

THE WESSEX CAVE CLUB JOURNAL

VOLUME 23 NUMBER 250 JULY 1996

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

Club Notes

Wessex People

Sue Bonar has moved to:

254 Byng Street, Orange, 2800, NSW, Australia

Bruce Albright can now be found at:

1326 Clayton, Denver, Colorado, 80206, USA tel (303) 860-0320. Bruce has written to let Wessex members who are planning to go to the **NSS Convention** in Colorado this year, know that there are 2 WCC members in Denver - himself and Hazel Barton.

Congratulations to Nick and Anna Williams on their Marriage on 25th May this year.

Hut News

The garage donated by Cheddar Caves has now been built on the concrete base and will be used as a **storeroom**. Power and water have been laid on and the concrete at the far end has now been laid so that the power-washer can be re-installed.

A **drying room** is currently being built within the changing room at the far end of the showers. This will have a coin-operated meter for heating and de-humidifying.

A mass attack is planned for **painting the lounge** sometime during August. The paint has been available for ages - now we just need volunteers!

Other News

The BCRA Conference **Hidden Earth** is being held in Sheffield 13th - 15th September and we are thinking of applying for a block booking which should reduce the price to approx. £9 for both days. If you are interested, contact Caving sec. We are also thinking of having a stand at the Conference - any offers of assistance or ideas?

If you are staying at the hut, signing in the book on arrival is for insurance purposes, in case of fire. It also helps us work out finances at the end of the year so we know how many guest nights and member nights to budget for. Please also note that everyone who stays at the hut is expected to pay the going rate - at the moment this is £2 for members and £3 for guests.

The Wessex has a club meet to **North Wales** on **13/14th July** and we will be camping at the Red Lion public house in Rhosesmor. There are no facilities but the landlord has said he will do breakfast and snacks in the evening if required. From the A55 North Wales after Queensferry and approx 400m after Little Chef, turn left signposted to Rhosesmor. At the Britannia pub on bend, turn left. After approx 800m is a T- junction, turn left. Follow road over cattle grid to the Blue Bell pub on the right. Carry on past the Cross Keys pub on the left to a playground and waste ground on the left. The Red Lion Pub is on the left and camping is in the field behind the carpark behind the pub. Tel 01352 780570 (in emergency, ie lost etc)

Congratulations to the **Shepton Mallet Caving Club** who on 8th June managed to win the Wessex Challenge. "*We couldn't have won it without the Wessex*" was one quote heard!

Don't forget the **Cricket Match** on 6th July against the BEC. It will be held in the 40-acre field opposite the caravan site next to the Wessex and will be followed by a BBQ in the evening.

On Saturday 3rd August there is a conservation day at **Compton Martin Ochre Mine** with a BBQ in the evening - all welcome to come and help.

The planned trip to the Picos has been changed into an exploratory trip to **Slovenia** and will take place during the **last week of August / first two weeks Sept**. The plan is to meander down to Slovenia (possibly via the Vercors) and camp en route. For further details of this and other trips planned (ie, Pwll Du meet at August B H, Otter Hole, etc) please contact Les Williams (Caving sec.).

New Members

Emma Heron:

73 Kenilworth Rd, Bognor Regis, West Sussex
PO21 5NF 01243 82087.

Bruce Duncan Fraser:

PO Box 78, Eastleigh, Hants, SO50 6UQ
01703 642252

Caving Notes

GENERAL

The **British Cave Rescue Council** have published their incident report for the period 1st January - 31st December 1995. The table of incidents is included with the MRO report on page 126 for comparison.

The NCA has set up an electronic communication system with the help of UK Online which amongst other things are making space available for an **NCA Web site**. Even if you haven't got your own computer and modem, you'll be able to see what's on offer by going down to your local library - many libraries will soon have connections to the Internet.

WALES

Ogof Draenen now stands well over 40km in length. With increasing numbers of cavers from many different clubs working on extending and surveying the system, Morgannwg Caving Club have now taken the lead in setting up a Management Committee to ensure the conservation of and continued access to the cave. All clubs involved in the exploration and work in Ogof Draenen have been invited to nominate a representative to this Committee, which it is hoped will provide a forum for discussion on matters relating to the conservation of this unique system.

Ogof Draenen Special Publication. If you have any information on the cave, please let Chris Howes have it. Do not leave it to others.

South Wales Caver Training Day

Saturday 13 th July

Workshops on:

SRT (Introduction and Rescue)

Ladder & Line

Cave Photography

Cave Art

Surveying

Further details from: Juliet Parker-Smith

Plas Pencelli, Pencelli

Brecon, Powys LD3 7LX

Tel: 01874 6653211

DERBYSHIRE

While caving in Derbyshire, if you notice any **DMM's** which you suspect to be **lose**, please contact Mark Lowe on 0161 330 5111 at:
141 Birch Lane, Dukinfield, Cheshire, SK16 5AP

The main part of the installation of DMM's in **Rowter Hole** is complete. A future visit is planned to put a deviation into the entrance shaft and to complete work on a handline to the upper levels.

DMM's have been installed on the climbs into and out of the "cart gate" in **Odin Mine**. Please note that the bolting teams have bolted the only relatively safe route into Odin and even this route should be treated with respect. Other areas are best avoided.

The Y-hang part way down the 2nd pitch in **Knotlow** has now been removed. It has been replaced with a single DMM for a **DEVIATION** for which a long sling is required.

It is NOT a re-belay.

DEVON AND CORNWALL

Radford Cave remains closed due to the instability of the entrance chamber - DCUC are looking into ways of stabilising this.

The keys for **Bakers Pit** and **Afton Red Rift** have been changed. Applications for keys should be sent to DCRO Treasurer Pete Waite at:

17 The Mint, Exeter, EX4 3BL

Tel: (01392 56438)

There is concern over the damage suffered by the well-decorated cave **Dog Hole** and so there are now proposals to gate this cave and to operate access on a key system similar to Bakers Pit and Afton - no further news as yet.

MENDIP

There is currently a proposal for **Rhino Rift** to be rebolted. CSMC have asked member clubs for feedback.

Priddy Green Sink has now been connected to Cowsh Aven in Swildon's Hole - see overleaf for survey and more details.

Editorial

Following on from last Journal's theme of safety (although more by luck than judgement!), this issue contains the MRO Incident Report for 1995. I have also included the British Cave Rescue Council Incident Report for this period so you can see how our area compares to others.

Uniano Paulista de Espeleologia, Desnivel, Brazil are a group dedicated to the exploration and surveying of Caverns and they have just started a Journal exchange with the Wessex. We welcome them and look forward to the continuing and ever-growing exchange of information.

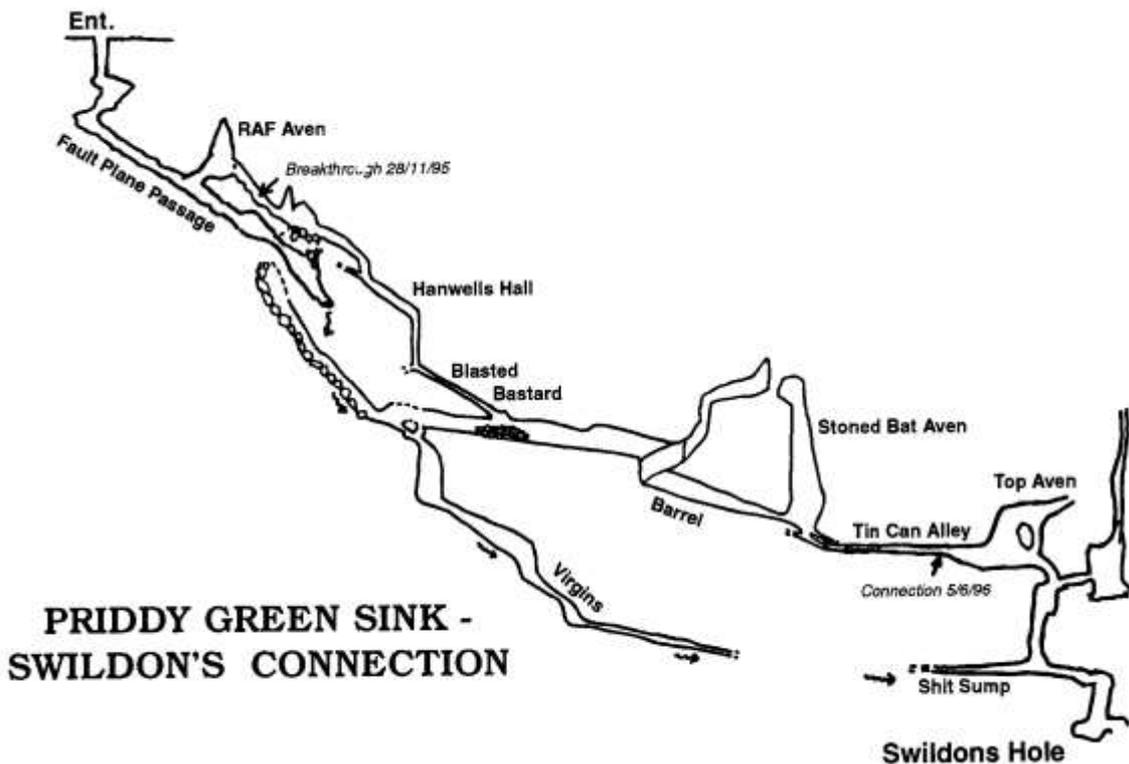
Thanks very much to Michael Cooper, Jim Rands and Pete Hann for their donations of books to the Wessex Cave Club Library. All donations are always more than welcome.



