

THE WESSEX CAVE CLUB JOURNAL

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Cenotaph Aven Mendip's Longest and Deepest Caves

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**Opinions expressed in the Journal are not necessarily those of the Editor
or of the Wessex Cave Club as a whole unless expressly stated as being so.**

Officers and Committee of the Wessex Cave Club, 1988/89

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Editorial

SO, THE WESSEX JOURNAL has finally entered the electronic age, and the paper and paste has been consigned to the bin.

For those of you who do not already know, I should first of all explain that my only qualification as Editor is that I possess a wordprocessor.

However, though information technology can do a great deal for the presentation of the journal, and makes this job a great deal easier, but it cannot actually create things to edit. As a result, I still need you, the Wessex member, to send me articles, photographs, news, notes, or anything else that might be of interest to other members of the club. Elsewhere, you will find a section under the title of 'Notes for Contributors' which gives details of the preferred way that items can be submitted for inclusion, but frankly, I don't give a damn how it is presented so long as you send it in. I will even accept short items dictated over the 'phone.

A brief glance round the hut at any time when there are more than a few members present will demonstrate that there are as many things of interest to Wessex cavers as there are cavers themselves, and all of them are valid subjects for articles in the journal (although I might think twice about publishing knitting patterns, as another journal's editor has threatened!). I hope that improving the quality of presentation will encourage more people to submit items to the journal, but please don't take that as an excuse for you not to do

anything.

IT IS PROBABLY VERY foolish of me, but I am going to stick my neck out and make a few commitments. Without doubt, the first priority, having taken over responsibility for the Journal, will be to improve its presentation. By producing it on a computer, jobs like producing an annual or volume index also become very simple indeed. However, the other problem has always been producing the issues to a regular schedule. There have been rumours that it might be preferable to produce a better quality journal (with more in it) fewer times per year, and also issue a regular, short newsletter. This is a view I have a lot of sympathy with and I believe that it would result in a much better quality journal as well as one which required less work to produce it.

It would be ambitious in the extreme to expect to get all these problems sorted out together, but we have to start somewhere, and again, I need feedback from other members of the club to tell me how successful you think that these changes will be.

FINALLY, IT WOULD NOT BE right for me to end without thanking the outgoing Editor. No longer will he have to fight the recalcitrant typewriter, but there is no excuse for not going caving now, Nigel! Good luck.

Club Notes

Member's Weekend

The weekend of **15 January 1989** will be reserved for members only, and a barrel will be supplied for the pleasure of those working on the hut. This will include a general hut tidying up session, during which **all unclaimed items found lying around the hut will be disposed of (i.e. burned)**. Lockers and food boxes not paid for by this date will be re-allocated.

Subscriptions are now due

These are:	Full Single Member	£16.00
	Full Joint (2 votes, 1 journal)	£28.00
	Ordinary Joint (1 vote, 1 journal)	£20.00
	O.A.P. (full member, no insurance)	£4.80
	Affiliated Group, Per member	£4.00

Members should have received a reminder by now, but if your subscription is still outstanding, please send your cheque to Mairi Rands (address at the front of the Journal) as soon as possible.

Sleeping accommodation at Upper Pitts

There has recently been an apparent increase in the number of guests staying at Upper Pitts, and the additional income which this brings is very welcome and help to reduce costs for members. However, it has been difficult to find bunks for all of these people on occasions because of members leaving their sleeping bags etc on "their" bunks, despite not actually being present at the hut that weekend. In order to avoid this, please could members who leave kit at the hut in this manner ensure that it is (tidily) stored away when they are not present so that it is easy to see which bunks are occupied.

Also, at times when the upstairs bunk room becomes full, but there are spaces in the ladies dormitory, please would all ladies sleeping upstairs move downstairs.

In Committee

Meeting of 16 October 1988 (No. 392)

As normal, the meeting held in the shadow of the A.G.M. was brief and hungover. To allow time for the new committee to get to grips with the issues, most matters were held over to the next meeting. However, the following were the main points were discussed:

Treasurer's Report

It was agreed that the various sums of money held about the hut should be removed at every available opportunity to reduce the opportunities for theft. With three committee members to act on this, it should be possible to keep the money left at Upper Pitts to a minimum.

Upper Pitts

A vote of thanks to Duncan Frew and Graham Johnson for the work done on the hut prior to the A.G.M. weekend was passed. It was agreed that the points made in the trustees report should be dealt with as soon as possible.

Tackle

The Gear curator reported that more ladders have been returned, and he hopes to get some wire for making some more. Gear still needs sorting out from the Berger trip.

Caving Secretary

It is hoped that we can arrange a reciprocal rights agreement with the Croydon Caving Club to the benefit of Wessex members caving in Wales.

Dinner Meet

Although the meal was very good this year, it was decided that we should look for an alternative venue for next year as a change. Suggestions from members would be very welcome.

Caving Politics:

Attendance at external meetings will be spread between committee members.

Other Business:

The following were co-opted to assist the Committee:

Hut Bookings-	Aubrey Newport
Survey Sales-	Maurice Hewins
M.R.O. Coordinator	Pete Lacy

The meetings of the Committee for the year 88/89 will be held on the following dates: (all Sundays) at 10.00am: 27 November, 15 January, 5 March, 23 April, 11 June, 30 July, 17 September.

Wessex People

Following the sad death of Norbert Casteret last year, we are very pleased to welcome Graham Balcombe as a new vice-president of the Wessex. Diving with Jack Sheppard, Graham in 1936 became the second diver ever to pass sump one in Swildon's , and later was a founder member of the Cave Diving Group.

Congratulations to Eric and Ruth Hensler (formerly Murrell) on their recent marriage. We wish them every success and happiness for the future.

Caving Notes

Agen Allwedd Trips

We no longer have a key to Aggie as we fell below the qualifying limit of 4 trips-per-year a couple of years ago since Wessex cavers were using other club's keys. Please could those people planning to do a trip into Aggie sign themselves in the entrance book as "WCC" members so that we can make a case to have our key returned.

Mendip on the Move!

There have been reports of movement in several places which already have reputations for being unstable. The boulder ruckle in Twinings is reported to be very wobbly, while Eastwater is on the move again. Please be very careful here, and follow the line rather than trying some smartarse side route. Finally, for the moment, the choke below the Main Chamber in G.B. is also shifting. The only safe route up into the chamber is as far as possible through the choke, in the direction of Bat passage.

(Reports that these shifts have been caused by Aubrey Newport, who has given up trying to bang the rocks he is actually trying to get past in favour of moving Mendip from around them, are being investigated).

Charterhouse

Members requiring leaders for this cave should contact Nigel Graham (weekend trips) or Jeff Price (weekdays, especially Wednesday Nights).

Reservoir Hole

Reservoir Hole is closed for some parts of the year (see Caves of Mendip for details). For trips during the open season, please make arrangements through the Caving Secretary.

Danger in Daren Cilau

The "Myndd Llangattwg Cave Management / Advisory Committee" (trips off the tongue that, doesn't it!) have recently expressed concern over the state and use of the ladders on the 65' pitch in Daren. Apparently, people have been climbing up this without a lifeline, stupid in any cave, but just plain crazy in view of your chances of survival in Daren, and the fact that the ladder recently broke while someone was on it. The Nature Conservancy Council, with whom the buck eventually stops, are considering the possibility of putting in a permanent ladder, but in the meanwhile the Management Committee would be very glad to receive any advice, particularly about the legal aspects of fitting and maintaining a fixed aid in the cave.

Two Geriatrics in Vercors

Ken Dawe

HAVING TAKEN BOB PYKE AND me down Daren Cilau a few times, your Chairman decided that the kindness deserved an article for the Journal. I avoided any such labour on the theory that to take anyone into Daren is more deserving of castration than of a favour. However, Jim invited me on a trip last Summer into Otter Hole, and I was so overwhelmed with the beauty, magnificence and sheer adhesive quality of the mud that I have penned these notes out of gratitude.

Bob Pyke and I, with our two wives and Bob's offspring, arranged our main 1988 Summer Holiday in Vercors. This happy arrangement allowed Bob and I to have a few days off for caving, the rest of the time being spent walking and drinking.

Couffin-Chevaline

Access to this system is controlled by the Groupe Speleo de Valence, and before the holiday I contacted the club and Bob and I were invited on a trip. Anyone visiting the area should note that parties are limited to six in number, including any members of the local club.

The Couffin and the Chevaline are two streams which feed into a large lake just inside the entrance of the commercial resurgence cave of Grotte de Choranche. We had arranged to meet the French group at 08.30 at the Choranche car park. We were just getting anxious at about 09.00 when the guide party drove up with a tremendous flourish, a squeal of brakes and a cloud of dust. There were four cavers in all; the leader, Laurent Garnier, is the club President, and he was accompanied by Patrique, Marlene and Stefan. The first two were well into their twenties, Marlene was 18 and Stefan only 14. Two balding Englishmen slightly startled our hosts at first, but then Laurent said that his father still caved at 56! Laurent himself is a wiry, energetic man (very much the Gallic equivalent in build and style of a young Fred Davies, but with a greater level of tolerance).

We duly changed and entered the show cave at about 09.30. The tourist portions is probably the most impressive show cave I have ever visited (we returned later for a tourist trip with our families). It has an immense lake, splendid straws and all other forms of stal formations.

The Couffin flows into the far left corner of the lake, and we followed upstream for a few hundred feet to the first sump in an easy passage with pleasant little waterfalls. The sump was bypassed by climbing up into a fossil passage, Gruyere 1, an amazing three dimensional sharply edged network. Following Laurent the way appeared most obvious, but I imagine that route finding without a guide may well prove a different proposition. After the cheesy bit there was a second, shorter, section streamway which took the form of a rift passage with delightfully calcited floor. In fact, throughout the entire system, the streams were depositing stal rather than eroding.

This streamway was followed by a second piece of Gruyere, shortly after which the stream route took off vertically in a series of pitches (8, 13, 10, 25m). These all had fixed electron ladders, with ropes for self lining. All the pitches were heavily calcited, the largest, Grande Cascade, in particular being superb. This 25m pitch ascends from a large chamber and carries the stream over a cascading sheet of calcite. Apparently, Laurent's father at one time spent 40 hours sitting out a flood in this chamber.

From the top of the Grande Cascade we rapidly came to a small climb up into the fossil series which connects with the Chevaline. The Couffin itself can still be followed for several kilometres, but we were told that it was mostly low, wet and horrid - a collectors' item.

The fossil gallery is mainly a high rift passage, the whole walls being formed of narrow ledges, a foot or so apart, which were packed with unusual formations rather like plates on a stem. From here the last uphill pitch leads 4m to Junction Gallery and the Chevaline streamway which we then followed downhill. The pitches were already roped for abseiling.

