



Wessex Cave Club Journal
Volume 26
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Officers of the Wessex Cave Club

President Elect Dr. Don Thomson. **Vice-Presidents** Paul Dolphin and Jack Sheppard



Hut Warden, Pauline Grosart

Pauline is a very brave lady, having taken on what is generally regarded as the hardest job on the committee, with great enthusiasm. Hard though it is to believe, some visitors to Upper Pitts can, on occasions, leave washing up etc undone so Pauline has tactfully had to remind them. She would like to thank the recent working party, who thoroughly cleaned the main dormitory. Please use the rubbish bins provided there. She also thanks Brenda Prewer for sorting out the new curtains in the lounge.

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This Issue's Cover Picture

Kevin Hilton and Emma Heron at the entrance to the E.D.F. tunnel, on their way into the P.S.M. Taken on the recent reconnaissance trip, described in this issue.

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Opinions expressed in the Journal are not necessarily those of the Club or the Editor.

New Members

We welcome the following new members, elected on June 10th and July 15th

Joanne Williams	69 Tanyard Close, Horsham, West Sussex, RH13 5BW.	01403 266548
Mark Reading	Flat15, 35 Cotham Park, Cotham, Bristol, BS6 6BY.	07900 495 399
Christopher Binding	Ty Bach, Round Oak Road , Cheddar, BS 27 3BN.	01934 741338
Jonathan Edwards	Hall Floor Flat, 32 Clarendon Road, Bristol, BS6 7EU.	0117 9245697
Michael Charlton	28 Alfred Road, Lake, Sandown, I.O.W. PO36 9HA.	01983 403561
Andy Judd	16 Thorncombe Close, Muscliff, Bournemouth, BH9 3OL.	01202 533563
Jo Wisley	66 Stouden Road, Charminster, Bournemouth, BH9 1QN.	01202 269793
Tom Miles	Rose Cottage, Lower Durston, Taunton, Somerset, TA3 5AH.	01823 412713

Committee Notes (meeting on 9th June)

Hut improvements. Work had gone well on the 12th/13th May weekend and a lot more was done on 9th June. Judging by the noise going on outside the meeting, work was still in progress. It was decided to keep the gas tank to run the shower system, because cylinders are more expensive and too much trouble. Because of the loss of income, due to the foot and mouth closure, the replacement for the Andrews boiler and materials for the fire escape were put on hold until a clearer picture emerges.

N.C.A Rope Test. The club has undertaken to test a 30m. rope, which has been given to us. It is marked as such. Please use it when you can and record it's use **in detail**. As a matter of course, the basic details of all use of club ropes should be recorded. In addition it is obvious that any rope should be visually inspected before use.

Frank Frost Journal Prize. A small fund was set up, as a memorial to former President, Frank Frost, to award an annual prize for the best article published in the Journal. For several years, this has lain dormant but this year it will again be awarded. Independent judges will be appointed.

Annual Dinner. This year's dinner will be at the Crossways, North Wooten. Wendy Williams is in charge of arrangements. Details are on the enclosed slip.

Letter from Dave Edge (Shag)

After my farewells, I set off to the Emerald Isle from Templecombe with Nimrod, only to be stopped at the Highwayman, Shepton Mallet for dinner with Nathan Jones. Excellent dinner was had by both and fruit juice only! Said our goodbyes and off yet again with van and caravan, through Bristol and on the M4. As I approached Port Talbot a beautiful sunset was hopping through the cranes and derricks. I found out from my father later that this was called Port Sun, once the name of a soap (Sunlight Soap Ed.) I came to the end of the M4, looking for a place to camp.

I found myself outside Cross Hands Caravan Park, which was closed, so I rang the number on the board and thankfully the man was there. After a bit of bartering, he let me stay and hook up to the mains. I cooked something to eat, walked Nimrod and collapsed into bed. Arising early, (9.00) I tidied up, thanked the owner and set off to Pembroke and went straight into the first and last car park. Ah now then, it's 11.00 p.m. Ferry sails at 3.15 a.m. Next day; fifteen hours to kill, so I went into the pub to ask if I could leave my van and caravan in the car park, while I wonder around. Not one of my better ideas. Six pints later, I emerged with 3 lighters and a toasted cheese and onion sandwich, which Nimrod promptly ate, as I closed the van door! Oh well, bed.

I Woke up about 11 o'clock and drove down to the dock, collecting a curry on the way. Parked up and into the caravan to eat. The wind had picked up and was blowing the van all over the place, which set my mind to the crossing. The time had come to embark and after parking up, I trotted off to O'Reilly's Bar. First thing I saw was a pile of sick bags. Oh dear!

A pint of Scrumpy Jack, please. Thank you. I went up and sat in the Panoramic Viewing Deck, looking aft. A voice came over the Tanoy, stating that the crossing would be moderate to rough! Oh hell! More Scrumpy Jack please!

As it happens, it was a very good crossing and we were soon on our way to Limerick. Now then, the golden rule of towing caravans is to put everything on the floor, which I did. But all the stuff in the shelves, which wouldn't normally fall off on English roads, flew off on 5 miles of the Irish lanes. I stopped at Tipperary for a kip but was woken by a tap on the door. I opened it and there was some bloke standing there. How much for your caravan now? What! It's up for sale now! No it isn't, it's my house pxxs off! Bloody cheek.

Back on the road again, the Gottee Mountains look great with snow on top. I arrived in Limerick about 3 p.m. Met the boss and employees. I parked the caravan around the back, plugged in, climbed into bed and that was it for the day.

Next morning, I went round to tell the boss that I was going shopping and was thrown a pair of overalls and a brake reline on a Volvo truck. No messing, I'm here.

One Month Later. Settled in now. Met the Wessex lads and lasses at Doolin for a pint. Work is going well, much more laid back here. See you all soon. Shag and Nimrod.

Dave Edge and Nimrod's latest address is ;- c/o Northside Test Centre, St. Annes, Cloghran, Co. Dublin, Irish Republic.