Stickers bearing the Ubique Primus logo are now available.

They are sold in multiples of 10 at a cost of £1 for 10, and the size is exactly as shown - ie, 30mm diameter

Mendip Breakthrough



After 38 years of climbing, digging and blasting the connection was finally made on 5th June 1996. An exchange trip was made by Rich Blake, Mike Willet, Adrian Hole (BEC members) and Brian Woodward (SMCC) who went from the Sink to Swildon's Hole, and Ivan Sandford and Tony Jarratt (BEC members) who did it the opposite

way. Both parties took under 3 hours and then spent about the same time celebrating!

It is a trip for the connoisseur but before attempting this trip, check the route with someone and beware that it is a very tight cave and a severe trip.

WCC Logbook Extracts

24.3.96 - Diccan Pot

Dom & Max

Bye Golly, It were cold down there

30.3.96 - OFD

Les, Mark, Andy, Dave

In OFD 1 ... then out ... in time for tea at Dudleys. In cave 5V₂ hrs. In Dudleys 2 hrs

31.3.96 - Little Crapnell Swallet

Carmen

... to sump ...again. Lower water levels gave good vis along sump, looks good! Must return with a keen 'boy' to deposit him down and along sump (in the name of cave research)

9.4.96 - GB

Ric Halliwell, Steve Pickersgill, Barbara Jenkins, Nigel Graham

To Bat Passage. Great Chamber hid from us ... fine helictities near here (Bridge), some of us had walked below without even noticing

8.4.96 - Swildons

Messers Hewins, Prewer & Thomas (senior) Gentle summer wise wamble to 20. Lots of nice long stops for photos

10.4.96 - Lodmore Swallet (NHASA's dig)

Ric and Pat Halliwell, Steve Pickersgill, Barbara Jenkins, Nigel Graham

Annual (Easter dig). Inspection team did venture forth into said chasm and helped winch out vast number of buckets of clag and thus veritably earned their ale

2.4.96 - Gaping Ghyll

Dom & Tonic

Went to do Direct now it's on P hangers however deviation still on 8mm spit so 'no brain Sealy' having forgotten to take a couple of hangers had to revert to that old favourite – Dihedral

3.4.96 - Box Head Pot (Leck Fell)

Dom & Tonic

Superb NCC engineering has turned the entrance from what must have been suicidal to a nice safe plastic tube. 102m shaft is split by a very unstable ledge at 34m - any rocks knocked from ledge follow the direct path and the remaining 68m is a freehang so be careful

9.4.96 - Thrupe Lane Swallet

Dom & Martin Ellis

Interesting afternoon bolting out over head of 200ft pitch. Crumbling rock turned what would otherwise be a straight forward traverse into a serious bolting session. Alcove/Passage on far side with small rift leading on - will require hammering/crowbar (possibly chemical persuasion) if further look required. In keeping with the cave's other high perch I have decided to call the mini chamber "Sparrow's Nest"?!?!!

5.4.96 - Rowten

Andy, Tall Graham, Cookie, Debs

Flyover route, rigger accused of having a buttered cat hidden in fleecy

5.4.96 - Kingsdale

Les, Mark, Simon, Mak, Jo, Bean, TNBD, LBS Bottomed **Bull Pot** - all 4! pitches. Out to **Jingling** - lateral cleft route yeh ha. Off hill via **Yordas**

6.4.96 - Dale Barn Cave

*Les, Mark, Vern, Mak, Jo, Rosie (mud glorious mud), Nick (lying ba***rd) Williams*

A nice man told us to go on a quality trip - he lied!!

6.4.96 - Black Shiver

Andy, Tall Graham, Bean, Tim NBD

Lots of crawling in water and tight squeezes. A refusal by one of us at Black Dub ... this time Tall Graham had his camera with film

6.4.96 - Black Shiver

Debs, Cookie, Simon, Simon, Ann, Mark

Why were the de-rigging team singing to the tunes of Walking In the Air and Mission Impossible and talking about chocolate caves?

6.4.96 – What about **Great Douk** – Proper Cave!

7.4.96 - Gaping Ghyll Invasion

Andy, Tall Graham, Les, Mark, Rosie, Vern, Mak, Jo, Cookie, Debs, Tim NBD, Bean, Simon, Nick & Ian (Shepton), Cal, Mark & Anne (Coventry)

All entrances rigged. Shepton members had to come with us to get a quality trip. It was a miracle no-one got left behind!

8.4.96 - Alum-Diccan extravaganza

Andy, Max, Cookie, Mak, Jo, Rosie, Vern, Andy, Les, Debs, Bean, Simon

Everyone seemed to make it out one way or another. Les was glad to use the Debs ladder.

13.4.96 - Goughs Cave, Cheddar

Malc Foyle, Robin Brown, Mike Thomas, Chris Castle

At long last we had success ... with only minor equipment failure mostly Malc's! - as usual! Malc & Robin finished line work in two ... continued pushing new passage to find caverns measureless to man! Robin took a compass bearing - the rest of us were impressed! Mike checked out the lines to -18m in sump 3 ready for our big push! Mike solo in Sheppard's Crook took a small fall in full kit that scared the life out of him. Though not as much as it would have bothered the MRO if it had have been serious! Ha Ha

14.4.96 - Crapnell Swallet

Carmen & Andy

A trip to the sump - an easy stroll for Carmen, hard crawling for me. Carmen went into the sump and laid out all the dive line

20.4.96 - Ogof Draenen Wessex Extensions

Dom, Mark, Cookie, Rich (Websell), Simon

Mark and Cookie digging and rift bashing found interesting rift (the Nickynocky Nu) ... will require a rope to drop. Dom, Rich and Simon down/upstream at bottom of "Didjurydo". ~200ft small passage found. Interesting draft. 10hrs

24.4.96 - Goughs Cave, Cheddar

Dom, Tau & Chris Castle

SRT Rescue Practice. Lots of fun getting people off ropes and cutting them when me knife doesn't snap!

26.4.96 - Swildons's Hole

Dom

Wimped on NW/Stream due to copious numbers of worms and cowsh. Troubles quite high, even had to bail first one a little!?!?*@!?

28.4.96 - Swildons

Maurice, Judy, Prew

Now that the entrance to Swildons has settled into an easy mode, Judy decided it was time to return to this subterranean wonderworld. In the pub under the influence of drink, Prew offered to come in support. All well to the 20 ...on returning ... disaster - Judy fell off the 8ft drop (that's why it's called a drop?). Heroically I broke her fall partly before we had sprawled face down in the streamway. In the water rift, Prew noticed the water was turning red with blood from Judy's thumb. Our MRO expert produced his first aid kit - a tatty neck scarf that had already seen service on Zot's leg and Dave Summer's knee. The flow stemmed, we slowly climbed towards the wafts of the pub.

