

THE WESSEX CAVE CLUB JOURNAL

VOLUME 20 (NUMBER 224) APRIL 1990

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

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

Officers whose address does not appear here may be contacted via Upper Pitts

| | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------|--|
| President | Luke Devenish | Editor | Nick Williams 93 Ashtree Road, Frome, Somerset, BA11 2SE 0373 64311 (day) 0373 51249 (eve) |
| Vice-Presidents | Rev. C. Cullingford Mr. P. Dolphin Mr. Graham Balcombe | | |
| Hon. Chairman | Aubrey Newport Bramblebank, Upper Stanton Drew, Bristol, BS18 4EG 0272 333236 (9am - 9pm) | Sales Officer | Aiden Williams 26 Rock Road, Midsomer Norton, BA3 2AQ 0761 412896 (9am – 9pm) |
| Hon Secretary | Nick Marachov 5 Daleson Close, Northowram, Halifax, W. Yorks., HX2 0EE | Hut Booking Officer | Roz Fielder 41 The Normans, Wexham Court Estate, Slough, SL2 5TT 0753 31374 (9am – 9pm) |
| Hon. Treasurer | Brian Hansford 34 Fleming Road, Weeke Estate, Winchester, Hants, SO22 6EE 0962 882814 | Hut Admin Officer | Pete Hann |
| | | Hut Warden | Howard Price 0705 822351 ext. 2113 (work) |
| | | Ordinary Member | Andy Summerskill |
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| Caving Secretary | Nigel Graham 60 Williams Ave, Wyke Regis, Weymouth, Dorset, DT4 9BP 0305 789770 | M.R.O. Coordinator | Pete Lacy 23 Old Banwell Road, Locking, Weston Super Mare, Avon |
| Gear Curator | Duncan Frew 90 heylesmore Drive, Camberley, Surrey, GU16 5BP 0483 22732 | Survey Sales | Maurice Hewins 31 Badshot Park, Badshot Lea, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 9JU 0252 29302 |
| | | Librarian | Paul Lambert |

Club Notes

In Committee

Matters discussed and decided by the Committee since the last Journal include:

Upper Pitts: An electronic clock is to be purchased for the **heating**. This will give much greater control over when the heating is on and off, will allow the heating to be turned on for short periods when required, and will not require re-setting following a power cut.

When funds permit, a de-humidifier is to be purchased for the **changing area**. This, combined with the recent repairs to the roof, will reduce damp in the rest of the hut as well. A storm porch is to be built on the end of the new changing room as the glass in this door is frequently smashed by the wind. Environmentally sealed lights are to be fitted in the changing room following the Trustees report of last year.

The **Ladies dormitory** is still not finished, and volunteers to assist with its completion are sought.

There is to be no provision of a special **member's bunk room**, either by partitioning the main dormitory or by conversion of the Ladies, as the former would entail the fitting of a second fire escape, and the latter would contravene agreements for the grants given to originally build the hut.

The funds remaining after settling the accounts of the **Berger trip** are too small to make it worth dividing them up amongst the people who went so the money will be used to mount some more photographs for display around the Hut.

The **Council of Southern Caving Clubs Company Ltd** is being wound up, and the Club will attempt to recover any money due to it.

The **loan of £200 to the MRO** which prevented the acceptance of the 1988/89 accounts at the last AGM has still not been traced, and a report will be made to the 1990 AGM.

Following enquiries, it has become apparent that there is very little that we can do about the level of **Community Charge** which will be levied on Upper Pitts as the authorities are not interested in entering into any negotiations or discussions until the rate has been set. The situation is to be monitored closely by the Chairman and Treasurer, who will report as appropriate.

The new **Club Handbook** will be prepared in time for the AGM. This will include Club Rules and a list of member's names and addresses.

In the absence of suggestions to the contrary, the Fenny Castle Hotel has been provisionally booked again for the Annual Dinner. It is hoped that alternative menus will be available this year.

Wessex People

Change of Address Duncan Frew has moved to: 90 Cheylesmore Drive, Cheylesmore Park, Camberley, Surrey, GU16 5BP Tel. Camberley 22732. Howard Price has moved to: 36 Normandy Avenue, Watchet, Somerset, TA23, 0TU.

It is with considerable sadness that we have to announce the recent death of **Bob Lawder**. A full obituary will appear in the next Journal.

New Members:

We would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new members:

Terry Shipley, 260 Endike Lane, Hull, HU6 8DW (0482 859191)

Dominic Sealy, 82 Kenilworth, Southhill, Weymouth, Dorset, DT4 9SJ (0305 772270)

Chris Jackson, 25 Oakley Road, Borden, Hants, GU35 0GJ (04203 87726)

Chris Giles, 83 Roseberry Gardens, Haringey, London (01 800 6708)

Dave Willmot, Perrott Lodge, Land Road, Crewekeme, Somerset, TA18 8HA

Duncan Wilson, Garden Cottage, Winscombe Hill, Winscombe, Avon, BS25 1NN, (093484 4261)

Lost

Huddersfield Polytechnic lost a yellow tackle sack (marked HPCCC) full of rigging gear and other ironmongery when they were staying at the hut on 2 - 4 March. Since a lot of people were about at the hut that weekend, it seems possible that it was picked up in error by someone else. If you know of its whereabouts, please contact Roz Fielder on 0753 31374 to arrange its return.

Caving Notes

The full meets list for Yorkshire in 1990 is as follows:

| | |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| 17 February | Longkin East/Rift Pot |
| 18 February | Hurnell Moss Pot |
| 10 March | Cow Pot |
| 17 March | Lost Johns |
| 5 May | Top Sink |
| 6 May | County Pot |
| 17 June | Gingling Hole |
| 7 July | Hammer Pot |
| 8 September | Birks Fell |
| 9 September | Pool Sink |
| 22 September | Notts Pot |
| 6 October | Dale Head |
| 7 October | Gaping Gill Main Shaft |
| 27 October | Disappointment Pot/Stream Passage Pot |
| 10 November | Penyghent Pot |
| 11 November | Little Hull Pot |
| 8 December | Juniper Gulf |
| 9 December | Nick Pot |
| 30 December | Lost Johns Cave |

Contrary to what was printed in the last Journal, please contact **Keith Sanderson** (address at the front of the Journal) if you wish to take part in any of these trips.

WCC Cave Leaders

Wales:

Dan yr Ogof
OFDI

Ian Jepson, Pete Hann, Rich Websell
Ian Jepson, Carl Pickstone, Don Thompson

Mendip:

Charterhouse:
St Cuthbert's:

Nigel Graham
Alison Moody

Would anyone like to take on responsibility for becoming a WCC leader for any of the above caves? Alison Moody wishes to retain her Cuthbert's leadership, but an additional leader to relieve her would be helpful. Similarly, with the Welsh caves and the present club leaders. Jeff Price is relinquishing his Charterhouse Cave leadership soon after several years of numerous midweek trips, and on behalf of the Club I thank him for his services. This leaves me (Nigel Graham), but of course I am not available mid-week as I live 60 miles away. The Committee is aware of one or two members who have expressed an interest in this work, but must naturally throw the posts open to the Membership as a whole. Anyone interested should contact me.

Welsh News

In **Dan-Yr-Ogof** and **Tunnel Caves** anti radon fans are being installed, which in DYO will mean a modification to the cavers' entrance from the resurgence passage, via a very tight squeeze. Whether or not this will be enlarged remains to be seen. **WARNING:** the fans which are being installed can start automatically with no warning so **KEEP CLEAR!**

The valley downstream of **Bridge Cave** is owned by Mr Davies of Dyffryn Nedd Farm. Please pay 40p in the box in the farmhouse porch. Mr Davies regularly patrols the area, so please pay up - and be courteous.

If you use the car park of the Pont Sarn pub when changing for **Ogof Rhyd Sych**, please ask permission first. Alternatively, use the lay-by a few yards down the road.

The **South Wales Cave Club** has a new cottage booking secretary: she is Janice Richards, 32 Emwell Street, Warminster, Wilts, BA12 8JA.

Yugoslavia

Information which will be of interest to anyone who is thinking of a trip to Yugoslavia arrived recently at Upper Pitts. My Yugoslavian isn't too hot, it appears to come from a tourism organisation who can offer a seven day tour of some of the country's (for that read "world's") major show caves, underground rafting trips, "Mountain Karst" trips to the alps, and also the 3rd international speleological camp which runs from 28th July to 4 August. Further details may be obtained by contacting the Editor or the Caving Secretary.

