

Number 338 December 2006

www.m-c-g.org.uk Founded 1954

Cave Training Course, 4th and 5th November 2006

by Karen Fendley

This year's Cave Training course was once again held by John Crowsley with the added assistance of Kev West. This is a training course that John runs as a contribution to the MCG. It was held over two days and consisted of classroom activities, practical sessions and caving.

The beginning of the course was mainly an introduction session to find out who wanted what covered. It became clear quite quickly that there were a few popular topics. Rope work and rigging were popular as was SRT. This section of the course was interesting as it showed the different angles that the trainees were approaching the training from and showed the difference in experience around the room (something which is very hard to cater for in a training session). Some were almost complete beginners and others had quite a bit of experience.

Other items covered in this part were safety equipment (both for the group and as an individual), the need to address cave preservation and cave safety, the formation of caves, navigating through caves and finally the call out procedure.

The first practical session involved going outside (even though it was a bit chilly!) and learning how to rig ladders and how to life line. After some practice with knot tying it was then down to Goatchurch to put into practice what we had learnt so far!

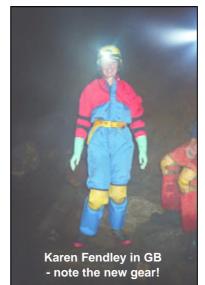
Along the way there was the first geology lesson on how caves and the Cheddar Gorge in particular were formed. We were also asked to review the approach to the cave from the view of 'Does this cave flood?'

Once inside the cave, the trainees were split into two teams for ease of working. Many more areas for consideration were pointed out and a further practical with rope work undertaken by both teams.

Day two started with a review of the previous day's geology lesson, followed by a more involved look at the production of cave systems. This was followed in the afternoon by a trip to GB.

Again, the approach to the cave was discussed and the possible problem of flooding looked at. Once inside the cave, formations were explained; flood lines questioned and the evidence of flooding looked for. The trainees were again split into two groups and navigation through the cave was taken in turns by all the team members. Ropes were again used when needed.

As a new member of MCG and an inexperienced caver, I found this course invaluable. I had not done any rope work or navigation before. Both have encouraged me to go and explore! I found



the geology really interesting as I had heard many terms used before and had no idea what they meant. Things were beginning to make sense! John and Kev were fascinating to listen to and were very able to gauge how long to spend on different subjects. John must also be very strong to have pulled me up through the Devils Elbow! Many thanks to both John and Kev for the course.

From the editor



Things are quieter on the Upper Flood front, so I can catch up now with Group news and publish articles or snippets held over from the newsletter. You will see that as well as the usual interesting social calendar, we have a very full and varied meet programme. Thanks to Bob Templeman organising this and the members who make suggestions or volunteer to lead the meets. Cottage income has increased due more member bednights and more guests groups staying. We have also had a steady trickle of new members and we've enjoyed having them along on members weekends to join in the social and caving meets.

2007 looks set to be a busy year! YR

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MCG Doings

Mark Ward has a new business email address. wgsltd@btconnect.com

Louisa Minahan is on maternity leave - could everyone try to stop sending emails to louisa.minahan@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Xmas dinner

Don't forget to get your names down for the Christmas dinner, it is always very popular and we have only so much seating/cooking space to play with! If you would like to donate any of last years Christmas crackers, or old decorations, festive candles, etc, we would be very pleased to have them

Appeal for expedition and holiday photos

In the publication which is currently under way it is hoped to feature some photos of MCG caving holidays and expeditions. Please will you look through your old photos and see what you can find? Some were provided for the 50th exhibition and some of those will be used, but there must be more out there! Mallorca seems to be poorly represented in Group's photo and archive, also Madagascar, but photos will be welcomed from any holiday or expedition. Please send to Joan, either email at pejogoddard@waitrose.com or on CD or as original prints (which will be scanned and returned to sender)

Hunter's Hole, 7th October 2006 – 'Better late than never'

by Linda Milne

This was my first ever SRT trip in a real cave. I have been a member of the MCG for about 20 years and I have never quite got round to it before now. I finally decided it was time to have a go when I saw some of our group abseil off a rather stunningly high limestone bridge while we were in Slovenia. Despite having a bit of a fear of heights (tempered somewhat after a few years of going up ladders to prune Wisteria and the like) I thought 'I want to do that'.