2.5.96 - Bull Pot, Kingsdale

Dom & Chris Castle

Note: bolts very high in roof at end of long thin traverse on last pitch!

"Didn't know there was a last pitch!!!" *Les*
(There must be, even if you can free climb it!)

4.5.96 - GB

Arundels' James, Oz, Roy, Graham and John

To Great Chamber and around the back passage. Lost a maillon somewhere - give it a good home somebody!

4/5.5.96 - West Mendip Way

Max, Christine, Maras, Batten, Leg, Rhys & Helmore

Walked the W. M. Way - because it was there? Well, us 30-somethings need a new challenge now the thrill of freezing cold water, mud and carbide has worn off, and some of us have "outgrown" our wetsuits!

9.5.96 - Priddy Green Sink

Dom & Adrian

A few bags of crap removed from the latest end? Nice aven climb, shame it doesn't go anywhere

11.5.96 - Ogof Draenen Wessex Series

Mark, Mak, Simon

Dropped Nicky-Nacky-Nocky-No!!! by rope (approx 30ft). 100ft rift passage found becoming a bit tight. 7hrs

Am I the first to notice that this log is upside down? No! "But it has been a Wessex tradition for the last 3 years!!"

18.5.96 - Banwell Bone and Stalactite Caves

Maurice & Judy Hewins, Mike Cooper, Jim Rands, Brian Pitman, Les, Tall Graham, Phil & Daniel Hendy, Cookie, Andy Morse. Carmen, Trish, Tim, Martin, Becky, Poppie, Peter

Explored Banwell Bone and Stalactite Caves, courtesy of the ACG and the owners of "The Caves" to whom a donation towards the tower restoration was made. Route to Great Chamber and Green Lake Chamber proved elusive for some. We thought Brian Pitman was psyched out on the squeeze into Main Chamber, but he was just having an internal battle with his lunch. A lot of film was exposed

19.5.96 - Swildons

Tall Graham & Dom (Tortoise and the Hare)

Short round trip. Not helped by Dom bailing into the ducks to make them sporty for me!

Library Acquisitions

WHITE ROSE POTHOLE CLUB Feb 1996 Vol 15 No 1

A Night on the Fells (Wast Water)
Bull Pot: this way and that - SRT trip and a few minor hang ups
Dow Cave - the first cave rescue? - an account lifted from "A Thousand Miles in Wharfedale" by Edmund Bog 1992. Douk Cave was the site of this event, well worth a read
Survey Notes - this is a brief run down on two survey programs for the computer buffs: - an update of SURVEY now known as SURV95; and SURVEX which is based on SURVEYOR 88. An example is included which includes Hagg Gill Pot

CHELSEA SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER 1996 Vol 38 No 3

AGM and club news
Trognat launched - Pengelly's information site on the World Wide Web. Perhaps cavers should include Trognat URL in their hot list. Trognat is at: <http://ourworld.compusrve.com/homepages/hape/>
A guide to the CSS (Nov 95) extensions north of Galeria Garimeiros, Ogof Draenen - route finding and a survey of the Realm of Baron von Carno plus a further survey showing the above in relation to the rest of the cave
System for removing Rock and Boulder obstructions
How to spell in Welsh
From the Whitewalls log

CHELSEA SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER April 1996 Vol 38 No 4

Gouffre Pierre St Martin - history, permission, access, etc
Ogof Draenen - correspondence received by the Editor. CSS reasoning for a second entrance. A letter from the original diggers Peter Bolt and Oxford Uni Cave Club. Basically, it can be summed up that the majority of cavers are opposed to a second entrance

CHELSEA SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER May 1996 Vol 38 No 5

Ogof Draenen - digging the second entrance has been stopped to let some form of mediation take place

UNIÃO PAULISTA DE ESPELEOLOGIA DESNIVEL May 1995 Vol 1 No 1

Editorial activities in 1994
Brief article on the Pedra Grande and the caves
Lapa de Sao Vincent - a short history of the speleological exploration of the area. Map of the area
XI Expedicao Sao Vicente - description of the project and the various activities which appeared to include making a video
GPS - a relatively easy to understand article on how it works and its use for the benefits of caving
Spits - how & where to use them

UNIÃO PAULISTA DE ESPELEOLOGIA DESNIVEL August 1995 Vol 1 No 2

Relato de Incident - report on a cave accident and its conclusion
XI Expedicao Sao Vicente 1995 - a brief report on the achievements of the Uniao Paulista de Speleologias first large expedition and the exploits of a number of visitors on the expedition
VI Epeleo - weekend caving conference, various topics
Two basic approaches to cave survey stations

MNRC NEWSLETTER Feb 1996 No 52

Primarily MNRC news and activities in Mendip, Yorkshire and Scotland

MENDIP RESCUE ORGANISATION

Annual report and incident list for 1995 and annual meeting of the committee

GRAMPIAN SPELEOLOGICAL GROUP BULLETIN Third Series March 1996 Vol 13 No 5

Club news and area reports
Just Another Swift Half - a southern caver's visit to Sutherland and what they did with the Grampian (or is it what the Grampian did to them?)
Descriptions of the caves visited, new passage discovered and surveys
Chile, South America - Chilly? Chilli? or Chile - a visit to Ceva Del Milodon This appears to be little more than a very large rock shelter, some 200m wide, 80m high and 600m deep. The cave has archaeological significance.
Some more work in Bowden Hill, Scotland - further exploration in the Bowden Hill Limestone Mines, West Lothian - description and a survey
More about a remarkable cavern at Stains, Aberdeenshire continuing historical research into this seemingly 'well-recorded in days gone by' cave, while modern records are rather vague. Includes an engraving of the cave published in 1799
Cave exploring in the State of Meghalaya, North East India - a mixture of clubs took part in this expedition, and with the help of local guides, several new caves were found, surveyed and photographed. Descriptions of the caves, with photographs and surveys
Claonaite 7- - it's getting personal. Alan Jeffrey's horror story with a sort of happy ending?
Grampian Speleological Group Bulletin Index to third series Volume Nos 1-5

IN THE ABYSS CRIAG VETTER Bill Stone

This is an out take from a USA magazine "Outside" and is an account of Bill Stone's caving and diving work in Huatla Cavern in Mexico. Contains colour pictures and a schematic survey

NSS NEWS
Jan 1996 Vol 54 No 1

Alabama - the incredible Tyrolean Traverse - this is of interest to the club's rope snakes
The remainder of the publication is taken up with internal news

NSS NEWS
Feb-Mar 1996 Vol 54 Nos 2-3

Pigeon Mountain Grotto hosts an Outdoor Adventure Weekend - a resume of events and thanks to all who took part
Bolted Rock Climbing Routes in Oregon Lava Tubes - covers the problem of when the interests of cave conservation clash with climbers who feel that they have a right to climb, even in archaeologically sensitive areas
Holstermans Pit Update, Pennsylvania - the ongoing fight to protect a cave from the activities of a Quarry
The South-eastern Cave Conservancy - yet more problems with access, legal hassle and land owners. Nice photographs of where it's no longer possible to go
Cave Conservation Issues in Federally-managed caves discussion, analysis and photos
Cost Accounting 101 - the effect cave diving may have on a site
A New Standard - do newer cavers have a better attitude towards cave conservation than older cavers? This article seems to show that they do
Conservation, Preservation and the Community Caver Bat Habitat in Caves - what are the Caver's responsibilities?
A variety of articles are included regarding the restoration of formations and caves (ie, Crossings Cave and the Lost Soldiers Cave, California) complete with techniques, materials and illustrations

BELFREY BULLETIN
1996 Vol 49 No 2

Club news and internal politics
Philippines - an account of the trip's work to date
An epistle from a Mexican cave - Cerro Grande region
Letter from the Phillipines - a move into a new area and its results

