

## ARGENTINA CAVE REPORT

*by Tim Francis*

Richard has already recounted the story of this year's trip to Argentina in a previous article, so this report will briefly discuss the caves that we explored. The primary objective of the expedition was to survey Cueva Federación, a new discovery found during last year's conference. Secondary objectives were to visit the other caving areas around Malargüe. In particular a large strip of gypsum is found in the foothills of the Andes, roughly parallel to the Chilean border. Several caves have already been recorded suggesting that the gypsum in Argentina is a promising cave-bearing rock. The caving areas are located several hours drive from the nearest 'tarmac' road and are not accessible during the winter months due to snow.

### POTI MALAL

South West of Malargüe, close to the Chilean border, is the small valley of Poti Malal, a tributary of the Rio Grande. The gypsum in this area is notable for the impressive entrance of San Agustin and the recent discovery, Cueva Federación. Although we spent only two half days in the valley it soon became apparent that there is potential here for further discoveries.

San Agustin is essentially a large collapse feature that has resulted in a rubble ramp that descends as far as the water table. Opposite the entrance ramp is a huge boulder slope that ascends into the hill as high as the entrance. In periods of wet weather the floor is covered by water. There are no side passages and no realistic possibility for extensions.

The focus of our visits to Poti Malal was to undertake a survey of Cueva Federación and explore leads left from 2000. Typically for gypsum the cave begins with a loose, bouldery entrance. Beyond the choke is a large chamber littered with rocks and dominated by one large boulder on the left. The only exit from this chamber is a descent through boulders on the left-hand side. At this point the character of the cave changes and the passages are low sandy crawls. The draught in Federación is particularly noticeable in these crawls but is lost in an area of chokes above the T-junction. The choke can be climbed into, directly above the T-junction, to access a steeply inclined rift. No way at the top was apparent and the choke could only be followed in a loop that rejoins the sandy crawl further back.

To the right at the T-junction is Galeria Mendip. This extremely sharp, and in places rather tight, passage can be followed for approximately 100m until the way on is impassable. At several places there are voids in the choke on the left-hand side but none can be followed far. An effort with a hammer and crowbar might extend this fault-controlled passage further. Much of Galeria Mendip is well decorated.

Turning left at the T-junction a low passage enters an area of boulder chokes. These are passed by descending a squeeze hidden behind a boulder on the left and wriggling along a flat out sandy crawl. The area beyond the squeeze was a new discovery for 2001. The choke can be accessed at several points but we found no obvious way on. After 30m the crawl pops out into some fine stooping-sized passage. The small passages on the right hand side are blind. Inevitably the passage ends in another boulder choke. This is passed at floor level to regain walking-sized passage.

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## 2001 MCG CAVING AND SOCIAL CALENDAR

DATE	AREA	EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
Jul 7th	Mendip	AGM and Barbecue	Tim Francis	0208 392 2572
Aug 4/5th	Mendip	Porch work weekend	Wayne Hiscox	01749 671282
Aug 4/5th	Mendip	Shed project weekend	Ben Cooper	01256 364199
Aug 4/5th	Mendip	Linda Milne's party	Linda Milne	01344 774589
Sept 1/2nd	Mendip	Bone Hole work weekend	Tim Francis	0208 392 2572
TBA	Mendip	Archaeology walk	Yvonne Rowe	01524 762664
TBA (n/l 292)	Somerset	Castle Cary tunnels	Martin Rowe	01524 762664
Every Weds	Mendip	Mid-week caving	Richard Carey	0117 986 0945

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 on 7th July

Secretary	Tim Francis	Flat 6, 16 Lambert Avenue, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4QR	Tel: 0208 392 2572 secretary@m-c-g.org.uk
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Tacklemaster	Bill Richards	6, Elizabeth Square, Newton Abbot, Devon, TQ12 4EJ	Tel: 01626 366960
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Social Secretary	Lynr. 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	01903 821447

THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP IS A REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 270088

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## MCG News and items from the committee meeting held 02-06-01:-

NEW NUMBERS for Tim Francis:

☎ 0207 656 5566 (work)

E-mail: T.Francis@research-int.com

NEW 'PHONE NUMBER for Bill Richards:

