





# 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 News

## Club Events and Meets

On the 21st of February there's the WCC **Wookey Hole Meet**. Meet in the Wookey Hole Car Park at 6.30pm. Please be kitted up and ready to go.

A **Devon Meet** has been organised for March 6th-9th, staying at the Devon Speleological Society's Headquarters. On the Friday night meet in the White Hart or the Waterman at Buckfastleigh. If directions are needed contact Les. Caves to visit include Red Rift Cave, Bakers Pit and Pridhamsleigh Caverns. There's also the possibility of some mines ... and of course the White Hart or the Waterman.

On March 22nd and 23rd, Les and others have organised an **SRT training weekend**. On the Saturday training will be inside or on the fire escape, depending on the numbers that attend and of course the weather. (See ad on page 126).

At Easter there's a **Yorkshire** meet as usual. Contact Les if you are interested in going, as he needs to know the numbers so that he can book the caravans at Ingleton.

For something totally different, a **Geological Excursion** "Trip around Mendip" has been organised for 25th of April. This will be a general study of geological history of the Mendip Hills, visiting various outcrops and of course a pub at lunch time. Meet at Upper Pitts at 9.30am ready to leave. It will be advisable to wear sturdy boots but not compulsory, and waterproofs would be a good idea as well. If you have a hand-held magnifying glass please bring it with you. To reduce the number of cars in the convoy, could you try to car share?

Over May Day bank holiday the usual **South Wales WSG** meet has been arranged. There will be leaders for OFD 1 and hopefully Dan-yr-Ogof, but if you want a particular trip please contact Les to arrange it beforehand.

At the end of May (23rd-25th) for the bank holiday, Les is hoping to arrange a meet in **Belgium**. If you are interested please let him know asap.

The **North Wales Meet** will be held on 6th and 7th of June, with camping at the Red Lion at Rhosemor. If you have not been before follow the A55 from Queenferry, approx 400m past the Little Chef, turn

left signposted for Rhosemor. At the Britannia Pub on bend turn left, then after approx 800m at the "T" junction turn left over the cattle grid to the Bluebell Pub on the right. Carry on passed the Cross Keys Pub on the left, to a playground and waste ground on the left. The Red Lion is on the left. Camping is allowed in the field behind the Pub. Plenty of caves, mines and walking in the area. For more information contact Les.

Maurice Hewins has again kindly organised a trip to **Banwell Caves** which include Stalactite Cave and Bone Cave. If you're interested, please meet on Saturday 20th June, at 2pm, at Upper Pitts. There's also the possibility of going in the Prospect Tower. (For last year's write up and pictures see WCC Journal Vol 23 No.251 p142).

At the **Cheddar** meet on January 17th, we had a turn out of 66 people - is this a record? Obviously this is a very popular meet, and I'm sure it will be repeated.

Thanks to **Les** for booking Cheddar and all the other meets. The aim is to have something for everyone's taste, but if you're still not happy or have any suggestions please let Les know.

## Hut News

The **microwave** in the Upper Pitts kitchen has had enough of not being cleaned, and in a protest blew itself up. Therefore we need a new or second hand one to replace it. If anyone has a microwave to donate we would be grateful.

There is still plenty of work to be done on **Upper Pitts** - from installing new fire doors to more seating in the changing room or even just general cleaning. So if you have any spare time please help and don't just leave it to the few. If you would like to help on one of the more major jobs contact the Hut Admin Officer who will give any guidance or help that is needed.

We would like to thank Nigel Graham, Dave Irwin and John and Jenny Cornwall for their donations of books and Journals to the **WCC Library**.

Thanks are well-deserved to 'Bean' who has built a first-class **Rope Washer**. This will be mounted as soon as possible, with a water supply. As soon as this is working the Club SRT rope shall be able to be used. (See pages 126 & 127 for a full list of Rules).

# Caving News

## Mendip

At **Hunter's Hole** several bolts are stripped and replacing these with P-hangers will be an early objective of the new Technical Group.

**Swildon's** Entrance is now apparently stable after the series of collapses that began a few years ago. Following the stream now provides a safe route between a solid roof and floor which bypasses the 8 foot climb.

The dig at **St Lukes** at Nordrach (central Mendip) was hi-maced a couple of years ago - since when digging has continued steadily. At -15 metres a small well-decorated chamber has been entered, There is a slight draught and work continues.

**Cairo Shaft** is also in the Nordrach area. A 17 metre mined shaft enters about 100 metres of partly mined natural passage ending in a sump beyond a tight section. The sump appears to be a flooded mine level and will be dived soon.

**Frog Pot** is at Chancellor's Farm near Priddy. A surface dig in a depression has revealed a fluted shaft which seems to be exciting everyone who sees it! Prospects look very good.