CRAVEN RECORD
April 1996 No 42

Club news and forthcoming events
The rebolting of the wet route in Sell Gill
A Welcome Return to Transylvania, Romania: - a mixed group of cavers from Hungary and Romania were based in the Garda Seaca Valley in the Bihor mountains and four caves were visited: Hodobana Cave system 15km long, Coiba Mare - Coiba Mica (Joint cave), Pestera Oilor (Sheeps Cave) and then the gated cave of Hoanca Apei Cave; well decorated and full of the bones from the extinct Cave Bear (*Ursus spelaeus*), dead some 15 thousand years. A digging trip visited Avenul cu Spinare Cave, then finally Pestera Varfuras Cave, a cave with a reputation of having a very tight squeeze
Caving by Tramline; A winter expedition to Hungary's Buda Hills which form part of the capital Budapest. The caves are formed by hot water action, these caves lie beneath the streets of the city, many are show caves but can be visited out of hours with local cavers: Gellert Hegyi Cave, Pal Volgyi Cave, Matyas Hegyi Cave, Szemlo Hegyi Cave, Ferenc Hegyi Cave, Jozsef Hegyi Cave. The article has really useful information of who to contact, where to stay and transport
Pierre St Martin 1995 - a through trip from the SC3 entrance. Lots of good information on route finding, a rigging guide, access arrangements, camp sites and all those handy to know bits and pieces
Changes Afoot - a tour of Mendip, with particular attention given to Swildons Hole
Biochemistry for Cavers - a general guide to how your body works under stress and the best food to eat
A Cure for Claustrophobia - if you want to know about cucumbers relieving fear, read this!

MNRC NEWSLETTER
April-May 1996 No 53

Hut building, accounts, plans for more building, land-rovering, winter walking, skiing, etc and bowel problems (different)

CAVE AND KARST SCIENCE
Dec 1995 Vol 23 No 3

The relationship between surface coils and cave sediments in West-central Florida
Morphology of rimstone pools at Pamukkale, Western Turkey
Some thoughts on hydrothermal caves
The crystallogenesis of gypsum flowers
The pinnacle karst of Gunung Api, Mulu, Sarawak
Symposium Abstracts Feb 1996. Forum

SPELEO DORDOGNE
Speleo-Club Periguet
1994 No 8

Explorations of the Gorges around the Pierre St Martin - a description of the Vezere clubs work in the PSM area, & survey Archaeologie Souterraine 1994 - description of several sites and two pages of drawings
La Mesure de Debit - how to measure water volumes & flows
Les Canyons de la Sierra de Guara - a history and description of several canyons and the gear needed to traverse them, together with the risks involved
Speleo et Radiesthesie - how to find caves by scientific witchcraft
La Grotte de Belcayre, Thonac Dordogne - description, geology, history of exploration, survey and map
Topographie - all about surveying and how to do it. Illustrated with a Martel survey of Postojna 1893 and the more recent methods

CAVES AND CAVING

From Nos 1 -70 have been bound into six volumes 1978-80, 1981- 83, 1984-86, 1987-89, 1990-92 and 1993-95

BSA CAVE SCIENCE
New binding of Vols 1-5. covering the years 1947-66

BCRA TRANSACTIONS
CAVE SCIENCE
CAVE AND KARST SCIENCE

These have been newly bound into nine volumes covering 1973-1995

Mendip Rescue Organisation

Annual Report and Incident List 1995

Report by the Hon Secretary for the year to 31st December 1995

The majority of our work in the previous twelve months has revolved around actual call-outs which is exactly as it should be. The number of incidents that we successfully deal with is something of which we should be proud and places us very much in the *'doer'* rather than *'pontificator'* class of organisation. We have also made our presence known within the political/administrative arena being represented at BCRC and, more locally, SWERA meetings where we have insisted on retaining our autonomy as a cave rescue organisation; this has given us the reputation of being somewhat different to other members in our approach.

Times, however, are changing and the perception of being a volunteer is not considered any excuse for not providing a professional service. The MRO philosophy, based on *'cavers rescue other cavers'* and that the MRO is not a club for those who wish to make rescue their hobby, will enable us to provide the required service now and into their future. We must not, however, rest on our laurels, the provision of training - such as the explosives/rock breaking workshop organised by Nigel Taylor at Westbury Quarry and the informative lecture season championed by Dany - is invaluable. The mainstay of cave rescue training lies with individual caving clubs and it is encouraging that the majority of the Mendip based clubs have carried out practice rescues during the year and have reported upon them. These activities, I believe, must be encouraged and supported in the future.

Insurance is an emotive issue which is being discussed within both mountain and caver rescue teams throughout the country. Our first priority must be to ensure that we provide our services to such a standard that they are never called into question and the risk to our own personnel and customers is minimised during live rescue incidents. Training is a different matter, and I believe that this is best undertaken as being part of

normal caving activity within the club environment and thus insured accordingly.

Three warden's meetings have been held during the year to conduct the business of the MRO. Brian Workman, who has been a warden for a number of years, resigned his position earlier in the year. Three local cavers were invited on to the list of wardens: Mark Lumly, Keith Savory and Rob Tavener, all accepted.

Finally, I would like to say that disregarding some of the frustrations caused by the bureaucracy involved I have enjoyed my first year as Secretary of the MRO. I take this opportunity to thank Sue Brown, a long suffering work colleague, who did not realise the amount of extra typing she was going to incur on behalf of the organisation.

R J Cork
March 1996

Incident Report for the Period 1st January to 31st December 1995

Twelve incidents were recorded during the above year - five of which could be considered to be of a serious nature. Overdue and parties showing poor communication again took the lions share accounting for half of the call-outs. The high volume of traffic through Swildons Hole is reflected in the call-out statistics with six of twelve incidents occurring in this location. Mid-week incidents are increasing and now equal those received for weekends.

A dozen call-outs in one year places us well into the category of a busy team in comparison with other cave rescue providers, although our entire workload occurred in the first six months of the year leaving us a surprisingly quiet period during the latter winter months.

The list is tabulated overleaf, followed by details of each call-out.

DAY	DATE IN 1995	LOCATION	NO	PROBLEM	MRO PERSONNEL
Saturday	7 January	Bathamton Mines	2	Overdue	0
Friday	27 January	Burrington Area	20	Poor communication	0
Saturday	11 February	Eastwater Cavern	7	Overdue	2
Saturday	11 February	Swildons Hole	1	Trapped	22
Wednesday	22 February	Swildons Hole	1	Dislocated shoulder	14
Monday	20 March	Swildons Hole	1	Dislocated shoulder	12
Thursday	23 March	Eastwater Cavern	3	Overdue	0
Sunday	15 April	Swildons Hole	2	Poor communication	0
Wednesday	28 June	Swildons Hole	1	Trapped	18
Thursday	24 August	Redcliffe Caves	1	Lost	6
Saturday	16 September	St Cuthberts Swallet	1	Broken bone	5
Sunday	17 September	Swildons Hole	1	Hypothermia	9

**Saturday 7th January 1995
BATHAMPTON STONE MINES**

Brian Prewer was contacted by Staple Hill police regarding two Swindon based cavers overdue from a trip to the Bathampton Stone Mines. The father of one of the cavers had been instructed to call the MRO at 19.00 hours. He had also been given a list of possible mines that they were intending to visit. These were Singleway Mine, Seven Sisters Mine and Devils Cave. Grid references were also given.

Bob Scammell was asked to stand by a search party. At 20.10 hours the police informed the MRO that the missing cavers had returned, having underestimated the time of their trip. Bob Scammell and team were stood down.

**Friday 27th January 1995
BURRINGTON COMBE AREA**

The MRO were contacted via Taunton police. A member of the public - a Mr John Tucker - had reported a large party (20 plus) of children accompanied by three adults all wearing caving kit and intending to visit the caves in Burrington Combe. His concern was the abnormal water levels through the Mendips due to the exceptional rain fall. Mr Tucker was unable to give precise details regarding the location in the Combe but from information given Brian Prewer deduced that they were probably going to Goatchurch or Sidcot Swallet and therefore would not be in any danger. As a precautionary measure Nigel Taylor was contacted and it was suggested that he keep a watch for the caving party. At 21.00 hours Nigel and Viv Taylor located an orange minibus at the Burrington Inn car park and at 22.00 hours the party were located after they exited from Lionel's Hole.

