

MCG NEWS

Number 365 February 2011



Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group
m-c-g.org.uk
mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

Founded 1954

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Photo: Curtain in Shatter Cave. Ed Waters

EDITORIAL

INCORPORATING EDITORS REPORT FOR 2010/11

It seems that I start every issue of MCG News off with an apology for its lateness, and this issue is no exception. It has been over three months since Number 364, something I am sure that my predecessors as Editor would never have allowed to happen.

In my defence however, I would like to point out that the editor is just that. I cannot be expected to spare the time to write the entire newsletter, so it is very much up to the membership to supply me with suitable material for inclusion. For that reason I have not held a strict publishing schedule, but rather compiled an edition as and when I have sufficient material to do so. My feelings on this are that the Newsletter's function has changed somewhat over the last few years towards a record of group activity rather than the main vehicle by which club activities are notified and organised. This has been due to the more and more group members choosing to organise their activities online.

To my mind, using the web as the main way of staying in contact with the group when not actually at the cottage is superior to a monthly Newsletter. Information flows in a much more immediate fashion, and it is possible to organise ad-hoc activities in a more inclusive manner than in the past. The down side is that it appears ever more difficult to plan our activities well ahead of time. I think that it is high time for group members to have a think about what they expect from **their** newsletter. I will be thrilled to receive any ideas about the future of MCG News from any interested party.

The crux of it is that if you want a more frequent Newsletter then you will have to contribute to it! I have stated before that I will publish almost anything that has the vaguest of links to the group or caving in general (as long as it is legal). I would prefer to receive articles in MS Word format, but I would rather receive stuff scribbled on the back of a soggy beer mat than not at all!

As well as being unable to write the Newsletter, like many people my cyber-life is somewhat swamped. Therefore I just simply do not have the time to search through the oodles of stuff on the newsgroup to select suitable morsels for inclusion in the Newsletter. Even if I did I am reluctant to go down this path as the majority of the membership has access to the newsgroup and there seems little point in producing a publication made up of material that the readership has already seen online. So come on, get contributing!

Four issues of the Newsletter have been published in this club year (May, August, November and February), roughly every three months. After the major change to the look of the newsletter in 2009, only a few minor evolutionary changes have been made. I hope these are seen to be worthwhile.

In addition to the newsletter, work has begun gathering information for the proposed Velvet Bottom / Rakes publication, with a working title of "Below the Gruffy Ground". Hopefully I will have more to say on this over the AGM weekend.

Finally I must thank all those who have contributed to this issue. In particular Kev Speight, Tony Knibbs and Joan Goddard.

Ed Waters

JOLLY TO DERBYSHIRE 11-13TH FEB

"A trip to Derbyshire you say? Deepest natural shaft in the UK indeed? I can't think of a better way to spend a pre-Valentine's day weekend. Fine Suggestion Mr Rodwell!"

Titan

As I arrived at the Orpheus Caving Club's splendidly isolated, yet cosy, HQ late on Friday evening, I found the group engaged in a frenzy of rope packing and some serious wine drinking. Having arrived a little too late to be fully involved with the former, I decided to ingratiate myself by engaging enthusiastically in the latter! Our group, in no particular order, was Geoff Rodwell, Tony Smith, Ray Sullivan, Debbie Lambert, Emma Lambert and Emma's boyfriend Oliver Norley who, generally preferring more horizontal, daylight based activities had brought along his mountain bike in preference to SRT gear.

Last to arrive was a somewhat harassed looking Ray, whose car had decided to limit it's top speed to 10mph for the last 20 miles of his journey! The application of beer seemed to have a positive effect on him however, and he resolved to postpone any Fawltly-esque, vehicle bashing antics until the trip was completed.

Saturday saw us make a start just on the civilized side of early. Fry ups were consumed, cars were loaded and we departed for Castleton, via a nearby village, where it had been arranged that the cave key would be left for our collection. Unfortunately, there'd been a misunderstanding somewhere along the line and we endured a few minutes of crisis while Geoff made enquiries. Luckily, Mr Rodwell is well connected and a key was soon conjured up - we were back in business...until Geoff's sat-nav decided to play silly buggers and give us a guided tour of Derbyshire's lesser trodden back lanes! I'd love to say that we simply produced a good old fashioned map and got back on track, but in actual fact it was my borrowed Garmin which saved the day.

A short drive later, we found ourselves atop the blustery moors above Castleton and set about getting kitted up. Here, Geoff discovered that his feet are actually very definitely both the same size as he attempted to force one of them into one of his wife's wellies, while the other nestled comfortably in one of his own! We can only hope that Mrs Rodwell had sufficient extra socks to pack out the wellie that Geoff had left for her! Being the no nonsense man that he is, Geoff was prepared to forge on wearing his Topsiders, but as luck would have it, my walking boots had been chucked in the boot and were now called into service.

After a short walk, we arrived at the heavy duty, industrial style entrance lid, which after a short pause for team photos, was lifted to reveal the impressively engineered 45m entrance shaft. This was tandem rigged by Geoff and Tony and the team abseiled in, two by two. At the bottom of the shaft, bearing left soon brought us to a ponded chamber with a window out into the main shaft itself.

Now, if you've never been to Titan, then it's difficult to imagine quite how incredible it is to look out into 140m of yawning, monstrous verticality. The scale of it really does defy description. Rigging the initial 80m pitch from the chamber down to the Event Horizon involves climbing out of the 'window' and standing right on the edge of the drop, on a ledge little more than a few inches wide. As if this wasn't enough exposure, the bolts for the Y-hang are right at the very edge of reach, forcing you onto tip-toes to get a krab in. Here, Ray proved that being 6 foot plus has it's advantages, as he bravely stepped up to the edge of the void to rig the first rope, followed by Tony who provided a second, allowing us to tandem abseil and crucially, speed us up on the ascent.

The window chamber was actually very chilly, so Debbie and I were glad when it was finally our turn to ab in. Getting on the rope, it was impossible to tell if our shivering was due to the temperature or the 80 metres of fresh air beneath! So cold were we, that we locked off our descenders about 50m down and had a little mid pitch cuddle!

We finally settled on the Event Horizon ledge to find that the next pitch hadn't yet been rigged. Seizing the opportunity, I put myself forward and set about rigging my biggest pitch yet. Surprisingly, the exposure didn't bother me at all, perhaps because my concentration was focused elsewhere. After cobbling together a 'fit for purpose' hang, I abseiled the final 60m to the bottom alone, dampened by the spray from the waterfall.

Having seen the amount of ammunition perched on the Event Horizon, immediately following my call of 'rope free', I opted to get under cover, well away from the rope. I needn't have worried, as the next thing to hit the bottom (Under perfect control I hasten to add!) was Ray, who quickly joined me under my boulder.



The awe inspiring Titan Shaft. Photo: Geoff Rodwell

Geoff arrived next, and provided me with a survey so I could scuttle off for a little poke about in the rest of the system. Obviously, I had to find my way through the boulder choke first! After one unsuccessful attempt, I found that the route through the choke actually started under the boulder under which Ray and I had sheltered. I suppose the strong draft should have been a giveaway!

My little solo trip took me down through a couple of squeezes in the extremely well scaffolded choke and into the un-named (as far as I could tell from the survey) west-trending stream passage which ends at a major sump. Not wanting to be gone too long, lest the others began to worry, I turned back after ten minutes of swift caving, pausing only to note the key inlet which marks the start of the Titan - Peak through trip, which I've heard mentioned as one of the best through trips in the UK. One day, soon...

