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CLUB NEWS

Further to the note in the last Journal concerning the indiscriminate digging in Burrington Combe, we are happy to report that the situation is now satisfactory.

While on the topic of digging it might not be out of place to mention those surface digs which have been discontinued. Any dig which has been abandoned is still the responsibility of the diggers. They are legally responsible for keeping the site safe, repairing fences etc., especially when the site constitutes a hazard to livestock. Failing this, the dig should be filled in and the site restored. It might be prudent to ask the farmer to keep an eye on the site and report any deterioration in its condition.

As more and more young people are taking an interest in caving it is inevitable but disturbing that there will be an increase in the number of underground incidents. In Swildons it is not unusual to meet several parties en route to Sump I and a moment's pause is sufficient to realise that most of them are on their first trip underground. We have all seen them, wearing jumpers, jeans and plimsols and carrying a torch! The experienced caver of course realises that only a very minor incident will put such a party at enormous risk. A few enquiries reveal that the members of such parties do not belong to a cave club and the leader is often very inexperienced himself. What is to be done about educating such youngsters? The critics of such parties scoff loudly over their pints in the Hunters but have no solution to the problem. We are all guilty and perhaps ought to leave our ivory towers and help make today's novices tomorrow's tigers in some properly administered instruction scheme. As far as the Wessex Cave Club is concerned, a training scheme for prospective Members has recently been instigated. The scheme is being run by Fred Davies and at the moment is only open to those prospective Members with no previous caving experience. At some future date it is hoped to embrace a wider field.

On a national basis the caving instructors at the Outdoor Activity Centres recognised the need for a properly constituted body to rationalise caving instruction. They formed themselves into the British Association of Caving Instructors. The B.A.C.I. is now a constituent member of the National Caving Association and has representatives on the regional councils. At a recent meeting of the N.C.A. in Nottingham the format of the B.A.C.I. Cave Leaders and Instructors certificates was issued and the syllabus for these courses is now nearing completion. The scheme is intended to train experienced cavers as leaders and instructors rather than to train teachers as cavers. This is a good scheme and worthy of all our support, especially the knockers who moan continuously about ill-led, ill-equipped parties down their caves.

Club Membership Cards have now been printed and will be issued in lieu of a receipt for your annual subscription. On each card there will be provision for Membership Number, Charterhouse and Fairy Quarry Permit Numbers and the dates of valid membership of the Club.

The latest Club Occasional Publication, "The Storms and Floods of July 1968 on Mendip" has now been reprinted and is available for purchase at 60p from the H.Q. or from Tony Philpott.

Committee Abstracts

The 264th. meeting of the Wessex Cave Club Committee was held on 25th of April 1971 at 10.00 hrs. Apologies for absence were received from John Jones, Phil and Alan Green, Tim Reynolds, Don Thomson and Malcolm Newson.

The Annual Dinner is to be arranged by Don Thomson, and will be in Frome as per last year.

A long discussion followed upon the problem of administering the H.Q. and it was agreed, with two abstentions, that there was a need for a person to look after the H.Q. on a long-term basis. The Hon. Sec. and Trustees had received two offers of help in this matter and a decision will be made at the next meeting.

Wally Wilcocks presented a sketch of the proposed extension to the building, which would fit on to the women's dormitory and have an area of approximately 750 sq.ft. Jim Hanwell and Keith Barber are to sound out the local planning authorities. The H.Q. expenses and income for the half year were as follows: Expenses, £276, Income £210. If this trend continues it will be necessary to raise the H.Q. fees next year. The meeting closed at 15.00 hrs and the next meeting was fixed for 6th June.

NEW MEMBERS

WILLIAM HAM, The Laurels, East Brent, Highbridge, Somerset.

TERENCE I. BAKER, The Cottage, Hanham Hall Hospital, Hanham, Bristol.

MICHAEL J. GALLAGHER, 52 Royal York Crescent, Clifton, Bristol.

G. PITCHFORD, subject to completion of application form.

CLUB EVENTS

September: Films of Everest and Volcanoes - date and venue to be arranged.
16th October: A.G.M. Priddy Village Hall, Annual Dinner, Masonic Hall, Frome.
15th November: Slide Show - Trans-African Expedition, by Dave Causer.
Venue to be arranged.

The Pecos

A small group of Members are leaving Southampton on August 28th for 14 days in the Pecos. Any cavers interested in joining this party please contact Michael Dewdney-York, Oddset, 19 Alfred Place, Kingsdown, Bristol 2.

MENDIP RESCUE ORGANISATION

Report of the Hon. Secretary and Treasurer for the year ending 31st January, 1971

Warden's List

The following new wardens have been elected

Dr. Michael E. Glanville, Jocelyn House, Chard, Somerset.

Tel. Day Chard 3380, Night Chard 3348.

Mr. Paul Allen, 7 Westbourne Place, Bristol 8.

Tel. Day Bristol 20456, Ext. 9.

Mr. Bob Craig, 31 Cranbrook Road, Bristol BS6 7BL.

Tel. Day Avonmouth 3631 (research Dept.), Night Bristol 46669.

Mr. Willie I. Stanton, Ph.D., Kibes Croft, Westbury sub Mendip, nr. Wells.

Tel. Day Bath 24275, Night Priddy 328.

During the year Dave Irwin has resigned on going abroad.

On 23.11.70 Luke Devenish tendered his resignation, to become effective on 17.3.71.

Note should be made on two more doctors willing to serve underground:

Dr. Peter A. Standing, an experienced caver recently qualified, Southmead Hospital, Bristol BS10 5NB., Tel. 622821.

Dr. Bob Branch, a registrar at the B.R.I. who did some caving while a student, 86 Reedley Road, Bristol 9. Tel. Day Bristol 22041, Night 682570.

Cave Rescues and Incidents

1. Goatchurch Cavern, Sunday May 3rd, 1970

Three youths from Bristol arrived at the entrance of Goatchurch at 7 p.m. They had one small torch between them and no boots or helmets. Only two went down as the third became scared. He sat at the entrance until 10 p.m. when, alarmed at their long absence, he ran down to the cafe in the Coombe and the manager rang the Police. Luke Devenish was alerted at 10.20 p.m. and consulted Howard Kenney. The latter rang Tom Elkin at Churchill and asked him to carry out the rescue. Tom found them in the Boulder Chamber their light having failed, escorted them to the entrance and sent them home with a flea in their ear. He did not obtain their names. Stand down to Kenney at 11.30 p.m.

2. Longwood - August Hole, Saturday 9th May, 1970

A party from Unit 2, Cave Research and Exploration of Thames Ditton, led by Martin Beales of 22 Dalmore Avenue, Claygate, Esher, Surrey, entered the cave at 10.30 a.m. The other members of the party were Mrs. Jackie Butler of 111 Somerset Avenue, Hook, Chessington, Surrey, Miss Katie O'Toole, Bernard Carter and Jim Haley.

In the main stream of August Hole between Fault Chamber and the end of the cave, Jackie Butler jumped about two feet, caught her foot in a crevice, fell and suffered a disabling injury to

her ankle. Martin Beales decided to call out M.R.O. and instructed Carter and Haley to remain with the girl. Miss O'Toole had got no further than the main chamber of Longwood where she had decided to wait as she felt tired. Beales reached the surface quickly and ran to the farmhouse where Mr. Trim (the owner) permitted him to use the 'phone. There was some delay through contacting Axbridge, not Wells Police.

Kenney alerted Hunters Lodge and asked 12 competent cavers to go to Longwood Farm. Brian Prewer was instructed to collect kit from Devenish's home and take the spare Nifes, dry suits and telephones. William Stanton was called out and asked to collect the plaster of Paris bandages from Manor Farm, Priddy to go to Longwood. Dr. Donald Thomson was asked to go to Longwood as quickly as possible. By 2.30 p.m. a party entered the cave with the usual rescue equipment and also a ladder for the Longwood main chamber drop. The 10' overhang and Swing Pitch were already laddered. Dr. Thomson entered shortly afterwards and caught up the main party. Brian Prewer began laying the telephone wire.

