





# THE WESSEX CAVE CLUB JOURNAL

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

# club notes

The club notes with regret the deaths of Luke Devenish, of Ivy Frost and of Sarah Bennett (nee Macdonald) of the BEC and Chelsea Spelaeological Society.

## Wessex People

Congratulations to Pete and Sandra Hann on the birth of a daughter, Sarah Louise, on 25 March.

New members:

A warm welcome to:

**Nicky Adlam**, 1 Boulter's Court, Maybank Ave, Sudbury, Wembley, HA0 2SY, 081 904 2174,

**David Wilson**, 22 Wirton Close, Partridge Green, West Sussex, 0403 711646;

**Ben Haliday**, 2 The Lanterns, Mosshall Grove, North Finchley, London, N12;

**Tim Feltham**, 45 Victoria Avenue, Winton, Bournemouth, 0202 526368;

**Martin Withers**, 13 Comley Road, Moordown, Bournemouth, BH9 2ST, 0202 524319.

**Change of address:** Sue Bonar has moved to Lavender Cottage, 15 Pretoria St., Lilyfield 2040, Sydney NSW, AUSTRALIA,

## Rescue conference

Following some confusion resulting from the note in the last Journal, I have been asked to point out that advance bookings for the use of the Hut on the weekend of the BCRC conference cannot be guaranteed; the committee have concluded that the only fair way to assign bunk space is on a first-come first-served basis.

## Footpaths at Upper Pitts

The committee has received confirmation from Somerset County Council that there is no right of way across Club property at Upper Pitts. Notices to this effect will be erected to ensure that a RoW cannot be established at some time in the future.

## Hut working weekend

A Hut working weekend will be held on the weekend of 7/8 May. The principal task this

weekend will be the footings for the new fire escape. Please come and help if you can.

## Pen Park Hole

So far no Club members have made use of the Club's leaders for this cave. If you are interested in a trip, please contact Mark Helmore on 0761 416631.

## Thanks to Jim Rands

For donating a large number of back issues of *Descent Magazine* for the library.

## Bosch drill for sale?

It would appear that those members who originally suggested purchasing the drill now have their own and there have been cases of the drill being used without any payment being made. In one case recently, the drill was found to have been returned with the gearbox full of water, but since it had not been booked out there was no way of tracing who had had it. Since it no longer appears to be making any money, the Committee has proposed offering the drill for sale to the highest bidder from amongst the Club membership and would be interested to hear from any member who would like to comment on this proposal.

## Hut fees going up

There has been a marked decrease in income from people staying at Upper Pitts over the last few months and bookings for the coming season are tailing off. Unfortunately, however, expenditure on Upper Pitts running costs have not decreased significantly. As a result, the committee have found it necessary to increase Hut Fees. Effective from 1 April 1994, the new rate will be £2.00 per night for members, £3.00 per night for non-members.

## Berger Trip 1995

Bookings for the Club's 1995 Berger trip are now open. Allocation of places will be strictly on a first come first served basis, so if you want to come send your £50.00 deposit (non returnable) to Duncan Frew - his address is at the

*Continued on page 95*

# caving notes

English Nature have agreed to make a grant towards the cost of shoring work which is required in Compton Martin Ochre Mine. Meanwhile CSCC are still negotiating the access agreement with the owner. Please contact the caving secretary for further details.

Mark Helmore and Les Williams have identified the source of diesel pollution in Swildons, which is in a pool just past Caliper Pot. It is steadily being removed with absorbing mats and does not appear to be being replaced. This indicates that it is the result of a one-off occurrence and hopefully will eventually disappear.

At the request of villagers in Priddy, Priddy Green Sink has been re-opened. For those who are not familiar, this 120ft long dig heads towards the area between sumps 3 and 4 in Swildon's and was once hoped to provide an alternative entrance to the cave. Unfortunately, this was not to be. The purpose of this was to improve drainage on the corner by the farm. The entrance has been raised to surface level with concrete rings and the increased flow of water via this route should help to clear pollution downstream of sump 3 in the cave.

The NCA Equipment committee has had a potential problem with resin bonded 'p' anchors brought to its attention. The full implications are as yet unknown but may result in premature failure of the anchor by degradation of the resin bond to the anchor and/or rock. The problem arises where parties using resin bonded anchors pass the rope directly through the hanger. Under certain circumstances the friction between the rope and the anchor may be sufficient to heat the anchor to a point which could damage the resin. Circumstances under which this may happen include lowering or hauling people or tackle without the use of a maillon, karabiner or pulley as an intermediate belay between the rope and the anchor itself. The Equipment committee is carrying out investigations to quantify the extent of this problem, and will modify its recommendations for the placing of anchors in due course. It may be necessary to place 'permanent' intermediate belays on some pitches in the form of maillon rapide links with the gates Loctited shut. In the meanwhile, all users of such

anchors should ensure that loaded ropes are never run through the anchor directly, and the use of a pulley in these circumstances is recommended.

Graham Bromley, the Club's MRO Co-ordinator, has scheduled the club's 1994 rescue practise for 7 May in Manor Farm. Please try to be there if you can. Further details from Graham on 0272 372542.

Mr & Mrs Gibbons have expressed concern about the speed of some drivers on Eastwater Lane. Please remember that there have been serious accidents on even this minor road in the past and try to stick to a reasonable pace when approaching or leaving the hut.

Club members driving over Mendip along the A361 between Frome and Shepton Mallet may have noticed a square tower poking out of the woods to the north of the road near the Downhead turning. This is Cranmore tower and the owners have recently announced that it is available for abseiling practice and climbing. At 120ft high it is one of the more impressive daylight venues in the South West. The owners will only accept bookings in writing and they must be made in advance, so don't turn up on spec and expect to have a go. (Having said this, the tower is on a footpath and is worth a visit 'just for a look'.) For further details write to Farhad Shahbarami, Cranmore Tower, Cranmore, Shepton Mallet, BA4 4LF.

From the North comes a reminder that all midweek trips into caves on Casterton fell (ie the Easegill system) require permits. These are issued free by calling at Hawkshead Farm, or by post from T. Bowring, Hawkshead Farm, Halton Park, Lancaster, LA2 6PD, tel 0524 811361.

Derbyshire Caving Association report that there are still substantial problems with people breaking into cars in the Knotlow area. Apparently they clean out everything from the car and take it to a nearby barn or other location where they can sort through it for the valuables. Cars with alarms seem to be less susceptible to attack, but leaving a guard seems to be the only sure way of deterring the thieves.

On the brighter side, DCA have also announced

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# Sump rescue practice

Wookey Hole 16 March 1993

The main aim was to simulate an incident during which cave divers and MRO Wardens could collaborate and coordinate their respective roles in recovering an injured caver from the dry passages of the twentieth chamber in Wookey Hole. This involves diving through long and deep sumps from the Ninth Chamber. Dummies only would be hauled underwater.

Safety was a big consideration of course, as always on an event of this nature. Communications between 9 and 20 were very important, to know and control how many divers were in the water at any given time. If good communications were not obtained the exercise would have been called off. The essential need for communications has major implications for actual rescues in such situations.

## *Personnel*

The following people and posts were established and sustained throughout the 8 hour long exercise. Each task proved to be vital and, on an actual rescue, it is probable that relief teams would be necessary.

## *Surface control*

In charge of divers	Bob Cork
land-line & radio	Rich West MRO
Manning log	Chris Smart
Roving comms	Brian Prewer

## *Chamber 9*

Molefone and Land-Line	Nick Williams
	Eric Dunford
Diver log	Struan MacDonald

20 other people on the surface, working as Sherpa's etc.

DIVERS:- Dany Bradshaw, Keith Savory, Tom Chapman, Richard Stevenson, John Buxton, Malc Foyle, Mike Thomas, Robin Brown, Alex Gee, Peter Glanvill, Pete Mulholland, Trebor McDonald, Dig Hastilow.

With the exception of JB, who remained kitted and on stand-by throughout, all others were kept fully busy. The number involved represents the minimum necessary for such an operation.

For the purpose of the exercise, divers had been pre-warned of the diving requirement and therefore arrived with the necessary personal equipment. An initial meeting was held involving the Diving Controller and the divers where a plan of action for diving operations was agreed. All divers were briefed on their specific duties including what rescue equipment they would be transporting to the incident site. The rescue operation was then successfully carried out in general accordance with the agreed plan.

## *Diver's Meeting*

This proved to be useful. Divers only were assembled in the Wookey Hole School room, briefed on the incident scenario, and their input invited to the plan of action. Such a meeting would be essential on a real incident, too. Their plan was detailed on a Flip Chart and included individual diver's responsibilities, equipment requirements and a list of safety issues. A number of concerns were raised regarding logging divers in and out of the water, communications and the packaging and transport of rescue equipment, these were discussed and resolved.