Saturday 11th February 1995
EASTWATER CAVERN

Cavers from the Axbridge Caving Club whilst on a trip down Eastwater encountered a party of young people near to the top of Dolphin Pot at approximately 21.00 hours. They were somewhat concerned for their well being in view of the age of some of the party, and water levels in the Boulder Ruckle. On exiting the cave the members of the Axbridge C G informed Mrs Gibbons of Eastwater Farm of their concern.

At midnight Dorothy Gibbons rang Brian Prewer direct to say that a party of young cavers had not yet returned to their minibus at the farm. Dany Bradshaw, Graham Johnson and Alex Gee were contacted and in view of the late hour, the length of time the party had been underground (6 hours plus) and the fact that the Gibbons family wanted to go to bed a quick search of Upper Eastwater was mounted. Graham Johnson and Alex Gee went underground at 00.30 hours taking with them a comforts box and Molephone. Force control at Taunton were informed and Brian Prewer with Dany Bradshaw set up the surface Molephone.

The missing party were located at 01.04 hours in the upper traverse area and found to be safe and well. All exited the cave by 01.15 hours. Tony Jarratt, Stewart McManus and Bob Cork were put on standby at 00.30 hours.

Saturday 11th February 1995
SWILDONS HOLE

Call received from Taunton police at 14.22 hours connecting with Martin Payne at Priddy Green callbox, who reported that one of his party (of 4) had his knee jammed in a crack at the start of the Upper Oxbow. The victim was Peter Hurcombe aged 19 years from Aston University.

Alan Butcher, Stewart McManus, Tim Large and Rich West were contacted to open the store and set up surface control. Vince Simmonds, Graham Johnson and Trevor Hughes entered the cave with comfort box, hot air and rope. They were joined by Anthony Butcher who acted as runner, Martin Payne and Tristram Caper from the original party. At 15.50 hours a request for hammer and chisels was made and at 15.54 Steve Redwood entered with Molephone. Longer chisels and a hammer were

requested - these were taken into the cave by Paul Fogen and Clive Silveson. At 16.16 hours problems were encountered with communications by radio due to heavy rain and also the store radio which in Eric's opinion had failed due to a lightning strike. At 16.37 a request was made for a drill and 'plug and feathers'. Although some difficulties were encountered locating a drill, this was achieved and both the drill and plug and feathers were taken into the cave by Trevor Hughes at 17.03 hours. Doctor Tony Boycott examined the victim and declared that there was nothing physically wrong with him at 17.51 hours. Dany Bradshaw entered the cave whilst further attempts were made to free the victim. This was successfully achieved and confirmed by the message 'victim free' at 18.30 hours. The victim exited the cave 18.53.

This rescue highlighted a need for the MRO to have constant access to a battery powered drill. This was discussed at the debrief and at a later meeting a suitable drill was sourced and purchased.

Wednesday 22nd February 1995
SWILDONS HOLE

The MRO received a call from Bristol police reporting an injured caver on Priddy Green and a second in Swildons Hole at Tratman's Temple (this later proved to be Barnes Loop). The police and ambulance were already on route and no further details were available. Brian Prewer went immediately to the Green and found James Shepherd slumped against the wall by the New Inn, a preliminary examination indicated a possible dislocation of the shoulder. Details of the other casualty and his correct location was obtained. Malcolm and Aaran Davies and Derek Sanderson were already on The Green and changed into caving kit. They were asked to go to the casualty, assess the situation and report back as soon as possible. Stewart McManus, Andy and Angie Cave, Les Williams and Rich West were contacted and whilst on route to the MRO depot to collect kit Brian Prewer located Tim and Jos Large. Stewart McManus entered the cave at 14.45 hours with Andy and Angie Cave and Anthony Butcher taking with them the baby bouncer, ropes and comforts box. The Molephone was taken in by Alan Butcher at 15.10 whilst Tim Large and Rich West took surface control. Derek Sanderson reported back at 15.23 to confirm that the second casualty had also suffered a dislocated shoulder but felt that he would

be able to get out with assistance if his shoulder could be put back in place. Molephone communications were established in spite of the appalling surface weather conditions. Entonox was taken into the cave by Doug Mills and C Vincent and a medic was requested. Dr Andrew Newton and Les Williams entered the cave at 16.35 with the medical and hot air kit. Adrian Hall took in heat packs and extra harnesses as the casualty had proven to be 16 stone in weight and thus required a larger than normal lifting harness. Andy Sparrow rigged the 20 foot pitch for dry hauling and by 18.10 the casualty arrived at the top of the 20 foot pitch and was moving well with assistance. The victim exited the cave at 19.13 and the cave was cleared of equipment and personnel by 19.20.

Monday 20th March 1995 SWILDONS HOLE

Brian Prewer received a direct call from Les Williams requesting help for an injured caver located in Barnes Loop. Rob Delacour reported that his friend, Bruce Frazer, had sustained a dislocated shoulder after a slight fall. Taunton police were contacted as were the following local cavers; Andy Cave, Stewart McManus and Tony Jarratt. Les Williams and Mark Helmore were also on hand. Rob Delacour was asked if he would cautiously return to his friend Bruce Frazer who was in the cave alone to reassure him that help was on its way. Brian Prewer collected kit from the Store and at 17.45 an underground team entered the cave with Molephones and hauling equipment. Martin Grass and Mark Graham were asked to stand by. Dr Andrew Newton and Dr Tony Boycott were paged, Jim Hanwell and Richard West were asked to attend and set up a control on Priddy Green. Andy Sparrow joined the underground party. Prewer and Andy Cave set up a surface Molephone and established communications underground by 18.10. An initial examination of the casualty suggested a posterior dislocation and that onsite reduction would be unwise. Temgesic was administered to the casualty and a shoulder strap applied prior to him walking out of the cave. By 18.50 the casualty had reached the Double Pots where a second Temgesic was given, then he carried on to the top of the 20 foot pot where he was administered with Entonox and waited the arrival of Dr Tony Boycott. Dr Boycott confirmed a posterior dislocation and administered an intermuscular injection of voltarol.

The haul up the 20 foot pot was assisted by Yeovilton Caving Club. The casualty reached the surface without further major problems at 20.30 hours.

It had been previously agreed that an ambulance was not required and Mr Frazer was taken to Bristol Royal Infirmary by Dr Tony Boycott.

Thursday 23rd March 1995 EASTWATER CAVERN

Dorothy Gibbons contacted Brian Prewer direct to say that concern had been raised for an overdue party by their driver, a Mr Kai Afflerbach who was supposed to meet them at 20.30 hours and that they were now 2½ hours late. Tony Jarratt, Dany Bradshaw, Martin Grass, Mike Duck and Ivan Sandford were contacted at the Hunters Lodge Inn, whilst Andy Cave and Andy Sparrow were phoned at home. Further investigation indicated that the party had not descended the cave at 15.00 hours as planned but had probably entered at between 17.00 to 17.30 hours. In the light of this it was felt that the search party should not enter the cave until midnight. At five minutes to midnight a party of three from Leicester University returned to the surface safely. Discussion with the party leader Tim Haynes highlighted that some communication problems existed between their driver and themselves and that they had in fact written up their trip to the West End Series at the MCG HQ with an ETO of midnight. There was no police involvement and the MRO did not go underground.

Sunday 15th April 1995 SWILDONS HOLE

The MRO were contacted by Taunton police at 16.50 hours. Richard West then contacted Maurice Hewins at the Wessex Cave Club hut regarding an overdue party. Maurice had become concerned by a message on the WCC blackboard which had been put there by Les Mottram. Maurice had previously spoken informally to Tony Jarratt at his shop who had advised him to check the other main huts to see who was around; this he did with no success and therefore made a 999 call. Tony Jarratt was contacted and asked to send people to Priddy Green, Dany Bradshaw joined Rich West on a frustrating trip to Mains Barn due to the holiday weekend traffic on Deer Leap. They were met by

Tom Chapman, Keith Savory and Carole Tapley who had been dispatched by Jarratt. A number of people were questioned who had just left the cave and it emerged that the party had been seen at the 20 around 12 noon on their way out. Maurice arrived shortly after to say that Mottram had turned up at the hut and all was well.

