-wide abyss in Thorpe St Andrew, Norfolk. Broadland Council said: "Kettle holes are quite common in East Anglia.

by John Troup, The Sun

TREASURE HUNT

A government sponsored treasure hunt has begun in the Thai jungle. A senator claims to have found evidence that Japanese troops stashed booty worth ?40bn in a cave west of Bangkok in 1945. The Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, has sanctioned an official exploration.

The Independent, 17th April 2001

PEAK CAVERN

The management of Peak Cavern Ltd have agreed to extend the caving season beyond Easter this year. This is in view of most other caving venues being closed for the foreseeable future during the foot and mouth disease outbreak. The usual booking arrangements apply - contact John Beck as normal (see p.3), giving one or two alternative (Sunday) dates as demand is expected to be high. Trips will be starting slightly earlier in the morning as this coincides with the main tourist season. All caving visitors are reminded that they MUST wash off all mud before returning through the show cave after the trip.

EXETER UNDERGROUND

Visitors to Exeter can still go underground during the foot and mouth restrictions: For £2.50 (adult) you can join a guided tour of the passages constructed in the fourteenth

century to bring water into the city. Romangate Passage, off High Street, Sat. 10am-5pm, Tues. to Fridays 2-5pm.

BERNIE'S BAD DAY AT THE OFFICE

A potholer with more than 25 years experience had to be cut free from a caving system after more than three hours stuck fast. Steve Round, a cafe owner from Yorkshire, became trapped while trying out a new 250,000 year-old man-made caving system - the first of its kind in Britain - set to open in a fortnight at the Welsh International Climbing Centre in Trelewis near Merthyr Tydfil.

The centre said that Mr Round was unable to make the final bend in a tight and twisting passage built for advanced cavers. Chief Executive Jamie Ellenor said, "Our instructors have all managed the passage but from the other end. When they tried the direction Steve took, they decided it was too difficult and wriggled back out. Only a caver of Steve's experience could have managed to get as far as he did. Had the 6ft man had shorter legs, he probably would have managed to complete it."

Initial rescue attempts using a rope around Mr Round's ankles to haul him out failed and a tool hire company was drafted in to help. A pneumatic drill was used to chisel away the surrounding concrete and Sean Lovis, a member of staff at the climbing centre, was sent in to help drag Mr Round out.

Despite his ordeal, just minutes after emerging through the emergency hatch to be greeted with a kiss from his wife, Mr Round went back into the system to finish the tour from the correct end. He said, "I've never been stuck in 25 years of caving. The passage wasn't the problem, but I went in without a guide and so I picked the wrong direction. I would still recommend the place, but perhaps not the way I experienced it. Maybe I'll take my own hammer next time. The climbing centre has a lot of guts to put so much money into building something we have naturally in the world, but I think the results are excellent."

Sian Harris, South Wales Echo

HUGE NATURAL CRYSTALS FOUND IN CAVE

February 8th 2001 - The largest natural crystals on Earth have been discovered in two caves within a silver and zinc mine near Naica, in Chihuahua, Mexico, according to mine officials. Reaching lengths of over 20 feet, the clear, faceted crystals are composed of selenite, a crystalline form of the mineral gypsum.

"Walking into either of these caves is like stepping into a gigantic geode," said Richard D Fisher, an American consultant with the mining company to develop the discoveries as tourist attractions.

Fisher said that most people can endure only a few minutes in the caves due to their high temperatures. The smaller of the two, which is about the size of a two-bedroom apartment, is 100° Fahrenheit. The large chamber, which Fisher describes as the size of a cathedral, is 150° F. Both are located approximately 1200 feet below the surface.

The mining company plans to air-condition the caves before opening them to the public next year, Fisher said. He adds that reducing the heat gradually will not harm the crystals.

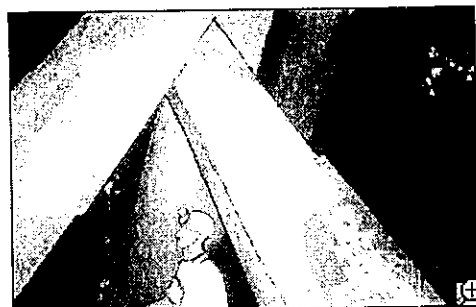
The largest previously known crystals were found in the nearby Cave of the Swords, part of the same mine system. Some of these are now on display at the

Smithsonian Institution. The local government and mine owners hope to avoid removing any of the new discoveries for museum displays or private collections, Fisher said.

While the company is currently limiting visitation of the caves to scientific experts, mineral hunters have destroyed locks and broken into the chambers twice since they were first opened by mining equipment last April. One man was killed when he attempted to chop out a gigantic crystal that fell from the ceiling and crushed him, according to Fisher.

"We need more on-site protection of mine caves," said geologist Carol A Hill, co-author of the book *Cave Minerals of the World*, who calls the new discoveries "by far the largest selenite crystals I have ever heard of." Hill applauds the tourist plan. "Without it, the mining company would probably destroy the caves. Museums have enough crystals," she said. "It's important to preserve discoveries like this where they occur."

Michael Ray Taylor, Discovery News



The Biggest Crystals