So this year I forked out for all the gear and set off to get some practice. Firstly, up the tree at the cottage with much tuition from everyone at ground level. This was a tester for me – would I lose it? Nope. The knees were a bit wobbly, but those pruning sessions up the ladder had served me well. Then, the opportunity arose to have a go on Biffs scaffold tower. This was invaluable. You get to go up ropes, trying deviations and rebelays as you go, fantastic. Thanks to Biff and Giles for my first 'technical' experience. I had another go a bit later and the time to have a go for real approached.

Mick and Biff had offered to take me, Karen (both of us new to SRT) and Adrian (not so new to SRT) down Hunters Hole. It felt a bit like a vertical rabbit warren with lots of bolts for rigging and a round trip 'route' in and out. This meant that we could split into two groups, and consequently weren't holding each other up (too much). Biff rigged one route and Mick the other and off we went. There were quite short stretches so we were always within sight or shouting distance from someone else, very reassuring. Having previously got used to doing everything whilst hanging off the rope, I now had to learn to take advantage of ledges and things to help take the weight off the rope and also to make sure the rope never rubbed against any rocks.

What a great trip. I learnt a lot without losing my nerve. Apparently Rhino Rift is the next trip. I think I may need to find some taller Wisteria.

Team: Mick Norton, Biff, Karen Fendley, Adrian Bell, Linda Milne

Early forays in Velvet Bottom

by Tony Knibbs

As an adjunct to what we already know about MCG's early forays in Velvet Bottom, here is a quote from my limited (1953 -1956) caving diary. It concerns Whitsun (5-13 June) 1954.

"On Wednesday, Malcolm Cotter and I went on a recce of Velvet Bottom right up to the main road. Interesting features of this trip were: a) the stream which disappears into a leat near the head of Velvet Bottom, b) the deserted cottage and windpump near Charterhouse, c) an excavated shaft at Charterhouse, which is taking a small stream. This stream is probably dry in dry weather. The head of Vel-



The cottage as it was in the 1980's (since demolished)

vet Bottom is riddled with odd cavities and curiosities; some of these 'odd cavities' might be worth digging out."

I remember that we clung on the unconnected shaft of the windpump to be alternately raised and lowered inside the pylon-type support structure just for fun (boys will be boys). If that Wednesday's date can be deduced, it marks the actual date from which MCG really got hooked on upper Velvet Bottom! (*Ed: The Wednesday between 5th and 13th June 1954 was 09/06/54*)

Rescue dump for Upper Flood

A trip to the far end of Upper Flood is now a serious undertaking. There are several tight squeezes as well as boulder ruckles which could be unstable, and it is not yet known if the low crawls flood in wet weather. There has been one roof fall, and Mike Richardson injured and ankle when he had a slight fall. Rescue could be difficult, or at least delayed.

We have therefore created a rescue dump which is located at the bottom of the Departure Lounge, to give short term shelter for anyone who finds themselves unexpectedly delayed in the cave.

There are 3 Darren Drums, with the following contents:

Box 1

- 1 x gas stove plus spares /assessories
- 2 x 100g gas (butane/propane)
- 2 x cigarette lighters (in with gas stove)
- 1 x box of waterproof matches (in with gas stove)
- 1 x box of chlorine tablets (in with gas stove)
- 1 x candle lantern
- 6 x tea-light candles (4 in lantern; 2 in stove)
- 4 x plastic spoons
- 4 x Mars bars (use by Jun 2007)
- 40 x tea bags (use by Mar 2008)
- 1 x 170g tube sweetened condensed milk (use by Aug 2007)
- 1 x 0.8 litre (1 ½ pints) saucepan
- 5 x beef & tomato cuppa soups (in saucepan)
- 5 x vegetable cuppa soups (in saucepan)
- 1 x swiss army type pen knife
- 2 x light sticks (use by 2010)
- 2 x packets tissues
- 3 x tea light candles (loose)
- 2 x garden refuse sacks (for waste!)