Mendip News

Following my own recent visit to **Compton Ochre Mine**, I pass on a request from the owners of the last house along the road to the mine. Just past the end of the metalled road, where this becomes a rough track up through the woods, is an inviting layby on the right. Please do not park in it as it obstructs the awkwardly-angled entrance to the house drive. I was asked to park in the layby a few yards back,

immediately before the last house on the left. The drawback is that this is a bit close to the houses, so do respect the resident's privacy please. I'm not sure if it is possible to park further up the track.

Nigel Graham

Portland

Following the latest in vague reports of difficulties between cavers and the owners of the old fort above Blacknor Hole, I visited the owners. The fort is now two private dwellings and ownership extends to the cliff top and face, and the under cliff screes, fronting the building. This was news to me, one of the cave's original explorers, and to the various other groups of local cavers. Anyway, I promised to pass on their request to belay sensibly. Please do not obstruct the footpath along the cliff top, nor venture onto the bank. One group (of suicidal tendencies?) had been ordered off from trying to the fort fence, which barely supports itself above an eroding bank. Thanks go to Richard Warman for the latest report.

Nigel Graham

From the Log

3/4 January 1990

Northumberland: Pete Ryder, Nigel G. "Chasing up reports of gritstone fissures at Muckle Samuel's Crag (Wark Forest) and at Darney Crag (Hartside). All we found were a few insignificant minicaves (slip rifts and boulder shelters)."

3 January

Drunkard's Hole. Aubrey, Pete H, Mark, Dunc. "Cementing with a little bit of digging".

5 January

Stoke Lane, Dunc. W, Mark: "Got to sump one in v. high water. No air other side of sump. Got the hell out to worsening rain."

13 January

Thrupe Lane. "A four hour rescue from Atlas Pot."

20 January

OFDII, Mark, Carmen, Duncan W. "entered via Cwm Dwr and out through top entrance."

12 January

Portland. "Inspecting storm damage (small collapsed cave at Bill, two large mud flows on Westcliff slopes)."

31 January

Cuckoo Cleaves. Pete H., Aubrey, Nick W, "to look at a new dig at the bottom of the canyon. A few boulders removed to reveal a small inlet with stream."

7 February

Cuckoo Cleaves. Pete H., Aubrey, Nick, Paul, "to put a shot hole in the inlet. Cave very wet on exit due a storm. Entrance pipe was like coming out of Swildons."

11 February

Pete H, Julian Taylor, Liz Green. Unknown hole near Halfpenny Hole. "Entrance in large rake dropped into a reasonable sized rift with many hanging death. The place has been visited by miners - i.e. stemple marks, stacked deads approx 150ft long, 50ft deep. One area looks like it needs a poke with a crow bar to get into another small chamber."

14 February

Portland N. G., Martin Crocker "Abandoned Coffin Hole for the moment. Boulder choke is so wet it is slumping in as fast as we can clear it. Visited Sawmill Cave dig (Dominic, Eddy, Wayne Brown) to view progress - slow!"

14 February

Drunkard's Hole. Aubrey, Max, Pete H., Paul, Nick W. "Mr Newport dug out lots of Clag and undermined the wall."

24 February

Gough's Cave, Cheddar. Mike Hearn, R. Brown, M. Foyle. "Dobbin and Male started building new diving platform. The Bosch drill has survived it's first trip into Cheddar: how many more will it??"

21 February

Drunkards: Aubrey, Max, Pete H., "started to build new wall under the free hanging one left last week."

28 February

Pete H, Aubrey. "Works outing to Twin T's. NHASA diggers out when we got there but still went down for a quick look - very impressive, lots of wall building."

3 March

Sue and Bev. Burrington Coombe: Where can we go where we can't get lost? Sidcot and Goatchurch! Quite an adventure for us - we did not get lost and flew through the Lobster Pot. No problem!

Northhill - Eddy and Dominic, "turned out to be everything and more that we had been told - basically shit! Got down to rumble plonk and decided that the Hunters was a greater attraction - was that cave worth it - NO!"

4/5 March

Ian Timney & Co. Swildons and Manor Farm. "Good caving and loads to drink: just the job."

5 March

Charterhouse: Pete H, Julie Bolt, Eddie, Dominic and Nigel. "More rocks out of end; boulders lowered by about 4 feet. More sand/gravel moved in. Very useful session."

10 March

Western Mendip. Nigel, Eddy, Dominic. "Went cave ticking: Denny's Hole, Fox's Hole and two others of Crookpeak, Loxton Quarry Caves, Loxton Cave and Crompton Ochre Mine. Nice easy afternoon."

17 March

Swildon's Watergate Connection. Mark, Duncan and Max. "5 hours of mud in the ears followed by 10 hours of shuteye."

18 March.

Peak Cavern, Speedwell, via the Wind Tunnel. Keith and Roz, Malc, Pete H, Nick. W., & 2 TSG members. "Horror in Derbyshire as Foyle drags four unsuspecting Wessex members along fifteen mile flat out crawl! Dragged seven four foot iron ladders along 1500ft mud filled flat out crawl (about two hours) Only took one photo. Went to Main Rising and Treasury Sump. A return trip is not anticipated in the near future."

21 March

Swildons: Jim, Nigel, Dominic and Eddy. "Quick trip to the top of the twenty with tackle sacs and BDH's, then split up and came out various ways clearing cave of sweet wrappers and carbide. 1 hour."

24 March.

Mark, Carmen, Max, Duncan. OFDI. "Guided trip courtesy of SWCC."

31 March.

Yorks. NG "digging with Gary Smith and Mark ? (CPC) superb liquid mud bath."

1 April

Aygill Caverns NG "CPC meet led by Chris Hayter. It's not a very long cave but it's quite varied."

8 April

Swildons. Mark, Duncan and Max. "Shatter - Damp Link (bad air) - Troubles - Vicarage - Hairy Passage - Sump One and out. Ohh, it was great fun (honest)."

Mendip Rescue Organization Annual Report

Report by the Hon Secretary and Treasurer for the Year to 31st December 1989

Sadly, yet with many lively memories, we record the death of Dr. Stanley Cannicott during the summer. Stanley started caving on Mendip whilst a pupil at nearby Downside School before the last War. He was also a keen member of their cadet corps. When the war came, Stanley joined up from university and saw much front line action as a paratroop officer and field surgeon. Being fluent in both French and Spanish, he also worked with the Resistance. He was decorated for valour and severely wounded himself. On returning after the War to work as the senior psychiatric officer in local hospitals, he settled with his family in Cheddar and joined the Axbridge Caving Group.

It was always a comforting and invariably colourful moment when Stanley arrived on the scene at rescues to attend injured cavers. All his field surgeon's experience and psychiatric skills went to work and we learnt a lot from seeing him in action; often unorthodox but unfailingly practical and effective. His First Aid lectures for wardens at the Mendip Hospital in the early seventies were masterpieces of anecdote and demonstration; he did not just talk about injections, for instance, but pulled down his trousers, stuck the hypodermic needle into his thigh and invited us to inject him with water whilst calmly explaining the do's and don'ts of the process. At one meeting to consider how we might

get a badly hurt caver back through Blue Pencil, soon after Swildon's Four was first discovered, Stanley seriously set out his requirements for performing an amputation in the cave. Needless to say, these were startlingly simple and made sense.

The last rescue Stanley attended was when Graham Price fell off the old Forty Foot Pot in Swildons in November 1973 and fractured his pelvis. Tim Reynolds and I were patching him up for the carry-out when Stanley arrived. Barely glancing at the patient, he asked us if we were happy with the plastering we had applied around the waist, then joined the hauling party saying: "We'll soon find out if you've done the job properly". He was an immensely practical and reassuring person who gave everyone great confidence in themselves. That is why he responded well to cavers and us to him.

In all other respects, the year has been rewarding. Rescues have been few but occasionally challenging. Other meetings, such as the advanced First Aid ones organised by Bob Cork and Dany Bradshaw, have started successfully. We have also received great support from local cavers and the Mountain Rescue Committee nationally. The accounts that follow tell their own story.