Mrs. Butler (widow aged 37) was found to be in good condition and cheerful. At 7 stone she was encouragingly light. Her boot was not removed so the ankle was not examined. Plaster of Paris bandages were liberally applied and once set, Mrs. Butler began to walk out. The degree of co-operation by the patient was excellent and the nearer she got to the entrance the more rapidly she moved. Telephone communication was first established in Fault Chamber and from then on a fairly constant report of progress was received on the surface as Prewer followed up the rescue team. In the rift just above the Longwood main chamber drop, one of the rescue party dislodged several boulders at the point where one has to climb up vertically between boulders. This is an area which was made unstable by the 1968 flood. On the surface the suspense was considerable. Prewer was on the 'phone describing falling boulders and scattering cavers. Various noises could be heard over the line. It was some minutes before it became clear on the surface that no one was hurt and that the patient was on the up-side of the fall.

Haley came out at 4 p.m. looking very tired and Carter and Miss O'Toole at 4.50 with a huge box of photographic equipment. Mrs. Butler was life-lined up the entrance shaft with instructions being given by 'phone from the bottom of the shaft. She emerged at 6.40 still smiling, colourful with her language and admired by all. Hot soup was given to her and then she was carried to the farmhouse and helped by other ladies to change. Mr. Trim happened to be going to the B.R.I. Bristol so he took Mrs. Butler in his car. Dr. Thomson had decided that an ambulance was not necessary.

Mr. Trim of Longwood Farm was most helpful, permitting us to use his telephone, house and yard. He lent us a thermos to take down a hot drink to the patient, but this was broken on it's way out and will be replaced. There is a need for means of carrying hot drinks to injured or exhausted cavers. The soup kitchen is not the right answer. It wastes too much time when patients could be on the move. Suitably packed thermoses or self-heating soups are the answer and steps should be taken immediately to procure these for the main M.R.O. store.

Mrs. Butler was found to have a fractured ankle and was expected to be detained in hospital for 48 hours.

C.H. Kenney

3. Agen Allwedd, Monday 1st June, 1970

At 4.05 p.m. Luke Devenish received a stand-by in respect of two cavers who had been lost down the cave for two days. He was to collect parties to arrive at 8 p.m. After 1½ hours telephoning he had raised three parties totalling 10 cavers. At 5.10 p.m. he received the stand-down. This shows how difficult it may be to rustle up parties during working hours. A full report has been received from Mel Davies and may be consulted.

4. Swildon's Hole, Sunday 5th July, 1970

Two students from Clifton College, John Hopkins (18) and Philip Hoyland (15) descended the cave at 7 p.m. on the 4th July. They tried to get through the Troubles, got lost and started to return, but couldn't find their way back through Paradise Regained. So they waited in the Blue Pencil Area, where they were found at about 9 a.m. by Fred Davies on one of his early Sunday morning trips. M.R.O. had been alerted at 10 a.m. and Howard Kenney was busy on the surface when Fred got them out in good shape and with minimal trouble.

5. Sidcot Swallet, Sunday 26th July, 1970

At 3 p.m. Howard Kenney received a call from the Weston Police to say that a party was overdue. Before he could get started, however, he received another call to say they were out.

6. Goatchurch Cavern, Tuesday 4th August, 1970

A schoolmaster called David Austin called at the Burrington Cafe and told the girl there that he was taking 5 or 6 of his boys down Goatchurch, and that if he was not back by 5.30 p.m. she was to take the appropriate action. The girl hadn't the least idea what this meant, but when the party became overdue had the good sense to get out the M.R.O. card and ring the Wells Police. Jim Hanwell was sent to the cave to investigate after Luke had checked at Burrington, and some hours later the schoolmaster rang up from Fontmell Magna, where he was staying at a holiday camp to say "Sorry, we forgot all about it". He subsequently wrote and apologised and sent £1.

7. Swildon's Hole, Sunday 13th September, 1970

Two cave divers from the Plymouth Caving Group descended at 11 a.m. to do a figure of 8 trip. In the evening one of the surface party rang M.R.O. to say they were overdue. A later call to say that they were out was received soon enough to prevent rescue attempts. People often grossly underestimate the length of long round trips.

8. St. Cuthbert's Swallet, Sunday 11th October, 1970

About 12.30 p.m. a party of 5 B.E.C. cavers (Colin Priddle, Dick Wickins, Colin Dooley, Graham Phippen and Tom Gage) descended St. Cuthbert's with the intention of looking at Pyrolusite Series. Once there C.P. and G.P. climbed up in the terminal rift which was directly over the passage where D.W. and T.G. were standing. A ledge on which G.P. was standing started to crumble sending a shower of small stones to those below. He then yelled "there's a big one coming down". At the same time as the stone fell T.G. (aged 22 from Keynsham) was taking off his helmet to attend to his carbide lamp; when the stone hit him he had his helmet half off. The stone was about twice the size of a Nife cell, fell from about 25 feet and hit T.G. on the rear right hand side of his head. When the patient had quietened down he seemed very shocked, there was a large cut and so D.W. and C.D. went out of the cave for help. Meanwhile C.P. and G.P. helped the patient out of Pyrolusite Series and up out of the cave. All of the time he was

slowly recovering and then caving without assistance. The party met Brian Woodward, Martin Mills and Pete Frankin at the top of Boulder Chamber. C.P. then went out of the cave to call off the rescue. Jim Abbott, Alan Butcher and Bob Lewis were passed on the way. On the surface everyone except a doctor was stood down. When the patient was near the entrance Alan Butcher requested one person to help in the Entrance Rift. Jock Orr was already there. At 4.07 p.m. the patient was out, looking quite fit. At hospital 3 stitches were needed.

<u>Times</u>	2.40 p.m	Estimated accident time.
	2.50	Estimated patient started out.
	3.00	R.W., C.D., out of cave and alarm.
	3.10	Martin Mills, Brian Woodward down with carrying sheet, rope.
	3.20	Jim Abbott, Alan Butcher, Bob Lewis down.
	3.35	C.P. out. Stand down called.
	3.55	Alan Butcher out for one to help.
	3.55	Jock Orr and Alan Butcher down.
	4.07	Patient out and Jock, Alan, Martin, Brian.
	4.25	Rest of cavers all out.

Lessons to be learned

- Never take a helmet off underground.
- Don't climb directly over other cavers.
- Don't stand directly under climbing cavers.

The accident could have been prevented by observing any one of the above.

C.J. Priddle.

9. Swildon's Hole, Saturday 28th November, 1970

At 11 a.m. a party of students from Cambridge University went down the cave and at 12.30 p.m. one of them, Roderick Leach (20) slipped down the Greasy Chimney and dislocated his shoulder. Two of the party returned to give the alarm, while the casualty remained where he was, unable to move for pain. After an hour and a half he began to feel cold and the party moved towards the entrance.

The rescue was under way by 1.45 p.m. and Dr. Rogers, who had been somewhat delayed getting morphia, went down later with Fred Davies and met the casualty at about 4.30 p.m. in Trat's Temple. He was in considerable pain, supporting his injured arm with his other hand, but his morale was good. Rather than render him a stretcher case by giving morphia and attempting reduction of the dislocation, it was decided to go on as they were. He emerged at 6.30 to 7 p.m. and was taken to the Bristol Royal Infirmary, where his wet suit was removed and the shoulder dislocation reduced.

Bob Craig writes as follows:

'When I was called out at 2.15 p.m. from the Hunters the rescue had already been in progress for about 30 mins. A caver had a suspected dislocated shoulder after attempting to climb the Greasy Chimney. A request was made for first aid equipment and it was suggested that I collect it from

Upper Pitts on my way to the green. At Upper Pitts I asked for the first aid equipment and was given a large box, which was marked with a red cross on a white circular background - the usual sign with which first aid equipment is identified. On opening the box on the green it was seen not to contain first aid but a various assortment of tins containing food etc. A further 15 mins. was wasted getting first aid gear from the Belfry. Further time was wasted when we met a caver returning from the cave who said the 20' was not laddered. On arrival at the 20' there were at least two ladders, one of which was hanging down the pitch. I met the first rescue party about 100' past the mud sump and the injured caver was on the move and in good spirits. Apart from the earlier delays the rescue went quite smoothly especially at the 20' where Fred Davies did a good job arranging a traverse, making the 20' ladder climb un-necessary. Telephone communication was made with the surface when we reached the stream from Trat's Temple. Although taken down, the carrying sheet was not used'.