☎ 01626 366960

THE COTTAGE WORK WEEKEND on 2/3rd June was only attended by 9 members but we still managed to get quite a lot done:-

- ◊ Lounge window frame and sill stripped and painted
- ◊ Gutters cleared
- ◊ Grounds cleared of beech mast, leaves and other rubbish, and burned
- ◊ New log shed creosoted, racking fitted and logs cut and stacked
- ◊ Hasp and staple fitted to log shed
- ◊ Nightlight fitted inside porch area
- ◊ Upstairs hoovered thoroughly
- ◊ All rooms de-cobwebbed
- ◊ Grass cut
- ◊ Large shed cleared out
- ◊ Gas store tidied
- ◊ Old concrete bin store outside front wall demolished
- ◊ Library work undertaken (books etc)
- ◊ Stone pile cleared from front of cottage
- ◊ Over a ton of rubbish taken to tip
- ◊ Roast dinner cooked and eaten

The cottage looks much better, especially the grounds now they have been cleared. *Thankyou* to everyone who took part.

ANOTHER COTTAGE WORK WEEKEND is planned for the August members weekend. This is for two projects:

1. To finish the porch - plaster the walls, quarry-tile the floor, finish the tiles on the roof, plus a few other necessary jobs. Wayne Hiscox will produce a task list and a sequence of work. He will also be on hand to help and advise.

2. 'The shed project' - to run concurrently with the porch work if there are enough people. To replace rotten panels, install wiring for the de-humidifier, fit the de-humidifier, plus any other work required. Ben Cooper will produce a task list.

## MCG Annual General Meeting:

As you should all know by now, the AGM is to be held on 7th July 2001 at 2:30pm in the Longroom of the Hunter's.

We will need a Social Secretary, Cottage Warden, Tacklemaster, Recorder/librarian, and Meet Secretary. If any members (full or associate) would like to come forward for co-option onto the committee (it's a good opportunity to see how it ticks) contact Tim Francis (details on page 2).

Would members prefer to have the half-yearly meeting and annual dinner in October or November? Decision at the AGM

A BARBECUE - has been planned for the Saturday night after the AGM. Salads, breads etc. will be laid on for a nominal charge (any volunteers?), but you need to bring your own BBQ meat or veggie equivalent. The annual dinner will now take place after the half-yearly meeting.

## BONE HOLE WORK WEEKEND:

Due to the foot and mouth restrictions the Bone Hole work weekend planned for 3/4 March had to be postponed. It will now take place on September 1/2nd (members weekend). We require lots of able bodies to haul the new lid up the hill to the cave and to fit it... *Please!*