Jim Hanwell Honorary Secretary and
Treasurer February 1990

Cave Rescues and Incidents for the Year ending 31st December 1989

For the second year running, there were nine cave rescue call-outs and their distribution through the year was remarkably similar. A high proportion of rescues resulted from falls as summarised below. There was an additional incident to recover a dog from a mine shaft.

| | | | |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------------------|----|
| Sat 29th Jan | Swildon's Hole | 1 Fall, broken leg | 10 |
| Thu 2nd Feb | Swildon's Hole | 10 Missing party, lost | 3 |
| Sun 26th Mar | Charterhouse | 1 Dog down mine shaft | 4 |
| Tue 28th Mar | Swildon's Hole | 1 Asthma attack | - |
| Sat 8th Apl | G.B. Cavern | 1 Fall, fractured jaw | 25 |
| Sat 6th May | Drunkard's Hole | 1 Exhausted, stuck | 5 |
| Thu 18th Mar | General search | 1 Overdue party | - |
| Thu 6th June | Swildon's Hole | 1 Fall, broken wrist | 30 |
| Sat 2nd Dec | General alert | 1 Overdue party | - |
| Sat 23rd Dec | Goatchurch Cavern | 1 Fall, dislocated knee | 5 |

MENDIP RESCUE ORGANISATION

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 1989

1988

| £ | | £ | £ | £ |
|-------|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | <u>Income</u> | | | |
| | Donations:- | | | |
| 1,135 | General Appeal | | 849 | |
| 97 | Collection Boxes | | 221 | |
| 65 | Rescued Parties | | 175 | |
| ----- | | | ----- | |
| 1,297 | | | 1,245 | |
| | | | | |
| 327 | Hire of MRO NiFe Cells | | 297 | |
| 56 | Sale of Equipment | | 10 | |
| 130 | Bank Deposit Interest | | 214 | |
| ----- | | | ----- | |
| 1,810 | | | 1,766 | |
| | | | | |
| | <u>Expenditure</u> | | | |
| | Equipment:- | | | |
| - | Radios | 326 | | |
| 172 | General | 300 | | |
| | | ----- | | |
| | | | 626 | |
| 556 | Medical Supplies | | 23 | |
| 280 | Belfry Store Repairs | | - | |
| 90 | Insurance of Equipment | | 90 | |
| 76 | Postage, stationery and duplicating | | 119 | |
| | | | | |
| | Donations:- | | | |
| 10 | S.W.E.R.A. | 15 | | |
| 10 | B.C.R.C. | 5 | | |
| | | ----- | | |
| | | | 20 | |
| 47 | Meetings and Information | | 65 | |
| ----- | | | ----- | |
| 1,241 | | | | 943 |
| ----- | | | | ----- |
| £569 | Surplus for year | | | £823 |
| ===== | | | | ===== |

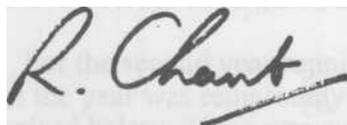
MENDIP RESCUE ORGANISATION

BALANCE SHEET
AS AT DECEMBER 31, 1989

| <u>1988</u> | | | |
|---|---|-------|--------|
| | £ | £ | £ |
| <u>Current Assets</u> | | | |
| | Balance at Bank:- | | |
| 3,300 | Deposit Account | 4,100 | |
| 492 | Current Account | 491 | |
| ----- | | ----- | |
| 3,792 | | | 4,591 |
| Nil | Cash with Hon. Treasurer and Equipment Warden | | 24 |
| ----- | | | ----- |
| £3,792 | | | £4,615 |
| <u>Representing:-</u> <u>Accumulated Funds:-</u> | | | |
| 3,223 | Balance at January 1, 1989 | | 3,792 |
| 569 | Surplus for Year | | 823 |
| ----- | | | ----- |
| £3,792 | | | £4,615 |
| ===== | | | ===== |

J. D. Hanwell,
Hon. Treasurer
50 Wells Road,
Wookey Hole,
Somerset,

I have reviewed the above Balance Sheet and attached Income and Expenditure Account which have been prepared from the books and records of the Mendip Rescue Organization. In my opinion, and to the best of my knowledge, the accounts give a true and fair view of the state of the Organization's funds as at December 31, 1989, and the surplus for the year ended on that date.



R. Chant FCA, FTII
Bali,
Milton Lane,
Wells,
Somerset.

February 1990.

The figures to the right show the numbers of cavers who go underground on rescues. In many cases, these might be doubled to include those who stand by and assist on the surface. The following log of each incident has been compiled from the notes made by the controllers and wardens involved.

Sunday 29th January **Swildon's Hole**

Brian Prewer was alerted by Yeovil Police at 4.05 p.m. They reported that a 16-year old caver, Lee Parker, had fallen down a 12 ft drop in the Wet Way and broken his leg. The injured caver's brother had left to raise the alarm whilst another brother had stayed to help. A Westminster Speleological Group party in the cave chanced across the incident and assisted.

A rescue party comprising of Tony Jarratt, Geoff Price, Pete McNab, Mark Lumley, Duncan Frew, Pete Hann, Mike Duck, A. Taylor, Pete Moody and Babs Williams entered the cave at about 4.20 p.m. with First Aid and hauling equipment. The patient was given two Temgesic tablets and the broken leg immobilised in neoprene splints. He was then hauled up the pitch in a "baby-bouncer" and brought out within the hour, including being carried across the muddy fields in the Paraguard stretcher. The ambulance left for Bristol Royal Infirmary at 5.45 p.m.

The three Parker brothers had been caving before, but Lee wore trainers which probably explains why he slipped. They also misinformed MRO that they were members of a club in the Hampshire area, which was officially refuted shortly afterwards.

Thursday 2nd February **Swildon's Hole**

Fred Davies was contacted at Bruton by Yeovil Police at 5.45 p.m. An army party had been reported as missing. He requested Stuart McManus, Dave Pike and Dave Turner to form a search party and obtain further details. Barely 15 minutes later, HTV gave a news flash that a "major search" was under way on Mendip. How they came by this and who confirmed the story is a mystery!

Nineteen Junior Leaders from RCT/RAOC, Azinghur Barracks, Colerne, Wiltshire, were led down the cave at about mid-day by corporals Ward and Bruce; the former being the most experienced caver. A third staff member who would normally have been with such a large party was ill. They went as one group to Sump One without incident; but, on the return

above the Twenty Foot Pot, Corporal Bruce and nine others strayed off ahead of the rest and became lost in the Dry Ways. Unaware of this, Corporal Ward's party surfaced at about 4.30 p.m. having come out via the Wet Way. After waiting an hour, he raised the alarm.

When Stuart McManus and Fred Davies arrived at about 6.10 p.m. there was some uncertainty as to how many were still underground. Meanwhile, the lost party was chanced upon in the Water Chamber by two other cavers from Dorset and escorted out safely. "Major Search" McManus thus called a parade on the Green and carried out a complete count to find all present and correct!

Sunday 26th March **Charterhouse-on-Mendip**

A family from Caine was exercising their Labrador dog over the Mineries when it crawled under the grill protecting the entrance of Rakes Shaft No. 14 and fell about 20 feet. Mrs Fry at Nordrach was alerted and she went to the Mendip Caving Group hut at Nordrach for assistance. Jonathan Roberts there contacted Martin Bishop and Chris Batstone, who were already changed for a trip, at the Belfry. Brian Prewer was also informed and all went to the site with ropes. The large dog was neatly trussed up, hauled out and returned uninjured to its grateful owners.

Tuesday 28th March **Swildon's Hole**

Ruth McBride suffered a bad asthma attack at the Double Pots whilst caving with Ravenskaff Venture Scouts from Clevedon. One of the scouts left the cave to raise the alarm and the Police contacted MRO through the Hunters' Lodge Inn at 9.57 p.m. A dinner party at Upper Pitts was informed and those not indisposed turned out to assist; namely, Fred Davies, Brian Prewer, Tony Jarratt, Steve Pickersgill, Malc. Foyle, M. Heard, Graham Johnson, Ric and Pat Halliwell. On arrival at Priddy Green, they found that the patient had surfaced safely with assistance from her own party. A convenient stand down at 10.20 p.m. followed.

Saturday 8th April

G.B. Cavern

Graham Heriot of the Victoria Caving Group fell about 25 feet from the top of the Ladder Dig pitch early in the afternoon and sustained a badly fractured jaw with lacerations and severe bruising to his head, legs and arms. He was wearing slip-on type Rigger Boots and the single band chin strap of his helmet broke at some stage during the fall. His own account of how the fall happened is appended to this report for the record. He was lucky to get away so lightly in the circumstances and to have the support of two nurses, Sue Grimstead and Nickie Trill, who happened to be in the cave. Another party in the cave was also able to assist for they raised the alarm when the Victoria Caving Group member hurrying from the cave for help slipped and badly twisted his own leg.

Brian Prewer received the call from Yeovil Police at 3.10 p.m. and was told that the fallen caver had "multiple injuries". A major call-out followed. Rescuers were raised from Upper Pitts through Murray Knapp and Dave Pike, whilst Trevor Hughes and Dave Leonard were encountered en route for Swildons in full kit and diverted to G.B. Dr. Tony Boycott was called from a meeting at the Hunters' Lodge Inn. The first MRO party, Trevor Hughes and Dave Leonard, went underground at 3.28 p.m., just 18 minutes after receiving the call-out. Stuart McManus organised the underground teams and Tim Large established the surface control.