### Bolt Update

Resin anchors have been installed on the Entrance to **New Atlas** and **High Atlas** pitch heads in **Thrupe**. Work will begin on **Rhino Rift**. There are two stripped spits in **Hunter's Hole**; one over the main pitch and one above Far Right Pitch. **Coral Cave** has recently been SRT bolted. **GB** ladder dig is now P anchored.

**Hazel Nut Swallet** is a BEC dig in the E Biddlecombe valley just outside Wells. There has been a recent small breakthrough into a short length of decorated passage. A way on is visible and work continues.

## Derbyshire

**Jug Shaft** has been permanently lidded for safety reasons, after consultation with the farmer and English Nature. This shaft is blind and drops about 20m.

Due to collapse, access to **Cumberland Caverns** is via Wapping Mine only.

At **Oxlow Caverns** the slope between the first and second pitches is unstable again, as is the ginging at the top of the second pitch.

The Giants Windpipe in **Giant's Hole** has been cleared and the water is again draining. Therefore the round trip is again possible.

**The Peak District Sump Index Update 1997** is now available. This CDG publication can be obtained from:

Steve Jay  
Albany House  
New Road  
Hangerberry  
Lydbrook  
GL17 9PS

## Yorkshire

In **Nick Pot**, the top 20m of the big pitch on the Traverse in the Gods route is very loose and great care should be taken if using this route. It is recommended that you avoid the wall at the top of the pitch and any one waiting at the foot of the pitch should wait at the far end of the shaft.

## Wales

A permanent telephone line has been installed in the **Daren Cilau** entrance series. Great care has been taken to ensure this is as far out of the way of cavers as possible to prevent damage, but due to the nature of several areas this is not possible and great care is needed. If you cause or notice any damage please report it to a member of Gwent CRT so it can be repaired.

The key to **Wainfelin & Tranch Iron Mine** at Pontnewynydd (previously held by Bill Gascoine), is now with Phil Jayne of Brynmawr CC. Contact him at:  
2 Forge Close  
Caerleon  
Gwent  
NP61PU

or Telephone on 01633 430249

## New Members

From all of the Wessex, a warm welcome to the following new members. Please feel free to make yourself known to any of the club members and if there's anything you'd like to see done in the way of trips, events, etc organised, contact any of the committee members - names in front of Journal.

### **Gillian Lindsey**

Flat C1, 114 Cotham Brow, Cotham, Bristol,  
BS6 6AR. Tel: 0117 942 8941  
Email: gillianlindsey@iopublishing.co.uk

### **John Vanderplank**

Lampley Rd., Kingston Seymour, Clevedon  
North Somerset, BS21 6XS 01934 838895

### **David Mason**

84 Gloucester Rd., Staple Hill, Bristol, BS16 4SU  
01179 573041

### **Andrew Jackson**

10 Lower Moor Rd., Yate, Bristol  
01454 311709

### **Mark Adams**

92 Littledean, Yate, South Gloucestershire  
01454 881857

### **Anthony Audsley**

Rose Villa, Redcliffe St., Cheddar, Somerset,  
BS27 3PF 01203 251207

### **Richard Gardiner**

342 Bishport Ave., Hartcliffe, Bristol  
0117 9044164

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## Les' Usual bit of Late Copy

On the 17th of May there will be a **Photographic Lecture and Critique Workshop**. It will be held at Upper Pitts at 10am and Pete Glanville will be presenting the Lecture. Afterwards there will be a Critique Workshop, so please bring along any Cave Photography that you have: slides, colour or black and white photos, 3D or even a video (if you can also bring the equipment to view it). However good or bad they are, there will be plenty of interested people present and I'm sure plenty of free advice and tips - this is your chance to improve - don't waste it!!

## Wessex People

Please note that the following people can now be found at:

### **Peter Bentley**

B28 Po Shan Mansions, 10 Po Shan Rd., Hong  
Kong, China. Tel: 852 2547 5777  
Fax: 852 2517 2626

### **Douglas Boomer**

15799 Fry Street, Plymouth, MI 48170-4818,  
United States of America  
Telephone number 00-1-313-420-0489  
Email: boomer\_home@compuserve.com

### **Liz Brandon**

W0827228 PTE Brandon E, Squad 9704  
Operations Training COY, RMPTS, Roussillon Bks  
Broyle Road, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 4BN

### **Peter Camilleri**

33 Rutland Close, Talavera Park, Aldershot,  
Hampshire, GU11 1RR Tel: 01252 345081

### **Ken Dawe**

Haye Cottage, Haye Lane, Callington, Cornwall,  
PL17 7JW Fax: 01579 382016

### **Nigel Graham**

121 Fortuneswell, Portland, Dorset, DT5 1LU  
Work Tel. No: 01305 212555

### **Malcolm & Sue Hodge**

23 Haywards Avenue, Weymouth, Dorset,  
DT3 5JU

### **Jack Sheppard**

47 Wyedean Rise, Belmont, Hereford, HR2 7XZ  
01423 35176'

### **Paul Stillman**

40 The Crest, Brislington, Bristol, BS4 3JB  
0117 914 0183

### **Beth Yates**

Crossways, Butcombe, Bristol, BS40 7U

### **Paul Hadfield**

Can also be contacted via Radio Amateur Packet  
net at:  
VE7PLH@VE7EAB.#NWBC.BC.CA.NOAM

So if you have a Ham licence give him a call.