10. Rod's Pot, Sunday 29th November, 1970

Stephen Close, aged 14 of 10 Green Dragon Road, Winterbourne was caving with the 1st Winterbourne Scouts when he fell down the crack just inside the first chamber and hurt his knee. The rescue party consisting of Dr. Gannicott and Messrs. Rees and Hanwell entered the cave at 12.45 p.m. Air splints were used, just in case the bone was broken, and the subject was extricated quickly.

11. Eastwater Cavern, Sunday 29th November 1970

At the height of the storm that afternoon a party coming out found the stream too high to negotiate. One eventually emerged and went to one of the caving huts for a rope and some help. The other members of the party were then extricated. There was no M.R.O. call out. It is gratifying to note that on this afternoon Mr. Main closed Swildon's Hole because of the storm.

12. Longwood Swallet, Monday 28th December, 1970

Howard Kenney was called at 6.30 p.m. to say that a party was overdue from Longwood. He replied "Ring me back in an hour, my tea's getting cold". At 7.0 p.m. he was rung to say all was well.

13. Malicious call, Sunday 3rd January 1971

The Kent Police rang to say that a party was overdue from a cave near Folkestone. It was alleged that the caller had tried to get hold of Oliver Lloyd without success and that his name was Philpott. The Police had no further information, no doubt because they seldom get cave rescue calls. We checked with our two Philpotts with no clue. Luke did some 'phoning with no luck. The Kent Police concluded that the call must have been malicious.

14. Swildon's Hole, Sunday 24th January 1971

Eleven Midsomer Norton scouts went into the cave about 10 a.m. They were led by John Dando, 1 Lilac Terrace, Midsomer Norton. Their driver, Dudley Soffe, a schoolmaster aged 38, accompanied the party which included his son Adrian. Father was lightly clad and it was his first caving trip. He stood 6 ft. and weighed 14 stone. In trying to get headfirst down through the tight rift at the head of the Lower Oxbow (Upper Series) he became jammed and unable to help himself. Dando alerted M.R.O. and Howard Kenney raised a party led by Peter Franklin at 1.30 p.m. A report of what followed was published in the February Journal.

This rescue proved more difficult than could possibly have been envisaged. Had Soffe helped himself earlier it would have been simple to get him out. As it happened he would not budge, which must largely be attributed to his inexperience. He became a very serious exposure risk, being stuck fast for over 10 hours in light clothes already sodden. Pessimistic reports from experienced wardens and cavers made it essential to draw on all possible resources which those in charge underground felt might help. A relief party under Dr. Lloyd had been stood by to turn out at 11 p.m. and another under Alan Thomas was to be ready at 6 a.m. Most of the equipment provided was not vital as it happened, but may well have proved necessary had the rescue been even more protracted.

J.D. Hanwell, 25th January, 1971-

Addendum - some later thoughts

1. The compressed air jack hammers were not used in the event, but may have proved necessary had Soffe remained fast.
2. I don't think the Police would be happy acting as a clearing house for Caving clobber after future rescues involving large amounts of kit. It was the local Chief Inspector who wanted it done that way since so many things had been borrowed from outside organisations. Hence ..
3. A letter of thanks to the Red Cross at Wells for their hot water bottles would not go amiss I feel. Also, perhaps, official letters from M.R.O. to R.N.A.S. Yeovilton and, maybe, Cheddar Fire Service. Howard may have ideas on this since he was involved in calling out people.
4. I would like to emphasise how helpful everyone was. It's one of the few occasions that I have not heard someone who ought to know better from one of the outside organisations grumbling about "these bloody cavers".
5. The press and B.B.C. were most helpful. I do feel it important that M.R.O. officially co-operates with them on such rescues. J.D.H.

Further addendum: If an anxious individual starts behaving irrationally, dexedrine will make things worse. This man needed the opposite: sedation. O.C.L.

Cave Rescue Practices

The policy of the M.R.O. is to encourage clubs to form rescue teams and to carry out regular cave rescue practices. In this way a large number of cavers get enough experience to make them useful members of the scratch teams who perform the actual rescues.

I have records of the following cave rescue practices:-

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 31.5.70 | Axbridge C.G. G.B. Gave. |
| 18.7.70 | Irish C.R.O. (with O.C.L.) Poll an Ionain. |
| 24.10.70 | U.B.S.S. and C.D.G. Stoke Lane. |
| 25.10.70 | Bath Caving Group Goatchurch. |
| 14.11.70 | Ordnance Survey C.G. Swildon's. |

- 21.11.70 Border C.G. Goatchurch.
5.12.70 B.E.C. St. Cuthbert's.
30.1.71 Shepton Mallet C.C. Primrose Squeeze.

The last of these deserves a report, as it is the first time anyone has tried to extricate a subject through the Primrose Squeeze in Eastwater Cavern.

Tackle used - seat harness, chest harness, 2 ropes, 2 crabs.

Account - The party consisting of 7 people including the victim Martin Mills and Mr. R. Craig (M.R.O. representative) descended to the squeeze. Although the entrance was taking a fair size stream, no stream was observed on the Traverse or Primrose Path. Due to the fact that only myself and the victim were able to pass the squeeze, I descended through first to be followed by the victim, who brought 3 ends of the ropes through. Because of extremely limited room on the other side of the squeeze, the victim was required to help himself to some extent in putting the chest harness and seat harness on. The ropes were looped, the knot being tied such that it did not come under the victim and crabled to each harness. A wrist loop was also made which was placed over the right hand. The victim was lying face down, head up hill and his left arm trailing.

Some confusion ensued on the identification of the ropes. However after initially pulling on all 3 ropes, it was found that the ropes tended to drag the victim to his left, which caused the victim to jam with his left shoulder at the crux position of the squeeze. By keeping the ropes well over to the victim's right, and using the seat harness rope to take the pull and the wrist loop to keep the body taut, the victim came through the squeeze in less than 15 minutes. The chest harness was not found to be very useful as it tended to bunch the shoulders up, thus causing a bigger shoulder width, which is the limiting factor to the squeeze provided the person is thin enough. After I had also climbed back through, the idea of carrying the victim out was abandoned due to the wet condition of some of the party who did not have wet suits.

Points of importance –

1. Victim face down, right hand forward.
2. Seat harness and wrist loop using different coloured ropes.
3. The provision of a belay point on the left of the entrance to the squeeze.
4. The use of a seat and chest harness to haul the victim up the first pitch. It would be impossible to pull a carrying sheet through the squeeze, or to take the victim out of one at the top of this pitch.
5. The use of a helmet with no peak or no helmet at all for the squeeze.

It was also noted that the only belay point present was an iron bar on the top side of the squeeze. To negotiate a person over the top of the first pitch, a person squeezed well back would be necessary, as well as one or two underneath. A belay point on the left wall at the end of the squeeze directly above the pitch would also be of great help.

R.D. Mehew.

Cave Rescue Council

The Council met on Saturday 19th September, 1970 at the Eagle Hotel in Buxton. Nothing of importance transpired. It was decided not to hold a Council Meeting or a meeting of C.R.O's in 1971, so as to give people an opportunity to attend the International Conference of Cave Rescue Organisations in Brussels on September 17th - 21st, 1971. The next Council Meeting and Conference of C.R.O's will be held on 23rd September, 1972.

The Cave Rescue Conference was held at Buxton during Saturday and Sunday 19th and 20th September, 1970. Two members of M.R.O. attended.

Finance

Donations totalled £44. We now have £123 in the General Account and £101 in the Research Fund Account. We are going to need quite a lot of this for establishing a rescue kit depot at the Belfry and installing a telephone. Part of our income still comes from the grateful subjects of successful rescues, but the bulk of it is from the supporting clubs, particularly the smaller ones.

March 14th, 1971.

Oliver C. Lloyd, M.D.,
Hon. Secretary & Treasurer,
Mendip Rescue Organisation.
Withey House, Withey Close West, Bristol BS9 3SX.