Murray Knapp and Alison Hutchings took down medical supplies at 3.36 p.m. Others followed in succession with necessary kit: Nick Pollard, Rob Taviner and Dave Pike took down the Mager stretcher frame and hauling ropes at 3.39 p.m; Tony Boycott and Stuart McManus ferried in the carrying sheet at 3.45 p.m; Brian Prewer went in with a bag of splints at 4.03 p.m; Pat Cronin and Ken James took down further medical supplies, and Nigel Edwards and Tim Hall of the Border Caving Group set up radio contact at the entrance. Communications with those underground were made when Stuart Lain and Jim Rands took down the Grunterphone at 4.40 p.m. Alan Butcher, Jeff Smith, Keith Capper, Linda Wilson and Graham Mullen entered the cave to support at 4.41 p.m. Heat packs and the hot air breather were taken down by Nick Sprang and Richard Payne just before 5 pm.

Good progress was made underground and Tony Jarratt, John Beachamp, Barry Hanks, Mark Lumley with two others went down to give a hand on the final stretch of the haul out. The patient was safely out of the cave by 6 p.m. and taken to Weston-s-Mare General Hospital. This incident involved over 25 people underground with additional cavers standing by on the surface.

Saturday 6th May

Drunkard's Hole

Yeovil Police called Brian Prewer at 7.15 p.m. with news that someone was stuck down the cave. No further details were available. It was subsequently found that Mr. G. Townsend from Bridgwater YMCA had been leading a group of novices comprising of one other adult and four 12-year olds when it was decided to turn back. Being now in the rear, he experienced difficulty in keeping up with his retreating party and exhausted himself in a tight passage. The youngsters immediately ahead could not help.

A rescue team consisting of Tony Jarratt and Andy Sparrow went to assist with Brian Prewer, Pete Hann, Nigel Graham, Dave Pike, Jim Rands, Pete and Alison Moody in support. Tony and Andy had the stuck caver out by 8 p.m. none the worse for his ordeal.

Thursday 18th May

General Search

Brian Prewer was contacted direct by a Mrs Ferguson from Bath 30 minutes after midnight. She said that her husband had gone caving straight from work the previous evening and had not returned. He had been expected back at 11 p.m. The informant had no further details of the cave or the other members of the party, except that they could be driving a green and white Citroen 2CV.

Yeovil Police were contacted to formalise the incident and they offered help with a patrol car to search likely sites. Nigel Taylor was alerted to check the popular places in Burrington and John Beecham did likewise at Charterhouse. Brian himself did a tour of Priddy. Twenty minutes later, Mrs Ferguson rang again to say that her husband Toby had returned. He had been down Manor Farm Swallet and taken longer than expected because of another slow party in the cave. On surfacing late, he had tried to

contact his wife but the pay phones he found only took 999 calls. Cavers relying upon remote telephones must beware of this situation.

Thursday 6th June Swildon's Hole

Roger Dors received a call from Yeovil Police at 9.20 p.m. with a report that a caver in another party had fallen somewhere beyond Sump One and sustained serious injuries. No further details were known. A major operation followed during which it became apparent that two experienced Bath University cavers had been on a trip to the bottom of the Black Hole but had belayed their ladder to an unsound boulder. Douglas Gauld, aged 23, was the first to descend, but tried this unprotected and so fell about 35 feet with all the tackle when the boulder pulled out. His distraught partner, Kevin Martin, was unable to go to his assistance and, whilst hearing moans from below and even seeing his friend crawling around, he clearly expected the worse. There was nothing for it but to leave the scene and call for help.

Upstream of Sump One, he met a party with two army instructors from Colerne. Arrangements were made to alert MRO and Kevin was accompanied back to the Black Hole. To his relief, they discovered that the fallen caver appeared to be remarkably composed and able to assess his injuries coherently. For some reason, the long rope available to the cavers on the spot remained in its tackle bag in the streamway.

The university students had gone down the cave at 7.15 p.m. and the fall occurred at about 8.30 p.m. So, the injured caver was stranded and unattended for about 90 minutes until Jonathan Swift, who headed the first MRO team, arrived at the Black Hole about 10.10 p.m. The rope was put to good use at last when Jonathan belayed it and did a classic abseil to reach Douglas Gauld. He was closely followed to the pitch by Graham Price, Mike Breakspeare, Keith Savory and Stuart McManus. By now, Richard West had set up a control on Priddy Green and many other teams were called and stood by. It promised to be an all night job at least.

Graham Johnson acted as an effective runner until full communications were established. Tony Jarratt carried in the neoprene splints and Dany Bradshaw the hot air kit. Nick Pollard took down extra heat packs and Andy Sparrow hauling ropes and a harness.

At 10.26 p.m. Bob Cork and Dr. Tony Boycott went underground with the Mager stretcher. Shortly afterwards, Jonathan Swift surfaced with first hand news that the patient had wrist and back injuries, but seemed to have had a remarkable escape from such a fall. Dave Pike brought the Sump Rescue apparatus along and several cave divers were alerted. Although there was a possibility that Douglas Gauld might be willing and able to be pulled through whilst holding his breath, this could not be guaranteed, of course. So, the bulky equipment was taken underground to Sump One by Martin Bishop, Chris Batstone, Pat Cronin, Ian Brown, Ashley Houlton, Aubrey Newport, Robin Brown, Pete McNab, Max Milden and Steve Redwood.

More hauling and medical equipment was taken into the cave by Nigel Graham, Rob Taviner and Dave Grieves whilst the Grunterphone and sump telephone went down at 11.30 p.m. with Nigel Taylor, Phil Romford and Trevor Hughes. Ted Humphries followed in support. By midnight, a surface team comprising Brian Prewer, Brian Workman, Jim Hanwell and Nick Barrington were listening in above Sump One and Dave Pike maintained a radio link at the entrance. Good three-way communications with control were established at 1.14 a.m. The hauling party was reported as approaching the downstream side of Sump One. Hot air spares and a dry furry suit were requested and taken down by Fred Davies and Alan Mills. The patient agreed to be towed through the sump without using breathing apparatus.

Throughout the night, the long haul continued: 1.22 a.m. through the Sump; 2.53 a.m. at Barnes' Loop; 4 a.m. at the Twenty Foot; 4.25 a.m. at the Eight Foot; 4.53 a.m. in the Water Chamber, and 5.23 a.m. at Jacob's Ladder. The patient was brought out of the cave to the awaiting ambulance and press at 6.03 a.m., over nine hours after falling so badly. He was taken to the Royal United Hospital in Bath.

This was the longest distance that MRO has had to carry someone injured out of a Mendip cave. It is a tribute to all concerned that it ran so smoothly and relatively quickly in the event. The inevitable media reports were also reasonable and we are learning how to deal with this side of things too. Thirty cavers were involved underground and ten more directly on the surface. Many others stood by in case they were needed later in the day.

Saturday 2nd December

General alert

Fred Davies was called by the Police at 50 minutes past midnight because someone from Bristol had been reported as overdue following a trip with a party of scouts to a Priddy cave the previous evening. He stood by Dave Turner and Brian Workman, then asked Brian Prewer to check both the Green and Eastwater Lane. Shortly afterwards, MRO was contacted again to say that the caver concerned had just returned home at 1.35 a.m.

Saturday 23rd December

Goatchurch Cavern

The Police called at 6.50 p.m. to report that a 15-year old scout had slipped and dislocated his right knee. Nigel Taylor was alerted and at the cave to help within ten minutes of the call-out. He found that a party of four adults and nine

teenagers, all members of the 21st Swindon Scouts, had been coming out of the cave when Paul Bannister slipped on the polished rock below the cut steps in the main entrance passage. His knee was badly dislocated and he was in great pain. The fall occurred at about 6.30 p.m. The scouts rigged a handline to the surface whilst waiting for MRO.

After assessing the injuries, Nigel called for a stretcher. This was brought to the cave by Tim Large, Fred Davies, Tony Jarratt and Dany Bradshaw at 7.25 p.m. The patient was soon evacuated and carried to the roadside to await the arrival of an ambulance. This was delayed until 8.15 p.m. owing to industrial action. A paramedic in the ambulance crew administered Entonox and relocated the injured knee. The patient was then taken to Bristol Royal Infirmary for further treatment.