Full details of the diving plan and equipment requirement were outlined to MRO Wardens immediately after the meeting.

As the equipment list had been pre-empted, all pre-prepared kit was assigned for transport through the deep sump. Such preparations have major implications for equipment packaging and availability on actual incidents of this sort.

## *Diving Control*

The diving operation went amazingly smoothly: in part due to all the divers turning up with the appropriate personal equipment. Because forethought had been given to the packaging of the rescue equipment, this considerably aided the general flow through the plan. This may not be the case in the event of a real rescue, of course.

The continually up-dated display of both the diving plan and the operation log at the Control aided general communications. There was little confusion, as proven by the relatively small number of questions that were directed towards the Diving Controller and the MRO Warden surface Control. It must be remembered, however, that the weather was good: we had daylight and it was only a practice! Therefore, it was relatively easy to set up 'shop' in the rear car park at Wookey Hole and control from this position. In the event of a real incident, maybe during mid-winter, at night and in poor weather, it is suggested that this operation would be more appropriately undertaken within the cave; always assuming that sufficient reliable communications could be established.

Problems did arise during the day, although these were relatively small in nature. These mainly concerned the relaying of information regarding divers and equipment position within the cave. The Control was always advised of divers and equipment leaving a station but rarely was it identified when they actually arrived at their destination. This would be particularly vital information on a real rescue where communications

systems may not be quite as good as they were on this practice.

The addition of a loud speaker at the key control point to support the communications system was useful and helped everybody to be updated. In a real situation however, problems might be encountered with this if there were others present, than those directly involved with the rescue, i.e. media, relatives, etc. It would not be good practice, even for the Cave Diving Group, to announce a death over the Tannoy!

The Job of Diving Controller for this exercise was relatively easy owing to the amount of pre-planning; a luxury probably not available to us in the real world. However, we can pre-condition ourselves (not the cave) to be more prepared for such an incident. The suggestions and observations made during the exercise debrief will go a long way towards this.

The fact that the problem has at last been recognised, and the CDG are prepared to support such exercises is probably the most significant step forward.

The exercise was totally dedicated to the Wookey site and related only to a problem in either 20 or 22. There are other diving/caving sites on Mendip with a higher potential for accidents to occur where divers would be required to effect a rescue. These also need to be considered.

#### *Observations*

1. In the case of a real incident divers would not turn up on site in the regimented fashion as they did for the practice. Therefore, it would not be possible to hold such a preparatory meeting for first strike divers. Nevertheless it became apparent later in the day that time would be available for such a meeting with a second strike team and it is believed that this should be done.
2. Care has to be taken when divers turn up who have not attended any initial meetings that they are fully briefed on the agreed plan. For example, a problem arose on the practice because it had been agreed by the initial meeting that no one would use the Shallow Route, so as not to worsen the poor visibility on the main line. In fact, a diver who turned up later in the day had no knowledge of this, and actually used the Shallow Route to exit the cave. No damage was done, but it could have caused confusion.
3. Persons calling out divers should ask them to bring ALL their kit and not just the items they personally intend to use.
4. On arrival on site an inventory should be made of all equipment brought by individual divers. This should also include small items as tools, spares, etc, and would best be done by a non-participating diver so that kit could be quickly identified and its fitness for purpose assessed.

5. These lists of kit, together with a note of where they can be found (ie in which car) should be taken personally to the Dive Controller or the MRO Warden together with car keys.
6. An up-to-date inventory of all equipment in the CDG Store should also be made and handed to Control.
7. MRO should collect and take to the scene all kit from the store likely to be of use. They should not wait for any diver's meeting to make a request.
8. A large Message Log Board is invaluable; but, during an extended incident, the log-taker would have to be relieved at suitable intervals.
9. The person logging divers in and out of the water should ideally be an otherwise nonparticipating diver readily able to identify individuals when dressed and their kit. He should also log their cylinder contents.
10. Avon & Somerset Police Underwater Search Unit must be alerted and called at the start of the incident. Their assistance would be invaluable regarding compressor facilities, Police Liaison, Police Radio, extra equipment location, Helicopter request, advanced diving first aid advice, etc.
11. A problem arose with "A" clamp cylinders being available but no "A"/DIN adaptors available. These were borrowed from the Police Underwater Search Unit.

#### *Chamber 20*

For the purpose of the exercise, DB and KS dived ahead to 20; the former to set-up and test the Molefone and the latter to enact the role of the casualty.

Having reached 20, getting the Molefone set-up and tested was the first task. Voice contact (not very good) was achieved fairly quickly. By NW and ED moving around in 9 good contact was eventually made. This process takes some time and the incident could not proceed without all concerned being sure of well-established communications.

DB & KS then booked-in with the Controller and the rest of the divers were given the go-ahead. No records were kept by DB in 20 as all information was relayed back to base in 9 and surface Control via the Molefone.

Compiled by Dany Bradshaw 16th April 1993

From written contributions by those participating in the exercise. These notes are available for further study by those interested.

*A log of the dive times was kept and is available from MRO as part of the report of the exercise.*

Both divers set about sorting out the canteen; the rocket tube this had arrived in doubled as a water container. Coffee made, they settled down to what promised to be a long day.

All the “rescue”-divers subsequently arrived in 20, with rescue equipment; a phase lasting almost 3 hours. The ‘Hot Air Kit’ was demonstrated with everyone taking a few breaths from it. The team then set about administering first aid, assessing the casualty's level of consciousness etc. The simulated leg fracture was diagnosed and the limb immobilized with neoprene splints. KS was then put in a stretcher and a short carry was made from just above the sump pool, to the lake in 20; a distance of about 200 feet. It is important not to exhaust rescuers who have to dive back through deep sumps.

TM & DH were kept on stand-by in 9 awaiting to be called to dive through to 20. They would also dive back out with the stretcher whilst still fairly fresh. On arrival in 20, RS & TC dived back to 9 to give assistance with the stretcher from the base side (downstream) in case it got stuck and blocked the exit of divers still in 20.

The task of transporting the stretcher and weighted casualty (dummy) back through the deep sump was both physically and technically demanding from many points of view. Appropriate training and safe-water practising of the necessary skills are indicated. These should also inform those responsible for designing suitable underwater stretchers.

#### *Observations*

The following notes raise points needing attention by cave divers who undertake such rescues.

1. The dry carry and first aid etc in 20 went well, but divers must be made more aware that as they and only they can get through long sumps, all must be conversant with the rescue equipment. Appropriate first aid training is also highly desirable, of course.
2. The stretcher on the underwater carry needs to have a ‘buoyancy bag’ of some sort which is controllable by the divers themselves en route.
3. Signals between the divers on the underwater carry in poor visibility are vital. An agreed system needs to be sorted out.
4. It was also felt that a ‘compulsory’ rest stop for stretcher bearers should be agreed; say every 50m. This is necessary to rest, check systems, change gags, sort out casualty etc.
5. Being swiped in the face by the front man’s fins and losing your mask is a real problem! To get over this, on the day, TM swam offline to the right so that the stretcher went crablike along the passage. Poor visibility requires that those concerned know the route well and can both work as a team.

6. Large tanks are needed on the carry-out because of the extra work rate. The task can only be performed safely by fresh divers and requires a high degree of skill.
7. The number of experienced cave divers required to Carry-out a long and deep sump rescue successfully has major Call-out implications which need to be continually reviewed by CRO’s both locally and nationally.

#### *Communications*

This note describes some of the communications techniques used during the practice sump rescue. Several observations are included to assist the setting up of any future communication link on a diving related incident.

A serious accident to a cave diver in Wookey Hole, or similar cave will almost certainly involve a difficult and protracted rescue. The length and nature of the sumps in Wookey and other sites on Mendip and elsewhere, mean that reliable and effective communications are essential for a safe and successful rescue. Good communications ensures that divers movements can be monitored and information passed between the ‘Sharp End’ and the Controller.

Prior to the practice in Wookey it was felt that some information was needed regarding the suitability of UHF/VHF radio links underground and also the surface locations of certain Wookey underground sites. These locations would be of particular importance in the event of a failure establishing a direct Molefone link between chambers 9 & 20. Checks using UHF/VHF hand held radio’s down the mined tunnel a distance of about 300 ft (100m), showed conclusively that this form of communication was useless. A land line from chamber 9 to the surface Controller was found to be a more effective means of communication, although it must be stated that a Molefone link here has been shown to be actually possible.

On the day of the practice a land line was laid from 9 to the surface, thus allowing the surface Controller to set up his base in the Mill rear car park. This location is critical to the effective management of personnel and equipment on such operations.

After DB & KS had dived from 9 carrying a Molefone, communication was established between 9 & 20 after some initial problems were resolved, (see observations). A diving control communications point set up in 9 where information received from 20 was relayed by land line to the surface Controller in the car park.

