

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

Wessex people:

Change of address:

Mark Kellaway, 5, Brunswick Close, Twickenham,
Middlesex, W2 5ND, 0181 943 2206
Lee (Fez) Ferris, 169 Fordyke Avenue, Hull, N.
Humberside, HU7 0DW 01482 580627
Ros and Keith Fielder, Sommerleaze Cottage, Wookey,
Wells, Somerset, BA5 1JU, 01749- 672954

New Members

Welcome to:

Milton Fenton, 33 Westway, Charminster, Bournemouth,
Dorset, BH9 3DT, 01202-526071
Andy Ewels, 4 Fernside Road, Winton, Bournemouth,
BH9 2LA

Congratulations to Fez and H on the announcement of their engagement. The wedding is at 1pm in Hull on 10.6.95

In committee:

Plastic credit card style **membership cards** are to be issued now that the stock of old cardboard ones is exhausted. Members who have paid their subscription this year should find a card enclosed with this Journal. Others will need to send their subscriptions as soon as possible as otherwise this will be the last Journal they receive. A list of unpaid members is to be found on page 14

In order to improve the ease with which members have access to **cave keys**, one of each key is now to be found in the key box in the library. (Members hut keys can be used to open the library door). This is for a trial period and if keys go missing consistently, we will have to revert to the old system.

We now have a second **survey kit** available if needed by members.

Hut working weekends have been arranged for May 13 - 14, August 5-6

BEC v WCC Skittles Match

The two clubs held a skittles evening at the New Inn (Priddy) on Monday January 2nd. There was an exceeding good turn-out, and two teams of 16 competed for the golden gnome trophy.

The BEC won the first two rounds, then the Wessex pulled back and there was a lot of excitement for the fifth and final round. Eventually Wessex won, by a margin of 11 points (452 against 441). Highest single score was Christine with 14. The highest men's score and the highest ladies score won a bottle of port each, and in each case there was a tie. At the play off, Nicola (BEC) won for the ladies and Tav for the men.

A return match next New Year is inevitable, as the BEC desperately want the Gnome for themselves.

Special mention must be made of the sticker-up, Martin Butcher, who worked ceaselessly all evening. The event raised £25.00 for MRO.

The scores were:

BEC		WCC	
Biffo	35	Uzi	37
Mac	32	Leg	38
Martin	30	Wendy	30
Nicola	34	Maurice	29
The Boy	29	Judy	22
Rachael	21	Helena	20
Prew	31	Nocola	23
Tim	34	Tuska	26
J-Rat	27	Amanda	25
Richard	24	Keith	34
Jane	25	Roz	24
Butch	24	Phil	27
Estelle	34	Max/Christine	29
Tricia	14	Andy	27
Aileen	19	Tav	38
Jake	28	Pauline	23
	441		452

play off

Nicola	6	Leg	1
Estelle	4	Tav	6

Report - Phil Hendy

caving notes

January saw the conclusion of most of the activity regarding the change of ownership of the Gruffy Field, where **GB and Charterhouse caves** are to be found. At a well attended but extremely business-like meeting of the Charterhouse Caving Committee held on 21 January, the Committee's member clubs agreed on a plan to purchase a 150 year lease of the underground features of the land from Somerset Wildlife Trust. In order to make this a reality, the Charterhouse Caving Committee is to be reformed into a company limited by guarantee, each of the member clubs being equal shareholders. The only minor problem so far as the Wessex is concerned is the possibility of cavers being outvoted under the proposals for the conservation plan but this need not be an obstacle to the deal as a whole going through and can be sorted out in due course.

Club trips to **Portland, Wales and Otter Hole** are included amongst the dates announced by Caving Secretary Vern Freeman recently. See the Diary at the back of the Journal for dates and contact Vern on 01252 629621 for further details and to book your place on the Otter Hole trip (priority will be given to people who have not been to the cave before). **Yorkshire bookings** for the rest of the year have also been announced: please contact Keith Sanderson on 015242 51662 if you want to take part in these trips.

While Wessex members will know better than to believe some of the recent hype, the entrance area of **Swildon's** definitely is on the move and you are urged to take care when entering and leaving the cave.

The Council of Southern Caving Clubs has at long last published its **access handbook**. Available from CSCC Secretary, Dave Bell at 2 Grosvenor Avenue, Carshalton, Surrey, SM5 3EW. It costs £1.00 plus an SAE.

Stoke St Michael basalt quarry has been given the go-ahead for an extension, but restrictions were placed on further pumping of ground water as this is known to affect **Stoke Lane Stocker**. The Whatley quarry extension looks likely to go to Public Enquiry.

£500 provided by English Nature is being spent on **Compton Martin Ochre Mine**. Assisted by members of the Cotham, Wessex members recently spent an extremely wet Saturday morning cutting up old telegraph poles in the British Telecom yard in Bath for use as pit props.

Resin bonded eco-hangers have arrived on Mendip. These are the chosen bolts being used by the CSCC under the **NCA's bolting programme** which includes

long term maintenance and insurance as two of its principal objectives. Further details from Les Williams on 01749 679839.

The back entrance to **Box Mines** recently had a gate fitted, but the CSCC don't know who by or why!

The **Mendip Rescue Organization** has announced its programme of events for 1995. On 17 March the Annual Meeting of the Committee will be held at the Hunters Lodge at 8:00pm. 25 March is a training session on Observation of the Injured, also at the Hunters Lodge at 7:30pm and a month later on 29 April at the same venue there will be a follow up to the Club Rescue Practice Reports. On 20 May a technical rescue equipment training session will be held at Westbury Quarry. Please contact Graham Bromley (number at the front of the Journal) if you want to attend any of these sessions.

Owen Clarke has published some preliminary results based on the NCA's rope testing project. Surprise, surprise, the results indicate that ropes tend to deteriorate only very slowly if unused. Owen is offering a **free rope testing service** for anyone who wants to check their old rope is still OK to use: any information about the history of the rope will be added to the database to further improve the possibilities of predicting the behaviour of a rope from its history. Contact Owen on 01495 773175 for further details.

Members of the WSG recently found a live high explosive shell on the top of **Pant Mawr**. The area was used for live firing practice during the war and there are still some remains. Take care when in the area, and treat unidentified objects with due respect.

The **OFD Columns** open days will be on Bank Holiday Sundays this year. Meet at Penwyllt at 10:30am if you want to see these formations.

The Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club have announced that 1995 is clean up year in **Otter Hole**. All visiting parties will be expected to assist - please show willing if you have a trip booked in the cave.

Readers interested in cave radio may be interested to join the **Cave Radio and Electronics Group**. The Group is now in the its fourth year of publishing a detailed technical *Journal*, as well as newsletters and a news sheet aimed specifically at surveyors. If you're interested in surveying, computers, lighting, cave radio or photographic aids, you might like to contact the Group at 12 Well House Drive, Leeds, LS8 4BX or gibson@microsol.demon.co.uk.

Climbing has been temporarily banned on **Llangattock**.

In **Dan-yr-Ogof** diggers have erected a scaffold construction in Gerard Platten Hall. Please treat this with care if you're passing. Also, recent vandalism in the cave has led to a radical overhaul of the leader system, effective from the beginning of 1995. Party sizes are now limited to four plus a leader and all leaders must re-register with the SWCC by completing at least one trip beyond the Green Canal and then writing it up in the log book provided at Penwyllt. **OFD I** parties are also being limited to four plus leader, and changes in the access arrangements for **Tunnel Cave** will be announced in due course. The requirements governing OFDII and Cwm Dwr remain unchanged.