G.B. The Painful Way

A Tribute to MRO by Graham Heriot

I have vivid memories of what happened on the afternoon of Saturday 8th April 1989.

It was the weekend of our Victoria Caving Group AGM. As my wet suit and caving boots seemed to get smaller each time I dig them out and get increasingly more painful to get on or off, I decided on this occasion to go comfortable caving in a dry cave. I therefore went down G.B. as far as the Ladder Dig extension, comfortably dressed and wearing boots not designed for caving. Although they had steel toe protection, they had no ankle support and not much grip. 'This was my second mistake'. The first was in going caving on this lovely sunny day.

I think there were seven people in our party. After reaching the top of the Ladder Dig climb, four of us, Alan, Mark, "Baldrick" and myself decided to sit it out whilst the others continued on to Bat Passage. The way through was a wet crawl which we didn't fancy; my reason being that I wanted to stay dry. As "Baldrick" has never been left in the dark before, we decided to do the traditional thing and turn our lamps out. Alan and Mark shuffled their feet as if to move. As I was already standing, I thought I would move behind the rock that I was leaning on. "Final and almost fatal mistake". I was much closer to the ledge than I realised, and my boots didn't help to save me from slipping.

It's amazing how much goes through one's mind when falling in total darkness! I thought of many things as I was descending. My first thoughts were that I was actually dreaming. I then realised that I wasn't dreaming, but actually falling. I then couldn't understand why I was falling as I couldn't remember a hole being near by. I then realised where I was falling, but by this time it was too late to panic. I suppose this was fortunate as I didn't stiffen up.

The next thing I recall was Mark saying something alongside me. I partially opened my eyes and saw a great deal of blood. I wanted to tell Mark not to worry about me as I knew that I would be OK. I was unable to do this as I learned later that I had broken my jaw in two places.

I could not help thinking how worried he and Alan must have been because I couldn't move, I couldn't speak and I was bleeding awful! I was fully conscious from then onwards. It didn't seem long before there were two nurses snuggling up to me to keep me warm. Alan had gone for help and caught up with a group which we passed earlier; but, in doing so, he unfortunately twisted his foot before getting back to me with the two nurses. (Thanks for your fast work Alan). I never got to see the nurses and, although they told me their names while lying next to me, I can't remember them. I would like to take this opportunity (in case they read this) to thank them very much. I understood later that they were with me for over an hour, talking to me and trying to keep me warm. By this time, I was shivering excessively.

The MRO was soon on the scene with bandages, heat packs and eventually a stretcher. This letter is a tribute to all concerned for doing an excellent job by getting me out fast under very difficult circumstances. I would like to give a special thanks to Mac who not only spent much physical effort getting me out, but also for the way in which he co-ordinated the rescue and for his sense of humour. Thanks Mac.

I hope that you will all join me in the near future for some well deserved liquid refreshment at the Belfry.

Graham Heriot
20th April 1989

Notes for Contributors

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

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

For those who have access to a wordprocessor, I may be able to accept contributions on floppy disc. Please give me a ring so that we can discuss whether or not your software is compatible with mine - at present I can handle contributions in ASCII on all formats of MS-DOS IBM disc, as well as Apple Macintosh. ASCII/BBC Model B format may also be possible.

Line drawings, sketch maps and diagrams

are all welcome. They should be supplied at the size at which they are to be printed.

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

Authors may obtain a laser-written copy of their article for the production of further off-prints by contacting me, although I may have to make a small charge for this service.

The Journal is produced on an Apple Macintosh Plus computer using a Western Digital 20AP hard disc, Microsoft Word 4 software and a LaserWriter IISC to produce camera-ready artwork.

I would like to thank Nick Marochov for the use of his LaserWriter in the production of this issue, Richard Kenny for his assistance with the typing and Paul Lambert for his assistance with the photographs.

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A Once Open Fissure on Cross Plain, Wavering Down

Trevor Shaw

The presence of substantial pieces of horizontally ribbed ('ripple-marked') flowstone close to the remains of an abandoned mine working on Wavering Down indicates that an open fissure must exist in the limestone there.

The site in question is on the spur called Cross Plain, at ST 41505570. It is best reached from the top of King's Wood by leaving the boundary wall soon after the wood ends and taking the diagonal track through the bracken in a direction slightly west of south. 376 m along the track, and 29 m beyond the present edge of the bracken, several broken slabs of flowstone lie embedded in the track, the largest measuring some 35 cm by 28 cm. They are almost flat and the surface is covered with the regular pattern often characteristic of a sloping surface.

It is apparently part of the low tip of mining debris, some 4 m in diameter and 40 cm high, which overlaps the path from the west. Immediately to the west of the tip is a shallow depression about 5' m wide and 50 cm deep. 10 m south of this and still close to the path is an elongated depression about 10 m by 3 m, oriented 36° W of (true) north. There is a similar but larger pit on the crest of the spur 60 m away in a direction 76° W of north. A parallel line of shallow mining disturbance, much enjoyed by rabbits, occurs about 36 m further north. No flowstone has been seen at any of these other places.

There is no means of determining from the calcite or the gossan (oxidised sulphide ore occurring in mineral lodes at shallow depths) what mineral was sought here (D.T. Donovan, pers. comm.). According to Knight (1915, p.360) it was probably calamine that was mined lower down the hillside, in the valley below Shute Shelve. On the other hand, as Stanton (pers. comm.) has pointed out, analogy with the more extensive mining that took place on Axbridge Hill beyond the valley suggests that the Cross Plain excavations could have been for ochre. In Letterbox Cave on Axbridge Hill (Barrington & Stanton, 1977, p.107) the miners dug through a layer of flowstone. Open rifts occur in many of the mines in Mendip limestone; indeed some of the mining was done by removing the ore

from the sides of such rifts, as at Green Ore. Although the 'ripple' marking of the flowstone found on Cross Plain suggests that it may have been sloping, this does not necessarily mean that the rift itself was sloping, though this is perhaps the more likely.

The surface of the flowstone being in the pathway, it is becoming abraded by the increased horse-riding of recent years. An attempt to cover it with turf has survived several months but this cannot be regarded as a permanent protection.

What does this minor find mean? Very little, really, except that natural fissures do occur in the limestone at this point, and in all probability there are others in the same line of mining remains. Larger cavities are known elsewhere on Wavering Down, e.g. Cross Quarry Cave, now destroyed, near the village of Cross to the south, and Coral Cave about 1 km to the WSW, besides Denny's Hole and others 2 km away in the same direction. There is no record or folk memory of significant cavities being entered here by mining; but there is no record or folk memory of Cross Plain mining at all, so it is not impossible.

It is interesting to remember that Tratman (1922) writing of the gruffy ground at Tynings long before G.B. Cave and Charterhouse Cave were discovered there, mentions 'the finding of calcite formation, which could only have come from the inside of a cave, embedded in one of the calamine pits with which the area is dotted' and deduced from this, and the presence of the swallets, that there must be 'a cave or more probably series of caves in close proximity'.

I thank Willie Stanton who read this note in draft and made several constructive suggestions which I have adopted.

References

- Barrington,N.[R.] and Stanton,W.[I.]. 1977. *Mendip the complete caves and a view of the hills*. Cheddar, Barton Productions, 3rd edn.
Knight,F.A. 1915. *The heart of Mendip ...* London, Dent.
Tratman,E.K. [1922]. *Field work*. Proc. Univ. Bristol Spelaeol. Soc. 1 (2) for 1920-1921, pp.95-97.

Wessex Rescue Practice

Cuckoo Cleeves - 28 Jan '90

Pete Lacy

Well, perhaps the weekend after the 'storm' was the wrong one for obvious reasons, but the arrangements having been made, we went ahead. The weather was fine but ground conditions were very damp due to the very heavy rain in preceding days.

As usual on these happy occasions, the 'wind-up' was fairly leisurely, and by 10.30 we were in the Wessex lounge debating how we could effectively unite the old Mager carrying sheet, with the new (unfinished ?) s/steel frames made by Bob Drake. After much discussion, we decided that neither ropes or tapes could do this with any reliability. The difficulty was made more acute by Duncan's height, in comparison with the length of the stretcher; could one be modified for adjustable length? In the interests of our casualty, we decided to use the carry sheet alone. (Sorry Brian!)

At 11.00 Duncan + 2 left for the cave. Pete Hann explained briefly to those left at the Wessex how to operate the base and mobile RT's. AVDP and PH left to set up RT/telephone stations at the entrance as the first party waited to go down. At this point, the key was accidentally dropped down the entrance pitch! Guess who?

The radio link to the Wessex also failed to produce any response (yes - it was switched on) so AVDP despatched back to Upper Pitts. On arrival, communication was established via the small hand portable, the main base RT being apparently US.