This communications set-up allowed casualty information and diver movements to be effectively relayed to the Controller. From the safety point of view, once a diver had left 9 it was essential that his arrival in 20 was carefully recorded before permitting the next diver to follow, and so on. Divers were paired with a long gap between each pair. Return dives were also monitored in the same way. The communications link

was maintained until the last diver had surfaced in 9.

#### *Observations*

1. The Molefone must go in first with divers. Spare batteries are essential.
2. "Rocket Tubes" (pre-checked to a water-depth of 22m) are the only effective way of transporting the Molefone underwater. Carrying handles suitable for a neoprene gloved hand are essential.
3. In Wookey 9 and, maybe other show caves, there is interference with the Molefone reception due to thyristor control gear used on the cave electricity supply. This interference is severe in certain areas of chamber 9. A large aerial loop should be kept as far to the right (when looking at the sump pool) as possible. It proved helpful to try vertical or horizontal loops to minimise interference. Also the largest area loop improves reception and, for electrical reasons, a square loop is better than a circle.
4. In chamber 20 the loop was vertical and reception was very good. The loop was tried horizontally but this did not work.
5. Incidents further into Wookey and, maybe, other caves would require a Molefone link to the surface above and not to chamber 9. In this event a surface VHF radio link would be needed to the surface Controller. Again, these situations might be treated in advance.
6. Land line phone links still have their use in places such as Wookey, in particular where the Molefone cannot be employed due to great depth. Their possible interference with underwater diver's lines poses problems, however, which need to be resolved.
7. Tandem Molefone operation could be used in a set-up linking three or more stations. Each link could be up to 300ft (100m) in length. This requires the availability of several sets. Indeed, the essential requirement for Molefones throughout raises important issues concerning their supply, maintenance and so on for CRO's.
8. Owing to noise levels at dive control communication site, as in 9, headsets on the Molefone are essential. Handsets are not practical. This in turn means that two operators (minimum) are necessary at such stations, one operating the Molefone and the other operating the land line phone. Single person operation is too difficult due to the amount of traffic and problems of operating a telephone handset while wearing a headset.
9. Molefone and Land-Line operators must be relieved for refreshments, rest, etc. Also, it is important to provide comfortable seating and possibly extra

*Continued on page 88*

## Wessex Cave Club Rescue Practice 18 September 1993

*Mark Helmore*

Following discussions with potential volunteers for the practice rescue it was decided to hold the practice in Swildons Hole, the exact location being the short drop on the far side of the Greasy Chimney.

The scene was set with the casualty in position having supposedly fallen down the drop sustaining a badly fractured lower leg. The advance rescue team arrived, attended to the Casualty with neoprene splints, and set up radio communications with the surface from a position adjacent to Shatter Pot. A hauling/carrying team was requested by radio, together with the rigid stretcher rigging/rescue equipment.

The rescue 'proper' commenced with the arrival of the hauling team at the Greasy Chimney. The casualty was placed firstly in a sit harness, and then into the stretcher. The Chimney was rigged for hauling and lowering by means of a stemple braced across the roof. Hauling commenced (the casualty being protected by a lifeline attached to the sit harness at all times during hauling manoeuvres) with the casualty being raised horizontally and placed feet first into the passage at the top of the Chimney to permit a feet first descent of the Chimney itself.

At the foot of the Greasy Chimney several manoeuvres were attempted before the successful solution was found, this being to position the base of the stretcher into the floor level alcove (opposite the low entrance/exit from the Chimney) thus permitting the casualty to be moved from the Greasy Chimney head first.

On arrival of the casualty at Shatter Pot the radio was relocated to the Mud Sump, where it promptly failed due to a technical problem. The Mud Sump was then bailed dry and enlarged by the ex-radio team, whilst the carry team made their way from Shatter Pot without any difficulties. The Sump was passed with ease and a straightforward carry saw the casualty arrive at the Blasted Boss without incident. The rescue then terminated and all exited the cave. Total time from the Greasy Chimney to the Blasted Boss was 4 hours.

#### *Conclusions*

Rescue In a stretcher from the far side of the Greasy Chimney to Blasted Boss is possible with reasonable ease, with no major difficulties or

problems to pass. The failure of the radio in this instance did not cause any problems (other than the radio team being forced into more physical work!). In a real rescue situation, however, where radio communication to the surface is vital, this failure may well have prolonged the rescue by some considerable time causing further distress to the casualty - and the rescuers.

Everyone agreed that the practice was a success and gave a good insight into rescue problems, and that Incidents underground are best avoided!

#### *Personnel*

Anne Wolpers (Casualty); Mark Helmore, Andy Summerskill(Leg) (Radio Team); Les Williams (Underground Control); Vern Freeman, Rose Freeman, Andy Ladell, Nigel Graham, Dominic Sealy (Hauling Team); Fred Davies (MRO Warden); Brian Prewer, Paul Lambert (Surface Control)

#### *Equipment*

Rigid stretcher & Drag sheet, Neoprene splints, Grunterphone, Hauling ropes, Stemple, Pulley, Lifeline & Harness, Heat pads

#### *Acknowledgements*

M.R.O. (equipment); Robin Maine (access); Andy Sparrow (casualty clothing). Finally thanks to everyone for turning up and taking part, especially Brian Prewer and Fred Davies for giving up their valuable time during the day, and for Brian's time during the evening demonstrating various rescue equipment. This proved to be a valuable addition to the rescue practice and is recommended for future practice rescues.

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#### Sump Rescue Practice

#### *Continued from page 87*

clothing. Their comfort must be appreciated and allowed for or their vital role will be jeopardised.

10. Surface and Underground Molefone locations need to be pre-determined. This should be undertaken so that both the surface and underground maps can be marked and made available in the MRO Store.

*The organisers and participants wish to thank the Management and Staff of Wookey Hole Caves Ltd for making the cave available and assisting during the exercise.*

The help of Rick Cross and Bob Randall of the Avon & Somerset Police Underwater Search Unit is acknowledged and Inspector Peter Coombs, Avon & Somerset Constabulary Liaison Officer to MRO and the South West England Rescue Association is also thanked.

## Unpaid Subscriptions

The following members' subscriptions were unpaid as of 31 March 1994:

Tim Atkinson  
Harold Bampton  
Karl Baverstock  
Tim Benfield  
Tony Bennet  
Peter Bentley  
Sue Bonar  
Wayne Brown  
Darren Brown  
Kev Clark  
Noel Cleave  
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0276 22732

# Mendip Rescue Organization Report 1992

*Report by the Hon Secretary and Treasurer for the Year to 31st Dec 1992*

Although the number of actual cave rescue incidents have been in single figures again, the year has been a much busier one in every other respect. An effort has been made to involve clubs and cavers more in a variety of relevant training exercises and workshops organised by Wardens. These have covered specialist aspects of First Aid underground, greater familiarity with MRO rescue equipment, such as the new Molefone and Entonox sets, and pitch hauling techniques. A session on incident management and control was also put on for the first time.

Three events are worth highlighting. In the Spring, BBC TV screened their new "999" series nation-wide which, apparently, received much acclaim and large audiences. There were also favourable responses to the episode in which MRO and those involved re-enacted the Black Hole rescue from Swildon's Hole in June 1989. During the Autumn, a highly successful and well attended underground workshop was staged in G.B. Cavern, with kind permission from the UBSS, involving nearly one hundred cavers from ten clubs. A stomp at Priddy Village Hall in November attracted even more and raised substantial funds as the accompanying accounts show.

There seems to be much greater mobility in the caving community on Mendip; more cavers come and go with a wider variety of specialist gear. Do they care about rescue work or take it for granted? New exploration by a few dedicated locally resident cavers and divers opens up fresh challenges, but the rest seem content with age-old favourites down Swildons and the Burrington caves. Such systems bear the brunt of traffic but are rarely pushed further these days. MRO tries to cover all needs by

ensuring that as many as possible become and stay conversant with rescue equipment and techniques. Experience shows that it is not enough to practice just once or twice with both, and it is unwise to assume that someone else will have done so. One day, it may be you alone that another's life depends upon underground! Rescues rely entirely upon cavers with a knowledge of what to do in the circumstances; unlike most other pursuits, no one else can help. For these reasons, we were pleased to join Portland cavers and the Dorset Coastguards on a training exercise last summer from which all learnt a lot.

Wardens have held more meetings and their own workshops lately. Useful talks have taken place with the Cave Diving Group about incidents involving long and deep sump rescues, as might occur at Wookey Hole and Cheddar caves. It is very much hoped that these will be translated into effective practical exercises during 1993. Good practice can only come from doing things rather than just talking about them. The alternative is to chance that the worse might just not happen! The Rescon in South Wales in the Summer was by all accounts an excellently organised event on these lines; MRO representatives seemingly left their own mark for good measure.