Back with the gang, a surprisingly short wait (Due to Emma's Speedy Gonzalez prussiking!) saw me break out the jammers for the long climb back up, leaving behind only Debbie and Tony. Without a doubt, the first 20m was the hardest as far as I was concerned. After that, I seemed to settle into a comfortable rhythm, with just the odd pause to admire my surroundings. On the way up, the ultra low stretch Spelenium Gold proved worth it's weight in, well, gold! On standard SRT rope, a pitch of this length feels like being on a bungee cord.

At the Event Horizon, I found that Emma, Geoff and Ray had already gone up. I only had a short wait before one of the ropes became free, and happily, it was the other Spelenium Gold. Here, the difference between an 80m pitch and a 60m pitch became painfully clear; my pace slowing significantly as I neared the top, where I found Geoff and Ray. Geoff, who'd arrived first, was chilled to the bone, so headed out with Emma to the surface. As Ray and I waited at the pitch head, the cold breeze began to insidiously rob us of our hard won body heat. After a quick look to establish that Debbie and Tony weren't quite at the Event Horizon yet, we decided to head for the surface too, although I would then drop back in to help with de-rigging.

Our little plan worked well, and when I arrived back at the window, nice and toasty from my little excursion, Debbie and Tony were just about up. Once they were safely off rope, I clipped back in and began the de-rig. Hauling up the bags which Tony had filled at the Event Horizon, I congratulated myself for bringing along a mini-Traxion, which definitely took the sting out of the work! Everything duly hauled up, de-rigged and bagged, Tony and I lugged the lot to the bottom of the entrance shaft and clipped it all on to be hauled out by the rest of the group. All that then remained was for us to tandem prussik out to a much calmer, but significantly colder, Derbyshire afternoon.



The Titan crew. Photo: Geoff Rodwell.

That evening saw us re-united with Oliver, who'd enjoyed his day out cycling along the Tissington trail and we headed, en-masse, to the Royal Oak pub. There we enthusiastically replaced our burnt calories, with interest! If you're staying at the Orpheus and looking for a pub meal, look no further than this pub. I particularly recommend the game pie and the Hartington ale!

Water Icicle Close Cavern

With the rest of our group gradually departing throughout Sunday morning, I was left at the mercy of the Orpheus membership! In truth, this was no bad thing, all of them being tremendously welcoming. Seeing that I was keen to fit in another trip before heading home, Pete Collins kindly allowed me to tag along on a digging trip into the recent (and controversial!) Water Icicle extensions. Also present were Orpheus members Steve, Rich and Simon.

Not wanting to just be a passenger, I offered to be a 'mule' and was duly given a couple of drill batteries to carry in, while Pete packed plenty of Nobel's magic rock remover, lovingly prepared the evening before by the resident Orpheus 'bang man', Ken.

The entrance to Water Icicle is in an unassuming corner of a field just outside Monyash. The 30m entrance shaft was quickly rigged by Pete, and we dropped in. Before visiting the extensions, we went for a look in Great Rift, a cross rift that was intercepted by the original miners, or, 'th'owd man', in Peak District caving parlance! It's possible to high level traverse through the rift for quite a way, before being stopped by breakdown, some of which Rich decided to trundle out, prompting some indignation from the rest of us directly below!

Leaving Pete and Rich to the rift for a while, Simon played the tour guide and led Steve and I through the 'old' cave toward the boulder choke which had previously been the terminal point. The diggers had originally attempted to pass underneath the choke, laying siege to it for a number of years until a re-think led them to try going over the top. This way proved to be more fruitful and in late 2009, Pete and his mate Keith Slatcher broke through to significantly extend the cave. The extensions are scientifically important due to the nature of their geology in relation to the surrounding landscape, as well as being almost uniquely pristine, in that not even 'th'owd man' had ever set foot in them prior to the breakthrough.

To reach the extensions, we climbed 4 metres or so, up a fixed ladder, then crawled through the oh so controversial padlocked gate and slithered down the other side of the choke. To the uninitiated, it's difficult to notice much difference between the 'old' and 'new' sections of the cave. It is effectively the same passage, separated by a boulder choke.

However, looking closer reveals the untouched crystal pools and mud formations in the floor, along with broken stal that has re-calcified in amongst the deposits.

While Pete and Rich set about enlarging a small side inlet, Steve, Simon and I continued to the end of the extension, where the passage ends in a mud choke. On the way back, I stuck my head in a couple of the holes off to the sides of the passage, which the diggers are hoping to push to find the new water route. Some of these look very promising indeed!

Back where Pete and Rich were digging was another passage, named 'Cherty Two', for one particular chert nodule in the wall, which if you squint, and look at it through rose tinted specs, apparently looks like the number 2! Never one to leave a passage unexplored, I popped in to have a quick look and take a few snaps, before re-joining the others. Mindful of the long drive ahead of me, I decided to head out, so bade my new Derbyshire pals goodbye. Simon, however, reckoned that I was not nearly muddy enough for having visited a Derbyshire cave, so led Steve and I down one more particularly squalid and flat out bit of passage, back near the Great Rift. It seemed to my untrained eye that this passage was very similar to the main parts of the cave, albeit almost filled with mud. There was however, space at the top to wriggle through and I could see it continued indefinitely. Perhaps this will be the Orpheus' next big breakthrough?!

Suitably soiled, Simon reckoned I was good to go, so I prussiked back up the shaft to be greeted by horizontal rain and a howling gale. Bracing stuff!

I thoroughly enjoyed my introduction to Derbyshire caving and will undoubtedly return soon. When I do, I will certainly be staying with the Orpheus, and hopefully be completing the Titan - Peak through trip.

Winner Winner, etc!

Kev Speight

LOGBOOK

It's surprising how many members make a point of looking in the logbook when they arrive. I do when I call in at the cottage as it's the traditional way of keeping in touch with what's happening on the caving front. But from what I read there's not much caving going on...

Now I know that's not true as people are always arranging trips on Yahoo. So please find time to write up your trip in the logbook. Diggers usually record their trips but tourist trips are also interesting. A couple of lines with date, cave, party members (full names please) and route would be better than nothing but a proper description would be even better.

Joan Goddard

MCG 'OCCASIONAL PUBLICATIONS' FOR SALE

Newer members may like to learn a bit about club history and the two most recent publications will hopefully provide some enlightenment.

Occasional Publication No 4 details the history of Upper Flood exploration up to 1996; although it's pre the big breakthrough it gives an insight into the hard slog which preceded it. Essential reading for anyone hoping to become a leader.

Occasional Publication No 5 "A Retrospective View" records the early history of the Group and has a potted resume of 50 years of expeditions and holidays.

As we have quite a few spare copies of these two journals members can purchase them, for a limited time, at the bargain price of £1.00. They can be found in a box in the library or if you contact Joan Goddard she can post you a copy for £1.50.

Joan Goddard

MCG ANDALUCIA 2011

Miguel Tome is again leading the MCG back to his homelands this year. Though the exact dates are still not finalised, the trip will be in September – probably early in the month.

As well as the excellent tourist caving, Miguel is also sorting out exploration permits to allow us to have a bash at extending some of the fine caves we visited last year.

Anyone interested should contact Miguel as soon as possible.

IRELAND TRIP – JUNE

Ladies and Gents. I'd quite like to get some member's weekend trips pencilled in for 2011. I could just make it up myself, but I thought i'd cheat and ask for suggestions! So guys, where would you like to go? Obviously, we have leaders within the club for certain caves. If those leaders think they might be able to lead one or two trips on member's weekends, that'd be fantastic too. I'm hoping to be an Upper Flood leader before too long, so I'll pitch in first and volunteer to lead a non-digging, MCG tourist trip on one of the weekends.

Additional to member's weekends, we have the April trip to Yorkshire, which I understand is now fully booked, and of course Miguel has already begun to plan our return to Spain. I wonder if we have room for one more away trip? I like the idea of going to Co. Fermanagh in Northern Ireland for a long weekend. Because times are a bit hard at the mo, I thought we could do it on a shoestring and camp.

