

MCG NEWS

May 2015





NANCY CAMEL'S HOLE

An Initial Report into the Engravings in an early 18th Century Home

By Charlie Allison

Chris Binding and Tom Harrison at the entrance

Nancy Camel's Hole is a small cave on East Mendip located in woods between Croscombe and Shepton Mallet, north of the A371, and just north of the sewage farm and so not a pleasant place to be if the wind is in the wrong direction! So why the interest?

Nancy Camel

Legend has it that a witch of the same name lived there until one stormy night she was dramatically taken by the Devil, his cart leaving grooves in the rock. The dates Nancy was allegedly in residence vary from report to report, however, the latter part of the 1700's seems most likely. One report suggests 1703 as the date of disappearance. In that year there was indeed a tremendous storm across the UK (parallels with the October 1987 hurricane). However, for the reasons outlined below I have doubts as surely she would have been accused and tried long before then.

To add some context to the belief systems in place at the time many of you will have heard of Matthew Hopkins – the Witchfinder General. He was active between 1644 and 1647 and, although mainly Essex based, the associated increased hysteria prevailed throughout the UK, and the history of persecution actually started long before and continued after his rather brutal reign of terror. King James I wrote a book called *Daemonologie* published around 1597 concerning the practice of witch hunting and advocating his support, a practice that carried on for many, many decades.

Move forward to 1657 and one Jane Brooks was charged with witchcraft in Shepton Mallet and, after a short trial, was found guilty and duly hanged in 1658 at Chard. Clearly the locals were a fearful and superstitious lot. This continuing attitude was not confined to Somerset – the Scots for example executed their last witch in 1727, the last in England being 1682, and Europe later still. The last execution directly related to witchcraft was in Switzerland in 1782.

Integration of folklore and myth is still prevalent today, for example, Snow White given the poisoned apple is a more modern example of how witches were thought to have peddled their trade and indeed the giving of alleged poisoned apples proved the undoing of poor Jane Brooks.

Nancy Camel's Hole is only a couple of miles or so and within easy walking distance from Shepton Mallet. She was supposed to have been old and somewhat cantankerous when she disappeared and therefore surely would also have come to the attention of the authorities in the mid to late 1600s long before her date with the Devil in the very early 1700s, hence the leaning towards the late 1700's date when people were a little less superstitious.

The cave was investigated by a Dr Allen in 1888 who claimed to find evidence of occupation. The Story of Croscombe by Keith Armstrong (2nd edition 2007, pp.111-2) suggests that the cave was also occupied between 1830 and 1846 by person(s) unknown, and that various items such as pottery shards, a coin and clasp knife were found. It could well be that the site was used at that time as temporary camps by travellers or migrant workers.

Another legend tells of a dog that entered the cave and emerged on Windsor Hill (approx 2km North-East of the cave) some days later hairless and dishevelled. From what we know of the cave an underground traverse is highly improbable. This myth also seems to do the rounds in caving areas.

Of course what is still uncertain is when (and really if) Nancy existed, how many periods of other occupation there were and for how long. Clearly the cave has been open for some time and there is a long history associated with superstition from which the legends have stemmed.

The advantages of the site as an historic place to inhabit whether on a temporary itinerant or semi-permanent basis are its ease of access, sheltered position, uniqueness as a cave in the area, and closeness to the river Sheppey. A small spring rises from the cliffs close to the cave as a source of water, although these days it may have farm related contaminants.

So what does all this witchcraft and demonology really have to do with cave exploration, and in a cave that is much shorter even than Aveline's Hole in Burrington? It is about what is currently in the cave, namely what is recorded on the walls.

I should say at this point that this article has to be brief to fit in the newsletter, so if anyone would like further information or more detail about other photos please contact me via the MCG. I've called this an interim report as there is undoubtedly more investigation required, and a subsequent article will likely appear.

Background Information

My interest in the site was initially kindled by investigations into myths and legends of Mendip associated with cave sites for another project I'm currently working on. A couple of years or so ago I visited Croscombe village and the cave a few times to take photos for the record. Unfortunately I managed to lose my last set of photos of the cave and village so returned in early Feb 2015 to quickly re-take them. Had I not been daft enough to lose the last set of pictures you wouldn't be reading this now. It was on the February visit that I noticed something odd on the walls of the cave: there were a number of engravings. Some clearly the initials of past visitors, and some that were rather odd looking. I recalled the UBSS papers on Ritual Protection Marks (RPMs) or Witch Marks or Apotropaics (from the Greek apotrepein "to ward off" from apo- "away" and trepein "to turn") and wondered, given the historical context, whether it was feasible they could be found here. Indeed I am grateful for Chris Binding bringing the UBSS papers to my attention a couple of years ago. It would seem possible these marks could exist, after all the cave has a long history of association with the supernatural.

Ritual Protection Marks

RPMs are essentially protection marks to ward off evil spirits and perhaps even the Devil himself and can often be found in old houses (above doors and fireplaces for example) and other places such as churches as well as caves. Many people today use a form of the descendants of apotropaic magic such as that 'good luck' caving T-shirt, lucky charm, or even touching wood to ward off misfortune. The key period of these marks is thought to date from approximately 1550 to 1750. Those found so far are in the caves of Burrington Coombe, Cheddar Gorge and Wookey Hole, so this would likely be a first for East Mendip if confirmed.

These marks take many forms but a key design is that of two overlapping V's. Essentially looking a bit like a Volkswagen logo without the surrounding circle.

The UBSS papers mentioned above are recommend reading and the experts here are of course Chris Binding and Linda Wilson. Please see reference section below for more details.

In February 2015 I noted three groups: markings on the left of the entrance, markings on the right of the entrance, markings half-way along the cave on the left wall, as it turns a corner. As I was intending only a few record shots my only light was the mini-maglite that lives in the camera bag.

On 7th of March 2015 I returned with better lights and noted another larger set of engravings on the right wall half way on and a few scratches towards the back. A survey to the dig was also done to note the location of the marks (Plan only as the cave is largely horizontal).

On 8th March I was joined by Chris Binding and Tom Harrison for another look. I'm grateful for their assistance for both Chris' expert eye and Tom's help with recording the pictures. The latter trip was also to facilitate Chris in taking a set of pictures to further determine the likelihood of genuine RPMs among the noise of the other marks.

Following the visits I have condensed the groups of marks as follows as marked on the survey:

- Entrance Marks
- Halfway along on the left
- Halfway along on the right
- Rear and roof marks

The 2nd and 3rd groups are at the edge of daylight penetration where the cave turns a corner and the 4th is in darkness. The bulk of the work on the 8th March concentrated on the last two groups due to time constraints.

The engravings are quite complicated in Group 3, and to a lesser extent Group 2. Group 3 also has the densest group of markings. This could be related to the fact they are at the approximate limit of daylight penetration into the cave. Group 1 consists of a few marks and Group 4 are less dense but probably more significant as will be detailed below.

The initial descriptions I have used were the ones that struck me as I was investigating. They may not be the best terms and better descriptions may emerge in time. As well as photos I have endeavoured to sketch the lines in the rock of some of the engravings. As far as I know this is the first time these marks have been documented and there may well be more to find. There is a dig at the back of the cave leading to some low muddy tubes. It looks like it hasn't been looked at in earnest for a couple of years or so in the time I've made the odd visit to the site. We are concerned here with the part of the cave before the dig as that is where the human activity is.

Recording the Marks

The marks are rather hard to see until you get your eye in. In the wrong light the marks can be almost invisible, and details appear and disappear depending on the angle of the light. Even when you know where they are it can be very hard to find them again, so the locations are marked on the survey for future reference.

The initial set of photos in February were taken with a LED mini-maglite in one hand and a large DSLR in the other, a rather cumbersome set up as I was expecting to take just a few quick record shots of the cave entrance and passage. Better lights and tripods were used in March, with many exposures requiring several seconds for best depth of field.

Photographing these markings is a little tricky. Direct lighting such as on camera flash (or helmet light in the same plane as the eye) means detail is blasted out. Side lighting is needed to bring out the textures. The best light direction whether top, bottom, left or right depends on the engraving, and a diffuse LED light source definitely helps. Also there's a tendency for marks nearer the light source to be over exposed compared to the far side of the frame if not careful, so a little fettling of the light source is required.



Recording the Marks, showing side light and scale.

Scales were used to show the size of the markings (not shown in all photos). Most individual engravings are quite small, usually only a few centimetres across.

Candlelight

To get a flavour of the atmosphere a candle and holder (borrowed from the MCG lounge) was used to illuminate the cave for part of the investigation, as a simulation of what the original carvers were likely to have used and seen. Candlelight does, within reason, provide a good deal of close up illumination and the details of the markings were quite visible when moving the candle around. One can imagine the psyche of the early symbol carver in fear of his very soul engraving protective marks by a guttering candle before retreating to the safety of daylight. Fear is a powerful motivator and the candle light does not penetrate the depths of the cave where the evils spirits were believed to dwell.

The more mega pixels the better when analysing the photos as you can then zoom right in on screen to see the fine detail. Large prints and tracings were made of some of the photos, which were then scanned to get an image of the drawing. Many of the images in this article were cropped from larger pictures for clarity.

Human Factors

First of all we need to carefully distinguish between natural and man made phenomena. For example, quite often in cave or other photos you'll be able to see what looks like a face in the rock if you look hard enough. It isn't a face, it is an example of pareidolia, that is the perception of seeing (or hearing) things that aren't really there, such as the face of Elvis on a piece of toast, or the 'face on mars' picture, they're just features our brains are interpreting to resemble a human face or that of an animal (See photo top page 6).

Certainly in caves such as Altamira in Spain ancient humans have embellished such features by painting eyes etc. to form images of buffalos and other animals. Unfortunately nothing like that has been found in the UK. (Marks and art are recorded in Aveline's Hole and Creswell Crags in Derbyshire, but are unrelated to what we are discussing here. They are mentioned (with references below) for completeness and so as not to confuse cave art or neolithic scratchings with RPMs).

Natural erosion of the limestone has to be considered. In Nancy Camel's there are numerous examples of cracks and grooves in the rock as a result of erosion, especially near the entrance and in the surrounding area. Erosion of the limestone outside the cave is likely to be responsible for the real Devil's cart tracks suggested in the legend. The internal marks we are concerned with here are clearly man made as they are too regular in design, and of course the carved initials are extremely obvious. Unfortunately a set that says 'NC' has not been observed. One person's random scratches is another person's ritual figure.



Left: Pareidolia example (Grands Causses, France) Is there really a face in the rock?