Gwent Cave Rescue Team are examining a proposal to put a permanent telephone wire in the entrance series of **Daren Cilau**. The aim would be to place this as high as possible to keep it out of the way of passing cavers. Martyn Williams, GWCRT Secretary is collecting views on this plan - please contact him at 58 Anthony Drive, Caerleon, Gwent, NP6 1DX If you have comments.

The **Ghar Parau Foundation**, worried about a dramatic drop in the number of new expeditions applying for funds, has launched a plan to apply to the Foundation for Sports and the Arts for a capital sum to enable it to dramatically increase the amount of money it gives to expeditions. An expedition planning seminar will also be held early next year - details from Nick Williams if you're interested.

The 1995 National Association of Mining History Organisations (**NAMHO**) **Conference** is being hosted by Shropshire mining and caving club at the Lilleshall national sports centre, near Newport, Shropshire on 14-17 July this year. Further details from Adrian Pearce at 72 Hopkins Heath, Shawbirch, Telford, Shropshire, TF5 0LZ.

After pressure from local diggers, DCA have set up a **Cave Discovery Fund** to help finance local exploration efforts. Is this an idea whose time has come for Mendip, we wonder?

Cavers regularly visiting the Peak District may find the new **Peak District Rigging Guide** of use. Published by the Crew Climbing and Potholing Club, it contains location information for all hangars placed in Derbyshire under the NCA bolting scheme, as well as rigging in other important caves. All sales from the proceeds of the Guide will go to the Derbyshire Caving Association's bolting programme. Copies of the guide are available from Jenny Potts at 3 Greenway, Hulland Ward, Ashbourne, DE6 3FE for £4.20. Updates will be sent out to people who send in SAE's.

The ropes in **Winnats Head Cave** were recently pronounced unsafe - one has even worn down to its core. DCA will replace the ropes after due consultation, but in the meanwhile, please don't use them.

A collapse in the Gulley/ Elizabeth Shaft area of **Nettle Pot** has revealed lots of loose deads hanging about. Please avoid even thinking about the place until something can be done to stabilise it.

Caves and Caving has a new Editor - he's Hugh St Lawrence of 5 Mayfield Road, Bentham, Lancaster, LA2 7LP. He'd appreciate any snippets of news as well as articles for publication [as, of course, would I - ed].

Last September the fixed iron ladders were finally removed from Stake Pot and Fall pot in **Lancaster Hole**. Fall pot now requires a 25m rope and gear for four hangars and Stake Pot now needs a 15m rope and gear for a further four hangars.

New fences have been erected on **Leck Fell** on the down hill side of the road. Please do not climb over them willy-nilly - stiles are provided at convenient intervals.

People travelling abroad for whatever reason might like to consider the BCRA **travel insurance** scheme. Apart from being the ONLY Insurance policy to cover cave related accidents and rescue costs, it can also be competitive for any holiday or business trip even if caving is not involved. Contact the BCRA's administrator, Bryan Ellis on 01278 691539.

Writing in the British Cave Rescue Council's newsletter, SWCRO's Brian Jopling comes up with some startling information on **Russian titanium** equipment. Brian attended a seminar held by the BMC at Plas-y-Brenin at which Fred Hall of DMM and Hugh Banner of HB climbing equipment gave a talk comparing titanium alloys with more commonly used alloys of steel and aluminium. Apparently, the grade of titanium being used for most Russian carabiners etc. is little stronger than in mild steel although there is some weight saving. More importantly it is very prone to stress fractures and behaves very like cast iron if the surface finish is damaged. Brian says that for practical purposes titanium does not conduct heat so small areas under friction load can get extremely hot.

At the same seminar, a talk on safety **helmets** confirmed earlier work done by Graham Proudlove. Apparently, moulded thermoplastic helmets can suffer substantial strength loss from impacts and although there is not much information to indicate they suffer ultra-violet degradation (more a problem to climbers than cavers anyway), they should be discarded after a fall of significant impact even if they appear to still be sound. On the other hand, fibreglass helmets such as the Joe Brown or Snowdon Mouldings type seem to bear up well even after substantial mistreatment.

Born again caver

Paul Hadfield

I first heard about the place at Linda's wake. We had come together again to spread her ashes on the slopes of the Andy Good plateau. In a small flower strewn meadow a little way above Camp Caves we cast her ashes into the wind and said our last goodbyes. For me, the memories were poignant, struggling through the snow in my early assays on skis, together with Boon, trying to keep up with her and Thompson as they led us on the trails in the Front Ranges of the Rockies, cold winter camp at Castleguard, the dive at Green Pool sump in Yorkshire Pot, passing the sump in Rats Nest, on rappel on Big Mother in Q5, stripping off at minus 35 centigrade to get through the entrance squeeze at Columbine Cave, Wyoming; and later, after her accident and struggling to regain her health, with us on the first trip to Dezaiko. She came to our wedding and read the lesson. Dooley and I had come to her wake and, as Jepson said, as we spelled each other carrying her remains up the trail to the old campsite, "It's the only time this lass ever needed to be carried."

I was acting as guardian of the one litre bottle of rather good twelve year old malt bequeathed us by Linda, when Drummond came over and mumbled something in my ear before promptly collapsing into the campfire. The ensuing rescue of Drummond's comatose body from premature immolation drove what he had said from my mind until the following morning when, routed from the mountain by driving rain, everyone headed down for breakfast to the restaurant in Coleman.

Drummond, now conscious, was able to enlarge on his interrupted comment of the previous night and it was here that I first heard about the caves of Prince of Wales Island (POWI). Cavers have been active on POWI for several years, since about 1987. Initially working independently, they have lately been co-operating with the Alaska Forest Service in efforts to locate and survey the caves on the Island in order that efforts can be made to protect them from the effects of clearcut logging which affects large tracts of land and which, when it occurs over cavernous limestone dramatically affects the surface drainage and development of the cave systems it overlies.

Articles have been published in the *NSS News* that detail many of the principle discoveries made in the past few years which include about 300 caves with pits up to 600ft deep. POWI is a large island (3rd largest in

the United States) located just off the West coast of the Alaska Panhandle. It is included in the Tongass National Forest, administered by the Alaska Forest Service. My home in Stewart BC is about two kilometres from the border of the Tongass, which I travel often to hike, ski and fish.

In July of '94 I travelled to POWI on the summertime weekly ferry service of the Alaska Marine Highway that visits Stewart at the head of the Portland Canal, a ninety mile fiord cutting through the coast mountains along which lies the Alaska/British Columbia border.

For two weeks, together with cavers from across the States, I served as a volunteer for the Alaska Forest Service. This meant that once arrived on POWI we were accommodated, fed and transported, including helicopter transport, to various places and caves. Essentially we found, explored and surveyed caves and presented the results to the Forest Service. The hope is that the data provided will be used to mitigate the effects of large scale clear cutting on the underground environment.

For a "lapsed" caver like myself the first item on the agenda before leaving for the island was to sort out my kit. When I exhumed my overalls from storage they disintegrated into dust, somehow or other my wetsuit had shrunk so that it wouldn't close around the waist and my boots seemed to have transmogrified into fossils.