A preliminary google search, based on four people car sharing, shows that we could probably do a ferry crossing for less than £100 per person, plus split fuel costs and accommodation (i.e. campsite!) charges. There is some fantastic caving to be had, and I'd be happy to organise the trips. For no other reason than it suits me, I was thinking 24-27 June. So who fancies it? If I have a good idea of numbers by the end of the month, I'll go ahead and book a crossing and campsite. Over to you...

The Caving Secretary - Kev Speight

3RD SATURDAY TRIPS

Richard Carey has made the [in my opinion excellent] suggestion of organising regular programmed caving trips on the 3rd Saturday of every month. He explains more below...

This is aimed primarily at the newer members of the club who are keen to do the Mendip classics but haven't yet found a regular group of caving buddies.

I propose the following trips starting in April. To take place on the 3rd Saturday of the month. Hopefully some of the more experienced members will step forward to lead some of these trips (other caving suggestions welcome).

Saturday April 16th Goatchurch Cavern, how well do you know this cave?

Saturday May 21st Lionel's Hole, definitely for the thinner of us.

Saturday June 18th Hilliers Cave, possibly through to Fairy Cave.

Saturday July 16th GB Cavern, Great Chamber.

Saturday August 20th Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink.

Saturday September 17th Eastwater Cavern, 13 Pots.

Saturday October 15th, Mangle Hole.

Saturday November 19th Rod's Pot, perhaps through to Bath Swallet.

Saturday December 17th Little Crapnel Cave and Honeyhead Hole.

Saturday January 21st 2012 Thrupe Lane, on ladders.

Saturday February 18th 2012 Manor Farm

Saturday March 17th 2012 Longwood Cave

Richard Carey

Experienced members are encouraged to volunteer these trips, but for the time being I have "volunteered" Richard to coordinate them! [Ed].

TACKLE MASTER'S REPORT FOR YEAR 2010 TO 2011

It has been another active year with plenty of caving happening both here and afar in Spain. The caving tackle has received a lot of usage this year. The dynamic ropes were used on 32 trips and after looking at frequencies of use it was again clear (as last year) that the ropes most often used, was in the 15-20m lengths. For the static rope there were 36 uses and quite well spread across the lengths.

Dynamic Rope usage			Static Rope usage		
Id.	Length m.	usage	Id.	Length m.	usage
E	13	6	9	40	7
G	14	3	11	35	6
H	15	3	13	15	5
I	16	3	5	35	3
J	20	3	8	55	3
K	16	3	12	20	3
D	12	2	2	25	2
N	30	2	3	16	2
S	40	2	15	24	2
A	6	1	7	55	1
L	25	1	10	25	1
M	27	1	14	25	1
P	35	1			
Q	35	1			
F	14	0			
O	32	0			
R	36	0			
T	45	0			

Ladders were used on 26 occasions so plenty of ladder pitch rigging going on.

Bags have been used on over 33 trips and are now showing signs of some serious wear. I have repaired two during the year and 3 others have begun losing their bottoms. Therefore at least 3 new bags will be purchased early this year.

In February a majority of the dynamic rope was retired and restocked with new ropes cut to lengths which reflected the usage over the passed two years. This means that we now have fewer ropes but I believe this will not cause any gear shortage problems. All the Static rope is either 3 or 4 years old. The older ropes will be closely inspected before the AGM and if any show noticeable signs of wear they will be retired, otherwise they will be replaced at the end of this year. There has also been an addition to the ladder selection with the new 'Swildon's ladder' (Tagged No. 25). This has been specifically designed for the 20ft. pot.

I am happy to continue with my position on the committee, should the membership so wish. It looks like there will be plenty of issues to contend with this year, not least the proposed extension. There is also the ongoing issue of heating the cottage to a better standard.

The Tackle Warden - Brian Snell

DIGGING

A few notes about group digging activities since the last Newsletter. Lots has been happening, but with little reward unfortunately...

Upper Flood Swallet

Chuckle sump has been passed by syphoning. Unfortunately it has only revealed a small extremely muddy chamber with an impossibly tight continuation. Elsewhere in the cave, digging continues to try and connect West Passage into Neverland beyond the vulnerable section and work continues at Walk the Plank Inlet in hope of discovering the fabled miners cavern and link with Stainsby's Shaft.

The choke at the end of West Passage and Chuckle's Joke have both received further attention. Special thanks to Dr Tony Boycott for supply of advanced digging materials and expertise.

Grebe Swallet

Chris Binding is leading a concerted effort at SD4 near the end of the cave. To date about 6m of downward progress has been made in a boulder floored rift. Work continues towards the postulated "Parallel Streamway".

Battery Swallet

Mark Ward and Miguel Tome continue to enlarge the tiny streamway towards what sounds like a cascade not too far ahead. These guys really deserve a breakthrough given the amount of effort they have put in over the last few years. Given that this is one of (if not the) highest swallet on Mendip, the rewards could be substantial if the siege works.

Bone Hole

Digging trips to Perforation Choke have been sporadic and enthusiasm waning. However, the draft appears to have been relocated, and prospects looking better.

Ed Waters

Thanks to Mike Richardson, Kev Speight, Mark Ward and Chris Binding for reports.

NEW MEMBERS

The following members have joined the group since the last Newsletter. ;

Ross Wheeler
May Yap
Paul Jiggins
David Ward

& Chris Binding

I am sure you will all join me in welcoming them into the MCG.

NEAR MISS IN THE NORTH

Once upon a time there used to be a pause between the time at which a young man finished full-time education and his embarking on a working career; it was known as doing National Service. When my turn came at the age of 18 years, I was invited to put on a khaki uniform and join the ranks of the Royal Artillery at Oswestry in November 1954.

By this time I was a convicted caver and anxious to discover ways in which my new life could further my interest. Oswestry was merely a starting point in my new two-year period of pleasure. At the end of the basic training period, I read my name on a notice telling me that I was being posted to Troon (wherever that was). It turned out that Troon was on the Ayrshire coast just north of Ayr.

I was, at that time, unaware of the existence of any caves in Scotland. My new surroundings didn't fill me with much enthusiasm, therefore. My new regiment was 50th Heavy Anti-aircraft (HAA) Regt RA. Heavy Anti-aircraft units, by their nature were usually extremely static, so there seemed little chance of moving around to any other interesting region. The train had already taken me north through such places as Leyland, Preston Carlisle and Annan. Making new friends among the 500 or so personnel of 50 HAA was very interesting.

I was lucky enough to meet Barry Crossley, who was a member of the Skipton Pothole Club. Yorkshire was the nearest noteworthy caving area, so I quickly persuaded Barry to help me arrange a visit as soon as a long weekend pass could be obtained.

The opportunity came at last at Easter 1955. I had gathered enough old clothes and already had my helmet and lamp. Barry informed his club that I'd be joining them for Easter; travelling down by train. It was agreed that I'd be met on Skipton station and that I would share a tent with someone.

I crammed all my gear into an old ex-commando rucksack, caught the train from Kilmarnock and headed south via Carlisle to Skipton-in-Craven. Once again I was passing through places, like Appleby, which I only knew by name. As dusk fell I lost the ability to clearly discern where I was: at last arrived at Skipton. It was 02h15 and I couldn't see anyone on the platform. No sooner had I started towards the station exit with my rucksack than a small group of figures emerged from the gloom asking if I were Tawny Knibbs. Hands were duly shaken and the camaraderie of caving took over.