Another example of auditory pareidolia is interpretation of sounds in a cave. I'm sure we've all been sat alone in the dark and thought we heard faint voices or the sound of water that isn't really there. Go back two hundred years or so to more uncertain times and it is easy to understand how this psychological phenomenon could link to superstition and therefore the perceived presence of malevolent spirits and the need to defend oneself. It must be remembered that we are not talking about rational and well informed people in the modern sense.

Adding to the atmosphere is the presence of fauna. Towards the rear of the cave Lesser Horseshoe bats have been seen and spiders are also in residence. The example here is by the Group 2 markings.

Right: Cave Spider – Tegenaria spp.



It is highly likely that the engravings were made at different times by different hands. The question is how many hands and over what time period. Clearly the number of initials carved indicates regular visits. It is hard to say over what time period but if any faith is attributed to the legends it could well be over three hundred years.

Some initials may therefore record those brave enough to face the witch's lair and return to tell the tale, and marking the cave with initials to prove their prowess to doubters. A strange sort of stone visitor's book. The more deeply incised initials would seem to be a record of the visit rather than a 'mark and flee' rapid symbolic inscription of someone more concerned with evil spirits.

The general assumption is that all witches are evil. A person may be alienated by society for being different and allegedly thought have supernatural powers, but that would not necessarily make them evil, nor would they actually have such powers. So, although it is somewhat speculative it is not beyond reason that Nancy could well have made some of the marks herself. After all it was allegedly a place of dwelling.

Of course much of this is conjecture and is suggested as a possibility of the motivation behind some of the inscriptions.

Who made the marks and what do they mean?

That is very simple question to ask and the most difficult to answer. The best I can do here is describe the markings and offer some possibilities and speculative suggestions (which may or may not be wide of the mark) and note which ones are the best candidates for Ritual Protection Marks (RPMs).

Graffiti is present in a lot of caves across the UK and indeed the world. What makes certain types different is the meaning they may have compared with general graffiti, such as initials or recent random vandalism.

The idea of the exercise here is to identify which ones could be RPMs or apotropaics as opposed to all the other marks.

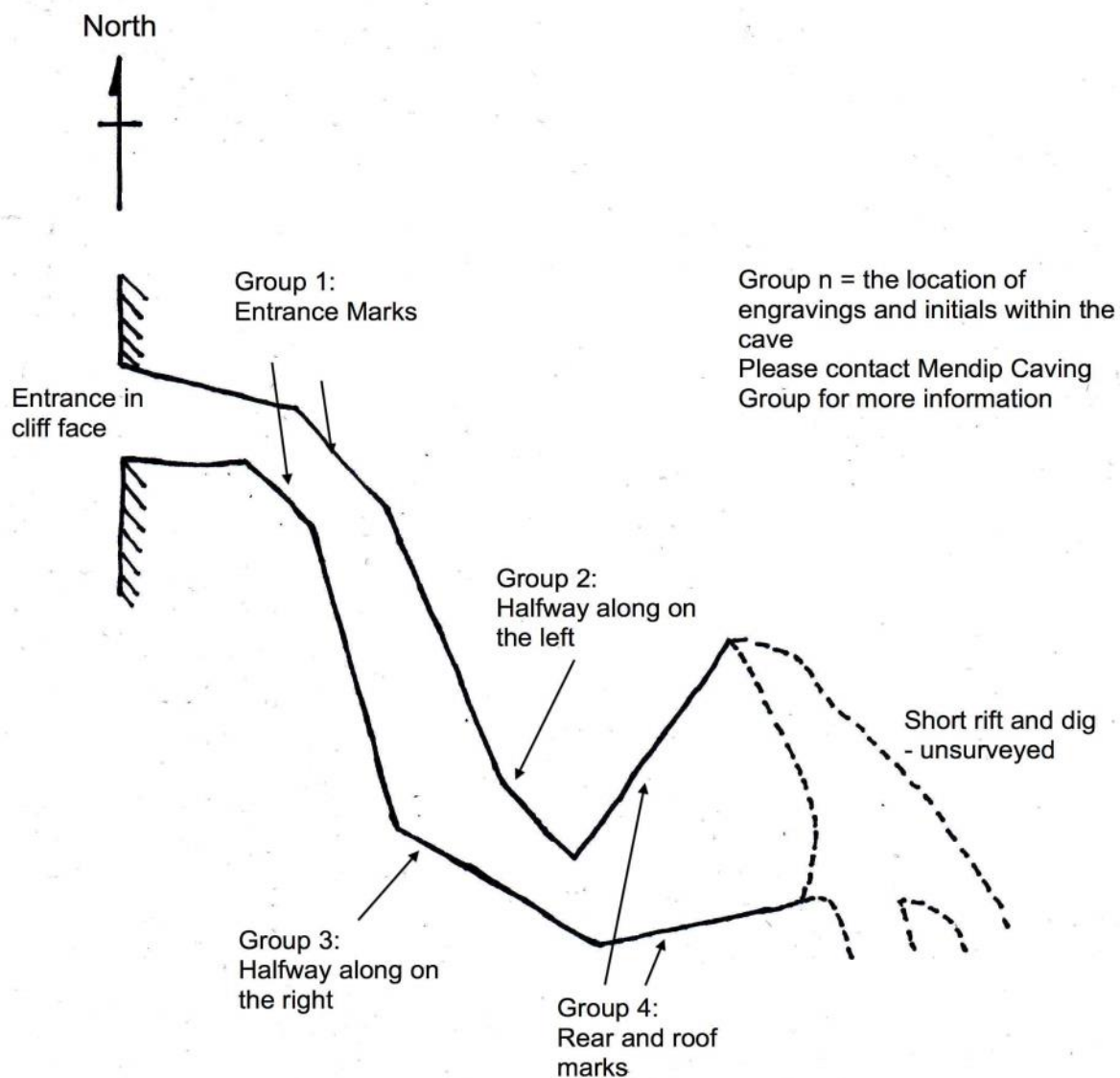
Some may have been made to serve another, unknown purpose. Older religions still permeate the British Isles (for example Pagan and Wiccan rituals are still widely undertaken in many parts of the UK) and some may be related to these, either now or in the past, either for some obscure practical purpose or as a bit of joke by more delinquent types. Perhaps the large amount of scratches in the centre of the cave (Group 3) are nothing more than a form of decoration – a pseudo artistic outlet of the haphazard thoughts of an inhabitant or random travellers; or maybe a way to idle away time. A future task is to look at the other Group 3 markings in more detail, and some may well have been over written on top of others, and there is a chance, albeit a small one, that more light can be shed here on the history.

Given that the cave has been open for at least several hundred years (assuming credence of the Nancy Camel legends as mentioned above) with relatively easy access there would have been plenty of opportunity for persons to have made the marks over a considerable period of time and for many reasons.

The actual age is much harder to discern, so far no inscribed dates have been observed either on their own or in association with initials. The patination of some of the marks does give an impression of some age.

Nancy Camel's Hole

Darshill, Shepton Mallet
Grid Ref: ST 6015 4417
WGS84: 51.19535, -2.57167



1 metre

BCRA Grade 3b
Surveyed & drawn by C. Allison, March and April 2015
Grid ref & WGS84 data from MCRA archive

If one was carving something why not make it stand out? I suppose the limit here is the efficiency of the tools used, that is stones or metal blades, and the hardness of the limestone. Apart from some of the more deeply incised initials they generally don't look like they have been chiselled out, however, some appear to have had more effort put into them than others. Also scratching rock requires some effort and if people didn't want to be there as mentioned above then hurried scratchings rather than deep engravings may have been their agenda.

On the 8th March trip eight potential RPM marks were recorded as different from the other markings in the groups. All of these were located within the last two groupings (see above and survey). These marks are:

Group 3:

- Marian mark - see photos and drawings.
- W mark, above the Marian mark - see photos and drawings.

Group 4:

- Conjoined V about 3cm wide about 60 cm from floor facing phreatic tube on ceiling on right of cave.
 - Possible 'IB' mark approx. 50cm above (3) - see photos and drawings.
 - Possible Dagaz rune (two triangles with points touching in the middle) about 1.5 m from Group 2.
- An example of a Dagaz rune:



- Less distinct markings, around rock corner from (5).
- Large Dagaz rune in the roof above (6)
- Complex set of symbols near (5) - see photos and drawings.

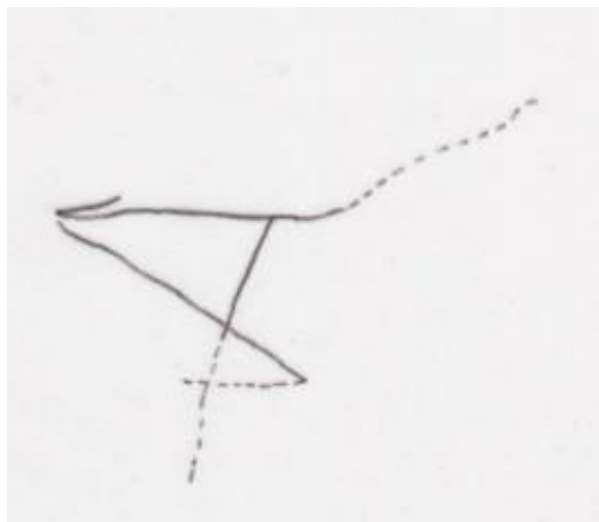
It is postulated that RPMs would, if possible, typically face the direction of perceived threat, for example draughting passages or the dark depths of the cave. The 8 marks identified above meet this criteria which helps set them aside from the general noise of more mundane graffiti. They also have a distinctive design as seen in other locations which adds to the evidence.

Given the variety of styles and positions within the cave it is plausible that the best candidates for RPM marks were also done by different people at different times, perhaps unknown to each other. Given that it is hard to see the marks it is also possible that previous marks could have been missed and so others were added as the cave was considered unprotected by newer visitors.