The Second P.S.M. Reconnaissance

Michael Thomas

Due to the current Foot and mouth restrictions, four Wessex members decided on another flying visit to the Pierre Saint Martin Massif, primarily with the intentions of finding the top entrances, SC3 and Tete Sauvage and a longish trip from the bottom of the E.D.F. tunnel. We hoped to reach the Lepineux Shaft.

On 24th May, Mike Thomas, Simon Richards, Emma Heron and Kevin Hilton took off from London, Stanstead, with overloaded rucksacks and landed one and a half hours later in sunny Biarritz. From here, we picked up a small hire car and drove the two and a half hours to Sainte-Engrace. At 10.30 a.m. on Friday, the four cavers were at an altitude of 1700 m. at the P.S.M. ski station, ready for a days walking in the mountains looking for caves. The wonders of modern travel!

The day was incredibly hot and with very little sun cream between us, we got a bit burnt! There was plenty of snow around about 1900 meters. Some locals we met said it had snowed heavily two weeks previously. The two marmots we found just above the ski station appeared to be quite happy though, bathing on the snow.



Looking towards the Spanish Border and the Pic D'Arlas

We got a bit confused with the instruction we had on how to find the entrances, so we were forced into climbing up on to a high ridge, to get a better view of the valley. This ridge turned out to be the Spanish border! From our high point, we soon worked out where we should have been, as we could see the old wooden chimney above Tete Sauvage. On our way to the Tete Sauvage, we found the Gouffre de L' Ours, another very impressive hole in the ground. After leaving Tete Sauvage, we assumed finding S.C.3 would be easy. Wrong again. None of the descriptions we had looked anything like we were looking at. A good hour and a half of hot sweaty clambering eventually got us to S.C.3, Simon and Kevin found it on a ridge, while Mike and Emma were searching lower down and having a bit of scary fun, traversing snow fields in the hottest part of the day! After using G.P.S. to record the entrance, we beat a hasty retreat down the mountain to find ice cream and beer.

The following day, we were out of the Gite by 9.30 and on our way to the E.D.F. entrance. Due to a lack of 4 by 4 transport, we had to walk, but even with heavy loads this still only took us 90 minutes. We were helped though by the lower part of the E.D.F. track having been modernised, presumably by the forestry workers.

We had a very successful caving trip, reaching the Lepineux Shaft in approximately four and a half hours, although it took us a while to work out where we were, as the place is so big! We confirmed our whereabouts when we eventually found the French 1952-54 camp and later on Marcel Loubens' exhumed tomb, complete with, presumably, his helmet and some medical supplies! The writing on the wall to his memory is still readable.

After a bit of a meal we had a good trip out and made the surface after eight and a half hours. A tired but happy team walked back into Saint-Engrace after twelve hours to a well deserved beer.



Left, Simon Richards and Emma Heron in the E.D.F. Tunnel.

Right, Simon high on a traverse on his way into the Lepinaux Shaft.



We awoke late on Sunday and decided it should be a day of rest and much festering was done until lunchtime, when Kevin, Emma and Simon walked up the Katouetta Gorge. After a pleasant walk up the gorge and spotting several cave entrances, they came to a show cave type thing and found that if you bring caving kit with you, you would be allowed beyond the tourist trail into 2km. of wild cave.

Mike continued doing not a lot, to try and get an overall picture of the mountain. It worked, the view was excellent and you could see from S.C.3 to the E.D.F. valley. After this bit of a view, Mike went for a three hour walk up the Ehujarre Gorge, opposite Saint-Engrace, looking for caves. Several promising dig sites were noted, if you're into digging! And one

cave was found in the river bed, with a draught coming out of it that would blow your light out! Another trip for the summer.

On our last full day, Monday, we decided to drive over the border into Spain and inspect the Spanish side of the P.S.M. Massif. Don't forget your passports, or the Spanish Police could give you a hard time. You are not a member of E.T.A. are you?

After driving a few miles over the border, we stopped at a Spanish ski refuge at about 1300 meters above sea level. Without local O.S. maps, it seemed pointless to continue any further, so we opted for a walk around a huge Karst bowl that the ski refuge overlooked. We had good views into Spain and back towards the P.S.M. and you never know, we might find a cave! After a short walk, we came to a large hole in the ground, about 15meters deep: our luck was in. Or rather Kevin's was, as he duly volunteered to descend the pit to find out what was there.

Due to a shortage of gear, we only had one ladder and 30 meters of lifeline, Kevin was persuaded to free climb the first part of the pitch (on a lifeline) and rig the ladder about half way down. With a bit of creative work, Kevin was soon at the bottom of the hole. Only it wasn't the bottom, a smallish hole obscured by rubbish lurked in on corner and stones dropped down it went a very long way. So far in fact, Kevin made Mike climb down as well to take a look. Both cavers then got very scared, leaning out over the pitch and chucking bloody great logs down the hole; just how deep is this thing? Before we climbed out, we noticed evidence of previous explorers, in the form of one 8mm split, nothing else, just one split! We plan a return to this site in the summer with a bit more gear, you never know it might do something. The only concern, we had with this site was the constant barrages of naturally falling stones we could hear down the shaft, Keep those helmets on!

Tuesday came all too soon and it was time to load up our little car and head back to Biarritz, for our flight back to London, Stanstead. We all left the region with high hopes for a successful trip in the summer.

Our thanks to Andy Kay for booking the Gite up for us, as my French is just not up to a phone conversation.

Grid References for P.S.M.

Tete Sauvage : N42.57.741,W 000.44.610

Lepineux : N42.58.073, W 000.46.156

S.C.3 : N 42.57.707, W 000.43.770

E.D.F: N 42.58.759, W 000.47.789

Rescue from Blackmoor Swallet

Brian Prewer

Some time before the 3rd May a young man left his home in Radstock without, according to the press, any belongings.

A week and a half later he turned up down the bottom of a mineshaft on Mendip with a harness and ropes! The story of the intervening days is not without interest. Where was he during those days, down the shaft or was he living rough somewhere on Mendip in spite of foot and mouth restrictions? Only he will know the answers.