# Letter to the Editor

Hello Rosie,

Just to clarify the note in the journal about Paul Hadfield being "about to climb the ladder" in North Hill Swallet. I was in fact half way up the pitch unroped, (as someone, presumably to delay me, had removed the lifeline), when I was inundated with the material in question.

Undoubtedly, apart from an excursion into a Belfast sewer as part of my then professional life, the most odiferous moment I can recall!

I'm happy to say that I'm now caving in an area where bovine faeces is absent. The largest wildlife being ursine, and fortunately very shy. The biggest problem is finding enough cavers to explore all the virgin cave.

When are we going to see a Wessex contingent out here? My next scheduled trip to POWI is mid July to mid August, or for those who don't fancy virgin cave, how about a ski trip on the Cambria icefield in mid May?

Regards

*Paul*

## **SUBSCRIPTION RATES**

The new subscriptions set at the AGM are as follows.

Single member	£25.00
Joint members (1 vote)	£31.25
Joint members (2 votes)	£43.75
Senior Citizen rate	£7.50
Food boxes	£2.50
Lockers	£6.00

To renew your membership, please send a cheque with your name, address and tel. no. (and details off the rates paid) to the Membership Secretary, Dave Cooke – address at front of Journal.

# Unpaid Members

This is the list of unpaid members as of 10th January 1998:

Bruce Albright  
Harold Bampton  
Clive Barlow  
David Barnett  
Hazel Barton  
Andrew Bliss  
Glyn and Julie Bolt  
Sue Bonar  
Paul (Cal) Callister  
Russell Carter  
Noel Cleave  
Mr M Coventon  
Jackie and Nick Dallman  
Fred Davies  
Ian Durham  
Mark Easterling  
Tim Greenwood  
Malcolm & Sue Hodge  
John Hooper  
Richard Hooper  
Owen Howells  
Michael Hyland  
Graham (Jake) Johnson  
Martin King Tony King  
Murray and Angela Knapp  
Mark Lanney  
George Littleton  
Geoff (Zippy) Newton  
David Parker  
Jeff Phillips  
Bob Pyke  
Paula Rich  
Derek Sanderson  
Adrian Savidge  
Andy Sparrow  
Stephen Standing  
Stoods Stoodley  
Stephen Tucker  
John Venn  
Stephen Waite  
Alan and Becky Weight  
Richard Witcombe

## **Journal Subscriptions**

Tony Boycott  
Iain Buchanan  
Emma Heron  
Graham Mullan

Please send your subscriptions to Dave Cooke. Please do NOT put your subscription in the hut's safe, as it is all too easy for the money to go directly into the clubs bank account without the membership secretary being aware of it.

# SRT Update

The Club has now purchased equipment specifically for SRT (Single Rope Techniques) use. It has been several years since the Wessex Cave Club AGM when it was proposed that there should be Club SRT rope available in the tackle store. One of the main difficulties in setting up the SRT rules was the type of system that should be employed; whether to have a restricted leadership system or allow SRT equipment to be available to all Club members.

Following on from Nick Williams article (ref) concerning legal aspects of cave accidents, the committee have decided to adopt an open policy; the SRT equipment will be available to all members. If you have any doubt about the safe use of SRT equipment then you should not use it. There are many Club members who have a lot of SRT experience and will be willing to help. The Club also has a training officer who will give advice and has already organised several SRT training events (see Club Diary for dates and below).

As SRT is different from the more traditional ladder and lifeline techniques, it will be kept separately and have a different booking procedure. The SRT store will have a separate log book from which

equipment must be booked out before the cave trip. The leader of the trip should be the person who books out the equipment. There will be a file in the SRT tackle store compiled from the Log Book which will keep details of the history of each rope. After the cave trip the equipment should be cleaned and returned to the SRT store.

Some of the rope has been donated by Club members. This has been very useful in starting the store, as ropes are expensive items of equipment. All donated rope, whatever its age or appearance, will have a section of rope tested before being made available. Currently we are using the NCA rope testing scheme, but we are planning to have a rope-testing rig at the Wessex soon. If in any doubt about a rope then report your concerns to the Gear Curator and don't use it!