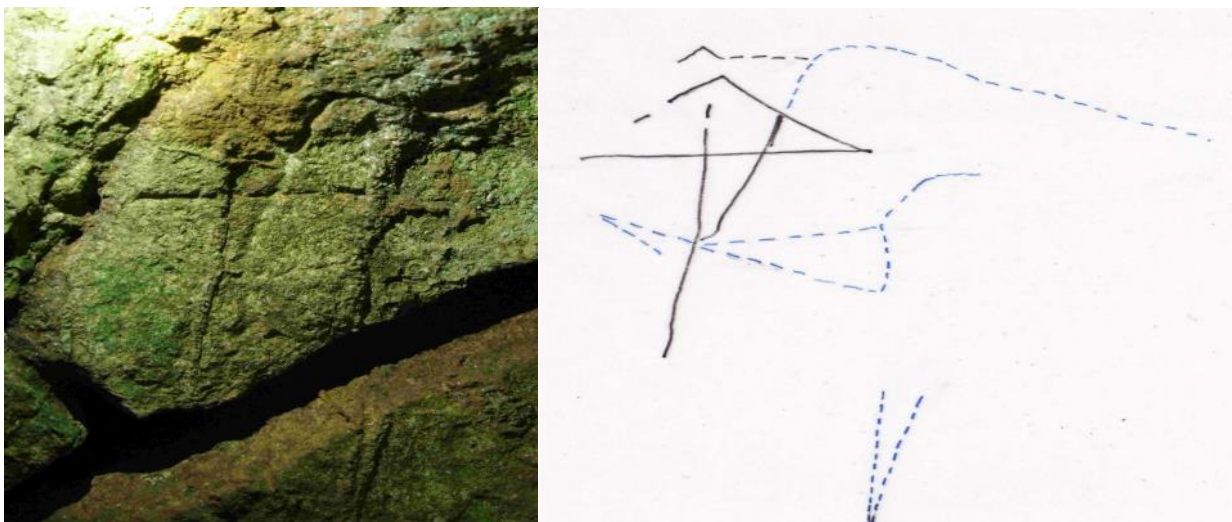
Example Engraving Photos and Drawings:

The images below show the photographs and tracings made of the inscriptions for clarity. The photos have been cropped from larger images to focus on the areas concerned. The Group 1 and 2 images are included for completeness and some of the prime RPM candidates are shown in Groups 3 and 4.

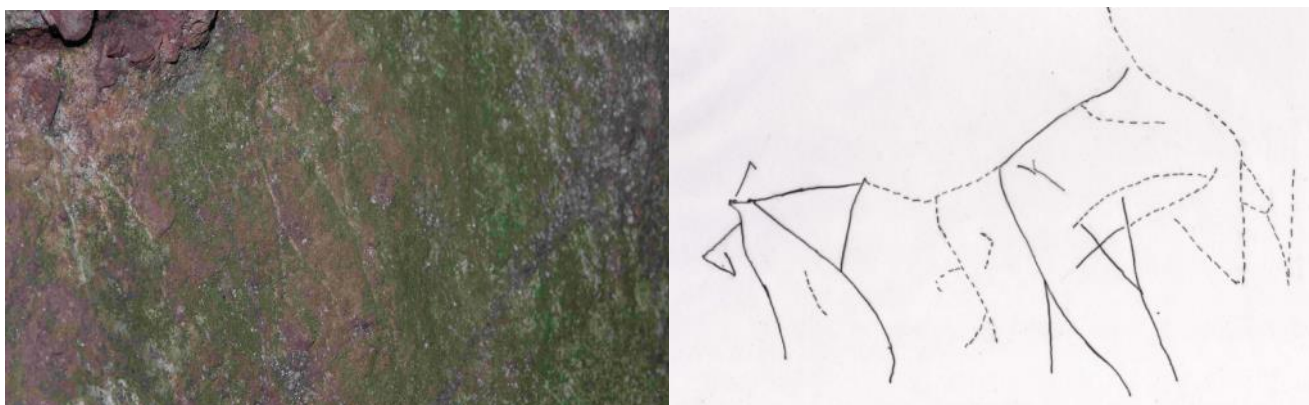
Group 1 Images:



The tail going off to the top right seems to be where the tool slipped, creating the tail.

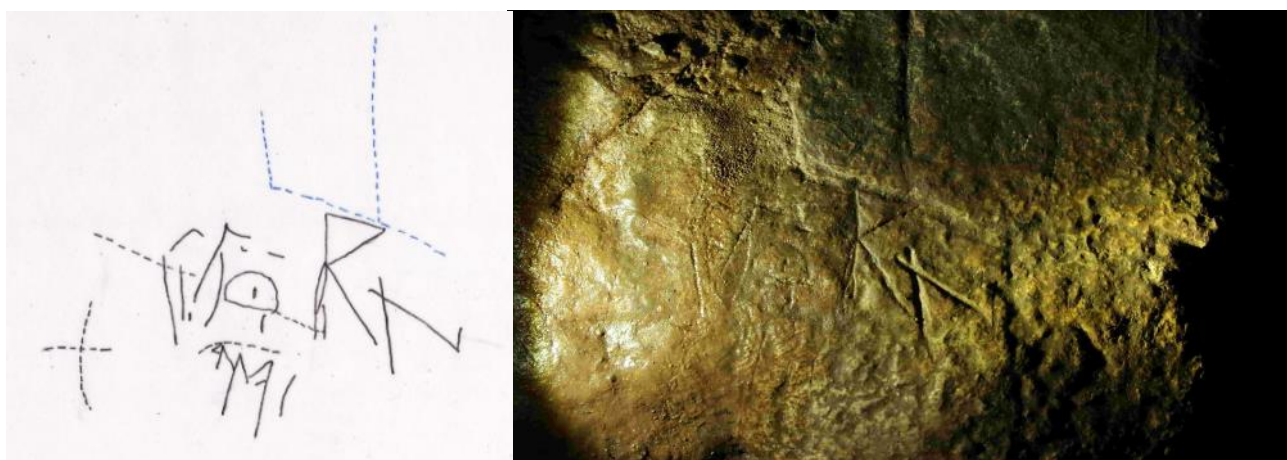


Initially this looked a bit like a pentagram, but now seems to be two overlaid triangles.

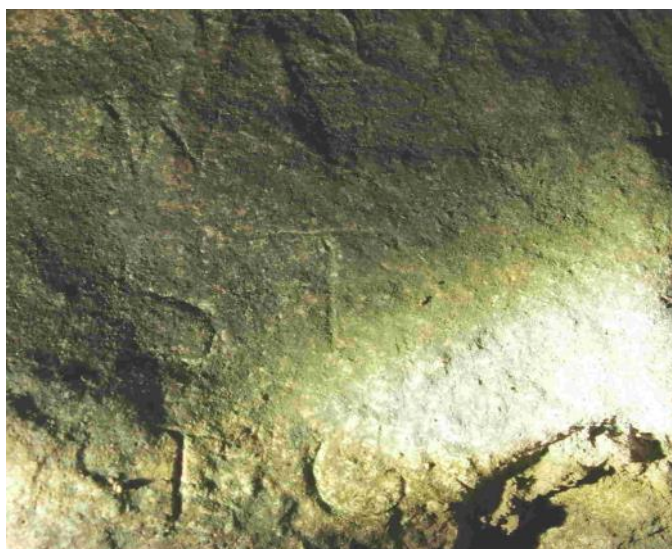


These require further analysis but may be more modern marks as they are close to the entrance and viewable in daylight.

Group 2 Images:

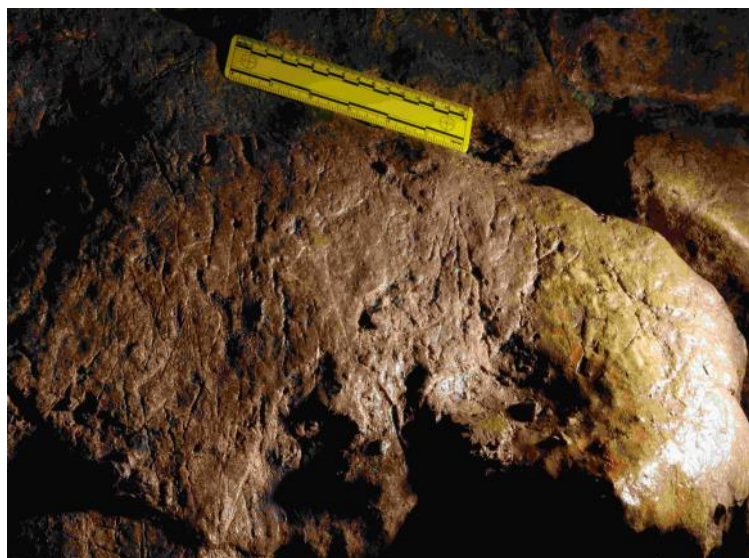


The most obvious mark here is the runic looking R. The eye like mark to the left of the R is unusual in as much that it is circular and not composed of straight lines. The R is more deeply incised than the others in the group and so may have been made at different times or by a different hand.

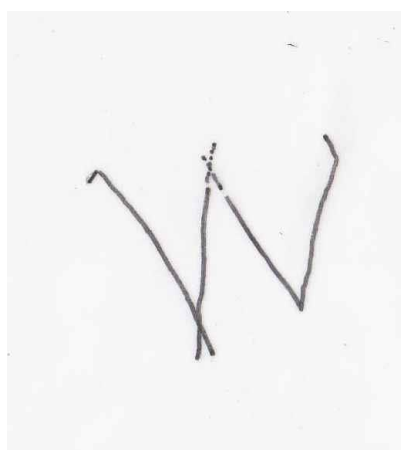


The initials shown here are typical of what may be seen. These are to the right of the marks above on the other side of a nose of rock. The orderliness of this set could suggest they were made at the same time, presumably to commemorate the visit. Space does not permit showing all initials found in the cave. There are many more sets of initials in the Group 3 section of the cave.

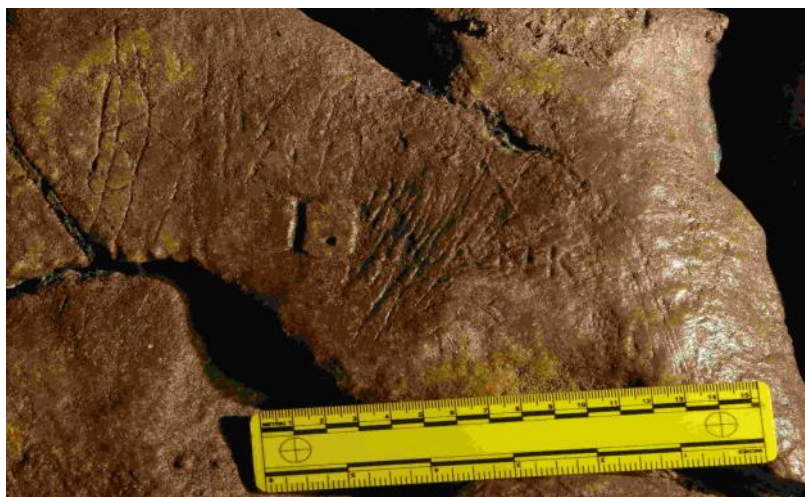
Group 3 Images:



This shows an example of the jumble of marks in group three. Space does not permit printing of all the photos here. Below the right hand edge of the scale is a triangular shaped mark that may be a Marian mark RPM. (Mark 1 in the list above) The drawing to the right is of just this mark for clarity. Next to the Marian mark is what looks like a W but is in fact part of a set of initials 'HW'.