M. R.O.'s involvement began on Monday night, May 14th and carried on over into most of Tuesday. It included the rescue of the man from the shaft and the plaguing by the media circus right through until Tuesday evening. There were press interviews with the doctor, the children who found him, parents of the children, rescuers, staff at the Charterhouse Outdoor Centre etc. Then there was TV coverage and more interviews with all concerned.

If you don't know what happened, you must have been in the upper reaches of the Amazon, up Everest, or on another planet. The story made places like France, Cyprus, Canada, Japan and even Cambodia. Just in case you were on another planet here is the gist of it.

Needless to say most of Mendip had been off limits during the foot & mouth crisis. Charterhouse and the surrounding area had been particularly quiet. On the evening of May 14th Charterhouse Outdoor Centre had been given permission to take a party of school children from Trowbridge on a night hike to listen for owls etc. John Baker, along with several parents, was in charge of the group. On passing close to the old mineshaft/cave known as Stainsby Shaft/ Blackmoor Swallet the children heard shouting rather than the hooting of owls. The shouting appeared to come from the shaft. The children thought this was part of their test or even a joke by the adults. On investigation by John Baker the shouting was found to be real and in fact was coming from the bottom of the shaft. A person was seen at the bottom and was asking for a drink. He claimed to have been down the shaft for some time. John thought a drink could be arranged and promptly left to raise the alarm and get help. One parent remained at the shaft while another parent took the children back to the Centre. John contacted the police indicating that he thought that the person down the shaft could be the missing person from eleven days previous. John also contacted the MRO via Alan Butcher. A rescue party, including Andrew Newton the MRO doctor and Wessex members from Upper Pitts (see Log entry, page 95) was rapidly raised and after picking up equipment rendezvoused at the shaft with John. First indications were that the man had serious injuries with possible spinal problems, dehydration and hypothermia. An intra-venous fluid drip was set up at the bottom of the shaft. Due to the suspected serious nature of his injuries combined with his hypothermia and dehydration it was felt necessary to haul the man up the shaft in a horizontal position. Also due to the length of time that he was thought to have been in the shaft a helicopter evacuation would be desirable to expedite hospitalisation.

Using some cunning rigging and the Paraguard stretcher a fairly straightforward haul to the surface was achieved. Further medical checks were carried out on the surface before he was taken by ambulance to the Centre to await the helicopter. Unfortunately, during the early hours of the morning Mendip weather played its part; from a clear starlight night the scene was transformed with a typical Mendip mist. When the helicopter arrived from RAF Chivenor the mist had done its work – the helicopter couldn't land. The journey to Weston hospital had to be completed by road. With that most people, including the children, retired to bed at about 3.30am, only to be awoken by the Press at 6.00am! The injured man has since spent several weeks in hospital for treatment of problems arising from dehydration, circulatory problems and hypothermia.

Further Adventures in the Herault (cont.)

Caving for the elderly by John Thomas.

The advantages of being a saga CC member are shown when you are invited to be team manager and chief worrier, a role taken over from the late Mike York when in France.

Over this Christmas and New Year, a mini team and their families carried out a full programme of cave exploration and entrance location aided by G.P.S. units. Although the jagged terrain, barbed wire trees and razor-blade bushes did their best to reduce us to blood, sweat and tears.

After giving surface cover, while the young ones dropped into big scary holes, dived various sumps and climbed mountains to find cave entrances, your reward is to be taken caving by two minders.

The first cave visited was the Grotte du Maire. We donned our kit and dropped into the cave, on the side of the road. But after only 100 metres, the two minders stopped, at a lake at least 10 metres, deep and said this should not be here! And so we retreated.

The second trip was to the Grotte du Sergent. On the way to the cave, we met a group of hunters with lots of guns. Malc said "at least these nice new oversuits show up well" I did get to the cave entrance alive and looked up at the entrance, 10 metres up a rock face. No

problem, my minders had brought a rope. After a two-hour trip, in which we made it to the lake we returned to be faced with a lot of lead being fired in the direction of a local wild pig. The day finished with a trip to the Grotte Clamouse show cave, absolutely stunning, especially the aragonite passage. Angela and I managed this trip on our own.

On another day we visited the Grotte Exurgence du Garrel, a Mendip style entrance with an 8-meter ladder pitch, leading to several large, well decorated, passages and chambers down to a lake. We regained the surface after three-hours, there was another 7km to explore if we had the time.

My last underground adventure was sheparding diving equipment into the Event De Rodel a resurgence cave with a crystal clear and very inviting sump pool. The trip to the sump was short and easy and I took several photographs on this trip.



John carrying bottles in the Event De Rodel



One benefit of being elderly was when the boys were descending the Aven du Bois du Bac on lots of string, I met two lady walkers. They said that they had seen our Land rover parked and that they were worried about us, as the area is full of potholes! After I explained what we were doing, they produced a bottle of champagne and asked me to join them while I waited for my minders to return. One could get used to this type of hospitality while out in the hills. Mendip walkers please take note.

Mendip Rescue Organisation

Incident reports for period 1st Jan. 2000 to 31st Dec. 2000

DAY	DATE	LOCATION	PROBLEM
Monday	3 rd January	Thrupe Lane Swallet	Flood
Thursday	20 th January	Swildons Hole	Missing Persons
Monday	8 th May	Rhino Rift	Overdue
Sunday	23 rd July	Stoke St. Michael Area	Missing Person
Monday	7 th August	Wookey Hole	Hoax Call
Sunday	1 st October	St. Cuthberts Swallet	Stuck
Saturday	2 nd December	Swildons Hole	Exhaustion

Monday 3rd January 2000

Thrupe Lane Swallet

At 13:00 Brian Prewer received a call from Taunton Police, reporting one person trapped by flood waters at Thrupe Lane. Brian contacted Richard Whitcombe, who had become concerned after finding a foot deep stream entering the cave, as Simon Meade-King was known to be on a solo digging trip in the Railway series. Whilst Richard, Dave Speed and Clive North set about clearing a blocked road drain in an attempt to lessen the flow, Brian contacted Tony Jarratt, Robin Taviner and Andy Sparrow and asked them to attend.