**Wednesday 28th June 1995
SWILDONS HOLE**

Call received from Taunton police at 23.57 hours connecting a Tony Beardsly who requested MRO help to assist a female member of his party who was unable to make a return dive through Sump One in Swildons. The young lady in question, on her first caving trip, had passed through Sump One successfully, however, on her return she had refused to attempt the sump. One of her two companions had re-dressed her in a wet suit, the other had exited for help. Tony Jarratt, Stewart McManus, Andy and Angie Cave, Richard Blake and Graham Johnson were contacted. Brian Prewer collected the Molephone, hot air kit, ropes and comforts box from the depot. McManus set up surface control. The first MRO team went underground at 00.25 hours followed 10 minutes later by Molephone party. Six cavers were located at the Shepton Mallet Cave Club hut and asked to stand by; these included Alex Gee and Mike Willett. Martin Grass was contacted and confirmed that he had a light weight diving kit in working order.

The reluctant diver, Becky Battles, was refusing in a very positive manner to dive back through despite there being a two inch air gap through the sump. After further refusals it became clear that more kit and manpower may be needed in the cave. The following were asked to attend; Richard West, Nigel Taylor, Tim Large, Phil Romford, Andy Sparrow, Alan Butcher, Adrian Hole and Shaun Howe.

Diving equipment, a hot air kit, heat packs and comforts box was taken into the cave at 02.10 hours these were shortly followed by Dr Andrew Newton whose presence was considered necessary as the casualty had now become hysterical and was probably hypothermic. The Doctor reached the sump at 03.14 hours but before he was able to give any assistance the casualty came through the sump of her own accord assisted by Martin Grass and Mike Willett. Becky walked her way out of the cave with help from the MRO party reaching surface at 04.38 hours.

**Thursday 24th August 1995 REDCLIFF
CAVES , BRISTOL**

The MRO were contacted by Bristol police re: a missing person in Redcliff Caves. Nigel Taylor was informed and he joined Martin Grass and Richard West to travel to Bristol. Dave Price was contacted (Bristol person with local knowledge) and they arranged to meet him at the cave. All rendezvoused with the police and were informed that the missing person was a Jonathan Eden and his companion had become frightened and left him. Further interrogation ascertained that they were not particularly well equipped having only candles for illumination. A quick search by the above four revealed a still burning candle on the floor near an unlisted entrance. The remains of home-made cigarettes and empty cider bottles were found also. In view of Eden's lack of light or knowledge of the system, a search was conducted of the obvious areas without success. It was assumed and reported to the police that he had most probably exited the cave after his mate had left him.

Second part - 11.00 hours the same day

Richard West was contacted by Inspector John Hook who firstly enquired as to the cost of our services. Richard informed him of the voluntary nature of our work. The Inspector then asked if we would conduct a further search as Eden is well known in the area and had not turned up to any of his usual haunts or collected his Thursday morning giro which was uncharacteristic and they were now becoming concerned for his safety. Arrangements were made to meet the police at Redcliffe Cliff Quay at 14.00 hours. Richard West, Martin Grass, Nigel Taylor, Stewart McManus, Tony Jarratt, Geoff Price and Mr Hewins of the City Engineers Department carried out a much more systematic search which proved without doubt that Eden had exited the cave in the afore mentioned manner. A quick search of a derelict building near the presumed entrance did not reveal anything.

**Saturday 16th September 1995
ST CUTHBERTS SWALLET**

Brian Prewer was contacted direct by Estelle Sandford to say that a Peter Smith had sustained an injured foot caused by a falling bolder and was at present in the Mudhall area of St Cuthberts Swallet. His condition was good and he was helping himself out. As he was now approaching the ladder section

of the cave she felt that ropes and harnesses would be necessary. Brian Prewer went to the depot and the appropriate kit was taken down the cave by Estelle, Mike Willett, F Howe and P Hartley. Taunton police were informed of the incident at 14.35 and Dr Tony Boycott was asked to stand by. Glynn Roberts, a member of the casualty's party, surfaced at 14.30 to request that splints be sent down the cave. This was done and the casualty made his egress from the cave at 15.20 hours. He was taken to Weston General Hospital and put into the capable hands of Mrs Jane Jarratt.

**Sunday 17th September 1995
SWILDONS HOLE**

At 14.15 hours Carmen Smith of the Wessex Caving Club contacted Brian Prewer at his house to say that there was a partially unconscious girl at the bottom of the entrance climb in Swildons. An MRO

party was raised from the Hunters Lodge and asked to attend immediately while stretchers and other kit were fetched from the MRO store. Dany Bradshaw, Vince Simmonds, Graham Johnson and Richard Blake entered the cave at 14.30 hours with the stretcher. Colin Masters and two other cavers from 'Upper Pitts' were in attendance. Further information gained from the casualty's party suggested that part of the problem might be due to an asthma attack and possible diabetes. On this basis, medical help was sought and Dr Andrew Newton was contacted at 14.35 hours. An ambulance was also asked to attend. The casualty was located in the Showerbath Chamber where she was put into the major stretcher and hauled to the surface by 14.50 hours and examined by Dr Newton. She was subsequently taken to the Bristol Royal Infirmary with suspected hypothermia, low blood sugar level and a respiratory problem, a minor knee injury was also noted.

**BRITISH CAVE RESCUE COUNCIL
INCIDENT REPORT FOR PERIOD - 1ST JANUARY - 31ST DECEMBER 1995**

	Cave Rescue Organisation	Cumbria Ore Mines RU	Derbyshire CRO	Devon CRO	Gloucestershire CRG	Irish CRO	Mendip RO	Midlands CRO	North Wales CRO	Scottish CRO	South East CRO	South Wales CRO	Swaledale FRO	Upper Wharfedale FRA	West Cornwall Mines RG	Others ¹	TOTALS
Caving Incidents	10	3	4	-	1	1	11	-	-	-	-	8	-	5	-	2	45
Persons Assisted	16	2 ²	6	-	1	3	39	-	-	-	-	21	-	19	-	2	109
Fatalities	2	0	0	-	0	3	0	-	-	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	5
Persons Injured ⁴	3	0	1	-	0	0	4	-	-	-	-	4	-	0	-	1	13
Animal Incidents	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	5	-	5	15
Assistance to other teams	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Totals Underground Incidents	14	3	4	-	1	1	11	-	-	-	-	9	-	10	-	7	60
Surface Incidents	27	-	-	-	1	0	-	-	1	-	-	-	10	11	-	X	50
Persons Assisted	60	-	-	-	1	0	-	-	2	-	-	-	22	6	-	X	91
Fatalities	2	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	-	12 ³	1	-	X	16
Persons Injured	39	-	-	-	1	0	-	-	0	-	-	-	7	5	-	X	52
Surface Animal Incidents	5	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	X	7
Assistance to other teams	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	X	-
Totals Surface Incidents	32	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	11	11	-	X	57

(1) The 'others' column reflects underground rescues carried out by member teams of the MRC and whose Incident reports have been submitted to the BCRC. These are shown in the incident list (26 and 43)

(2) COMRU were called to two similar incidents involving the same casualty. who was in receipt of treatment for depression.

(3) On 24th May 1995. Swaledale FRO were called to the aeroplane crash at Dunkeswick between Leeds and Harrogate, which involved some 12 fatalities.

(4) Persons injured includes those casualties needing assistance for a medical condition.

Further details relating to this incident report can be obtained from the Hon. Sec. Pete Allwright, Pearl Hill, Dent, Sedbergh, Cumbria, LA10 5TG. Tel: 015396 25412

Letter to the Editor

I have been meaning to write for some time in response to Phil Hendy's letter in Journal 247 (December 1995) regarding some of the potential pitfalls of the Club's recently acquired policy of providing SRT rope and equipment for its members. It is probably too much to hope that the following will put Phil's mind entirely at rest, but if nothing else it will provide an agenda for the Committee to consider before taking the practical step of actually acquiring rope and other equipment, and if this agenda is fully addressed it will, I believe, answer many of the potential problems foreseen by Phil and some other members of the Club.

Before I start, I should point out that the following is a personal assessment of the situation and not the considered view of the Committee as a whole. I do know, however, that the committee have not published a concerted response to Phil's letter in the knowledge that I was preparing the following. This letter may not, therefore, be the last word on the subject! I might also point out that I have sought the advice of a solicitor on some points and that advice is reflected in what follows.