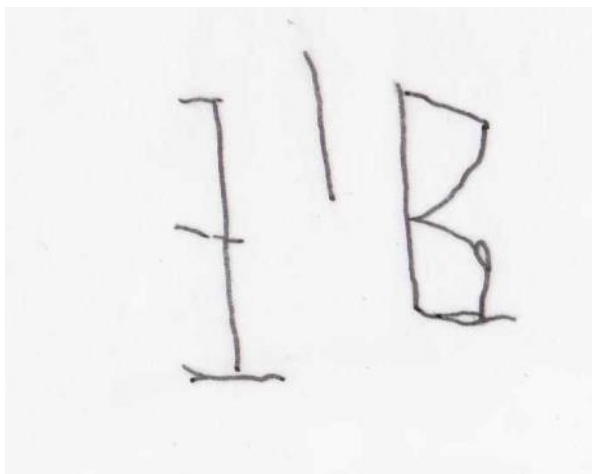


An example of conjoined V's (Mark 2 in the list above). This is one of the highest marks in this part of the cave facing towards the rear and is on its own away from other marks.

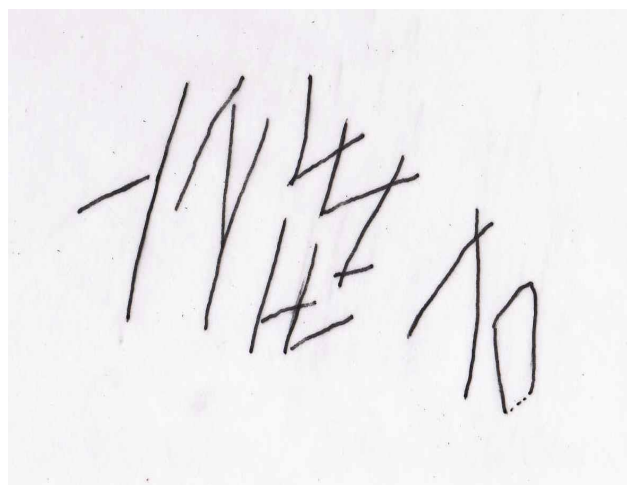


Another example of the complexity of markings found in Group 3. Most of these are random markings or initials and do not seem to fit the criteria for RPMs.

Group 4 Images:



This is one of the more significant marks (Mark 4 in the list above). The line through the centre of the I distinguishes it from a normal set of initials and is thought to refer to latin quotations to repel and protect. Other sets of initials found in other places in a similar style are IA, and ID. This is on the right of the cave high up near the dig area.



Here is a group of conjoined Vs and other marks (Mark 8 in the list above). These are on their own at the back of the cave on the left.

Next Steps:

There is clearly more to do here, and further visits are required. The other marks need looking at in further detail, in particular the rather crowded Group 3 on the right, at the limit of daylight. Also, the more spaced out markings in Group 4, require further photographs to check if anything has been missed. This would form part of an update article.

More corroboration of the existing set of marks is required to increase and / or confirm the consensus that some or all of the 8 main marks are indeed RPMs, and if there are any others.

Answers to some of the speculative questions, conjectures and theories outlined in this note are desirable. However, the real truth may have been lost over the centuries so absolutes could remain rather elusive.

Is the cave still guarded, either by the ghost of Nancy or warding powers of Apotropaics? Well that depends either on what you believe or what you know.

As a footnote at the March 2015 MCG Member's meeting following discussion of what we'd observed Geoff Beale and Ed Waters commented on seeing some interesting markings in Emmer Green Chalk Mine near Reading that bear a resemblance to some of the markings found here.

Marks have also been found in buildings and churches: a recent BBC website article <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-31459761> talks about people writing about the plague on a church wall, but there is a certain similarity to RPM's in the images underlying the writing.

References:

MCRA Website URL <http://www.mcra.org.uk/registry/sitedetails.php?id=1373>

Mendip the Complete Caves and a view of the Hills by Nicholas Barrington and William Stanton, 1977, p 116

Mendip Underground A Caver's Guide by Alan Gray, Rob Taviner and Richard Witcombe 2013, p 435

The Story of Croscombe by Keith Armstrong (2nd edition 2007, pp.111-2)

RITUAL PROTECTION MARKS IN WOKEY HOLE AND LONG HOLE, SOMERSET by C.J. BINDING and L.J. WILSON Proc. Univ. Bristol Spelaeol. Soc., 2010, 25 (1), 47-73

RITUAL PROTECTION MARKS IN GOATCHURCH CAVERN, BURREINGTON COMBE, NORTH SOMERSET by C.J. BINDING and L.J. WILSON Proc. Univ. Bristol Spelaeol. Soc., 2004, 23 (2), 119-133

A POSSIBLE MESOLITHIC ENGRAVING IN AVELINE'S HOLE, BURREINGTON COMBE, NORTH SOMERSET by G.J. MULLAN and L.J. WILSON Proc. Univ. Bristol. Spelaeol. Soc., 2004, 23 (2), 75-85

The Cave Painters by Gregory Curtis 2006

The Mind in the Cave by David Lewis-Williams 2002



Bone Hole: Happy New Year

By Tom Harrison, photography by Andrew Horeckyj

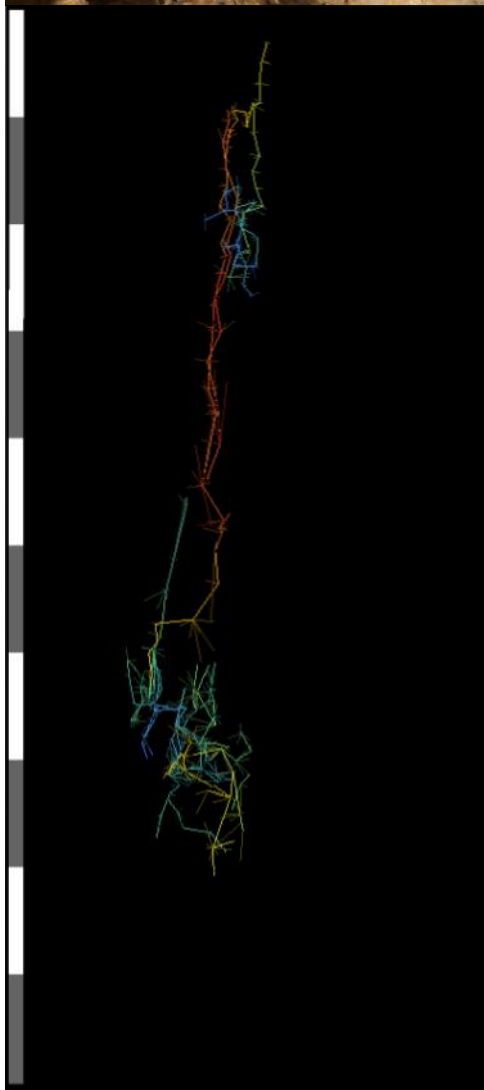
In the last edition of MCG News, Tim Francis reported on a significant breakthrough in Bone Hole, named Happy New Year. Since then Tim and Ben Cooper have returned to survey the new findings, another digging trip has pushed 2 of the leads and a photography trip in April was undertaken to record the extensions to the cave.

The surveying trip was undertaken by Ben and Tim in January. The centerline survey has been added to the existing Bone Hole data and can be seen in plan on the left. The new extensions are at the very bottom right of the drawing. As can be seen, the centerline survey shows the complex nature of the cave. The new survey is being drawn and will be published shortly and should give more clarity

to those unfamiliar with the cave. The survey confirmed the newly found part of the cave to be at furthest parts South and East of the previously discovered cave and drafts were noticed at several points.

At the February Members weekend, a party of diggers, Mike Moxon, Mike Richardson, Brian and myself, returned to the extension to pursue a couple of leads suggested by Tim and Ben from the digging trip.

A poke in the more southerly chamber against the eastern wall gave a hint of a way on in the floor, but it was Mike Moxon in the northerly chamber who had the most success with a few metres of depth into an area which looks like it would be worth pushing.





During the March member's weekend, Andrew Horeckyj and I took the chance to get some photographs taken of the new parts of Bone Hole. Andy used his Fuji X100s Camera to take these fabulous shots. The photo on the previous page were taken in the more northerly of the 2 Chambers.

Those on this page were taken in the southerly chamber which appears to get very close to the surface, from the roots, flies and bones observed. The 2 chambers are really just one collapsed rift with collapse down the western side and at the northern end. The chambers are connected by passing under a large boulder.

In the 2 pictures of Andrew you can get some idea of the nature of the new finds, with 1 solid wall on the eastern side and collapse fill running down towards this wall. There is more cave at the top of this collapse a few metres above this area.

The photo of myself at the bottom of the page is at the very southern limit of the new finds and the known cave.





These 2 photos were taken in the more northerly area of Happy New Year.





Attborough Swallet

Report and photography by Andrew Horeckyj





Brian Snell, Ed Waters, Andrew Horecky

The Sunday morning of the February members' weekend was a quiet and small group affair, as might be expected in the depths of winter. Perhaps it was the bright sunlight that prompted us to think about poking around in a cave – whatever it was – the Mendip Underground was opened at the front and there, first on the list, was **Attborough**.

It had a number of things going for it: none of us had been there before, it wasn't very far away and it involved very little walking from the car. It was also geologically interesting, being a cave in the dolomite conglomerate formation. The survey was pretty simple- from the book, so getting lost wasn't really an option which was just as well since we didn't take one along for the ride.

A clamber down through the relatively roomy rift and stream passage at the bottom of the entrance pipe gave swift access to a roomy chamber **Cotham Hall**, [see the image of Ed Waters above], from which a couple of dug passages had been extended. The upper one **Nasty Nasty** became quite tight and uninviting after a few yards - to a first glance, but in reality was supposed to go on for a bit and give access to another large-ish chamber, **Mud Hall**...but we didn't get there.

The lower route gave access via a short low crawl **Twist and Shout** [see the image of Brian on the previous page] and drop-through to a not particularly active looking dig in a quite gnarly and tight rift, that had a small stream running at the bottom. [See the image of Ed and Brian, bottom right, previous page]. The main chamber gave the opportunity to get a few atmospheric frames in a cave that was more red-brown than grey. [see the image at the top of the previous page]. The most awkward part proved to be the entrance pipe, which has rungs welded-in at too great a spacing to be useful for anyone approaching 6ft tall. Long leg bones don't let you step from one to the other, so you just end-up hauling yourself out with a series of pull-ups on the rungs. [See the image on the back page].



WHITE PIT

Report and photography by Andrew Horeckyj

Mike Moxon, Andrew Horeckyj.

After our return from Attborough and with the congregation rapidly dispersing from the cottage after lunch I was anticipating a quiet afternoon, when Mike Moxon arrived as we scanned through the pictures that we'd snapped that morning.