Rescue Depot on Mendip. It has been decided to have a Rescue Depot at the Belfry, the room on the right of the old stone building. We have negotiated this with the B.E.C., who will let us have it rent free as a permanent home. The B.E.C. will be getting a coin box telephone, so that we can disturb them in the middle of the night. We will pay the installation cost and two thirds of the annual rental. We have appointed a Store Committee consisting of Mr. Kenney (convenor), Dr. Lloyd, Mr. Prewer, Mr. Devenish, Mr. Alan Thomas and Dr. Thomson. Their job will be to see that the store is established, fitted and equipped and to run it. It is proposed to ask 26 of the Members of M.R.O. Committee to spend a fortnight each during each year in charge of the Depot under the Store Committee. In this way all will become acquainted with what there is, how it works and what needs doing to it. We are very grateful to the B.E.C. and hope we won't be too much of a nuisance.

Dr. Lloyd

Dr. Lloyd has been re-elected Hon. Secretary and Treasurer, but although he accepted he gave a year's notice saying that as he would be sixty in August he would not accept re-election in 1972, since it was fitting that the man who ran M.R.O. should be a young caver fully in touch with Mendip caving.

He will be celebrating his 60th birthday with a party in the Old Grotto of Swildon's Hole on Wednesday 4th August at 7 p.m. Any caver who would like to join him there and have some sherry and cake will be welcome. He will not be issuing individual invitations; all will be welcome.

* * * * *

COLOUR FILMSTRIPS ON CAVES AND CAVING

Alan Coase is well known for his magnificent cave photographs. He has now prepared a series of filmstrips for use with young cavers, adventure groups, Venture Scouts, and in schools. They should be available for purchase in August 1971.

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 1. <u>Limestone Landforms</u> | approx. 36 frames |
| 2. <u>Caves: their formation and formations</u> | approx. 18 frames |
| 3. <u>Caving and Potholing Techniques</u> | approx. 18 frames |

All sets are provided with notes containing bibliographies, suggestions for further study or activities and, where appropriate, useful addresses. Each note in the first two sets contains an introductory paragraph suited to Primary and lower Secondary levels whilst a further paragraph extends the content to 6th form and University level.

HALF-FRAME VERSION (picture size 24mm x 18mm) with notes.

FULL-FRAME VERSION (picture size 35mm x 24mm) with notes.

No.1 (c. 36 frames) full-frame (2.50, half-frame £2.00).

No's 2 and 3 (c. 18 frames) full-frame (£2.00, half-frame £1.50 each).

The full-frame versions are suitable for cutting and mounting as individual slides; self-seal card mounts are available, price £0.62½ per 100. They are being produced by DIANA WYLLIE LTD., 3 PARK ROAD, BAKER STREET, LONDON N.W.1., to whom all inquiries should be directed.

A.L. Butcher

AN I.S.C. FOR BRITAIN

Before the end of this month, a report will be sent to the National Caving Organisations stating that Britain may possibly act as hosts for an International Speleological Congress. The report, prepared by a committee of representatives from the N.C.A., C.R.G., B.S.A. and Pengelly Trust, may not seem to be full of impact yet it is a step forward for caving in this country. The International Union of Speleology requires that a country submitting proposals for hosting a Congress (they are held every four years) should be one in which caving and cave science are properly organised on a national level and worthy enough to gain financial backing from important scientific bodies within that country. Previous feasibility investigations into the topic of Britain inviting the I.S.C. have concluded that we were not yet ready to organise things nationally and get financial backing. We are still not sure whether proposals can be submitted at the next Congress (scheduled, the situation permitting, for Czechoslovakia in 1973) for us to hold the 1977 I.S.C. This will depend on the reaction of the national caving bodies and, if they are in favour, organisations such as the Royal Society to whom applications for finance would be made.

It may cost anything between £2,000 and £3,500 to hold the Congress here, over and above what the delegates pay in fees. We would almost certainly attract a big attendance in view of the encouragement British delegates have had at previous Congresses. The extra money is needed to cover lecture room charges, publications and office work and possibly interpreters' fees. It is hoped to solicit funds, too, from trust funds and from industry. The sport's equipment manufacturers may be asked for help since a British I.S.C. would, although dominated by geomorphology and hydrology, contain a higher proportion of material on Exploration Techniques.

So far eight centres have been discussed as possible venues for a British I.S.C. in 1977. While Bristol is ideally placed as a centre for excursions and as a centre of University research, Sheffield has the edge so far because of its much cheaper residential and lecture accommodation. No decision has yet been made. Whatever the final choice there will be a lot of activity on Mendip. If the Congress goes North a long excursion will be made to the Bristol area, involving tours, brochures, demonstrations, lectures and trips underground. If any Wessex Member has ideas on this topic could they please communicate them to the Editor or one of the National Organisations. The first test lies with them and then comes the financial exercise!

MENDIP EXHIBITION NEWS

You may remember the 'M71' symbol which appeared in February's Journal. After some thought it has been changed to one depicting arrows focusing upon a hexagon - the basic design shape for the Exhibition. It seems that the interest which it was hoped to whip up amongst commercial interests in the area is bringing home bounteous gifts of cash and that the scene is set for an event which will be important for the region's future. However, the reports do suggest that farmers are hesitant about giving their support and that one crucial problem is a lack of willing helpers in certain of the organising roles. There comes a time when one runs out of people who are skilled, local AND cheap!

The book which will accompany the venture is proceeding slowly, no longer written exclusively by the Extra-Mural Dept. of Bristol University but by local academics, conservationists and industrialists. There will be sections on:

A brief history by Mrs. Frances Neale, B.A., A.K.C.

A section on Natural History submitted by the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation.

A section on Agriculture by Mr. Jim Hanwell, the geographer and teacher.

Quarrying from the amenity point of view by Dr. W.I. Stanton.

A section on the uses of quarrying stone and the organisation of the industry by Amalgamated Road Stone.

A section on Planning Policy related to the Mendip area submitted by Mr. L.A.D. Russell, Assistant County Planning Officer.

A section on Communications and Tourism by Mr. A. Court of the Automobile Association.

Forestry by Mr. Howell, Director of Fountain Forestry.

A section on recreation including short papers on Caving by Mr. Howard Kenney; Walking by Mr. Stan Marriott of the Ramblers' Association and Gliding by Squadron Leader Robinson, who was one of the pioneers of the Gliding School at Priddy on Mendip.

During the period of the Exhibition, whose themes will be Settlement, Water, Agriculture, Industry, Communications and Recreation, it is hoped to present lectures, promote university and school research ventures, interest children by getting a newspaper to sponsor a painting competition and get the B.B.C. Natural History Unit to make a film for 'the box'. The Exhibition itself will consist of maps, drawings, models and a catalogue and will be designed around a hexagonal chipboard setup with maximum cross-reference between the separate themes.

The event is set for September and a preview will appear in the August Journal.

CAVES OF MEXICO 1970

by Carl Pickstone

Much was known about the history of Europe during the period when the Conquistadors prowled the Seven Seas. When Cortes returned from the New World in 1519, he brought news which startled European society; for deep in the jungles of Central America he found a flourishing culture rivalling that of Greece, which erected huge pyramids and worshipped the Gods of the Sun. When Aztec gold reached the coffers of Charles V, Spain was at war again, so Cortes returned and one by one the empires of the Aztec, Mayas, and Incas toppled and were brought under the Papal yoke. New Spanish cities were fashioned out of the stonework torn from the pagan temples, whilst gold and silver treasures were melted down to provide money for the hungry jaws of the European war machine.

Today little remains of those impressive structures which amazed the Conquistadors. The passage of time and the ravages of the jungle have reduced many of the buildings to rubble, but here and there are pyramids which have withstood the onslaught, and they stand as proud as ever thrusting their weathered crowns through the tangle of vegetation. The pyramids were used as temples where unfortunate victims had their hearts cut out as offering to the Sun Gods.

The natural cenotes which have been formed in the limestone of the Yucatan Peninsula also featured in this macabre scene, for at Chichen Itza sacrificial victims were flung into the 100ft deep pits, whilst the Toltecs drew water from another water filled pit. Caves too were known to the early Indians and some are now yielding up their legacies as they are explored.

