



FOREWORD

This being the first issue of the Journal since the annual General Meeting and Dinner it was thought that a few comments could be made on the subject of the "fun and games" that followed the actual dinner. These were arranged on similar lines to those of previous years, but the organiser now wonders if it would not have been a good thing if there had been a 'quiet room' available for those members and friends who like to take this opportunity of meeting old friends. We should be very pleased to hear members views on this suggestion so that we can make the necessary arrangements in the future.

David Harbord and Jock Broadley have been elected by the Committee as joint hut wardens and will welcome any offers of help from members who are willing to assist them in completing the work which is outstanding on the Hillgrove hut. A very good suggestion has been made by Peter Harvey - he thinks it would be a good idea if members of the Committee take it in turn (more or less) to stay overnight at the hut on certain weekends, so making access available to those members who only decide at the last moment that they want to stay on Mendip over a weekend. This scheme is so good that it could be extended to cover more weekends if other members would come forward with offers to stay there and act as hosts, and we urge all who can spare a weekend or so to let the Hon. Sec. know, giving the dates when they are willing to help by staying at the hut. Members who book will still have prior rights to accommodation and their names will be sent to the wardens and/or host by the Hon. Sec. with whom the actual bookings should be made. A key of the Eastwater Hut is now held by Luke Devenish, Chapel House, Priddy, and not by the farmer at Eastwater. It was discovered that the key was being given to outside cavers as it is not possible for the farmer to know who is or is not a member of the Club. Bookings for the hut should still be made with the Hon. Soc., but the key will be obtainable from Luke by those members who are known to him, and it is suggested that in other cases a note should be obtained from the Sec. stating that the person in question is a member of the Club.

Until the Club's insurance has been amended to cover the use of the coal burning stove at Hillgrove hut this stove must not be used. Certain modifications to the method of fixing have to be made before the company will accept the risk and the time this will take will in a large part depend on the amount of help given to the wardens who will be doing the job.

HON. SEC: F.W. Frost, 22 Wolseley Road, Bishopston, Bristol 7.

Phone: Bristol 44221.

HON. ASST. SEC: D. Thomson, 4 St. Joseph Rd. Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset.

HON. TREAS: G. Williams, 1 Redhill Drive, Fishponds, Bristol.

HON. SEC. LONDON GROUP: Mrs. J.H.D. Hooper, 92 Station Crescent, Ashford,
Middx. Phone: Ashford, Middx. 2168

NEW MEMBERS

M.A. AHERNE. 65a McGeery Road, Sherborne, Dorset.
J.L. BRADBURY. 9 Wares Lane, Bridgwater, Somerset.
MISS M.P.V. BORLAND. 10 Priory Road, Clifton, Bristol.
A.R. GRIFFIN. Rookstone House, Chew Magna, Somerset.
P.R. HARRIS. 655 Wells Road, Bristol 4.
D.G. HUNT. 19 Spring Street, Cadoxton, Barry, Glam.
A.H.H. JOHNSON. Trinity College, Cambridge.
K.R. NIGHTINGALE. 20 Hadrian Close, Sea Mills, Bristol 9.

AFFILIATED CLUB

THE SOUTH TOWN CAVING CLUB, Clifton College, Bristol 8.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS

M.P. GLENISTER. 16 Graham Road, Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset.
MISS B.S. JONES. Bath & Wessex Orthopaedic Hospital, Bath.

CLUB BADGES: These can be obtained from the Hon. Asst. Sec., D. Thomson, 4 St. Joseph Rd. Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset. Price 2/6 each.

FUTURE EVENTS

OLD GOUGH'S & LONG HOLE, CHEDDAR. SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13TH. Meet near Gough's Cave, Cheddar, at 1.0 p.m. The party must be out of the caves by 4.30 p.m. Names to the Hon. Sec.

SWILDON'S HOLE (TO SUMP) SATURDAY, JANUARY 10TH 1953. Meet at Maine's Farm, Priddy Green, 3 p.m. (Change in barn, upstairs). Party limited to six maximum. Names to D.A. Willis (address below) one week in advance.