"If you're not doing anything then why don't we have a look at White Pit – and bring your camera cos there's plenty of pretty bits," he suggested. Well, he wasn't wrong on that front. We kept to the obvious route down to the Talus IV passage and then played around with the camera and flashguns to try to capture the beautifully clean formations on the wall across the taped area, as well as the straws between the beds down towards the dig end. There's always a bit of playing around required when you are guessing at flash exposures and positioning, but I think the shots show what the passage has to display.





Mike, Estelle Sandford from the BEC and James Begley from the SMCC have been digging in White Pit in recent months.

Mike reports the current dig as, "going slowly through the mud, with bad air often holding things up. Things improved slightly last week with the clearing of the muddy puddle at the end and being able to see a small passage continuing beyond, although it's not big enough for any of us!"



AGM WEEKEND

By Jeremy Gilson with photography by Tom Harrison

This years AGM was held on Saturday 18th April in the Long Room of the Hunters and was chaired by Jeremy Gilson. The meeting went well with positive input from all concerned; topics included investing further funds, the purchase of a new computer, replacing tackle and voting in the committee and non committee posts for the year ahead.

The meeting was followed by an excellent Annual Dinner at The Isle of Wedmore Golf Club, the event was well attended and enjoyed by all. The food was excellent as was our speaker Ed Waters who gave a talk on Lava Tubes. Tim Francis won the digging award for leading the 2 trip breakthrough into Happy New Year. Dave Ball won Ed's award for most caving trips recorded in the logbook. A massive thank you to Karen Fendley for organising the evening which was a great success.



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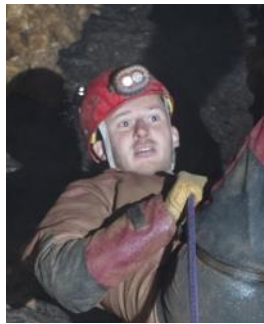
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COTTAGE WORK

A busy couple of weekends for the new Cottage Warden Keith with Chimney problems and the re-installation of the MCG Brass plaques. Keith Reports:

"Friday night before the AGM Roy fired up the wood stove. Loads of smoke but little fire, then bits of burning twig fell down the back of the stove pipe. Roy managed to put out the stove and the chimney fire. We arrived just after to find the cottage full of wood smoke. Subsequent investigations Saturday morning discovered the wire mesh on the chimney pot to have been dislodged.

Saturday after the AGM Biff threw a rope over the roof, got kitted up and climbed the roof. He discovered a bird nest in the chimney pot which he removed. The stove was taken out and a load of burnt twigs and other debris remove from the plate above the stove and the stove pipe. Brian re attached the mesh over the chimney pot, with steel wire supplied by Biff. (The pipe up the chimney makes a great voice tube) Biff also did some gutter cleaning over the dormer windows as he was up there. Fire lit all OK."

At the May Member's weekend Keith and Brian were able to get the two brass plaques [*photo by Charlie Allison shown right*] onto the door. For those member's that don't know, the rectangular one was made by Pete Goddard and the shield-shaped one was made and presented to us by the builder who built Nordrach Cottage 'Mark 2'. (This is the cottage that was built to replace 'Mark 1' which exploded on New Year's Eve 1979).



CLUB NOTICES

Roy and Fiona Kempston have volunteered for the role of Accounts Examiners for many years and this year they are handing the role over to Sue Fennell. It is an onerous task and takes many hours of close examination of the accounts. The committee would like to acknowledge their sterling effort over the years and send a very big thank you for all their efforts.

Many thanks from the Committee 2015-16

The MCG constitution states that **any member who fails to pay their subscription by January 31st may be required to re-apply for membership when paying late.** As late payments cause a significant administration burden to the Treasurer and the Secretary, who have to arrange for multiple updates to BCA insurance details and deliveries of BCA cards. It also potentially causes issues with the Group's BCA insurance coverage if there is any ambiguity over who is, or is not, a member at any particular time, since every member needs to have BCA insurance for the Group's activities to be covered. The committee has therefore decided that this rule will in future be strictly enforced, so if you fail to pay your subs between the reminder in November and the 31st January, your membership will lapse and access to the cottage blocked. If you wish to rejoin the group, you will then need to submit an application form to the committee (along with the due subs) and follow the same procedure as new members prior to regaining access to group facilities. Though this may seem heavy handed, many members currently fail to renew their subs on time and this really is causing a lot of problems for our hard working Treasurer and Secretary. The easiest thing to do is to pay as soon as you receive your reminder, after all, MCG subs are incredibly good value! In the case of any member who has genuine problems paying the subs, please contact a committee member prior to January 31st, well before your membership lapses, as we may be able to find a way to help you out. As always any member of the committee will be very happy to answer any issues you may have with Group membership.

MCG Committee 2015/16

COMING UP

Our new Caving Secretary; Jeremy and Social Secretary Hayley with Ed's assistance have been busy filling up the calendar with events and trips for the next few months. If you can offer to lead or organise a trip in the coming months then please let Jeremy know. Likewise as Ed says below; help and assistance in organising the social side of the MCG is always welcome. Trip places fill up quick so contact the organiser early, and if a trip is full, it may still be worth an email for a place on a reserve list.

"All social events are on the Saturday night of members weekends unless otherwise stated. Further details of each event will be released closer to the date, so keep your eyes peeled on the Yahoo Group. The Social Secretary will always be delighted to hear from anyone who wishes to help out in organising any event, or who has suggestions for future events. It will help organisation considerably if you can indicate to the social secretary if you will be attending any of these events (or you might just go hungry)."

Date	Event	Location	Contact/ No. of Beds Booked
10th May	Lost World CC	Cottage Guest Group	3 Beds
3rd / 4th June	S Devon Steiner School	Cottage Guest Group	30+ Beds
5th / 6th / 7th June	Member's Weekend	Nordrach	See Yahoo! Group
6th June	Stoke Lane Slocker		Dave Ball tackle@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
6th June	Reservoir Hole		Jeremy Gilson caving@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
6th June	French Night *	Nordrach	Ed & Hayley social@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
20th June	Thrupe Lane Swallet		Henry Davies-Ball henrydaviesball@yahoo.co.uk
3rd / 4th / 5th July	Member's Weekend	Nordrach	See Yahoo! Group
4th July	Rhino Rift		Chris Binding adventurecaving@gmail.com
4th July	MCG BBQ & Disco *	Nordrach	Ed & Hayley social@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
7th / 8th / 9th August	Member's Weekend	Nordrach	See Yahoo! Group
8th August	Cheddar Chips *	Cheddar Gorge	Ed & Hayley social@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
28th / 29th / 30th August	East Pennine Outdoor Club	Cottage Guest Group	15 Beds

***June:**

French Night. Cheese & Wine party with French food. Petanque tournament. Berets, stripy T shirts and moustaches are de riger.

July:

Summer barbeque and disco. Fancy dress and music theme of James Bond. Dress up as your favourite villain, bond girl or even as Q and groove the night away to Birley Shassey...

August:

Cheddar chips, caves and booze night. Fish & Chips in Cheddar, followed by evening visit to Long Hole, Great Oone's Hole and Gough's Old Cave. Apres Caving in one of the pubs in Cheddar. The number of places on the cave trip will be limited to 20 people,

The MCG's Yahoo! Newsgroup can be found at:
<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/mendip-caving-group/>

LIBRARY ADDITIONS

By Joan Goddard

Mendip Country by Jillian Powell and Julia Davey, *Bosssiney Books, 1987*. Not a caving book as such but describes places of interest, villages, local crafts and industries - easy reading.

Man and the Mendips edited by W.G. Hall, *The Mendip Society, 1971*. Another general study of Mendip, quite old now but still relevant in parts. (This book replaces one which seems to have gone missing from the library – does anyone have the original copy?). A new edition is in preparation by the Mendip Society to commemorate their 50th anniversary this year. (Both these books donated by Mike M. Thanks!)

The Mendips (West Country Landscapes) by Robin and Romey Williams, *Ex Libris Press, 1996*. A good general introduction to Mendip. Brian Prewer is interviewed and provides a short resumé of caving on Mendip (donated)

South Crofty Underground by P.R. Deakin, J.A. Buckley and K.T. Rickstins, *Penhellick Publications, 1995* (Donated)

Thanks, too, to Charlie who is currently updating the **DVD collection** in the library.

Editor: The following newsletter's have also been received : The Craven Pothole Club Record Jan and April 2015, Cave Radio and Electronics Group Journal Mar 2015, Descent 243 Apr/May 2015 (**look out for Tim Francis' Bone Hole piece and a review of MCG News 376 in the Club Publications section!**), Mendip Nature Research Committee Easter 2015, Mendip Times April 2015, Red Rose and Combined Services Caving Association August 2014. Shropshire Caving Spring 2015 and Subterranea Britannica April 2015. All available in the library.

STOP PRESS : The Wessex Caving Club's magazines has arrived, worth a read as it contains a survey and details of the latest big breakthrough at Home Close Hole.

MUSELETTER

Following on from Charlie Allison's version of The Pogues hit, 'A fairytale of New York' in MCG News 376, Ian McKechnie got in touch with me with a different musical theme. Ian takes up the story;

"This is what you might loosely describe as a new concept in Newsletter production; a newsletter article set to music.

In July 1981, Prince Charles married Lady Diana Spencer, and although the marriage turned out not to be quite the success we might have hoped for, at the time it meant for us an extra day's holiday from work, and therefore an opportunity for a longer than usual weekend of caving. One of the trips we did that weekend in Yorkshire made such a profound impression on me at the time that I was inspired to write a report of the trip in an unusual format, and when it was published in the MCG Newsletter, it comprised most of the content of Newsletter 144 in September 1981.

Fast forward now to Christmas 2014, we've had a family dinner with plenty of wine and some singing, and somehow the suggestion came up that we set my epic trip report to music. My initial attempt was rather monotonous, but my brother Neil took it away and came back with a draft version.

After a little editing, I am pleased to present the latest version of the Gaping Ghyll story, arranged and performed by my brother Neil McKechnie. Please note Neil's caveat that the file size has had to be reduced, for it to be sent for use in the newsletter, and my own plea of sanity on the grounds that the original words were only ever intended as a quick trip report for the Newsletter, rattled out in one evening of inspiration (or maybe it was desperation!)."

To listen;

For those reading the electronic edition of the newsletter with an active internet connection click on the musical notes to the right.