Luckily my vertical rig seemed to have survived in a much better condition. A couple of new pieces of string here and there and a drop of oil on the cam springs and it was ready. "El Sol", the big stinky, fired up with no problems and no maintenance so all that was required were a few items of clothing and I was set to go. (Not forgetting of course to pack the fly rod and tie a selection of suitable flies.)

Almost forgotten in my enthusiasm was the "body caving". The years have not been too unkind to me and I still have all my limbs attached. My job here in Canada puts quite a bit of strain on my knees, requiring as it does, occasional ski descents over variable terrain after decamping from helicopters on mountain tops. Last year I had surgery on one knee and things weren't quite right yet. The chief problem however appeared to be my chest. Over the years it seems to have relocated around my waist. Thinking back to my Mendip days though I recalled much more substantial girths propping up the bar at the Hunters, and I figured that in comparison my figure verged upon the sylph like. Still, to be sure, I threw up a rope, albeit only 20ft in the garage and climbed up and down a few times. Things seemed to work OK though I must confess that it did seem a bit of a squeeze between the backstrap and the rope.

Cavers trickled in to El Cap camp at the northern end of POWI over the first few days of July and until the Forest Service came back from the 4th of July public holiday we hiked into local caves to explore and survey known leads.

In this period I did two trips with a Florida caver, Kris Esterson, into a passage we excavated in a cave located at the bottom of a large doline. This produced sporting caving for a couple of hundred feet where the longest survey shot was about eight feet, apart from the 34ft pitch we encountered. An entertaining duck about twelve feet long about midway along with an awkward exit on the way out made me feel I was really getting back into the swing of things. There's no doubt that the rule of survey as you go is the only way to function on these trips. There's just so much virgin cave that anything else would be irresponsible.

Another trip in this period that proved interesting was with Pete Branson from Wrangell, Alaska, and Darcie Ziel from Chichagoff Island, Alaska, when we went into Snow White passage in Beaver Falls Cave. The early section included a downhill squeeze that Darcie with her youth and sylph like figure breezed through, Peter made it too, without too much of an effort, but your author was obliged to dig his way through in the best "bulky Brit" style he could manage. A little further on my two youthful companions dropped out of sight down a fifty foot pitch. I followed over the lip, but had only dropped a few feet down the rope when I spotted a likely lead only fifteen feet down and to the side (the reward of age and craft). A nifty bit of tension traversing got me into a nice dry vadose canyon passage where I unroped. Just then, cries from the bottom of the pit informed me that I had made the right choice as there was a sump just around the corner from the foot of the pit. I rapidly prepared to do a bit of illegal "scooping", and galloped off alone into virgin territory. Some twenty minutes later I was back at the lip of the passage directing Darcie, who had prussiked up level to the lip, over towards me. (After unroping, the rope had swung back to the centre of the main pitch, out of reach, and I was rather anxious to ensure that it was going to return to a position where I could get back on to it.) It was at this point with Darcie starting the tension traverse, that the rope above her caught behind a small nubbin, and a huge flake of rock, weighing several hundred pounds detached itself from the face of the pit. As it was immediately next to her and had not had time to build up any velocity, Darcie was able to shoulder herself away from it. Peter, however, at the bottom of the pit was in very close proximity to where the rock landed and shattered. Luckily he was not injured but was placed in an interesting predicament as the rope was now almost severed in two places. One, at the bottom of the pit, and a second some ten feet above the floor. It took a few anxious moments until he got a

prussik in place above the upper break and was able to rejoin us, whole, but rather frazzled in the side passage.

The dry passage led to a wet inlet and eventually to a pleasant little streamway that ascended to what we judged from the evidence of root fibres, to be close to the surface. Another four hundred feet or so of virgin cave under my belt!

A few days later I was in a camp just below the timberline on Calder Mountain, courtesy of a Forest Service Helicopter. With me was Kevin Allred, the original impetus to all the cave exploration on POWI, Tim Heaton, a palaeontologist from the University of South Dakota, Dave Love; caver and biologist, and Terry Fifield, a forest service archaeologist. Kevin and I were there to map going leads in Blue Marble Cave and the objective of the other three was to excavate the remains of bears found last year in Bumper Cave.

Let me tell you, that if you've never wrestled with a thousand feet of fire hose when laying it out through dense temperate rain forest to create a washing station for paleontological specimens, you haven't missed anything.

After we had helped get the others set up, Kevin and I were free to visit Blue Marble Cave. As the name implies, the cave is developed in marble and the "Inhale" entrance led down a steep clean washed entrance climb to the "Exhale" squeeze. At this point I had to undress. This was a tight one and my neglected physique needed all the help it could get, especially as this squeeze was in bedrock.

A series of short pits led to a streamway and from here we took a side lead to an undescended pit. This forty footer took us to a crawlway and another twenty foot pit which led back to known streamway. On the climb back up the forty the shortcomings in my long neglected equipment revealed themselves. The buckle on my foot cam refused to work partway up the pitch and I was obliged to reverse prussik to the bottom to try and effect repairs. The same thing happened not once but three times! Compounding things was a thick layer of particularly viscous mud that required me to literally force each of my cams individually up the rope. Altogether a not too pleasant experience, but you can be assured that my buckles will never give similar problems again.

Another lead led us up an exposed climb above the main streamway to an abandoned vadose canyon and ended in an unstable boulder choked chamber. A nervous kind of place. The days trip ended by traversing over the top of the pit to a down climb where we reached the top of an

Continued on page 15

Eastwater- the 1st Rift Chamber Extensions

By Graham Johnson and Rob Taviner

Eastwater Cavern is one of those caves which you either love or loathe, and its grim reputation has doubtless been partially responsible for the somewhat stop-start history of discovery and exploration. Breakthroughs have tended to come in batches close together, but with the batches themselves separated by long barren spells.

From its discovery in 1902, much of the known 'old' cave - including The Canyon, The Upper Traverse, The Rift Chambers, The Twin Verticals, The 13 Pots and Muddy Oxbow - had been explored by the end of the decade. Visits to the cave gradually declined until, with the outbreak of WW1, they practically ceased. The war took a heavy toll on the small Mendip Caving fraternity and it wasn't until the 1930's, following the formation of new caving organisations - notably the WCC and BEC - that any further serious work was undertaken. Then discoveries flew thick and fast - Harris's Passage, Primrose Path and the small Weaver-Bowen Extension were explored and Dolphin Pot established as a second route to the lower reaches of the cave - before war again intervened. Peace brought another batch of discoveries, notably at Primrose Pot and Ifolds Series, and the considerable survey effort during the early 50's added a few small extensions and tidied up a number of loose ends.

And there, apart from a handful of minor extensions it rested, until the discovery in 1983 of the notorious West End Series, a period of exploration to rival that of the original discovery, doubling the length of the known cave, and culminating in the scaling of Cenotaph Aven and the discovery of Southbank Series.

