



THE WESSEX CAVE CLUB JOURNAL

VOLUME 25

NUMBER 271

SEPTEMBER 2000

THE WESSEX CAVE CLUB JOURNAL

VOLUME 25 NUMBER 271

September 2000

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ISSN 0083-811X

Opinions expressed in the Journal are not necessarily
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Club News

We Won The Ashes Again

Photos by M Hewins



Wessex Cave Club Hymn

Tune: The Church is One Foundation

Author: Many

Reproduced: from many sources, including WCC Journals

We are the Wessex Cave Club, no bloody use are we.
We have a half of cider, and then we have to pee,
And when we're down Swildons' and haven't got a light,
We stand about the Forty and Shit ourselves with fright.

But as we go to blow it, in the middle of the night,
When the turds go skywards, we run like f**king shite.

The B.E.C. they help us, through every pitch and squeeze.
We like the way they do it with such consummate ease.
And when we are much better at caving we agree
It is our one ambition to join the B.E.C.

We are the Cotham Cave Club, but not as we may seem,
You show us a cave entrance, and we will start to scream,
For we do not like caving, but give it all the snub,
The nearest we touch caving, is in a Mendip pub.

We are the Shepton Cave Club a family clique are we,
Ken Dawe he was our leader, A clever bugger, 'ee.
He led us over fields and stiles, down potholes vast and deep,
Because we followed meekly we're called the Shepton Sheep

Swildons goes to Wookey, or so they do confide,
There is a sign to say so, on the Sump 1 downstream side,
But this is misconception, there is a brand new sign,
Now Swildons is an Entrance, to Dan-yr-Ogof 9.

We've dug down South East Inlet, we've dug on Priddy Green,
And in between the digging, we're often quite obscene.
We tell prospective members, with regularity,
To do just as the song says, and join the B.E.C.

We are the Clockwork Cave Club, and South Wales is our home,
And from our native valleys we do not care to roam,
And when we go out caving it is a certain bet,
That we will carry with us, a giant Meccano set.

We are the Cerebos Cave Club, we are not worth our salt,
Max Unwin is our leader, but that is not our fault,
He lectured us on caving, his wisdom was profound,
He told us that most caves are located underground

We don't go down Pwll Dufn, you'll find no rawl bolts here,
The thought of ladder pitches, it fills us with despair,
And if you go out caving with S.W.C.C.
You'll always find a welcome, if you've got a B.Sc. (in Engineering)

Caves are discovered for us, from digging we all shirk,
And when it gets too dicey, other clubs can do the work,
For they can draw the surveys and they can make the maps,
'Cos when it comes to caving, we really are the chaps.

The U.B.S.S.'s divers, they found a brand new hole,
They told no-one about it, they did not tell a soul,
And when we found out about it, they said please stay away,
Until they all got stuck there, one dark and wintry day.

We hold committee meetings, we talk and never cave,
We pass firm resolutions, to show that we are brave,
We very often argue, but on one thing we agree,
If only they would have us we'd join the B.E.C.

We are the Tratman Fan Club, we are a shower of shits,
We often need the rescue to extract us from a fix,
And when we are in Yorkshire, before we go below,
Our automatic procedure is to inform the C.R.O.

We are the Axbridge Cave Club, we know we are so good.
We blow up every Elsan, just as we know we should,

The U.B.S.S. Choir boys, they are a dreadful crowd,
Each song becomes a death march, at volume extra loud,
And when they get a chorus, they chant in ecstasy,
The only trouble being, it's in a different key.

Library Report

Phil Hendy

LIBRARY - RECENT ACQUISITIONS

As at 25th July 2000 The Club was bequeathed three books by the late Graham Balcombe. They are:

The Netherworld of Mendip (E.A. Baker & H.E. Balch 1907).

The Darkness Beckons (M. Farr, 1980).

The Longest Cave (History of the Exploration of Flint Ridge Cave System and Mammoth Cave, Kentucky) (R.W. Brucker & R.A. Watson 1976)

Thanks to John Buxton for arranging delivery.

Eternal Caves (Valery d'Amboise). Photographs and commentary on French show and archaeological caves. Donated by Bob Scammell.

25": 1 mile OS maps of Priddy (North of Top Green, and Hunter's Lodge / Minneries) Attborough Swallet (Survey)

White Pit (Survey)

Bristol Exploration Club. Belfry Bulletin Vol. 51 No. 3 No. 507 (Jun 2000)

BCRA Cave & Karst Science Vol. 26 No. 3 (Dec 1999)

Chelsea Speleological Society Newsletter Vol. 42 No. 6 (Jun 2000). No. 7 (July 2000)

Craven Pothole Club. Record No. 59 (Jul 2000)

Descent No. 154 (Jun/Jul 2000)

Devon Speleological Society Newsletter Vol 19 (Jun 2000)

Grosvenor Caving Club Newsletter No. 104 (Jun 2000)

Mendip Caving Group Newsletter 279 (May 1999) to 287 (Feb 2000)

Mendip Nature Research Committee. Newsletter No. 78 (Jun/Jul 2000)

NSS News Vol.58 No. 4 Part 2 (Apr. 2000) - American caving Accidents 1996-1998 No. 5 (May 2000)

Regards (Bulletin trimestrial de l'Union Beige de Speleologie) No. 37 (1999) No. 38 (2000)

Shepton Mallet Caving Club Journal Series 10 No. 7 (Spring 2000)

Westminster Speleological Group Newsletter No. 2001 (Apr. 2000)

CNCC Minutes of AGM (4th March 2000) and access updates for CNCC Handbook

In cataloguing the Library, I have failed to find the following books; they are missing and have not been booked out. Apart from the fact that these items of Club property are no longer available for general reference, some of these items are quite rare, and their total value is considerable. If you have any of these items, please return them to the Library. No questions will be asked.

The Great Cave of Wookey Hole (H.E. Balch) This is the large book, and this copy was dedicated to the Wessex (subsequently overwritten) by Balch himself.

Wessex Cave Club Journals (bound) Vols. 5 & 19.