At 13:15, Richard phoned to say that Simon had surfaced, having sat out the worst of the flood and made his exit as soon as the route was practical. The M.R.O. were stood down and the police informed.

Thursday 20th January 2000.

Swildons Hole

Brian Prewer was contacted by Robin Main from Manor Farm to say that he had a Mr. Ian Rostron with him, who was concerned for the safety of his party of school children. Brian spoke to Rostron and was informed that he was leading his party of five pupils, from Shapwick School, out of the cave, when he had become separated from them in the region of Jacob's Ladder. He had last seen them heading towards Baptistery Crawl and into Showerbath Chamber. He had been unable to follow them and expected to meet them above Jacob's Ladder. When he failed to make contact with them, he did a quick unsuccessful search down the Wet Way. Mr Main had already rung 999 requesting M.R.O. assistance.

Brian contacted Alan Butcher and Tony Jarratt, suggesting that they search the three main Upper Series Routes. Information from Rostron revealed that the five "lost" pupils were thought to have some knowledge of the cave and were well equipped. As the M.R.O. party was en route to the entrance, the missing party appeared. They were safe and well. Apparently, they had misunderstood their leader as to the exact route and had carried on into Kenney's Dig and down the Long Dry Way before returning to the surface. The Police were informed of the outcome at 20:00.

Monday 8th May 2000.

Rhino Rift

Vince Simmonds rang Brian Prewer to say that he had found a Rhino Rift trip still on the board at the Belfry. He was concerned, as he believed the party of four had gone down the cave the day before (Sunday) and it was now some way past their E.T.O. of 22:00 (21 hours). He had also noticed that their kit was still in the Belfry. Brian drove to Lower Farm and found the missing party's car. A check with Mr. Trim at the farm revealed that the car had only been there since mid morning that day. Clearly, there was some confusion over the date of the trip. Further enquiries showed that the group had gone down digging and expected to be a long time. It later transpired that no date had been given on the trip board. No further action was thought necessary at this stage, but as there was no one at the Belfry during the evening, further events would be monitored.

At 22:00, Mr. Trim rang to say that the cavers had still not returned to their car. At 23:00 Brian Prewer contacted Tony Jarratt and it was decided to give the party until midnight before taking further action. At 00:30, Brian checked the Belfry and put Martin Grass, Dany Bradshaw and Vince Simmonds on standby. At 01:00, Brian went to Lower Farm and found the car gone. The group had missed him by moments and had returned to the Belfry, from where they telephone him to say that they had had trouble getting one of their party out of the cave.

Two lessons to be learnt :-

- 1) Always leave a date with your E.T.O. on the trip board.
- 2) If you cave mid-week, do not assume that your trip details will be seen on club Boards. Make alternative arrangements.

Sunday 23rd July 2000**Stoke St. Michael Area**

Brian Prewer received a call at 18:15 from Taunton Police, requesting the help of M.R.O. to search for a missing person in the Stoke St. Michael Area. A 67 year old female holiday maker had gone missing and had not been seen since leaving the local store at 11:00. She was thought to be on medication. In view of the number of slockers in the area, M.R.O. was asked to attend. Brian contacted Martin Grass, Robin Taviner, Mark Lumley and Dany Bradshaw. Nick Mitchell was asked to standby. A rendezvous with Inspector Roe at the Knatchbull Arms was arranged for 19:00. At 18:40 the Police rang to say that the missing person had been located in Leigh on Mendip and the M.R.O. stood down.

Monday 7th August 2000.**Wookey Hole**

At 20:15, Brian Prewer was contacted by Portishead Police Headquarters to say that they had received a call about a serious rock fall at Wookey Hole, trapping 9 cavers. It was not possible to contact the informant. The police were asked to obtain more details as to the precise location, in view of the other caves in the vicinity.

Information from Taunton Police suggested that the call from a Mr. Mike Richards might be a hoax, however, they would send a patrol car to the show cave to check. Brian contacted Dany Bradshaw and Bob Cork, who left for the cave. They met the police at the scene and decided that no further action was required and that, in fact, the call was a hoax. The Police subsequently investigated the matter and had a "meaningful" discussion with Mr Richards.

Sunday 1st October 2000.**St. Cuthberts Swallet**

Brian Prewer received a call from the Belfry to say that a large person was stuck in the Entrance Rift and could not move. The "baby bouncer", hauling ropes and the rope puller were requested. These items were sent underground with Chris Harvey, but were not used, as the casualty had been freed by Chris, Mike Wilson and other members of the party.

A group of cavers, from the Brighton area had been to Gour Hall on a tourist trip. On their return, Sean Lee-Francis had become firmly stuck in the Entrance Rift. In view of previous similar incidents and the possible increase in water flow, some degree of urgency was felt, so M.R.O. were requested and Taunton Police informed of the incident.

Saturday 2nd December 2000.**Swildons Hole**

At 18:30, Brian Prewer received a call from Portishead Police headquarters to say that a 40 year old female caver was stuck at the bottom of the 20 ft. pitch. She was unable to climb the ladder and was very tired. The informant, Ian Bush, was contacted on Priddy Green and gave full details of the situation. The casualty, Julie Capel, was in a party of four scouts, from the first Hurstpierpoint Scout Group, Brighton. They had been to Sump 1, but on their return Julie had become very tired and unable to make the climb. The water level that day was very high making the pitch more difficult than usual. Her own party were unable to get Julie up the pitch, so Steve Taylor came out to raise the alarm. He left Ian Bush, one of the scout leaders on the surface, to liase with M.R.O. and returned to the 20ft. Brian Prewer contacted the following M.R.O. personnel – Bob Cork, Alan Butcher, Dany Bradshaw, Rich Blake and Rich West. A group of 5 cavers from the Wessex were asked to attend. Brian collected equipment from the M.R.O. store and stood by another party at the Belfry.