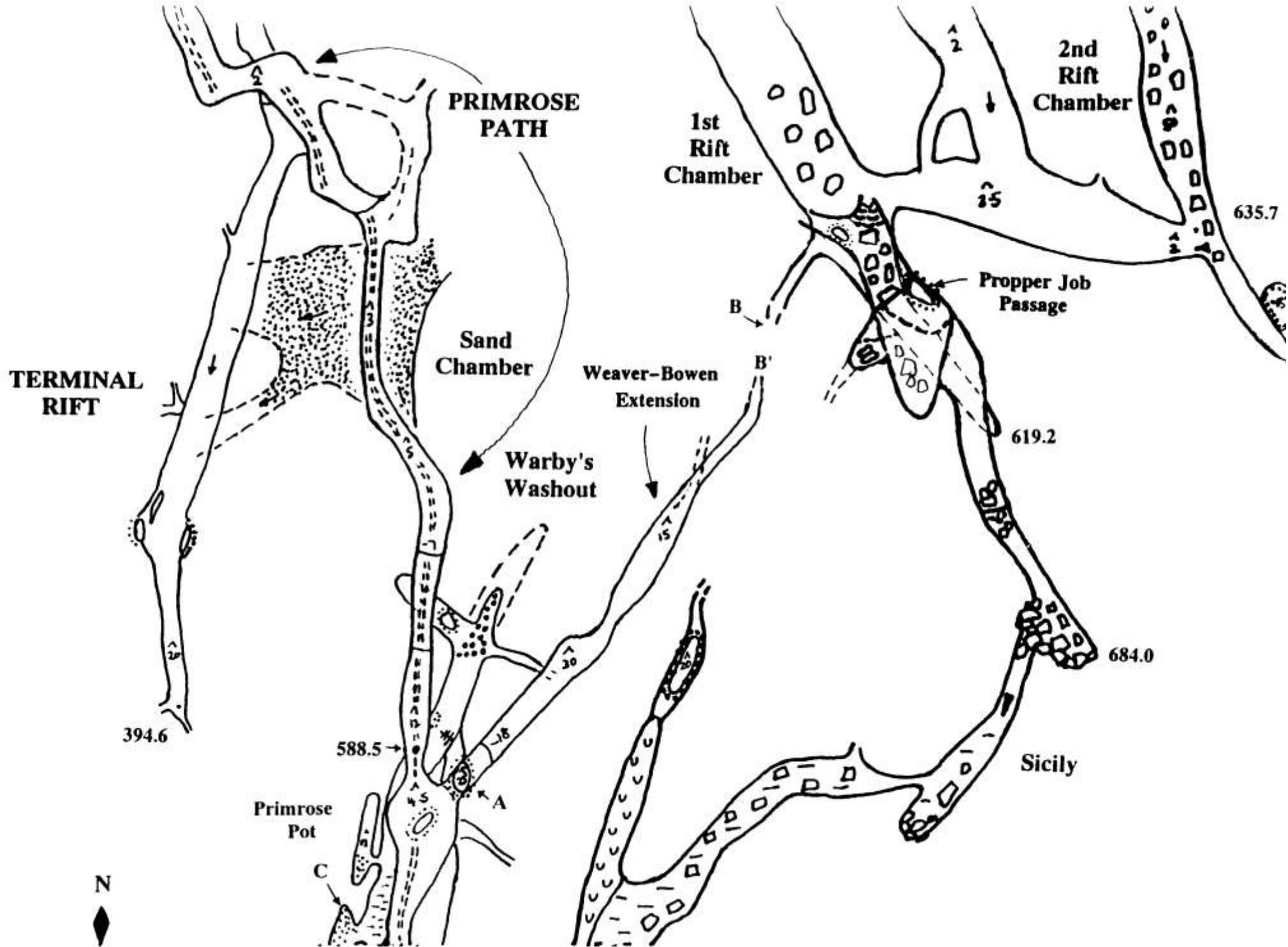
Sustained and arduous pushing trips in these remote locations produced alarming side effects - hideously deformed wetsuits, a complete inability to stay sober etc..., so throughout this period the Wessex contingent of the West End Boys' continually looked elsewhere for respite. With all of Mendip to choose from, where did we plump for ? - Yes, you've guessed it - Bloody Eastwater. This then is the somewhat belated story of another Eastwater find, the exploration of a series of passages in the roof of the 1st Rift Chamber, which passed all but un-noticed in the glare of the more acclaimed discoveries.

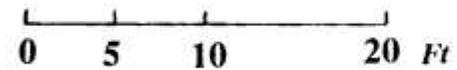
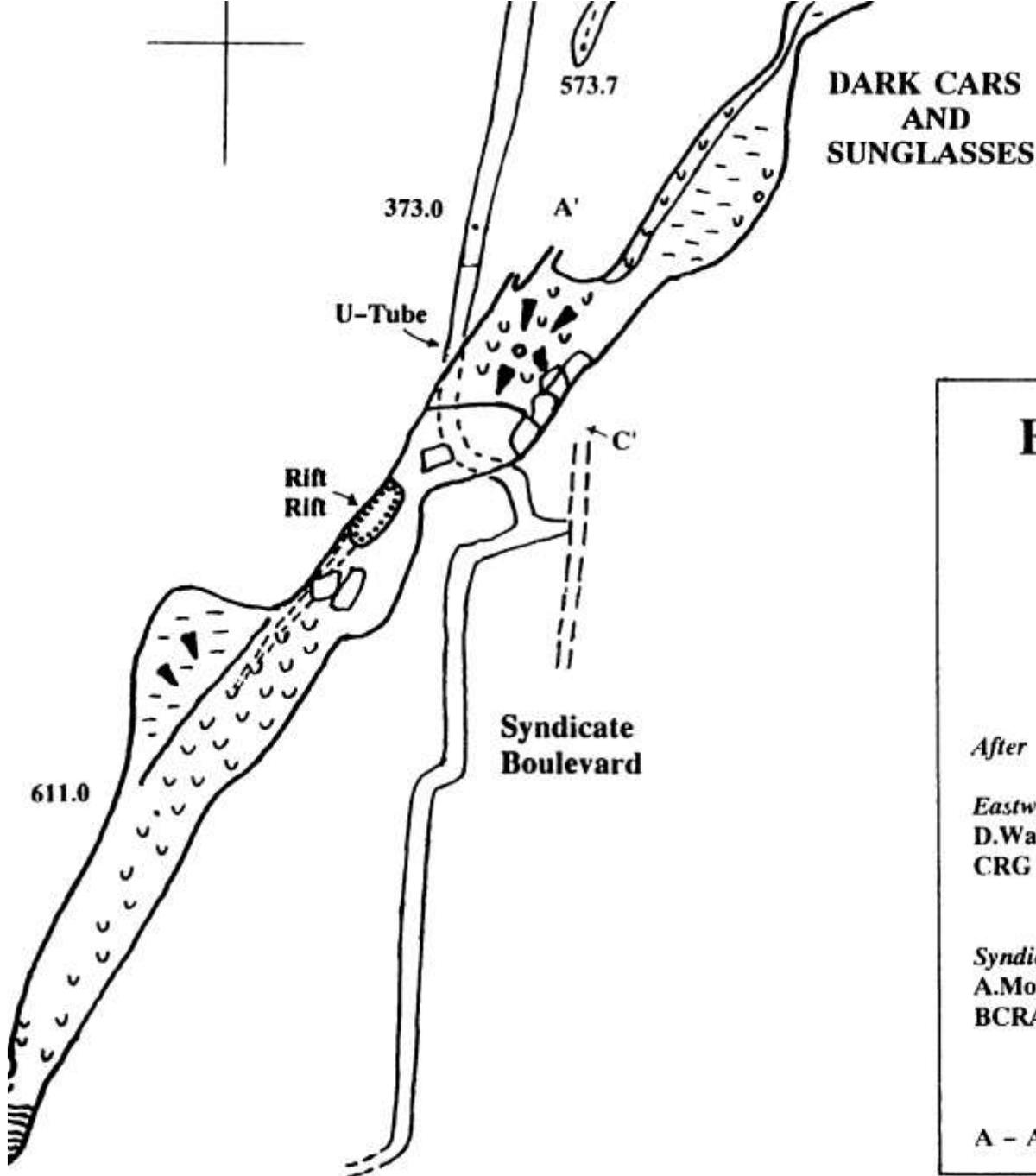
As stated earlier, only a handful of discoveries were made in the period between the mid-50's and the early 80's. One of these however was to prove the key to the passages described in this report. It had long been thought that passages may exist in the roof of the 1st Rift Chamber, and this was reinforced on the 6th January 1955 when Oliver Lloyds 36-watt spotlight revealed two possible routes leading upwards. On 14th March 1965, Fred Davies (SMCC), Paul Allen (SVCC), David Rigg, Charles Hope (Millfield School), Leo Holland and Tim Atkinson (WCC), successfully scaled the smaller of these two

routes to hammer open a narrow calcite squeeze and enter 25m of attractive passage ending in a small chamber and boulder choke. Possible ways on were noted, but not pursued.