G.B. CAVERN. SATURDAY, JANUARY 24TH 1953. Meet, ready to descend, at entrance to cave, 2.30 p.m. Trip arranged by U.B.S.S. Names to Hon. Sec. at least ten days beforehand. This is a U.B.S.S. Guest Day - not a Club Trip

EASTWATER CAVERN (VIA DOLPHIN POT ROUTE) SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15TH 1953. Meet at Eastwater Hut at 11 a.m. Party limited to maximum of six. Names to D.A. Willis, 18 Church Road, Hanham, Bristol, one week in advance.

N.B. The number attending the Swildon's and Eastwater trips has been limited for the sake of members' comfort. Should there be a large demand additional trips will be arranged.

SPECIAL NOTE!

Subscriptions for 1952/53 are now due, and the Committee call the attention of all members to the fact that about 80 are still outstanding. Under rule 8, names of unpaid-up members must be published in the next Circular, so Subs. to the Treasurer Please! Full membership 7/6 Family 10/- Affiliated 1/6

THE WESSEX CAVE CLUB ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Club held its annual general meeting and dinner on Saturday the 18th October at Wells.

THE MEETING

It was a great pleasure, once again, to be welcomed by the President, Mr. H.E. Balch, now in his 84th year, to the Museum at Wells for our annual general meeting. There were about 50 members present. Last year the President had been prevented by ill health from remaining throughout the whole of the proceedings, but this time he opened the meeting with a speech which showed not only, by its anecdotes, that he retained his past enthusiasm unaltered, but also that he had a wide knowledge and lively interest in our present activities.

The Chairman, Mr. A.J.S. McMillan, then took the chair, and the Hon. Secretary, Mr. F. Frost read the minutes of the last meeting. Out of this arose one matter of interest. A life-line had broken on a trip to Eastwater and it was sent back to the makers for their inspection. The Gear Curator, Mr. P. Harvey, said that their reply was simple and all too short: "It was rotten". He suggested that ropes used for this purpose should be discarded after they had served for about a year. The Hon. Sec. then read his report on the year's activities.

SECRETARY'S REPORT FOR 1951/52

"The membership of the Club is 175 including 9 joint memberships. In addition three clubs are affiliated to the Wessex Cave Club. During the past year 50 new members have joined the Club.

"When the late owner of Beechbarrow informed the Club that he was selling the place, and would therefore have to give us notice to vacate our headquarters, we found ourselves in a difficult position. All efforts to obtain alternative accommodation failed and investigations into the possibility of purchasing a second-hand building convinced us that the work and cost involved would not be warranted by the result. The position was looking rather grim when a magnificent offer was received from an officer of the Club. This was gratefully accepted and we were then able to buy a now wooden hut for about the price one would have to pay for a second-hand building. An appeal to members for help towards the cost of the hut was most successful; the contributions received covering the actual cost of the hut. Fittings for it were purchased from club funds. As members will know, the hut has been erected on Hillgrove Farm and work on the site continued for most of the summer.

"This work resulted in a reduction in the amount of spare time available for actual caving activities, but the usual trip at Easter with the Stoke-on-Trent Pot Hole Club took place and there was a club visit to South Wales. In addition most Mendip caves were visited, but there was a reduction in the number of members who visited the caving districts of France compared with that of recent years.

"There is little to report on the digging front. D. Willis and party have been at work on Cow Hole and there was the usual annual dig in Lamb Leer, but apart from this little has been done. It is hoped that there will be a renewal of interest in digging during the coming year.

"The Journal in its new and enlarged form continues to be a success and great credit is due to both Phyllis and Leslie Millward, who put a tremendous amount of work into it, but who now find it impossible to continue. We would like to take this opportunity of thanking them on behalf of members for all they have done during the past two years to make the Journal such an interesting publication.

"Owing to having to leave the London district, H. Murrell had to resign from the position of secretary of the London Group, but we were very pleased to learn that Win Hooper was willing to take over the task of keeping our London members together and we hope that they will find it possible to visit Mendip as a group during the coming year.

"The Club is now in a very sound position, perhaps better than at any time in its history. It has a fine headquarters, a reasonable quantity of gear and tackle and a very good membership. All that is required from members to make the coming year one of the most successful in the Club's history is their loyal and active support. Given this we can have no fear that the Club will not continue to be one of the foremost caving societies of the country."

The report was adopted by the Meeting.