The audited accounts and details of each call-out follow. The latter are the only official reports issued by us at the end of each year. Other write-ups of selected rescues published elsewhere by correspondents without the full facts are clearly incomplete and unauthorised by MRO. They only reflect the experiences and views of the reporter at the time, of course.

Sun 19th Jan	G.B Cavern	4	Trapped by boulder fall	(8)
Sun 19th Jan	Jack's Workings, Box	9	Lost, light failed	(3)
Fri 5th Jun	Stoke Lane Slocker	3	Overdue party	
Fri 26th Jun	Swildon's Hole	1	Exhausted, stuck	
Thu 23rd Jul	Swildon's Hole	4	Overdue party	
Tue 28th Jul	Goatchurch Cavern	1	Fall, broken ribs	(10)
Sun 23rd Aug	Lionel's Hole	3	Trapped by floods	(8)
Mon 12th Oct	Waterlip Quarry	1	Dog trapped on cliffs	(3)
Sat 14th Nov	Swildon's Hole	1	Fall, injured knee	(13)
Sat 19th Dec	Box Mines, Wiltshire	1	Missing person, alert	

## *Incident Log 1992*

There were nine calls through the Police, exactly as in the previous year. At Christmas, we were also alerted to keep an eye open for a missing person believed to have been murdered in the Box and Corsham area, Wiltshire.

The body was subsequently found on the surface. The following table records all ten incidents using the format by which MRO has recorded call-outs over the past forty years since reforming after the

Second World War.

The figures in brackets to the right record the numbers of cavers actually going underground to be directly involved in attending to and hauling out the patients concerned. They give a somewhat misleading picture of the total numbers participating in rescues, however, since many more provide essential support on the surface and stand by in case needed. Data on the latter are more difficult to record at the time, of course, but would give a fairer account of what has to be done on every incident to ensure success. On most incidents, a three fold increase would be realistic. In future, MRO will try to compile fuller information of this sort for the record and those interested. But there are clearly limits to the amount of paper-work that can be done on actual incidents, and we will continue to put the needs of the patient first.

An attempt is made to cover most of the above needs in the accounts of each incident that follow. These are compiled from the records written-up by Wardens at the time, and reported here for the benefit of the caving community as a whole rather than other outside interest groups, of which there appear to be growing number.

### **Sunday 19th January G.B. Cavern**

Brenda Prewer was contacted by the Police from their Taunton Control at 3.50 p.m. It was reported that a party had been trapped by a boulder fall in the cave. Brian Prewer was alerted in Wells and rang the informant at Tynings Farm for further details. It appeared that a party of four had been trapped behind in the Ladder Dig when a large boulder was dislodged by the fifth member in the lead on the way out. The boulder jammed in the chimney between Bat Passage and Helictite Chamber. Fortunately, it had not fallen onto the caver concerned, but he was unable to heave it out the way from below. No one was injured, but those left behind could not lift it up either, so he wisely left the cave to raise the alarm and get assistance.

The original party of five members of the Outcasts Caving Club had entered the cave at about 12.15 p.m. Luckily, they were on their way out when the incident happened, for there would clearly have been a much longer delay and search had all five been trapped on the wrong side of the boulder. They did all the right things in the circumstances.

Fred Davies went underground at 4.30 p.m. with a party comprising Pete Hann, Jim Rands, Carmen Smith, Colin Masters and Eddy Waters. They carried in suitable hauling tackle and the new Molefone. Brian Prewer, Phil Hendy and Max Midlen set up the

surface receiver above the site. Richard West established a Control on the roadside. Tony Jarratt, Tim Large, Stewart McManus, Dany Bradshaw, Nigel Taylor, Graham Mullen, Linda Wilson and Dr. Tony Boycott were alerted at Priddy and went to the cave straight away in support. Ian Timney and Nigel Graham took food and heat packs underground at 5.35 p.m. Molefone communications were established soon afterwards. It appeared that a single boulder weighing about 50 kg had fallen down the chimney and lodged above the squeeze into Helictite Chamber. It was only possible to talk to the trapped foursome beyond. They were rather cold and hungry, but otherwise in good spirits and unhurt.

After some skillful chiselling from below by Fred Davies, the lodged boulder was persuaded to fall through the squeeze into a roomier section out of the way. The grateful trapped party was escorted from the cave, reaching the entrance at 7 p.m. The stand down followed twenty minutes later after all rescuers and equipment had surfaced.

### **Sunday 19th January Jack's Workings, Box**

Whilst the G.B. rescue was underway, the Police from Chippenham, Wiltshire, rang regarding a missing party in the old stone mine workings adjacent to the main system at Box. Jim Hanwell was contacted at 4.55 p.m. and asked to deal with it separately using other rescuers still available. On contacting the Police, he learnt that the headteacher of Downlands School, Devizes, a residential special needs establishment, was concerned because one of his colleagues had allowed nine of its pupils on a day out to go into the workings unaccompanied and with a single candle! When the candle burnt out, the children were stranded and lost, of course. The teacher had left the scene to report the situation to his head by telephone.

Jim Hanwell concluded that the party could not have gone very far in the circumstances; but, as the children could have become split up and were well out of earshot, a search party would be necessary. He failed to find Bob Scammell at home in Bath, but located Chris Batstone at Plummer's Farm, Priddy, and requested him to stand by. Derek Hawkins in the Bath area was also contacted and agreed to go straightaway to Box with Paul De'Ath and Mike Breakspear. They expected to be at the mine within twenty minutes. Meanwhile, as anticipated, a Police team found the missing children not too far inside. One had tripped over in the darkness and was slightly hurt. All were understandably rather distressed at their predicament, which could have so easily have been avoided. The local Police clearly thought so too!

### **Friday 5th June Stoke Lane Slocker**

Taunton Police contacted Brian Prewer at thirty-five minutes past midnight to report that Ben Thorpe from Countryside Weekends, Cheddar, was concerned that a party of three had not returned from a trip to the cave as expected. He had been instructed to call out MRO if they were not back by midnight.

On contacting the informant direct, it was learnt that those concerned were well equipped and experienced cavers on a diving trip to Sump Four. They had parked in Bector Lane near Stoke St Michael. Bob Cork was alerted in the village and went to check if the car used was still there. At fifty minutes past midnight, the overdue party arrived back in Cheddar having under-estimated the duration of the trip. All were stood down just before 1 a.m.

### **Friday 26th June Swildon's Hole**

Force Control in Bristol rang Brian Prewer at twenty-eight minutes after midnight because they had been told by Taunton Police of reports that a girl was stuck in a cave at Cheddar, at the bottom of Jacob's Ladder. In fact, the call had been initiated from Priddy Green, within sight of Brian's bedroom, and turned out to be an exhausted caver unable to climb the rift in the Upper Series, also called Jacob's Ladder. This is a good example of why it is so important for informants to give clear messages and stay at the phone until contacted by the MRO Warden who gets the call from the Police.

In this case, the caver concerned did stay at the phone to clear up any confusion. So, instead of rushing off to Cheddar, Brian was able to decline the offer to turn out the local Fire Brigade for assistance on the cliffs, alert neighbours Alan Butcher, Pete and Alison Moody and then walk a few yards to get the full story direct from the informant on the Green within fifteen minutes of receiving the call. The person concerned was clearly impressed and relieved by such a rapid response in the small hours! By the time they had changed and reached the entrance to the cave some twenty minutes later, the exhausted caver had just surfaced having been hauled out by her own party; a good example of self-help by all at the end of a tiring five-hour trip.

The exhausted caver was Debbie Dinnige from Gloucester. She had been down the cave four times previously and had undertaken trips in South Wales on several occasions, but had not been underground for over a year. On the day, she had not eaten much and was far from being on top form. The party had

planned a long trip but contented with a visit to Sump One when Debbie began to tire. On coming back up the streamway she needed much assistance and other members of the party tired too as progress out slowed down. John Steeson, the experienced leader of the party from Gwent, did much to assist everyone and keep up morale. He subsequently sent a helpful four-page report on every aspect of their trip, including the call-out.

On returning to the Green quicker than expected, Brian Prewer was able to stand down three Police patrol cars sent to the scene and forestall an ambulance which had been requested to Priddy as a result of the initial call going to Bristol. Busy emergency services do not need to be troubled until MRO has made a clear assessment of an incident and requests them to attend. Our communications are now such that we can time ambulances and other services to arrive within minutes of when their expertise are really needed. We take satisfaction from knowing that such costly provisions are not kept needlessly waiting for us to complete rescues and, so, are available elsewhere in the community meanwhile.

### **Thursday 23rd July Swildon's Hole**

Brian Prewer received a call from Taunton Police that a Mr. Stevens in Swindon had rung the Yeovil Control to report an overdue party of ten who had been down the cave the previous evening. It was then forty-five minutes after midnight and the party had included five novices. Brian was unable to get further details from the informant since the number given to the Police was incorrect. He then established that there was a car still parked on Priddy Green with a licence disc issued in the Swindon area. The Police were asked to trace the owner, although this failed to produce someone with a telephone.