After the first, and largest, pitch (21m), the stream disappears into an impenetrable hole but a fossil 10m pitch drops into the Galerie des Gours. For about 1000ft this passage is a series of beautiful, large, gours with quite deep pools. Crossing these provided much amusement. They have been equipped with a series of traverse wires and, in one place, a short trapeze wire. Only one pool had any real difficulty, an awkward straddle. Pyke's legs were long enough, mine were not, and I can

report that, despite the southern latitude, the water was extremely cold. Marlene showed concern at my fall, Pyke showed withering scorn.

The water from the gours joins the Chevaline, but this soon sumps. A fossil passage shortly before the Chevaline connection bypasses the sump and leads via a short pitch to the Riviere Suspendu. (My aged memory is a bit uncertain as to which of the pools we crossed here and which in the Galerie des Gours. Some of the descriptions in the previous paragraph perhaps should be here.) Certainly in this section there was a long duck of about 30 - 40ft, with a 1ft airspace. This was followed by southern-Britain crawl finishing in quite a tight squeeze - the Trou Souffleur. The draught here extinguished the large Petzl carbide lamps. I had to de-kit to pass the squeeze, but it was that or a solo five-hour reverse trip, and, after a gentle massage of my left foot from Marlene, (Pyke would have used a carbide lamp) I was through.

We were now just beyond the inner chamber, the Cathedral, of the commercial cave. As soon as we reached that point we had to hide behind a boulder as the guide put on a son-et-lumiere show. The music created a natural urge for me to leap onto the boulder and deliver "The Boatswain" [sic] but I was forcibly restrained.

At the end of the son-et-lumiere we followed the tourists and left the cave. We did not notice whether or not the whole population was peering at us from the bushes as we left.

It was, indeed, a most memorable trip, both sporting and delightful. I will just mention the kit for anyone who may be fortunate enough to visit the system. Basically, for upping the Couffin and downing the Chevaline, you will need a full SRT rig, including cow's tails, but without footloops or the footloop ascender. For clothing I simply wore a furry suit under a P.V. oversuit and, apart from when I fell in or during the long duck, was very comfortable. On the other hand, Bob claimed to have also been comfortable in a wetsuit.

Scialet Vincens

When planning our trip, Bob and I had vaguely thought of descending the Scialet de Malaterre. However, over a beer with Laurent and the others after the Couffin - Chevaline, he offered us the use of the Scialet Vincens, which his club had already tackled. This seemed a good alternative vertical pot, but we felt, after the splendid trip just completed, that

we should be more helpful, and offered to join the de-tackling party. We duly met at the appointed time and place. Again there were four French cavers led by Laurent. Marlene we knew from the earlier trip, but she was accompanied, confusingly, by another Laurent and the original Laurent's identical twin (even more confusing). Thank heaven there are not twin Fred Davies! To our astonishment the bottom de-tackling party consisted of three, Laurent Gamier plus Pyke and Dawe.

The Scialet Vincens is a stark, dark hole, but immense sport. It is almost completely vertical, with a total depth of 402m and a horizontal development of only 115m. From one pitch to the next is often only a ledge or "sentry box". The pot was not tackled right to the bottom as the last section becomes 'orrid' (at least, that is what I thought Laurent's French said). The ropes were muddy and wet, and extremely efficient at rack-knacker. The longest un-interrupted pitch, the third, is only 38m and even that has, or should have had, a re-belay at -9m. As the old man of the trio I was thrust first down the pitches. Shortly before -9m on the big one I noticed our rebelay dangling on the rope below me. I panicked back up the rope, but Laurent recovered the situation by making a very elegant and efficient deviation around a rock bridge. Descending in turn I made a much less elegant and efficient passing of the deviation. It was then on down to -345m, the end of the tackled portion. At about -314m the pot suddenly develops into a 250ft low, South Walesian, sandy crawl to the next pitch. Apparently, this is due to a geological change, from one type of Urrgonian Limestone to something else. It is all quite obvious to the experienced eye.

The descent was almost fairground fun. Suddenly, at -345 we realised that we had to commence to de-tackle. However, before commencing this Laurent showed us his dig - N.A.H.A.S.A. please note.

We de-tackled fairly easily to - 200m, and Bob and I came out with a bag of ropes each, taking a total of four hours to exit. Laurent had done it in one hour ! To pass the time whilst awaiting our slow retreat, he detackled all the other pitches up to and including the third, leaving all the ropes there. There was no difficulty with any of the pitches, except that the top of the 38m pitch was a bit tight, reminiscent of Derbyshire's Nettle pot, and was a bit awkward with tackle bags.

We emerged to a beautiful sunny afternoon, and a repast of cheese, ham,

saucisson and baguette provided by the rest of the party; most enjoyable.

The Scialet Vincens is a grand, sporting hole and is to be thoroughly recommended if you wish to bomb down (and up) vertical pitches. Personally I enjoyed it immensely. It is not easy to find but following directions may help:

About 4 miles South of St Agnan en Vercors, on the N518, is the Grotte de la Luire. A further 2km along the road beyond this Grotte, take the forest road on the left; this angles back on the main road and is the Route Forestiere de la Coche. Follow this as it winds up hill and through the forest to Mais Foret de la Coche - this is the last parking place and there is no driving permitted beyond this point. Having parked, but before changing, walk along the (still metalled) road for about 200m to the Abri Foret de Pre Grandee. Turn left at the Abri onto a cart track and keep straight on this, ignoring a junction on the right. After about 1km take a path on the left into the forest. At the start it is not very obvious but there was a large cairn at the junction when we were there, and after a few metres it soon becomes much more recognisable as a route. Follow this for about 300m to another footpath on the right. This again is not very obvious, but within a few metres is the Scialet Vincens. This is not a very imposing entrance, just a muddy slot amongst some trees.

One last point to be mentioned is flood risk. I have read horrendous tales of the Austrian pots. Down to -200m the Scialet is never worse than very damp. At -200m a second aven joins the main hole. This is presumably the lower end of a similar system, but a surface connection has not been found. However, the system is much more sensitive to surface conditions than the Vincens before that point, and from -200m downwards the hole can become very sporting.

Grotte de Gournier

The Grotte de Gournier is another resurgence cave found at the base of the cliffs of the same cirque as the Couffin-Chevaline. Parking is, again, at the Grotte de la Choranche car park, and from the tourist cave entrance the Gournier is signposted.

The most obvious feature inside the walk-in entrance is the large, deep, lake; the Lac Meduse. This is about 40m long and its depth is indicated by a plaque on the wall to an unfortunate who drowned therein. Among the many skills I have abysmally failed to acquire is swimming, at least for more than an odd length

so, as a trial, we visited the cave armed with a Dawe special flotation device. Not having a latrine bucket available, I used a standard airbed but tied a strap around the middle to give it, after inflation, an hour-glass figure. The theory was that I could, with a cows tail, grab onto the strap so that, if the craft overturned I would not lose it. My initial attempts at piloting this craft in a sitting position were hilarious (at least to the audience), as I was very soon deposited in the water. However, I found that by lying completely flat on the bed I could make quite respectable progress simply by paddling with my hands. I could even, more or less, steer the thing. It was a bit cold as I was only wearing a shortie wet suit (a kind of caver's version of baby doll pyjamas), but it worked and I recommend the system. A day or two later Bob and I returned, accompanied by his son, Mark. Almost disappointingly we found an English party had already rigged the lake with two inflatable boats, so we crossed in style.

The landing stage is an obvious bouldery ledge about 20ft from the far end of the lake. A climb up from the ledge looked rather serious, but was dismissed as "only a v. diff" by one of the other Englishmen. The correct procedure is for one reasonably skilled in the art of climbing to negotiate the climb, traverse above the lake, and then drop a ladder for those less skilled (like me) at the far end. Both climb and traverse were fairly liberally splattered with shells, and I strongly advise anyone attempting the hole to take a dozen or more hangers. Without the other party, and not having taken hangers, we would certainly have failed to get out of the lake. Fortunately our friends already had a ladder in place at the far end.

Alternatively, it is possible to traverse completely above the lake from the entrance. Several bolt holes could soon be seen in the left hand wall by the lake, and there are traverse wires in place. My son did enter the cave this way on a previous trip, so it can be done, however, he did not lead it and cannot give proper rigging information. If you fancy this route I can recommend that you check it out thoroughly before you start, but I cannot say with whom you should check it.

I had crossed the lake in my shortie wetsuit, so had to take dry clothing, and we also had a ladder. This was taken across the lake in polythene bin liners in a tackle bag, using empty "Evian" bottles for flotation. It towed very easily behind the boat.

Having splashed across the last few

feet of the lake, climbed the ladder and changed into my furry, we set off in a more traditional way. Essentially the readily accessible parts of the system are in two sections; a dry fossil series, mainly easy walking, which connects at four points with the lower, active, streamway. The higher passage is extremely beautiful, for although the passage is fossil, the formations are still active and moist. The most impressive section was probably the chamber containing La Cascade Rouge - a series of large, coloured, cascades.

The easiest access to the river is by the second connection. This lies in an obvious hole in a funnel shaped depression in the floor just after the Cascade Rouge. It is important to take note of the route for the return when entering the stream.

The streamway, like in a Chevaline system, was a fine passage with several pools and traverse lines, mainly of wire. However, unlike the Chevaline, the state of the wires was often similar to that of the elderly members of the party; decaying badly. At one point I had to join two broken bits of wire with a karabiner. Over another pool the wire finished before the end of the traverse. Mark, like Bob, suffers from the Pyke disease of disproportionately long legs. Whilst this results in a certain gangling and inelegant form as a whole, the Pykes crossed over the pool. With my more perfectly formed body, I fell in. The temperature was similar to that in the Chevaline.

We followed the stream uphill until we came to a large chamber with a pebble floor, leading to a short, but deep, lake. The pair of Pykes wallowed through to find a cascade, with only a very dubious rope as a climbing aid, so we turned back and returned to the surface. At the Lac Meduse I used a boat, but Bob and Mark swam (they wore full wet suits), thus demonstrating yet another way to cross the lake.

Surface Vercors.

I must not close my article without mentioning the area itself. When we were on the BEC Berger trip, Bob and I were both very single minded about the cave, and paid scant attention to the surface. During this trip we had many walks in the area and were astonished at its variety and beauty. Walking on tracks in pine woods, we would suddenly break out into the most delightful alpine meadows, with hosts of different flowers. Above Villard-de-Lans the karst scenery is stark and bare. There are fine hills, the highest being the Grand Vemont, to walk up. Away from the centres such as Villard it was never crowded. Certainly, even ignoring the speleo-interest, it is an area which I thoroughly recommend.