FINANCE

The Hon. Treasurer, Mr. G. Williams, presented us with a Balance Sheet audited by Mr. C.H. Kenney. He pointed out that the whole of the cost of the new hut, now standing at Hillgrove, amounting to £160., was borne by members' response to the special appeal that was made. The other erection expenses amounted to £48., but because of the increased income from subscriptions, donations and entrance fees, it was possible to meet the whole of this out of current income, the balance being reduced only from £64. to £51. Against this, however, should be set the smaller outlay in gear, which amounted to only £7. this year, as compared with £29. last year. Our Chairman spoke for us all when he said that it was the best club balance sheet he had seen.

The Meeting unanimously accepted the Hon. Treasurer's Report.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

The retiring Committee proposed the names of the following:-

PRESIDENT:	H.E. Balch, Esq.
CHAIRMAN:	G.H. Williams, Esq.
SECRETARY:	F. Frost
TREASURER:	G.H. Williams
ASSISTANT SECRETARY:	D.M.M. Thomson
GEAR CURATOR:	P.I.W. Harvey

For the Committee, the following having been nominated in accordance with the rules, were therefore declared duly elected:-

L.W.E. Devenish
J.G. Broadley
D. Harbord
D.A. Willis
P.B. Lawder
D.G. Goldie
M.P. Glenister
C.H. Kenney.

The name of Mr. W. Edwards having been proposed and seconded and there being no further nominations he was elected to fill the Committee vacancy. The Chairman suggested that it would be a good thing if members sent in nominations for these posts, instead of waiting each time for the retiring Committee to make their recommendations.

DISCUSSION ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The discussion opened by the acting Chairman calling on Leslie Millward, who then gave the meeting an account of the methods used in the production of the Journal, mentioning that the chief difficulty was to obtain sufficient material to make up an issue well in advance of the actual date of publication and so avoid the last minute rush that made things so difficult. He also mentioned that a large proportion of all the articles came from the some small section of the membership. Phyllis and he had decided that it was time they gave up so that some of the younger members might take over the responsibility for producing the Journal.

David Willis who, with the help of his wife, had joined with the Hon. Sec. in the production of the last two issues, suggested that it would be better to produce the Journal once every three months instead of every two. The general feeling of members seemed to be, however, that it would be better to stick to a bi-monthly issue. The reasons were: first that it would be difficult to arrange a programme of activities sufficiently far ahead (4 months instead of 3) and that it was important that the news side of the Journal should not be allowed to get stale; second that as the greater part of our membership was no longer active, we depended on our Journal for retaining their interest, which might be lost if it appeared less frequently.

Other members suggested that it was important for it to appear punctually, either on the first day, or at least within the first week of alternate months. Dr. Lloyd suggested that in order to make sure of its regular appearance and of the retention of a high standard of journalism, it would be better for short issues to be published on time, rather than that delays should be allowed to take place through search for copy. The meeting decided to retain the present number of six issues in a year and referred the matter to the Committee for them to arrange.

LITTER IN CAVES

The Chairman read us a letter by Mr. J. Hooper reporting a meeting of the Cave Preservation Trust. Out of this arose a discussion on damage to caves, either by defacement or destruction of formations or by leaving litter. Many bore witness to the loss some caves had suffered by removal of stalactites; writing names was rare but not unknown; spurious drawings and inscriptions were described by our President, who also deplored the use of iron-shod boots when walking over stalagmitic rock; but the greatest problem was litter. Old tins, flash-bulbs, spent batteries and even firework cases were commonly to be found; but an even greater menace was used carbide. The only wise thing to do with this to tip it into the streamway, where it could do no harm, but man left it lying on rocks or stalagmite. One speaker pointed out that the worst thing one could do with it was to empty it into a gour pool, such as had been done in Barnes' Loop. It could never be washed away and it would spoil the pattern of crystallisation around the pool margins. The problem was how to bring this question home to all cavers. Dr. Lloyd suggested that the Club might organise scavenging parties; if the younger members would come on these parties they would achieve two results; first, they would do something to repair the damage, and second, they would inculcate tidy habits and a healthy respect towards the natural beauty of the caves. A good example was better than any exhortation.

Our Chairman's closing remarks were to remind us that the bar of Wickenden's Restaurant was not open for another three quarters of an hour, but that Wells boasted other hostelries. Many of us accordingly went to light our torches at the Star. By a quarter past seven there was no ice left to break and we went to receive our guests.