00004 A Mendip Caver's Ropework Guide
(A.Sparrow)

00016 Subterranean Climbers (P Chevalier)

00021 Traveller's Survival Kit (N. Clarke)

00045 Living Underground (D. Kemp)

00174 Geological Excursions around Bristol
(R.J.D. Savage)

Caves of Ireland (J.C. Coleman)

Beyond the Bounds of History (H. Breuil)

00229 More Years Under the Earth (N. Casteret)

00292 Challenge Underground (B.L. Bedford)

00301 The Descent of the Pierre St. Martin
(N. Casteret)

00379 Irian Jaya (Severens)

00381 Bibliography of Belizian Caving
(N. Williams)

00388 A History of Swildon's Hole (O. Wells)

00490 The Grotto (H. Bridgwater)

00494 The History of Tunnelling (G. Sandstrom)

00502 British Regional Geography -
Welsh Borderlands (K.C. Dunham)

00504 Bristol & Gloucester District (G. Kellaway)

00515 British Stratigraphy
(Black Country Geol. Soc.)

00516 Knots & Splices (C. Gibson)

00530 Mendip Underground (1993)

(D. Irwin & A. Jarratt)

00938 Handbook & Access Guide (CSCC)
(D. Irwin)

00943 Limestone & Caves of Wales (T.D. Ford)

01093 Most Splendid of Men (H. Brown)

01174 Mendip's Vanishing Grottoes (J. Eatough)

01225 CDG (Somerset) Practice Rescue (R.Drake)

01292 Killer Mine (Hammond Innes)

01321 Climber & Rambler (1984) (BMC)

01758d Introduction to Cave Photography
(BCRA Series) - only acquired recently!

02003 Postojna Jama (1990)

05002 Mysterious Britain (J & C. Bord)

Water & Mud 1997

Andy Kay

Previously published in *Speleo-Dordogne* 2nd Trimestrial 1997. Translated by Andy Kay

The relaunch of operations at the Doux de Coly this year having greatly influenced the time available for the majority of the team, it is only a very small group that assembles for the traditional Easter visit. In fact it is only Malc 'Beer Monster' Foyle and Mike 'Yorkie' Dewdney-Yorke who arrive at La Chassenie on the 19th April. The van nevertheless contains a large number of tanks, the compressor, etc, as usual!

20 April

A late lie-in, and slow preparations for the trip to Font de Cujes (Bars). However, with the warm sunshine, the idea of a serious underground trip is hardly tempting, and is put off until the next day, with just a visit made today to the Grand Souci (St Vincent sur L'Isle). The water appears less clear than three weeks ago, though better than last summer. Malc decides he'll dive it during the week.

On the way back, we stop at the resurgence of La Servalic (Mayac), a site which I haven't visited for some years. The waters of the river Loue, just below the spring, are low for the season, and the outflow from the resurgence joins them via a slight slope. As I'm the only one to have brought any kit, and faced with Malc's exhortations, I'm obliged to wriggle into the entrance (+/10cm airspace) to find that it sumps after about 3.5metres. However, a bit of digging at the entrance might make penetration possible with dive tanks.

'Speleo Score': Andy 1, Malc 0. A lazy day.

21 April

We are woken at an early hour by Yorkie, who is busying himself preparing a substantial bacon and egg breakfast for the 'explorers'. Thus we have no excuses, and are soon *en route* for Font de Cujes. This cave has intrigued us since last year, especially because of the enigmatic presence of an electric cable leading all the way from the entrance to the first sump. Despite serious research, we have not discovered anyone actively exploring the cave, and now feel that we can make an incursion without being accused of 'piracy'.

The line is still there, although it doesn't seem to have been recently used. Malc dives first, and shortly afterwards I receive the signal that he is through and everything is OK. Soon I rejoin him. Beyond the sump the cave regains the ampleur of the entrance passage, although the walls are

carpeted with mud. After forty metres of easy walking, the second sump is found, and has to be cleared by pushing the sand (which has accumulated in the low part after the first metre back down the slope) with one's feet. Malc decides to give it a try; I'll wait for him where I am.

During Malcolm's half hour of exploration beyond the sump, I examine my immediate environment: fossils, exposed by erosion, protrude from the walls, along with numerous chert nodules. Ten metres downstream of the sump is a chimney which it would be interesting to try climbing My reveries are interrupted by Malc's return, and he recounts his advance up until a climb which he didn't want to try with all his diving kit, also thinking of myself who awaited him between the two sumps! Anyway, as he explained, it would seem better to leave the dive kit at the exit of sump 2. Exit via the first sump and the impressive galleries without problem except for the presence of a dead blackbird and thousands of mosquitoes in the entrance duck. Ugh! It's the nastiest bit of the whole cave!

The trip having finished by early afternoon, Malc enquires about other interesting places to visit. In comparison with Great Britain, where there are probably a hundred cavers per acre of limestone, over here there remains just too much to choose from. We head north for some forty miles to the valley of the Cole. At the Perte de St Pierre de Cole we are impressed with the dig undertaken by the G3S¹ and curious as to where it leads This time it's Malc who puts on his wetsuit, and goes in for several metres before encountering a sump. The noise and volume of the streamway are very spectacular. A call to J-M Ostermann² that evening informs us that a diver from their group had dived the dump for an unspecified distance before being stopped by roof breakdown.

'Speleo Score' today: Andy 2, Malc 2.5 (having gone further into Font de Cujes), Christiane & Yorkie 1 point each for the cooking and having the patience to put up with our interminable stories.

22 April

To St Vincent and the Grand Souci, with a certain unease³ as Malc will be diving alone without any back up. The plan is relatively simple: descend with two line reels to be tied off to the shot at - 15m. Then follow the line to the shotline weight to see if it is still lodged on the talus slope, or 'floating in

midwater' as told to me by some local divers recently. Next, return to the line reels and depart horizontally to the wall, then use the second one with a lead attached to sound the depth of the hole from this point. Wearing a wetsuit and 12L bottles Malc couldn't take too long unless he wanted to do a long deco.

The level of the pool seems about 30cm lower than last year. I take up my traditional 'on rope' position to pass the kit to the diver. Then it's the wait. Malc returns after 23 minutes underwater: everything has gone as planned, or almost. Following the shot he found the breezeblock weight well buried in the mud of the talus at a current depth of -39.5 below water level. Coming back up he took the reels, and after 12.5m swimming just below the ceiling of the chamber, found the wall, where the line was tied to a large flake. On testing the belay, however, the entire flake came loose from the wall, very luckily escaping from the knot as it disappeared into the depths. So although the plan was not totally achieved, we now know that the walls and 'ceiling' of the Souci are composed of very unstable rock! Returning to the house, Malc complains about the fragility of Perigord caves, but at least he's gained another point on the 'Speleo scoreboard'!

23 April

With a number of small things to sort out, this turns into a rest day. Mal & Andy nevertheless make a quick pilgrimage to the Font de La Doue to observe that although the flow is constant as always, the level seems low. Despite neither of them having brought any kit, they give themselves half a speleo point apiece. Yorkie and Christiane are beginning to catch up, what with the cooking, and being regaled with our projects for the following day.