Ken Dawe

The Discovery of Thrupe Lane Swallet

Extracts from the Digger's Log

Richard Witcombe

The history of cave digging around the farming hamlet of Thrupe dates back to the 1930s, but until the late 1960s the exploratory probes had concentrated on the rocky outcrop at the smaller eastern swallet. The main swallet beside the road had been a rather featureless morass until a sudden collapse in 1967 left a muddy 20-ft deep crater with a more definite stream sink at its northern end.

Wessex diggers sank two shafts amongst the unstable boulders in the floor of this new depression before an alarming secondary collapse literally swallowed up the winch - it was never seen again! Attention shifted to a superficially quarried cliff face several yards to the south of the collapse and a regular team of diggers came together to start shaft sinking against the reassuringly solid rock wall.

The Wessex cavers had by now been joined by Westminster Speleological Group and Axbridge Caving Group members, and it was decided to dignify this grouping with the acronym ATLAS - the Association of Thrupe Lane Advanced Speleologists! Mid-week digging sessions started in 1973, making use of changing facilities in an old shed kindly provided by local farmer Nelson Butt. The Ferret Shed (it did contain a ferret in the early days!) was the home for the digging log commenced in the same year.

The following edited highlights from the log record the steady, unspectacular digging which culminated in the substantial breakthrough of 1974. The diggers' initials are expanded at the end.

Wednesday 3 October 1973

SMK and DCE dug under spotlight (a car headlamp rigged up to a car battery - RGW) for several hours removing many buckets of sand. Discovered an important change in roof line which means we must continue on a more vertical trend.

Saturday 5 October 1973

CN, JP and SMK. Large amounts of spoil removed. Shaft end of rift reveals solid rock. Shoring put in place against sand bank. Day concluded with 1.5lbs charge of gelamex on boulder in floor.

Wednesday 10 October 1973

DGE, AE, SME and RGW dug a lot more fill. (This log is sure to bore readers!). General progress downwards.

Saturday 13 October 1973

WE, SMK, RGW and CN. An early start (9.30am) enabled a vast amount of fill to be removed. We now have solid rock on all sides. During the day we exposed solid rock along the back of the bedding plane. CN had a good probe with the crowbar in the evening and it appears that the large boulder in the floor is well fractured by our last 1.5lbs charge.

Wednesday 17 October 1973

SMK, DGE and AE dug under spotlight for some hours. 8-9 barrows taken out. Vertical progress recommended.

Sunday 21 October 1973

SMK, DGE and AE. Large quantity of material removed. The boulder in the floor bears a marked resemblance to solid rock. The up-dip side was cleared out. Scallops on one side of rift but getting narrow.

Wednesday 24 October 1973

RGW, SMK, DGE, AE and KEB. The evening's activity was brought to a close by a decision to dig out the end of the rift.

Saturday 27 October 1973

RGW, SMK, CN and AED. The evil hour of digging was postponed until a shelter had been erected to give surface teams protection against the elements. The down dip end was the focus of our attention and large quantities of blackened pebbles were removed. A large sausage shaped boulder soon appeared, jammed in the end of the rift - movable with a crowbar.

Wednesday 31 November 1973

RGW, DGE, SMK, MC and D?. Continued digging at down dip end of rift. Little progress, much mud.

Saturday 3 November 1973.

AED, SMK, TB, MC and D?. Two large boulders obstructed progress in the down dip end of the rift - one very waterworn and blackened was, with difficulty, pushed on one side. The other - the thin rock in situ - suddenly toppled over onto my leg [SMK] whilst being dug round. Fortunately no injury and it was rolled on one side out of the way. Digging then began in earnest in the down dip end and a large quantity of spoil, wet and with many blackened pebbles, was removed. A black hole appeared and when finally opened revealed two narrow chert lined channels running down dip - rather immature looking, but it could be the top of a rift. The digging finished at dusk - we adjourned to Talbot's Fish and Chip Saloon in Wells.

Sunday 4 November 1973

AED, SMK, TB and D?. Began work at

around 11 am. We decided to have a probe in the inlet passage exposed in the right hand wall of the rift. Our interest grew as the passage increased in length and appeared to be descending instead of ascending. Digging rather tiring - backing out each time with armfuls of mud etc. By the end of day the passage had been extended to about 8ft in length. Vadose features appeared to be emerging at the far end. Could we be onto something really significant at last? One important factor is that this passage, though small, is the first development not controlled by the one big joint - also the entrance is not in the bottom of the rift. Is it not possible that the passage took the main stream before downcutting left it isolated as a hanging passage? Further excavation will give us the answers.

Wednesday 7 November 1973

RGW and SMK. More grotting around in Butt End Passage. Good forward progress made. Passage appeared to be reducing in height at end.

Saturday 10 November 1973

CN, SMK and DGE. Both the side passage and the bottom of the rift dug.

Sunday 11 November 1973

SMK, CN, DGE and AE. Dug the side passage until it closed down with little forward progress made. A minutely low passage appears to come in from above. The passage can now be eliminated although its formation is still not clear. If nothing else, the passage does prove that the geology of Thrupe is capable of conventional cave development. The rest of the afternoon was spent in a concentrated dig in the rift, and the floor was lowered by several feet. It looks as if, with luck, we may be able to eventually by-pass the gigantic boulder in the rift and possibly regain the full length of the rift again. One important discovery - a strong inward draught is flowing into the narrow rift at the down dip end.

The afternoon's proceedings were enlivened by the arrival of Richard Cottrell of HTV and a cameraman. Film was taken of the stream and myself [SMK] and DGE climbing up and down the shaft and also of the winch in action. This film was used in an item on the local news on Monday evening. Nick Barrington gave a discourse on the drainage of the Thrupe area, in front of a diagram showing Thrupe with a shaft of Pierre St. Martin

proportions!! He was even asked whether a cave bigger than Wookey could be discovered. Nick Barrington did not deny this!!!

Wednesday 21 November 1973

RGW, DGE and AE. Dug in frosty conditions. We removed many buckets of spoil from the floor and found many holes opening up in the now loosely packed gravels. Things look really good for a change.

Wednesday 28 November 1973

RGW, DGE and AE. Foul, atrocious rain. Dug for a little but decided it was too dangerous owing to falling debris (loosened by the rain). Decided we must work in the daylight, covering the top of the rift to keep out shit falling from above.

Saturday 1 December 1973

AED, WE and SMK. Fair amount of gunge moved. Large boulder dislodged from down dip end. Will need banging on Saturday next.

Saturday 8 December 1973

AED, SMK, DGE and AE. The above boulder was successfully destroyed, after which a considerable amount of spoil was taken out. Floor lowered by several feet. It is now quite clear that the obstruction in the rift is a piece of detached bedrock resting on end at an angle of about 60. We are now by-passing it.

Monday ? January 1974

SMK and CF. The continuation of the down dip joint had been noticed to be draughting strongly on several occasions and we decided to enlarge it with bang and discover the source of the draught. About 9ft of the joint was exposed and the way on seen to be a narrow slot in the floor. Spoil was dumped in the deepest part of the dig and this area temporarily abandoned.

[Over the next two weekends the floor was considerably deepened to give access to the slot.]

Sunday 24 February 1974

SMK RGW CN and two Axbridge helpers. A really constructive day's digging. The joint deepening to give access to and enlargement beyond via a 6ft drop. Very fine chert bands on both sides and masses of crinoids. The way on down the joint visible.

Saturday 2 March 1974

AED, RGW, SMK, DGE and AE. A pleasant Spring day. After lunch in the Ferret Hut, work commenced on enlarging the way on and after a few hammer-blows on chert obstructions access was gained to another 10 - 15ft of the joint - still unpleasantly narrow and sharp, playing havoc on boiler suits. Ahead of us the water appears to have gone vertical - very narrow but boulders fall for an appreciable distance and it sounds as if something larger lies beneath us. In addition, a cool draught blows steadily out, indicating that we may be fairly close to our goal now.

Our intention to bang an obstruction was thwarted by heavy snow and generally miserable conditions. The next move must be to eliminate two squeezes in the joint and make access generally easier. Banging can then commence on the vertical section at the end and the draught pursued further. It looks very much as if the further section of the joint is connected by a continuation to the area we were digging beneath the shaft i.e. all the water which sank in the dig exited through the joint.

Saturday 9 March 1974

RGW, AED, CN, DGE, AE, TB and two Australians. Numerous charges laid to enlarge the squeezes and passage leading to the top of the narrow rift. By evening we could begin operations in the rift itself and late in the evening RGW passed the rift to land in a narrow passage. Nothing much up dip, but down dip we emerged after 10ft at the edge of a 20ft drop. Much celebration all round. Things look very encouraging. We exited to break the news to the surface party who were consuming chips around a fire.

Sunday 10 March 1974

AC, AED, SMK, CN, RC, DGE, and AE. Heavy snow in the morning but it soon stopped. Then back to renew our assault. The 20ft drop reached on Saturday night was free-climbed after extensive gardening and we landed on a pile of boulders jammed in the rift. After considerable effort to remove several large boulders, CN and SMK entered a near vertical rift and slid down for approximately 15ft. At this point a maze of interconnecting rifts joined each other. The main one carries on down - slightly too narrow at the top but widening out below. Stones dropped down fell for an impressive distance before striking the bottom with a dull boom.

Not much draught in the entrance passage but significantly a strong draught was blowing into a scalloped tube on the right just before the first squeeze. I think that it is quite possible that this could provide a cross connection with the passage now carrying the stream - the draught being drawn in by the water beyond. Nowhere in the new extension is there any sight or sound of the stream.

Nelson Butt [the farmer] reported hearing hammering whilst in the cow-yard, indicating the presences of an aven or rift extending towards the surface.

Saturday 16 March 1974

BW, AW, RC, SMK, CN, RGW, TB, and 2 Australians. The first business of the day was the enlargement of the top of "Slit Pot". Two plaster charges linked with Cordtex were fired and a large amount of damage done. Access to the rift was made easier and 50ft of ladder was belayed to a convenient flake. AW and RGW then descended and reported the rift to be very narrow all the way down. At the bottom they dropped into a passage leading on the down dip side into a chamber approximately 40ft high ending in a boulder choke. Up dip the joint passage ended in a stal blockage with a strongly draughting hole. Plenty of digging potential here, but before operations can begin in earnest, Slit Pot will have to be enlarged.

Sunday 17 March 1974

BW and SMK. After the long wet digging of Saturday, nobody felt very keen to get moving. But another rift leading out of Perseverance chamber cried out for investigation. A couple of charges laid during the day removing two reefs of rock. SMK was then able to squeeze through to the head of the rift. As with Slit Pot, too narrow at the top but wider below. Whether or not this will give us easier access to the levels below remains to be seen. Stones fall a considerable way (50-60ft) but, more interesting, from a point near corkscrew Canyon [above Slit Pot -RGW] the dull roar of water could be heard coming up from the direction of the new rift. Could we be on the track of the stream at last.