Jim Hanwell was contacted at 1.12 a.m. and it was agreed that no effective action was possible until positive information became available through the Police. Twenty minutes later, Taunton Police rang to say that the party had returned to Swindon, safe and well. It appears that they numbered just four and had seriously under-estimated the duration of their trip. On getting home, one had the good sense to contact the Police and so prevent a fruitless full scale search of Swildons. The car still on the Green belonged to someone else unconnected with the incident!

The details of this call-out show how difficult it is to organise a response to situations with such minimal and even misleading information; especially during the early hours in mid-week!

## **Tuesday 28th July Goatchurch Cavern**

Richard West was contacted by the Force Control in Bristol at 2.44 p.m. with news that Yeovil Police had reported an accident in the cave. A male caver had fallen and sustained broken ribs and ankles somewhere in the system. The informant was not known but it was thought that the call had originated from the Burrington Combe Cafe. This number remained persistently engaged and so action had to be taken without further details.

After alerting Stewart McManus to get kit and go to the scene, Richard spent a further twenty minutes and twenty-five calls, many to answering machines, to muster a rescue party comprising Nigel Taylor, Pete McNab, Jim Smart, Graham Johnson and Andy Sparrow. Tony Jarratt happened to be with four members of the Manx Mines Rescue Team on a visit to Mendip, and Rachel Robertson, Pete Geddes, Dave Briggs and John Maddrell kindly offered to help. Shaun Shaffey and Claire Knifton of the Mendip Exploration Group happened to be in the Combe at the time and also lent a hand. Phil Romford was met en route and all went to the cave, arriving there at 3.30 p.m. amid crowds of tourists and seemingly endless streams of young cavers.

The party concerned totalled seven and included experienced Police Officers on a training course with young students at the Detective Training School, Kings Weston, Bristol. It was led by Martin Shotbolt. Steven Morton, the officer that fell, came from Bridgenorth and was on his first caving trip. He had broken ribs and sustained a badly sprained ankle, both of which were very painful; otherwise, he was in good spirits in the circumstances.

Richard West established a roadside Control and two Policemen marshalled traffic throughout the incident. The patient was reached at about 3.45 p.m. His injuries were protected by Neoprene Splints and Entonox made available to him during the carry out in the Mager stretcher. He arrived at the surface at 4.30 p.m. to the awaiting ambulance and was taken to Weston-s-Mare General Hospital for treatment.

The organisers of the trip and the patient were extremely grateful and subsequently wrote to express their thanks.

## **Sunday 23rd August Lionel's Hole**

Yet another rescue in Burrington Combe on a very busy holiday afternoon! The area had experienced heavy and prolonged storms throughout the weekend, however. These had not deterred five members of

Blackdown Venture Scouts from Wellington, Somerset, from descending the cave at 2.30 p.m. after visiting several others nearby earlier. Although well clad in 'dry grotts', they passed the ducks along the very wet and tight streamway. Fortunately, two retreated and, on surfacing, became alarmed at the rapidly rising stream. Both deduced that the second duck would soon sump and trap those left beyond. They alerted the Police at 7.22 p.m. and requested MRO.

The call-out from the Taunton Control was received by Andy Davies shortly afterwards. She contacted Roger Dors at the Hunters' Lodge Inn, and he quickly organised a rescue team initially comprising of Stewart McManus, Alan Butcher, Dany Bradshaw and Bob Cork. Nigel Taylor was contacted at 7.45 p.m. and he went straight to Burrington Combe Cafe to meet both informants for precise details of the situation. He then established a Control at the cave entrance.

It was clear that 'thin men' were needed and Nigel chanced upon Pete McNab and Tim Partridge at nearby East Twin. Both were joined by Andy Sparrow at 8 p.m. and all three descended the cave shortly afterwards to assess the situation. Bob Scammell, Vince Simmonds, Robin Brown and Keith Savory arrived in support. Robin and Keith were prepared to dive if necessary. Pete and Alison Moody who had originally dug open and explored the flooded passage came to help and went underground at 8.15 p.m. Arrangements were made to improve communications in the cave and back to Priddy whilst the Police were advised that the Fire Service might be needed and that traffic control would be desirable, especially if pumping was required later. P.C. Chris Hall subsequently arrived from Cheddar.

No news of rescuers making any contact with the trapped scouts was received at the surface for over eighty minutes. The Molefone was taken underground at 9.40 p.m. to reduce the need for 'runners'. At 10.10 p.m. the underground team was reported to be on the way out and that those trapped were well and able to help themselves. The rescue party had reached them by using an unfrequented bypass to the sumped second duck. All concerned returned to the surface safely at 10.30 p.m., about three hours after receiving the initial call from the Police.

The three scouts, Chris Cox, aged 30, and teenagers James and Edward Ellaway had been underground, wet and cold, for over eight hours, however. It was as well that their two friends Graham Bell and Mike Salter left the cave when they did to report the situation. They were unable to get out without a knowledge of escape routes when the Lower Streamway floods.

## **Monday 12th October**

### **Waterlip Quarry**

Richard West was called by Yeovil Police at 1.38 p.m. They requested help because a liver and white spaniel was trapped on a ledge. It had been spotted by workmen on the far side of the lake and was at the bottom of almost vertical cliffs overhanging the east end of the deep quarry floor lake. They thought that it had been there for some time and that the ledge was inaccessible to the local Dog Warden and RSPCA, even by boat. They feared that it had been abandoned by its owner and could well be injured.

Richard informed Jim Hanwell who got in touch with Dave Turner as he lived near the quarry. Dave agreed to go to the scene and abseil down to the dog on his own rope. Meanwhile, Richard and Jim collected hauling gear and a bag from the Belfry Store to assist Dave and the abandoned dog back up the 100 ft cliffs. The alternative of lowering both into a boat was dismissed as being too involved.

Dave reached the dog at about 2.15 p.m. and found it shaken but not too poorly in the circumstances. He comforted it until Richard and Jim arrived at 2.25 p.m. in the company of the Police, the wife at the nearby farm and the local Dog Warden. A stake was secured as a second belay and Richard abseiled down to assist, carrying a suitable tackle bag for the dog. A lot of tricky gardening of loose rock was required. Dave tied on to the MRO hauling rope, shouldered the surprisingly calm dog inside the bag and prussicked up his own rope with some hauling assistance over the awkward bulges by Jim from above. Richard found an alternative free climb out of line of fire from above.

All were safely on top of the cliffs by 3.15 p.m. The Dog Warden reported that this brave little animal had clearly been maltreated for some time. We hope that it has found a good home since.

## **Saturday 14th November**

### **Swildon's Hole**

Adrian Kemp went directly to Brian Prewer's home at Priddy at 2.50 p.m. to report that 14-year old David Love had tumbled off the Eight Foot climb at the bottom of the former Forty Foot Pot and sustained a severe knee injury. He was in considerable pain and, although placed into an exposure bag, had not been moved further. The party of sixteen belonged to an Outdoor Group from Brixham, Devon, and were on their way down the streamway early in the afternoon when the incident happened.

A Wessex Cave Club party including Maurice Hewins, John Thomas and his son Mike happened to be going down the cave when the incident was reported and went straight to the scene to assist within minutes. Brian Prewer informed Taunton Police that a rescue was formally in progress. Richard West and Dany Bradshaw were already at his house and went to collect MRO kit from the Belfry Store. They encountered a number of cavers there and raised a strong party comprising Vince Simmonds, Trevor Hughes, Richard Blake, N. Gymer, K. Gurner and Sarah Bennett. This group went underground with Dany at 3.10 p.m. Dr. Andrew Newton from the Royal Navy was also at the Belfry with Mike Hollingsworth, and they followed fifteen minutes later to assess the extent of the patient's injuries. Martin Grass and Andy Cave took the Mager stretcher into the cave at 3.30 p.m. Brian Prewer set up the surface Molefone with Rachel Gregory and Nikki Simmonds.

After examining and splinting the patient, Dr. Weston suggested that he could well do a lot to help himself out with the amount of assistance present and the sparing use of Entonox, when necessary. This would avoid a long stretcher carry. David Love was thus out of the cave by 4.30 p.m. and the cave cleared soon afterwards.

A surprising number of cavers do not know the commonly used names for parts of the streamway, nor even some of the Dry Ways in the Upper Series. Most of us refer to the short cascade at the bottom of the 'Old Forty Foot Pot', as the Eight Foot climb and the drop at the 'Old Well' in the Wet Way as the Twelve Foot one. It is even more surprising to hear reports that inexperienced cavers have been encouraged and allowed to Jump off the former by the leaders of some parties!