24 April

Arriving at Font de Cujes we find that we haven't forgotten any of the kit, so there's no excuse for not going caving. This time your author leads, and thus gets a bit of visibility to study the form of the first sump. However there's no viz in the second, where one goes feet first to bulldoze any sand: one needs to stay 'stuck' to the line on the left hand wall to get through. But the underwater passage is short (6m) and at last we can explore this cave together after seven months' waiting to do so. The dive kit is dropped off on a boulder five metres upstream of the sump.

First objective: a possible sump bypass, but after a climb it turns out to be blocked after five metres. We continue upstream. A decorated chimney is spotted, which it would be interesting to climb as its bringing

in a significant amount of water, however we leave it for the present. After a pleasant wade along the streamway, we arrive at a right-angle turn; 'sump three' for the original explorers, which one gets through on tiptoes with just the head above water. Arriving at the climb which stopped Malc (wearing all his kit) two days ago, we scramble up it without too much problem. (On the way back a tight bypass was found at water level).

At the top of the climb we are in the 'Triangle Grotto'. Why is it that other than in a certain well-known showcave, which pronounces them 'unique in the world', these extraordinary triangular formations only seem to be found in distant parts of generally unfrequented caves? It's a mystery, but what a pleasure to admire these unsullied triangles, columns, cave pearls and helictites, knowing that literally only a handful of other people have ever seen them.

Not far after this chamber we're halted by another, more awkward, climb. Malc almost chimneys to the top, but doesn't particularly want to wriggle into the continuing passage as all the accumulated water in his boots would run down the slope, making it dangerously slippery. We're 479 metres from the entrance. About-turn due to caution about this pitch. On the way out, sump 2 seems easier to pass than on the way in, even though it is more 'wiggly' and shorter than sump 1. (With British-style sidemounts; French-style backmounts would not pass).

For the technicians, the trip was made in wetsuits, using electric lighting, and each caver carrying independent 8 litre and 4 litre tanks. Your author needed 4 kilos of lead, Malc only 3. It should be noted that the former, very inexperienced in underwater caving, used up twice as much of his air as did Malc, who's an expert in these things.

Returning to La Chassenie we make a detour to the Puits de Bontemps to look at the stream and a resurgence noticed during the winter. There is no flow from the 'Puits', and the resurgence is now just a trickle of water coming through the pebbles in the bed of the stream.

25 April

Friday is consecrated to tourism: the prehistoric cave paintings of Font de Gaume (Les Eyzies), and the trogloditic site of La Madeleine.

26 April

Comes the time to say farewells, and to tot up the 'Speleo scores'. Malc 6 points (we took a point from him because during a climb beyond the right-angle

'sump 3' in Font de Cujes his handhold detached itself from the wall and he narrowly escaped a 5 metre fall. Ah, these fragile Perigord caves!). Andy 5 points, Christiane and Yorkie 4 each (cooking, tourist caving, putting up with two bores, etc).

Even if the 1997 'Water & Mud' visit was brief, didn't assemble as many people as previously, and didn't lead to any new discoveries, it was a good week's caving. No doubt there will be more dives at Le Grand Souci in the future, and we'll return to Font de Cujes with climbing kit.

C. DEVAUX-KAY (SCP)
M. DEWDNEY-YORKE (WCC)
M. FOYLE (CDG/WCC)
A. KAY (SCP/WCC)

1 GSSS: Groupe Speleologique, Sportif, et Scientifique: another local club

2 Member of the G3S responsible for the dig at this site

3 'Souci' in the local patois means swallet, or any big hole in the ground: however, in modern French it translates as 'unease' or 'worry'. Hence Le Grand Souci could be called The Big Worry!

Beer Quarry Caves

NBW & Cathy 18-6-00

Excellent guided tour of these fascinating caves (mines really). Having dispensed with the "weegies", we had a personal guided tour of the stone mines. Stone has been extracted since Roman times & then ownership passed into church hands.

The history of these caves documents the history of the local quarrymen that mined this stone for a pittance & the church that grew ever richer in its exploitation. Additionally, the stone was carved underground by masons, who were much better paid & had better conditions. Hence this mine also documents the beginnings of the Free Masons & their attempts to keep secret their skills (being their key to privilege.)

Discovered artefacts include everything imaginable to plot the life of the English labourer, even before England existed, from the remains of an 18th Century packed lunch (bread, rabbit meat & a bottle of cider) that sustained a quarryman for his 14 hour shift; a tuppence coin lost by a unlucky worker (this was a week's wages - so the family probably went without food & faced eviction); to a Roman coin bearing the face of Caligula. The reverse side shows a horse that Caligula appointed Senator together with the sun & the moon. Caligula took the sun & the moon imagery as flattery, confirming that his rule extended to the heavens. The imperial mint

meant it to represent the "Ides of March" & looked forward to Caligula's assassination!

The mines, through names, dates etc, also tell the history of local smuggling which was used to supplement the quarrymen's wages & their continual cat & mouse games with the Customs & Excise men.

None of the men ever used or could afford soap, bars of French ladies' soap could feed the family a few times. Well worth the risk of having a hand cut off, if caught!