THE ANNUAL DINNER

Some sixty members and friends attended the Annual Dinner, which was held at Wickendens Cafe, Wells. As is customary, a welcome was extended to our visitors from the U.B.S.S., B.E.C., M.N.R.C., and South Wales. The guest of the evening was Professor T.F. Hewer, who was welcomed no less warmly by the younger members than by the older ones who had been caving with him thirty years ago.

The dinner was, perhaps, not entirely a gastronomic success, but the generous effect of good spirits and good company made the occasion an evening to be remembered. The toast of the Queen was honoured in silence and A.J.S. McMillan then proposed the health of the guests in a speech describing the activities and achievements of the Club.

Professor Hewer replied to the toast and made the best speech that has been heard by the Club for a long time. He began by recounting the dangers which might befall a man such as he, returning after so many years to the circles he had formerly frequented.

He related one or two anecdotes to illustrate this point, and then went on to recount the early days of his friendship and collaboration with "Trat and Crook". It was in 1922 that Trat persuaded him to take over the secretaryship of the Spelaeos, and about the same time that they made the first big extensions to the hut at Burrington, nailing on wheels to satisfy the local authority that it was mobile. There they would repair for week-ends. Trat would wake up very early and scan the horizon for any barrows, and having discovered one would persuade as many of the others as he could to go and help him dig it. Crook would disappear in the opposite direction down holes in search of a bottomless pit which, as everyone should know, means a pit you can't get your bottom into. Between them all, as their publications in the Proceedings show, they did a lot of useful archaeological work and Professor Hewer was glad to have the opportunity to thank Trat and Crook for the encouragement they had given him to pursue those studies. Their specimens went to the Spelaeos Museum, where unfortunately most of them were destroyed by Hitler during the war. But now, from the accounts he had heard, the activities of cavers were directed to more daring and dangerous forms of exploration and he congratulated them on their pluck in both their efforts and their achievements.

It fell to the task of Luke Devenish to reply to those congratulatory remarks, which he did quite briefly. The diners soon adjourned, after having been warned by the Chairman not to break too many things in the room into which they were going and in particular to spare a large mirror at one end. His admonition did not pass altogether unheeded.

The fun and games included many of the set pieces which were such a success last year: the squeeze, a traverse climb, something resembling a tug of war, several unconscionably noisy fireworks and a game of hoops with car tyres. The record squeeze was accomplished (to the shame of the Club) by visitors, Valerie Boarland and Geoff. Coates, both at something less than six inches. (Geoff. has the kind of figure that disappears when he turns sideways.) A new game was the rocking ladder and the best performance, glass in hand, was given by Peter Cooke. The party began to break up round about eleven. Most of the newer members and guests voted it a success, but those who had been to last year's party found that it was tame by comparison.

The following articles were found at Wickendens after the Annual Dinner. Will the owners please claim from C.H. Kenney, 5 Vicars Close, Wells, Som.

Black propelling pencil, silver ends and clip.
Black fountain pen, silver coloured cap.

HILLGROVE

Due to the kindness of Mr Seally, tackle and members' private gear have been stored in his barn, but he now requires this to store hay, etc., for his cattle. In future, members must not leave any personal gear in this barn.

CLUB LIBRARY ADDITION

A copy of the M.N.R.C. Report for 1950 has been received for the Library. It includes a description and plan of a new cave in Eastern Mendip. A limited number of copies are available from the M.N.R.C. Secretary, C.H. Kenney, 5 Vicars Close, Wells, at the: price of 2/- including postage.

WELLS MUSEUM MEETINGS

The Secretary of the Wells Natural History and Archaeological Society extends an invitation to any Wessex members who may be in the district to attend the following lectures at Wells Museum:-

- February 21st. 5.30 p.m.: "THE ROMAN TEMPLE SETTLEMENT AT PAGAN'S HILL"
Messrs. Rahtry and Harris.
- March 7th 5.30 p.m. "RINGING BATS IN SOMERSET" Mr. P. Bird
- March 28th 5.30 p.m. "FIFTEEN YEARS WORK AT THE BADGER HOLE" Mr. H.E.
Balch.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

1. VOL. 23. BRITISH CAVER. 7/3d. post free from G. PLATTEN, ROTHERFIELD, FERNHILL LANE, NEW MILTON, HANTS. Caving Miscellany.
2. "TEN YEARS UNDER THE EARTH" by Norbert Casteret. PENGUIN BOOKS, NO. 846.T. @ 2/6d. A new edition within the reach of anyone's pocket and well illustrated.