The issues

There are five issues which need to be faced before we actually take the step of spending money. In order of importance, these are: consent, liability, the practicalities of providing the kit to members, paying for it and selecting the right kit to purchase. The issues of liability and the practicalities of the provision of equipment are closely linked and I will return to them below.

Consent

The issue of consent has, in practice, already been dealt with, but I shall rehearse it for the sake of clarity. Although I would argue that the club's acquisition of SRT kit is not, in fact, quite so big a deal as some have made it out to be, clearly it is seen as such in the minds of some members and those members have a right to be satisfied that this decision is right and reasonable. The club is a democratic organisation and the views of all members must be solicited and taken into account whenever a major decision is taken. Regardless of how big a step it actually is, acquisition of SRT

equipment for members' use is certainly seen by many as a serious step, and it was entirely right that this decision should have been taken by an AGM. The AGM is the supreme decision making body of the Club, and neither the Committee nor anyone else has any right to act against its wishes in the name of the Club. The 1995 AGM, which was entirely properly constituted, took such a decision to add SRT equipment to the Club's tackle inventory: this is now the policy of the club and can only be reversed at a subsequent AGM.

Paying for it

Paying for the kit is probably the biggest practical obstacle to implementing the AGM's decision at this time. In order to provide a usable amount of equipment, it will be necessary to spend of the order of £500 or more and this is money which the Club does not have available at present. We are already heavily committed to a programme of improvements at Upper Pitts (in particular, of course, the kitchen) and until this work is completed that is where the Club's revenue should be channelled. SRT equipment will have to take its turn along with all the other normal running expenses of the Club, including the existing tackle stock, the library, publications, insurance and many other items.

It might be argued that there is some capital available in the form of bequests or donations. However, unless this money is specifically given for the purpose of purchasing SRT equipment, I would contend that it would not be right to spend it on such a contentious purpose. In particular, this is not what the Alan Surrall bequest should be used for.

So, in practice, it may be more than a year before we can actually put the AGM's decision into effect. That, I am afraid, is a hard economic reality.

Selecting the right equipment

The various factors in deciding what would be the right equipment to purchase would more than fill a whole Journal and are outside the scope of this letter. In practice, I doubt that it will be difficult for

those who wish to have an input to the selection process to agree on a shopping list, but I believe that it is important that the shopping list contains only items of equipment for Group use. In addition to rope these would include bolts and carabiners, rope bags and a rope washer. The club should not purchase items of personal equipment (such as harnesses, ascenders, etc.).

I do not subscribe to the argument which was put forward at the AGM that the Club should provide a small pool of equipment for training purposes - I consider this to be the top of a slippery slope. Anyone with significant experience of SRT will tell you that their equipment is highly personal and that they have spent hours selecting it and adjusting it to their personal taste. If the club owned any personal items such as harnesses, they would inevitably end up being used by particular individuals to the exclusion of others. Also, it would place too high a burden of maintenance on the Gear Curator. In a club with active SRT cavers there will always be enough spare kit around to allow people to have a chance to sample the experience without having to purchase their own equipment, and beyond the first couple of novice trips it is not unreasonable to expect to see some commitment from the members in the form of them buying their own kit. We do not provide helmets, lights or belts, and we should not provide harnesses or ascenders.

Liability

Liability is the subject which generates the most discussion in clubs which do not already have SRT equipment for members' use since it is seen as the iceberg which lurks, nine tenths hidden from sight, waiting to wreck the club if it is not addressed correctly.

When considering the following, readers may like to reflect that the law relating to liability makes no distinction between a caving trip using SRT, using ladders, or even one using no equipment at all. Furthermore, the Club already officially sanctions trips on which these techniques are used and has done for years. The integration of SRT into the Club's tackle provision in practice does very little to alter our existing liability and arguably even improves it since we are now forced to grasp this nettle and come to terms fully with its implications.

Liability only becomes an issue in the case of an accident where someone suffers loss or injury as a result of participating in the use of the Club's SRT equipment and decides to seek compensation from the Club and/or individual members and officers.

Leaving aside the (unlikely) case where the Club or its insurers admits liability and pays up without seeking a court judgement, the issue of liability can only be decided in a court, where it will be necessary for the individual seeking damages to prove that the Club (and/or the individuals concerned) has been negligent. [For the purposes of simplicity I will refer only to the Club from this point, but this may be taken to include any individuals or officers which might also be cited in any action.]

This is a civil case, so the burden of proof, while still in the favour of the Club, is only one of the balance of probabilities (i.e. is it more probable than not that the club was at fault?). However, for the Club to be proven negligent, the court must be satisfied on three counts:

1. That the injured party was owed a *duty of care* by the club;
2. That the club has *failed to discharge that duty*;
3. That the injured party has suffered *loss* that can be attributed to the club's failure.

Dealing with each question in turn:

1. *Duty of Care*

Every individual owes a duty of care to every other individual, to a greater or lesser degree. The ordinary duty not to (for instance) run people down in the street or burgle their houses may be enhanced by a number of factors where there is a relationship between people, and these are relevant here. If one person has specialist knowledge which they might use to protect another in their party, or assumes a role of leader or trainer, they increase the duty they have to the other members of the party who are not in possession of the knowledge or claiming a leadership role. The duty is enhanced further still by payment, but this is not relevant to the Club's situation.

2. *Failure to discharge duty*

Obviously in order to decide whether or not the Club has failed to discharge its duty, it is necessary for the Court to define what that duty is. As noted above, this will depend heavily on the circumstances of the accident and the relationship between the parties concerned. In the case where the party consists of peers of equal knowledge, the court will determine if the actions taken by the members of the party were those of 'the ordinary competent caver'

but if one of the party is in the position of assuming responsibility for the safety of the others a more stringent test may be applied.

It is not possible for a person to sign away their duty of care, or to avoid it by getting signed indemnities from other members of the party. Equally, it is not possible for someone who is an experienced user of SRT amongst an otherwise inexperienced party to reduce their duty of care by (for instance) avoiding leadership of the party. Current legal opinion is that liability waivers (or 'blood chits') have absolutely no value in changing the relationship between members of a party in respect of duty of care and may even be counter productive by fostering a false sense of security. It is even possible to conceive of a situation arising in court where such a waiver could be seen as an attempt by the more experienced members of a party to evade their responsibilities.

It is important to realise that the defence which says that the injured party knew what they were getting themselves into and should therefore be responsible for themselves is not without validity but can only be interpreted by a court in the knowledge of the full circumstances of an incident. The court will need to be shown that the injured party was indeed competent to judge the danger of their situation for themselves, was as responsible for that situation of danger as all the other members of the party, and was no less able to materially affect it.

The test of whether the actions were those of an 'ordinary, competent caver' will very much depend on the circumstances of the individual incident and the performance of the witnesses in court (especially expert witnesses called to inform the court what practice would be considered normal). This is important for the Club to consider in deciding how it provides access to the SRT equipment for its members since it will be judged against the normal practice at other clubs and any known or obvious bad practice. For instance, if the club insisted on providing hawser laid hemp ropes, and a claim resulted because one broke, the Club would be found wanting because established practice is to use kernmantel nylon ropes.

If the Club does follow normal practice and an accident occurs, the Club cannot be found liable since it has not breached its duty of care. It is not necessary for the Club to take any special steps in providing equipment to members: it has been suggested (for instance) that it might be necessary to tell people to use a lifeline in addition to an SRT rope as is common practice in industrial roped access work. Quite apart from the issue that this

particular practice might actually increase the risk to the user because of the obvious danger of entanglement in a real caving situation, this provides no extra protection to the Club because it is not normal practice in the caving world in general.

Similarly, if established practice in all other clubs is to ensure that SRT equipment is only available to members who have undergone a special training course and/or assessment, the club might be found to have failed in its duty of care if it simply allowed free access to the tackle to all members. On the other hand, to have such a rule and then not follow it is by far the more dangerous course since probably all the injured party would have to do in order to prove that there had been a failure to discharge the duty of care would be to show that the Club's own rules had been breached. Far better not to have the rule in the first place - to say that the rule was never made because it would have been unworkable is a perfectly reasonable defence.