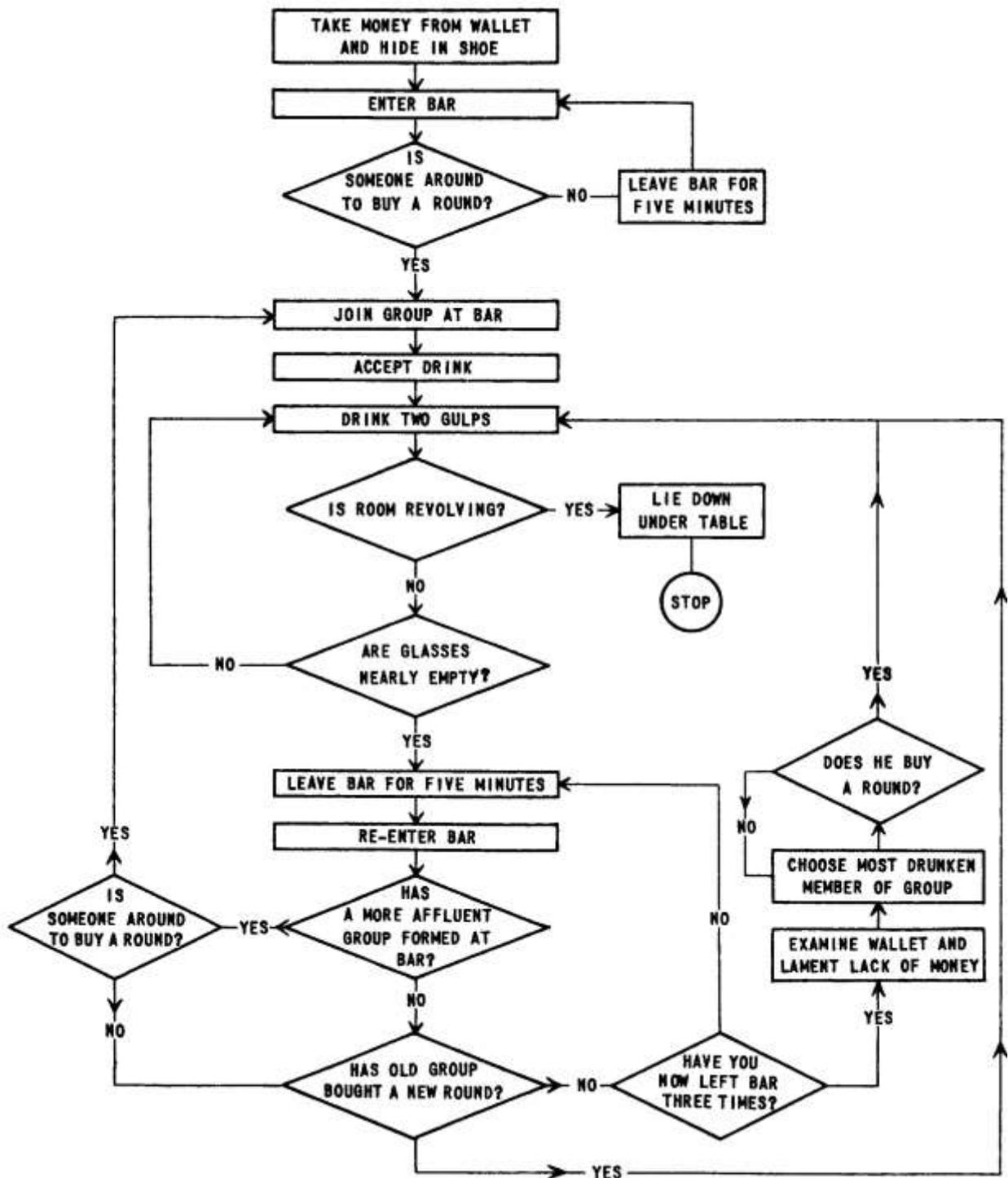
There is plenty of opportunity for digging, as some chambers haven't been entered since roof collapses documented 400 years ago.

This trip is highly recommended & the management can arrange special Wessex CC extended guided tours.

These caves are huge. Not all are mapped, they all look very similar to the untrained eye. The total area is estimated at something like 17 Wembley football pitches & compasses don't work inside (huge amounts of iron ore etc)! Last time anyone got lost it took 17 hours to find them!

Check it out!

The Long Dry Way or the Wet Way



Reprinted from a previous Wessex Journal

Water & Mud 1998

Andy Kay

Previously published in *Speleo-Dordogne* 2nd Trimestrial 1998. Translated by Andy Kay

Just like in 1997, a further expedition to the Doux de Coly reduced the number of cave divers able to come to France twice in one year. Nevertheless there remained a number of unsolved points regarding projects already in hand, without mentioning new objectives. Only Robin 'Farmer' Brown and Malcolm 'Beer Monster' Foyle were able to make it to La Chassenie this Easter. However another crew from the CDG were also in the area at the Ressel in the Lot, attempting an exploration beyond the sumps.

Arrival of our friends on the 28 March in a heavily loaded Land Rover. The kit is unpacked and sorted. Christiane & Andy having a prior engagement for the weekend, we leave the keys to the house with the two divers, who pay a trip to the Grand Souci de St Vincent in the evening: the water appears (from the surface) to be clearer than before.

29 March

Andy and Chris being still absent, the divers drive down to the Lot to meet up with their colleagues, and perform an 'acclimatisation' dive at the Gouffre de Lantouy, where they reach the depth of -52 without any problems.

30 March

The Grand Souci. Since his deep dive in 1996, the Souci has become a bit of an obsession for Malc, an enigma whose solution *must* be found. The plan is as follows:

Rob, diving first, will descend to the shot weight at -39.5m below the water to check on the condition of the line. Then at -36m (depth chosen as the optimum for changing mixtures if trimix is eventually to be used) he'll tie on another line and attempt to unreel it horizontally across the chamber to a wall on an axis of 210, (the approximate sink/Souci/resurgence azimuth), all of this in virtually non-existent visibility.

Your author takes up his traditional position 'on rope' to pass the tanks and other kit to the diver. The line joining the attachment of the shot to the surface is quickly installed, then Robin dives and we wait.

Cave-diving is no great spectator sport, and being in support at surface no sinecure either. One tends

to worry a bit, wondering what is happening below, frequently consulting one's watch ... At the Grand Souci we have learned to 'read' the divers' movements according to the pattern of bubbles reaching the surface, even if the moment when the bubbles cease to appear is a bit stressful, although we know that this only means that the diver has departed from the shotline.

This particular time we are surprised that the bubbles don't disappear, and in twenty minutes Rob is back with us, although he doesn't look very happy. He had descended to -39 to find the shotweight still firmly attached and the line in good shape: however, on departing from the shot at -36 he had only gone two or three metres when he found himself to be completely disorientated, despite having a compass. Prudently he returned to the surface.

Malcolm's turn. His dive will be a bit longer. He double-checks the shotline, then striking out from it at -36 fins in complete obscurity for about fifteen metres before (literally!) bumping into a flake protruding from a wall, where he ties off the line. Mission accomplished, he turns around and returns to the surface after 55 minutes passed underwater.

Big discussion around the table that evening: how to pursue the exploration? The discussion becomes long, despite knowing we're going somewhere else the next day.

31 March

Fond de Cujes. We have waited almost a year to return to this cave. The plan is to get to the 'terminus' and if possible, climb the cascade which stopped the original explorers, the Speleo-Club de la Seine, in 1976. To help achieve this aim we have a secret weapon in the form of Robin, who is an expert in artificial climbing techniques.

We are intrigued by the presence at the entrance of a French-style dive line which was not there last year. As ever, since the work done here by the Speleo-Club de Perigueux in 1976, the entrance is a simple duck with about 10cm airspace. Once through, we notice that the enigmatic telephone line is in place, as is the thick dive line at sump 1. Sumps 1 and 2 (respectively 12 & 6 metres long) are passed without problems, even if Malc and Rob

are encumbered by two kitbags of climbing kit. We leave the tanks on the boulder just after sump 2.