At 18:50, Alan Butcher and Bob Cork entered the cave, followed at 19:00 by Dany Bradshaw and Rich Blake. The Wessex party comprising Martin Civerton, Gordon Lloyd, Malcolm Loveday, Duncan Price and Tim Morgan then followed. The baby bouncer, hauling ropes and a first aid kit were taken. Dr. Andrew Newton was asked to stand by.

At 19:50, Tim Morgan returned to the surface to say that the casualty was in good spirits and had now been hauled to the top of the pitch. She was making her way out of the cave with assistance. By 20:30, the casualty was back on Priddy Green, tired but otherwise in reasonably good shape.

Flashback to 1947. Beechbarrow.



Recently, Phil Hendy received a letter from Mrs Eileen Withey, who's late husband Malcolm (seen above), was a pre-war member of the Wessex. He was one of the diggers at Cow Hole and Hillgrove and after the war a regular user of the club's second headquarters at Beechbarrow. Malcolm was a committee member from 1947 to 1948. Last month, Judy and I visited Mrs Withey in Lewes and were given some unique pictures.



Beechbarrow was in use from 1947 until the move to Hillgrove (Seen Left in 1953). The hut at Eastwater is shown in 1946. (Right) The man is Tommy Thompson.



Beechbarrow Headquarters

Phil Hendy

Among the collection of photographs and postcards, donated to the club by Mrs. Withey was one of Beechbarrow. (Top Right). Until then, the only suspected photograph we had of the site was one showing Frank Frost (in shorts) with a group of presumably French cavers. It was probably taken during an exchange trip in 1947, with the Club Alpin de Francais but shows very little of the building. We knew where it was and can now reveal that the hut was a concrete stone faced block building converted from stables.

The club's first headquarters was a barn loft at the Grange (now Hill Grange), a quarter of a mile past the Castle of Comfort on the Burrington Road. Little is known about it and it was lost during the war. **Information and photo's would be gratefully appreciated.**

Most of Mendip was taken over then for military training and dumps, and so out of bounds to civilians. In any case, not only was caving severely curtailed, but many Wessex members joined up and saw active service. Frank Frost, by then Secretary, was in a reserved occupation with the G.P.O. (telephones) and it appears that he was able to store the Club's possessions, issuing tackle whenever members on home leave were able to arrange a caving trip. It was largely due to Frank, who by default became responsible for the duties of the other Club officers, that the Wessex survived after the war.

Soon after the war, Gerard Platten gave the Club a small wooden shed, which was situated near Eastwater Cavern (on the opposite side of the wall to the present East Somerset hut). The annual rent for the land was £3-10-0 and with considerable effort it was moved from Chewton Mendip and reassembled. John Lander designed and built some ingenious folding bunks, (1) and the Eastwater Hut was used, until it became redundant with the building of Upper Pitts. It was then passed to the Severn Valley Caving Club, before falling into complete disrepair and being demolished. Hut fees here, in 1951, were 1/- per night (11), which was quite steep when the very basic facilities were compared with Beechbarrow. The Club, however, needed something larger, and the search was on by February 1947. The June Circular contained the following:-

“New Headquarters at ‘Beechbarrow’ near Hillgrove. Members will be interested to know that after a protracted search we have at last been successful in securing permanent headquarters. Conveniently situated at Beechbarrow, on the main Bristol to Wells bus route about half a mile past Hillgrove in the direction of Wells, it is ideally suited to our purpose. The building consists of a well-built modern stable, is clean, dry and in good repair. There are two good size rooms, the larger to be used for living and sleeping quarters, the other for washing caving gear, is fitted with an Elsan latrine. There is a water boiler heated by two primus type stoves and a two-burner pressure type cooking stove. Although the place is habitable, a considerable amount of work has still to be done, and it is hoped that members will come forward with offers of help and so ease the burden on the few who have worked extremely hard in making the place usable.”

The original working party found plenty of evidence of the late occupants, in the form of about 3 inches of very “ripe” stable manure – “one member brought his wife and it is believed that since her experience of helping to clear it, she has started a campaign for a ‘one day week’ for the Land Army! Another member was highly delighted with the “Muck” and took a trailer-full home- he reports that his marrows have outgrown his neighbours’ by about six feet. It is hoped that members will use the headquarters – it is quite suitable for a long stay. If members have any suggestions regarding improvements, the committee will be very pleased to receive them.

The Club would like to hear from any member who may have available one or more of the following items:- “Portable Bath, Mugs, Cups, Plates, Milk Can, Knife Box, Chairs, Cutlery Dish Cloths” (2)

And so the Club settled into its new head quarters, as tenants of Mr. White. Beechbarrow (named after the nearby tree-clad burial mound) was at that time a horse ranch, and there were several identical stables near the house. The H.Q. was one of these. Hut fees were set at 1/- per night, falling to 6/- for 7 nights and 6d per night thereafter. Guest fees were respectively 1/6, 8/- and 8d

Of course, then as now, the work on the hut was done by the dedicated few, and in November 1948 there were complaints to that effect. (4) and also about the place

Extracts from the Upper Pitts Logbook

Edited by Brian Prewer

14.2.01 St Luke's

R Scammell

Cows? What cows –where?? Aubrey said there are cows in the next field over, where Steve & I had dug rocks & stones out of a small depression in the corner of a large depression at the instigation of Paula. “A cow could fall into your hole_ & injure itself”. I promised to fill the hole in to save injuring a cow. On Friday, I decided, being the person I am, that to leave the hole until Wednesday was courting trouble & Aubrey would be the first to say “I told you so”. I took the afternoon off to do my duty.

On the way I stopped & rang the farm to let them know in case anyone was going out. “What cows? – where? – There are no cows in that field, none have been in there since last year”. Aubrey saw cows. I decided to go ahead because I was convinced that Aubrey is always right, & even if rustlers were using it for keeping stock during transit, we had no right to injure them. Paula frowned. “Why fill in the hole with no cows in the field?” Aubrey saw cows – there must be some. “It’s our field.” I filled the hole in. I saw no cows – not even a cow foot print, but I believe Aubrey saw cows. If he’s sensible enough to be allowed a pilot’s licence & allowed to fly airplanes on his own – he must have seen cows.