## **Saturday 19th December**

### **Box Mines**

The Wiltshire Police were trying to find the body of a missing person, believed to have been murdered, somewhere in the locality. Several detailed searches had been conducted on the surface without success. There was a faint chance that it could have been disposed of in one of the old stone mines. MRO was informally requested to ask cavers visiting the mines over Christmas to be aware of the possibility and to report anything unusual.

Bob Scammell at Bathampton acted as a clearing house for such information. The victim's body was found by the Police in nearby woodlands soon after Christmas.

*Continued on page 95*

# Around the Wessex Digs Richard Witcombe

Not all digging teams these days have a particular club affiliation but Wessex members are currently active in a surprising number of Mendip digs, ranging from the Wednesday night "surface" sites to the deeper parts of the big systems.

The following is a brief round-up of the current state of play.

## Barrow Rake Swallet NGR 5559 4895

A swallet high on the northern flank of Pen Hill, dug many times over the years but back-filled by the farmer. It was re-opened and piped by Hy-mac method in 1993 and BEC and Wessex diggers are re-excavating a choked rift. Bad air has been encountered but is extracted before digging by a domestic vacuum cleaner. The current depth is 30'.

## Charterhouse Cave

The main passage terminates in a huge boulder choke, probably associated with Great Swallet some 200' above. The ruckle has been penetrated for over 50' over the last few years by following a solid wall and grouting the surrounding rocks. Intermittent digging continues and beyond a decidedly dodgy Mini sized boulder, black spaces are beckoning.

## Clay Holes NGR 5780 5358

A curious and enigmatic site close by Rushy Ground Swallet at Greendown. Hy-mac digging and latterly tractor hauled bucket digging - courtesy of the farmer, Jim Young - has revealed a very large (20' X 10') steeply inclined bedding plane, massively fluted and cut into a level limestone platform. It appears to be a truncated system, the top level of which was probably formed in shaly clays which have since been eroded away. Needless to say, the geologists are excited by it.

It was dug to a depth of 35' during 1993 and a horizontal passage at the bottom was followed for about 15'. A second lower phreatic passage was just emerging from the fill when the winter rains came. The cave takes a small stream and the heavy clay caused ponding to a depth of 5' to 10' throughout the winter months. Wessex diggers will be pumping the site - again courtesy of farmer Jim - in the late spring and resuming the onslaught.

## Cuckoo Cleeves

A Wessex team has been working in the lower reaches of the cave for the past two years, banging a way along a narrow rift which, although down dipping, brings in an inlet stream. They have recently installed an aerial ropeway to make spoil removal easier.

## Drunkard's Hole

Wessex diggers found several hundred feet of new

passage here in the late 1980s including some impressive rift chambers. Digging conditions are muddy and squalid, especially in the winter months, and the site is currently being "rested".

## Eighteen Acre Swallet NGR 5445 5019

Another Hy-mac site, placed interestingly over the lower end of Cuthbert's. It has so far yielded about 100' of choked parallel rifts, but several of the leads involve dicing with very heavy overhead boulders. The current dig is rather more solid and is following a narrow, very muddy, but occasionally draughting, slot downwards.

## Hillgrove Swallet NGR 5783 4945

Mendip's oldest dig, first probed in 1903 by Herbert Balch and the MNRC and looked at in almost every decade since. The latest effort, itself extending over many years, has once again penetrated the rifts and fissures of this vertically bedded zone to a depth of about 80', and in the past month about 40' of passage has been added. Work continues in a sometimes very wet gravel choke.

## Lodmore Swallet NGR 536 534

This is the current NHASA Wednesday night dig. It is situated on the Army ranges in an area surprisingly devoid of caves, and was first probed by Thorn EMI / BEC diggers in the late 1980s. NHASA are re-excavating against a V shaped rock face, building their usual solid retaining walls as they descend. They have currently reached a depth of about 25' and are working through a bouldery fill.

Access is strictly controlled by the Ministry of Defence and any would-be visitors must contact the NHASA diggers first.

## Longwood Valley Sink NGR 4858 5548

An ATLAS/Wessex team has been working at this site since the early 1980s. The current effort is directed at enlarging a small high level tube running off just below the oil drums. A generator powered Kango is in use to drill shotholes, and a comfortable tunnel has been driven for a distance of about 25'. Passage dimensions are enlarging ahead, but the tube goes tantalisingly out of sight around a corner.

## Rushy Ground Swallet NGR 5775 5350

An attractive 200' cave with some leads still to be pushed. Both the small active streamway and the high level phreatic chambers may reward further efforts.

## St Luke's Pot NGR 5330 5505

This is a fluted shaft on Whitestown Farm land close

to Rocket Drop, which was uncovered by Wessex Hy-mac digging over the weekend prior to St Luke's Day, 18th October 1993. It was a fine weekend, matching the tradition of St Luke's Little Summer - a dry spell which often occurs in mid-October. The name also reflects the fact that the date of discovery was close to the birthday of the late Luke Devenish who had just stood down as Wessex President because of ill health.

Digging in the autumn of 1993 took the depth down to 30' and the onset of the summer should see a resumption of interest in the site.

#### Swlldon's Hole

Rolling Thunder, a tight inlet passage below the old Forty, is one of those long standing but intermittent Wessex projects. Banging and hose piping of fill has extended it to about 70' but it is currently dormant.

Further in, Wessex diggers have recently resumed the assault on the mysteries of the Pirate Chamber boulder choke. Scaffolding has been taken down with a view to engineering a way into the fabled high level route to Wookey.

#### Viaduct Sink NGR 6099 4549

Another ATLAS dig, deep in the heart of Ham Woods near Shepton Mallet. Work in the 1970s produced a 350' long cave containing a number of streamways all too tight to follow. A return was made in 1990 to attack the boulder choke in Downside Aven. Four years later a route has been engineered through the ruckle and 10' down a narrow rift to a point where yet another stream can be heard about 10' ahead.

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#### MRO Incident Report 1992

*Continued from page 93*

To conclude this Report, it is worth noting that Taunton Control has now taken over the co-ordination of all 999-calls for Cave Rescue in Avon and Somerset. As they deal with thousands of calls every day, it becomes even more important for those who request MRO assistance to be very precise about:

**WHO YOU ARE  
WHERE YOU CAN BE CONTACTED  
WHAT HAS HAPPENED  
WHEN DID IT OCCUR.  
WHOM ARE INVOLVED  
WHICH CAVE IS CONCERNED.... and  
WITHIN WHICH PART, IF KNOWN.... then  
WAIT AT THE PHONE UNTIL A MRO  
WARDEN CALLS TO CONFIRM DETAILS**

*J.D. Hanwell  
Hon Sec and Treasurer  
Wookey Hole  
January 1993*

## club notes

*Continued from page 82*

front of the *Journal*. Cheques should be made payable to WCC Berger Account. Details of training meets etc will follow in the new few *Journals*.

#### **Wessex 60th Anniversary Dinner**

The dinner is to be held at the Wessex Hotel, Street, on 15 October 1994. Details of the menu and booking forms will be sent out with the next *Journal*, but older club members are particularly invited to contact some of their contemporaries and invite them to come. Dinner will be 7.30 for 8.00pm but we have arranged to have access to the venue from 5.00pm to allow people to meet and talk. It is hoped to be able to have displays of photographs and slides etc. as well.

Accommodation at the hotel is available at £40.00 per double or £35.00 per single room, including full English Breakfast. Bookings can be made on 0458 43383 or by writing to the Wessex Hotel, High Street, Street, Somerset, BA16 0EF.

#### **Swlldon's adopted**

Following a request from some local members, the Committee has agreed to the Club joining *Descent's* Adopt-a-Cave Scheme, whereby clubs nominate themselves responsible for keeping particular caves free from litter. Since several club members are already doing this and other clean up work in Swlldon's Hole there seems no good reason not to join the scheme and get the credit for the work these people are doing. This will also answer those who ask why a club with the resources of the Wessex is not already involved in the Scheme.

**May 7 1994**

**HUT WORKING WEEKEND**

*and*

**CLUB RESCUE PRACTICE**

*All Welcome!*

# Luke Devenish

1920 - 1994

## A matter of extreme urgency:

a tribute to Luke Devenish from MRO.

My phone rings. It is late on Sunday; the end of a typically wet winter's weekend on Mendip. I recall it being sometime late in 1960, for Luke had just moved home from Priddy to Washingpool Farm, Chilcote, where he had more room to spread. Earlier that day, he had come back to help us bang at the bottom of Priddy Green Sink. On Saturday, would you believe, we had finished another hectic caving stint down Swildons despite the weather. He had warned us to be on our guard at a Wessex Committee meeting a few days earlier, though I fear that we did not believe everything our new Chairman said. His habit of raising more, 'But, what if?' and 'Have you considered this?' queries meant that we often missed closing time at Ben Dors' Hunters. Yet, we were more than recompensed from his own well-stocked cellar, and never left wanting!