I was shepherded along a street in the small town to what I can best describe as a doss house; their headquarters on the first floor of a building in a side street. We snatched a few hours of sleep and were ready to move by lunchtime. The bus arrived at Clapham at about 15h00. Sharing out the camping kit

and ropes, we crossed the footbridge over Clapham Beck and started the long trek up past Clapham Cave thence through Trow Gill and out onto the moors proper towards Gaping Gill.

Having looked at the unimpressive shaft entrance of G.G. We selected various level-looking patches of grass about 100 yds upstream of the mouth of G.G. on which we pitched our tents. Of course, it came on to rain while we were doing this. The rest of the day was spent visiting Carr Pot to recover some rope ladders.

Next morning it became apparent that we had pitched our tents on individual patches of grass, which had now become islands as the stream of Fell Beck had swollen overnight. At least there was no problem finding water to wash-up after breakfast!

It was now Saturday and the cloud was well down on the moor and rain was falling. We decided to ladder the 110ft pitch in Bar Pot in preparation for a descent the following day. It was decided to tie two ladders together for the big pitch. The first pitch was of 45ft down a narrow rift to a stance at the top of the big pitch; it was normal practice to thread the longer ladder down the shorter pitch.

I watched the tying together of the hemp tails of the rope ladder and decided that I didn't really like the look of the knots being used. I waited until the ladders were tied together before asking to examine how these things were done in Yorkshire.

The knots looked quite strange. I put my feet on the wooden rungs of one of the ladders; put my arms through the rungs of the other straightened my back and pulled extremely hard. The two ladders came apart. There was a moment of agonised silence and worried looks. I offered to carry out the task again using the method I usually used. Even on Mendip I had had to tie ladders together.

It is not difficult: all that is required is that each of the two pairs of hemp 'tails' is tied with a fisherman's knot, taking care to keep the rung spacing regular. I repeated my test pull and nothing slipped! I think maybe a nasty incident had been avoided.

The descent proceeded without further delay. My first Yorkshire cave!

The first pitch was indeed at a steep slope and rather narrow. The big pitch was superb; I had never seen anything like it. The landing was in the lofty South East Passage of the Gaping Gill system. We followed this passage, traversing around a deep pothole in the floor where water from Flood Entrance came in as an impressive cascade. Eventually we reached the impressive main shaft of Gaping Gill. Having no waterproof clothing we tried to keep clear of the main

360ft waterfall, but our curiosity invited a wetting of some kind. Conversation was reduced to brief shouts as we moved around in this absolutely huge, dripping chamber. Everything was shrouded in swirling mist and the cold wind easily penetrated our boiler suits and woollens.

We retreated from the main shaft into South Passage, which we followed to where it ended in a narrow, stalagmited rift chamber. On the return we easily found Hensler's Passage, a low, wide bedding-plane. This eventually became a prolonged duck, at which we turned back.

We returned to Main Shaft and turned into South East Passage back towards Bar Pot. The climb back up the pitches was tiring even with the very tight lifelining technique in use. On the big pitch, I must have trodden at least the first three or four rungs to the floor, taking up slack in the ladder, before I began to ascend. We surfaced into a black, misty night after eight hours underground. On the morning of Easter Monday, weak sunshine glistened on the dew-clad moorland as we packed our rucsacks for the long walk to Clapham back down Trow Gill (already thick with ramblers and trippers).

Tony Knibbs (based on an Early logbook entry)

CAVING QUIZ – YORKSHIRE, NORTHERN PENNINES.

Question 1. Where is Doctor Bannister's Handbasin?

Question 2. What is the mineral associated with Pikedaw Caverns? Answer; Calamine. Corrected text attached

Question 3. Who wrote "Pennine Underground"?

Question 4. "Ding, Dong Bell, Pussy and Well are the names of a sequence of pitches leading to "Duke Street"; in what cave?

Question 5. There is a cave on Newby Moss called "Boggart's Roaring Holes. What is/was a boggart?

Question 6. What cave forms the major component of "The Three Counties System"?

Question 7. In the 'Three Peaks Race'. What are the 'peaks'?

Question 8. The stream of Fell Beck falls into which cave system?

Question 9. Who was the first person to descend the main shaft of Gaping Ghyll and what was his nationality and the year of his descent?

Question 10. Geologically, what is Malham Cove ?

AGM & DINNER REMINDER

THE AGM & DINNER WILL BE HELD ON SATURDAY 26TH MARCH. THE AGM IS BEING HELD AT THE HUNTERS LODGE INN AT 10AM.

HOPEFULLY YOU HAVE ALL RECEIVED AN INVITE FOR THIS EVENT ALREADY, BUT JUST IN CASE IT IS REPEATED HERE;

Event Details:

The date: 26th March 2010

The Price:

Food £26.50

Coach: £8.50 return

The Venue:

The White Hart Hotel

WELLS

Somerset

BA52RR

Tel: 01749 672056

Email: info@whitehart-wells.co.uk

Website: www.whitehart-wells.co.uk

The Hotel Room Price (space limited):

£85.00 per room, per night

(Full English breakfast & VAT when booking included - please ask to Speak to Sonia and say you are attending the function to get this rate)

The time: Arriving at the White Hart 19:30, for food at 20:00

The Coach: Do you want to be on the coach? If yes, picking up from the hunters or the cottage – first come first served – reservations only made once monies received as limited seats! Coach departs 18:45 sharp from the Cottage, picking up at the Hunters on route.

The menu choices: pick 1 starter, 1 main, 1 Dessert and fill out the attached form

The Beer:

1x Barrel of Ale

Booking and pay for:

Send your menu / transport selections and your payment to:

Jenny Plumb, 288 Nine Mile Ride, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG403NT

(Cheques made payable to 'Mendip Caving Group')

Just dinner £26.50

Dinner and coach £35.00

CLOSING DATE FOR EVENT FRIDAY 4TH MARCH, I NEED YOUR PAYMENT, MENU & TRANSPORT SELECTIONS BY THIS DATE!!

White Hart MCG Menu Choices

Starters:

Sweet potato & Roasted Pepper Soup

Smoked Duck & Mushroom Terrine served with Green Leaves & Melba Toast

Baked Brie with lightly toasted Ciabatta served with Port & Cranberry Sauce

Main Course:

Roast Topside of local Priddy Beef served with Yorkshire pudding

Roasted Somerset Pork served with Cider & Sage Sauce

Fresh Salmon, Prawn, Crab & Coriander Fishcakes served on a bed of creamed Leeks and New Potatoes

Chargrilled Bell Peppers stuffed with Rice & topped with Goats Cheese

Desserts:

Sticky Toffee Pudding & Toffee Sauce

Belgium Chocolate Mud Pie

Fresh Cheesecake with Fruit Compote

After dinner Coffee included

NOTE THAT TIME IS SHORT AND FEW PEOPLE HAVE BOOKED SO FAR!

Guest speaker(s)

This year will be a little different than usual. During the course of the evening, various group members will let us know what they have been up to in their exploration since last year.

The main event will be a presentation by Andy Sparrow about the "Burrington Project". This will detail his theories about cave development in the Burrington area, what has been found to date, the efforts being made to explore the area at present and the prospects for future discoveries.

TO THE BOTTOM OF SIMA GESM

The last issue of MCG News concentrated on the summer expedition to Andalucia. As noted in that article, a small group of MCG "super cavers" took the opportunity to descend Sima GESM, the deepest cave in southern Spain. Here is their story...

One of my main personal objectives for our Spanish expedition, was the goal of bottoming Sima Gesm. My motivation being the chance to push my boundaries and, if I'm honest, the bragging rights of having been to -1000m! I genuinely wasn't sure quite whether this was a realistic ambition or not. On paper, my experience levels said no, but something in the back of my mind told me that I had the minerals for it. I determined to keep an open mind as we racked up the trips and decided to play it by ear.