Rapidly we reach the climb at point 470m. Robin chimneys up it, and sets off to reconnoitre the passage. Pretty soon he's back, explaining that it would be best to keep the ladder for the climb back down to the stream after the crawlway. Thus we chimney up to join him. After fifty metres on all fours we understand his reasoning: the way down is steep and very slippery, via a muddy tube which opens into a fissure which would be an easy place to get stuck. The ladder is belayed in a well, unorthodox fashion (diveline!) and we clamber down into the streamway. Very welcome it is too, as the tackle and our wetsuits are now covered in sticky mud.

The way upstream follows the water, which sometimes hides deep pools of liquid mud. After a hundred metres or so there's another climb up, this time to a semi-active passage with a sandy floor. For twenty metres it's a flat-out crawl, but then it opens out to a roomy chamber, one wall of which constitutes the 'Grande Barriere', a massive and rigourously vertical boulder breakdown. At its foot is a cone of pebbles, some containing fossils, beneath the spray of an inlet from above whose point of entry we are unable to make out.

Above and beyond the breakdown, the cave can be seen to take on even grander proportions. However, aided by an old (1976?) rope left in place, only Rob dares attempt the climb. We should have brought another ladder! Meanwhile, I enter a narrow muddy squeeze about two metres above the floor, only to find myself in a small chamber between the blocks of the choke, with no further way on.

Returning through the squeeze feet-first, I miss the hold which allowed me to enter it, and find myself ejected like a cork from a champagne bottle to arrive on my arse in the stream, luckily with no harm done.

Rob, from the top of the breakdown pile, yells to us to move back a bit, the following slope looks unstable. So from a safe distance we watch him scramble up and vanish into a high-level passage. He's soon back with his news.

Font de Cujes ends in a chamber some fifteen metres high on the other side of the breakdown, and whose roof forms a perfect dome. The stream arrives via a circular hole in the very middle of the roof. Beside this hole is a dark space that could either be a passage or simply an alcove. Either way Rob is definite: despite his climbing skills and the

kit, that we have painfully dragged to this spot, there's no way to get up there today.

We're not too disappointed however. The known end of the cave has been reached, and the trip in itself is a caver's dream. Varied terrain, with some highly decorated sections guarded by the two sumps which serve as a defence against the damage which would otherwise inevitably occur if the access was easier.

We regain the light of day after five hours underground, and quite happy with our little exploit. We're sure that the story of the exploration of Font de Cujes is not over, but hope that anyone following in our tracks takes every precaution to preserve the wonders of this magnificent cave.

1 April

Le Grand Souci. Since Monday Robin has been somewhat disappointed in himself regarding his short dive. Today he firmly intends to get to the wall belay where Malc tied off, and to carry on down in search of a passage. By following the wall he hopes to avoid the central talus slope where 'on landing' the visibility goes completely.

It's 'all or nothing' for the Souci. The delicate kitting-up completed, the diver submerges beneath the surface. He's taken a tank of Nitrox as well to tie onto the shot at -36m in order to reduce decompression time. On the surface Malc and I watch the bubbles, then the froth that indicates that Rob's at depth, then the absence of bubbles that means that he has left the shotline.

A while later the bubbles reappear, and then get bigger showing that he's on his way up. Even with the Nitrox, his deco stop at -3 is a quarter of an hour long. We start to wonder what Rob's reactions will be on surfacing: the typical theatrical pause, followed by a torrent of invective about this sinister and dangerous hole, or what ?

For once, having spat out his gag, Rob starts to speak, with a smile on his face. He brandishes the empty line reel. He's found what seems to be a passage at -54. He's got a couple of surprises: firstly he encountered a large eel (or is this an April fool joke), but unusual, he's brought out *another* line reel, evidently of British manufacture, which he found tied off to a dead branch during his deco stop at -6.

A good push, then, and although we had planned to do some classic caving in the Lot the next day, Rob insists on striking while the iron's hot and continuing in the Souci.

2 April

Return to the Souci under grey skies. Malc will dive first, with the plan of adding more line in the passage. While Malc is on his long deco stop at -37 Rob will dive to the belay on the wall to replace it with a bolt and a hanger, because there are doubts as to how well it is tied off.

Sometimes however the dive doesn't always follow the plan. 'Reading' the bubbles, we see that Malc is back to the shotline quicker than anticipated. His deco stops also seem longer than necessary for the time that he has been at depth. Once at -3, he tugs twice on the relay line to the surface. We wonder what he's trying to tell us. We give a slight pull on the line, but seem to meet with some resistance. The 'two tug' signal comes once more, then Rob notices that judging by the form of the bubbles, Malc is going deeper again.

Usually when the divers prepare to dive it's an unhurried business: now, however I'm up from where I'm belayed to the rope in one jump, and Robin kits up in record time.

Returning to the pool we see ... Malc, whose head breaks the surface a couple of seconds later. Breathing a sigh of relief we find ourselves being called all the names under the sun because we can't remember the classic line signals: one pull, stop; two pulls, up; three pulls, down! We try to excuse ourselves, in that we weren't expecting these signals given the context, we didn't want to pull on the line, etc. To no avail, so we let Malc rabbit on 'til he'd calmed down. What has happened was that he'd finished the Nitrox, and had tied it onto the relay line along with his slate with a message attached. Realising we didn't comprehend his signals, he'd gone back down to - 6 to retie the line.

He had laid fifteen metres more line in the 'passage'. Doing so he had gone a bit deeper, and at -57m his fins touched a floor covered with sediment. This reduced visibility from about a metre and a half to absolutely nothing. Being at a pretty serious depth for air, as it had been decided not to use trimix, he preferred to come back up.

In turn, Rob dives. He drills the bolt and reattaches the deviation line. Then he continues down to the end of the line: the viz seems to have returned; could there be some current down here?

Once the diver is back at -3, the jokes begin (a tradition with this crew, but not all of them can be told). Two tugs are received on the relay line. This time the message is understood, and we pull in, to find the line reel attached plus a slate bearing a

rather uncharitable note regarding Malcolm's knot-tying abilities, now that the belay has been replaced with a bolt and hanger. By way of reply to this, Malc chucks a pebble into the pool. The bubbles stop rising. Knowing that Rob is going to hold his breath as long as possible to try and get us worried, Malc throws in a bigger rock ...

This provokes a huge gush of air to the surface: Rob (with plenty of air in hand) had pushed his purge button!