BAT RINGING ON MENDIP

Research into the habits of cave-dwelling bats by statistical methods has only been embarked upon in this country since the war. Now, ringing is being carried out in several British caving areas. The majority of bats ringed are found in caves, but ideally all the bats in a given area should be ringed because some of the bats found in caves are not exclusively cave-dwelling.

Each bat (on Mendip at least) is marked by an aluminium ring slipped over the humerus. These rings are initialled and consecutively numbered. Three series of numbers are in use on Mendip, bearing the initials UBSS or UBS, and ART or AT, and PFB. The rings are easily seen on bats, both in flight and at rest, and information on the whereabouts of bats already ringed is always welcomed. I am also very pleased to hear of the presence of unringed bats anywhere.

Details of species, sex and locality are recorded in the field for all bats ringed and whenever possible any additional notes, such as the presence of parasites (Nycteribids etc.) or perforations in the wing membrane, are taken.

Probably between 10% and 15% of the bats on Mendip have been ringed. Considerable movement between caves has been shown. The longest distance recorded so far is 19 miles; a Lesser Horseshoe bat ringed by Peter F. Bird, B.Sc. of the U.B.S.S. at Burrington was refound at Frome. It is rarely possible to tell when long-distance flights actually take place. The nearest we have to an accurate date is in the case of a Greater Horseshoe bat which I ringed in Goatchurch on 1st March this year and refound in Long Hole on 9th March (distance approximately 3½ miles).

There is evidence that a southward migration of bats from Burrington occurred last spring, though on what scale we do not know. It would be interesting to know if there is a corresponding northward movement in October. We hope to have several observers working at Burrington whilst bats are ringed and refinds listed at Cheddar.

Ringing over a period of years should offer a solution to many problems. Are there more bats of one sex than the other? What is the expectation of life of a bat in each species? (Norbert Casteret refound a bat this year which he ringed in 1936). Are the dates of the beginning and end of hibernation related to the weather? Why are some summer dormitories not used for hibernation? Less is known about bats than about any other British mammal and the bat is more subject to popular fallacy than any other.

Suggested reading for those interested:

"British Bats" B. Vesey Fitzgerald (General reading).

"Instructions for Bat Banding" W.M. & J.H.D. Hooper (CRG Newsletter No.29)

"U.B.S.S. Bat Ringing Scheme" P.F. BIRD (Proceedings U.B.S.S. 1949/50)

A. R. THOMAS

AN UNDERGROUND TUNNEL AT STREET

PART II

(Note: The original of this article was sent from Ireland about two months ago but was not received by the Club. Willie Stanton apologises to members who expected to find Part II in the October issue.)

The investigation of the Grange tunnel was resumed in March 1952. At this time of year surface excavations are unpopular among experienced cavemen, who normally devote their energies to work at sites remote from the inclemencies of wind and weather. Hunters Lodge, for example. But the present occasion was an exception, for, decently and warmly clad, I strolled down to the Grange one morning to observe the operations of two strong and determined men, whom Mr. Clark had detailed to dig out the third shaft and open the Way into the Great Unknown.

Bill (from County Tipperary) and Ted were audibly critical of the policy which had set them uprooting an inoffensive meadow on such a wintry morning. Warming to their work, however, they marked out a five feet square around the "tapping" stake and soon removed the turf, exposing the yellow clay derived from the weathered lias. There was no sign of disturbance, but this did not impress me as unnatural if the work was several centuries old. Nevertheless my concern was great when, on my next visit, some hours later, I found the pit four feet deep and solid rock everywhere exposed, with no hint of a shaft. Such a morale-shattering incident called for desperate action, so I left the locality and its doubtful warriors to don caving clothes and renew my acquaintance with the two hundred feet of a mediaeval plumbers unwholesome brainchild. Hammering this time indicated a spot four foot to the East, although Bill declared that the sound came from everywhere at once. Accordingly, a trench was sunk in the former direction.

It was at about this time that Bob Sellers, who had been invited to bug-hunt in the Great Unknown, hove into sight above the crowd of juvenile onlookers. On learning the state of affairs he immediately waxed sarcastic, and remained in this somewhat unhelpful vein throughout the afternoon!