I pick up the receiver, intuitively half-expecting Jim. It's Luke'. Before I can suck in enough breath to reply, for I am known not to be at my best without a face to see; 'Get your kit on. This is a matter of extreme urgency! See you on the Green'. Click, burr; the line goes dead. I surmise that yet another exhausted caver is stuck below the Forty Foot Pot. And poor Wallington had died from such an ordeal the previous year, on 17th January 1959. Sodden kit goes back into the car boot, and I curse having taken a warm bath earlier. Why do most call-outs occur at such inconsiderate times? I can think of worse moments, however!

When I arrive at Main's Barn, Luke is already busy at the back of his Land Rover. The rigours of the open top Jeep had been long abandoned; it would have been of little use on such a night anyway. He doles out MRO's newly acquired chest-entry Goon suits, still neatly packed in their yellow rubber holdalls. They were Oliver Lloyd's ultimate weapon against deadly cold on rescues, and treated like gold. Each MRO Warden had paid for one, but only had it on loan. We had instructions, no less, to confine their use to

'approved caving', such as those mammoth diving op's in the late 'fifties to push the Swildon's streamway, and rescues, of course.

Anyone caught doing otherwise was gently reprimanded. Many of us were thus obliged to avoid casual encounters with OCL, especially down the cave: a difficult cat-and-mouse feat at the time, for he was always there - invariably and uncannily when everyone was changing in Main's Bam. He liked to light the fire there. I usually wore a scarf to hide the neck seal, but was even caught one Easter in Yorkshire; a tell-tale yellow arm beneath a torn boiler suit was enough!

Luke was different. I reflect that his equally bright light shone rather more our way, and cast no shadows. His first home on Mendip had been just up the road, on top of the Black Hole Series he had helped to discover with Willie Stanton and Howard Kenney a decade earlier. They were then the young lions of the MNRC; even Herbert Balch's chosen hit men'. Luke knew all about gold, and silver too. He had many rich seams which were enthusiastically quarried and put to good use rather than hoarded. Smiles and especially the boom of a big 'bang' were his rewards.

Whilst stalwart, he was always prepared to look ahead and move on. Well before the night in question, Luke had already spotted a bright future for neoprene in caving and, although spurning the need for such protection himself, had encouraged Mike Thompson to try out a borrowed wet suit to prove his point. Mike's own diaries will record this first ever use of a wet suit down a Mendip cave. Luke also claimed to have made the first electron ladders used on Mendip; however, I await Dave Irwin's findings and verdict on this one. Whatever, it was right to call him a 'trailblazer' in the report of his death published by the



Luke takes over from George Williams as Club Chairman in 1959

Wells Journal on Thursday 3rd March; the day after his funeral in Cheddar, and the day I write this little tribute.

Goon suits showered from the Rover like confetti! If needs be, Luke would deal with Oliver later, should he ever find out. Eager hands took their pick; people like Mike Thompson, Fred Davies, Ken Dawe and Mike Holland. Few words were exchanged for we had all been caving together hours earlier. Luke did all the shouting anyway. And thank goodness he kept a cache of dry grots, boiler suits and fully charged lamps for such occasions. He had also bagged-up those thick hairy hauling ropes, to stop them squirming uncontrollably in squeezes, and carefully wrapped the trusty St. John's drag sheet; though I confess to finding his tight knots difficult to untie!

Lights raking the Green and hurdle rick through lashing rain announce the arrival of another car full of rescuers. It skids and splashes down among the deepening puddles, for the road outside Manor Farm is now awash. A torrent tumbles down the pipes we had laid the previous year as the entrance shaft to Priddy Green, yet it doesn't back-up too much across the road by Fountain Cottage; a good sign. David and Brenda Willis climb out the vehicle with Howard Kenney. Dave has 'borrowed' Gwen Thomas's car, again! He and Howard start to organise us. Brenda takes shorthand notes.

But Luke is in overall command. He knows that: Fred and Mike T. will get there first with Comforts, mainly fags and chocolates, and be runners too; that Ken makes splendid brews underground, and that Mike Holland and myself are better porters, haulers and willing consumers of Ken's potions. Dave is one of the few who knows how to rig the giant block-and-tackle on the Iron bar cemented across the rift at the top of Suicide's Leap; yet another of Luke's 'fixes'.

In the darkness, our controller strikes an imposing figure; his huge frame magnified by an ankle-length black cape which drips and shines brightly in the light that dear old Albert Main has switched on to help us. The high collar clasped around the neck cannot conceal his beard. This glistens with rain drops which, somehow, have escaped the wide brim of a Saturn-like hat; the sort worn by priests. He is a high priest of Mendip caving, after all. Luke's version sports an ingenious home-made bracket and giant French carbide lamp which gutters and hisses. He's given his own electrics to us. Beneath the black cape and sharp instructions is one of the most colourful, kindly and openly candid characters on Mendip; always true to his ideals.

As we leave the scene to get on with the rescue, Mr. Main entreats us to come inside afterwards to warm up, any time. He tells Luke to let him know when to start

running the hot bath should the exhausted caver need one. Jack's wife, Hilda, will stay up to provide drinks, whenever. Young Robin is left fast asleep to be fresh to milk the cows the next morning. We get the exhausted caver out before then and dash home for short kips ourselves. It goes well because we have done it all many times before; at least four times for real and even more on practices.

Luke is left to clear up, though somehow he lets us depart not feeling too guilty. It was his job and he would do it properly. Everything would be hung up to dry straightaway. A full day or so had to be spent repacking and storing it all; Goon suits powdered and folded; hairy ropes brushed, coiled and bagged up; lamps recharged; pulleys greased: Oliver's beloved drag sheet scrutinised for damaged eyelets, and repaired if necessary, and fags and chocolates restocked in the Comforts boxes. We all smoked a lot, too! Afterwards, if the time was right, we would also imbibe his excellent wines and whisky to celebrate another successful rescue. And, yet, I never recall a single bill to MRO, nor even a moan about always being first to get called by the Police. Luke was the lynchpin.

So ends just one of many stories to be told about this larger-than-life character, affectionately known as DEV during his more active cave diving days in Wookey Hole after the last War. Everyone, local farmers included, will have a first-hand 'DEV or Luke yarn' to tell, too. The contents of such an anthology might even outshine those distinctive tartan and Hawaiian shirts! Many whimsical headings come to mind: Tiddle-tum-tum; Operation Sandblast; Photo-phlop; the Humber desert car; the dream house on Deer Leap; DIY readimix; home-made 'flashless smokepowder' in Eastwater, and drilling and blasting the Twin Titties' entrance shaft In two mad weekends. To it could be appended a useful litany for the uses of explosives, of course; especially on underwater demolition. The list is endless. Would that it is compiled soon.

Among my own more cherished ones would be: the Night of the Wessex Coup at Hillgrove. On this infamous and unrecorded occasion, Luke alone held the Club together, as no one else could have done in the circumstances. He showed how both young and old still had roles in caving, each generation helping the other. No one deserved to become President of the Club more than Luke. I also recall that he resigned from MRO at the age of fifty: 'To set an example', for he held that cave rescue on Mendip should not become like clubs ruled by armchair cavers, out-of-touch with the action. Consistent principles, as ever, led him to resign his presidency of the Club when ill health took hold.

Without Norma, I daresay that even Luke would have struggled to burn so brightly. The warmth of their homes

and welcomes at Priddy, Chilcote and Cheddar was legendary. Latterly, both sought to avoid those cold, wet winters on Mendip; even the season's warmest spot at Bradley Cross became uncomfortable for Luke. They escaped to the sunshine of Andalucia, near to one of his brothers in Fuengirola. Norma drove most of the way there and back whilst Luke navigated the way. That is how they shared much of their rewarding life together. When Mendip warmed up enough, they came home.

Appropriately, the Sun shone for Luke's funeral; the first real warmth of a new Spring. None of us think of Luke as being no more.

*Jim Hanwell*

It with great sadness and with deepest sympathy to Norma and her family that we have to record the death of Luke at the age of 73 after a long illness.

He was always a legend, for he had an age "edge" over the immediate postwar cavers and was in the forefront of many activities. The realisation soon comes that his efforts in the caving world covered so many aspects of our lives that it is impossible to do justice to him in this brief obituary.

At some time in the future his work must be documented for it covers such fields as archaeological conservation of remains from Badger Hole, first postwar use of mechanical digging aids, early attempts at cave photography, original cave exploration, cave diving, use of explosives, restoration of gruffy ground to agricultural use and a social standing in the local community that enabled him to communicate easily between cavers and landowners.

The manner in which the Wessex Cave Club conducts its affairs with annual and acceptable elections is largely due to his efforts in holding the club together during the controversial change from the previous system some thirty years ago.