For those reading the printed edition goto:

<https://soundcloud.com/tomsouthcoast/ballad-of-the-royal-wedding-2-the-gaping-ghyll-story>





Dan-yr-Ogof

Report by Jeremy Gilson,
Photography by
Andrew Horeckyj and Jeremy

Jeremy Gilson, Debbie Lambert and Andrew Horeckyj

DYO has been my favourite cave since my first visit almost twenty-five years ago, the cave offers great variety with amazing passages, stunning formations and a variety of fun obstacles like the Long Crawl, Green Canal, Camel and Abyss.



Andy, Debbie and I arrived at the showcaves on Easter Sunday with the first of the tourists, families eager to explore the caves and enjoy the dinosaur Park and Shire Horse Center. After a visit to the café we changed and paperwork in hand made our way to the cave where one of the staff beckoned us through the turnstile, its always nice to in without having to pay!

Beyond the showcave we noticed some changes, the first of these was a deep layer of sand in Lake One which covered my usual marker stone and was in the region of 45cm deep, this made the water level look high and for few minutes I was concerned that we wouldn't get in. The second change was a new steel barrier installed by the showcave company with an open access door in the centre. Next to this was warning notice stating that should a second entrance be found then the showcaves would have no option but to lock the doorway to prevent access for insurance reasons. This was very sad, I love this trip and it would be a bad day for caving if the show cave route into the cave was closed and access denied.

Trying to put this behind us were soon wading out into the lakes and shoulder deep in cold lake water... well shoulder deep for me, Debbie was less fortunate and was having to hold on to the side and swim along to make progress. The water levels were high and the cascades beyond the lakes were fast flowing, we carefully made our way up, pushing against the fast flowing current.

Beyond the lakes we were into the cave and made our way without event to the long crawl. I had been filming our trip with my new GoPro and was determined to film the crawl, this all went well and I was pleased with the footage although crawling with one arm held out in front of me with a selfie stick didn't make progress easy.

From the Long Crawl we did the usual round trip starting with a visit to Flabbergasm Passage. New loops have been installed on the traverse to help prevent feet touching the water.



Andy and I took pictures with Andy's photo kit although the hardest part was resisting the many hundreds of photo opportunities that presented themselves on the trip.

The remainder of the round trip went without incident, as is often the case most of the buoyancy aids were at the far end of the Green Canal so I went down to fetch some. I thought it would be easy bringing four extra rubber rings back with me but it must have looked like a scene from a comedy sketch, sadly not caught on GoPro.

The pictures we took were very pleasing, it would have been good to have taken some at the Abyss, a note for next time and I was particularly pleased with the ones we took of the Bakerloo Straight, one of which is shown on the cover.

Dan yr Ogof is an amazing cave, lets just hope that caving politics and access restrictions don't prevent what for me is my favourite caving trip.



STAINSBY'S SHAFT



This impressive aerial shot of Stainsby's Shaft was taken by Nigel Cox during a photography mission organised by Chris Binding.

Nigel's home built hexocopter can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7Am39APdrQ> or by finding "Chrispy B" on Youtube. Film of Leamaneh Castle taken by Nigel from this impressive piece of kit can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sphCwoy9br8> or by finding "TheNigelCox" on Youtube.

In the centre right of this still of Stainsby's shaft is the lighter metallised fencing surrounding the entrance with the MCG installed grill inside protecting the 10m drop.

The shaft was dug out to connect to the Chamber dug into from Blackmoor Swallet, and was named Blackmoor Shaft until Stanton and Clarke identified this as one of the Cornish Shaft's of the Mendip Hills Mining Company. The feature shown faintly south of the shaft is a hollow on the ground. Is this evidence of the mineral lode heading south or to do with the excavation and spoil haulage?

Following on from the piece about the Mendip Hills Mining Company (MHMC) and Stainsby's shaft (MCG News 376) I thought I'd write a little about the latest in a long history of MCG digs at the site. Biff Frith, Keith Knight, Bill Chadwick and myself have (so far) been the diggers. Andrew Horecky joined me at the April member's weekend to take some photos in the mine/cave.

It has been a few years since the last team of MCG diggers worked here and their efforts focused primarily in deepening what is almost certainly the main Cornish Shaft. Evidence of the mining can be seen in this area with 3 large timbers which are likely to have been used across the width between the hanging and foot walls. Only 1 of these timbers remains in the position the miners placed it in, albeit having slipped out of its socket. The photo below shows Andy sitting in what is believed to be the main shaft. Below right is the still (almost) in position timber, beneath my right boot.

Another similar sized timber sits a few metres below this one and can be seen through the jumble of rocks to the south in this shaft. More importantly this 2nd timber is at approximately the 18 fathom level based on measurements taken from Alan Gray's survey data. I plan to confirm this with more accuracy in the next few months by resurveying the shaft.

As many of the previous diggers will attest, what we believe to be the continuation of the Cornish Shaft, is a very difficult dig. The mining journal reports state that a Swallet was used by the MHMC as a drain for the waste, thick black gritty mud produced as the MHMC ground up and reworked the high lead content slag, that previous generations didn't have the technology to get all of the metals out of. This is found washed in, in layers throughout the cave staining your oversuit and everything else as you dig. Precarious boulders hang menacingly around you in much of the promising dig areas. Although, the main shaft dig is potentially above a very long drop and perhaps not so blocked further down, we are currently digging elsewhere.



It is difficult to be certain with previous caver's work but it appears that the side shaft that is used to gain entry to the main shaft, is in 'Old men's workings,' It is in this side shaft that we are currently digging. This could be an area where pre MHMC miner's worked the lode of ore south and north at the depths that their less sophisticated technology allowed them to. Capt. Harpur of the MHMC reported finding old men's workings to a depth of 20 fathoms, so I would speculate that this area is honeycombed with workings.



The primary dig is just off this laddered shaft; heading south. A tube is being created in an attempt to get over the top of the slimes. It is hoped that heading south and gaining depth we will break into the 18 fathom level and a clear run to the natural chamber found in 1845.

A 2nd smaller scale dig is at the bottom of this side shaft with the same objective. Within 5m, I believe that this shaft should be at a depth contemporary with the 18 fathom level workings. This dig is shown in the photo left.

Anyone who wants to know more or even to assist with this potentially historically and geologically interesting dig then please speak to Biff Frith or myself.

1902 TRIP REPORT

And the lost cave of Charterhouse by Tom Harrison

The British Newspaper Archive, in partnership with the British Library is an excellent online resource for research. Mike Moxon suggested that it might be useful site to take a look at and I paid the subscription to look up some Mendip mining information. Whilst searching I found this interesting article from the Western Daily Press of November 27th 1902.

A party of explorers were visiting Cheddar and Burrington. They first visited Gough's cave, quoted as being the biggest cave in the area in 1902, and inside visited 'several pot holes, which had never been descended into', as well as climbing a 'huge shaft, sloping into the heart of the hill,'

Some beautiful descriptions such as 'stalactitic incrustations, profound abyss and fantastic incrustation', are used by the writer to describe the cave. I might re-use some of those myself in future!

Other caverns in Cheddar visited by the party were Gough's Old Cavern, Cox's Cavern, the Roman Cave (Long Hole) as well as some unnamed others.

They then spent a day at Burrington. Here they visited Goatchurch, with 'the vestibule of the cavern lighted up with acetylene lamps.' Their exploration further into "the Goatchurch" was partly in an attempt to connect it with other adjacent caverns. (And still today cavers are attempting to link the Burrington caves!)

The party appeared to have reached just beyond the water chamber. After describing how much of a maze Goatchurch is, they talk about briefly visiting the lower part of Burrington Gorge and how one of the cave mouths in the gorge is said to "tunnel for a great distance under the Ham," although blocked when they visited. Aveline's Hole perhaps??

The unknown author of the piece also talks about Plumbley's Hole and describes the death of the labourer let down it 'some years ago, since when tons of rubbish have been flung in.' Two men are described as being let down 80 to 90 feet, showing that it was still more open then than today.

Finally and of most personal interest, is the description of 'a large chasm, formerly known to drain to Cheddar, has now been covered up by refuse from the old lead mines and it's whereabouts been lost sight of'. Is this some evidence for the existence of a Lost Cave of Charterhouse??

Time might well tell!

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Western Daily Press—Thursday 27 November 1902
Image © The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.

(SPECIALLY CONTRIBUTED.)

Some interesting investigations have just been carried out in the caves at Cheddar and Burrington by a small party of explorers, Messrs E. A. Baker, M.A. (of Derby), H. Bamforth (of Holmfirth), J. O. Morland (of Glastonbury), and Dr. Sheldon (of Manchester), who were concerned in the remarkable discoveries recently made in the Derbyshire caverns. They were assisted by the Messrs Gough, of Cheddar, proprietors of the largest cave there, and by the workmen of James Gibson, Esq., J.P., of the Langfords. Most of their time was devoted to Gough's Cave at Cheddar, the largest in this part of England. Several pot holes, which had never been descended into, were explored, in one case a very deep pool being discovered at the bottom. One huge shaft, sloping up into the heart of the hill, was climbed with the aid of Alpine ropes. The top had never even been seen previously. A number of similar shafts of small dimensions were ascended, partly by means of ladders and partly by climbing the rocks, but all of them terminated in grottos of no great size, although the stalactitic incrustations and the cylindrical shafts worked by the percolating water were extremely interesting. At the top of the magnificent vault known as "St. Paul's" two of the explorers penetrated into a series of galleries, and examined a number of possible exits, without, however, discovering any large caverns. An enormous sheet of stalagmity extends across the widest of these galleries, and the display of fantastic incrustation was very beautiful. At a later date, perhaps, a connection may be worked out between this and some important caves beyond; there are many indications of this in the appearance of the place. Between "St. Paul's" and the even finer cave known as "Solomon's Temple" the explorers followed up a rugged passage, heaped up with enormous boulders, until they reached a chain of vaulted chambers that gave access to a profound abyss. There were two ways of reaching the bottom of this deep cavern, which proved, by the aneroid, to be 100 feet below the vaulted chambers just referred to. One was by letting a man down over a sheer cliff by means of the rope; the other was a curiously twisted shaft, probably an ancient pot hole. With the rope ladder attached to a rope, two of the party managed to get down this hole, crawled through a low arch, and found themselves in a lofty chamber, whose floor was strewn with huge masses of rock. They attempted to squeeze through the sole exit at the bottom, but found this impossible without digging away the silted up beds of clay. Their attempts to find an outlet in a slanting funnel, which had evidently once been the channel of a stream, likewise proved ineffectual.

The party were furnished with the most efficient illuminants, including a 2,000 candle-power searchlight, whose beams lit up the grand scenery of the caves in a manner that had never been seen before. Though the results of the exploration were highly interesting, it is hoped that more work will be done in this cave on a future visit.

The Western Daily Press.

BY THE GENERAL POST
IN A NEWSPAPER.