## PARTY

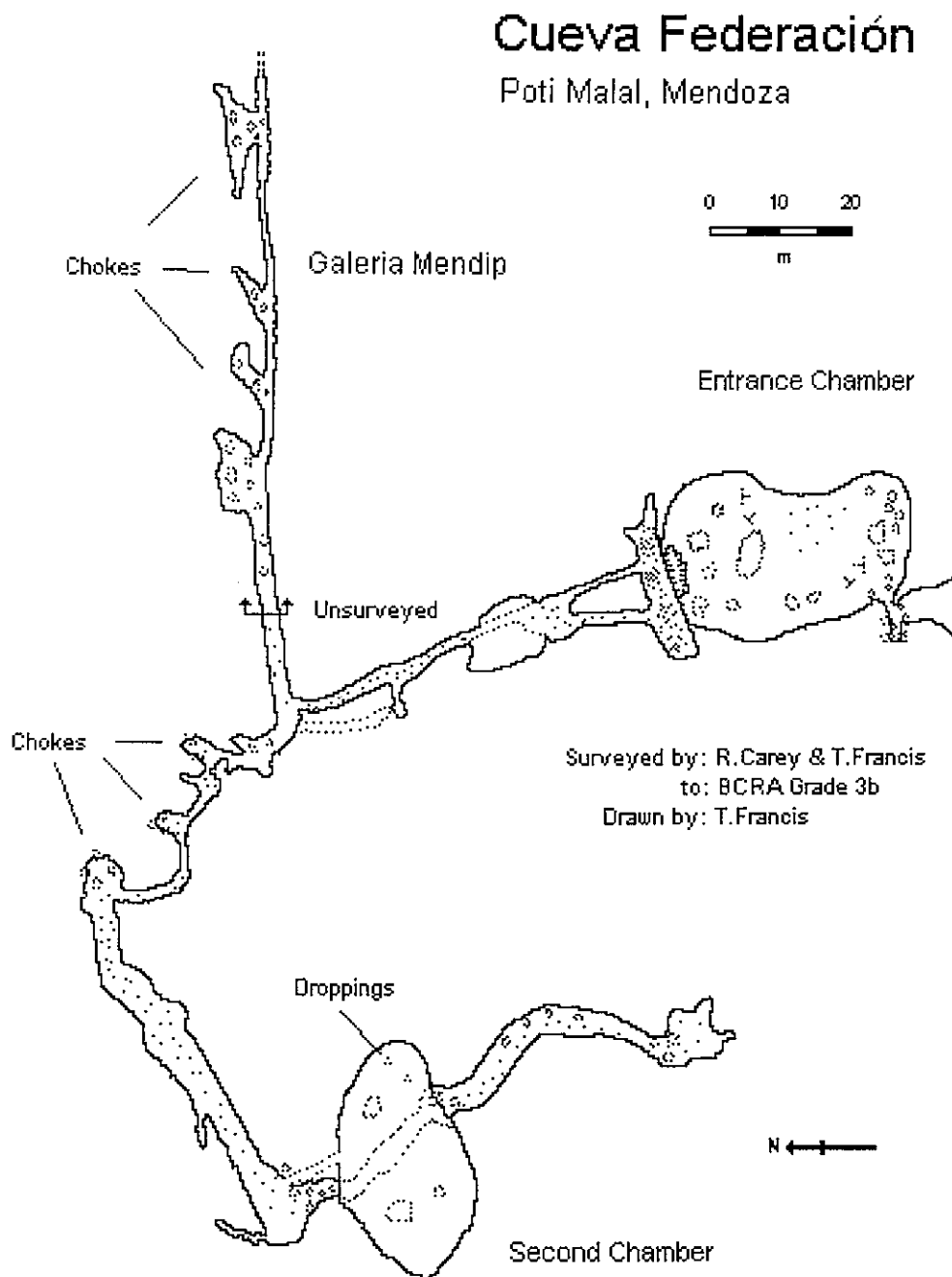
☞ Linda Milne (nee Gates) is about to reach that 'life begins at' age. She would like to invite all MCG members to a party at the cottage on Saturday August 4th (members weekend). She would especially like to see the old faces (metaphorically speaking) who were around during the 80's when she started caving with the MCG. If the weather permits there will be a barrel and barbecue, if not there will be a barrel and curry (for the usual nominal charge).☞

This coincides nicely with the planned cottage work weekend so come along, work your socks off, then relax with old and new friends, a few drinks and some good food.

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The choke is easily climbed at this point to enter the Second Chamber. This is slightly smaller than the entrance chamber and is similarly boulder-floored. The presence of animal droppings suggests that there may have been an entrance at this point in the past, now blocked by boulders. The survey does indicate that this chamber lies not far from the valley side. A second route into the chamber (unsurveyed) was forced through boulders to a connection with the passage below. Continuing along the main passage, the cave has developed into a fine meander: not what we were expecting in gypsum. This abruptly ends in yet another choke. Immediately beyond this choke is a small chamber with a floor of damp sand. There is a slight draught here but the choke could not be passed at roof level. Around the walls of the chamber is a tide mark that indicates that in wet weather it may half fill with water.

The cave length is 350m including roughly 100m of passage in Galeria Mendip left unsurveyed.



The only other notable cave in the Poti Malal valley is Doña Palmira. Although only 20m in length this cave is extremely significant. It is located on the valley side just above the level of the river. Immediately inside is a large sump (undivided) which suggests that there is a flooded phreatic layer in the valley. Above the sump is a short length of fine phreatic passage, stooping-sized in height, with a small vadose trench. This is blocked after a short distance but the vadose trench looks diggable.