This is a provisional system; any comments suggestions or complaints should be given to a committee member. No doubt these rules will be modified; the latest set will be displayed in the SRT store.

Good caving

*Andy*

## Training Weekend

March 21st - 22nd

Any advice or training required, just ask. From basic SRT to more advanced, Rigging and Rescue techniques.

*Saturday - above ground training*

*Sunday - underground training*

Any special training or requirements contact Les Williams.

# SRT Rules and Guide-Lines

## SRT Rules

SRT ropes are susceptible to damage because of poor rigging or misuse which can result in injury or death. The leader should satisfy themselves that they know how to rig SRT ropes safely and the competence of every member on their trip with consideration given to the cave in mind. These rules have been introduced specifically for SRT ropes as they are expensive equipment, but also (with obvious modification) apply to other equipment.

1. SRT ropes must be booked out, using the separate SRT log book, by the leader of the trip, along with information on the intended trip. The person booking out the rope is considered to be the leader of the trip.
2. The rope must be inspected for any visual damage before use. Any damage should be logged and reported to the Gear Curator.
3. Rope should be transported and taken underground in tackle sacks.
4. Permission must be obtained from the Gear Curator if the rope is not to be returned to the tackle store within 48hrs.
5. On return, rope must be washed immediately and stored in the approved manner, not left in tackle sacks.
6. Any damage, falls and loss of equipment must be recorded in the SRT log book and reported to the Gear Curator.
7. Leaders may be required to contribute towards the cost of lost or damaged equipment, at the discretion of the committee.

## Guide-lines

These Guide-lines are intended to minimise damage to SRT rope. Although not hard and fast rules, damage caused by not following these guide-lines may require the leader to contribute to their replacement.

1. Rope should be wetted before use.
2. Great care should be taken if using wet cells as they can leak and damage rope. Note that rope is most likely to get damaged during car journeys if wet cells are dumped next to rope.
3. Rope should not be used for pull-through trips as they can get damaged or snagged and then abandoned.
4. Figure of eight type descenders or descending using an Italian Hitch should not be used as it twists and damages rope.
5. SRT rope should only be used for abseiling/prusiking, not life-lining.

## Notes for Gear Curator

1. All rope should be visually inspected for damage at least twice a year. Any damaged sections should be removed.
2. Sections of a rope should be rope - tested after two years and every year thereafter.
3. Members losing, damaging or misusing equipment may be required to pay for their replacement. If they refuse then they will be barred from using club equipment.
4. Donated rope must be rope-tested before use.
5. SRT equipment shall be kept separate from other tackle.

# 1998 Golden Gnome Challenge

## Phil Hendy

WESSEX					B.E.C.				
ROUND	1	2	3	TOTAL	ROUND	1	2	3	TOTAL
Dave Edge (1)	3	5	6	14	Brian Prewer	4	3	7	14
Dave Edge (2)	6	7	7	20	Brenda Prewer	7	8	5	20
Danny	2	6	5	13	Rich Blake	4	6	5	15
Phil Hendy	5	7	7	19	Martin	6	1	6	13
Golly	2	4	6	12	J-Rat	8	8	4	20
Bob Scammell	5	3	5	13	Andy Sparrow	5	3	6	14
Les Williams	7	6	7	20	Stewart McManus	7	7	7	21
Wendy Williams	6	8	4	18	Jake	5	4	6	15
Mak	5	6	4	15	Becky	6	3	3	12
Jo	8	5	5	18	Martin Grass	3	3	6	12
Pauline Grosart	5	5	2	12	Nicky	7	6	7	20
Christine Grosart	8	6	7	21	Estelle	4	7	6	17
Tuska	7	5	2	14	Robin Gray	2	8	3	13
Maurice Hewins	6	8	7	21	Chas	6	5	8	19
Judy Hewins	0	5	5	10	Mike Wilson	5	8	6	19
Pete Hann	6	7	7	20	Hilary Wilson	5	7	5	17
Keith Fielder	6	9	6	21	Alan Butcher	5	6	8	19
Ros Fielder	6	6	9	21	Paul (Mike W)	8	2	4	14
Brian Pitman	15	15	6	36	Annie West	5	5	7	17
Brian Hansford	4	6	8	18	Jon Roberts MCG	4	9		19
Rosie Freeman	7	0	4	11	Tim Francis "	6	6	7	19
Vern Freeman	4	6	3	13	Julie Hesketh "	3	6	8	17
Tav	6	5	7	18	Marcus Ward "	8	4	5	17
Carmen (Sue)	5	6	7	18	Dave Tooke	7	6	8	21
David H	5	7	4	16	Lettie	3	8	6	17
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>421</b>

Spare

### PRIZES

Highest Male score	Brian Pitman	36	Sparkling wine
Highest Female score	Christine Grosart	21	Wine
Lowest Male score	Martin Grass	12	Hobgoblin beer
Lowest Female score	Judy Hewins	10	Hobgoblin beer

Thanks to Phil Hendy for organising the Golden Gnome Challenge and for doing the scoring



# There's (G)no Place Like Gnome

The Golden Gnome left his sanctuary in the Upper Pitts Library for his annual trip to the pub. His Wessex friends took him to the New Inn at Priddy on January 5th for the annual Golden Gnome Challenge, when for the fourth time the BEC tried to persuade him to return with them to the Belfry. The challenge this year was serious, and for the first time the BEC turned out in force, not requiring any Wessex to make up the numbers, and only relying on a few MCG members to help them out.