But, he leaves a yawning gap. Many of us regarded him as a "father" figure. We were amused by some of his outrageous activities, but he led the way when perhaps we were too conservative to "have a go". He could be acidic in his comments but they were always well meant - rather like those of a sergeant-major trying to improve performance.

He will always be remembered for his generosity - to poor adolescents - to guests invited to his and Norma's fondue parties - to young cavers In need of a tot of rum - there are so many memories.

It is never easy to compare members of different generations. Figures from the past can become "giants" in literature whilst the "hard done by" activists of today wonder why their efforts don't attract more attention.

Whatever is written about Luke in the future one thing is certain, his place in our affections will remain constant.

*Richard Kenney*

*Luke William English Devenish FIEpE, former President of the Wessex Cave Club, Born 18 October 1920, died 23 February 1994*

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## Alan Surrall

1929 - 1993

Alan Surrall, who died just before Christmas, was a stalwart member of the Wessex in the 1950's and 60's. He contributed to many aspects of the club's activities and was one of that generation who gave us Upper Pitts.

Alan began his caving career with the army in the Peak District and in 1949 he joined forces with Dennis Warburton on a trip in Giant's Hole. For a time, both worked at Rovers and a small local caving group was formed, before the pair joined the Wessex. In the 60's the Birmingham contingent became known as the Brumcong.

On their first visit to Mendip, Alan and Dennis explored Eastwater, which they went on to survey. The Lamb Lair and Balch surveys were also largely their work. Alan also became interested in cave photography assisting Dennis

with various lighting units. Later, in 1962, they began to experiment with cine-photography while on club trips to Yorkshire. The club archives contain some interesting shots of the heavy battery pack Alan developed.

Alan is perhaps best remembered as a supremely competent engineer and cave digger. His logistical abilities were superb.

After the club dig at Thrupe Swallet was finally abandoned, Alan threw his energies into reopening Cow Hole. In 1962-3 most of the Hillgrove regulars were roped in to help, when what had seemed a simple problem turned into a siege. Weekend after weekend, the core of the team, Alan, Dennis, Phil Davies and Alan Ash camped by the shakehole in all weathers. Throughout it all, Alan remained calm, good humoured and resolute. Cow Hole was eventually re-entered on June 3rd 1963.

Alan's last major dig was at Fairman's Folly, where a solidly shored shaft was sunk for some 20ft. A railway was constructed ready for a 'big push'. My log book

records "The engineering is of true Surrall magnificence and quite out of proportion to the slim chance the dig has of going anywhere." The shoring collapsed a few months later. Undeterred, Alan set his sights on Nine Barrows, which yielded even before he had time to get properly organized.

About this time the club gave up digging to concentrate on building Upper Pitts. This was something of an act of faith and if younger members had seen the effort put in by Alan and his friends, they might treat the place with more respect today. I still have a memory of him cutting up aluminium sheeting from an old caravan to line the kitchen benches. In recognition of his services to the club, particularly at Head Quarters, Alan, together with Phil Davies was made an honorary member at the 1967 A.G.M..

Shortly after, Alan retired from caving to devote his time to engineering, setting up a small die casting business to make parts for models. He also took a great interest in steam railways and once rode on the footplate of the Flying Scot. He died a few months before he was due to retire.

The Wessex have lost a good friend and we extend our sympathy to his family.

*Maurice Hewins*  
2/2/94.

## Sales

Since the beginning of December 1993 the embroidered garment price has risen by a small amount. Sweatshirts, available from stock in Royal Blue and Black, are now £15.50 for small, medium and large sizes, £16.00 for extra large and £17.00 for extra extra large. Other colours are available at these prices, but only to special order. Tee shirts in Sky Blue, Bottle Green, Grey and Black are available at £9.00 for small, medium and large sizes. Larger sizes are available to special order.

You may also notice a few rugby shirts and sweaters in circulation around the Club. These are available to special order in a range of sizes and colours.

New in stock for 1994 are stickers. These are 4" diameter in three colours with the club logo and address on them. They are available with adhesive on the front for window mounting or on the back for mounting on opaque surfaces, both at £1.50 each.

Field trials of Wellington boots are currently underway. These will be available from stock in sizes 6,7,8 & 9; other sizes can be obtained to order.

Lastly, in order to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Club, a range of etched glassware and a special sweatshirt with a body-sized logo will be available.

<u>Clothing:</u>	£
Sweat shirts S,M,L,	15.50
XL	16.00†
XXL	17.00†
Tee shirts S,M,L	9.00
XL	9.50†
XXL	10.00†
Rugby shirts S,M,L,XL	18.00
XXL	POA
Polo shirts S,M,L	15.50†
XL	16.00†
XXL	17.00†
Acrylic sweaters S,M,L	15.50†
XL	16.00†
XXL	17.00†
Pure wool sweaters S,M,L	32.00†
XL	32.50†
XXL	33.00†
Ties	4.50

(† = available to order only)

### Other goods

Mugs	4.75
Enamel car badge	2.00
Car stickers	1.50
Stickers	1.50
Cloth badges	1.75

### Publications:

Mendip Karst Hydrology Project	0.50
Below Belize	3.50
Man on Mendip	8.00
Great storms and floods	1.75
Who was Aveline anyway?	4.00
(non members: 5.00)	
City Pit	1.00
Journal back issues (each)	1.00

### Other Items

Ammo box, 6"	3.00
Ammo box, 3"	2.00
Digging gloves	0.75 & 0.50
Safety Boots (sizes 10 & 11 only)	11.00/pr
Miner's knee pads, small	7.00
Miner's knee pads, large	8.00

The glassware is only available to special order - please contact me for details of the prices and items available. Pint and half pint glass tankards, whiskey tumblers, paperweights, decanters etc are all available. Order dates for these items will be arranged to make delivery coincide with the Rescue Conference in July and the Annual Dinner in October.

For further details, and to place orders, please contact

Colin Masters  
113 Blackheath Road,  
Upper Hale,  
Farnham,  
Surrey,  
GU9 0DZ,  
0252 712585

# club diary

## March

- 11th: MRO AGM, 8.00pm, Hunter's Lodge  
12th: MRO Kit Circus, Hunter's Lodge, 7.30pm  
19th: NCA AGM, Stafford  
26th: Yorkshire booking: Lancaster Hole/Link Pot  
27th: Committee meeting  
Yorkshire Booking: Pool Sink

## April

- 16th: MRO Meeting re BCRC Conference  
Yorkshire booking: Disappointment Pot  
17th: Yorkshire booking: Gaping Gill Main Shaft  
30th: MRO Communications Workshop

## May

- 7/8th: Hut Working Weekend  
7th: WCC Club Practice Rescue, Manor Farm  
CSCC Meeting, Hunter's Lodge, 10.30am  
8th: Committee meeting  
21st: Yorkshire booking: Birks Fell  
22nd: Yorkshire booking: County Pot

## June

- 4/5th: 1994 Caver's Fair, Dalesbridge Centre, Austwick  
10/ 12th: Forest of Dean Caving Symposium, English Bicknor  
18th: Yorkshire booking: Flood Entrance (Gaping Gill)  
19th: Committee meeting  
Yorkshire booking: Stream Passage Pot

## July

- 9/ 10th: British Cave Rescue Council Conference, Priddy  
30th: Yorkshire booking: Rumbling Hole  
31st: Yorkshire booking: Lost John's Cave

## August

- 5/8th: NAMHO Field Meet, Forest of Dean  
7th: Committee meeting

## September

- 4th: Committee meeting  
10th: Yorkshire booking: Ginging Hole

## October

- 1st: Yorkshire booking: Penyghent Pot  
9th: Yorkshire booking: Big Meanie  
15th: AGM And Annual Dinner - 60th anniversary celebrations

## November

- 26th: Yorkshire booking: Top Sink - Lancaster Hole  
27th: Yorkshire booking: Cow Pot

## December

- 4th: Yorkshire booking: Little Hull Pot  
30th: Yorkshire booking: Lost Johns  
31st: Yorkshire booking: Notts Pot

## July 1995

- 14th: Wessex Gouffre Berger booking

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## caving notes

*Continued from page 83*

that Oxlow Cavern has been added to the list of those which have been re-bolted recently.

Local cavers in the Forest of Dean in conjunction with BCRA have organised a Caving Symposium to be held on the weekend of 10-12 June at the Sports and Social Club, English Bicknor. The plan is to have talks and discussions linked to underground trips in Redhouse Swallet, Otter Hole and Slaughter Stream Cave amongst other sites. Cost is £12 to BCRA members (£15 to others). Places are limited so book in advance by post to Paul Taylor, 9 Massey Road, Gloucester, GL1 4LG.

Finally, the Llangattock hillside road will be closed for three months from February for the laying of a water main.