I would argue that a formal assessment of people's SRT skills by the Club's committee (or a sub-committee set up for the purpose) would provide no protection against liability and may even be dangerous since it would imply that there is a group of people within the Club who are significantly more expert than the rest and who set themselves up as responsible for judging the others, while our best defence is that we are all equals. Whether or not we have such an assessment would be largely immaterial to a court, which will be looking to make up its own mind about the relative knowledge of the members of the party on the basis of questioning about each member's experience, not on the basis of a piece of paper from the Club's committee. If assessments were done externally to the Club they might have some value, but I hardly see that as being acceptable to even a small proportion of the membership. Quite apart from any other consideration, no standards for such assessments currently exist and to develop them would be an unwelcome step along the road to licensing cavers.

3. Loss or injury

The injured party can only succeed with his action if he or she can demonstrate that they have suffered loss or injury as a result of an action or inaction, on the part of the Club. Their condition must deteriorate as a direct result of the defendant's intervention. This will always be a simple question of fact although the true magnitude of the injury may be open to some debate.

It is probably pertinent here to examine briefly the difference between UK and United States law since the USA is always quoted as the ‘nightmare scenario’ in liability cases. In the US, the level of damages in a case is decided by the jury and they may easily be swayed by the sight of (for instance) an unfortunate cripple with no health insurance claiming damages off a mighty corporation with enormous resources. Under the UK system, there is no room for this ‘sympathy vote’ since the tests outlined above must be applied and passed before damages can be awarded. Also, importantly, the level of damages is decided by the judge who has formulae and precedents (as well as submissions by the defendant and plaintiff) to take into account, and not by the jury.

Provision of the service to members

To say that ‘SRT ropes do not break’ would be a recipe for complacency, but given normal care and conditions of use it would also be true. It is important to objectively assess what the major risks in using SRT are to ensure that they are effectively guarded against. This is possible by examining rescue statistics, and consulting those who might be considered experts in the field (i.e. anyone who might be called as an expert witness if a case came to court). From my own knowledge of the subject I would point out that the incidence of injury due to equipment failures caused by poor maintenance are far outweighed by the dangers of poor technique and bad judgement. It is possible that an assessment of users’ knowledge of the care and maintenance of the equipment may be of use in this context, but this has little to do with their skill at actually using the equipment and we must give club members the credit for some intelligence; it is not likely that people will grossly abuse ropes and even if anyone did I find it inconceivable that they would go unnoticed for long.

A recommended course of action

To summarise the above as a series of action points, my own opinion of what the Club should do now is as follows:

1. Contact at least five other clubs who are known to hold SRT for use by members and ask them for information on how they manage their own system.
2. Contact one or two experienced SRT trainers and ask them what they think the most

important dangers are. Ask them to provide statistics or other information to back up their opinions.

3. Examine the British Cave Rescue Council statistics and look for causes of accidents and injury relating to SRT.
4. Devise a detailed set of club SRT rules on the basis of this information and present them to an AGM for approval. This should include details of the arrangements for storing and maintaining the equipment and training club members in its use. The rules must be simple to operate and should be difficult to breach in the circumstances of a normal club trip. They should give ready access to the equipment to all Club members on Club trips.
5. Create a shopping list of equipment and publish it in the Journal, giving a period of three months for comments from members.
6. Raise the money necessary to purchase the equipment by reviewing existing commitments and/or launching an appeal amongst the membership.
7. Ensure that the club insurance covers this activity for claims by third parties and between club members.
8. Purchase the equipment.
9. Document all of the above and provide a file for the Librarian to catalogue.
10. Go caving!

A final thought

As has already been noted, the liability resulting from the provision of SRT rope and equipment to members is no different to that of the provision of any other facility. If there is an accident in the use of ladders, or in the provision of dormitory accommodation, exactly the same tests as I have described above will be applied should the injured party decide to pursue a claim against us. Maybe it is time to review our practices in some other areas and check that we can stand the tests should the need arise.

Nick Williams

25 years ago

Journal No. 135, Vol. 11. June 1971

CLUB NEWS - p247/8

... In Swildons it is not unusual to meet several parties en route to Sump I and a moment's pause is sufficient to realise that most of them are on their first trip underground ... wearing jumpers, jeans and plimsols and carrying a torch! ... the critics of such parties scoff loudly over their pints in the Hunters ... we are all guilty and perhaps ought to leave our ivory towers and help make today's novices tomorrow's tigers. As far as the Wessex Cave Club is concerned, a training scheme for prospective Members has recently been instigated.

... the caving instructors at the Outdoor Activity Centres recognised the need for a properly constituted body to rationalise caving instruction. They formed themselves into the British Association of Caving Instructors ... The scheme is intended to train experienced cavers as leaders and instructors rather than to train teachers as cavers.

A small group of Members are leaving ... for 14 days in the Picos.

Committee Abstracts - p248

A long discussion.....about the problem of administering the HQ it was agreed ... that there was a need for a person to look after the HQ on a long-term basis.

... presented a sketch of the proposed extension to the building, which would fit on to the women's dormitory and have an area of approximately 750 sq. ft.

HQ expenses and income for the half year were as follows: Expenses £276, Income £210. If this trend continues it will be necessary to raise the HQ fees next year.

ARTICLES

Cave Rescues and Incidents 1971	- by MRO	- p249
Caves of Mexico 1970	- by Carl Pickstone	- p260
An ISC (International Speleological Congress) for Britain		- p258
Mendip Exhibition News		- p259

REVIEWS - pp272/3 - reviewed by M D Newson and J D H

"Some of the Legal Aspects of Cave Preservation for Scientific Reasons" by G T Warwick

"The Dangers of Pollution of Limestone Aquifers, with special reference to the Mendip Hills, Somerset" by T C Atkinson

"UBSS Newsletter New Series No 2 May 1971" by A C Waltham

OBITUARY - to Jack Coleman - p274

Second European Expedition Symposium

Organised by the Committee for International Relations of the French Federation of Speleology, the second European expedition symposium was held in the village of Mejannes le Clap, south west of Lyon, on 1-5 May 1996. Participants from France, Italy, Russia, Poland and England discussed recent expedition activities from their respective countries and prospects for future expeditions. Presentations were illustrated with slide and film shows and round table discussions allowed the exchanges of much useful information and experience between all parties.

UK delegates Andy Eavis and Nick Williams came back with many useful contact names and other information, including a database of French caving expeditions. People who wish to make use of this information should contact either Nick or Andy, or the BCRA foreign secretary, Terry Whittaker.

In order to improve collaboration with our European and international caving colleagues in the future, it would be very useful for the UK to have a computerised database of expedition information to match that of France and one being developed in Italy. Volunteers to help create this information database would also be welcome to contact Nick, Andy or Terry.. All that will be required is access to a word processor (any flavour) and the time to type in details of past expeditions.

The third Symposium will be held in the UK in 1998 - details of date and location will be circulated early next year.

Contacts: Nick Williams: 01772 421119
Andy Eavis: 01482 648658
Terry Whittaker: 01542 62269

Club Diary

1996

July

6th	Cricket Match & BBQ
7th	WCC Committee meeting
13th	South Wales Caver Training Day
13/14th	North Wales Meet - Rhosesmor
20th	Redhouse Swallet trip

August

3rd	Compton Martin Ochre Mine (Conservation and BBQ)
3rd-9th	NSS Convention, Colorado
24-26th	Wales Meet - Pwll Du
25th	OFD Columns access

September

7th	Otter Hole trip
8th	WCC Committee meeting
13-15th	Hidden Earth - Sheffield
27-29th	NAHMO Meet, Dartmoor

October

10-14th	Assynt, Scotland
19th	WCC AGM & Dinner

November

1st/2nd	Derbyshire Meet
23rd	MRO Stomp

1997

August

6th-20th	UIS International Congress of Speleology, La Chaux de Fonds Switzerland
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WESSEX AGM & DINNER WEEKEND

AGM 10am Saturday 19th October.

Dinner Crossways Inn, North Wootton.

To save postal costs, the Dinner menus will be posted with the AGM handbook which should be out by middle of September. Other entertainment is also planned for this weekend - further details in next Journal, or from Christine Lumb Tel: 01749 840667