Saturday 24 March 1974

RGW, RC and CN. CN struggled through the Meade-King sized passage to the head of the new pitch where a large piece of detached bedrock was effectively blocking the

hole. A 11b charge was laid in an attempt to break the block into pieces which would not jam down below and also to break up some bedrock nearby. A pleasing thump resulted. On returning, a chaotic scene met our eyes. The block had gone, so had a lot of bedrock, and the lot was jammed up some 6ft down the pot. Large scale gardening amid bang fumes blown back up the rift revealed a large block jammed in the rift. An hour's work with a short bar moved it a little. It must be banged next week. The way on down will then be open.

Saturday 30 March 1974

CN, RC, SS, DGE, AE and RGW. Two bangs and a session of gardening cleared the remaining obstructions in the new pot and 75ft of ladder was belayed to the "Great Slab" in Perseverance chamber and fed down the pitch. SS was volunteered to descend first and he agreed to increase the risk by accepting a lifeline. After some thrutching, he passed through the tight section. Thereafter he quickly descended to about 60ft, complimenting the shaft from time to time on its pleasing appearance. A long minute passed during which the only sound heard was a desultory scrabbling at the bottom of the pitch. It became obvious to those waiting that SS was searching in vain for the way on. RGW enquired if there was an impassable stalled up passage thereabouts, and the affirmative reply confirmed suspicions that "Perseverance Pot" was the rift seen at the bottom of Slit Pot on 16 March.

In due course, CN and RGW joined SS at the foot of the pitch, a cramped uninspiring piece of floor some 3ft by 6ft. CN and SS started enlarging a narrow up-dip rift partially blocked by boulders but draughting slightly and a few flakes of rock eventually surrendered to the furious hammering. RGW took over but after a few ineffective blows he decided that the remaining boulders were not going to give in, and he squeezed through the slot and dropped about 5ft onto a sandy floor. He found himself in a narrow rift which ran back under Perseverance Pot where it was about 3 - 4in wide and full of murky water. In the other direction the passage was transformed into a phreatic tunnel, characteristically sculpted and rendered impassable by a rock buttress which was, however, undercut at the level of the sand floor. The end of the dig is nigh, he thought, as he sank to his haunches "gurgle, tinkle, gurgle, tinkle"....Good God!..."gurgle gurgle tinkle gurgle" the stream! Not fifteen feet away!

CN and SS assaulted the boulders above the squeeze with renewed vigour, while RGW dug away at the sand floor. Chips and flakes plopped into the water, and the water gradually rose up and flooded the hole that RGW was digging. RGW looked into the squeeze ahead and thought he might be able to get through. After long minutes of indecision, he decided - he would come back next week. The rest agreed - next week would do.

Sunday 31 March 1974

RC, CN and RGW. Conducted an aerial photographic reconnaissance mission over Thrupe Lane. Our aircraft made several passes at an altitude of between 500 and 1000ft. The target was unimpressive from the air. No flak. Two balloons - possibly manned by NAHSA - were easily outdistanced.

Saturday 6 April 1974

RC, CN, RGW, SMK, DGE and AE. RGW's fevered ramblings about the sound of distant water had instilled a measure of optimism into the hard bitten members of the Thrupe Lane team. However, on descending the new 50ft shaft, rose tinted spectacles were removed and the way on was examined realistically.

A phreatic passage did indeed drop down for 6ft into a muddy, choked tube and yes - the sound of dripping water could be heard not a great distance away. But the passage appeared to narrow a few feet ahead, and removal and disposal of the mud in the floor appeared to present problems. Furthermore, a rock buttress lowered the roof in front of us. The diggers on examining the situation, fell strangely quiet, but with the enlargement of the approach to the passage, prospects began to improve. Buckets of liquid filth started appearing and were emptied behind us. An hour and a half later, RGW decided to attempt to force his way through. A few seconds of scrabbling and shouts of delight were heard from beyond. Apparently the passage enlarged ahead and another pitch led off.

We all squeezed through and found ourselves in a continuation of the rift. The roof soared up again and to the left a hole in the floor was visible. Stones dropped through it indicated a 60 - 70ft fall. To the right we climbed up over a massive boulder into a large chamber.

The roof was visible 50 - 60ft above us - a most impressive place. Breakthrough fever gripped us - strange rantings and ravings being evidence of the disease. Up dip, there was a way on between boulders up a steep slope. Obviously this area was situated close to the surface collapse, and it looked more unstable the further up I [SMK] climbed.

Meanwhile, RC had entered a phreatic tube leading out of the south side of the chamber. It led into another smaller chamber with a high aven in the roof and some beautifully marked limestone. Following the slope to the lower end of the chamber, a boulder fall appeared to block the way on. But from beyond came the roar of the stream! Certainly more water than can be accounted for by the Thrupe Stream. At this point we decided to turn back with this tantalising problem unsolved.

News of the discoveries was broken to the surface workers and Mrs. Butt produced wine and sherry to toast the breakthrough.

Sunday 7 April 1974

After the traumatic events of Saturday, a day of rest was declared. RC arrived with a friend who welded a gate together out of various bits and pieces of metal, and the upright for the gate was concreted into position just before the first squeeze. Only the eyebolt hole now remains to be drilled.

Friday 12 April 1974

RGW, AED, RC, DGE, AE and BG. The first day of the big Easter push. Usual afternoon start as the Thrupe Lane cronies shuffled reluctantly towards the entrance shaft. Those whose ingenuity had concocted unshakeable reasons for not going down (e.g. slashing of wet-suits or sudden dizzy spells) remained above ground to finish off the gate. The remainder descended to sample the peculiar delights of Cowsh Crawl.

The first point of attack was to be the shaft on the left of the new passage. On close examination, all possible belay points for the ladder appeared to be loose boulders and CN disappeared into an horrendous looking boulder choke on the right. Shouts informed us that he had found a way down onto a natural bridge from which a 20ft ladder would reach the bottom. A perfect belay point was found and we climbed down to find ourselves in a steeply descending rift up to 80ft high in

places. A small stream was flowing down the rift which, after about 100ft became too tight for further progress. Small avalanches of debris were being carried through the constriction by the stream. Beyond, the rift could be seen to widen, and stones thrown through dropped down for some way. Obviously, a bang job.

Whilst CN, RC and RGW had been poking about in this rift, DGE and SMK headed for the chamber off Butt's Chamber from where the sound of water could be heard. SMK climbed down over a huge boulder and navigated a route through a mass of boulders into an open space beyond. DGE followed and we found ourselves looking down an ancient waterfall into a stream some 15ft below. A climb down took us into a confluence point for the water that we had heard. Above our heads soared an aven for some 40ft and down it fell two separate streams - one from about 20ft up, the other from near the top. Another stream came in at floor level from the direction of Butt's Chamber. The combined water flowed away down a beautifully sculptured, oval shaped passage on the far side.

We followed this down small rapids and round twists and turns until the sudden gradient of the streamway steepened and with several more leaps and bounds the stream plunged over the lip of an abyss. Before us yawned a tremendous gulf, neither floor nor roof visible. The walls soared up into the blackness above. We boggled

Having recovered our senses, we stepped round a ridge of rock to the left so that we might better this wondrous sight behold. To the left of the entry point we now stood in a large dry inlet which we followed back for 100ft to a boulder choke. A bedding plane passage ran back from one side to another point of the brink of the pot.

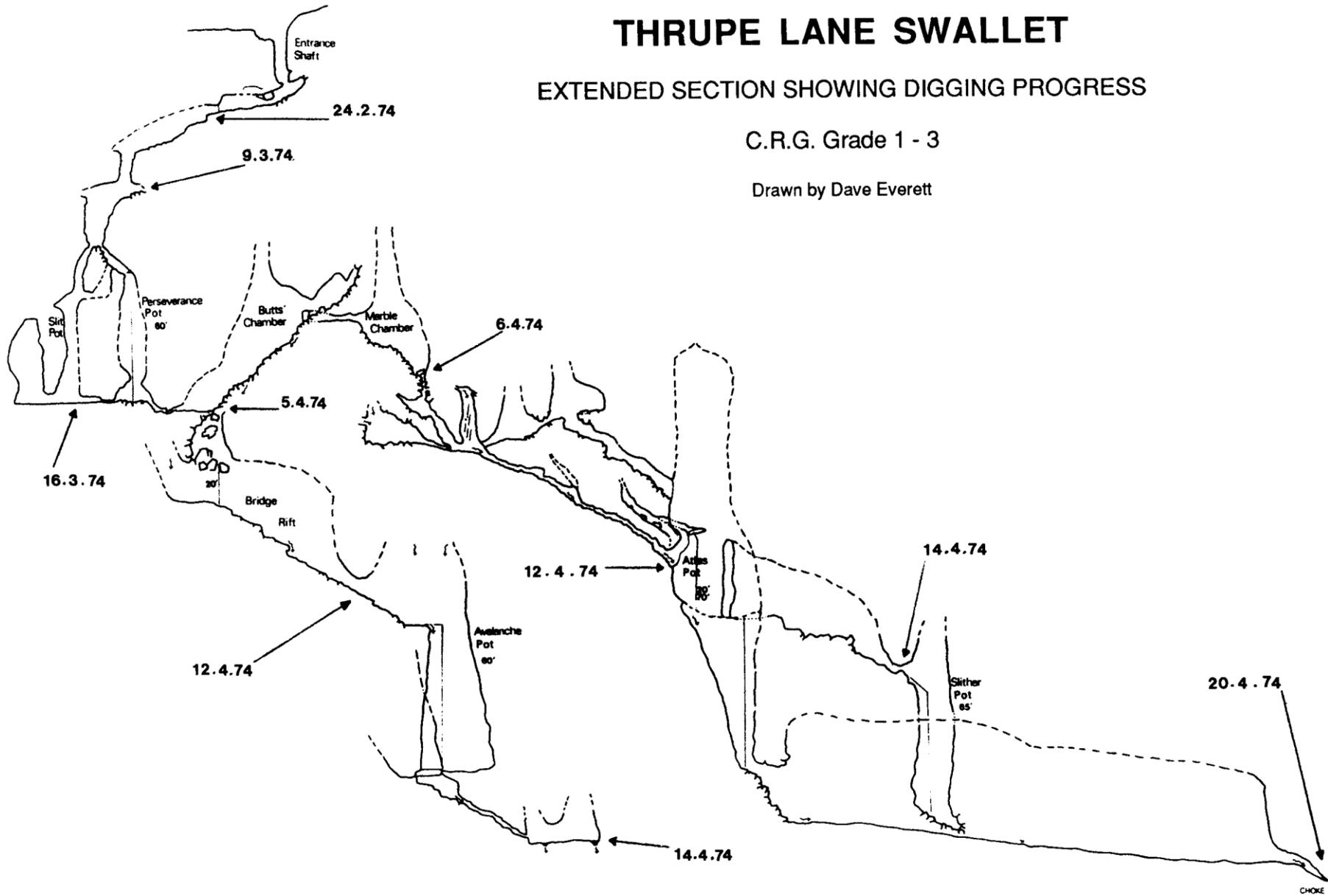
We have obviously, by luck, broken into a large shaft which at some date in prehistory engulfed the drainage of the area off the Old Red Sandstone. It is most probable that the shaft was at this time open to the surface. In the course of time collapse has closed the open entrance and later drainage has broken into the shaft at lower levels.