In July 1987, Nick 'Skiddy' Pollard and Graham 'Jake' Johnson, frustrated by their search for the fabled 'East End Series' in the pot in the floor of the 2nd Rift Chamber, decided to look elsewhere for joy and following a conversation with Pete and Alison Moody, began investigations in the 1st Rift Chamber. After a couple of fruitless trips excavating an obvious, heavily-choked passage in the floor of the small 1965 chamber, a glance in the roof revealed a narrow but open rift passage, which clearly enlarged beyond a short constriction. Hammering proved useless, so with the promise of new cave Aubrey Newport was encouraged to enter the cave for the first time in a number of years, and demolish the squeeze. On the 17th November Nick and Graham managed to hammer their way through and enter a sizeable rift, 2-3ft wide, 10-40ft high extending at a gradient of about 45 degrees. The passage proved to be the most richly-decorated in 'old' Eastwater, with many fine formations including a magnificent curtain - above which poised a large and unstable boulder which threatened to smash the curtain and plug the exit. A full exploration revealed an estimated 90ft of rift passage, with a further 20ft of horizontal passage above, terminating in a draughting plug of jammed rocks in the roof. The following weekend a large group descended on the newly christened Propper Job Passage to survey and push any remaining leads. Unfortunately no-one else was able to pass the squeeze, leaving Nick and Graham to survey the passage to 104ft which lay directly above the 1st Rift Chamber. This has since been extended to around 120ft with a faint voice connection traced to the roof of the 2nd Rift Chamber.

Attention shifted to the strongly draughting boulder pile below a narrow rift, apparently the downstream continuation of Propper Job Passage and the terminal point of the 1965 extension. On the 26th June 1988, Nick, Graham and Rob 'Tav' Taviner located the site and removed a good deal of loose stuff from around larger boulders to reveal enticing black spaces. Stones thrown through the gaps could be heard to drop into apparently open passage. On the 2nd July, Tony Jarratt accompanied Graham and Nick to chemically remove a large rock at the base of the pile - with the hope that the large boulders above would not collapse into the void, and choke it completely. The exit was enlivened by a rapid encounter with Pete 'Snablet' McNab descending the cave via skateboard! The following day Nick, Graham and Tav, accompanied by Pete and Alison Moody returned to find the choke cracked, but





EASTWATER CAVERN

'Dark Cars And Sunglasses'

PLAN

R.Taviner 1994

After -

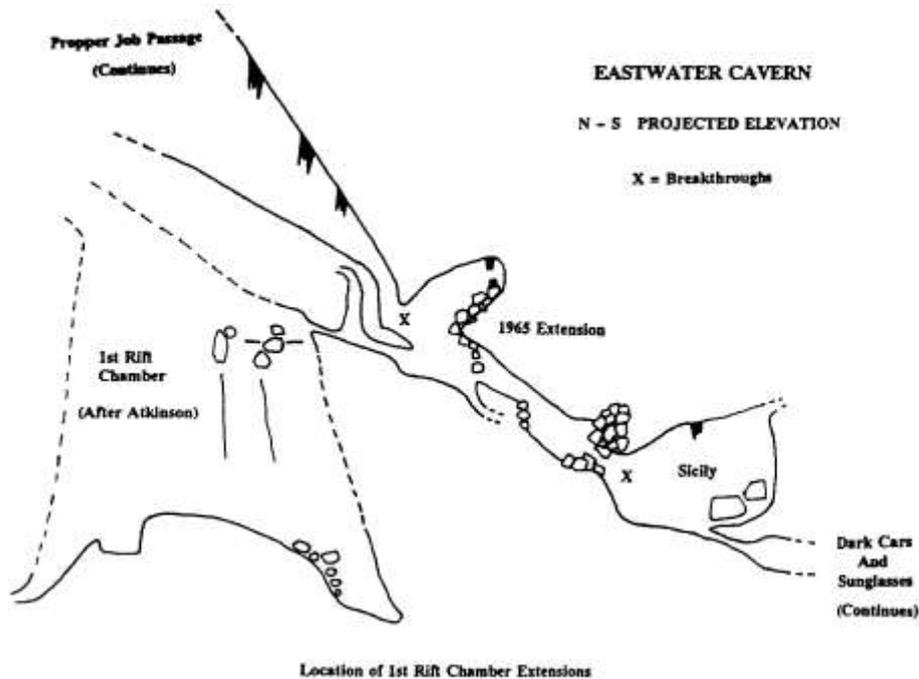
Eastwater Cavern
D.Warburton / A.Surrall
CRG Grade V 1952-54

1st Rift Chamber Extension
T.Atkinson
CRG Grade IV 1965

Syndicate Boulevard
A.Moody
BCRA Grade I 1980

Dark Cars And Sunglasses
S.Milner
BCRA Grade V 1988

A - A', B - B', C - C' - Aural or Aural/Visual Connections



thankfully not collapsed - and after clearing the bang debris all wriggled cautiously into Sicily - a small chamber. A very narrow way on in the roof was noted and stones dropped down a tiny crack in the floor rattled down for a short distance before hitting water. The draught however was whistling out from a low decorated slot beneath the right-hand wall which proved too-tight for all but Alison. Announcing 'Well I'm in a biggish walking canyon passage', frantic digging from both sides soon saw everybody through, and we descended an enlarging passage with fine stal floors, passing an obvious inlet on the right to the head of a small drop. At this point the passage was 10ft square, and dominated by the most magnificent formation yet found in Eastwater - The Sting And The Godfather' - a large white stalactite and stalagmite formation. The drop was easily free-climbed and the passage continued, passing a pot in the floor almost hidden beneath a large rock, before gradually lowering beyond a beautiful wall-to-wall calcite floor to terminate in a seemingly hopeless muddy pool. The draught whistled from the small pot in the floor, at the base of which the narrow 'Rift Rift' assumed tortuous winding proportions. This was pushed with difficulty first by Pete and then by Alison for some 20ft to a point where bang was needed. Surprisingly, an old candle and some washed-in debris were found here, subsequently conjectured to be a remnant of the '68 flood. Satisfied that nothing further could be achieved down dip we proceeded to check out the inlet passed on the way down. This lay beyond a particularly delicate and beautiful gour floor where we removed our boots to avoid damage. The passage rose into an attractive flowstone aven ending some 50ft beyond the main passage in a narrow rift - trending back towards the small chamber and probably the other end of the

heavily-choked passage in the floor. In all we had explored around 250ft of large and sporting canyon passage, containing some of the finest formations in Eastwater and ending in very promising leads. The new find was christened 'Dark Cars and Sunglasses' for no other reason than the hell of it.