Box 2

- 1 x first aid kit
- 4 x pairs gloves
- 4 x balaclavas
- 1 x garden refuse sack
- 2 x mugs
- 1 x meal : pasta in cheese sauce (veggi) (use by Dec 2008)
- 1 x meal : chicken risotto (use by Dec 2008)
- 1 x beef : strogonoff (use by Dec 2008)
- 1 x meal : ham and leek (use by Oct 2007) (All above meals: just add boiling water to

pouches)

Box 3

- 2 x double size orange suvival bags
- 1 x 25m roll duck tape
- 1 x packet 15 fem-wipes (use as toilet paper)
- 1 x 1 litre water bottle
- 3 x garden refuse sacks (for waste!)

The boxes are for *emergency only* and have tamperproof seals.











Caving meets

Here are details of caving meets for both the December and February members' weekends. (I have nothing planned for January!)

Sat 2nd December:
Bath Stone Mines. We can decide which mine to visit on the day, i.e.
Swan Mine, Brownes
Folly or Box. Meet 11:00 hrs Quarreymans Arms carpark, grid reference:
ST 83446 69319. Further details from Geoff Beale geoffbeale@hotmail.com or 01189 722510

3rd December: Sun Tyning's Barrow Swallet. The cave is stunningly easy for route finding so there should something for everyone, only stipulation you must be able to climb three five metre ladders and not be over 20 stone. Cost £1.00 each. Further Details from Mick Norton.

February Members' weekend: It is planned to visit the newly found Loxton Cave. Leader Doug Harris plus 4. Arrangements to be firmed up nearer the weekend.

Bob Templeman Caving Secretary

MCG library roof

I would like to announce that the Library Roof is now completed!

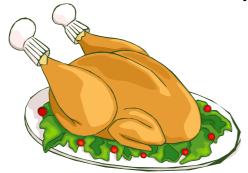
Doug Harris Cottage Warden

MENDIP CAVING GROUP



Christmas Dinner Saturday 2nd December

7.30pm At Nordrach Cottage



2 course dinner with all the trimmings



Please book in advance to be sure of a place. Final numbers will be needed Saturday morning. Veggies catered for. Cost is usually around £4.00

Contact Linda on 01420 562315 or linda.milne@btinternet.com

Summary of Cave Leaders 2006

Upper Flood Swallet

Charlie Allison 01903 821447 callison@dircon.co.uk Peat Bennett 01223 245455 pbennett@amgen.com Jean Paul Burch 01737 217039 jean-paul.b@ntlworld.com mrcarson@lineone.net Mike Carson 01753 655143 Ben Cooper 01344 776306 ben.cooper@siemens.com Sonya Cotter s.cotter@minster.wilts.sch.uk 01971 502383 john@crowsley.freeserve.co.uk John Crowsley Steve Eddy 01594 530339 steve@livingmyths.com Tim Francis 0208 392 2572 t.francis@research-int.com Lee Hawkswell l.ee@bluevonder.co.uk 01985 212690 ihesketh-laird@swa.org.uk Julie Hesketh 0131 661 9951 Doug Harris 01934 843636 dougharris31@yahoo.co.uk Mike Richardson 01761 492505 mike@quaking.demon.co.uk Adrian.Thomas@WSPGroup.com Adrian Thomas 01275 851286 davetooke@hotmail.com Dave Tooke 01784 244479 m.awkward@btinternet.com Mark Ward 01749 672654 Stephen.Wyatt@ukes.aerospace.gknplc.com Stephen Wyatt 01934 838953

Charterhouse Cave

Charlie Allison 01903 821447 <u>callison@dircon.co.uk</u>
Martin Peck 01865 376442 <u>martin@mvpeck.co.uk</u>

Reservoir Hole

Geoff Beale 0118 972 2510 geoffbeale@hotmail.com
Nick Gilson 01934 417697 geoffbeale@hotmail.com

Shute Shelve Cavern

Doug Harris 01934 843636 dougharris31@yahoo.co.uk

Loxton Cave

Tim Francis 0208 392 2572 <u>t.francis@research-int.com</u> 01934 843636 <u>dougharris31@yahoo.co.uk</u>

Dan-yr-Ogof

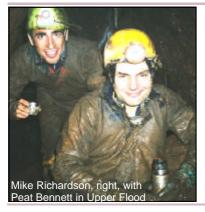
Geoff Beale 0118 972 2510 geoffbeale@hotmail.com
Martin Peck 01865 376442 martin@mvpeck.co.uk

OFD 1

Geoff Beale 0118 972 2510 geoffbeale@hotmail.com
John Crowsley 01971 502383 jenn@crowsley.freeserve.co.uk
Martin Peck 01865 376442 martin@mypeck.co.uk

SRT rope box - key holders

Peat BennettLee HawkswellReggie PainBen CooperJulie HeskethDave TookeTim FrancisMick NortonKevin West



Foot Loose.....