Other spelæological features were noted in the valley. A possible fossil resurgence was spotted immediately below the entrance of Federación. This draughts slightly but was only given a cursory dig. However further down valley is an active resurgence with water emerging from a bank of soil. Above Federación we briefly looked at the hillside. The gypsum here is extremely weathered and there are small caves associated with faults and weathering. One did have a strong draught but needs a bit of digging out. From the top of the ridge we were able to look down on the next valley which also contains gypsum. This has not been looked at and may be worth a visit.

### PINCHEIRA

Nearer to Malargüe, to the west, is small outcrop of gypsum at Pincheira. This was worth the visit if only for the impressive scenery and in particular the picturesque weathered rocks at Castillos de Pincheira. The outcrop of gypsum, much of which is being quarried away, contains a number of small caves. Most are extremely loose and dusty although in places they are well-decorated. We visited four or five just to get a flavour of the place. There is little potential for large cave development here, and the landscape was reminiscent of the hillside above Poti Malal.

### LAS LEÑAS

The gypsum can be accessed again further to the north near to the ski resort of Las Leñas. The area is notable for some hot springs and the Pozo de Las Animas. The latter are two large water-filled holes in the lateral moraine of the Rio Salado valley. Due to the atrocious weather we virtually did not leave the car but did note one cave by the roadside. The road was poor so we did not drive much beyond the resort. With hindsight I think this area would be worth further investigation.

### CUEVA DEL TIGRÉ

This was the only lava tube that we visited this year. The cave is used as a wild show cave due to its close proximity to the road and easy walking sized passage. Our interest in the cave was to see if we could follow the huge draught at the end. Four hours were spent digging out a sand-filled tube. Digging conditions were horrendous. The basalt was extremely sharp and the visibility was virtually zero as we stirred up huge clouds of dust. Fortunately we had come equipped with a bag of dust masks. Excellent progress was made but we were unable to break through. The dig ended under an area of boulders with airspace and a howling draught. More passage here is a certainty!

Above ground we headed off across the featureless lava plain to see if we could find another entrance. After a couple of hours under the blazing sunshine we called it a day. On a previous day we had driven around looking for a cave that a local farmer had spotted. As is always the way with these things, the location description didn't fit the topography. But bearing in mind the huge expanse of basalt in the area related to the El Payan volcano, there are undoubtedly more lava tubes to be found.

### BARDAS BLANCAS

Near to Malargüe there is a relatively large area of Jurassic limestone which contains the Cavernas de Las Brujas. Brujas has been converted into a showcave and the limestone hills surrounding it form part of a reserve. There is no access to Brujas for cavers or the promising limestone behind it for exploration. Hence we were restricted to exploring some of the outlying fragments of limestone that top some of the hill tops around the reserve. These fragments are too steeply bedded and too thin to contain significant lengths of passage. Despite this we did find a couple of small caves with one surveyed to a length of 24m.

### CONCLUSION

Of all the cave-bearing rocks near Malargüe, the gypsums would seem to hold out the best prospect for large cave development, although lack of good roads means that the best way forward would be to camp at Poti Malal for several days to maximise use of time. At present the most promising area of limestone that lies behind the back of Cavernas de Las Brujas is off limits to cavers. There is undoubtedly considerable scope for further lava tube discoveries, although exploration of the remote basalt scrub will be difficult.

## CAVING SNIPPETS

### MAN RESCUED FROM DISUSED MINESHAFT

Matthew Head, a geology student, was rescued after surviving up to 3 days trapped in a disused mineshaft. His cries for help had been heard by a group of sharp-eared children on a night-time nature hike in the Mendip Hills, Somerset. They heard the 26-year-old's cries after falling silent to listen for owls during the walk. One of the children said: "We were being quiet listening for owls and we were looking at the Stainsbury Shaft (*Blackmoor Shaft*) and we heard a voice coming out of it. It said, 'can you get some help down here?' It was all very scary, but also very exciting."

Police and members of the Mendip Cave Rescue team took three hours to rescue him from the Stainsbury Shaft. Despite having fallen 12m (40ft) down the old lead mine, his injuries are described as giving no cause for concern. Mr Head was treated for severe dehydration, hypothermia, shock and bruising to the legs at Weston General Hospital in Weston-super-Mare. He was later transferred to Frenchay Hospital in Bristol where he was described as 'remarkably well'.