The first round saw the Wessex in a narrow lead, thanks to Brian Pitman scoring 15 on a spare. He repeated this in the second round, but fell away to a 6 on the third. There were some strong scores put in by the BEC and MCG, notably Stuart McManus and Dave Tooke, while Jon Roberts put the wind up the Wessex by getting a spare of his own, before failing to capitalise on it.

At the end of the evening, the Gnome decided to stick with the Wessex, who had scored a total of 432 against 421 from the BEC/MCG team. Brian Pitman took top men's score with 36, while Christine Gossart won the ladies' prize with 21. Lowest scores were Martin Grass (12) and Judy Hewins (10). They were awarded a bottle of Hobgoblin ale each. A special award went to Brenda Prewer, for her efforts at scoring, which computer analysis later showed to be completely unbiassed, even though the arithmetic skills of Brenda and Phil Hendy need a little honing.

Special thanks to Sue Owen at the New Inn for tolerating us again, although the beer flowed like .. well, beer, and the chef did a good trade. The match was over in time for a late delegation to inflict themselves on the Axbridge Stomp at the Village Hall.

The skittles match is not intended to make a profit - but it is intended not to make a loss. There was, I am happy to say, a small surplus of £20, and a cheque is winging (or maybe bouncing) its way to the MRO. (Back by popular demand next year - curses!

*Phil*

# Build your own Cave Phil Hendy

I found the following in an old edition (the 112th) of 'Enquire Within', approx date 1912. The instructions seem to predate Blue Peter by some years, and do not rely on the use of sticky-back plastic or washing-up liquid bottles. Building your own caves could be an amusing fireside pastime when the weather (or other excuse) prevents you from exploring the real thing. The opportunities are endless - reproductions of famous cave systems, competitions for the best cave, etc, etc. Why not be a real conservationist - make your own cave, then gate it and prevent anyone from looking into it. Or build a really well-decorated cave, then relieve all your stress by vandalising it to hell.

## To Model Caves in Cinders

Arrange the cinders in such a manner as to resemble the intended design; then cover in such parts as require it with brown paper soaked in thin glue until quite pulpy. When nearly dry, dust over with sand, powdered brick, slate and chopped lichen or moss, touch up the various parts with either oil, water, or varnish colours; and if necessary, form your trees of wire, covered with brown paper and moss, glued on. A cave constructed in the above manner, on a large scale, and the interior sprinkled with powdered fluor-spar, or glass, is very effective by candle-light. To imitate water issuing from the cave, a piece of looking-glass should be glued on the stand, and the edges surrounded by glue, and paper covered with sand.

## To Model Caves in Cork

Construct the framework of wood, and fill up the outline with old bottle-corks. The various projections, recessed and other minutiae, must be affixed afterwards with glue, after being formed of cork, or hollowed out in the necessary parts, either by burning with a hot wire and scraping it afterwards, or by means of a sharp-pointed bradawl. Various parts of the model must be touched up with oil, water, or varnish colours; and powdered brick, slate and chopped lichen, or moss, dusted on as usual.

Stalactites may be represented by rough pieces of wood, which must be smeared with glue, and sprinkled with powdered fluor-spar, or glass.

# Review of Pwll Du Cave Management Meeting held on 9.11.97 Mark Helmore

Following the Group officers individual reports, discussions were held on three major items, these being:

- 1. The land purchase of Pwll Du.** It appears that the NT is the front-runner of several parties interested in the land. It is hoped that rather than attempting to buy the land the *Group* will be able to agree access with the new owners.
- 2. Current verbal agreement** with the Coal Authority is in the process of being drawn up and will then be reviewed by the *Group* prior to final agreement.
- 3. The policy on other possible entrances** was discussed. The current view of another entrance to the cave with access administered by the *Group* is still held, this will be reviewed as and when required.

**Note:** a full copy of the minutes and related documents for this meeting are currently available on the WCC library notice board.

## The current WCC members access for Ogof Draenen

We currently hold a "Permanent" loan key which is available from Mark Helmore on request. Please phone Mark with plenty of notice.

As part of our access agreement any passage that we discover **must** be surveyed to at least "tape & compass" standards and the data passed on to the Pwll Du Cave Management Group.