Commiserations to Mike Richardson who fell off a short climb (Foot Loose) in Upper Flood, hurting an ankle. He dragged himself back to the cottage to find his tackle sack with his clothes had been taken from the cottage.

Meanwhile, a party of MCG on a training trip with Kev West and John Crowsley were surprised to find, when they opened the rope bag to begin rigging a pitch, that it contained only underwear and a towel......

Earwig in on the committee meeting 05/11/06

Fliers avertising the Group and its facilities are are looking very professional paper copies for people to take, and glossy on show at Tourist Information Centre. Harptree stores etc. BCA **insurance:** no change to the cost of inurance for 2007.... **Wheelie bin:** the Group is to get a bigger bin to take the extra rubbish produced by extra cottage usage. This will result in less 'lifts' and we are charged per lift.... Fire grate: Doug Harris has mended the big hole in the fire grate - many thanks.

Correction

I take issue concerning Martin's obituary of Eric Dowley as the facts are wrong. I was Treaurer for nigh on 10 years when the Group was very poor and sruggling to save funds to buy the original site [and to] complete our first new cottage during which time I paid some of the merchants bills out of my own pocket -I was reimbursed when funds allowed! Numerous members made interest free loans or pledges. When the cottage was all but complete, I handed over the Treasurership to Eric - then we blew it up. I went to view the ruins (as solicitor to the Group) concluded the building was a total loss, arranged a site meeting with the insurance assessor.... and it was agreed we should be paid the full insured value. Shortly after I went to the insurers offices in Reading, collected the cheque... and placed it on the money market. I do not write this to denigrate Eric who was my good friend but ... to present sufficient facts to correct Martin's assertions. Maybe Eric will smile about this.

Ron Saunders

Library additions

National Geographic Magazine Vol 210 No.3 September 2006 - contains an article "Raging Danger" about an expedition in January/February 2006 to the Ora Doline on the island of New Britain, (off the coast of Papua New Guinea). Plenty of good photographs and a sketch section through the Ora cave system.

CREG Journal No. 64 Sept 2006 – "A robotic surveying vehicle" - but you'll need to enlarge the tight bits in Upper Flood first!

NSS News, published monthly - The August 2006 issue includes "A Cave trip in Casteret Country". The NSS News always has some brilliant photos of caves and recent issues are no exception.



British Caving Association Handbook 2006-2007 -

Nice little A5 booklet packed full of useful information. Will be filed in the library under BCA.

Journal of the Wessex Cave Club Vol 28 No 301, September 2006. The Wessex have also kindly provided us with a couple of back issues which were missing from the library (- not signed out!). We now have a full run which will be bound as our latest volume of Wessex journals

Shepton Mallet CC Occasional Publication No 10 - Caves of the Nam Nao National Park, Thailand. Expeditions between 2000 and 2006 with colour photos and surveys. Unfortunately the print quality on some of the pages is poor.

Bradford Pothole Club Bulletin, Vol 7 No 2, February 2006 – 84 pages of varied and interesting articles, including trips to the Pyrenees 2003 and 2004.

Speleologia Vol 26 Vol 53 (December 2006) Italian Speleological Society – beautifully produced with excellent photos. This issue has an article on Bemaraha in Madagascar (pp 48-55) which may interest those who went there a few years ago.

Speleology, Issue 7, August 2006 - contains expedition reports (Matienzo and Asturias (Spain), India, Pakistan and Laos). Also an interesting account of field trip to S W China to visit massive tienkengs, huge holes with vertical cliffs, formed by the collapse of large chambers in rivers.

Video: Clay and tin mines in Cornwall, Coal mines in Forest of Dean and Somerset. 25mins. (donated)

Also the latest editions of Belfry Bulletin, MNRC, Chelsea S.S. and Westminster S.G.

Remember to let me (Joan Goddard) know if there are any books or publications which you would like purchased for the library.