Miguel Tome deserves a medal for organising the caving itinerary he put together for the expedition. The quality of the caving was never less than superb and our accommodation brilliant. I don't know if he planned it that way, but, leaving Sima Gesm until last was an absolute master stroke, as the 11 trips in the run up served to toughen the sinews, expand the lungs and prepare the mind for the challenge of a 1000m deep cave.

Three of us elected to have a go at the 1km mark; myself, Tim Francis and John Crowsley. This gave me a huge confidence boost: Tim and John's combined level of experience meant that I'd be in extremely good company! The other (More sensible!) members of the expedition planned to visit other caves and do a little digging during our first two days underground, with some of them planning to drop in to Sima Gesm and meet us on our way out on our third day. Miguel had volunteered our services in whatever capacity the local cavers pushing Sima Gesm could use them. In the event, we were lucky to be given what amounted to a more or less free ride. We would take in and fix a plaque to mark the survey station at -996m on the shore of Lago ERE, then attempt to bring out as many sleeping bags from the 1000m bivouac as possible for washing. This in itself worried me a bit. We would be using those sleeping bags. How long had they been there? How badly did they need washing!?! I decided that I would probably be too minging and knackered to care and resolved to MTFU!

After the 11 lead up trips, I was delighted to find that I felt good. The caving had been hard, but I was ready to give it a bash. I had hoped to get a good, solid night's kip prior to going in, but was thwarted by two of the local hounds, Satan (If you could see him, you'd understand!) and Ralph (As named by Russ Porter, who calls pretty much any quadruped Ralph!). The pair decided to have a barking competition at some ungodly hour of the morning.

This simply wouldn't do, so after enduring their cacophony for half an hour or so, I took action! Clad in my finest boxers and flip flops, I bravely donned my trusty Scurion and set about scouring the undergrowth for the pesky canines. Spotting Satan first, I 'persuaded' him to bugger off with a well aimed rock (Not too big a rock you understand, I'm a dog lover really!) and set out to give Ralph a taste of the same medicine. Unfortunately, the Guarda Civil chose that very moment to drive slowly past the hotel. Exactly what they made of a half naked bloke stalking around a hotel in the wee small hours, armed with rocks and wearing a helmet with an attached bright light will go unrecorded, but even with the language barrier, I couldn't help but notice that the first guy out of the car seemed just a teensy bit concerned. My Spanglish, combined with enthusiastic sign language, clearly wasn't helping my case, judging by his pre-occupation with the handcuffs! Thankfully, his partner emerged and seemed more inclined to simply pity the specimen before him, no doubt planning to bundle me straight back to whatever institution I'd escaped from. Lucky for me though, he'd heard of Sima Gesm and put two and two together when I showed him our gear store. They drove into the night, leaving me to salvage as much sleep as possible.

Our departure day dawned with yet another full Spanish breakfast (Same ingredients as a full English, only drowned in lashings of Castrol 10w 40), which went down surprisingly well, considering the knot in my stomach. I was genuinely nervous about what I'd committed myself to and worried that I might let John and Tim down. Trying to banish the negativity, I busied myself packing gear and food for three days underground, Tim and John providing sound advice as I tried to strike the balance between taking enough to be comfortable, whilst not overburdening myself with too much weight. At this point, I was provided with what proved to be absolute godsend. A Meander undersuit from Ed Waters, a furry balaclava from Biff Frith and a Petzl Myo headtorch from Russ Porter. My clothing strategy was to take in two sets of light thermals for caving in, and to wear the Meander undersuit and Balaclava in camp, with the headtorch for camp use and as a second backup light. Food wise, I took six ready to eat pasta salads, a sack of cereal bars and enough chocolate for two bars per day. Tim and I had bought some pasta in powdered cheese sauce for hot meals, which he carried in his kit. Water would come from the stream-way, which we were assured was better than any bottled water you can buy. Additionally, I carried a spare Scurion battery (cheers Hatstand!), contact lenses and glasses, wet wipes, toothbrush and toothpaste, camera and some survival kit. All this was deposited in a dry bag, which was packed in a large tackle-sack.

Biff once again did a sterling job in successfully coaxing his long suffering minibus up the torturously steep, switchback and rubble strewn track to our parking area, high in Sierra de Las Nieves. As views from car parks go, this one is hard to beat, stretching across the mountains and out as far as Gibraltar in the distance. Truly spectacular.

Accompanying us on the trip were three Spanish cavers, Agustine, Marion and Smokey Joe. (Who we were soon to discover had a certain fondness for very odd smelling tobacco!) At this point, we discovered that the Spaniards had pulled a bit of a flanker and were basically piggybacking on our permit. This led to a few minutes of diplomatic negotiations over which vehicle should contain what paperwork, but things were soon sorted and we said our goodbyes to the rest of the team, who had scheduled a day gawping at the delights of Sima Erotica.

Our walk in was over relatively gentle ground, but Smokey Joe set a blistering pace, no doubt fueled by whatever was in his roll ups! The 40 minute walk we were expecting was significantly reduced in duration as a result and we soon found ourselves at the unremarkable entrance depression, where we wasted no time in getting kitted up. The swarms of infuriating, but thankfully non-biting insects, provided ample motivation to get underground and out of their reach as soon as possible. With the benefit of hindsight, I now know I should perhaps have restrained myself a little, rather than rushing headlong into the entrance series, where a minor epic was to unfold less than five minutes into a three day trip! Allow me to elaborate...

The entrance to the cave consists of a short, daylight pitch, (At the bottom of which we stashed our surface gear and some food and drinks should we exit at an unsociable hour.) followed almost immediately by a tight section known by the Spanish as literally, 'The f***ing squeeze'. All of this was liberally blanketed with the aforementioned insects, which when disturbed, were almost impossible not to inhale or keep out of eyes and ears. The resulting urgency with which I attempted to pass the squeeze led me to get firmly wedged by the metalwork of my SRT kit, which I had neglected to remove in my haste. I was stuck at a point where I had tried to slither sideways into a lower, wider section, which in turn opened out over a pitch.

Any attempt to move forwards simply made the situation worse and the pressure on my pelvis to increase. I was making a complete balls up of the whole thing and we weren't even at -10m yet! Luckily, John had gone in ahead of me and was able to provide assistance and re-assurance, which was good, as I was rapidly losing my cool and wondering if I had bitten off a lot more than I could chew.

After John loosened my harness and removed my descender, I found I was able to wriggle upwards, where the passage became more open, but had the drawback of emerging fully 1.5m above the Y hang of an 8m pitch, leaving me with an awkward, exposed climb down. Again, John made it all better by rigging a safety line to protect me as I clambered down to safety. What an utter 'mare! Rescued within spitting distance of daylight! I was not alone in my tribulations however, as Marion discovered that she had forgotten her descender and Agustine's light was faltering due to a loose connection. Was this mean't to be? It almost seemed that the cave was issuing the challenge; 'Are you sure you're up to this? I'll chew you up and spit you out!'

Despite the knock to my confidence, I was eager to push on, hoping that we'd got all the Gremlins out of the way early. While Marion dashed off to try and scare up a spare descender and Smokey Joe waited for her, we plucky Brits, together with Agustine and his intermittently functioning light, forged on into the depths, leaving behind the bugs and quickly arriving at the head of a 115m pitch, La Gran Pozo, the first of two 100m + pitches we would descend that day. This being by far the largest pitch I'd tackled to date, and still rattled from my entrance series epic, I was obviously a little on edge. I made sure that all my movements getting on to the rope were considered and deliberate, and began to gingerly abseil down. Despite it's obvious vastness, the pitch had quite a friendly feel, being nicely broken with re-belays every 20-30m or so and mostly close enough to the wall to avoid feeling over-exposed. After a couple of re-belays, I had recovered some of my mojo and felt my confidence returning. I tried not to think about how I'd be feeling on the way back up!