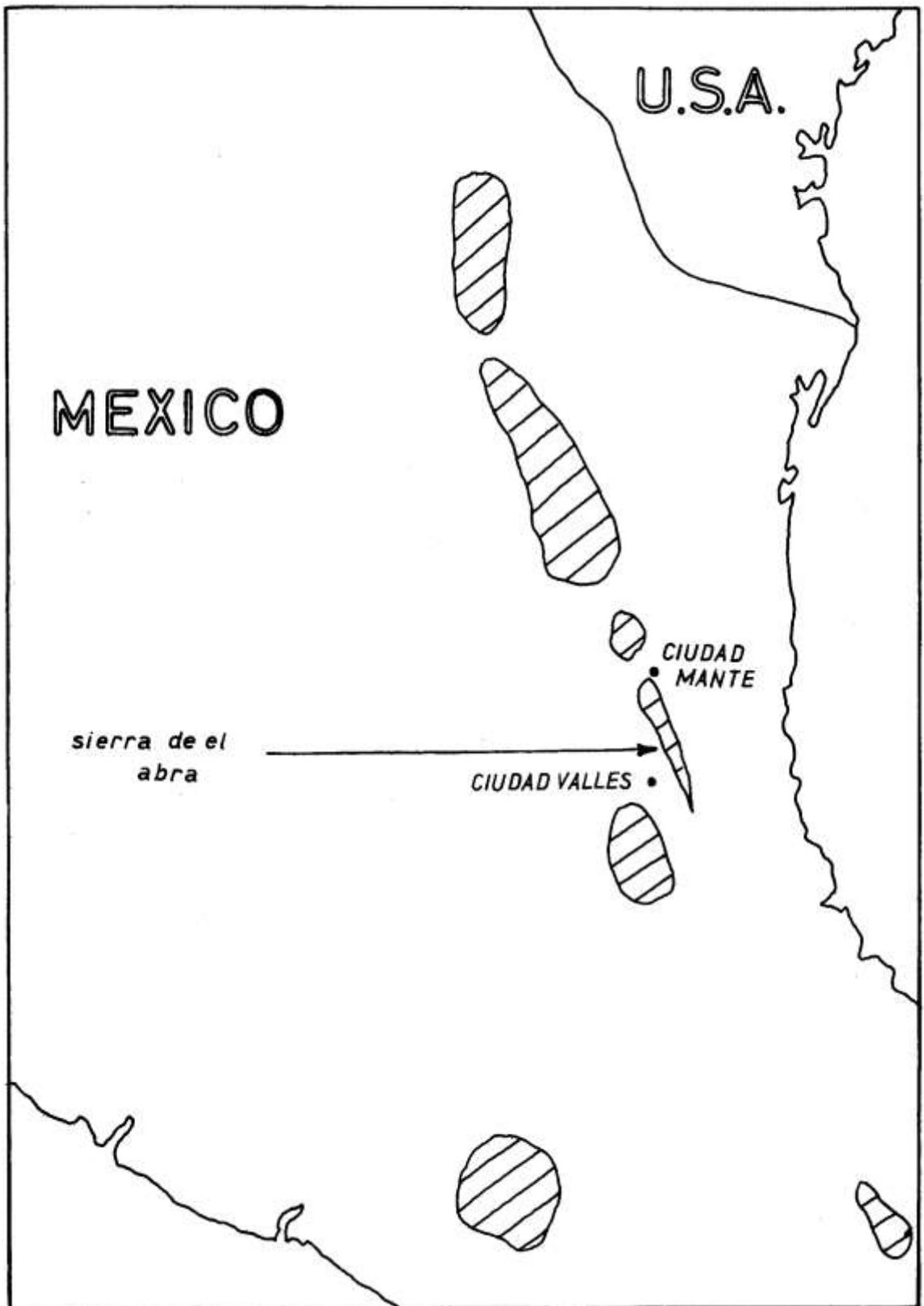
The majority of known caves in Mexico are formed in the Sierra Madre Oriental which runs north-south close to the eastern seaboard. The mountains were formed during the Laramide Orogeny by the folding of the El Abra reef limestones. The cave bearing areas are the Nuevo Laredo-Monterrey range in the north, the Sierra de Guatemala, Sierra de El Abra and Xilitla ranges in the central region above Mexico City. In the south are the high ranges of Huatla and Guerrero-Morelos. The Chiapas is another karst region close to the Guatemalan border.

Most of the serious caving in Mexico is done under the aegis of the Association of Mexican Cave Studies having its headquarters in Austin, Texas, and also by the Canadian cavers from MacMaster University, Hamilton. I was fortunate to be able to spend a couple of weeks caving in Mexico last summer, with John Fish from MacMaster University who is doing research in the caves of the El Abra range.

Sierra de El Abra

The Sierra de El Abra is a narrow range about 75 miles long, and from 2 to 10 miles wide. To the east a steep escarpment, in places over 900ft high drops to the coastal plain. The highest part of the range is about 1480ft, while the plain is 300ft above sea level. The range supports a dense growth of brush which rapidly becomes impenetrable at the higher elevations.





Access is by means of the Inter-American Highway which passes along a valley close to the crest of the range, and from this tracks and paths penetrating the brush. Although the El Abra has received more attention than other caving areas in Mexico, only the more accessible ones have been explored so far. The problems associated with navigating through the dense brush are immense. Several large shafts have been located by the use of aerial surveys which show them to lie within a mile of a track, but so far these shafts have proved to be rather illusive, as compasses are virtually useless in really dense vegetation.

Most of the forty caves so far entered by cavers have been known to local woodcutters, who penetrate the brush in search of good trees for making charcoal. The longest in the range is Sotano de la Tinaja which has a length of over 14000ft. Most of the water falling on the range resurges in two springs at the base of the eastern escarpment. These discharge an estimated 1155 million cubic metres annually.

In the two week period when I was there, we visited two known caves extending one a further mile, and discovered eight new ones, two of which were in the Xilitla area which lies 50 miles south in the Sierra de la Madredal.

It was 5.30 a.m. when I staggered from the bus in Valles, after a 3000 mile 3 day journey from New York, sleeping on Greyhound buses is an acquired knack which Englishmen have little chance to practice. A swift search of the dusty streets soon revealed the apartment which John Fish used as his base. As I walked in, the nocturnal inhabitants scuttled off to their holes - the cockroaches of Mexico were the first of many delights in store for me. There were four bodies lying amidst a chaos of equipment strewn about the three rooms and one of them was John Fish, but which I did not know, so I bawled cheerfully into the nearest unsuspecting ear. The bodies soon assumed identities, Don Broussard, Jerry Broadus, Tom Albert from the University of Texas, and John Fish. At last my 6000 mile journey from England, with only a name and town to go on was completed.

Pits of the Xilitla Area

The first day we were to look at a couple of shafts or Sotano's as they are called, close to the village of Ahuarcatlan. This area has much more relief than the Sierra de El Abra, it's 6000ft high mountains are very steep and clothed in dense vegetation, save for where it has been cut back to enable the local Indians to scratch a meagre living out of the sparse soil. A field in this area consists of three quarters bare rock as the high rainfall promotes rapid soil erosion. There are quite a few deep shafts in the area, the best known being Sotano de las Golindrinas - Pit of the Swallows - with it's 1094ft free fall entrance shaft of 180ft diameter which widens out at the bottom to give a floor area of 6 acres! This shaft has been pushed recently to a depth of 1689ft by the A.M.C.S.