John Baker, the manager of the Charterhouse Outdoor Activity Centre, raised the alarm at around 11pm. He said: "The shaft has a number of ledges and the man was about 40ft down." The Mendip Cave Rescue team arrived within about half an hour and a member of the team (*Ed: Tony Jarrat, according to the Daily Mail*) was lowered into the hole where the man was lying on a shelf near the bottom. He was put onto a lightweight stretcher and the team at the top pulled the pair up on ropes.

Mr Head had no food or water with him when the accident happened but John Baker said he may have found water in the shaft. "Most of the old shafts have water running through them and this one was certainly very damp," he said. Avon and Somerset police have confirmed the man was from Midsomer Norton, near Bath, and had been reported missing by his family 11 days previously. Police had been hampered in their search by foot-and-mouth restrictions, recently lifted on the area after two months.

Cave rescuer Brian Prewer said Mr Head appeared to have gone down the shaft on purpose. It is thought he abseiled in on a rope, pulling the rope down after him, and then got stuck. There is a waist high fence around the shaft and anybody wanting to get close would have to climb over it.

*BBC News, 15/5/01*

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### COLD, WET & MISERABLE - mmm!

Six shopping trolleys, 23 car tyres, four bicycles and tens of traffic cones were removed from the River Kent, in Kendal, by the town's caving club. Due to the foot-and-mouth crisis the club has been unable to continue with its caving activities, and team member Keith Bradbury said: "The team are only happy when they are cold, wet and miserable, so we decided to walk the river removing as much of the rubbish as was physically possible." In just three hours the club managed to remove seven stockpiles which were disposed of by South Lakeland District Council the next day. Kendal Caving Club is planning to repeat the clean-up during the summer months.

*The Westmorland Gazette, 11th May 2001*

## Digging at the end of Foot and Mouth

With access to the Mendips gradually being relaxed I thought it was about time I got back underground. With funds limited I didn't really think that another Bank holiday jaunt to Belgium was on the cards so the Mendips it would have to be. A few flying e-mails and a couple of telephone calls late on Friday night meant that we were able to arrange a trip down Gough's on the evening of Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> May. This was to be our first underground trip in the UK for eight weeks so it didn't take much prompting to get a team together. Chris Castle, Chris Binding et al from the Cheddar Caving Club went off digging leaving the rest of us to rummage around in the non-show cave bits. A welcome return to the Netherworld of Mendip!

*Team: Richard Carey, Tim Francis, Jackie Gibbins, Lee Hawkswell, Vicky Landeryou*

### Stock Hill Mine

The first area to be re-opened to cavers was land owned by the Forestry Commission on 21<sup>st</sup> May. Lubricated conversations down the Hunter's on Saturday night meant that J'Rat managed to scrape together a digging team for the Sunday morning. Apparently we were to meet on site at 10am. Ughh... Fortunately Tangent gave me a lift from Nordrach Cottage to Stock Hill despite having got no nearer home than J'Rats sofa the night before. Luckily we weren't to be doing anything too strenuous which was fine by me. The result of previous collapses in the upstream passage has meant that large amounts of mud has washed into the dig. Our task was to dig out the mud from the streambed in the Downstream Level, bag it up and carry back to the base of the entrance shaft ready for hauling out.

The digging team has been re-enthused by the discovery of an old sketch map that had been discovered in the British Library. Apparently the reference has been sitting around in various Mendip bibliographies but never chased up. Certainly it seems that Gough had not seen it before writing his Mines of Mendip. There may well be additional documentation associated with the map but it needs someone to spend some time at the library looking through the relevant papers. We spent a while trying to align this map to the area around Stock Hill but not without absolute certainty as to the scale or where each of the features should be. The map indicates the position of the road by Bernard's Bend between the Hunters and the Miners Arms and each of the rakes, including Gold Rake which hadn't been known about before. But the most interesting feature was the presence of an unknown swallet or cave called Golgo Swallow. The water sinking here supposedly comes out at Skye Hole. The mine at Stock Hill is a 17<sup>th</sup> century (or possibly 16<sup>th</sup> century) drainage level rather than having been mined for ore. The miners must have known about a good source of underground drainage to have spent time and money on driving this drainage level. The hope is that by digging out the mine, cavers could gain access to natural cave beyond and the map adds significant weight to this theory. The cave could well have been known as Golgo Swallow with a natural entrance lying further long the valley.