Immediate follow up trips concentrated on photographing and surveying the extension and taping-off the formations. The survey was carried out by WCC and BEC members on the 8th August and drawn up by Steve Milner of the BEC. It is published here for the first time, in a format that can be added to the existing survey. Once finished, attention shifted back to pushing the on-going leads and the first in a series of charges was fired along the tortuous rift. As it became clear that this was becoming frustratingly long-term, attempts were made first to bail and then to pump the muddy pool beyond the fragile gour floor, but failed to reveal a viable way on. It was clear from the survey that the passage lay directly above the Primrose Pot Series. This was confirmed in March '89 by Snablet, who met the fumes from Dark Cars whilst ascending the pitch. We were intrigued as to where the two passages would connect and on the 20th May a voice connection was attempted. This was readily achieved between a tiny hole behind The Sting and the Godfather and a narrow passage leading off near the base of Weaver-Bowen Series. More surprisingly, visual contact was established. The close proximity of the new passages to Primrose Pot undoubtedly accounted for much of the draught, apparently dashing hopes of a major discovery. At this point serious work ceased.

Continued on page 14

A quick look at Les Pyrenees-Atlantiques

Bob Lewis

I knew they'd search me at Customs in the same way that I knew I'd be killed if I went to Chu-Yan Dong. I didn't really know, you understand, but I had a fairly strong notion. The trouble with Chu-Yan Dong is that SRT is the only way (or was thought to be) and the trouble with SRT is that I dislike it and am no good at it. I don't know whether I disliked it first and became incompetent later, or whether I came to dislike it because I was no good. Being no good at SRT is a real drawback for others in the party because everyone gets frozen while you're prating your way to the top. The consequence of this, if you're otherwise able-bodied, is that you come up last. There are certain risks associated with coming up last on a new pitch, particularly if you are slow, jerky and heavier than those in front. Since I "felt ill" on the morning of Chu-Yan Dong, it was Ian Houghton who ascended last. He found the rope half-severed at a point of contact and berated the man in front for not repositioning it. I was safely elsewhere.

Mine was the only vehicle searched. There was nothing unusual about it, a mere Ford Fiesta. I stuck one of the plastic deflectors on the roof before disembarking - perhaps it was taken as a sign - "here's our man". "You do know there are certain things you're not allowed to bring into this country?" said the official. "Yes", I said, "there's nothing here, no contraband, nothing druggy, I haven't used my duty-free card, I've nothing of a sexual nature - you can search, if you like", I added. "I intend to", he said. They did. I thought about Tony Jarratt's tale of customs: "I'm a potholer, he's a neuro-surgeon and he's the world's leading expert on dandelions" (I hope I'm remembering right). It was true. I bet they weren't searched.

After about thirty minutes they'd searched the car, checked the ownership, dropped two torches onto the concrete and dumped the rope on an oily floor. They'd X-rayed the spare wheel. "The heater-vents don't work", announced the officer. "They worked for me", I replied. I turned-on the ignition. They worked. "What's this?" he demanded, handing me a package of polythene sealed tightly with that strong brown adhesive tape you can buy in Post Offices. "I don't know", I said, "It's been sealed for four years". "D'you mind opening it?", he asked. "Let's have a look", I answered. "It's a food pack of some sort, that I never used", I added. Under the wrapping was a healthy packet, still sealed, of "SOSMIX", a dehydrated vegetable meal. "I'd rather you didn't open it", I smiled. He pointed to the top: "It says 'best before July '91'. 'I could always eat it later'" I agreed. "We have to do this to catch people" they explained at the end. I don't think they believed people do solo trips to the Pyrenees, certainly not people who own a car, are unemployed and travel via l'Autoroute du

hashish". I left them with the notion that Frenchmen smuggle illegal items via Puits Lepineux and they informed me that the longest British cave was a "touristy" site in the Forest of Dean. Ah well. The "real" smugglers probably enter Britain complete with plausible reasons, a wife and family in tow and a trailer-tent packed solid with cannabis resin. I have written to tell them all this.

One of the attractions of the western Pyrenees is the Canyon d'Olhadibie. Another is PSM. I did not officially go to PSM. Salle Navarre is a menace: I did three and a half big circles on mountainous slopes before rediscovering the disintegrated ladder which marks the climb back out.

The best low-level camping at the moment seems to be behind l'Hotel des Touristes at Licq. Larrau is hopeless and Ste. Engrace more expensive. From Licq, moreover, you can shop easily in Tardets and choose which valley to visit without feeling committed. The girls aren't bad either.

The thing about the western valley is the Olhadible, which is admittedly not a cave but a fine through-abseil without obvious escapes. If you have enjoyed the Berger below Camp Two, this is a soft option for which lighting is unnecessary. The biggest pitch is 35 metres but there are about twenty others and a fair amount of deep water. With the exception of the "grande cascade", the most alarming feature is probably the suspension-bridge on the tourist path up the Holzarte. This crosses the Olhadible just above the confluence of the two gorges and bears a faded sign disclaiming liability for any kind of accident. It bounces around on wires installed in 1920 and is officially 170 metres above the gorge (though it looks less, maybe 100 metres). A long mile upstream beyond the bridge, eventually on a level track, gains the first real cascade which is also the first visible one! Go down the bank and jump the stream. If this is too wide to jump, consider the conditions or rig from trees downstream on the same bank as the track. The pitch is 15m or 20m, according to which option you take. You are now virtually obliged to do the whole gorge, proceeding immediately to a 3m abseil almost in the stream-bed and then a 10m one on the left where you dangle in front of a cave formed by enormous boulders. Beyond is the "grande cascade", with hangers and maillons on the right side. These maillons give an 8m abseil into a pool on the very edge where more maillons are in situ, adjacent to the pool or, in high water, further to the right. Because the pitch is convex in profile you can't see whether the rope is down, so the middle needs to be marked. Assuming 'Beal' doesn't shrink enormously, the pitch is 34m.

Continued on page 13

Letters to the Editor

Dear Nick,

I have just read the paragraph on Lechuguilla cave in *Journal 243*. Perhaps it is of interest that the Wessex was represented on that record breaking expedition of October 15-23 1994 by myself and Grant Lindsay of Matlock. Perhaps the approx. 1.25 miles of new cave surveyed by the expedition could be counted towards the barrel of beer competition?

Regards and compliments of the season

Stuart Genders
Inkersall,
20 December 1994.

Dear Nick

Enclosed are a few pages of my ramblings outlining a trip I made last July to Prince of Wales Island, Alaska. There's lots of karst and caves and very few cavers.

The initial paragraphs in particular may be of interest to some of the old brigade who know the Canadian cavers. (Linda Hastie was one of Castleguard's original explorers and worked a good deal with Derek Ford and was involved as the only woman on the Infamous Castleguard film among her many other underground outings.

The Tongass cave project really does need and welcome competent cavers. If you could pass the word it would be most appreciated. It's good to be back in the game again after such a long lay-off even though I ache a bit.

Regards,

Paul Hadfield
British Columbia
December 1994.

The article appears elsewhere in this Journal. People interested in caving on POWI may like to contact me and I'll put them in touch with Paul. - NJW.