The trench was no more successful than the pit, and it is well to draw a veil over the remainder of the days work, during which I twice more traversed the tunnel. The hammer was now permanently installed below the final shaft. At knocking off time there came several distinguished visitors, who left the chaotic scene in ominous silence. I crept home, hiding beneath stones and under the bark of dead trees.

Next morning the top of the shaft was at once discovered, showing clearly as a circle of rock and blue shale in the yellow clay. It is evident that the sound of tapping only ten feet away can be most misleading. Bill and Ted became most enthusiastic, the Pride of Erin in particular shovelling in a sort of frenzy, expecting to uncover a banshee or a pot of gold at any moment.

By lunch time the shaft was open to a depth of nine feet, and through a chink in the rocks was observed the hammer. Soon afterwards Erins Pride descended rapidly and unintentionally to its side, fortunately without damage. The tunnel now had two entrances, and a little clearing showed that beyond the shaft, fourteen feet deep, there was indeed a passage, closed by a dry stone wall. An opening was made in the top of this and before us lay the Great Unknown!

Peering in, we could see a rectangular block of wood and several bones. The former possessed no special characteristics but was very decayed, whilst the latter, doubtless the relics of a villainous lunch, belonged to a mediaeval chicken. The passage itself was constricted, and broke into a wider heading after fifteen feet. A thin trickle of water flowed down the floor. Forty feet from Shaft 3 Anglo-Irish hopes were dashed, for the tunnel was completely blocked by another dry stone wall. It appeared to be holding back a mass of clay and stones and a little probing showed that we had arrived at Shaft 4. Beneath it a large flat slab covered a shallow trench scooped in the floor and by adopting a classic attitude it was possible to see six foot along a narrow crevice into the further continuation of the tunnel beyond the shaft. The brooklet flowed on through the crevice in a tantalising fashion.

It was now clear that the tunnel beyond Shaft 3 (which proved to be similar in every way to 4) had never, except during its construction, been accessible to man. The stages in its construction had been as follows:

1. Shafts were sunk to the wide shale band.
2. Headings were driven in the shale until each shaft was connected to the next.
3. Below Shafts 3 and 4 a shallow trench was dug in the floor and covered by a slab, to provide an open channel.
4. All the shafts were isolated from the tunnel by dry stone walls, and were infilled with the freshly excavated debris, which still retains its unweathered appearance.

Thus beneath these shafts the tunnel has never been big enough to pass anything larger than a rabbit.

It is curious that Shafts 1 and 2 were offset, presumably with the object of keeping this part of the tunnel accessible to man. Neither of these shafts has been excavated. They would appear to be less complicated to build than Shafts 3 and 4 and it is rather difficult to see why one method was not followed throughout. It is not impossible that the latter were an intentional barrier.

The Monks and Boltholders seem therefore to be frustrated. The School of Sewermen remains, but on an occasion when I was not present Mr. Raleigh Radford, an architectural authority, suggested that the tunnel was originally part of a water supply system. At present there seems to be insufficient evidence either for or against this theory.

On another occasion the course of the tunnel was accurately traced on the surface by a dowser unacquainted with the survey, using empty test-tubes. Although I was again absent this effort appears to have been unquestionably genuine. The dowser is also reported to have discovered other tunnels in the vicinity. Evidently there is a considerable field for further work, to which we look forward.

One or two surveyors assistants may be wondering whether the tedious traverse failed to close as shamefully as they predicted. But no - I triumphantly assert that the centre of Shaft 3 was only four feet horizontally away from the "survey" stake! What was that? Luck?! Well, maybe.

W.I. STANTON

RECENT PUBLICATIONS (Continued--)