BRISTOL, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1902.

(LARGEST CIRCULATION IN THE
WESTERN COUNTRY.)

10 PAGES

Several other caves were examined at Cheddar, including Gough's Old Cavern, Cox's Cavern, the Roman Cave, and some others farther up the gorge and among the cliffs. The last-named is extensive and well worth a visit. After proceeding two or three furlongs the party scrambled, with great difficulty, up a pile of jammed boulders, and reached a passage that doubled back towards the cliffs. Crawling on their stomachs, they came to a spot quite close to the hill top, as was proved by the gusts of wind that nearly blew out their lights. Many outlets of caves were inspected, and found to be too much blocked with earth and rubble to be accessible at present. One day was spent in exploring the Burrington Caves. The most famous and important of these, the one in which such great discoveries of human and animal remains were made and interesting researches carried out by Mr Boyd Dawkins, is the Goatchurch Cavern, on the slopes of Black Down. It is situated on land belonging to Mr Gibson, who lent the party generous assistance. Quite recently he has had the vestibule of the cavern lighted up with acetylene lamps, and placed it in the custody of a guide. Led by Mr Gibson and his men, the party descended into the maze of passages branching off from the vestibule, and then, pushing on, endeavoured to find a gallery, or pot-hole, connecting the Goatchurch with the other adjacent caverns. Although they explored a multitude of fissures, pot-holes, and tunnels, and got to the farthest point ever reached by any previous explorers, about 220 feet below the entrance and a considerable distance to the west, they were unable to discover any such connection. About the lowest point there is a finely developed chamber, with a steep shaft leading up to a stalagmite grotto. The top of this was blocked up by an accumulation of deposits, but half-way up another shaft was found, thickly coated with stalagmite, which seemed to promise an exit into new ground, but it eventually brought the explorers back to the summit of the same shaft they had entered by. The complexity of the cavern is bewildering.

The complexity of the cavern is bewildering, and much time was lost in following up ramifications that only led back in a circle to the known parts. It is a most interesting fact that the stream which the explorers passed, not far from the extreme limit of the cave, is the source of the stream which ultimately comes to light at Rickford Rising, after traversing the interior of Burrington Ham, and there is utilised as one of the supplies for the Bristol Waterworks. Undoubtedly, a complex series of caverns extends underneath the centre of the hill, and it is hoped that further work will reveal their nature and extent. Several cave-mouths are visible from the road in Burrington Combe, but most of them are choked up with 'débris,' washed in by the surface drainage. One of them is said to tunnel for a great distance under the Ham, but nothing can be done to explore it until the debris accumulated beneath the stalagmite floor has been cleared away. Its yawning mouth is a conspicuous object not far above Plumbley's Hole. This last occurs just opposite the "Rock of Ages," sacred to the memory of the hymn-writer, Toplady, erstwhile rector of Blagdon. It derives its name from a fatal accident to a labourer who was let down it some years ago, since when tons of rubbish have been flung in, and have blocked up the shaft some 80 or 90 feet down. Two men descended to this point, at considerable risk from falling stones, and reported that the passage was completely barred, until the mass of rock and clay was removed. The pit is evidently an old swallow, formed by the widening of a joint or fissure; it is almost vertical, and is supposed to be several hundreds of feet deep.

The party made a superficial examination of the outlet of the stream at Rickford, but had no time to explore the cavities that exist in the combe between this place and Blagdon. They also found at Charterhouse that a large chasm which was formerly known to drain into the Cheddar stream, has now been covered up by the refuse from the old lead mines, and its whereabouts lost sight of. The party will, however, resume their explorations at no distant date, and no doubt the researches they have carried out will ultimately lead to some interesting discoveries.

GOLGO SWALLOW, PIT SWALLOW, AND SKYE HOLE

A 17th Century Map of a Lost Mendip Lead Mine

By Tom Harrison

Whilst researching the lead mining history of Mendip, I have made visits to both the National Archives at Kew and the British Library at St Pancras. Both are fascinating free resources of British and overseas history and have in recent years catalogued the vast majority of their records online at www.bl.uk and www.nationalarchives.gov.uk. This is a huge aid to research, as it allows a simple at home search for items of interest, so that the time spent visiting the records can be more productive.

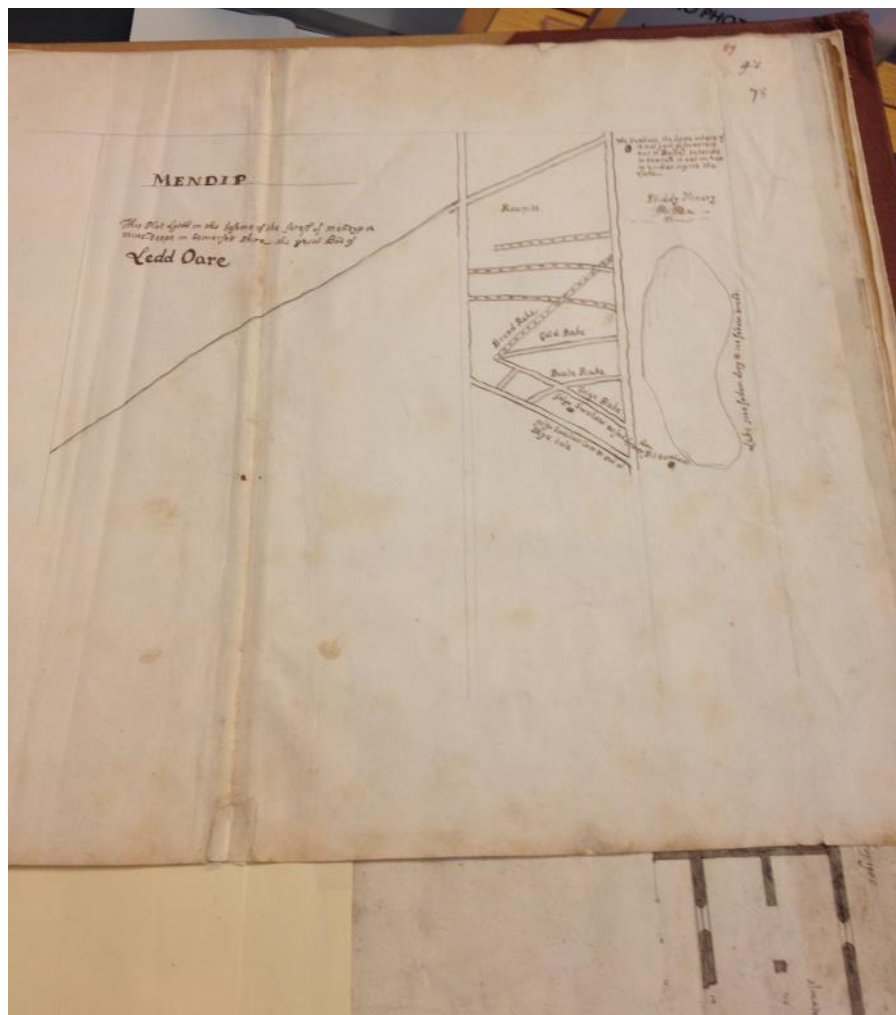
Lead Mine Plan

One of these such searches came up with a title which caused some excitement; "Plan of the workings of a lead mine near Priddy, in the Mendip Hills, in Somersetshire about 1658." Could this be a plan of the Charterhouse workings? Maybe it showed mine entrances, grid references, and information about where natural features were entered by the miners. I was perhaps overly optimistic!

With enough leads to pursue to last a week of visits, I headed up to London for the day to visit the Archives and the Library.

After I had finished at Kew, I headed over to the British Library and the map room to view the Lead Mine Plan.

A large approximately A3 book was brought out and I carefully went through each page to try to find the plan. At first I thought there had been a mistake as the book was filled with overseas maps from various locations and certainly nothing suggested a mine map might be somewhere in its pages. However, it soon became obvious that this book was simply a salvage of various different maps, perhaps cut out from Atlases or other documents and preserved together at some point by persons unknown.



Eventually I found the plan. (Photos here with permission from the British Library) The document was titled "MENDIP" underneath this, from what I can work out, it says, "This Plot Lyeth in the bosome of the forest of mendyp or mine-deepe is Somersett shire the groal Bed of Ledd Oare".

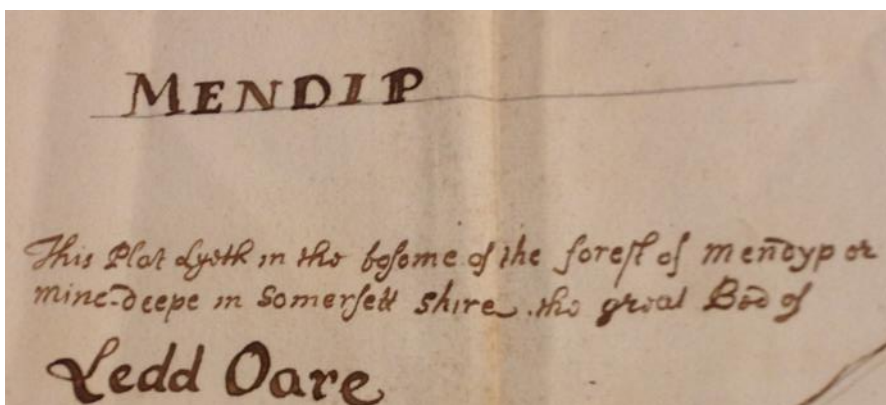
There is also a plan of the mine workings with a number of Rakes, (4 named), a lake, 3 Swallows, Rowpits and Priddy Minery also shown. 3 lost (or perhaps renamed) Swallets on Mendip, also caught my eye!

The Clues

The mapmaker has also given us 4 more pieces of interesting information. Firstly we learn that the Lake is 1000 fathoms long by 100 fathoms broad. A huge 6,000ft or 1.83km or 1.13 miles long by 600ft or 182m or 1/10th mile wide.

We learn that Golgo Swallow comes out of Skye Hole, and that it is "20 fad lower than Pit Swallow" according to my reading of the script.

Finally we learn that there are plans for the 'Swallow' confusingly named, 'The



The Swallow, the issue where of
is not yet discovered
but M. Bushel Intends
to search it out in hope
to undermine the
Lake

Priddy Minery

Rowpits.