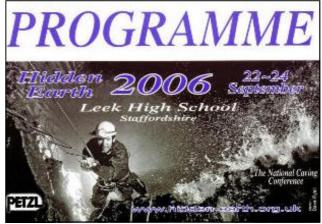
Hidden Earth 2006 – Leek, Staffs

by Yvonne Rowe

The caving conference this year was held over the weekend of 22-24 September in Leek High School, a good venue in all ways except for parking. It was a bit of a scramble for places on local residential streets and we were guiltily aware that we were probably taking up locals' parking places. There were good facilities for lectures and trade stands, with excellent hot breakfasts and lunches laid on in the school canteen.

Martin and I drove down early but by the time we found a parking place we only had time to quickly scan the programme of events, choose a lecture then go straight in.

We chose a film by Gavin Newman entitled 'Maybe

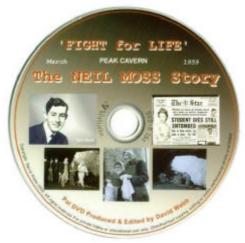


China, maybe not!'. A superbly shot film, as you would expect from Gavin, which was supposed to follow a planned mega-trip into one of China's huge systems. However, the team were foiled by constant bad weather which flooded the cave enough to make it too dangerous to enter. Instead they searched for lesser known, but no less spectacular caves and filmed these. It was not disappointing.

Later followed the Mendip round-up. Tim Francis told a packed audience about our (then) very recent 800 metre breakthrough in Upper Flood. His PowerPoint presentation (now available on the MCG Yahoo website) included a survey of where we were up to plus a few photos taken with a throw-away camera – such was the last-minute rush to get something together in time for the conference. When we got home that evening we had a phone-call from Doug Harris to say he and Mike Richardson had been down Upper Flood again that day and had discovered a further 100 metres!



On Sunday we chose another video – the Neil Moss Story by David Webb. This video project was started almost ten years ago with the gathering of video footage (much of it in older formats), interviews and documentation. The story of the failed 1959 rescue attempt of Neil from Peak Cavern in Derbyshire attracted world-wide media attention resulting in many false accounts, and the object of the film was to present a factual account of



the rescue attempt, told by those who were there. The accounts from the rescuers from that time were quite harrowing and the whole video, although fascinating, was very emotional, even tear jerking (for me anyway). There were tales from the rescuers of how they tried all ways they could think of to extract Neil from the deep, narrow shaft he was stuck in. Because the shaft was so tight, and Neil so tall, he could not bend his legs enough to make use of the ladder (with far-spaced rungs in those days) to climb out. Nor could the rescuers get close enough to him to help with things like tying ropes round him for hauling, or to use the ladder to pull him out as it too had become stuck. After his mammoth efforts to get up out of the shaft, Neil soon became too weak to help himself and he was drifting in and out of consciousness due to the build up of bad air. Hundreds of oxygen cylinders were taken down to give both rescuers and Neil some fresh air, but to no avail. The rescuers told how they and the attending doctors could hear Neil's breathing getting shallower, then erratic, then finally stop. The lecture hall was full

to overflowing, but you could have heard a pin drop!

Another of Gavin Newman's films was 'Filming Planet Earth - from OFD to Lechuguilla!' This was a behind-the-scenes look at filming for the BBC Planet Earth Caves programme shown earlier this year. Gavin was one of twelve cameramen who worked on the series and he filmed all the UK based underground sequences. He also spent ten days underground (eating, sleeping and sh***ing under strict access conditions) in Lechuguilla cave in New Mexico in charge of lighting the world's most beautiful cave. This, amongst other things, highlighted the extraordinary lengths they took to rig zip wires and ropes in the cave on which cameras were attached so they could move through the cave smoothly, filming as they went. Gavin was told there was to be no still photography at all - no lingering shots of stal or cave fauna. When they were to film, say, a beautiful cluster of contorted helictites, a rig would be built allowing a stills camera to be moved a few degrees between each



shot and the whole sequence later animated to give the impression the camera was moving more quickly. As a result, scenes lasting only 30 seconds on screen could take 6 hours to film. Gavin said that in ten days working in Lechuguilla they got about nine minutes-worth of film! It was interesting to learn all the secrets of filming the caves for this series, but, fortunately, it didn't shatter any illusions we got from seeing the final result on TV.