Nick,

You might be interested to know that Alan Fincham, an old Wessex stalwart from the '50's who was involved in a lot of the explorations in the classic Mendip systems (and who went to Mossdale, via ULSA, then to Jamaica for 17 years) currently lives here in Los Angeles and will be working with me on cave palaeontology in Jamaica this month. Also, much of my dateable stal goes to

Doddering in the Dordogne

Phil Hendy

When the Young Wessex and Mike York returned from caving in the Dordogne last year, full of tales of large caves and good food and drink, it was easy to be swept along with their enthusiasm. It all seemed too good to be true, and so Brian Pitman and I made plans to take a leisurely vacation in mid-France, to find out for ourselves. It was to be a gentlemanly trip, you understand, taking into consideration the families - Daniel with me, and Sheila and Rachel with Brian. The plans progressed, and in late August we were waving a fond farewell to Blighty as we sailed on a well-appointed cattle-boat from Pompey to St. Malo. Pausing only to listen to the tinkling ivories of the resident pianist in the Bar Fred, we ate a sumptuous meal before settling down into the concrete luxury of the Pullman recliners for the night. Steerage passengers were strewn over the floor all around us, and sleep did not come easy.

A good breakfast later, we drove through a deserted Passport and Customs shed and into french France. A mere eleven hours later and we had arrived on the banks of the Dordogne, having paused only to get lost, eat lunch, and get gesticulated at by a gendarme.

We roughed it at a large campsite called Soleil Plage, near Vitrac a few miles south of Sarlat. It was populated by ex-pat Brits and sundry foreigners. The meagre facilities included bar, shop, restaurant, pool, playground, putting green and two bog blocks, but we made do, as we were well able to do without luxuries. As we speculated on the possibilities of the cave entrances visible on the far side of the river, and how to cross over to them, it began to rain, just to make us feel at home.

The next morning, I beat the Germans to the sunbeds. By lunchtime it had stopped raining. We investigated the bar, and found it sold a reasonable pint of Stella. We investigated the river, and found it was a) warmer by far than the pool, b) full of little fish, and c) easily crossable.

Within days (we had a hectic schedule) we had bought a lilo, with which to ferry our gear across the river,

Derek Ford at McMaster, another Wessex old timer. Small world.

Have a good Xmas.

Don McFarlane
California
21 December 1995.

together with Dan, as we thought it unreasonable to make him swim over wearing a NiFe cell. The first cave we investigated was a large phreatic tube from which flowed a small clear stream of ice-cold water. Fully kitted out in swimming trunks, daps, helmet and light, we entered. The cave appeared to be developed along joints; the height necessitated crawling on hands and knees. There were gasps of shock when the family jewels became submerged, and Brian exited, saying he had better keep an eye on Dan. I continued, until I came to a low sump in the side of the passage, from which the water emerged. This was not passable, but I crawled past it over a muddy constriction, to a static muddy pool with no obvious way on. So much for the vast caverns we had heard of!

We looked for more caves all the way down the river until we reached a bar, and realised we were too scruffy to get served even if we had brought some cash with us, which we hadn't. On the way we investigated every hole we found. These were mainly large entrances just above water level, which rapidly closed down to silt chokes. We were very disappointed, as Mike York had assured us that there was an extensive resurgence cave opposite the camp site. On returning to England, we learned that this was in fact the resurgence we had looked at, but last year the water had been very low, and the sump had been passable. I found and explored a small dry cave system near and above this resurgence. It might repay digging, but it was clear that some work had already been done on a precarious ascending boulder choke at the end.

A change of approach was called for, and so one afternoon we hired canoes, to go down the river from Grolejac to Soleil Plage. We stopped at every cave entrance we found, but the pattern was the same - large entrances at river level, rapidly closing to slit chokes.

We also looked at a few small caves and a cliff-dwelling near Vitrac, but found nothing of much interest or consequence.

So, lacking the resources or energy to go yomping through the hills in search of wild cave, we decided to tread the tourist trail. First on the agenda was Grand Roc, a pretty showcave half-way up a cliff near Les Eyzies. This was a circular route along a path lined with chicken mesh through a grotto full of stal, mainly large and grotesque helictites. The most famous decoration was a long straw pillar with a crosspiece reminiscent of a Cross (honestly!). However, someone had managed to poke something through the mesh only a fortnight before, and had smashed it. In its place was a colour photograph! Nearby, we looked at the large Magdalenian cliff-dwelling at Laugherie Basse. Very impressive, with a preserved section of the dig, and a couple of tantalising holes going off at the back. The guides here spoke no English, but we were handed English-language sheets which explained what we were supposed to look at. The next port of call was the Speleological Museum, where we had free entry on production of our Wessex membership cards (so that's

what they're for!). This museum is half-way up a cliff, housed partly in a semi-artificial cliff dwelling. There was a good display of caving and diving kit ancient and modern, plus some archaeological material. Many UK exhibits had been donated by one A. Knibbs, but we failed to see any reference to the other club. Perhaps they don't get quite everywhere after all. We rounded off the day with some ornithology while we sat at a pavement cafe in Les Eyzies.

High spot of the trip was a visit to Padirac. This was caving in style! Scorning the lift, we descended an iron staircase to the bottom of the Gouffre, and then a concrete stair to a concrete path along the streamway. It reminded me of a NHASA dig, but on a slightly grander scale. Hailing a passing boatman, we navigated the quarter-mile of deep water to a further concrete path, from where we followed the river for a way before ascending into the 310-foot high Great Dome Gallery with its' perched lake. A very impressive trip, though again, no English spoken, yet we were expected to tip both the guide and the boatman. Feeling somewhat peckish after this gruelling bit of exploration, we found a cafe, where a promising sign informed us "We try to speak English". The waitress was Glaswegian, which explains all!

So, a very leisurely and enjoyable bit of geriatric caving. Lessons worth passing on are: Diesel cars are more economical than petrol. *Fruits de mer* include raw and chewy shellfish. Wine at less than £1 per bottle is drinkable, but best start on the good stuff (from £1.20). Allow more time and money than you think you'll need. A crystal ball and compass are more useful than a French road map and non-existent road signs. French bacon fries up like slices of old walking boot. French shop-girls do not like you squeezing their avocados.

A quick look at les Pyrénées-Atlantiques (*continued*)

It could be split, but only if you have all the gear to do so. After the "grande cascade" it's a splendid stroll through magnificent rock scenery with harmless short abseils and regular swimming. There is an underground section, but it goes without a light and in two to four hours you find yourself sliding around under the suspension-bridge. The pitch at the Junction with the Holzarte can be free-climbed among the boulders. The Holzarte leads downstream to the path and car-park near the hostel at Logibar. This area, in the recommended season (August-September) for doing the gorge, is rich in insect life, especially Lepidoptera. Hummingbird Hawk-moths hover among the sunlit blooms alongside the Holzarte and, after dark, huge hawk-moths with eyes glowing in one's lights, are frequently to be seen in the Gave de Larrau. I think these were *Herse convolvuli* (their probosces were at least three inches long) but am not sure. I didn't have room for the identification texts. Bad enough to be a caver - how you tell Customs and Excise that you're a caver interested in wildlife I've no idea.

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Please send your subscription to Dave Cooke (address at front of the *Journal*)

Eastwater - the first rift chamber (*continued*)

The extension has been visited on only a handful of occasions since, despite its inclusion in the latest Mendip Underground, where it has been significantly down-played to protect the formations. Anyone intent on visiting the passages described should find the directions given in that guide quite adequate. Possibilities for extension still exist - it would, for example, be fairly straightforward to link Dark Cars and Sunglasses with Primrose Path to create another Eastwater round trip, but at the cost of the almost inevitable destruction of some fine formations.