I’ve photographed the “dig” for future reference before filling it in. Ask me about the hole in the next field over.

16.2.01 Upper Pitts

The hut has been “Paulined”. I’ve spots in front of my eyes from the fair shine of it in the early Spring sunshine. The flowers on the table need some scent on them.

17.2.01 Daren Cilau

Nik-Nak, Jonathan, Kev & Em

In (don’t remember much about that) down to Time Machine, down to Bonsai Streamway where it is reputed to flood to neck height. Bumped into diggers, thanks for the tea guys – candlelight at Hard Rock Café, then out. Don’t remember much about the last bit of that either!

18.2.01 Swildon's

Geoff, Terry & Ron

Terry got a shock as it was his first time. I don’t think he thought the water was going to be that cold! Geoff made me carry the bag (bastard). I think I won’t buy any more kit especially if I have to carry it. Bottled it at the sump – maybe next time.

23.2.01 Goatchurch & Sidcot *Herbie Plant, Bri Hansford, Danny Brennan & Chris Wilkinson Age 9*

They (the caves, of course) haven’t changed much in the last 15 years. Chris’s first trip. He was a natural, had trouble holding him back – future Wessex member?

24.2.01 Swildon's

Same group, + 6

Good trip to Sump I, reasonable amount of water – young Chris got through Sump I – obviously daft enough to be a WCC member later on!

24.2.01 OFD

Cookie, Tall Graham, 2 Irish & Marcus

Cwm Dwr to Top Entrance. The highlight of the trip was route finding without problems. Unfortunately there were no highlights. We route-found through Cwm Dwr choke only to find we were still on the wrong side! Dropped too low in Smithy – we were off survey (that is the survey in my pocket). All fell in/jumped in the ‘man-traps’ – two light failures, one injured wrist & then all out for a splash about in disinfectant (pine fragrance). Top trip, 5½ hours.

Then over to Mendip for a beer & a sofa killing. No caving allowed on Mendip until further notice due to ‘Foot & Mouth’. Annoying when it took 17 hours to get here.

5.3.01 Upper Pitts Closure

Following the nationwide ‘Foot & Mouth’ crisis Upper Pitts has been closed to member & guests until further notice. All caving areas on Mendip have also been closed.

27.4.01

The hut is once again open although the UK is still under the cloak of Foot & Mouth & caving remains a distant memory.

6.5.01 Wookey Hole 9 to 22

M Thomas, Andy, Jud & Jo

Wookey Hole open to divers again. MBT was helped into the water in 9² by Andy, Jud, & Jo, wisely to become Wessex members soon. The diver had a one hour dive in low vis’ sorting out the line in the shallow route before swimming to 22 & out via the deep. MBT surface in 9² & was pleasantly surprised to find his two sherpas sitting in the dark, waiting to help carry the kit!

6.5.01

While M Thomas was diving in Wookey JT spent the afternoon in the ladies dorm laying!! – a carpet. Keith Fielder arrived around teatime & cut the grass, our bit towards the hut working next week? And the carpet is very nice too! Pauline – Hut Warden. (*I'm having to put in these little gems, as there is virtually no caving news at present – Log Ed*)

6.5.01 Redcliffe Caves

M. & J. Hewins

Yes! We got underground in Redcliffe Caves with Alan Gray & a crowd of Belgium Folk Dancers

14.5.01 Blackmoor Rescue

Em, Kev, Vern, Bean, Nik-Nak & MRO

MRO call-out at ca 10.30pm to rescue a person from the bottom of Blackmoor Swallet (shaft). Despite having been drinking for most of the evening (surely not – Log Ed) things happened very quickly. A lot of people piled into a very small number of cars & before I knew it we were all down at Velvet Bottom (or did it take longer but it was seen through the hazy glow of beer?) The casualty was located & brought out quickly – he then had to wait for ages before the helicopter tried to land (a big field with two police cars lighting it up was apparently not enough!) Finally got back to the hut at 2.30am.

15.5.01 D Y O

Em, Kev, Nik-Nak & Vern

3½ hours sleep (see above entry). Went to Dan-y. Tourist trip – excellent – but seriously tired.

12/13.5.01 Working Weekend

Multitudes

Tackling boiler, porch, roof, scrap, car park, oil tank base, windows, changing room etc. Wot a lot we done! Weather hot, except for re-roofing the porch in a gale & rain. Typical. Good BBie Saturday evening. Phil, Pauline, Ian T, Geoff B, Rosie & Vern, Tommo, Dom, Mark, Les, Em, Kev & apologies if I've forgotten anyone.

20.5.01 Wookey Hole 9² to 22

M Foyle, M Thomas, G Newman

Malc's first dive for a while 3 to Edward's Rift. Mike & Gavin through to 22 to check out areas for filming, vis' not very good, wish we were warmer.

9.6.01 Rhino Rift

Dom, Debs, Andy Laddell, Nik-Nak, NewJo & Yee (Malaysian caver)

Seven hour trip to celebrate the re-opening of the caves after F&M. Rigged first pitch of RH Route, & all of LH Route. Thorough trip, Dom doing the cave approximately twice, Yee throwing tackle down 2 pitches, Nik-Nak enjoyed the 2nd pitch so much he re-rigged it & did it again (after he realised he'd left the tackle sack at the bottom), Andy Laddell attempted to break his leg AGAIN at the bottom of pitch 5 by free-falling (it's supposed to be free-CLIMBING, Andy.)

And then we hauled New Jo up pitch 1 for rescue practice – just for fun! Good to be back underground.

BEC turned up with a novice trip (“see this blue thing – that's your descender, you use it for going down” = direct quote), but realising we'd rigged both routes, got fed up waiting & went away again. A case of Wessex Cave Club “UBIQUO PRIMUS”, I think.