Broad Rake

Gold Rake

Boate Rake

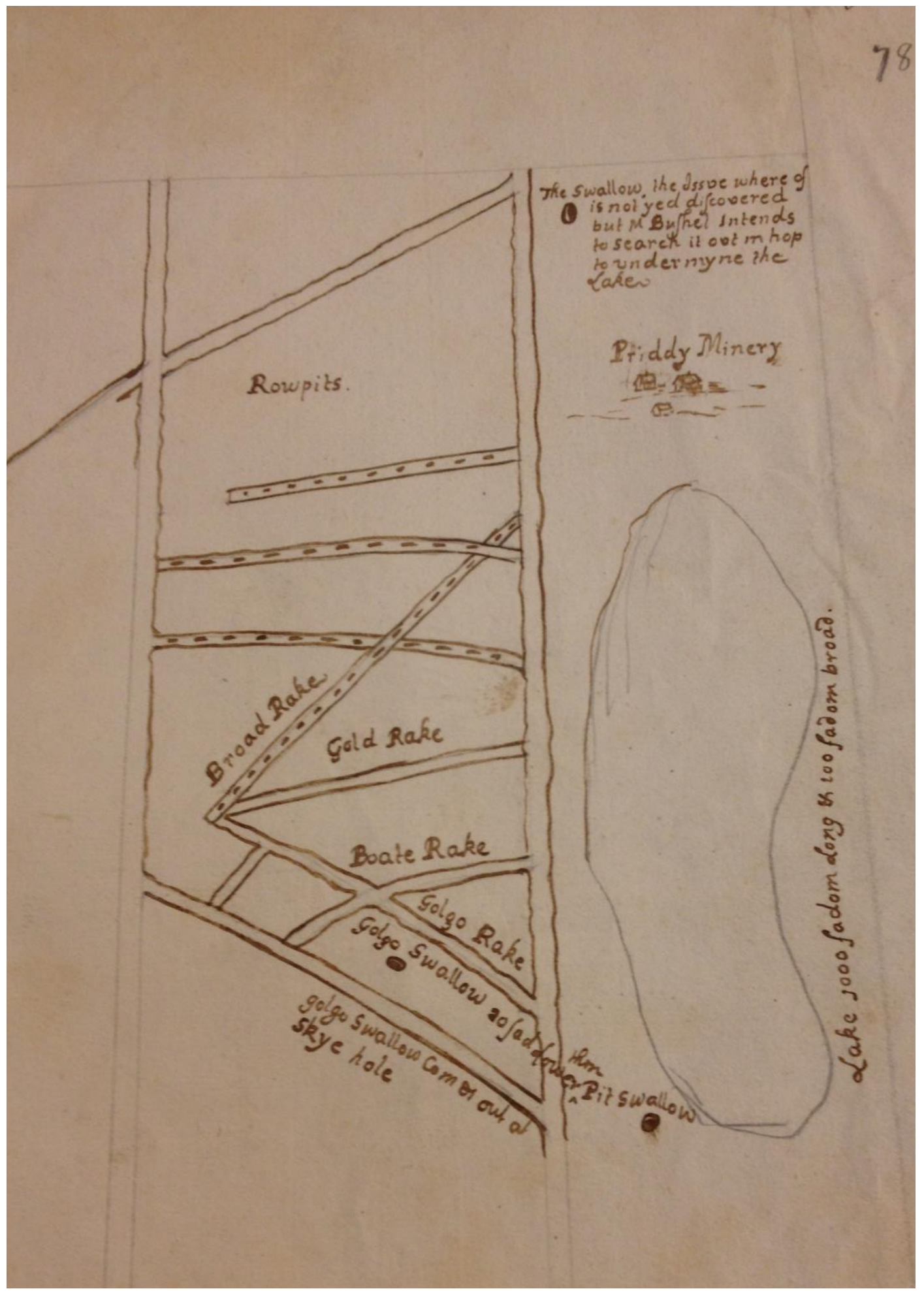
Golgo Rake

Golgo Swallow

golgo Swallow com out of
skye hole

Here
Bit Swallow

Lake 1000 fadom long & 100 fadom broad.



Swallow' shown above Priddy Minery on the map. "The Swallow, the issue where of is not yet discovered but M Bufnel intends to search it out in hop to undermine the Lake."

Looking more closely at the drawing it appears to me that it has been drawn in pencil and then inked over. This would suggest that it is a tracing and that the original may have contained much more information. Nowhere on the map is the date of 1658, so where did the person who catalogued this map, get the date from? I am yet to answer this question.

Location

As 'Priddy Minery' is clearly marked, my first idea, was that this was a map of the area around and perhaps destroyed by the St Cuthbert's Lead Workings.

The long diagonal line at the top of the plan, could well be the Wells Road from Priddy with the top of the map being south.

However the location I was looking in could not contain a lake of the size described. There were no lakes of any size in the area around Priddy, only

Waldegrave Pool.....

Maybe the miner's succeeded in undermining the lake in their search for more lead and accidentally drained it? Or maybe the later 19th Century mining at St Cuthbert's deliberately drained the lake?

Geological Clues

My next port of call was the British Geological Website where I'd remembered seeing a geological map of the Priddy area. With their kind permission via Dr Farrant it is reproduced below.

This shows a heavily mineralised area in Stockhill Forest and lead veins which looked at first to be very similar to the rakes on the plan running through it. This area is unfamiliar to me although I have subsequently learned that mining remains do exist here,

Rotating the plan upside down so the map was orientated with the lake to the left of the rakes, this could be the location.

The lake is all but gone and the veins do not all follow the North West to South East alignment as shown on the Geolog-

ical map. What are the other lines on the map? Roads or tracks? It is inconclusive.

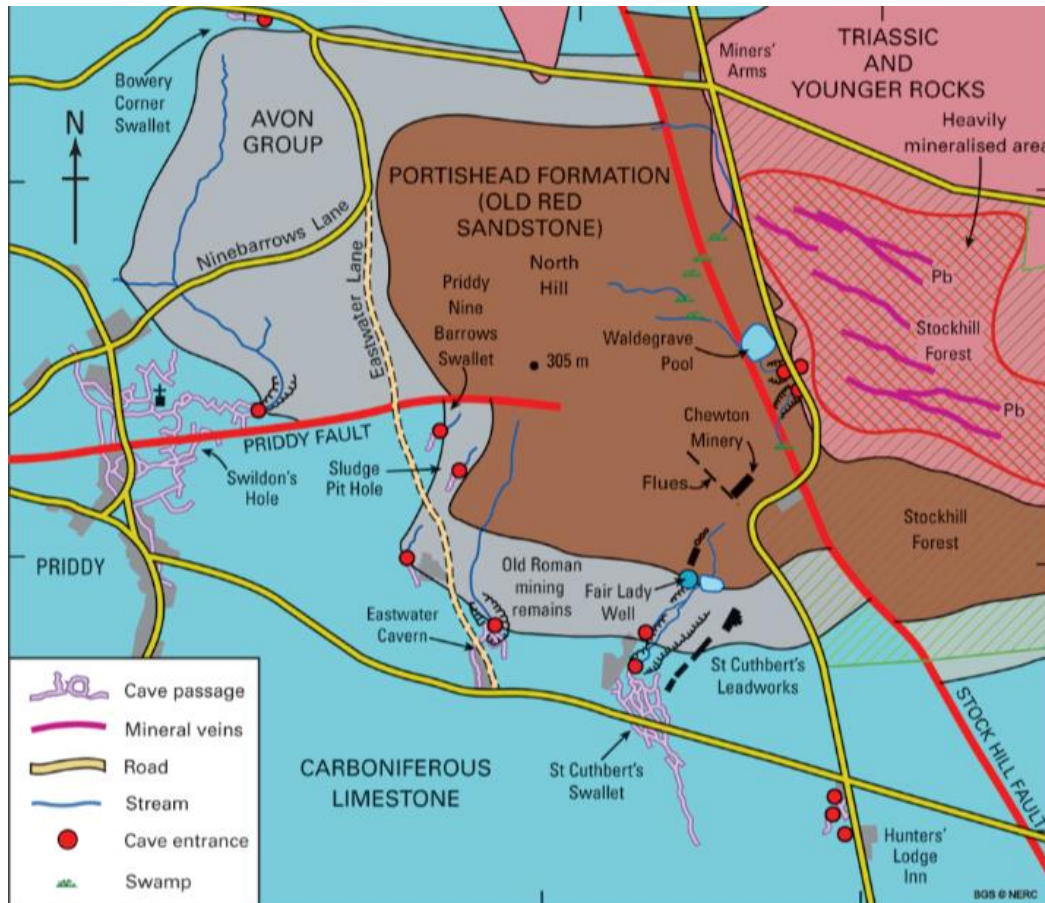
Tony Jaratt and the BEC

In March, I showed Mike Moxon the plan. He found a reference to Golgo in 'Who was Aveline Anyway' by Richard Witcombe. This made it clear that I wasn't the first caver to see this plan!

A search on google revealed that an approximate position has been hypothesized on the MCRA website's maps. Another listing takes you to an article in the Belfry Bulletin No. 511 and authored by Tony Jarratt on 12 July 2001. Whilst researching Chewton Minery, they had found that 'Mendip Cave Bibliography Part II—CR.G Transactions, vol. 14, no. 3, July 1972' had referenced the same plan as a "folded manuscript."

The BEC had been excavating in the area and were interested in seeing if a site adjacent to what Willie Stanton had referred to as Wheel Pit, was Thomas Bushell's Lost Swallow (Belfry Buletin No. 494). According to Mendip Underground, The BEC diggers had been searching for the mine workings and the natural 'swallow' which Bushell had wanted to use to drain the lead mines. The BEC dug open Stock's House Shaft, Five Buddles Sink and some other workings in the area as a result. 'The Swallow' is likely to be either one of the caves/mines in this area or nearby.

It seems however that Pit Swallow and Golgo Swallow were not found and remain lost and there are some tantalising questions that remain. What happened to the huge lake? Where are the missing 'Swallows'? And where is Skye Hole? So although I was a few years late in seeing this document I hope it has been of interest to some of you!



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And to all the photographers' contributions, as acknowledged.

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Founded 1954

Please send any submissions, photos, comments, letters to Tom Harrison

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The Mendip Caving Group consists of some 120+ members of all abilities who have banded together to share resources such as ladders, ropes, caving library and accommodation on Mendip.

The Group is registered as a charity in the UK, and our objectives are: For the benefit of the public, the furtherance of all aspects of the scientific study and conservation of caves and their related features.

Membership is open to anyone over the age of 18 years with an interest in the objects of the Group.

Members have use of the Group's cottage at reduced rates, free use of Group equipment and free access to the library. They also receive the newsletter of the MCG and Occasional Publications (a journal-type document published infrequently.)

And Finally.....

Andrew Horeckyj took the picture right of Ed Waters emerging from Attborough Swallet on the trip that is reported on inside. We agreed that this would make a good photo for a **caption competition**.

Email me at editor@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk with your suggestions and to encourage your creativity, the best suggestion decided on by myself will win a small alcoholic prize or the cash equivalent!