THRUPE LANE SWALLET

EXTENDED SECTION SHOWING DIGGING PROGRESS

C.R.G. Grade 1 - 3

Drawn by Dave Everett



Saturday 13 April 1974

A day of meditation (fester) with AW and SMK the only two to go underground. Our object was the destruction and enlargement of the squeeze in Bridge Rift by means of chemical persuasion.

Sunday 14 April 1974

SMK and AW had returned from their banging trip on Saturday bearing news of yet another shaft - a hundred footer (?) just beyond the blasted squeeze. It was decided that this should be tackled before Atlas pot.

Sunday saw several teams underground at Thrupe. AED contented himself with digging up the floor of the upper series in search of buried tools. SMK and BW concentrated on removing the squeeze in Perseverance Pot. The ladder was re-hung from a bar, and the pitch is now much less of a problem.

The Bridge Rift 'pushing party' comprised AW, CN, SS, RC, TL and RGW. We found that 10ft beyond the banged squeeze was five foot drop onto a ledge at the head of a fine pitch. It took the form of an irregular ellipse aligned very slightly to the east of Bridge Rift, and measuring 20ft by 2ft at the top and wider below. The Bridge Rift stream was augmented by a very heavy drip from an aven above the pot, but a boulder jammed across the pot divided it into a wet and a less wet pitch. The ladder was belayed to a rock flake on the left-hand wall and fed over the boulder.

AW descended first, followed quickly by the rest of the party. At floor level, about seventy feet below, the spray filled rift is over six feet wide. A parallel rift chamber can be entered but the way on is down through the floor into a short rift passage. The stream here turns right into a very low inclined bedding plane in which a meandering trench has been cut. After 30ft, a cross rift is encountered, and part of the stream sinks immediately into an impassable mud sump. Some water flows south down the very narrow rift for twenty feet before disappearing into another mud sump. The rift is choked with mud in both directions, and there is mud high up in the roof, indicating that the water backs up considerably in times of flood. The bedding plane obviously floods to the roof regularly as the banks of vegetable matter and rich wildlife testify.

The party returned to Bridge Rift a little

disappointed but still optimistic about Atlas. The Bridge Rift pitch was christened Avalanche Pot on account of the sliding pile of rocks in the rift immediately above. TL left the cave but the rest of us moved off to Atlas to examine its outer defences.

After yet another stone throwing session, CN decided to visit the ledge visible 25ft down on the left hand wall. He traversed across on a lifeline, found a rift passage leading off the ledge, and then came back for re-enforcements. No one liked the traverse and everyone was very cold. Eventually CN went off on his own down the passage. He returned after a quarter of an hour to announce that the passage was extremely muddy and ended after 80ft in a 100ft pot. It was suggested that he trade this in for a 1000ft streamway!

The log unfortunately peters out at this point. It had been compiled principally by Simon Meade-King with some help from Dave Everett, Clive North and myself. There is no entry recording the first descent of Atlas Pot, but for the record it was made by Andrew Webb, A South Wales member of the Westminster Speleological Group.

The diggers - regular and very occasional - were as follows:

AC	Alan Clarke	(WCC)
AE	Anne Everett	(WSG)
AED	Tony Dingle	(WCC)
AW	Andrew Webb	(WSG)
BG	Barry Gay	(WCC)
BW	Barry Webb	(WSG)
CF	Charles Fenn	
CN	Clive North	(ACG)
D?	Derek ?	
DGE	Dave Everett	(WSG)
JP	John Paget	
KEB	Keith Barber	(WCC)
MC	Mark Collins	
RC	Ray Cavill	(ACG)
RGW	Richard Witcombe	(WCC)
SMK	Simon Meade-King	(WSG)
SS	Steve Spratt	(ACG)
TB	Terry Baker	(WSG)
TL	Tim Lyons	(WCC)
WE	Will Edwards	(WCC)

Richard Witcombe

National Trust at work in Cheddar Gorge

WRITING IN THE TRUST'S magazine, Rosanne Fisher (Cheddar Area Warden for the National Trust) recently explained some of the work which the Trust has been attempting in the Gorge.

After a two - week pilot project in February, when scrub and undergrowth was removed from an area of the Gorge slopes and cliffs, plans are now afoot to extend this clearance to all areas of the Gorge which are not already too heavily overgrown.

Apparently, throughout the twentieth century, as a result of the removal of sheep grazing and demise of the Rabbit in the Gorge area, many of the rare carboniferous limestone herbaceous plants have been threatened by a build up of scrub, bushes and ivy on the grass areas and rocky outcrops. The Trust therefore plans to remove most of the scrub from the more open areas where "grassland is still hanging on", although Fisher states that "even in these places we will be leaving certain species of shrub for specific reasons."

The Trust hopes to have started work in October, and will introduce grazing to the cleared areas. The Nature Conservancy Council are giving a grant towards the cost of the work.

Thanks to Pete Hann for the information upon which this article is based.

Bonnington Lecture

Menlungtse and the Search for the Yeti

CHRIS BONNINGTON'S entertaining lecture at the Colston Hall, Bristol, on 25 November 1988 was well attended and well received. Photographs of the "Yeti" footprints - on snow in the high valleys- were shown, plus a map of similar sightings and hair finds in an area extending well to the East into central China.

The West, lesser, summit of the mountain was reached by a rather desperate two man push involving a long descent (in the dark) of a huge icewall.

The lecture was promoted by the Mendip Nature Research Committee. Their own club display stand, showing primarily

their caving, and hill walking in Scotland, attracted a lot of interest. Its photograph of Jingling Hole was the best I have seen of this shaft.

The highly successful evening was a great credit to the MNRC

Nigel Graham

South Nordland '89

Expedition to Elgfjell (Norway)

THE 1988 EXPEDITION SAW THE first visit of cavers to Elgfjell. Over 100 cave entrances were found and surface searching is by no means complete. Several of the caves have the potential to be major systems by Norwegian standards. There is plenty of scope for extensions including a number of open unexplored passages and others which should yield to 5 minutes work with a crowbar or lump hammer.

Elgfjell has magnificent scenery and offers idyllic camping in a totally uninhabited area. The region is noted for the variety of its wildlife including elk and bear and eagles.

The 1989 expedition will be held over a 2 to 3 week period probably at the end of July / beginning of August.

Anyone interested in participating should contact Geoff Newton for further details, either in person at Upper Pitts, or by writing to 71 Middle Lane, Epsom, Surrey, KT17 1DP.

Geoff Newton

Weil's Disease - A bigger hazard than we thought ?

ON RADIO FOUR'S *Travel Programme* on Friday evening (25 November), there was a discussion on Weil's Disease (clinically known as Leptospirosis). Describing how it could be caught by anyone coming into regular contact with dirty water or rat infested places, (canal, farm and sewage

workers, water sports enthusiasts etc.), the interviewee mentioned that, of the few cases diagnosed, 15-20 per hundred were fatal and that antibody tests have shown that a great many more people have had the disease without ever being aware - the figure may be as high as 20% of the population. While in most of these cases the symptoms are probably no worse than those of a bad cold or 'flu, it would probably be worth cavers visiting the doctor with similar symptoms (or worse) mentioning the fact that they spend their spare time wallowing in dirty water.

Caves under threat in Australia

WRITING IN THE JULY 1988 edition of *Bat News*, Bob Brown of the Australian Wilderness Society and Tony Hutson of the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society tell a story not unfamiliar in this country: that of the threatened destruction of a site of major ecological importance by big business: in this case the Central Queensland Cement Company.

Mount Etna is a 280m high cone of limestone situated in a Public Recreation

Reserve, near the city of Rockhampton in Queensland. To date, 46 caves have been found in the 'mountain', but now that the State government has withdrawn the area's reserve status, CQC are steadily destroying these. The focus of attention is Bat Cleft, home for populations of at least five species of bat, of which the most important 80% of the total known number of the Australian Ghost Bat, one of the world's largest carnivorous cave bats. Bats leave the cave in such numbers each evening that the local snakes also gather to feed off any which are unfortunate enough to come within reach as they start their nightly flights.

Despite the Queensland Premier reinstating Bat Cleft as a reserve, CQC have not altered their quarrying plans, but at present there is something of a truce while an independent assessment is made of the caves use by the ghost bats. To reach this stage, however, cavers, naturalists and others had to organise a 24 hour a day rota to ensure that there was someone in the caves threatened with blasting.

The article invites readers to write to the organiser of the protestors in support, or to the Queensland Premier, if they feel strongly enough about the issue. I would be pleased to pass the necessary details on to any Wessex member who wants to follow this up if they would like to contact me.

Bats Underground

Those people who are regular readers of *Caves and Caving* and *Descent*, will probably be aware of a leaflet recently published by the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society and the Nature Conservancy Council. Called *Bats Underground*, it is the culmination of a period of consultancy between cavers, mine historians, naturalists and the NCC, and sets out a conservation code which has been drafted to try and protect the interests of the bats without encroaching on human underground activities excessively.

While, in the main, cavers' requirements for a satisfactory cave are somewhat different from those of bats, quite a lot of caves in regular use by cavers do contain bats. Most cavers, I suspect, do not even know they are present but it is worth pointing out to the few whose attitude is one of "and I don't

care either" that the code is backed up by some fairly tough legislation. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (a piece of legislation which American cavers are constantly amazed by, judging by the amount of coverage it has received in *their* press) it is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any bat; to disturb roosting bats; or to damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place used by bats for roosting. There are heavy fines, calculated on the basis of the number of bats affected, for anyone caught breaking the law, but the law does allow the handling of bats found *in the living area* of a house for the purposes of releasing it, and of injured bats to help them recover. Seriously injured bats may legally be humanely destroyed.

Of the fifteen species of bat found in the British Isles, eleven have some reliance on

caves for hibernation and breeding. Of these (see table) the major species happen also to be some of the rarer types, so if you do see a bat in a cave, the chances are it is not one of the more common variety. Just because the bats are not obviously hanging from the ceiling does not mean they are not present; in fact, only the horseshoe bats normally hang free; others squeeze themselves into crevices and cracks.