Finally, we went to a lecture on cave exploration in Laos – 'Caving in the land of the Mekong' by Joerg Dreybrodt. Northern Laos is virtually unknown to speleology. Five expeditions were undertaken from 2000-2006 to achieve an overview of the caving regions. The areas searched were Muang Ngoy, Luang Prabang, Phoukhoun and Vieng Phouka where caves with a total length of 25km were discovered. In Vieng Phouka they discovered the largest cave, the river cave system of Tham Eng. It consistes of a 3.1km long upper fossil system and a 3.5km long lower active river system. Other expeditions focussed on caves used as hiding places by communist resistance fighters in the area around Sam Neua.

As usual it was hard to choose which lectures to attend, and, as always, there were some we wanted to see but were running at the same time as others. The choices were many and varied – from cave photography to rescues; from caving expeditions all over the world to caving at 'home'; from cave diving to dowsing for caves; from caving electrics to filming Planet Earth, and much more.



Group Headquarters

Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse-on-Mendip, Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7XW 101761 462797 Grid Ref ST51475606



Custodian Trustees

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Rescue Warden

Keith Knight 01329 280386

Conservation Officer

Mick Norton 01344 421469

Examiners

Fiona Kempston (MCG member) Anne Pittman (External)

Booking the Cottage

Please make bookings for Groups (whether MCG or Guests) through Joan Goddard 01934 732760 to avoid double bookings

Please note: Guest fees are increasing to £4.00 per night from 01/01/2007



GROUP INFORMATION

Weekly Meeting At The Hunters Lodge, Somerset, Tuesdays at about 10pm **Monthly Meeting** At the Group HQ on the first Fri/Sat/Sunday of the month http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/mendip-caving-group/ **On-line Meeting** Accommodation Available at the Group HQ (for members and guests) MCG members, members' children, SWCC, NPC **Cottage Fees** £ 2.00 (per night) Guest clubs and member's guests £ 3.00 (£4.00 from 01/01/07) MCG members, members' children, SWCC, NPC **Camping Fees** £ 2.00 Guest clubs and member's guests £ 3.00 (£4.00 from 01/01/07) (per night) **Season Ticket** Available to members only £40.00 Subscription 2006 Full and Probationary (excluding BCA insurance) £30.00 Associate Members (excluding BCA insurance) £15.00

BCA Insurance Cavers £15.00 Non-cavers £5.00 (all members must have cover)

Reciprocal rights MCG members have reciprocal rights with SWCC and NPC

NPC bookings secretary@northernpennineclub.org.uk

SWCC bookings Keith Goodhead, tel 01874 610080 hutbookings@swcc.org.uk

CAVING AND SOCIAL CALENDAR 2006/07

DATE	AREA	EVENT	CONTACT	TEL
Dec 1/2/3rd	Mendip	Members weekend		
Dec 2nd	Mendip	Christmas dinner	Linda Milne	01420 562315
Dec 2nd	Bath	Bath Stone Mines	Geoff Beale	01189 722510
Dec 3rd	Mendip	Tynings Barrow	Mick Norton	01344 421469
Jan 5/6/7th	Mendip	Members weekend		
Feb 2/3/4th	Mendip	Members weekend		
Feb 3rd	Mendip	B'day Party (all welcome)	Martin Rowe	01524 762664
Feb 3rd	Mendip	Loxton Cave	Doug Harris	01934 843636

THE 2006-2007 MCG COMMITTEE

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COTTAGE BOOKINGS Latest updates at http://www.caver.plus.com/MCG/

Who	Date Arrive	Date Leave	Nights	Beds	Rooms
S.Tibbert (Scouts)	Fri 19/01/07	Sun 21/01/07	2	24	3
G.Bligh (Scouts)	Fri 09/02/07	Sun 11/02/07	2	24	3
GS Exiles	Fri 16/02/07	Sun 18/02/07	2	7	
G.Bligh (Scouts)	Fri 09/03/07	Sun 11/03/07	2	24	3
Maybury/Matthews(Scts)	Fri 30/03/07	Sun 01/04/07	2	20	3
G.Bligh (Scouts)	Fri 20/04/07	Sun 22/04/07	2	12	2