9.6.01 Banwell Caves

Cast of 20

The biennial Wessex trip to Banwell Caves. Some 20 members keen to get underground savoured the delights of the Bone & Stalactite Caves. Most of us got to the lower grottos of the Bone Cave & into the big chamber in the Stalactite Cave. Also a visit was made to the Prospect Tower, which was capped with a fine scaffolding climbing frame. The highest points were awarded to Les for his acrobatics on the scaffold poles. Thanks to the owners & John Chapman of the Axbridge CG for the arrangements. A silver collection was made towards restoration on tower. (£15. Ed.)



10.6.01 Eastwater

Kev and Em

After speaking to Dorothy at Eastwater Farm the previous evening we were all set for an epic to Blackwall Tunnel. The ladders in place at Dolphin, Gladmans & Lolly are remarkably sound although the ladder on the 10' drop beyond is more than dubious! Excellent first trip back on Mendip. The duck is drafting nicely & we will be back ASAP to go further (or we might leave it long enough to forget all the nasty bits!)

9-10.6.01 Hut Working Weekend (yet another)

The opening of some Mendip caves this weekend saw the arrival of many members at Upper Pitts, some to cave, some to work & some to cave & work. The weekend saw much activity, with caving trips to Rhino, Eastwater & Banwell. On the work front Ian Timney brought his mobile workshop thus allowing work on:- new oil tank base, rendering walls, cementing, painting changing room, scraping, more painting, bunkroom cleaning & dysoning (hoovering with a Dyson), carpentry & finally the removal of one stinking, sooty, bird's nest from the stove chimney. A fine but rather chilly BBQ was held on Saturday evening. Some of those involved were:- Phil H, Tommo, Nik-Nak, Andy Ladell, Rosie & Vern, Jo & Mak, Pauline, B&B Prew, Les, Ian T, Laurie Orr, M&J Hewins, Butch, Cookie, Dom & Debs, Kev & Em, Kathy & Jon & those whose names I have forgotten.



Top Left, Bones stacked in Banwell Bone Cave, (Photo Tommo Thomas). Top Right, Kathy Glenton in the Axbridge Dig, at the bottom of the Stalactite Cave (Photo Phil Hendy). Below Left, Members enviously inspect the Banwell climbing frame and Bottom Right, Vern Freeman does a Max impression while attacking the (abandoned) bird's nest. (Both photos Tommo Thomas)





Loosing my Cherry in Wales

Geoff Ballard tries a cave diving course with Martyn Farr, in Dan yr Ogof.

In the days leading up to that Friday, I was permanently distracted from my everyday life, probably as a result of an overactive imagination that was to overindulge my anxiety of the environment I was soon to be consumed by.

Always allowing one retail day, Wednesday evening was spent checking kit ; charging batteries, reconfiguring “open water” first stage valves and blowing the dust of my drysuit. Whilst Thursday was spent clock watching, knowing that in a few hours I’d be in Wales. On arriving at Crickhowell the following morning I was greeted by Martyn, his wife Jane, their daughter, the dog and a welcome mug of coffee. Very soon we were joined by Dave, a technical diver from Bristol, and so began our two days “Introduction to Cave Diving”.

An intense day of theory, interspersed with slides and acetates, was broken only by Martyn’s coffee sautés, equipment / harness preparation and pool sessions where black out and line loss drills were practiced. By 7p.m. we called it a day. I was staying in the village and as it had finally stopped raining went for a wander, meeting up later with Martyn for a quick half!

Saturday morning, Dive Day, arrived and we set off for Dan yr Ogof, where lakes 1, 2, and 3 were to be our practice ground. Phil Dotchen joined us, only to find that he was to be sacrificed to the paparazzi, as we were accompanied by a journalist from the Independent on Sunday’s Active Sport’s section. After a couple of trips ferrying gear from the car, I decided that the next bit of “new kit” needs to be a Sainsbury’s shopping trolley. We discussed the dive objectives and began the arduous task of kitting up, which was somewhat reminiscent of my childhood. Anyone remember Buckaroo.

I decided to trail a 7 bulb LED / Halogen combi headlight, but found that using the LED was like driving in the fog with the main beam on – not that it would have mattered, there was nothing to see anyway! It felt like a lonely place as I progressed along a slender thread; an “umbilical cord” that slowly appeared, under the dim amber glow from a pair of failing Q40’s, guiding me through the unseen terrain.

However, the day passed with no casualties, even though I left my ankle weights back at Martyn’s house...oops! And concluded in the pub for a beer or three, where we were briefly interrupted by a passing stripper – shame!

I’ve been asked if it was scary or exciting. For me it was neither, although someone once told me that they believed life was nothing other than a series of experiences and the more experiences one had, the more they lived.....go on, live a little.

Library – Recent Acquisitions (to 12/7/01)

Richard Kenney's caving Scrapbook.
Malcolm Withey Photo Collecton (Donated by Mrs. Eileen Withey).
B.C.R.A. Cave and Karst Science 27, 3 (Dec 2000).
B.C.R.A. Bulletin (Caves and Caving) Spring/Summer 2001 (history and exploration of DYO).
B.B.S. Speleological Abstracts No.39 (1999).
Chelsea Speleological Society Newsletter 43 ,6 (June 2001).
Craven Pothole Club Record 63 (July 2001) (See letter from Brian Prewer).
Descent No.160 (June/July 2001) (With report on Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink).
Grosvenor Caving Group Newsletter No.112 (June 2001).
Devon S.S. Newsletter 24 (June 2001).
M.N.R.C. Newsletter 84 (June/July 201).
N.S.S. Journal. Caves and karst Studies 63, 1 (April 2001).
N.S.S. News 59, 4 (April 2001) and 5 (May 2001).
Plymouth Caving Group Newsletter/Journal No. 137 (April2001) (Article on Ding Dong).
Regards (Bull. De la Soc. Spel. De Wallonie, Belgium.) 39 (2000 and 40 (2001).
S.M.C.C. Occ. Publ. No 9 Thailand Expedition 2001. Umphang District, Tak Province. (5/2001).
S.M.C.C. Newsletters: Various back-issues (Exchange with S.M.C.C.).
S.M.C.C. Journals: 9,3 (Sept 1992) and 10, 8 (Sept 2000).
White Rose Pothole club Newsletter 20,2 March 2001) 20, 2 (May 2001).