"Ah, got 'im that time" quoth Malc.

Shortly after, a length of line comes floating to the surface. It's the bit that Rob had cut off from the flake after replacing the belay with the bolt. Getting as low on the rope and as close to the surface as possible, I catch a hold of it. But instantly Rob gives a huge tug on the other end, but he fails to pull me in! At that moment, I hear a strange sound: looking up I see Malc in the process of unscrewing the krab which attaches my rope to a tree. Luckily I'm lazy and haven't oiled this krab recently, so he's 'foyled' in his attempt to get me wet.

As I said, gags like this are common currency with this team, but they help keep one sane during what is otherwise a pretty extreme adventure.

3 April

La Roque Gageac. Yesterday evening we had received an SOS call on the phone from the guys at the Ressel. Their compressor had broken down, and by coincidence Malc and Rob had what they needed to get it working again. A rendezvous was fixed in the town of Domme, which fitted in well with their plans.

At a point just downstream of La Roque Gageac, the bed of the Dordogne river suddenly deepens to 30 metres or so, according to local knowledge. Beyond this point the river is very shallow, its bed composed of fine sand and gravel. This place, which seems to have escaped all notice in speleological lore, seems highly likely to harbour an unknown resurgence, especially given its position below an important dry valley.

Unfortunately, at this time of year, we observe that any attempt to investigate would be dangerous due to the current and volume of water descending the river. So it's off to Domme, where from the terrace of a certain cafe we admire the panorama, swap stories, and generally put the caving world to rights.

4 April

No caving today. Instead it's shopping for beer and wine (so cheap in France). Our friends take the road north for Great Britain, myself the shorter one west

for the monthly SCP meeting in Perigueux. A fulfilling week, caving wise.

EPILOGUE AND TECHNICAL NOTES

One is frequently worried, when publishing details about ongoing projects, by the fear of seeing them 'pirated'. But here we cannot consider either Font de Cujes nor Le Grand Souci to be the 'exclusive territory' of this team. However, a few cautionary words are in order.

Le Souci is on private land belonging to Monsieur Zachari of St Vincent sur l'Isle: please contact him before visiting the site. The WCC/CDG team not only hold the depth record in this cavity but also the number of dives performed there; Malc alone has done seven. It is their equipment which is in place there, hence we would politely request that it is not tampered with. The presence of the shotline, and the thirty or so metres of line that is the deviation and continuation should not be considered by visiting cave divers to be an 'easy route' to follow. The visibility in the cave varies from very bad to non-existent, and the depths attained potentially dangerous without the use of mixed gases. All this having been said, the team would be upset to find their lines 'paralleled' by others which would only confuse things.

Regarding Font de Cujes, the owner of the land is untraceable, possibly deceased, the going relatively easy, and the cave superb. We do not consider its exploration terminated. Divers using the backmount system (without wishing to seem nationalistic) won't get through the second sump (and possibly the first) without dekitting and pushing/pulling their tanks, with the dangers that this practise implies. At sump 2 it appears best to go feet first, to clear accumulated sand from the low point. However, once beyond the sumps, interesting possibilities for exploration exist, notably at point 672m and in the terminal chamber. We therefore request that if members of other clubs wish to continue the exploration of the cave, they'll be polite enough to send a note describing their work to the editors of the **Speleo-Dordogne** magazine

PARTICIPANTS

Robin BROWN (WCC/CDG) Diving and Caving
Christiane DEVAUX-KAY (SCP) Cooking and unbelievable patience
Malcolm FOYLE (WCC/CDG) Diving and Caving
Andy KAY (SCPN4CC) Caving (very occasionally underwater)

Warning

Upper Pitts 20-7-00

B Pitman & Laurie Orr

"Warning" Brian Pitman had 5 minutes to fill having, at the weekend, found a new bow saw in the hut he was itching for action. Those of us who know Brian, will immediately have run for cover - Laurie was not amongst those.

Laurie for a while kept a low profile -despite my efforts to involve him, thus leaving the way clear for my escape.

The first tree, the one by the drive went well, the whole exercise was to save the electricity cables from being damaged, we were mightily impressed. After some discussion it was decided that Brian should ask Mrs Pattinson for permission to cut the tree on her ground - I prayed she was out - no such luck, she was over the moon, she also thought it was very dangerous.

Laurie, who had given advice from a distance during the first tree, retired to the changing rooms. My chair was positioned on the lawn to give me the best view of which parts to cut down. Work went well, only one last branch to come down Brian explained, there would be no problem if he angled the cuts correctly. The branch would fall straight down! I asked Laurie to keep an eye on things & went in to make a cup of tea with the new electric kettle. Laurie got a rope to ensure a straight fall. The kettle boiled. There was a loud thud - I panicked thinking Brian & tree had fallen on Laurie. I took courage in both hands & looked out of the window - both Brian & Laurie were up & walking so I assumed it was the tree falling down. I took a cup of tea out & was surprised to see them pouring over the Yellow Pages. I asked what they planned to do next - fearing for the rain forests. They said they were looking for the Electricity Board number. I got the 2nd cup of tea & asked why? Stepping out onto the lawn produced a shriek of "don't step on there, the wires are live & down"!

To cut a very entertaining afternoon's story short we informed Mrs Pattinson - highly amused - later offered us refreshments in case we had no gas. Roger Haskett, in the caravan, couldn't watch Neighbours on TV. Mrs Gibbons - smacked Brian's wrists for being so stupid & not asking the Electricity Board to do it - it's free of charge!

The Electricity Board said
"we do it free of charge you know!"

End result - trees & wires now safe.
(Ask Brian what a 160 amp fuse sounds like when it blows! Log Ed).

Logbook Extracts

3.6.00 Pollnagollum (County Clare)

Nik-Nak, Bob (potential new member), Gar, Des & Rachael (Irish member)

Two hour pull-through (or pull-round) trip into the pot & through muddy link to branch passage gallery; no mud just a long belly crawl. Classic streamway continues to a long canal with no bottom, three-minute swim or doggy-paddle (definitely a wetsuit trip). Onto a 25' pitch, first four down a ladder, Nik-Nak last on rope. Continued on along branch passage streamway to main junction & main streamway. Slowly made our way back to Pollnagollum Pot admiring flowstone & out for Guinness. An entertaining trip worth doing at least once.

4.6.00 Poll-the-Other-One (Dig)

Nik-Nak, Bob & Des

Another couple of tons of rock out but no significant progress, other than we now know we are excavating a pitch that has deep potential.