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## Max's Last Climb (*Possibly*) After the MRO Quiz Night - 15th November 1997

Max Midlen was a "tiger" true,  
heed sound advice he wouldn't,  
but habit's he had worst of all,  
for going where he shouldn't.

A word best to describe the lad,  
from Les would be quite "Ravin!"  
his fondness for the natural hole,  
was paramount to caving.

The Butcombe did it's lowly trick,  
- he's young - well he might think!  
he toppled from the Wessex roof,  
while blinded by the drink.

One day he's going to fall they said,  
and right enough they knew,  
but it was only on connecting ground,  
that the prophets words rang true.

The blame must rest on Sparrow's head,  
his books and videos tell,  
the art of going down a hole  
and coming up as well.  
They never mention how to climb,

a caving hut or two,  
with proper lines and ropes and things,  
- to save the drunken few.

A broken ankle could be worse,  
(well, a compound fractured one),  
now a metal plate and pins will do,  
what solid bone had done.

It's Christine we feel sorry for,  
though she shows a patient cast.  
She ought to choke his scrawny neck,  
and kick his stupid ass.

To see him very close to tears (Ho. Ho!)  
the physio' gave him such -  
a therapeutic reddened face, from  
a lady's gentle touch.

Has he learned his lesson now,  
with this story told in rhyme?  
Sit back you Wessex "tigers" all,  
It'll all be told in time.

*Bob (t bstd)*

# Slovenia 1997

Ian Timney

This report follows on from the report of Paul Callister who, with Les Williams and others, went on a reconnaissance trip to Slovenia in 1996. The report can be re-read in The Wessex Journal Volume 24 No. 254 April 1997 pages 45-49), but basically, they set up the contacts and came back so enthusiastic that a return trip was planned straight away.

I am eternally grateful to Les Williams who in the car park at the Rock of Ages cafe filled me with tales of caves measureless to man, castles built in cave entrances, train journeys deep into the bowels of the earth, and boat trips two and three kilometres in length up underground rivers where dragons live - tales that stirred my imagination until the desire for adventure burned deep within my soul.....I just had to go!

At last the day of departure arrived. At 7pm on 25th July, Les Williams and Dave Meredith arrived at my house -I wasn't there I was still at work (oh, the joys of running your own business). At 7.30pm I managed to get home in a panic, but never mind - our excitement was running high and over a glass of beer we discussed our imminent adventure as all else was cast from our minds. We were off to discover the secrets of dragons' lairs from which we may never return.

By 8pm all my gear was stuffed into Butch's car - there was no room for me, but I wasn't going to be cut off at this early stage and so with the help of my two burly comrades I was squashed in amongst the paraphernalia of an expedition.

We were off to Cookie's house where we were to assemble ready for the push the following morning at the crack of dawn - you had to be there man! You could hardly move, the whole ground floor of the house was covered with tackle sacks, bags, boxes of provisions and who knows what else. So we had a few tinnies, some fish and chips and off to bed to fart, belch and dream of caverns measureless to man.

Up at 6am on 26th July and we were off - well some of us were because we had slept at Jo and Mak's leaving the others to load all the gear into the Cookie mobile - impossible but Les got them out of the poo by constructing a roof rack out of the oars from the rubber dinghies and bits of string.

We were on the ferry - Mak, Jo, Russell Mines (he's barking) and myself - all waiting anxiously for the rest of our expedition to arrive. Would they make it in time? Could that be them in the distance? Yes it is - they have made it and with a nifty bit of manoeuvring they were last, but one, onto the ferry.

It was only a short crossing to Calais so we all got stuck into a skanky great breakfast to set us up for the day. We had a very long journey ahead - from France into Belgium, where we stopped at the Grotte de Hann (an excellent show cave - got a discount by showing our Wessex membership cards) then on with the trip through Luxembourg and down through Germany - we did the Ruhr Valley in the dark fortunately. We drove until midnight without a morsel to eat and had a cold, large-scale bivouac in a motorway rest area just this side of Stuttgart - Jo, Mak, Andy Morse, Les Butch, Russell and me.

We woke to the roar of the traffic and a sunny day - we hadn't realised that in the dark we had camped at the base of an extinct volcanic ridge, the first of many pleasant surprises. It was wonderful to be travelling and so we got on with it, stopped at a service station for breakfast and up into the Austrian Alps. We had a fabulous carefree day with regular stops to explore and the camaraderie could not be better - I think we all experienced a tremendous feeling of euphoria.

Late afternoon we stopped at an Alpine hotel and had a banquet which, much to our surprise, didn't cost a lot - "*excellent good, good excellent*" Russell was heard to say; not for the first time for he hadn't yet discovered Slovenian pizzas and Lasco pints. In the dark we crossed the very military border into Slovenia and arrived at the Speleo Camp at about midnight; the Coventry mob were there to greet us with some bottles of beer. It was too dark to pitch our tents so we slept in the loft of the cabin.