3. VOL.1 NO.4. THE JOURNAL OF THE CRAVEN POTHOLE CLUB. 1952. 5/3d. from A. WATERFALL, 10 SHEEP STREET, SKIPTON, YORKS.

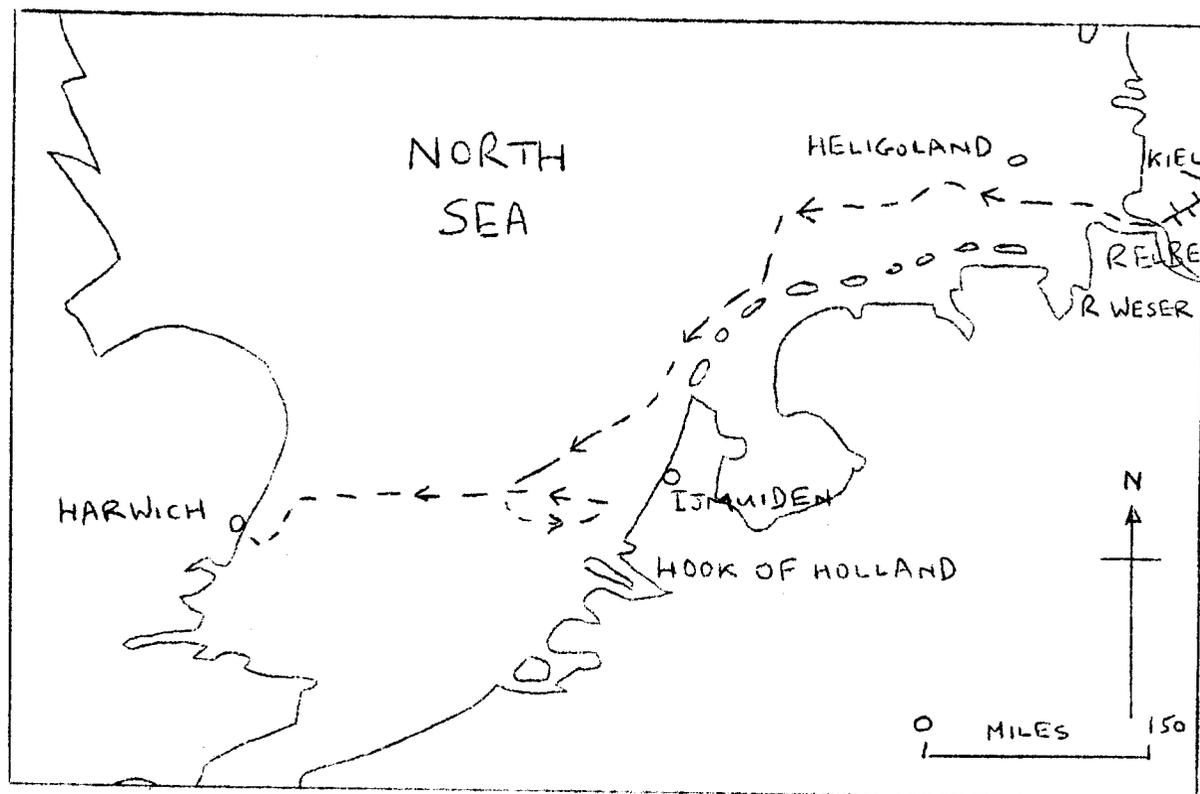
A well written and beautifully produced account of the Club's activities during the year 1952 with some excellent illustrations of POLLARAFTRA (N. IRELAND), and the new cave, POLL AN IONAIN (EIRE;), discovered by the club in the summer of 1952, also of WHITE SCAR CAVE, INGLETON.

A CAVER AT SEA OR FROLICS ON THE FOAM (Continued...)

After some hours, the coast of Holland, yellow and brown under the sun, came into view as each successive wave lifted the ship. Two steamships were in sight apparently motionless to our envious eyes. Their courses indicated the position of the Hook and members of the crew who had been there before racked their memories in an effort to remember the distinctive buildings on the shore and their relationship to the narrow entrance between the twin moles jutting a mile out to sea. A decision was reached and, with the mainsail down, we ran before the wind toward the shore. The steep seas came up to the stern; just when they seemed about to fall on the deck, up went the stern jauntily and the crest hissed past harmlessly under the keel. The motion now was even more disturbing, pitching and rolling simultaneously, but the prospect of a meal and a real bed that night was encouraging.

Then, with only two miles to go, we found we were aiming at the wrong piece of coast. Warily we sweated at the mainsail halliards, turned and beat out to sea again. Stagger, crash, lift, hesitate. For two hours the unholy sequence repeated itself tirelessly. Then another run back to see how far we'd made along the coast. The moles were visible but the tide was against us and we made no progress. Another attempt met with no more success and it was resolved to make for Harwich.

Next morning, at just the time and place our Skipper had said it would, a buoy appeared straining at its mooring and dancing wildly to the tune of the green foam-flecked waves.