5.6.00 Upper Pollelva - Through trip

Nik-Nak, Bob, Gar, Des, Rachael & Dee

Split into two groups of three. Short one hour trip if you find your way out but then a one hour wait for the other group that can't find the way & have to do the complete length 800-1000 meters in the opposite direction. In at the top of Pollelva Pot, where the waterfall comes in & upstream passing many formations. Out at Pollismorahaun about 600 meters up the road. A quick relaxing trip following the previous day's digging.

8.6.00 Attborough Swallet & His Lordship's Hole

NBW, Laurie, Paul & Uppy

(NBW's 101st cave of the year & still some year left) Plenty of red mud type thrutches for all. Lots of panting & gasping at the bottom of Attborough. No water in the cave, in contrast to last time I was in here - suspect CO2 levels high.

10.6.00 Swildon's Sump I & beyond

Nik-Nak, Emsey, Kev & Lou

Kev was keen & so we headed up the Landing to go as far as we could without any kit. Vicarage Pot and the pitch before Northwest Stream Passage, Wet Ears Squeeze was fun - who - who!! Very wet, muddy & porridge-like. Well worth a visit & we will return with further ladders - we must reach the end.

10.6.00 Swildon's

Kathy, Jon, Jez (who's that), Jenny & Kieron (two new try-outs)

Went to look at pretty stal & a geology venture to 20' & out

11.6.00 Manor Farm

NBW, Badvoc, Dee, Nik-Nak & John

Three hour "loonabout". Very dry conditions - Albert's Eye was dry, except for a very small puddle. Bottomed it all, also did a few other legs etc.

11.6.00 Wigmore Farm - Tuska's Dig

Nice one - it was before they filled it in.

14.6.00 Stockhouse Shaft

NBW, Emsey, Nic-Nak & Kathy

Digging with Jarratt. Excellent fun for all. Took turns at the sharp end. Came out wet, cold & covered in the usual red mud.

17.6.00 Wookey Hole

Mike Thomas & Phil Short MT to Wookey 25; beyond 25 to minus 60m by PS. Yes the end is still there! Quick trip, in & out in just under 4 hours. Day trips available!

17.6.00 OFD Top Entrance

NBW, Laurie, Russ, Paul, Dave, Uppy & Chris White Arch Series, Brickyard, B.C.N.T.E (if you don't know what it stands for, look at the survey-Log Ed), Salubrious, Maypole Inlet & upstream Main Stream.

Russ had a major poo attack & had to make a hasty retreat from the cave. We commend his commitment to cave conservation & so should the people that would have interrupted his speleo-eco-poo, had he followed our advice. Thank goodness none of us carry bog-roll.

For the record, Russ had his "appointment with fear" at the SWCC Club house, & lived to tell the tale.

18.6.00 Swildon's

Kev, Kath & Nik-Nak

Was going to be Sump 4. Unfortunately, came across a BEC member & three scouts in need at the Double Pots. One scout had twisted his ankle (a leader) & we had to escort them to the surface. Took approximately 1_ hours to get them out, then to the Hunter's for a well-deserved Butcombe.

20.6.00 GB Cavern

NBW, Uppy, Laurie & John (prospective)

Did a little bit of the old videoing before leaving Laurie to it & heading off stal watching plus a little round trip.

From the Bridge we nipped off to the Rift Chamber; round the Loop, down Bertie's Pot & along the Oxbow. Quick inspection of the terminal non-sump (very dry conditions) & back up the Main Chamber, arriving back in time for tea & tiffin. What ho!

23/24.6.00 Gough's Cave

Cast of Thousands, Andy K etc

A most enjoyable furtle in the nether regions of the show cave, donkeying kit for bunch of tekkie divers in search of caverns measureless to man etc ... (Rupe eat your heart out). They didn't find them this time, but who cares? Quality better than quantity. Excellent time had by all.

I (Andy K) enter claim for longest distance travelled to sherpa for Cheddar divers' prize, i.e. - France.

24-25.6.00 Yorkshire

Kev, Emsy, Mak & Jo

24th Lancaster Hole - bumble around - a quick 100' drop with a nice interesting Y-hang free-hanging rebelay for Emsy's first time, followed by a wander for a few hours. A quick retreat for a swift slice of cake at the tea rooms in Ingleton & an even swifter pint in the Marten Arms - beer still as good as ever.

Evening entertainment at the Goat Gap consisting of discrete dining room caving - did not manage the hole in the wall though; still we'll have to go back with reinforcements.

25th Alum Pot via Dolly Tubs - there were coach loads - literally, but fortunately no one else going to the bottom. Excellent trip - I think we all managed to keep only one foot dry in the Dolly Tubs. Managed a quick chip butty at Bernie's before retreating south.

24.6.00 Shatter Cave

Maurice & Judy Hewins & Prew

Gentle 2 hour stereo trip to Tor Chamber & beyond. Judy's first trip beyond first chamber, no problems, other than the ageing process.

25.6.00 Upper Flood

NBW, Uppy, Laurie, Paul & Tim (MCG brother)

Nice meandering crawl cave, with bunches of straws & other formations in abundance. Squeezes & ducks didn't give much trouble & added a sporting

element to this otherwise nice trip. Good fun for all.

25.6.00 Conservation Conversation

Nigel Graham

Or how to write lots about caving without doing it! Some 2 months ago I completed my submission on behalf of the caves there (Portland), invited to do so by Hanson Aggregates pic (also of Watley Quarry)

Just popped in for a cuppa on my way home from the Dales (hence my knowing about boulders in Swinsto/Simpsons). Found I'm down as tackle sherpa in the Berger this August, admittedly with my CPC rather than WCC hat on. This is getting daft. Third trip to one of the deepest caves in the world & I cannot get to OFD 3, Swildon's Round Trip was a long-ago one-off, & I can no longer get into August-Longwood or down Blue Pencil Passage!

1st Berger trip - WCC 1988 to the Canals

2nd trip - CPC 1996 to Camp 2

3rd trip - CPC 2000 third time lucky, I'm not going again after this trip.

27.6.00 Pinetree Pot

Uppy, Laurie & Chris H

After spending 5 minutes at the top of the pitch wondering how to rig the ladder we found that Chris had been sitting on the bolt in the floor, finding this made things a tad easier. Overall an uninspiring cave apart from a nice grotto with some fine stal.

4.7.00 Mangle Hole

Uppy Laurie & Chris H

A surprisingly deep cave considering how low on the hill it is. An interesting descent using 3 of our 4 ladders. Boulder choke looks very daunting. Pressed our suits in the mangle & out. Nice trip for a Tuesday.