### Hunters Lodge Inn Swallet

This was a previously unrecorded sink that J'Rat noted in 1989. It takes the drainage water from the Old Bristol Road and Hunters car park. But as it is located actually in the car park and virtually underneath the back corner of the Long Room, digging permission had not been granted before. But I think Roger took pity on J'Rats dejected face during the Foot and Mouth outbreak and told him to go on and dig!

So after some refreshments in the pub, required on account of our exertions at Stock Hill in the morning, we did a spot of work in the Hunters car park. Myself and Tangent removed the spoil from the previous bang whilst assorted BEC types did a spot of walling around the entrance. Eventually the cave will be topped by a wall and lid to stop cars and drunken cavers falling in. The entrance shaft is 25ft deep leading to perhaps 30ft of passage. The cave is steeply bedded, although flatter at the current end, and rather pleasant. But it will need some serious banging for further progress to be made as the airspace where the water soaks away is only a few inches in circumference. I suspect digging will only continue when there is not much else to do as it could prove a rather expensive operation. On the optimistic side the water does not reappear in Hunters Hole, although a link to Alfie's Hole could be a possibility.

*Tim Francis*

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## COTTAGE BOOKINGS

June 8th - 9th	BTCV	(12)
July 2nd - 6th	Lindeth College (Yvonne Rowe)	(16)
July 30th - Aug 3rd	HMS Collingwood	(16)
Sept 22nd - 28th	BTCV	(16)

## REIGATE SAND MINES

With practically all underground sites closed to cavers in the UK, and with most suffering from limestone withdrawal symptoms, it was good to be invited to visit some sand stone mines in Reigate.

I went with members of Bracknell C C on their trip to these mines on 7th April 2001. The trip was organised by Wealden Cave & Mining Society.

### MINE 1

This mine was beneath an exhaust centre on the town ring road. It was necessary to walk through the workshop, over ramps and through an office then down a flight of steps cut in sand to gain access to the workings below the exhaust centre and adjoining ring road. The exhaust company are using part of the mine to store exhaust systems. The sand is very soft to dig and is easily worked by spade. All the mined passages had domed roofs and were about 10' high x 15' wide.

### MINE 2

This mine was in the park and is also known as the Baron's Cave. The entrance was the old Sally Port from the nearby Reigate Castle. This is an extensive mine complex, but unfortunately we were only allowed in a short way as it was still the bat season.

The lower reaches of the mine was very wet (in sand), a large wet tunnel with lots of old graffiti and dates from as early as 1642. Tunnel dimensions were 15' wide x 25' high with a perfectly domed roof.

### MINES 3, 4 & 5

In the long archway in Tunnel Road West were several mines, some of which were taken over during World War II and used for various military uses. These were mines 4 and 5.

Mine 3 was on the opposite side of the road and contained large extensive workings, some of which had been converted as an indoor rifle range for 0.22 target rifles and for air rifles and pistols.

### MINE 6

This was a short mine at the rear of the Samaritan's premises in Reigate. We were shown early lemonade bottles with glass marbles (Codd Bottles) that had been found under the floor layers. Used medical syringes showed that locals had also used this mine for their own nefarious purposes.

### MINE 7

This mine was conveniently at the rear of the Market, a public house where we also stopped for lunch. It was at a higher level than mines 3, 4 and 5 and if dug further it would extend over them. The mine was being used as a beer cellar and storage area by the pub and here we



stumbled from the bar straight underground. It was a lot closer from the bar than the Hunters to Hunters Hole on Mendip.

Sites 1 - 7 were easy walk-in mines with no difficulty. However, Mine 8 visited in the afternoon was different.

### MINE 8

This mine was in the grounds of Reigate College and was more adventurous. A locked metal grille in the lawns in front of the college was the entrance. The entrance was a brick-lined shaft about 4' diameter and was about 25' deep. A convenient tree nearby was useful to belay a 25' ladder, tether and lifeline to.

This mine had been dug in the traditional pillar and stall method, ie. long sloping galleries (the ground sloped downhill to the college) with regular crosscuts between the galleries. This gave the maximum amount of sand removed for a given area. As with the other mines visited, the mine passages were approximately 15' high x 10' wide with a domed roof for support.