Once again, due to the darkness, I had no idea what our surroundings were like, so the next morning I was pleased to find that the Speleo Camp was perched on high ground, above the Polfe just outside the village of Laza, surrounded by low Alpine forested hills and mountains.

On our first morning we all went in to locate the nearest town to change some money and get some provisions including a crate of pivo.

However, no hanging about as we were eager to go exploring so after lunch we went searching for new caves in the forest at Planinska Gora where we found three caves to come back to at a later date. We logged them into the GPS and then went off-roading in Cookie's four-wheel drive vehicle - what fun. Back to camp for a barbecue and a stroll down to ZANZIBAR for some more pivo and some slivovich.

The next day I awoke miraculously without a hangover, so after a quick breakfast Russell and I went for a hike around the Polfe and to search for caves. The others all went to Phesa Mountain near Nanos (1262m). The Polfe was like a large sunken agricultural valley with farms and small settlements on high ground above water level - for the Polfe floods and becomes a lake in winter. The atmosphere was so calm and peaceful with farming methods that belonged in the last century.

After an hour or so we found an inviting cave entrance on the wooded hillside, so we scrambled down the gentle slope and along a spacious horizontal passage. After a short time we found ourselves looking out through a wide low-arched cave entrance - the strong sunlight filling the splendid entrance chamber, the sort that stone age man would have loved. I stepped out into a very large doline (one of Mother Nature's beautiful landscapes) with a large cliff to my left, whilst ahead and to my right the blinding light of countless sunbeams pierced the trees and I felt its wonderful warmth after the cold of the cave - the rocks and plants around me were steaming adding a mystical quality to this lost world. I was lost in a dream back in the old stone age with bird song all about me and the rustle of wild animals in the undergrowth ... but my dream was soon shattered by a wild animal called Russell - there he was besides me like a cave man but with a hard hat and a caving lamp on his head. Oh well, never mind, time to be going, so we retraced our steps and took a circuitous route around the rest of the Polfe and back to camp for a shower before the rest got back from the hills.

They arrived soon after complaining bitterly, for when they got to the top all hot and thirsty, the bar was shut. The bar that Russell and I had found at the far end of the Polfe wasn't - ha ha. We had a super BBQ and copious amounts of pivo to finish off the day.

A later start than usual on Wednesday 30th after a big breakfast. Andy, Butch, Mak, Jo, Mad Al and myself carted our SRT kit and ropes through the village of Laza and up into the forest to find Jama Na Meji, Cave No. 208 - it's very important to watch where you step in the forest as we found out on

finding this cave. We had just left the footpath and started to climb a gentle slope where there was a hole in the ground 6 metres wide with a drop of 36m to the boulder slope at the bottom. Andy Morse rigged the first half of the pitch from two convenient trees down onto a large landing and a squared rebelay, then 15m down onto the top of the boulder slope - this is a classic abseil into a huge chamber but sadly it doesn't go very far. The trouble with Slovenia is that there are so many undiscovered caves that no one goes digging. Eventually, when the diggers do get going, I am sure that with just a little boulder-moving they will break through into miles of new caves.

In the afternoon we went 'on mass' up into Planinska Gora to do a systematic grid search for new caves but found nothing.

On Thursday 31st, Butch, Russell and myself got up at 6am leaving all the others snoring and farting in their tents whilst we crossed the Polfe. This was our first attempt at navigating with the GPS (many thanks to Tav who lent it to the expedition) and we had the co-ordinates set for Vrangna Jama Cave (88). We left the Polfe at the other side and followed the steep loggers road up through fairly dense forest - much to our surprise the GPS could still pick up 3 satellites through the trees and the clever little gadget took us straight to the back door high on the hillside. It was an easy scramble down over boulders and along horizontal passageway (very much like Skednena Jama) except that when it breaks through into another cave entrance and doline they are immense and gigantic - the cave entrance chamber has its own weather system with clouds floating around and drizzle - we were completely gobsmacked. We hadn't read up on any of these caves, but even if we had it would not have prepared us for the enormity of it all.

We scrambled down the most impressive mud slope to the pond at the bottom and saw some Proteus in the gloom, then nearly lost our boots trying to extricate ourselves from the mud. We then scrambled up to the top of the doline which seemed to take ages. Russell had gone out before Butch and I and had disappeared into the forest. We could hear him calling miles off - when we regrouped we discovered that he was only on the other side of the doline. At that moment Butch spotted a brown and yellow snake right next to us on the path so we legged it back to camp.