It is also wrong to think that the bats are necessarily only looking for somewhere warm and dry to hibernate over the winter. Caves are also used for breeding, but when the bats do decide to hibernate underground, they will be looking for somewhere which is safe and cold, so that they can lower their body temperature and metabolic rate to conserve energy while they are sleeping through the winter. Hibernating bats are cold to the touch, and take time to warm up. The awakening process is often irreversible and uses up large quantities of the animal's stored energy, so if it triggered by someone handling it in the depths of winter, the bat may be unable to replenish its energy store and will die of starvation before the end of the winter. It is thus especially important not to handle bats during the winter period.

British Bats

Species	Reliance on caves	Occurrence
Greater Horseshoe	major	rare
Lesser Horseshoe	major	rare
Brown Long-eared	partial	v. common
Grey Long-eared	partial	v. rare
Barbastelle	partial	rare
Noctule	none	common
Leisler's	none	rare
Serotine	none	common
Pipistrelle	none	v. common
Mouse-eared	major	v. rare
Bechstein's	partial	v. rare
Natterer's	major	common
Daubenton's	major	common
Whiskered	partial	frequent
Brandt's	partial	frequent

Individual caves, mines and other underground sites have been graded according to their importance to bats. While this grading has yet to be completed for all such sites, when it has been done it will give people visiting the site an indication of how much care they have to take on behalf of the bat population. Sites graded to date include:

Grade 1: "Sites used by bats throughout the year for hibernation and breeding. Access to is controlled throughout the year. Visits by prior arrangement with the keyholder, in agreement with the relevant national or regional caving organisation or NAMHO, normally during spring or autumn."

Grade 2: "Sites used by large or locally significant numbers of bats during the winter (normally 1 November to 30 April, but extended in a few cases) where seasonal access control is considered desirable or is already in effect. Control over activities such as blasting may also be required."

Grade 2a: "Sites already gated or grilled. Unrestricted access by arrangement with the keyholder during the summer or restricted access by agreement between the keyholder, NAHMO or NCA or other relevant caving body during the winter. This agreement may cover activities such as blasting." (Agen Allwedd is in this category).

Grade 2b: " Sites without protection. Unrestricted access during the summer but winter visits and blasting should be avoided unless agreed with NCA/NAMHO." (Sandford Hill, Mendip, is in this category).

Grade 3: "Sites known to be used by small numbers of bats during the winter. No formal access control but proceed with caution and follow the conservation code. Avoid winter visits if practical. Report numbers of bats seen. (Eglwys Faen is in this category).

Grade 4: "Sites not known to be used by bats or with only occasional records. Follow the conservation code and report any bat sightings."

People visiting sites where bats are known to live and roost are encouraged to follow the conservation code:

- Do not handle bats.
- Do not photograph roosting bats.
- Do not warm up hibernating bats.
- Do not shine bright lights on bats.
- Do not use carbide lamps in bat roosts.
- Do not smoke or make excessive noise underground.
- Do not take large parties into bat roosts in winter.
- Do seek advice before blasting and digging.

Cavers spotting bats in caves (and

anywhere else, for that matter) are being asked to report their sighting to Mrs Stephanie Maude at the School of Life Sciences, Leicester Polytecnic, Scraploft Campus, Leicester, LE7 9SU. Tel. 0533 431011 ext. 329.

Further copies of the Bats Underground literature, together with data sheets on each species of bat, may be obtained by writing, enclosing a large S.A.E., to the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society,

79 – 83 North Street, Brighton, East Sussex, BN1 1ZA.

I hope to serialise these data sheets in following issues so that interested people can find out more about the different bats likely to encountered underground and how to make a preliminary identification of them.

NJW

The River Clydach Project

An interview with Clive Gardener

My 1982 edition of Stratford's *Caves of South Wales* describes "Ogof - y - Darren Cilau" (in half a page) as 1097 metres in length. The latest estimate I could get six years later is 24km, and anyone who has had any connection with British caving in that time cannot help but be aware of the activity under Mynydd Llangattwg (Llangattock mountain).

Although the work under the hillside has been the result of much effort by a great many people, one man who has been involved right from the very start and continues to push the limits of the system is Clive Gardener.

The latest focus of attention is the rising in the Clydach Gorge where the waters from Agen Allwedd and Daren both meet the light of day. I talked to Clive about the potential of the rising, his reasons for the project and the proposed method of exploration.

NJW "So, Clive, what actually is the Clydach Project ?"

CG "In about 1982 three or four of us from Chelsea Speleological Society went to the Clydach Gorge to look at the Pwll - y - Cwm pothole in the bed of the river Clydach on the south east side of Llangattwg. The reason that we were interested in the pothole is that the main resurgence water from Agen Allwedd and Daren Cilau comes up through the pothole and the associated risings round it. The pothole, which was dived in about 1961, has always been a maximum of about seven or eight metres in depth and at the bottom were large rounded boulders. In 1982 John Cooper's idea was to go and dive in the pothole and we constructed a rope across the river strung between two trees, and we had a pulley hanging off this that we were then lowering this wire cage from: into which John was going to put boulders. However, when John got down to the bottom of the pothole he found that, instead of the boulders which he'd seen

on his last trip, there was this very fine sand and as the holes in our wire cage were about four or five inches square the whole thing was a complete write-off and nothing more really got done.

"The project obviously took off once Daren Cilau had been found and we knew we had fairly major sump that was heading South East towards the Clydach Gorge. Of course, we dyed Daren Cilau fairly early on with fluorescein, I think it was the Sunday following the discovery of the Time Machine. The previous day, the dye from Llangattwg Swallet had turned up in the bottom of Daren Cilau so on the Sunday we went into the Clydach to see if it was coming up through the Aggie rising. Of course, we didn't know then that Daren Cilau came anywhere near the Clydach though when we drew the survey up we found we were only five or six hundred metres short.

"So down we went to the Gorge and sure enough but there it was, the whole river was green and the Aggie rising now becomes

the Daren Cilau rising. Then , in 1985 Martyn Farr decided to start diving in Daren Cilau, and he dived downstream until in early 1986 he had reached a point about 320 metres from Daren Cilau down to a place where the passage, from being smallish, came out into a really big tunnel which he was felt convinced was the main Aggie trunk route which the Daren Cilau water had now entered.

"Having decided that the carries in Daren were getting so desperate and that the biggest bottle, in fact three of the biggest bottles, which could be got in had been used on this last dive, Martyn felt that it did actually warrant a return to Elm Hole in the Clydach Gorge so in 1986 he did a series of dives which eventually led to the lines being connected through diving down a narrow rift in Elm Hole, through a crawling sized tube and then coming out through a window into this big trunk route. Now the southern end of this trunk route terminates in a boulder scree, and nobody has actually tested this out, but the theory is, and I think it's a pretty reliable theory, that this boulder choke is the bottom of the Pwll - y - Cwm pothole. We know that there is a difference in height of something like 5 metres between the bottom of the pothole and the top of this underwater passage."

NJW "So there is a line linked from Daren Cilau through to Elm Hole ?"

CG "That's right."

NJW "And then, sort of on the way past, you come past this underwater boulder choke which you think is the bottom of the Pwll - y - Cwm pothole ?"

CG "Yes: what happens is you start somewhat up in the mountain, you dive down towards the gorge in going through the Elm Hole sump, and then you get to a very sharp elbow where , at the Southern most point, you have the boulder choke, but then the passage shoots back up through the mountain and that's where it goes up to Daren Cilau. En route there are side branches to be looked at once bigger bottles are available at the bottom of Elm Hole. Similarly, you've got this big trunk route which is the linking point between Daren Cilau and the Aggie trunk routes, still to be explored upstream. If you then consider the possibility that the Clydach is a fairly recent feature, the pothole that you have got in the stream bed may be an aven or just a later development where the river once went down into the cave

system, but it would seem possible that the cave doesn't in fact rise there and terminate, but continues on, under the Clydach, and from there it is something like seven miles as the crow flies to Pontnewynydd where there are some very major risings which have not yet been traced. That will be something for the year 2000!."

NJW "So that the objective now is to go in from the pothole end and come out in Daren Cilau, but to do that we have to clear the rubble from the bottom of the pothole."

CG "Right, now this is where, late in 1985, having discovered that we have got this marvellous through-trip and all these potential leads both upstream and downstream to be explored, the Cave Diving Group started drilling work to place poles in the bed of the river. They drilled holes using a compressor and then they concreted stakes in. Very rapidly, the river built up a natural dam - unfortunately it was all twigs and branches and things which don't last when you get a major flood pulse. A lot of effort was put then put in by the Cave Diving Group to excavate a lot of rubble out of the bottom of the pothole. They used two systems, an A-frame with a pulley and a bucket to haul out the bigger boulders, but in order to clear a route first they devised an airlift, which was built from a conventional design by Owen Clarke in the Cave Diving Group. This airlift worked very successfully, especially if you were stood in front of it! The principle of it is that you pump compressed air down into the bottom, and then the air rising lifts all the sediment with it."

NJW "So we've got a dam upstream built by flood debris rushing into the row of stakes across the river, and people working in the pothole downstream of that."

CG "That's right, and in fact what they were really hoping was that by a quick hit-and- run exercise they would get down into the cave system and be able to go and explore it."

NJW "Was it dry where they were digging, or was it surface workers supporting a diver working on the bed ?"

CG "Steve Ainley did an awful lot of diving. Basically, you had to have a diver working underwater, either feeding the air hose around or collecting boulders and putting them in the tray, and then you'd have a team of

people -I remember Crewe Cave and Pothole Club turned up one weekend and had about six or seven people on the hauling line hauling up this rubble and tipping it away downstream. It's quite light while you're lifting it in the water, but as soon as it comes out of the water it weighs a ton, and you have to be careful not to pour it back down the hole onto the diver !"

NJW "Presumably you had a collapse or something and the hole filled back in again."

CG "What subsequently happened was rather unfortunate. In the Easter floods of 1986 the whole lot got washed back in again because the dam was demolished by a major flood. This disheartened a lot of people who felt that they had followed a lead, put all their effort in and that what had happened at the end had been a bit of a fiasco."

NJW "How far had they got before it had actually filled back in again ?"

CG "They may well have gone down a metre."

NJW "Over what kind of area - how big is the bottom of the pothole ?"

CG "It's a sloping bottom so it's difficult to define exactly what area they were working on, but what they were trying to do was lower the floor overall. Of course, this bottom becomes quite steep after the Winter floods when the waters seem to form the boulders in more of an incline."

NJW "Are we talking about something which is six, twenty, a hundred feet in diameter, or what ?"

CG "The pothole itself must be two or three metres by two metres, and it stays roughly uniform the whole way down, but because you have got these boulders on a ramp you obviously don't have to take the whole surface area out.