After La Gran Pozo, we descended a few more small pitches before meeting another team of Spanish cavers on their way out. I hoped their expressions of exhaustion were at least partly exaggerated for our benefit! Stopping occasionally to refill our bottles, we settled in to a rhythmic cycle of getting on and off short pitches, broken occasionally by the odd meander or free climbable slope. Every now and again, Agustine would halt proceedings to query the route. It seemed that the numerous signs posted at junctions, directing us along the 'Via Classico' (Our chosen route), were escaping his attention. Being the bastion of patience that he is, this didn't even slightly annoy John!

Our next milestone was a biggie, quite literally. Pozo Paco de la Torro is, at 145m, the biggest pitch in the cave and obviously a major psychological hurdle. What we wanted was an unhurried, no pressure atmosphere so we could all descend at our own pace.

What we got was the arrival of Marion and Smokey Joe, who, true to form, had a spliff the size of a baby's arm in his mouth and was whooping and hollering his way down the ropes above us like Tarzan! Not ideal when there's 100m+ plus of fresh air between your backside and terra firma, and all you want to do is focus on passing each re-belay in turn, and study intently the wall in front of you! Luckily, the pitch was nicely broken by re-belays, meaning that any feelings of exposure, or irritation from drug addled Spaniards, were mitigated by the calming influence of John and Tim's proximity.

We made it down in spite of the dope head's antics and enjoyed our first substantial stop of the trip thus far, taking the opportunity to cram in some calories and re-hydrate, while marveling at the scale of sheer face which we had just negotiated. We were at -700m and pretty tired, but still had quite a way to go yet. Facing us now was our first taste of horizontal caving so far, La Gran Via, accessed by prussiking upslope, directly opposite the main face of Paco de la Torro, for about 30m, before abseiling down the other side of a knife edge ridge.

La Gran Via proved to be a welcome change after hours of on-rope caving. It is a desiccated and ancient looking fossil passage, liberally encrusted with botryoidal formations, which in places were almost impossible not to damage. Occasionally, the floor would drop away, leaving us to negotiate our way around yawning pitch heads. Some of these were protected with in situ traverse lines, but on a couple of occasions, we were forced to bridge out with our legs and gingerly shuffle across, or for those with shorter legs (John!), to climb higher to find better holds for traversing. Despite these occasional doses of adrenaline, it really was very pleasant caving.

Eventually, the passage opened out to reveal a couple of short pitches into the chamber which contained the main camp. Being the last to descend, I had a little more time to survey the impressive scene below. The bivouac itself was constructed from a shocking pink and yellow parachute, around which was stored enough rope and metalwork to rig the cave twice. As I waited for Tim to complete his descent, it occurred to me that we still had 200m+ of further descent to go! Banishing this thought, I dropped down to join the others for a refuel and a rest. Despite our fatigue, we were keen to press on, ostensibly to get to the -1000m camp with plenty of time in hand for food and sleep, but also to get out of range of smokey Joe's funny fags! So, with -1000m almost in our grasp, Tim, John, Augustine and I left the drugs mule behind for the night.

After a couple of short pitches, we found ourselves in the absolutely stunning Gallery of the Gours. For me, this part of the cave was by far the most visually striking. The passage was impressive enough in terms of its sheer size, but the stunning floor, with its myriad of pristine, dried gours, was truly a sight for sore eyes. With no conservation path marked, we had no option but to pick our way through as best we could, but felt like utter vandals as we tiptoed our way across.

Pozo Pangea (21m) and Pozo del Infierno (80m) marked our final two descents of the day. At the bottom of Pozo del Infierno, our goal was reached and we stood on the shore of Lago E.R.E. After handshakes all round, we set to the task of fixing the permanent survey station plaque at the -996m mark. John was delighted that he'd lugged a lump hammer down from the -750m camp; particularly as we could have just as easily knocked home the securing pin with a bar of partially melted chocolate. Once Augustine had joined us, we did a symbolic walk down from the -996m plaque to the significantly lower water level of Lago E.R.E. Whilst none of us had surveying gear on us, we were all quite satisfied that we were comfortably below the all important -1000m mark, although it seemed to take Augustine a while to twig the significance of the location!

Once we'd paused for the obligatory handshakes and photos, we dusted off the ascenders and made our way up a couple of short pitches to our campsite, which was perched on a ledge above the streamway feeding Lago E.R.E. As we wandered up the stream, our noses alerted us to the location of the loo; an extremely unpleasant puddle, over which we had to traverse to reach the camp. At least we now knew where it was!

The camp itself, while smaller than the -750m camp, was quite nicely appointed and we soon set about getting some hot food and drink on board. Augustine, however, had seemingly decided that he would fuel himself on chocolate alone, leaving Tim and I to our cheesy pasta, and John to his pilfered military ration packs!

Surprisingly, we all managed a reasonable amount of sleep that night, despite initial fears that Augustine might turn out to be a snorer, and awoke at least semi-refreshed!

After enduring a prolonged olfactory assault from John (I blame the ration packs!), we forced him out to try out the 'facilities' while we began to ready ourselves for the first leg of our exit. As well as lugging out sleeping bags for washing, we'd also been asked to make an inventory of the food and other sundries stored in the camp.

As well as the expected assortment of dried and tinned food, the Spanish explorers had also seen fit to stash some 'reading' material to while away the long hours in camp!

Despite the long slog now facing us, we wanted to do a little exploring for ourselves, so after packing the gear and returning the camp to a (semi) habitable condition, we set out to rendezvous once again with Smokey Joe and Marion. After the short descent back down to Lago E.R.E. our first of many climbs was Pozo del Infierno. At 80m, it wasn't exactly a gentle re-introduction! Once I was on the rope, I soon discovered that carrying loads on your back makes life considerably more strenuous! On all subsequent pitches, I hung my bag off my central maillon.

Before too long, we arrived at the -750m camp. Tim and I were profoundly moved on witnessing the emotional re-union of John and Smokey Joe, who are now undoubtedly making plans to get together and reminisce in the New Year. Meanwhile, Augustine seemed mesmerized by the sight of Marion in her extremely tight fitting thermal baselayer!

It soon emerged that Marion and Smokey had enjoyed a full scale, slap-up meal of paella the night before. No wonder Augustine had dolefully refused our offers of dried pasta and boil in the bag. These Spaniards are clearly used to a higher class of cave cuisine!

Having generated so much washing up, Smokey was concerned that the water supply was getting low in the camp, and asked for someone to help him fetch water. "Ten minutes", he said. "Walking", he said. Fair play to him, he even kept a straight face! Being a compulsive volunteer, I got kitted up while he stuffed two rope bags full of empty 1.5L water bottles. The thought crossed my mind that these would be fairly hefty once full, but banished any concerns with the reassuring knowledge that "ten minutes walking" shouldn't pose too much of a problem. Obviously, the 'Herbal Cigarettes' have altered Smokey's perception of time, because what followed was at the very least, twenty minutes of flat out sand swims, squeezes and traversing!

On the plus side, our destination was a glorious little sump pool, from which a crystal clear stream issued and tumbled off down a fabulously sculpted passage. Smokey told me we were near Via Glaciar, although we were in unsurveyed territory, and the sump (Which was sizeable and looked to be wide open) had not yet been dived. From what I could pick out of Smokey's Spanglish, no-one is really sure where it goes. All too quickly, the bottles were full and we began to wrestle our truculent loads back to camp, where we were disappointed to discover that Marion was now fully dressed in her caving gear!