The best leads remain the draughting rift and the fluctuating pool at the end of the fossil passage. The Rift Chambers - Dark Cars - Weaver/Bowen - Primrose passages obviously interconnect through a complex series of narrow rifts. Voice connections abound and powerful draughts seem to come from everywhere. The position is further complicated by the close proximity of the Terminal Rift at the base of the 13 Pots with the Primrose Pot Series. East of this region, no cave is known, whilst to the west lies a big blank space before

the West End Series is met. The main cave water sinks at Mortons Pot, which trends, right through the middle of this gap towards Southbank, as does Dark Cars itself - possibly heading for the fossil upstream segment of The Lambeth Walk. There is undoubtedly much cave to be found in-between. Furthermore, the discoveries in the West End prove that the local water-table lies much deeper in this cave than was once thought so Southward there could be another 100ft depth potential for Primrose Pot itself, and more than 300ft for Dark Cars. Decent figures by any standard. Encouraging progress at Mortons Pot promises to shed further light on this fascinating area.

And what of the fabled East End Series, which started it all?

Watch this space. This cave is far from finished.

REFERENCES

The First Rift Chamber Extension, Eastwater Cavern

(T. Atkinson) *W.C.C. Journal* Vol.8 No. 101 p.254 (1965)

Born again caver (continued)

undescended slimy black pit. Here we went down to a ledge some thirty feet down before calling it a day.

Next day we were back and dropped the black pit to a horrible vadose canyon filled with thixotropic mud that continually shifted and fell out below us and which was so slimy and pervasive that bridging and jamming oneself between the walls was impossible. We shot only two survey legs before leaving "Mud Sucker" passage for future generations. Back in the main streamway we took a tourist trip so I could view Caddis Fly Creek, so named because on the day of its discovery Caddis flies, (presumably washed in from the surface), were seen hatching in the light of cavers lamps. It was a beautiful active streamway carved in handsome marble, with at one point a large granite erratic in the passageway.

Out of the cave, we surveyed over to another cave entrance some hundred and fifty feet away. Once more the "bulky Brit" syndrome struck. I was unable to even get through the entrance. Hung up on my chest in a vertical down squeeze, it was a no go. I hiked back to the camp and cooked supper.

For the next day, Dave and I swapped roles, he, being slim and agile went with Kevin to survey the new cave whilst I became assistant for Tim's paleontological work.

Bumper Cave had been found the previous year. It is a short cave, perhaps only 100ft in length but contains innumerable bones from both Black and Grizzly bears who presumably used the place as an hibernaculum, and who, when they woke up in the Springtime after their Wintertime snooze, found the entrance blocked by ice so subsequently expired there. There is a truly remarkable number of bones there, scattered all over the floor space, including complete skulls of both adult and juvenile bears. It was the first time I had witnessed, let alone participated in a paleontological dig, and although my role consisted of that of an unskilled labourer, I found it quite enlightening. At the end of our session I exited the cave, crawling with a haul sack full of carefully labelled bones and two large plastic ziploc bags each containing about five kilos of sloppy cave mud. This little load was then packed about a kilometre through the forest to the washing station we had set up on our first day.

Washing the mud samples through three graduated sieves and finally through cheesecloth yielded a veritable treasure trove of small bones from fangs to phalanges. A molar which I scooped out of one of the washes later turned out to be from a black bear that Tim pronounced to have been probably one of the largest such animals North America has ever known, surpassing in size as it did, all similar specimens in the Smithsonian.

My time on POWI was only too brief and next year I shall be back again for longer. Already I have received my invitation to join the Tongass Cave Project again in 1995 and fully intend to return.

In addition to exploration on Prince of Wales Island, there will be work done on Heceta Island and there, is talk of a non Forest Service sponsored trip to Chichagoff Island. The surface terrain below timberline is largely temperate rain forest. If you think bushwhacking in tropical rain forest is tough, you really should try this stuff for comparison. (I've done both so I already know which I prefer).

There is lots and lots of unexplored karst. In each and every trip I did I was into virgin cave; this is not unusual on POWI, indeed, NOT to get into virgin cave is unusual.

Please feel free to write or call me for more information if you want to come along in July '95.

Be sure your vertical skills are up to scratch!

Paul Hadfield Box 791 Stewart BC, VOT 1W0 Canada,
Phone: 604-636-2302

club diary

9th: Yorkshire Booking: County Pot
14-17th: NAMHO Conference, Shropshire
14th: Wessex Gouffre Berger booking
17th-21st: 1995 NSS Convention, Blacksburg, West Virginia

March

5th: Cambrian Caving Council AGM, Brynmawr
11th: Yorkshire booking: Gaping Gill Main Shaft
12th: Yorkshire booking: Juniper Gulf
17th: MRO AGM, 8.00pm, Hunter's Lodge
18th: NCA AGM, Stafford.
25th: MRO Training: Observation of the Casualty, Hunter's, 7.30pm

April

1-2nd: Portland Meet.
15-17th: Berger Training, Yorkshire
15th: Yorkshire booking: Stream Passage Pot/Flood Entrance
16th: Yorkshire booking: Disappointment Pot/Bar Pot
29th: MRO: Club practice follow up. Hunter's Lodge, 7.30pm
30th: Otter Hole Trip (see caving notes)

May

6-8th: Wales meet, stay at WSG, Penderyn
6th: CSCC AGM, Hunter's Lodge Yorkshire booking: Pool Sink
7th: Yorkshire booking: Cow Pot/ Lancaster Hole
7th: OFD Columns open day. Meet Penwyllt, 10:30am
13-14th: Hut working weekend
12th: MRO Wardens Meeting, 8.00pm, Hunter's Lodge
14th: Committee meeting, Upper Pitts
20th: MRO Technical Equipment seminar, Westbury Quarry
25th: BCRA Hydrology Meeting, Assynt
27-29th: Berger Training, Yorkshire.
27th: Yorkshire Booking: Hurnell Moss Pot
28th: OFD Columns open day. Meet Penwyllt, 10:30am
29th: Yorkshire booking: Long Kin West

June

17th: Yorkshire booking: Gingling Hole
24/25th: 1995 Caver's Fair, SWCC, Penwyllt, South Wales
25th: Committee meeting, Upper Pitts

July

8th: Yorkshire Booking: Top Sink/ Lancaster Hole

August

5-6th: Hut working weekend
6th: Committee meeting, Upper Pitts
28th: OFD Columns open day. Meet Penwyllt, 10:30am

September

10th: Yorkshire Booking: Birks Fell
17th: Committee meeting, Upper Pitts

October

14th: Yorkshire Booking: Penyghent Pot
15th: Yorkshire Booking: Little Hull Pot
21st: AGM and Annual Dinner

November

18th: Yorkshire Booking: Lost Johns
19th: Yorkshire Booking: Rumbling Hole
26th: MRO Wardens Meeting, 8.00pm, Hunter's Lodge

December

30th: Yorkshire Booking: Notts Pot
31st: Yorkshire Booking: Lost Johns

1996

August

3rd - 9th: 1996 NSS Convention, Salida, Colorado

1997

August

6th-20th: UIS International Congress of Speleology, La Chaux de Fonds, Switzerland.