7.7.00 Swildon's Sump I

Weston Bros (SAGA)

Another surprisingly damp cave! Unable to light fag standing below the 20' Pot. Equipment supplied by Mendip 2000 Jumble Sale. All in good order except the wearers! Came out rather damp and knackered.

Recovery time - 2 weeks min.

10-12.7.00 Cavers' Fair - Derbyshire

Kathy Tommo, Little Chef & Jon

Friday - Trip to P8 (Jack Pot) - nice damp pitch & bold step, but a good cave. Kathy & Tommo 1st batch, Little Chef & Jon 2nd batch Saturday -

Eldon Hole SRT practice - tried 2nd pitch but not enough rope - whoops! Gave up on real caving, all went to Blue John Caverns & entrance to Peak Cavern. Rounded the evening off with a Stomp.

Sunday - Kathy wanted a trip to her first ever cave 5 years ago so Tommo, Little Chef, Jon & Kathy took a trip into Giant's Hole.

12.7.00 GB Cavern

Malcolm, Jack & Claire

Down to Bat passage & Great Chamber. Finally made it there after previous attempts were thwarted by equipment, flooding & Americans. Enjoyable trip to look at lots of pretties.

13.7.00 Swildon's 2

Malcolm

Quick trip. The rope at Sump I is getting frayed - inner cord is still OK but rest is gone - will need replacing soon. Good fun was had by all!

14.7.00 Lionel's Hole

Jack, Malcolm & Claire

Short trip - luckily found the naked dancing girls near the entrance which saved us a trek to the bottom & back.

15.7.00 Rhino Rift

Dom, Debs & Brian H

A "gentlemanly" trip down to warm up for the Cricket Match! This caving lark's quite fun - we'd forgotten! Might have to cave again this year.

16.7.00 Swildon's

Butch, Cookie, Jon, Tommo & Kathy

Water sampling from Sump I back to entrance.

19.7.00 Swildon's

Carmen Who?

Swildon's Sump I and back. Overland of course!!

20.7.00 Lodmore

B Pitman & NHASA

After a boring day trying to kill myself, blow up Mendip, piss the neighbours off, went digging down Lodmore. 120' - very interesting. NHASA engineering at its best. Went to Hunter's to drink beer for a change.

22.7.00 Waterwheel Swallet

Weston Bros

To head of the pitch, one to remove the bung (he of Prew's s/hand wet suit), the other to keep dry (he who cannot get into his wet suit). Next time we will take a ladder. Advised by committee member to drink as much beer as we could at the hut as "it is

free", is this a new committee decision -will it be in the journal Vern?

20.7.00Goatchurch, Sidcot

21.7.00 Swildon's

Emma "I've been punched so many times 'cos I'm crap at this game" Heron, Kev "Spiderman" Hilton, Rachel "I think I've been violated" Mann, Jodi "I think I may be stuck" Hill, Will "Check out my bruises & biceps" Gray, Simon "I'm sure we don't have to be up yet" Norton, Lottie "Ouch, I've just fallen off me rock" Feldon & James "I'm glad I'm not a lobster" Horne.

(Comments by various authors:-)

Good caving, good food, crap beer, toasted marshmallows and Jodi being pulled out of the ladder by 3 men! Top couple of days.

All caving people are mentally deranged but know how to have a good time. Next time, bring painkillers. Damn fine experience - can't wait to come again. (Simon)

I like caving better if it's moist! (Rachel)

Well I think I can safely say we have all had an excellent time, thank you very much Somerset, we O.U. I've fallen 10' off a rock face & landed on my bum; we all have bruises on top of bruises but we all be still alive. Thank you Wessex Cave Club. We will be back. (Lottie)

I really was stuck, I have the bruises to prove it. Thanks for a great two days. I will be back just for laughs. (Jodi)

Hi, I'm the monkey with bruises on every part of my body. The two days here were bruise-a-rific. No doubt about it, I will be back. Hopefully, with a lot more nutters by my side in the rocky caves. Top place, definitely worth it. (Will)

22.7.00 Ogof Draenen

NBW, Cookie, Peter & Ian

3pm in & 4.20am out. (mega trip - 13hours 20mins)

Circus Maximus = Outrageous

Midwinter Passage = OK

Unnamed chamber at the end = the best there is, was or will be.

Kingsdale Simpsons & Swinsto

Message received from Dave Ryall of the
Bradford Pothole Club.

The area below the Great Aven in Simpsons Pot, Kingsdale is dangerously unstable. A number of large boulders and a quantity of mud has fallen from beneath the huge jammed boulder which forms the 'floor' which you land on descending the Great Aven pitch, threatening to block the way down into KMC.

One very large boulder (~3cu M) is perched just above the squeeze down at the base of Simsons/Swinsto final pitches and seems likely to be knocked further by any more falls, effectively cutting off this way on. Philosophers crawl may remain open, but if the huge boulder comes down this will also likely be blocked. Looking up, it is difficult to work out what is holding the rest up, and further collapse seems likely.

For the time being it seems sensible to avoid descending the Great Aven, and potential through trippers should be aware that Simpsons/Swinsto through trips may well be impossible, and should bear this in mind if contemplating one way trips

Rigging Topos

A6 laminated rigging topos to Wharf (Engine shaft, Climbing shaft and Balcony route!)-Knotlow and Hillocks system for sale.

£1.00 all money to DCRO.

SAE to:
CCPC, 92 Long Valley Rd, Biddulph, ST8 6QZ

Events Diary

September

2nd WCC Committee Meeting 5pm
2nd Geological Excursion
15th/17th Hidden Earth 2000, Bristol

October

21st WCC AGM

November

16th/19th Belgium Meet

2001

July

15th/22nd 13th International Congress of
Speleology, Brazil
23rd/27th NSS Convention, Great Saltpetre Cave,
Kentucky, USA

Belgium Meet

There will be a club meet in Belgium in November. We plan to leave on Thursday 16th in the evening and return on Sunday 19th

Transport will be by car sharing. Accommodation is in a bunkhouse in a castle near the village of Mont near Prefondoville in the province of Namur.

It can get cold in Nov so bring warm sleeping bags etc. Breakfasts and evening meals can be provided although people may wish to eat out.

Projected cost of W/end is expected to be around 100 for all expenses including transport, food, beer, accommodation etc.

I need to have a good idea of numbers as soon as possible as the people at the castle need to know It is possible that we may meet up with some of the Dutch cavers although this has not yet been arranged yet

If you want to go on this meet or for more information please contact the Caving Secretary ASAP