DAW

Course was altered and we steered for a lightship that marked the Northern end of a shoal that lay between us and Harwich Harbour. On sighting it we started beating into the wind in order to clear the Southern end of the shoal. We had watched a dark bank of cloud creeping up for some time and sure enough when it came the wind increased, gusting up to Force 11, a full gale. Whenever we went about the scene was pandemonium. Blocks swung wildly, canvas slatted and crashed and the ship came round slowly, fighting against the rudder as the seas smashed into spray against her bows. Sometimes she wouldn't come round, the backstays had to be hastily tightened again to save the mast and the whole weary business would begin again, after an interval to regain speed. In one of those melees two sails were damaged and we lay hove-to, with the sails fighting the rudder for control, while they were safeguarded against further damage.

We had looked up the lightship we expected to see in the book of words; eventually we sighted one which answered the description and we made down towards it. But the Harwich authorities had been doing some maintenance. When we could make out the lettering on her side we found she was the lightship at the Northern end of the shoal! We were back where we started, driven North by the tide, and quick evasive action was necessary. We did a smart about turn and beat away again with heavy hearts. The men on the lightship must have been most amused at our antics, but we didn't share their feelings.

It was obvious that we could not make Harwich in daylight, so the mainsail was brought dawn preparatory to idling to and fro waiting for the dawn. Just as it was nearly secure a wave caught the ship and she lurched suddenly. The boom swung over viciously and the man who tried to stop it was caught by the arm and injured, we didn't know how seriously. At the same time it neatly removed the helmsman's cap and rolled the author like a pat of butter off a skylight and over a pile of sails in the dinghy. Fortunately, when there was only two foot between me and the tip of the rail (which was level with the top of the dinghy) I stopped. That is how accidents happen at sea, quickly and cruelly.

Now that we had an injured man on board we gave up the unequal fight and signalled for a tow, flashing morse at passing ships with an Aldis lamp. They acknowledged and steamed on. All that night we moved slowly to and fro, broadside on to the seas, causing the ship to roll heavily. It was bad enough on deck, but down below it was almost terrifying. Over she would go, to an accompaniment of breaking crockery, loose bits and pieces sliding across the deck in company with the water that had found its way down from the streaming deck above. Often it felt as if she was never going to stop and the injured man and I eyed each other without voicing our thoughts, but she always recovered, only to roll equally sickeningly in the other direction. Dawn brought some improvement in the weather, and two ships steamed up attracted by our signal requesting assistance. We only wanted a tow (which is a very different thing in Marine Law) and were in no danger) but we had not the correct flag and the signal we were flying held out hopes of salvage. We declined a tow to Lowestoft and a Dutch tanker, which was by an amazing coincidence also named "Theodora", took us in tow.

The operation of passing a line in heavy seas is always a difficult and tricky business, and the fumbling of his inexperienced helpers called forth a seamanlike flow of strange oaths from our Mate, who was in charge. The tanker's captain handled her expertly, and as her ugly bows rose and fell only 20 foot away from our side it often seemed that it was bound to crash down on us. Eventually the job was done and the solitary sail that had stood between us and a helpless drift out into the North Sea was lowered. One strand of its halliard had already parted and we had watched the other two anxiously. And so the tow began, the long, hawser dipping into the sea, its length and springiness absorbing the shocks. We had only wanted a tow to a spot from which we could make harbour under sail, but the Dutch captain had misunderstood and took us right into the Harbour.

On arrival we found we were "in the news". Two reporters came on board and tried unsuccessfully to get all the lurid details. During the tow the injured man's dislocated shoulder slipped back and it was most amusing to watch him parrying the questions the reporters asked him about himself, not realising that the whole crew were still on board, and no mangled wrecks had been carted off to Hospital.

At least two of the crew were heard to declare "never again". One was the unfortunate fellow who had been seasick for the first three days and soaking wet for the rest of the time, feeling unable to face the flog below decks. An unkind baptism.

Our last job on board was to sort out the tangle of ropes aloft, and to spread out and dry the sails. That evening out came a carefully hoarded bottle of brandy and at last the dog-tired crew could go to sleep, on bunks that didn't leave, them in mid-air, coming up to meet them half-way as they fell down again.

R.E. LAWDER

Footnote:- Does anyone want a crew-member for a seagoing boat? Guaranteed non-seasick (touch wood) able to cook (after a fashion) and tinker with engines.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations and best wishes to Colin Vowles on his recent marriage to Ann Billet of Trowbridge, Wilts.