Our arrival in the village produced the usual flock of onlookers who followed us up the stony path, despite the fact that it was raining heavily. Soon we came to a dense clump of vegetation about a hundred yards from the village square. After about quarter of an hour's

work with a machete a hole was cleared to enable us to peer into the 30ft diameter black void. A nearby tree was swiftly harnessed, and Don Broussard rappelled to the bottom. Unfortunately the shaft was blocked at the bottom of the first 120ft drop, so we named the shaft Sotano Hermilo Vega, after the owner of the land and passed on to the next shaft, Sotano de los Huesos - Pit of the Bones - which was only 300ft away. This shaft had been entered before, but there were two passages at the bottom, one of which had still to be checked. Jerry Broadus rappelled in, followed by Tom Albert, and a very reluctant Englishman was buckled into a seat and chest harness and pushed towards the edge. The rappelling rig consisted of three karabiners coupled together to form a chain, each karabiner having an aluminium brake bar across the middle. This device is connected to the seat harness, and the rope passes in and out of the bars. The friction induced by the bending of the rope around the brake bars is enough to allow a smooth descent, but as I hung motionless over the 130ft drop I discovered that they do have snags. The friction was too great and I tried feeding the rope into the bottom karabiner to reduce friction, this allowed me to descend six inches but it was a step in the right direction. Eventually I found that walking headfirst down the walls of the shaft allowed a slow descent. Experts with these devices can vary the friction at will, but I considered it prudent to remain on the safe side. At the bottom of the shaft a boulder slope led down to a junction where the air was thick with the smell of a rotting carcas, we did not bother to investigate the source. The passage to the left dropped down a 150ft pit to a chamber. The right hand passage went up a steep dried mud slope before entering a 100ft high rift which soon narrowed down after a hundred feet or so. Disillusioned we returned to begin the prussik out. At long last I had a chance to try out those expensive bits of ironmongery I had brought from England, the only time I had used my Jumars had been on the fire-escape at Upper Pitts. So, muttering the sacred northern oath, "If yer not 'ard yer shouldn't 'ave come", I started my ascent - trying hard to remember the instructions. -'Chest Jumar up as high as it will go' - 'Hang on it, then raise bottom Jumar as high as possible! -'Stand up raising chest Jumar at the same time-. 'Repeat as often as necessary' - Once a rhythm was obtained it was easy and I soon reached the top.

There was another shaft close by which was shown to us by the locals, a small hole in the base of a cliff gave way to a mud slope which dropped into a deep shaft. John Fish descended and found it to be 180ft deep to where a high fissure led off. He climbed down a further 30ft and estimated that a further 80ft pit followed. The pit was named Sotano de las Avispas, (Pit of the Wasps) and left for future investigation.

Sotano del Tigre

A couple of days later saw us wading up to our necks in the warm waters of the arroyo which fed the Pit of the Tiger, this was considerably easier than chopping a path through the jungle. Close to the entrance the river ran into a small ravine, and we made as much noise as possible whilst approaching. It was not called Sotano del Tigre for nothing, as two years previous on the initial descent of the shaft John Fish had startled an enormous Jaguar which was basking in the sun on a large ledge above the shaft. A narrow blind ravine is not the best place to meet a 240lb Jaguar! The shaft dropped sheer with dimensions 50ft by 25ft to a

deep pool 190ft below, overlooking a further shaft making the total drop 300ft. One by one the others rappelled in and soon it was my turn. This time I tried another type called a Rack (After the struggle with the Karabiner device down Sotano de los Huesos), which is supposed to be particularly suitable for long rappells as the degree of friction can be varied more easily than the Karabiner type. I was told that five brake bars would be enough to ensure a gentle descent, so with trembling knees I swung over the edge. I had only moved six inches when I realised one very great fault with all these rappelling devices - they are strictly one way tickets. The five bars were insufficient to control my descent, and very soon the walls of the shaft began to pass by at an alarming rate. In the ensuing struggle to try and control my rate of descent, I inadvertently got my fingers wound up inside the works and they began to burn inside my leather gloves, despite the water cooling. The rope curved over the small pool far below me before vanishing into the blackness of the lower shaft. Fortunately the pool was deep and I surfaced next to the bloated corpse of a possum which had been washed down the shaft. I looked over the edge of the lower shaft and I could see the lights of the others at the bottom as they waited for me, so gathering together my decidedly damp scattered wits and deciding that I wasn't " 'ard" and I shouldn't " 'ave come", I continued the descent with an extra brake bar in place.

The shaft dropped into a rift over 100ft high and 30ft wide, which soon led to a further 30ft drop, and a short climb down a stal slope gave way to another short drop. At the bottom of this pitch we took our rappelling rigs off and stowed them away in our packs. A large passage was then followed which ended abruptly in another drop with the shimmer of water 40ft below. It was a large lake which looked deep and extended beyond the range of our carbide lamps. Cautiously we clambered down burdened with inflated car inner tubes. The water was so warm that I only wore a woollen shirt and jeans, and it was a pleasure to paddle along. This was the way to go caving. None of your tight Mendip holes! This place was huge and the walls soared up out of sight. After 400ft or so the lake ended and we could walk again along the 50ft wide passage. Soon we came to the end of the known section of the cave and we set off across another deep lake, the passage here was much smaller as the roof was only a few feet above our heads, and we had to take care not to snag our precious inner tubes on the jagged walls. This canal ended after 600ft and the passage opened up again with the roof way out of sight once more. We stumbled over a boulder littered floor for quite a way until yet another lake appeared. Here the roof dropped dramatically until there was only two feet of airspace in the 80ft wide flooded bedding plane. The roof was completely flat and it seemed never ending, as we paddled through the silent brown water, each deep in thought. There were plenty of blind fish which provided an amusing distraction to the seemingly endless canal. After a thousand feet or so we beached on a gravel bank, and we could wade into another side passage. A short climb over some beautiful formations then a drop led to another wide lake which we could wade along, dragging our feet through deep mud. Eventually we had to resort to the inner tubes again, and the canal debouched into a huge chamber where we could see neither roof nor walls. We had to paddle round the side until a large mud bank appeared. The chamber was over 300ft diameter and the roof was eventually located 100ft above our heads. From this chamber the stream ran into a small passage and into another small chamber before sinking in the floor. This was the end of the

cave, so after having a substantial meal and a brief sojourn we began to survey out, stopping periodically to eat our tinned Mexican food. After about ten hours work we reached the known part of the cave and we could pack away the precious survey notes. The entrance shaft beckoned and a rather weary Britisher began to fight his way up the small entrance drops. These posed quite a few problems as the rope passed over a few overhangs which are difficult to surmount with Jumars. By the time I reached the 300ft entrance shaft I was really tired, but a new Mexican dawn was about to break, which spurred me on. I swung about in the centre of the shaft as the bats were returning, and it was a little unnerving to have thousands of bats swooping around your ears. Fortunately none collided with me and after what seemed like a lifetime I crawled over the edge and croaked through parched lips for water. Twenty hours underground culminating in a 300ft prussik in tropical conditions gave me a healthy respect for Mexican caves and Texan cavers.

When the survey data was analysed later we found that the cave was over two and a half miles long, which made it the second longest known cave in the El Abra.

Sotano de los Monos

A few days later saw us chopping through the dense vegetation again in search of another cave which a local woodcutter knew, on the top of the range. The heat was oppressive and the air was full of the noise of countless insects as we steadily worked our way up the steep hillside. After passing a clearing, in which there were several mounds of earth emitting wisps of acrid smoke (where the local woodcutters produced their charcoal), we came to the pit. A dry arroyo, overgrown with creepers and full of dead wood, led to the edge of the shaft. As we began to clear a path through the tangle of greenery, we disturbed a Fer-de-Lance over six feet long which slithered off into the brush, while overhead a flock of parakeets shrieked at us. Not a very wholesome place to be in at all! The shaft was estimated at over 500ft deep so a 200ft rope was tied onto the end of a 400ft rope length and lowered down the shaft, after taking the precaution of tying a large knot on the end of the rope - just in case it was deeper than 600ft! After drawing lots as to who should have the honour and privilege of being the first down the shaft, Don Broussard lost, and he assembled his serious rappelling rig which consisted of a seat harness with karabiner type descender, and a chest harness with Jumars at the ready, because he had to cope with a knot in the rope. The technique for dealing with a knotted rope is to rappell down to the knot, Jumar over the knot onto the next rope, and then re-connect the rappelling rig to continue the descent. As he descended he gave a running commentary and his voice gradually grew fainter then stopped altogether. We had to wait two hours until he returned to hear that the shaft was blocked at a depth of 470ft.

While he was in the shaft we examined a small cave which broke out into the shaft. There was a platform at the extreme edge of the shaft with carvings on the walls, which led us to believe that the shaft had been used for sacrificial purposes by an ancient culture far older than Mayan or Toltec. There is evidence to show that man has lived in Mexico for 11,000 years, but at the time of writing these carvings have yet to be identified. Perhaps we have

stumbled across something of great importance, who knows!