After a brief pause to replace lost fluids, we set off down Paso de la Gran Evasion, with Smokey pointing out scores of side passages which have yet to be pushed. Again, this passage was railway tunnel sized and completely dry, with sandbanks on either side. These banks got progressively higher as we walked, until they met the roof at a point which had once barred the way on. Fortunately for us, three seasons of digging had seen the Spanish break through only weeks before our arrival.

Unfortunately for me, I was still feeling the effects of the water carry and didn't particularly fancy the squeeze at the far end of the excavated sandy crawl. I elected to wait while the others pushed on to explore, as did Augustine. Our conversation, being limited to what we could communicate via the medium of mime, was somewhat stilted, and the minutes soon began to drag as we awaited the return of the others. After what seemed like ages, return they did, telling tales of colossal passage and crystal clear, expansive lakes. I cursed my decision to conserve energy and glared at Smokey Joe!

Our focus was now firmly on regaining the surface. As we headed for the -750m camp, Tim, John and I discussed our exit strategy. Essentially, we wanted to try and break up the ascent into two parts, camping at the -500m bivouac along the way. The main advantage would be psychological, in that we'd only have one 100m+ pitch to do on each day. The problem with this plan was lack of sleeping space at -500m. Somehow, we had to persuade poor Augustine to remain at -750m, leaving him with a marathon final day accompanied by Smokey's potent fumes! Thankfully, John's pitching of this idea left very little wriggle room for the Spaniards, and almost before they had time to object, we'd shaken hands and were swarming up the pitch leading us back to La Gran Via.

Our caving was more businesslike now, the thought of Pozo Paco de la Torro looming large in our minds. Once we reached it's base, I asked John if, despite his level of experience, he still felt a bit nervous at the bottom of a big pitch. His answer of, "Not nervous, f***ing terrified!" was music to my ears, my trepidation now not seeming like such a burden after all!

Tim started on up first, followed by John, with me bringing up the rear. Once off the ground, my nerves evaporated as I settled in to a steady rhythm. If anything, the purity of purpose in hauling oneself up such a huge pitch is actually somewhat therapeutic!

Once at the top, we paused to re-hydrate, then struck out for the refuge of the -500m bivouac. With the big pitch having occupied such a large part of my mind for much of the day, my subconscious had persuaded itself that the distance from the top to the camp was insignificant.

In fact, there was a further 100m of vertical distance, incorporating a 60m pitch, as well as a punishing series of meanders, where the bag seemed to snag at every turn. This part of the trip really tested my energy reserves, but the promise of some hot food saw me through and I eventually stumbled, hungry and exhausted, into the -500m camp.

After sorting out our kit and hoovering up as much carbohydrate as we could hold, we settled down for our final night underground. The -500m camp was certainly a more cramped affair, but was also somewhat chillier, so the prospect of sharing body heat wasn't as unappealing as it otherwise might have been! I can't speak for the others, but I certainly slept like a log. So deep was my slumber that even the metal fork upon which I'd inadvertently led didn't wake me!

The following morning found us in a pretty jovial mood, despite our aching limbs. We were on the final leg! Okay, so the final leg involved over 20 pitches, including one of 115m and 500m of vertical ascent, but the prospect of natural sunlight and a cold beer or three reduced these statistics to mere trivialities! We packed for the final time and headed off up the nylon highway.

In the camps, the Meander undersuit, loaned to me by Ed Waters, had served brilliantly as comfy and warm pyjamas, but having depleted my stock of kit, I was now wearing it to cave in. Unfortunately, it's warmth was now causing my body temperature to soar and I was forced to stop regularly, just to stay hydrated. The short pitches just kept coming and coming, but we made steady progress as we clawed our way back up the Via Classico. Eventually, we reached the base of the 115m, Gran Pozo. We were all pretty gone by this stage, but were heartened by the thought that we may soon bump into some of the other MCG'ers on their way in to the cave. Sure enough, as I was around two thirds of the way up, I could hear Tim and John laughing above me. Unless they'd completely lost their marbles, I reasoned that they must have met the others.

The others turned out to be Chris Binding and Russ Porter. The lads very kindly offered to take out our bags after their trip, but having lugged them this far, we all felt, on principle, that we should finish the job ourselves! Brief congratulatory handshakes were exchanged with Chris and Russ, then we left them to continue their trip and headed up the last couple of pitches. Pretty soon, we began to see the odd insect here and there and got that slight whiff in the air that told us the surface was near. Arriving at 'The F***ing Squeeze', I elected to remove my SRT kit this time and passed it with much less drama than on the way in!

One final, short pitch, bathed in rays of warm sunshine and that was it. We'd successfully bottomed Sima Gesm! Waiting to welcome us on the surface were Ed Waters, Hayley Clark and Biff Frith. Being the all round good eggs that they are, they'd even brought us beer, which was swiftly and enthusiastically imbibed!

Physically and mentally, this caving trip was one of the most challenging things I've done, but for those reasons, as well as the fantastic company I was in, it will always be memorable. I sincerely hope we can return in the near future to push some of those open leads...don't tell Smokey Joe though!

Kev Speight

NEWSLETTER QUIZ NO.1 (MENDIP) - ANSWERS

Question 1: in which cave were the remains of an Upper Palaeolithic hunter found?

Answer: Gough's Cave (Cheddar Man.)

Question2: Which British monarch is commemorated in Stoke Lane Slocker?

Answer: Queen Victoria.

Question 3: What was extracted from the mine at Compton Martin?

Answer: Ochre.

Question 4: What metal is associated with calamine?

Answer: Zinc.

Question 5: What animals might once have grazed on Piney Sleight?

Answer: Sheep.

Question 6: What is the highest point on Mendip?

Answer: Beacon Batch (on Blackdown 325m)

Question 7: Who was the first diver to pass Swildon's Sump 1 in 1936?

Answer: Jack Sheppard.

Question 8: What was the name of the Wells alderman after whom an overpass in Swildon's is named?

Answer: Barnes.

Question 9: Where did the "Local Bloke" come from?

Answer: Rodney Stoke.

Question10 : What is probably easier down than up in Eastwater Swallet?

Answer: The mud escalator.

Tony Knibbs

LIBRARY ADDITIONS

Venturing Underground , the new speleo's guide by Ben Lyon, 1983 (donated)

Northern Caves, Volume 4 Whernside and Gragareth by Brook, Davies, Long and Sutcliffe, 1975. This completes our set of the first series of Northern Caves (donated)

Colorado Caves; Hidden Worlds Beneath the Peaks. Text by Richard Rhinehart, photos by David Harris, 2001. A lovely book with plenty of excellent photographs. Chapters include Explorations, Subterranean Science, surveying, history, development of commercial caves, Conservation. At the end are three useful appendices (Caves open to the public, Caving organisations & websites, Related reading and videos). The book is attractively laid out - short 'stand alone' sections within the main text which make the publication easy to dip into. Anyone holidaying in Colorado would find this book a useful starting point (donated)

An Unconventional Guide to the Caverns of Castleton and the Surrounding District by Francis A. Winder (& J.W.Puttrell), 1938 (Photocopy). Chapters on Peak Cavern, Speedwell, Blue John, Treak Cliff and Bagshawe Caverns, Oxlow Caverns & Nettle Pot, Eldon Hole and Caverns of the Great Fault. Also surveys for most of them and numerous illustrations. An intriguing read if you are interested in the history and development of Castleton Caves (donated).

MCG Went Wild in Andalucia (DVD) by Chris Binding. If you want to know what went on this Summer, this DVD will tell you all about it. Thanks to Chris for donating a copy.

Mid Rope Rescue (DVD) Produced by Ralph Johnson, IntroAct Films, 2010/. This video comes with a strong warning that the techniques described should only be used if no other means of rescue are available and only if you have practised and practised the method you are going to use. The emphasis is on self preservation - don't make a difficult situation worse by adding to the number of casualties. The film lasts 47 minutes and is divided into three sections. I cannot judge the quality of the production as I'm SRT illiterate but the filming and text appear to be clearly presented. This is not a film to watch for entertainment but as a training aid. Mid rope rescue should only be used if you are totally proficient in its use.