There is now a complete members' database on the computer, listing all members since the formation of the Wessex (currently numbering 1898 names!) A mine of information: who joined and when, Honorary Members etc. Click on Database, then Membership.

Missing! Wessex Committee Minutes for 1987-92, bound as item 00842 and kept in the Reserve Cupboard in the library, appear to be missing. Will whoever has them please let Phil know, or preferably return them. (That sounds like a really exiting read, me next please! Seriously though this is a unique volume, it must be found. Ed.)

Club News

Black Wal's Cupboard This now has a new lock. Current holders are "Black Wally", Willcocks, Phil Hendy, Pauline Grosart, Mark Helmore, Jonathan Williams. and Debs Morgenstern. The cupboard holds stocks of canned soft drinks and Lucozade Sport, various Chocolate bars, Jammy Dodgers, canned meat, veg, sardines and puddings, soap, toothbrushes, matches and more, all at competitive prices. Ask any keyholder for access. **Thanks are due to Black Wal** for keeping this facility going over many years.

Lost Property The lost property cupboard stores various items of clothing and personal items left at Upper Pitts. To claim, please contact any committee member. Unclaimed items are likely to be sold at the A.G.M. weekend.

Bunkrooms. Both bunkrooms are now fully fitted with curtains, thanks to **Brenda Prewer**, who also bakes an exceedingly good cake.

Berger 2002 The Wessex are submitting a joint bid for the cave with Devon S.S. Watch this space!

Notice of A.G.M. 2001

The Annual General Meeting will be held in the Function Room of the Hunters Lodge at 10.30 a.m. prompt, on Saturday October 20th. Try to be there!

Auction at the Dinner, It is hoped to raise funds at the Dinner by auctioning a few good quality caving Items. Please contact a committee member with your donations.

Caving in the 70's

Richard Kenney

This article, found on Richard's Computer, is published with his widow's consent.

No, I don't mean the 1970's when all was sweetness and light in the Wessex, but the back-aching gum-squelching real 70's when early morning stiffness is not what it used to be.

I want to do a trip to OFD2 dry passages 'cos I haven't been allowed to do wet trips for 20 years and since then this has been my favourite cave. However, I must use all my guile to ensure that I am not over-taxed but that the other party members think that I am still "with it". So far the planning is going well. I have to drive the ten miles from home to Paul Weston's house and then he and Garth do the rest. Sheer luxury, for I have driven on nearly all my trips in the last many years and if I fall asleep it doesn't matter.

I told them that we could do a five or six hour trip so now I must make a plan that uses up as much time as possible. To start with we can walk up to the Byfre and if I can persuade them to move a few boulders then all the better. Then to the OFD2 entrance. It is too much to expect that this will be blocked by snow so there will be no opportunity of using our helmets as shovels to clear the door. That can take up to an hour in winter. Perhaps, if I take them to Arête Chamber that will be enough?

These days with modern lights there are no chances of festering as with carbide or domestic cut-down tinline torches but I have another delaying ploy. On every trip I lay spoor -- no not the kind that is prefixed with a yelp -- but curious shaped stones that I can recognise and about which I can spin a yarn to pass the time. Of course there may always be someone who wants to go into spoor less territory. The answer is to stop and get them to discuss the Pleistocene Era processes and their effect upon the geomorphology of the area contiguous to the Cribarth Disturbance.

OFD2 is a marvellous cave! I can move them around from passage to passage and they may think that they have been on a major trip whereas in reality I have kept carefully within a quarter of a mile of the entrance -- just in case.

There will be no climbing for I don't even like Jacob's Ladder unless there is a piton, a guide rope, I am in a sit harness, there is a lifeline, I have tricounis and a kick up the backside. Mind you, I enjoy a bit of traversing in the Middle Way provided I am not more than five feet above the floor.

Oo -- I nearly forgot. At my age I need a long time just inside the entrance before I can see a thing. Then the key must be put away in my ammo box, the party of three must be counted and numbered off, the feeling "where the hell am I" resolved and then we can move -- somewhat.

Subs reminder from the Membership Secretary.

According to the Club Rules, subscriptions and locker and food box fees are due to be paid at or before the A.G.M. (Oct 20th 2001). The amount due should have been on the yellow slip, with your last Journal. It will greatly help the Club and ease the cash flow, if you can pay a.s.a.p. Please send your subs etc to Simon Richards. 65 Bifield Road. Stockwood. Bristol. BS14 8TW

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Forthcoming Events

Video Evening (Rearranged after F & M) at Hunters, Sat. Sept 15th at 7.30 p.m.
Hidden Earth At Buxton, (The Club is heavily involved) October 12th to 14th
Wessex A.G.M and Dinner Oct 20th
Check the Website for Updates (I hate to have to say that Ed!)



Caption Competition

Phil Hendy has suggested that we pinch Descents idea of a caption competition. As bait he has offered this picture of his sister. Please give your entries (up to 3) to Phil or the Editor and a suitable prize will be given at the Dinner.

Frank Frost Prize

This prize, for the best article of the year, will also be awarded at the same time.

Buy a Sweat Shirt and help the Club

The Sales Officer, Jonathan Williams, is about to order T-Shirts, Sweat Shirts or Rugby Shirts with Wessex Badges He can take customised orders in several colours. This is an excellent way to help offset losses caused by foot and mouth, or raise money for the building repairs. (You can of course give a donation instead!)

Editorial

This is my fifth and final Journal for this club year. The A.G.M. Handbook is, in effect, the sixth issue, although it is not available to non-members. I would like to thank all contributors and helpers, particularly my long-suffering wife, Judy. Without you all, there would be no Wessex Journal. **A newsletter may be issued with the A.G.M. Handbook.**