Cueva de las Quatos

One part of the range which had received scant attention in the past was the steep eastern escarpment. The only known caves were the Nacimiento's of the Rio Coy, and Rio Mante. So one day we drove along a dirt road which runs parallel to the escarpment, scanning it's verdure-covered heights. About half way along the range we saw what appeared to be a cave opening near to the top of the escarpment. After confirming that it was a cave a local farmer chopped a path up the steep slope. It was hard work climbing in the tropical heat, and we had consumed the contents of our water-bottles by the time we had reached the mouth of the cave. It was a rift 130ft high, about 25ft wide with a steep slope of guano. On looking closely at the steep slope of guano, we observed that someone had been into the cave before us, for the soft dry guano had a line of Jaguar tracks leading up the slope into the darkness of cave. Our guide refused to accompany us, so with thumping hearts we crept up the slope keeping close to the wall, expecting every second to come face to face with one of your actual ferocious furry-faced four-footed felines which frequent the neighbourhood. After passing a pile of bones, we came into a large chamber about 200ft diameter ... no Jaguars ... no passages. As I began to look for any continuation, I noticed a small hole beneath a pile of boulders, with a set of tracks going to and from it. With my machette held in front of me gleaming in the light of my carbide lamp, I cautiously peered in. The hole appeared to drop down, and as I wriggled in to have a better look there was a flurry of movement which caused the dry guano to spill down the hole, and me to back out rapidly. An irate bat came out of the hole flew silently around my head and then vanished up into darkness of the roof of the chamber. After a few minutes my jangled nerves allowed me a further look, and the hole appeared to be blocked 15ft down. So that was that, and after surveying the cave we made haste back to Valles before the rain started, which would make the dirt road impassable.

Nacimiento del Rio Seco

Another cave we visited on the eastern escarpment was a small resurgence known to the locals as Nacimiento del Rio Seco. As we entered the cave we noticed the characteristic odour of an active bat colony. Sure enough high in the roof was a black rustling carpet of Vampire bats, whilst the floor was a knee deep slimy black morass of fresh guano, crawling with parasitic insects. The whole mess gave off a nauseating stink, and the inviting pool at the entrance to the cave offered an open invitation to wash of the stinking slime, but when a stone was flung into the innocent looking pool the rocks became alive with deadly Moccasin snakes which scuttled from the pool. We had to go further down stream to wash off the sickening mess. Later we found the local natives used the pool for their drinking water.

Soon it was time for me to leave Valles and as Don Broussard and myself had a few days spare, we did a rapid 4000 mile journey which involved us in a tour of the Mayan ruins in the Yucatan and Guatemala, and a visit to the Toltec pyramids close to Mexico City, before

a five day drive up to Pennsylvania to attend the N.S.S. Convention. (Reported in the W.C.C. Journal No. 132, Vol. 11). After the Convention I spent the remainder of my visit in Canada, except for one weekend visit to West Virginia which involved a 5000 mile drive from Hamilton.

Conclusions

Perhaps a personal opinion on the merits of using ropes against ladders might not come amiss. I found that using the rappelling devices made the descent of any shaft much easier than had it been laddered. The rappelling rigs do have their faults, but even after having a slightly worrying time down the 300ft entrance shaft of Sotano del Tigre with the Rack type, I am very much in their favour. Climbing back up the rope by means of Jumars is strenuous and slow, but it means that one person can descend large shafts completely unaided, instead of having a hauling party for the return climb. Prussiking is slow compared with the use of ladders and lifelines, as a 600ft shaft would take approximately one and a half hours to ascend, compared with the fifteen minutes taken for the 600ft climb up from the snow ledge in Provatina Abyss in Greece. As Prussiking is much slower than ladders, I feel that it would be inadvisable to use this technique down wet shafts, as you can easily return (if ladders are used), when the water volume is too great. Using a Rack for the descent would involve changing over to Jumars to return, and delay in those circumstances could be fatal. However this technique has it's place in cave exploration, where there are long dry shafts, - the time taken to get into your rappelling rig renders it unsuitable for short drops. The real advantage of this technique appears on large expeditions, where vast amounts of tackle have to be handled. The descent of Provatina Abyss could have been relatively easy using ropes, as one person could carry the 1400ft of rope up the mountain, and nylon rope does not attract lightning!!

The caving regions of Central America are only just being examined by cavers, of these the El Abra range has received more attention because it is the most accessible. Already there are forty known caves and there are likely to be many more in the more remote parts of the range. The maximum depth of any system would appear to be approximately 1000ft. Caves of greater depth exist in the higher ranges of Xilitla, and Huatla where the Sotano's of Golindrinas and San Augustin lie. There are many other exciting possibilities in the high ranges of South Mexico and Guatemala which have never been looked at yet. A recent expedition from MacMaster tried to reach a high plateau in Guatemala, but failed because of dense vegetation. As more cavers begin to travel further afield these are areas which will receive more attention.

The caving regions of Central America are not beyond the resources of European cavers, as travel to the U.S. is fairly easy nowadays. Once in New York, Mexico is only three days away by Greyhound bus, as are the Rockies. If anyone contemplates a visit to these regions it is a good idea to contact Derek Ford, as the MacMaster cavers have considerable experience in Central America.

The main problems of caving in Central America are the dense vegetation, insects and the heat. Coming from England I had considerable problems coping with mosquitoes, ticks and the tropical heat. But despite these discomforts I thoroughly enjoyed my visit, and I am very grateful to both John Fish and Derek Ford who made my trip possible.

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Sotano de San Augustin. G. Pilkington & T. Morris W.C.C. Journal No. 125 Vol. 10.

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CAVE SCIENCE COURSES AT WHERNSIDE MANOR

The programme of courses at the National Scout Caving Centre for 1971 includes a number of Cave Science weekends. Much assistance is given by members of the C.R.G. in running these courses, and they are directed by recognised experts in their field. The planned courses are as follows:

Cave Surveying (April 23-25) The techniques used underground and at the drawing board. It is intended that a survey of a cave in the area will be made by the course members using the centre's Suunto instruments.

Photography Underground (July 2-4) The equipment available to the cave photographer will be discussed, and there will be opportunity to experiment with multi-flash units, etc, in near-by caves. A session on underground cine work is also planned.

Karst Hydrology (October 8-10) A practical approach to problems of water composition and flow in limestone. Methods of water analysis and water tracing will be covered, as well as flood pulse analysis should conditions permit.

Limestone Geology (October 29-31) An opportunity for a close look at the speleologists' favourite rock.

Each course begins at 9.00 p.m. on the Friday and ends at 6.00 p.m. the following Sunday. The fee of £4.20 covers accommodation and all meals, as well as the use of Centre equipment and transport during the course.

Application may be made by letter, stating the course required and enclosing a deposit of £1, to The Warden, Whernside Manor, Dent, Sedbergh, Yorkshire.

M.K. Lyon

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Brook House,
Wrighton,
Bristol.

Dear Sir,

I was interested to see the reference to Kernmantel ropes in the report of the 1970 N.S.S. Convention (Wessex Jnl., Dec. 1970). The British Mountaineering Council, as reported by the Climbers' Club, are carrying out tests with Kernmantel and laid ropes. The loss of performance in the former is such that it is suggested that they should be discarded after two years' or fifty days' use, whichever is the earlier. While laid ropes can be inspected to check their condition this is impossible to do so thoroughly with Kernmantel.

Yours,
P.B. LAWDER

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Sidcot School,
Winscombe,
Somerset.

Dear Sir,

Recent experience at the '20 Foot Pot' in Swildon's Hole force us to conclude that there is a lot to be desired of the manners of some cavers (though the small minority for certain).

I refer to 'ladder hogging', a spreading habit. The case in point occurred when a member of our Club was leading several others on their first Swildon's trip. Two cavers, found to be digging at the high level mud sump, sat on top of the pitch, obstructing the leader's view of the situation and proceeded to descend our ladder, splitting our party. Neither made a polite request to do this.

Our party may have been slow and the diggers' need for speed understandable but even if we had been unwilling to allow them immediate descent they would have had to wait only two minutes. I feel I can make this request for patience because the following day I waited 50 minutes to ascend the ladder after a four-hour Sump Two and detour trip while hundreds descended!