"So they reached a point where they were making progress, people were supporting them, but it all got washed back by Nature. After that, John Cooper decided that the only way to satisfactorily excavate the pothole was to build a proper dam. He set about doing that almost solo, with the help of one or two Chelsea people and a few other bystanders who occasionally turned up, and over the last couple of years he has been building this dam,

very painstaking, based on the original iron stakes which were put in."

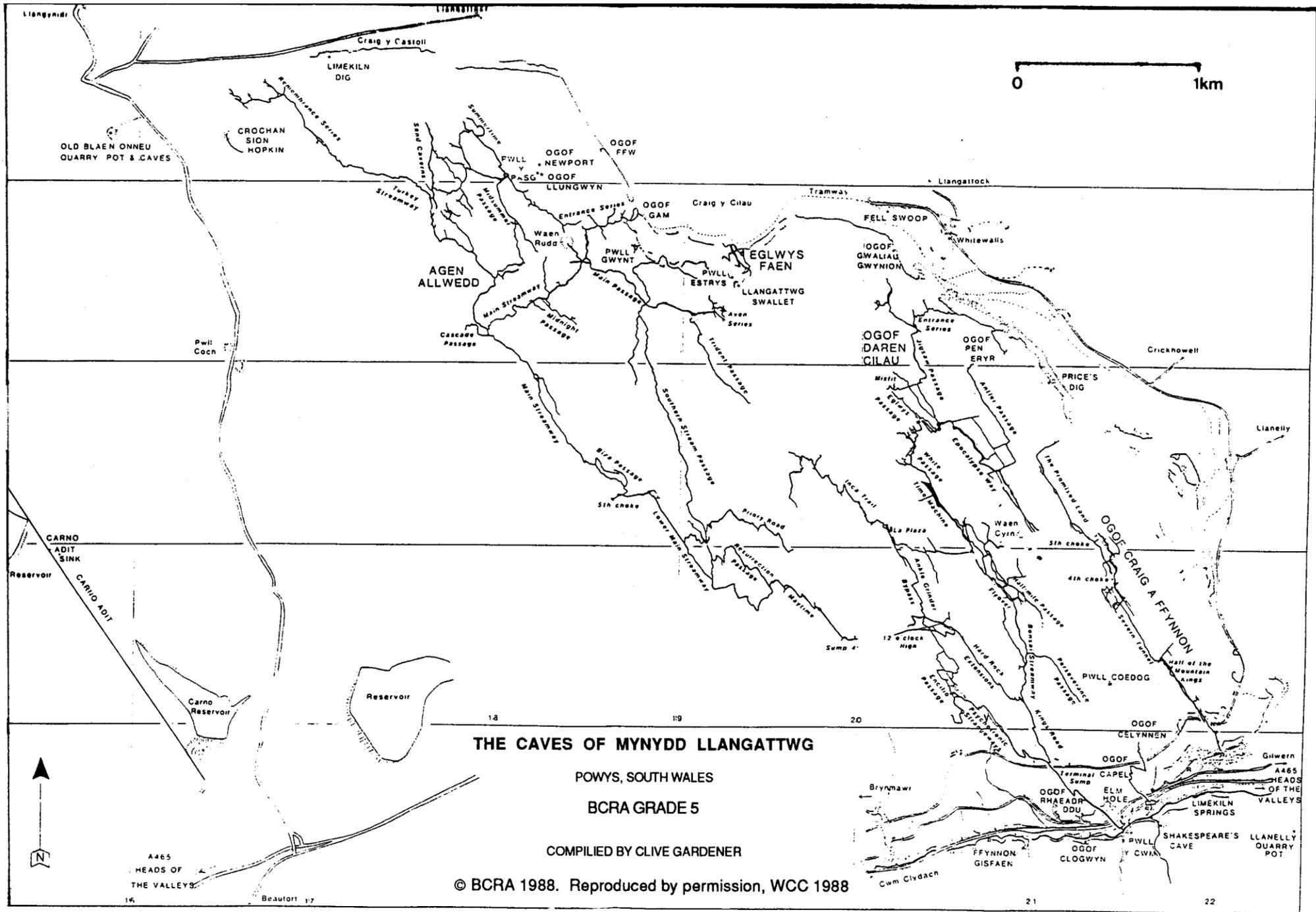
NJW "What are the political repercussions of sticking a dam across a Welsh river - who do you have to have permission from to do that ?"

CG "This gets on to the next thing now. You start off with finding out whether the Water Authority mind, and you find out that they have a sewerage effluent upstream and their main concern is not that you will affect the course of the river, but that you will cut yourself and catch some nasty obnoxious disease off the water. That was their main concern and they were quite happy to grant permission. The next thing was that the size of the dam was felt to be of importance - that it should not be six-foot high, obscuring all the view of the Gorge if you were downstream of it. There is a local conservation group, and with the latest project we have approached the chairman and asked him to come along to the meeting when we finally discuss what's going to be done.

"But we've really jumped the gun because we are now at a stage where the Cave Diving Group have had a bit of let down, and things are going along but fairly slowly. I talked to John, and he felt that it was going take at least ten years before we were going to see any results out of excavating this hole, and somehow I kind of wished that it would be possible to do it a bit quicker."

NJW "Presumably things have changed rather, largely due to your impatience."

CG "I've got this producer raising funds to make a film about the Llangattwg caves. At this stage I'd been working with him for about twelve to eighteen months, and he had been quizzing me about the logistics of filming inside the mountain. One of the hare-brained ideas that I came up with was, if this pothole had been opened in time, we could well have ferried supplies in through the sump which would have meant that an awful lot of heavy equipment hauling would have been made largely unnecessary. Not only that, it would be very useful if we had a power cable that would enable a camp to be run for re-charging battery units at the bottom of the cave, which would enable you to film the further reaches in relative ease and comfort. At the same time some sort of telephone line as well would have been handy. Now that was the personal motive.



"I was out in France in 1984 and I met up with the Army Caving Association and they very kindly let me go on their rig and bottom the Berger. The thought occurred to me that maybe this [the dam] is the sort of thing that the Army might be interested in as a training project. I spoke to Ian Rolland, who is the secretary for the Welsh area of the Army Caving Association. Ian, of course, had a long history of exploring in the mountain though due to unfortunate other commitments he had missed out on both the original breakthroughs - I think his car broke down for the second one. He talked to Ian James and came back to me with a suggestion that I should send a letter. This letter was accompanied by a report, a brief outline explaining the significance of exploring the mountain and what the significance of this pothole was, what the actual project was, and a number of proviso's. Among these was that, if the Army was to be involved, the project was to be overseen by the Army Caving Association in the shape of Ian James and Ian Rolland, and also that the conservation of the Gorge was to be borne uppermost in mind and that any works that were done fitted in with the landscape of the gorge and didn't conflict with its natural beauty.

"Now at this stage this was a letter from a film company, ostensibly for the purpose of enabling us to make our filming work easier. Ian James bounced it around people in the Army, and came back to me and said "look , this is interesting as a training project, but you basically need something a bit better than it's just a commercial proposition for making a movie". What he suggested was, were there any uses on the cave rescue front that would enable us to approach the project through the cave rescue organisation. What actually turned out was that there are people looking into trying to rescue injured people through sumps.

"I must say at this point that rescue through a 500 metre long sump is absolutely impossible at this moment in time, but we have just had a doctor go through the entrance series [of Daren] and confirm what I have known for four years, which is that you are not going to rescue a badly smashed up person from Daren, because there is too much self-help needed in the present entrance series. Now I think that if we've got a large, open, underwater tunnel and you are then faced one day, sometime in the future, with a person with a broken back, or badly broken legs or arms, then I think what you are going to be faced with is either you have the tactics to bring them out through the

sump or they just die in the cave.

"What we then looked for were the benefits of what we were proposing in the first place that would work for cave rescue. In the long term we could develop a capsule that would take a human being that would be self contained with air supply and that could be managed through the sump. Size is no problem, it's purely the length and whether you've got the visibility. Once people are exploring the sump the degree of skill will be there in the divers - at present people in South Wales are not used to diving 500 metre long sumps, but all this will come.

"However, for the immediate use, [the aim is] to be able to run a camp from the bottom of Daren which is fed by power which would provide heating, maybe cooking or certainly light, and a telephone line to enable immediate communication to the surface. It would then be feasible to keep an injured person underground for number of days until they get into a state where they can bring themselves out of the entrance series."

NJW "How far, in time terms, are a few of the key points into Daren ?"

CG "People have been getting down to the Hardrock Cafe at the bottom of the Bonsai streamway in three hours. On a regular tourist trip you are looking at about four hours to the bottom of the cave. If you know where you are going you can expect to do in and out in about eight hours, if you are going in with just a guide book you can expect it to take ten to twelve hours. The camp that we are talking about being able to supply is approximately three and a half to four hours into the cave- about half way through the present cave."

NJW "So we are talking about knocking a minimum of three and a half to four hours off the callout time in the case of a rescue by having a telephone available."

CG "Absolutely. If you are looking at someone who has done a search and find in the cave, the amount of energy you use in Daren you will not have the ability to rush back out again and pass the information out. This, in fact, could save a life.

"We do have a number of pitches at the further reaches of the cave - three mile plus into the system, and if there was to be an accident there, which is feasible, the time it would take you to reach just the Restaurant at the End of the Universe, would be about seven or eight

hours from the entrance. Seven or eight hours to get to that point to find out what equipment was needed. If you were able to stop at the bottom of the cave, about two hours from that camp, you could very quickly feed out the information, whereas if you are looking a fifteen hours to go in and come out again you could very well find that the person is dead by the time help arrives."

NJW "So, the Army have been approached to ask if they are prepared to help with this project."

CG "The reply that came back from Ian James was "if you want to proceed further we'll have to proceed through the cave rescue route", so I had a chat with Bill Gascoine, who has always been very helpful to people who have got projects or ideas they want to get working. Bill said to let him know what was wanted, and he would get on with it, so Ian James and myself went to visit Bill. We took him the book [describing the pothole project], and a suggestion of how the Army could be approached. He then wrote to General Llewellyn because we felt we needed someone with a significant amount of clout, who could assess the project and whether or not it was the sort of thing the Army wanted to get involved in. He put Major Stan Willis, who is the Royal Engineer's chief engineer in South Wales, onto the project to assess it's viability. Major Willis wrote back to Bill and said that yes, they were interested and would be taking it to a finance committee, but could we look into raising £20,000 which he estimated would be the materials cost of the operation. He did say though, that the Army would provide labour, equipment and fuel free of charge.

"Bill then took one look at this letter and said "we haven't got £20,000" and passed it onto me, which was very good of him as what it needs is several letters seeking sponsorship, of which I have sent the first one out to the Welsh Sports Council.