This was the last mine visited on this trip. The sand dug out here was used mainly in the cleaning industry. It is very soft and ideal for using for scouring etc.

### Note:

Access to all sites is controlled by Wealden Cave & Mine Society. Requests for trips should be booked through them. I enjoyed this trip in the absence of limestone caving.

The moral of this trip is not to buy a property in Reigate - you might never know how safe your foundations are!

Graham Old and myself are continuing to dig in our chalk mine in North Reading. Any members who might be interested can contact us.

*Geoff Beale*

## FOUND IN THE COTTAGE

The following three items were found and advertised in the newsletter some months ago and are going to be binned if not claimed by the AGM weekend:

- Chuck key for a drill
- An Hitachi electric razor
- A Mr Minit Yale key with yellow fob
- Girls knickers (age 2-3 years)
- 1 black chenille glove (smallish)
- Pair prescription glasses in a black Calvin Klein case
- Pair white sports socks
- 'Renault' wrist watch
- Casio watch with no strap
- Large towel

The following items were found on the weekend of 2/3rd June but as the cottage has been closed for some time there's no saying how long they have been there:

If you think any of these items belong to you, and you would like them back, then contact Ben Cooper or Yvonne Rowe (details on page 2).

## MCG NOTICEBOARD

**Dates for your diary:**

July 1-Aug 6 13th UIS International Conference of Speleology, Centro de Convencoes de Brasilia, Brazil. Website: <http://www.speleobrazil2001.org.br/>

August Conference on Sustainable Development in Karst Regions, China. See BCRA website: [www.bcra.org.uk/events.html](http://www.bcra.org.uk/events.html)

Sept 7 Conference on Limestone Hydrology and Fissured Media, France. See BCRA website: [www.bcra.org.uk/events.html](http://www.bcra.org.uk/events.html)

Sept 22-24 NAMHO Conference, Co. Wicklow, Ireland - *Cancelled due to foot and mouth restrictions.*

Oct 12-14 Hidden Earth 2001, Buxton Community School, Derbyshire.

July 5-8 2002 NAMHO Conference, Aberystwyth, Wales.

**MENDIP CAVE ACCESS:**

Assuming there are no further outbreaks in the area, most Mendip caves will re-open on June 9th. These are as follows:

Burrington Combe, Swildons Hole, Fairy Quarry Cave, Singing River Mine, St Cuthberts Swallet, Eastwater Cavern, Longwood Valley, Tynings Farm.

Manor Farm is apparently open plus a few other small sites, but people should check first before visiting any cave.

Most footpaths will be open by June 2nd except for those passing through farmyards. Check the Somerset County Council website - [www.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.somerset.gov.uk) - or local tourist information offices for details.

Waterwheel key - the new lock has been installed and the key *should* be in the cottage by the time you read this.

**MISCELLANEOUS CAVE ACCESS:**

Derbyshire - A number of sites are open but NOT in the Castleton area except for Peak Cavern.

Yorkshire - All the Dales caving areas will stay firmly shut for a while yet.

South Wales - No caving at all except for Dan-yr-Ogof.

Forest of Dean - No caving at all.

South East - Merstham and Godstone stone mines are open.

**SCOTTISH CAVE ACCESS:**

Assynt - access almost completely back to normal. There are buckets of disinfectant at access points.

Skye - footpaths have re-opened and the Cuillin are now accessible from all directions including Glen Brittle. The path around Loch Slapin past the Allt nan Leac valley is open so that group of caves is accessible. For other caves further from the path Steve Birch thinks it would be diplomatic to check with the local crofters first. There are disinfectant baths at the start of paths and dogs are unwelcome.

Appin - access restrictions have been lifted in Glen Duror, Stockdale and Salachan. Access is open from Glen Creran to Beinn Sgulaird to the east but not sure about access from there to the west where the caves lie.

Schichallion - according to the Scottish Mountaineering Council website only the walkers' path to the summit is open which would mean all caves are still off limits ([www.mountaineering-scotland.org.uk](http://www.mountaineering-scotland.org.uk)).

Glasgow/Edinburgh area - is closer to the effected areas and access is still restricted but becoming easier. Check each site first.