Craven Pothole Club 'Record' No.100 (Oct 2010) is accompanied by two surveys, **Stump Cross Caverns/Mongo Gill** (in colour) and **Sell Gill Holes**. These will be filed in the plan tank in the library. In the *Record* is a description of how the surveys came into being and also a number of other interesting articles.

Conquering an Infinite Cave by Mark Jenkins, *National Geographic*, January 2011, pp 104-125. A typical; NG article – lots of amazing photos of huge caves in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park in central Vietnam. A British-Vietnamese team began exploring Hang Son Doong in 2009 which has been hailed as having one of the largest passages in the world – not sure if that's true but I'm sure someone will put me right if it's not.

A batch of old **Shepton Mallet Caving Club Newsletters** from 1964 to 1968 (donated)

OWSS Journal (Old Westonians Spelaeological Society) for 1960 includes a description of Tynings Farm dig when it was only 20ft (6m) long ((donated)

EGONS Journal (Exploration Group of North Somerset) for 1976 (donated)

Joan Goddard

PHOTO CAPTION COMPETITION

Some of you may remember the following picture from Newsletter Number 354, and the request for a suitable caption...



The following responses were received for the photo caption competition in the last newsletter. Well done to Allan and Joan who can both claim a drink from me at the dinner!

"that's a nifty little hanger you've got there!!....."
Allan Mellon

"Where did you say the shower block is?"
Joan Goddard

PHOTO COMPETITION – WHICH MENDIP CAVE IS THIS?



FROM THE PAST

45 Years Ago – From Newsletter No.42, February 1966:

The Group's Annual Dinner will be held on Saturday, March 26th 1966 at 8 p.m. at the Cave Man Restaurant, Cheddar. All members and unlimited numbers of friends will be welcome. Tickets, price 16/- [80p – Ed] each (including tip – for the waitresses, not Pedro) now available from the secretary. A chance to drink after closing time is not to be missed.

40 Years Ago – From Newsletter No. 87, February 1971:

In searching for a venue for the MCG's summer expedition, Pete Mathews says he would like to go to a place conveniently close to the road. He has had enough of panting up and down mountains to go underground.

30 Years Ago – From Newsletter No.137, February 1981:

The Annual Dinner will take place at the Star Hotel Wells. The cost of tickets will be settled in the next week or two at around £6-£7 for beef in red wine.

25 Years Ago – From Newsletter No.183, February 1986:

Dear MCG,

Regarding your challenge to Cerberus on the Assault Course on April 12th. We will be happy to accept, and in return challenge you to provide a barbeque at Nordrach on the Saturday evening...

20 Years Ago – From Newsletter No.214, February 1991:

A distinct lack of enthusiasm from the other CDG members at the camp saw Nick making a solo effort. When he surfaced in the airbell, he was greeted by a distant rumble of flowing water, and a tricky 15ft climb led him into the new cave... ..he had far more enthusiasm for his next trip...! [discovery of the Battle of Britain Series, Dan yr Ogof, Ed].

10 Years Ago – From Newsletter No.287, February 2000

The publication of a new Mendip Underground is normally enough to drag even the most hermitic caver out of his hole and... ..spend his hard earned cash.

...In conclusion I think this is the best Mendip Underground yet... ..A snip at £14. [This is still the latest edition, Ed].



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Roy Kempston
Linda Milne

Cottage Bookings

All groups (guests and members) should be booked via Mike Richardson, email bookings@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

MCG News is published by the Mendip Caving Group, Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse-on-Mendip, Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7XW

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Material for MCG News can be submitted to the Editor, Ed Waters, via email, editor@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

Or via the cottage address above. Submissions are preferred in electronic format, but any material, in any format, is always welcomed.



Group Information

Monthly Meeting:

At the Group HQ, usually on the first Fri/Sat/Sun of the month.

Online Meeting:

<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/mendip-caving-group/>

Websites:

www.m-c-g.org.uk & www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

Cottage Fees:

MCG members, members children, SWCC, NPC £2.50 per night.
Guests £5.00 per night. Camping at same price as cottage fees.

2010 Caving & Social Calendar

Date	Location	Activity	Contact
Mar 4/5/6	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage
Mar 25/26/27	Mendip	MCG AGM & Dinner Weekend	Jenny Plumb
Apr 1/2/3	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage
Apr 8/9/10	Dales	Northern Dales Meet	Jeremy Gilson
Apr 16 th	Mendip	3 rd Saturday – Goatchurch Cavern	Richard Carey
May 6/7/8	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage
May 21 st	Mendip	3 rd Saturday – Lionel's Hole	Richard Carey
Jun 3/4/5	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage
Jun 18 th	Mendip	3 rd Saturday – Hillier's Cave	Richard Carey
Jun 24 to 27	N. Ireland	Co. Fermanagh	Kev Speight
Jul 1/2/3	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage
Jul 16 th	Mendip	3 rd Saturday – GB Cavern	Richard Carey
Aug 5/6/7	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage
Aug 20 th	Mendip	3 rd Saturday – Hunters Lodge Inn Sink	Richard Carey
Sept TBC	Spain	MCG Andalucia 2011	Miguel Tome
Sept 17 th	Mendip	3 rd Saturday – Eastwater Cavern	Richard Carey
Oct 7/8/9	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage
Oct TBC	Mendip	Family Weekend	Julie Hesketh
Oct 15 th	Mendip	3 rd Saturday – Mangle Hole	Richard Carey

Note that there are also many informal caving trips, particularly digging trips, organised online.

Nordrach Cottage Bookings

Booking Group	Arrive	Depart	Nights	Beds Booked
Hades CC	Fri 25/02/11	Sun 27/02/11	2	24
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 04/03/11	Sun 06/03/11	2	
Bucks Scout Caving Club	Fri 11/03/11	Sun 13/03/11	2	20
Majendie-Steeple Scouts	Fri 18/03/11	Sun 20/03/11	2	11
MCG AGM & Dinner Weekend	Fri 25/03/11	Sun 27/03/11	2	
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 01/04/11	Sun 03/04/11	2	
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 06/05/11	Sun 08/05/11	2	
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 03/06/11	Sun 05/06/11	2	
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 01/07/11	Sun 03/07/11	2	
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 05/08/11	Sun 07/08/11	2	
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 02/09/11	Sun 04/09/11	2	
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 07/10/11	Sun 09/10/11	2	
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 04/11/11	Sun 06/11/11	2	

COMMITTEE CONTACTS:

Secretary – Mike Richardson
Treasurer – Karen Fendley
Tacklemaster – Brian Snell
Recorder/Librarian – Bob Templeman
Cottage Warden – Doug Harris
Editor – Ed Waters
Caving Secretary – Kev Speight
Social Secretary – Jenny Plumb
Rescue Warden – Miguel Tome

The above can be contacted via the email addresses to the right, or via the contact details included in the membership list circulated to group members with this Newsletter.

Secretary	secretary@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Treasurer	treasurer@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Tacklemaster	tackle@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Recorder/Librarian	recorder@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Cottage Warden	warden@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Editor	editor@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Caving Secretary	caving@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Social Secretary	social@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Rescue warden	rescue@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Conservation & access	access@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Auditors	examiners@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Cottage bookings	bookings@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

"I am not really very happy about highly athletic swinging around on ropes underground. I like to move slowly and carefully and either to be moving under my own steam or attached to a lifeline, or to be on a rope system. The idea of having slack on a rope and then swinging out into a gulf doesn't appeal to me."