"I asked Bill if he would then go and talk to the locals, which he did in the Drum and Monkey pub, and from discussing the project with them, they had absolutely no objection whatsoever, as long as they were informed as to what was going on."

NJW "Is there actually directly anything in it for them ?"

CG "I'm not sure whether they are likely to gain out of it. I mean they will gain in terms of

something odd or unusual happening in their area. The [use of] explosives is what they are mainly concerned about cavers for, due to an incident in which a large amount of explosives used in Ogof Capel caused the foundations of the Drum and Monkey to settle. Their main concern is that we don't actually do any blasting.

"We have arranged for a local conservation officer to get involved in the project, and guide us along. This person is the Chairman of the Llanelly Hill and Blorenge Defence Association, and he was responsible for stopping the council application to dump refuse in the Pwll Ddu quarry. He's got a fair amount of support for the work he's done, and the purpose of his being there is to say either one way or the other whether what we are considering is suitable or not.

"The next thing we did was we discussed it at the Cave Diving Group meeting. This was brought up under any other business, and discussed by the members present. The outcome of that was total support. We found that cavers would give it their support providing it didn't damage the Gorge. I would certainly not have wanted it to go ahead if I felt there was a pressure group against it.

"We now come bang up to date. I wrote to Major Stan Willis, asking for more particulars of what exactly we had to raise and saying, yes, we were prepared to seek sponsorship, and then Major Willis rang me up and told me everything they were going to do. He was actually able to say that he had a better way. What we are looking for now is building a dam, which will deflect the main flow of the water and the rubble, so that no rubble will go down the pothole in future. We are also looking to slightly widen the river, and definitely deepen the river at the side of the pothole, so that the main flow then goes along the side. Being a diver himself, he felt that a group of divers could be brought together, and that they could get an airlift, and if necessary use small shaped charges to break up larger boulders.

"The whole project seems to be nicely ticking over. It's gone through the finance committee, and it's now gone to the auditors, and the auditors will decide whether it is going to be totally funded by the Army. This will stand on whether they felt it is a significant enough training exercise. Otherwise it will be part-funded by sponsorship, but I'm still seeking sponsorship anyway. Approaching people for sponsorship also helps to get the project known, and I think one of the things

the Army will be looking for in this, which I'm only too pleased to help them on, is some reasonable publicity.

"They've got something like thirty men available for fourteen days, and they would have been on some training exercise abroad, maybe in Norway, but it's much cheaper to put them on an exercise in Britain. This particular group are Royal Marines, and they will be abseiling into the Gorge from the Heads of the Valleys road, and climbing out again in the evening.

"If you are going to have an Army, you have got to train them. If you are paying good money to have them trained, why get them to build a bridge that's then going to be demolished purely for a fake training exercise, why not give them a useful, worthwhile, project which will last for years afterwards and

will serve a good, useful purpose in the community. Military assistance to the civil community I think they call this."

The proposed project to excavate the pothole can, I think, been seen as the logical next step in an evolution of caving under Llangattwg. Where it marks a quantum leap, in my estimation, is the recognition, by the Army, that cavers are in their own right, a legitimate community to be helped. For a variety of reasons, we can look forward with interest to the next chapter in the story.

NJW

Book Review

***Race Against Time.* Jim Eyre and John Frankland. Lyon Books, 1988, 208pp softback £9.95**

It was in 1934 that Reg Weetman of the York Moor and Fell Club was trapped by a rock falling onto his leg while exploring in Gingling Hole. It took 29 hours for Weetman, whose leg was fractured in two places, to be brought to the surface, and it was as a direct result of this incident that the Cave Rescue Organisation (as it rapidly became known) was formed. Since then, over three hundred and seventy caving incidents have been attended in a total of more than a thousand call outs, to subjects as diverse as frogs and a JCB.

In the early days, when hemp ropes and wooden rungs were standard caving tackle, rescue was a difficult and protracted process, not least because of difficulties in pulling together an adequate rescue team in a time before motor cars and telephones were common. While the causes of rescues (falling boulders, flooding and unlife-lined climbers falling off ladders) remain much the same today, the chances of survival of a victim are much better in these days of wet-suits and waterproof clothing, and advances in techniques have done as much as those in technology to compensate for the more difficult rescues in the more obscure places in which cavers are getting into difficulty these days.

This book, written by two people who have been heavily involved with cavers and the CRO over a period of many years, chronicles the development of these techniques during the first fifty years of the CRO in accounts of many individual rescues over that period. In an economical and, where required, humorous style, it treads the fine line between clearly enunciating the causes of an accident and allocating individual blame, with great success.

It has the added advantage of being a pleasant book to read, being well written and liberally sprinkled with photographs, reproductions of newspapers and Eyre's cartoons. Printed on good quality paper, my only reservation is that it does not have a sewn binding, and how it will stand the ravages of time and the many friends who will want to borrow it remains to be seen. The answer is simple: don't lend your copy to anyone. With the proceeds going to the funds of the CRO, nobody who regularly caves in Yorkshire should be without their own copy of this excellent book. Buy it.

NJW

An open letter from the Chairman

"The time has come," the Walrus said,
"to talk of many things, of hut, and
showers, and tiled floors, committees and
designs, of whether they are finished yet,
and whether pigs have wings."

A caver of some 30 years standing applied recently to join the Wessex. Among his reasons for seeking membership, he includes "seems to be a friendly club" and "hut is excellent".

Our insurance company has just made its five yearly survey of Upper Pitts. The inspector arrived with his 1983 survey notes, and spent an hour or so ferreting about. On leaving he remarked "...the club does seem to have made tremendous improvements to the facilities. You must have a very enthusiastic membership..."

These impressions from outsiders sit uneasily alongside the last few years of negative back-biting and petty power politics which have accompanied said "tremendous improvements." This letter comes in response to those comments, and from a recent Committee discussion of life, the universe andeverything. The opinions expressed - and responsibility - are, of course, mine alone.

Let's start with some history. The Wessex de-camped from Hillgrove to Upper Pitts in 1968. The shell of the hut was built by contractors, the rest being completed by members. A while later, the extension was built. Discussions on how best to use it to improve the tackle/changing/ladies/locker facilities culminated in a drawn plan approved in principle by the 1983 A.G.M. Since then, virtually all of the work has been completed, with only minor changes to the original scheme. Since that time, also, there has developed a very "hut-possessive" attitude of "I'm/we few are right - the rest of you buggers are wrong." This has proved divisive and increasingly acrimonious, and has effectively reduced the wider membership's inclination and opportunities to contribute to the improvement of the club. I am disturbed that it takes "outsiders" to remind us of the progress the Wessex continues to make. Still - maybe it's true: "when you are up to your ass in alligators, it is difficult to remember that your original objective was to drain the swamp!"

Looking in detail at the work, it seems self-evident that the facilities we wanted are

now there, and are a considerable improvement. It also seems clear that the Club is not about to rip up several years - and several thousand pounds worth - of work to remedy minor imperfections. Consider the changing room floor (which so often haunts us on Saturday evening when ale has addled brains and loosened tongues). The original specification was put out to tender by the Committee. It included the tackle store, blockwork and tile shower partitions, a central drainage gully, and an external mud trap. A quotation was accepted. Between tender and work commencement, the tackle store was demolished and built in a different place. The showers went from block partition to stainless steel partition to no partitions at all, to plastic partition and finally to "sod - it - I'll pull the bloody blockwork up next weekend " (thanks, Malcolm). The floor drainage and mud trap went through several design modifications. That the contractors actually managed to tile the floor seems to me a minor miracle ... and even then they were so confused by conflicting instructions that they tiled (unasked, and unquoted) the gent's toilet floor as well. We now have a changing area which works, and wins admiration from visitors, but, "IT'S NOT RIGHT" the "I'm right, you buggers are wrong" brigade will tell you. Granted; if you throw a bucket of water just so, in just the appropriate place, it takes as long as a few minutes to drain. Horror of Horrors, one might actually have to sweep the floor as well! I think this level of negative, after the event criticism is ridiculous. I'm not afraid to say so. Often. No wonder the floor doesn't drain like the Sultan's hammam in Istanbul - it went through so many "design modifications" that I'm amazed the contractors didn't end up tiling the car park !

Plans A to E and back again! The ladies dormitory ? Had it not been for Dave Morrison saying to the committee "sod it - just let me get on with it - I'll provide all the labour if the club gets the materials" we wouldn't have got the near finished edifice we have got now. (By the way; why do we seem so to undervalue our female members that "ladies" facilities are obstructed and delayed until last.)

"Ah, but what about the central heating" say some ? I have the temerity to suggest that it may well work better if little fingers stopped fiddling with the controls. Of course, everyone knows how to operate central

heating systems, which is probably why we have just had to call back the installers to put it right following some evident confusion of the on/off switches with drain/repressurisation taps.

Enough ? Too much, I'd say. Let's just remember a few things: the Wessex is a premier U.K. caving club; we have excellent caving facilities, and even those are improving; we are enriched by a diverse and strong-minded membership; and we owe not a penny to banks, building societies or loan sharks. The club's only debt is to ourselves - the members - and then mainly for time, commitment and sweat. Isn't it about time we all recognised (and accepted) that you can't please all the

people all the time ? Isn't it about time we used our energies for the betterment of the Wessex Cave Club, instead of strengthening our positions? Isn't it about time we all recognised what a damn fine club this is, and committed ourselves to working cooperatively to continue its damn fine traditions? I think it's time; that's why I won't mind the ale added Saturday night hauntings provoked by my scribblings. That's why I look forward to your response - personally, or via these esteemed pages.

By the way, will you be there at the next club/working weekend, January 14 - 15? There's still lots to do!

Jim Moon

Notes for contributors

IF YOU HAVE ANY ARTICLE, letter, comment, news, photograph, or anything else which you would like to see published in the Journal, please do not hesitate to send it to me at the address below. Preferably, text should be typed on one side of the paper only, with wide margins and double spaces between the lines, but I'd rather have it scrawled on the back of a cigarette packet than not get it at all.

The main requirement for photo's is that they should not have too much contrast as otherwise they are unrecognizable when printed. Prints or slides, in black and white or colour are acceptable, but bear in mind that they will come out as black and white prints when they appear, so if the colour is an important feature they will not be a lot of use when printed. Please make sure that your prints or transparencies are clearly labelled, and send the appropriate captions for each label on a separate sheet.

For those who have access to a wordprocessor, I may be able to accept contributions on floppy disc. Please give me a ring so that we can discuss whether or not your software is compatible with mine.

Line drawings, sketch maps and diagrams are all welcome. They should be supplied full size.

If you copy drawings or photo's, or quote from another publication, please make sure you inform me before publication so that I can make arrangements regarding copyright.

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