At 11.40 the first party entered the cave, and were followed up by more laying a telephone cable and depositing hauling ropes at strategic positions. By 12.00 the casualty was installed in the sheet and it was adjusted to ensure comfort on the vertical sections.

By 12.20 the casualty was ready to be taken up the canyon in one move by means of a lifeliner, a top hauling party and strategically placed bodies in recesses of the canyon. At this point we regrouped, the majority of the team being moved forward. Contact with the surface had been maintained until this point, but a fault now required the changing of the surface handset. A potential difficulty was also avoided by

removing loose cobbles and stones from the stream so that they were not then displaced by the hauling activities.

By 12.45 the casualty was being moved toward the surface, predominantly by being passed over cavers lying in the stream. Space is very restricted in this part of the cave. A hauling party had by now been prepared at the surface. Supporting the casualty at the base of the entrance tube did prove difficult, especially when the haul started. Duncan described this as a 'pile driving' session as the surface party took up the slack. This would obviously require further attention in the case of a genuinely leg injured patient!

The casualty arrived at the surface at 1.05.

The cave was detackled, the last person out by 1.30.

Having completed the essentials of the report, I would like to add one or two points:-

1/ Why hold such a practice? The Wessex Call-out list provides an essential backup to the MRO. Admittedly we have not been used in anger by the MRO for a long time, but have been placed on standby twice in the last three years, indicating a need by the MRO for clubs to maintain such a facility. In order to fulfil this backup role we are required to keep up to date lists and hold an annual practice.

2/ What did we learn? First of all, some of the younger members present had not seen a drag sheet before, let alone tried to safely install a fellow human in one! We all learned to take equipment for granted, (ie RT's) and that simple things like loose floor cobbles and even pebbles present a significant problem when under the feet of a hard working hauling party. Despite the fact that the team did work well together, there were occasions near to the entrance where the casualty needed more physical support.

I would like to record my thanks to the current Wessex committee, who on this occasion outnumbered those members on the 'list' by at least three to one!

I understand that the committee are

planning a social weekend in the spring, when it is hoped to have access to some of the other goodies in the MRO store for a surface training session. Watch the Journal for details.

P.J.Lacey
14/2/90

The following members attended:-

Adrian Vanderplank

Aubrey Newport

Pete Lacey

Howard Price

Roz Fielder

Malc Foyle

Mark Helmore

Eddy Wabens

Duncan Frew (casualty)

PeteHann (Surface control)

Duncan Wilson

Aidan Williams

Nigel Graham

Nick Williams

Dominic Sealy

Max Midlen

Dayle Malliatt

Mock Rescue

Anon

An occasional mutter, a 'sound', then snoring
the "sweet" melodious song of a hungover morning
A stir, a yawn, a thought, its Sunday morn,
to Cuckoo Cleeves, from our slumber we are torn.

The stretcher on the floor, the huge frame beside
A victim offered, is he to be a grand sacrifice?
We march to the hole in a bright array,
the sun is shining and the pub - we passed it on the way!

Alas, an omen a bad luck charm is it to be?
Some 'clever' person has thrown away the key!
But do not despair another key is found,
and yes the intrepid Wessex do go underground

A shove, a push, a kick and a shout,
one hour later and the victim is out,
well done the Wessex, we're on the right track
now let's get digging and get our barrel back!

Further Exploration at Malham, Yorkshire

John Cordingley

For an area with such good potential there is still a scarcity of decent cave passage at Malham. All this could change soon. Dye testing at the end of the last century by the Yorkshire Geological and Polytechnic Society revealed a complex hydrological system with two resurgences, i.e. Aire Head springs and at the Cove itself. The area has seen considerable digging activity for over 50 years, none of which has met with much success.

The oxygen divers of the Fifties and those using aqualungs in the sixties only managed to penetrate a few tens of metres into the spring at the base of the cove. During the seventies cave divers also gained entry into 150m of flooded passages from the adjacent Flood Rising entrance, but this has remained solidly choked ever since.

This is more or less how things remained until last year when Russel Carter and John Cordingley turned their attention to the project. Our technique was quite simple: find the current in the Main Rising bedding plane and follow it by digging. 50m and one year later we made a breakthrough into the known territory of the flood rising passages, the end of this was similarly choked so we dug steadily until another advance was made to 245m from base and a horrendous upwards boulder choke.

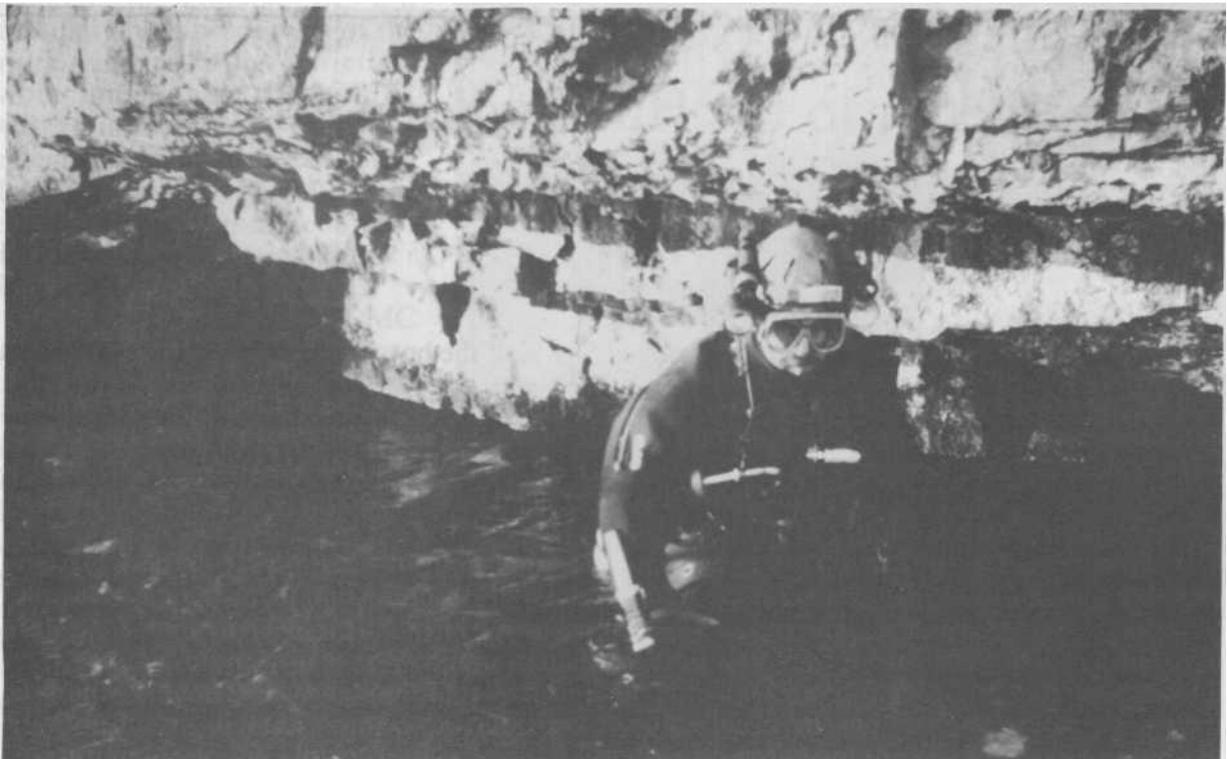
We dug vertically through this until breaking through after 3m of boulder roulette. Pete Hann would have been proud of us! It took exactly one month involving 20 hours of diving time over 14 man dives.

The reward came on 17th March this year when a final squeeze was passed to enter the side of a huge submerged tunnel going upstream and downstream.

This is almost certainly the long lost Malham Master Cave; presumably, all we have to do is follow it upstream and dry cave will eventually be discovered. On the breakthrough weekend 265m of new line was laid, mainly upstream, and the route continues in grand style. We have also found several large air bell chambers. The upstream limit is currently 630m from base.

Thanks go to a few Wessex members who have carried gear in the past, especially the Mendip Beer Monster himself - yes Malc - thought you'd got away without a mention this time

didn't you! Ha Ha -
"Foyled" again!



Bats and Rabies

Implications for Britain of European Bat Rabies

Rabies has been known in terrestrial animals for at least four millenia and in bats for probably four centuries. Although it is more than 100 years since the first vaccine was produced by Pasteur far more animal and human deaths from the disease are reported today than during that period. The importance of Rabies, therefore, should never be underestimated. Fortunately there are subtle differences between the Rabies viruses which have been identified in bats and those in terrestrial animals, and these differences are sufficient to warrant optimism that a bat virus which infects a terrestrial animal, although it may kill that animal, may not spread to other animals. These are, however, still Rabies viruses; they kill bats in nature, they kill mice in the laboratory, they grow well in mammalian cultures, and, given the opportunity, they will kill man.