Yours faithfully,
Ben Makins (on behalf of S.S.S.S.)

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Stephen Crabtree (S.S.S.S.) writes from the same address that he is willing to lead a trip down Magle Hole. The most convenient date seems to be July 3rd. All Longwood Valley diggers and any others are welcome. Drop a note to Stephen at Sidcot School.

Hillside,
Brookfield,
Wigton, Cumberland.

Dear Malcolm,

Following my article on the Caves of Cumberland (Wessex Jnl., 133. Feb. 1971) I have heard from Graham Stevens that we were not the first explorers of the Swilly Hole. Evidently the entrance is mentioned in Whilan's 'History of Cumberland and Westmorland', and the Northern Cavern and Mine Research Society's 1964 publication (No. 2) describes a Haltcliffe Cave which however was choked after 70 feet by flood debris. He also points out that I omitted a North arrow from the survey (Editor also apologises!) - which was conveniently orientated with north at the top.

Yours etc.,
Glenn Tomkinson.

* * * * *

The Quarrying Industry in Somerset

If enough interest is shown, the report prepared by the river authorities, ministries and recreational interests on the quarrying industry on Mendip will be published for general sale. There is an impressive list of chapters, covering the use, exploitation and control of quarrying on Mendip, with repercussions all over southern England and the Midlands. On the basis of public reaction to the report the Somerset County Planning Committee hope to publish a plan for quarrying. Those interested, at £5 per copy, should write, without obligation, to Mr. Denton-Cox, County Hall, Taunton.

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Journal Pierces the Iron Curtain

The Institute of Scientific Information of the USSR Academy of Sciences has asked for copies of the Wessex Cave Club Journal to be sent to Moscow so that they may "supply our readers with maximum information about the latest achievements in science and technology". K.G.B. = Karst Goodwill Bid?

REVIEWS

'Some of the Legal Aspects of Cave Preservation for Scientific Reasons', by G.T. Warwick, C.R.G. Newsletter, 125, March 1971, p.7

A handy review of just where we stand with regard to development pressures in karst areas. The old National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949, referred decisions on nature reserves and sites of special scientific interest to the Nature Conservancy (they are part of the Natural Environment Research Council - described as National by G.T.W., not Natural!). They were to inform landowners that their land was scheduled but no other action followed. In 1950 Town and Country Planning regulations referred local planning authorities to the Conservancy in all development procedures. If the land wasn't threatened by development the Conservancy remained inactive. Since the Countryside Act (1968), however, the Conservancy can enter management agreements with landowners and impose building covenants on the land. So those visits to Mendip by the Conservancy's physiographic section (P. Sargeant, Karst Policeman, Conservancy Division) should be encouraged wherever possible.

M.D.N.

The Dangers of Pollution of Limestone Aquifers, with special reference to the Mendip Hills, Somerset, by T.C. Atkinson, Proc. U.B.S.S., 12(3), 1971 281-290.

It has become obvious to the Karst Police that the purity of Mendip's risings is nowhere near the prodigious level boasted by the denizens. In short, though your teeth may grow strong your gut may well rot! This paper is a useful guide to the problems posed by rapid flow of water through a fractured crystalline aquifer such as the Carboniferous Limestone on Mendip. It is well timed to demonstrate that rather than the "water-makes-caves-makes-cavers-makes-filth" sequence, already largely disproved by Chairman Jim's survey (Wessex Journal No. 132, Vol. 11), there is a feedback to the local water supply industry of a considerable expertise which may be used in the prevention or cure of pollution.

Though the first few paragraphs of Tim's paper will read as rather simple stuff, it may not yet be realised by the water suppliers themselves! The main aquifers of Britain are porous rocks like Chalk and sands/gravels. The great filtration properties of such rocks have, unfortunately, been assumed to hold for the subterranean system feeding any spring. That the flow conditions in Carboniferous Limestone, and hence filtration properties, are very different to the classical aquifers is shown by a table of porosities. In addition to the voids with which it was endowed from early formation, the Limestone has secondary porosity and permeability - which is where we come in! The water tracing experiments on Mendip have proved many of the catchment areas for the risings and have shown flow-through to be rapid in most cases - certainly not subject to purifying delays in tight pores.

The fact that much of the water is weakly filtered by the soil before it enters the percolation system is mentioned but Atkinson usefully distinguishes between 'vadose trickles' and 'vadose seepage' in percolation water. He is bound to be remembered for ever for this small addition to

the terminology because percolation water is not just cave drips (seepage). Much of the percolation water enters through well-jointed rock in the base of surface depressions (trickles) and flows in fairly large streams into the main swallet flow through the cave. Thus dumping refuse in closed depressions is a dangerous practice.

In conclusion a list of 11 recent and continuing cases of pollution is given, together with a good map of the catchment areas and a list of references largely made up by members of the Wessex. One, at least, of those cited is known to be flattered by that nice diagram of a water table in Fig.48.

Shorter Notices

'Cave Development in the Limestone of the Ingleborough district', by A.C. Waltham, *Geographical Journal*, 136, (4), 574-585, Dec. 1970. A reply - by M.M. Sweeting, G.J., 137(1), 138-139, March 1971.

M.D.N. reviewed Waltham's paper for the April Journal. Dr. Sweeting has graciously answered some of the points made about her earlier work. By putting her finger on the little-understood relationships between hydraulic conductivity and structural features she touches the nub of the question about which karst enthusiasts should be anxious to debate and speculate.

Rapid post-glacial formation of large vadose systems is now more acceptable but there is a danger in the wholesale abandonment of the concept of still-stands during a falling base level, particularly where prominent shale beds exist upon which shallow phreatic zones may have perched.

J.D.H.

U.B.S.S. Newsletter, Newsletter, New Series, No.2, May 1971

Though well-known for its Proceedings all over the world, one of the things which has left the U.B.S.S. often forgotten in the local area is its lack of a regular publication. The amount of work done by this Society in Clare and South Wales means that those two areas are referenced most often. However, Mendip does appear first in the 'Caving Reports' section, with work going on sporadically in Manor Farm (are they fed up?) and G.B. (is it really they?). Hopes of a big extension to the Fergus River Cave were not realised during the Easter foray in Clare, though the trip was notable for one well-known septuagenarian doing the Doolin through-trip in a very short time! There is a separate report devoted to vandalism in G.B. and the problem of access. One learns that a significant speeding up of survey plotting and letter-writing in the Speleo Rooms has been achieved by means of a computer. A titillating bill-of-fare is listed for the forthcoming 'Proceedings'.

M.D.N.

OBITUARY

Jack Coleman

The protagonist of Irish speleology was tragically killed in a car crash on April 20th 1971. Many Members of the Wessex will have known Jack through visits to Clare which, since he published the description of Pollnagollum in 1944 (with N.J. Dunnington) and started work with the U.B.S.S., had become his favourite area. He had plans to retire there, overlooking O'Connor's Bar and possibly write up his Ph.D.

Jack was born in Cork, 57 years ago, and first became attracted to caving by 'an abnormal interest in Physical Geography and the discovery of Baker's 'Caving' in the Cork Public Library'. His early work was on the dry valleys of the area about his home but later he covered the country and in 1965 he published the most excellent of all cave guides, 'The Caves of Ireland'. His job in the Tourist Board made the opening-up of Irish cave areas that much easier and that much more important. He was returning from an inspection of the Board's work at Dunmore Cave, Kilkenny, when the accident occurred.

He has published works on Irish village travels and was a fine story-teller, with a rich experience. University College, Cork awarded him an M.A. in 1965 for his speleological research. A book of The Burren remains to be published posthumously.

Despite the excellence of his accomplishments a choice between the Man and his Works inevitably means the Man, in Jack's case. One of the finest things about recent Easters in Clare was that one could follow the sound of a rich base voice and find Jack remembering the early days in Lisdoonvarna, or shaking the bar with his singing. He did much to facilitate the research which culminated in the U.B.S.S.'s book on the caves of Clare. As Professor Tratman says, 'Caving has lost a distinguished exponent of this science and sport. We have lost a good friend. Jack will be greatly missed by us all'.