Of the 31 bat species which inhabit mainland Europe, 15 are resident in Britain. Regular migration to and from the continent is not thought to occur, but vagrancy undoubtedly does: high winds blow flying bats off course, and occasionally they land exhausted on such places as oil rigs. In Europe the great majority of infected

bats have been Serotines. These are relatively large bats which live almost exclusively in buildings, and are fairly common in south-east England, and rare or absent elsewhere. At the Central Veterinary Laboratory over 180 moribund or dead British bats of eight different species have been examined for rabies but only four of these were Serotines; all were negative.

Bats are gentle creatures which rarely attack humans, but like most other animals they will bite when provoked. Although some may survive for as long as 30 years their average life span is only four to five years and seldom do they have more than one offspring a year. Our bat populations are declining and for this reason they are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981. Only specialists are licensed to handle them and vaccination is recommended for those who have regular contact or are bitten. National Bat Year in 1986 was successful in encouraging public interest and awareness of bat needs and in the creation of funds for conservation projects. There is a good chance that rabies has not and will not spread to British Bats, but we must avoid complacency and remain ever vigilant.

Letter to the Hut Booking Officer

Thundergrounders
13 Feb 1990

Just a note to comment on the improved 'state' of the hut, it was rather different from our last stay. Despite the wet weather we managed to have a good weekend and look forward to our next stay at the Wessex.

Many Thanks,
Dave Marks.

Belize 1989

Duncan Frew

In Journal No. 222 we learned how the crew came to arrive in Belize, and explore the Caves of Roaring Creek. Despite close encounters with the local snake population, they survived to explore further elsewhere:

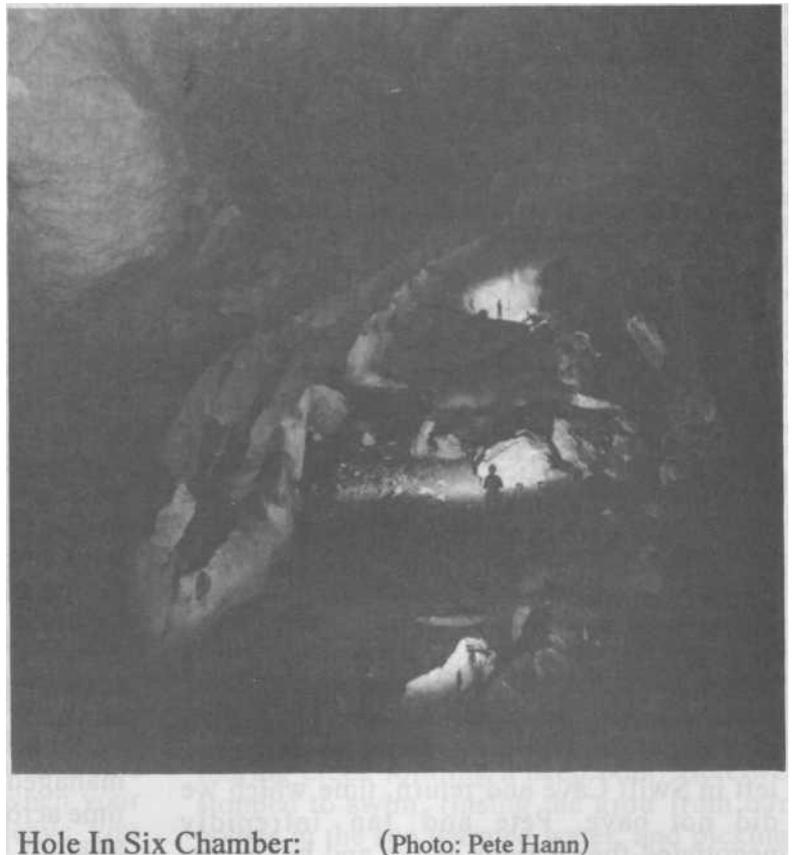
Away from Actun Tunichil Muknal and Roaring Creek the solitude and silence of the bush was accentuated. As the dawn cast deep shadows down the entrance passage of Camp Cave, for once people did not require much encouragement to get up and about. The hard ground was no real substitute for a comfy army hammock. After the regulation porridge breakfast Richard and Duncan set off to continue the cut into the second depression. Due to a simple oversight we only had a single set off survey kit with us. Without a compass any attempt to cut a trail would have been futile. Unable to start surveying Charlotte, Pete, Ian and Nick passed a pleasantly cool morning photographing our new home.

A couple of hours of minimal progress across the bottom of a vast doline failed to turn up a definite stream. We wandered vaguely eastwards picking up a series of short trenches in an indefinable soakaway. The dense vegetation seemed to consist of an unusually high proportion of the more vicious spiky varieties. More importantly the lack of water made our position untenable. An on the spot tactical decision was taken. We would cut our losses and head for number 3 with its better prospects.

Members of the '88 QMC expedition had flown over these sinks courtesy of the British Forces. Up to this point things had gone much as predicted by this aerial reconnaissance. We set the trail in a north easterly arc along the foot of a cliff. The going was slightly easier over tree covered boulder collapse. There was undoubtedly a respectable subterranean drainage and we encountered occasional tantalising

drafts issuing from the impenetrable ruckle. By climbing up the boulders and pushing up through the canopy we gained a fine view of a sea of green foliage gently rising back up into the mountains and to the rim of the doline. As we returned along our now easily negotiable trail we met Ian and Nick coming down to carry on the good work.

The night before on our approach to camp cave we had crossed a sizeable valley. According to our maps the stream which normally ran there sank 2 Km further north, it occurred to us that logically the stream should sink at the limestone boundary as in the other valleys. The photo session finished Pete and Charlotte went down to refill our water bottles. They set off downstream towards the anticipated sink. After 45 minutes gentle toil they found themselves in a meandering canyon which rapidly steepened to the head of an intimidating pitch into the darkness and a cool draft blew gently on their faces. Returning up the valley Pete was about to have a rather intimate encounter with some more



Hole In Six Chamber:

(Photo: Pete Hann)

of the local fauna. Something got tangled between his legs, assuming it to be yet another cable vine, he kicked out. Charlotte following behind screamed as a five foot emerald green snake bounced off Pete's inner thigh and shot past her. They collected the water containers and trudged back up to camp cave.

You could almost see Pete's hair going greyer as he retold his tale. In keeping with our numerical system the new entrance was dubbed 1¼ and we instantly christened it "Amazing Green Snake Cave", leaving only one problem, how to translate that into Mayan. Ian and Nick returned having found it easier going out over a low saddle to a gentle descent into number 3. Leaving Nick behind to mark the way Ian had nipped down to the valley floor. There much to Ian's surprise, wallowing in the mud was a Tapir (Tapierus Beirdii or Mountain Cow). The Belizean wildlife is very shy and apart from the snakes and insects is more often heard or smelt than seen. Leaving the Tapir to his mud bath undisturbed Nick and Ian turned once more to the west arriving at camp cave just before dusk. Over supper Pete regaled us with a repeat of his misadventure and then we set about surveying our abode.

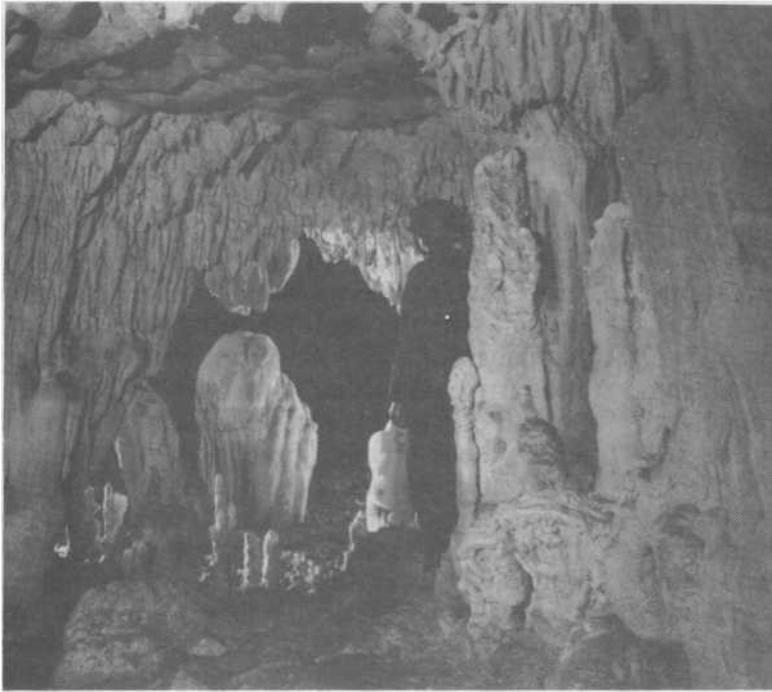
In all my years of caving this was one of the weirdest sights that I have seen. The survey team were kitted out in a motley selection of flip-flops, shorts, parachute boots and floppy hats. The cave on closer inspection proved to consist of a series of solution pockets, some quite sizeable, connected by many looping phreatic beddings. Unlike all the previous lower caves 1½ was formed in a single bed of pure limestone. There was a surprising amount of enthusiasm and the beddings being surveyed got lower and lower, the survey notes becoming increasingly complicated with loops being closed here and there. Eventually we called it a day and retired to bed well satisfied with our days work despite the disappointments.

We were running out of food and in a sense time, part of the team including the three Canadians was due to leave. We broke our retreat to inspect Amazing Green Snake Cave now just ten minutes out of our way. We only had one 25 foot ladder with us to rig a significantly longer pitch. It would have taken four hours or so to retrieve the other ladders left in Swift Cave and return, time which we did not have. Pete and Ian intrepidly negotiated the sections above and below the ladder, but the rest of us decided that discretion was the order of the day and

left them to it. Just short of where we had dumped our packs we met the cave's namesake sunning himself. The natives call this snake the green Tommi. It is not in fact related to the Fer-de-Lance, it is however the only other snake which stands its ground. Not wishing to test the theory that it was harmless we elected to move it on with the persuasive powers of a boulder or two. Charlotte, the previous days encounter all too fresh in her mind, wanted to climb a tree before anything was done. Typically there did not happen to be a convenient tree in this jungle. After the second rock the snake took of vertically and stopped 20 foot up the nearest tree, his garish livery rendering him all but invisible. Pete and Ian surveyed Amazing Green Snake Cave to a solid calcite choke over a completely silted sump of dismal proportions. When we compared their survey with the surface relief this end proved to lie almost directly beneath an insignificant surface stream which on closer inspection may provide a further part of the Caves Branch/Roaring Creek hydrology. The stream started low on the spur in which camp cave was located and was not conveniently intersected by our trail. On the map it ran for only half a mile before joining the supposed surface stream beyond Amazing Green Snake Cave sink. The cave its self was a predominantly linear rift development with a single ledge chamber. A few Mayan artefacts found here showed us that they took their caving very seriously and were great ladder builders.

The last week in the field with a diminished team was spent in a final push east. Pete and Lydia stayed at base camp tidying up a few loose ends in the Actun Yaxteel Ahau and Actun Tunichil Muknal. Sean, Doug, Nick and Dunc set off up river to Camp Cave finally derigging Swift cave. Camp cave was decidedly more luxurious with the now spare hammocks, but Dr Marochov managed to fill the upper half of the passage with smoke and this seemed to bring out of hiding a number of rodents to pester us. Nick as practical as ever nearly had one in the stewpot, coming very close to putting his machete through our supper not to mention the stove.

Despite the increase in luxury we managed another early start and made good time across to the 3 valley. Skirting around the swampy bits we stepped out of the trees into a wide river bed about half the size of Roaring Creek but a lot dryer.



Camp Cave Photo: Pete Hann

The occasional log jam had to be hacked through or round and a short section of limestone bridge surmounted by dense tree growth had to be climbed before we gained an even broader streambed. The '88 aerial reconnaissance had reported a high waterfall dropping from the escarpment to join our river just before it disappeared into the undergrowth at the foot of a low cliff. Disappointingly we did not see the waterfall but this was more than compensated for by a very gentlemanly entrance into a high rift chamber lit from above by a single shaft of light. The full volume of the river passed beneath a fine pair of curtains to continue in grand style down long phreatic straights interspersed with high rift passages. A pair of cross-rift chambers on our right proved not to lead anywhere, and we moved on through chest deep canals. The cave dropped in a succession of rushes and deep plunge pools, the grandest of which got called Dr Marochov's hand-basin. Visible high in the roof and hidden underwater was a profusion of flood debris, almost complete trees were jammed diagonally across the passage. Branches snatching at your legs added a further fiendish dimension to this sporting trip. We leap-frogged the survey as we went, you learn a lot about your friends when your next survey station is going to leave you swimming in surprisingly cold water. The

passage got ever bigger and a small inlet joined. Leaving the water for dryer ground we surveyed past wonderful gouged bosses. The ceiling soared up out of sight and the walls drew back, we moved forwards around yet another bend to be confronted by daylight. In the hope that this was only a short breakout Nick marched off downstream. From the beginning we had suspected that 3 would lead through the hill to join the the drainage of the fourth sink 6 km to the north. Here we were looking down the highway to probably the largest system of these previously unexplored sinks. We had just enough time to check out the inlet and return to our camp, which we had elected not to move on the off chance of finding a suitable spot.

There are two further unexplored sinks to the East before you reach "Actun Chek" and "Lubul Ha", which both drain to the Caves Branch valley. We had long ago given up any hopes of reaching these, it would be easier to approach them from the Caves Branch if starting from scratch again. As the dusk chorus swept across the escarpment we settled down contentedly sharing a hip flask of scotch and weighed up the facts. We had only one spare days caving before heading out to meet our transport. The past three weeks had taken a heavy toll on both us and our kit, one of Doug's boots had been ripped apart by a tree in the "Sunken Forest". Realistically we had no hope of reaching let alone exploring anything we might find in number 4. With only six hours in which to push on into the unknown and return there was not really any debate, even the time we might be able to save by shifting our camp east at this late stage would not have been enough.

With time to kill we made a late start, much to Nicks delight, and gently wandered west across the ridges back to Roaring creek. From time to time we stopped for a bite to eat or just to admire a rare view glimpsed through the canopy. At the foot of our trail the first of the upland volcanic intrusions had dammed up roaring creek forming a deep pool. Here we stopped to swim, rinsing the grott from our bodies in the sun warmed water, and picking the inevitable ticks from our skin. We lounged on the

bank drinking tea in best Wessex festering fashion at one with the world. Finally we waded on down to "Actun Tunichil Muknal" and base camp half an hour away. Our spare day was spent clearing up the camp site and carrying excess gear down river to our rendezvous. In the damp grey morning light we demolished the remaining hammock tripods, buried the last rubbish and turned away from this forsaken spot.

The final march out was not uneventful. A truly huge snake dropped from an overhanging tree to splash into the river, swam nonchalantly between two of us and vanish up the bank, where its bulk could be heard crashing away through the undergrowth. Leaving the river behind us we passed from the bush into the plantations. Alongside the first maize field we found a set of tyre tracks, new that morning, unmistakably left by an army four tonner. Redoubling our pace we chased after our transport fuelled by horror and disbelief. He could not have been and gone leaving us behind, could he? With a grinding of gears and assorted mechanical rattles the truck burst into view

to be greeted by two bedraggled machete waving civilians. Nonchalantly the driver leaned from his cab and enquired "Taxi?"

There is undoubtedly a wealth of cave in Belize to be rediscovered. Some of the sinks would bear a closer inspection. Our failure to locate entrances in certain dolines was mainly due to the proliferation of unspeakable undergrowth. There are a number of sinks in the remoter hills draining vast catchments, which have not been visited by modern cavers yet. However the greatest wealth of cave is probably hidden away back in the mountains left high and dry by present day watercourses. These potentially extensive fossil phreatic systems of which we have so far only seen tantalising glimpses are stumbled upon by chance. As with most remote regions, the locals can tell you that there is a cave somewhere in the bush, they have been there, just the once mind. You have little hope of finding it even with their help. Short of an unacceptably extensive defoliation programme much of the Belizean underworld will remain a challenging secret for a long time to come.

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 Last but by no means least the National Health Service for making some of us better when we got home!

Cave Names:

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|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Cave of the Amazing Green Snake | Actun Pa'ax Kan |
| Cave of the Swifts | Actun Box Ch'iich' |
| Camp Cave | Actun Tan U Wuyul |
| Cave of the Stone Sepulchre | Actun Tunichil Muknal |
| Footprint Cave | Actun Chek |
| Waterfall Cave | Actun Lubul Ha |
| Blue River Cave | Actun Yaxteel Ahau |
| Bat House Cave | Actun Zotziha |

*Duncan Frew
 (Concluded)*