Nearly everyone was still at camp discussing what to do that day. France Sustersic had given us some co-ordinates for a cave entrance that he knew of that had been found, but not entered, by an Italian group some years earlier. We found the cave without any difficulty in the side wall of a doline. Les

did a quick bit of expedition rigging and we made an easy first descent into Timber Jama as we later named it. We had found some markings painted on the rock near the entrance left by the Italians (JKZ 88) probably the initials of their Club and the year. We did a grade 5 survey of this new cave which turned out to be a 23m shaft with a boulder choke and small chamber at the bottom; so typical of these doline caves. On prussiking out we found a window through into another parallel shaft, the survey of which, along with the survey of Deer Leap (another of our finds) will appear in the next Journal.

Another early start on Friday 1st with Cookie, Butch, Russell and Al to do two of the caves on the

cave walk. There is a good description of the cave walk, which starts and finishes in Laze, in the "Cave Guide to Slovenia" by Ian Bishop. The first cave on the walk is Stota Jama (100), a small hole in the ground right beside the path which gives way to a steep, almost vertical, slope requiring a 30m handline. This is the nearest thing to a Mendip cave I have found so far - not very extensive but well worth a visit.

The next cave on the walk was our second cave of the morning Jama Za Teglovko (207) - another example of watch where you step. We left the path and walked uphill for a few yards over a slight ridge and as we started to descend there it was - a 4m diameter hole in the forest floor, 20m deep.

Last but one onto the ferry



Entrance deviation to Timber Jama



Entrance pitch to Jama Na Meji

Les logging coordinates on the GPS - a cave I spotted from the vehicle. Sadly we did not get back to explore it.

Cookie rigged the pitch and we abseiled in (except for Russell who doesn't do SRT - unfortunately for him we had no ladders at all). We scrambled down a steep boulder slope to a deep very muddy hole. The traverse around the top of the hole looked very slippery with nothing much to hold onto, and as the hole was about 6m deep we thought we would give it a miss. Also we knew that there wasn't much beyond the hole, so out we went and back to camp for lunch.

After lunch Cookie, Butch and myself went on the trip of a lifetime to Planinska Jama (748) south of a village called Planina, a few kilometres from camp. For this cave you need inflatable dinghies so we took the SS Yo Wessex Piss Pot III - a somewhat dubious craft but adequate.

You enter this cave down a steep pathway and along a timber walkway with the resurgence on your right - the river (Unica). Underneath and to the left there's a canal which powers what we took to be some sort of an hydro-electric system. The entrance chamber is enormous - you could fly helicopters in there and the reflected light from the river creates a wonderful shimmering atmosphere.

We walked some way into this immense chamber to a locked gate which you have to climb over (dinghy and all) and across a large bridge to the other side. It's then about a ten minute walk along a man-made path from when the cave was a showcave some years back (1920) and through a man-made tunnel to the confluence of two rivers -

the Pivka (pronounced Puka) and the Rak - both large rivers by any standards. The path leading to the tunnel gives very dramatic views of the river far below with lots of white water down there. By now you are awe-inspired and wonder what you are going to see next - this feeling never leaves you until you leave the cave.

From the end of the tunnel there is an easy climb down about 10feet and across some jagged rocks - convenient place where you can launch the boat. We decided to take the right hand river (the Pivka; but both these rivers run in great gorges so high that you can't see the roof. We paddled upstream and passed under several collapsed bridges - large sections of which you could see lurking menacingly under the surface of the river

Well, so far the only thing Les had exaggerated about was the Dragons - we only found lady ones dozens of them swimming all around us - I am lead to believe they are called Proteus. The strange thing about Proteus is that they are only found in the Pivka and not in the Rak. Several times we had to get out of the boat and carry it across rock barriers but most of the time the water was deep. We travelled about 2km upstream to the terminal sump where we beached the boat and explored the Paradiz series; an extensive dry passage with more stal than you could shake a stick at. What a beautiful place and beyond your wildest dreams - a photographer's paradise, but I discovered later that I had no film in my camera so I will have to go back.

## **Slovenia 1998**

August 8th - August 23rd

WCC returning to continue exploration in existing areas  
and possibly some Alpine karst

If interested a meeting will be held on  
Sunday 22nd February 3pm at Upper Pitts

Superb holiday for all the family

# Floodpulse

## A short Story by Andy Sparrow

*Smithy. High Fell Pot, Far Series. ETO 2300.* The words were chalked on the trips board but were, as yet, unread by the slumbering occupants of the bunkroom. A few miles distant, the caver called Smithy was trudging over dewy grass towards tiers of limestone scars. He imagined the others crawling from their pits, seeing the message. They'd see who was full of bullshit.

It was a perfect morning in that transience between spring and summer. He stopped to draw breath and surveyed the valley below where the snaking river glittered, winding away into misty obscurity, it was a day to breathe moorland air and view the world from hill top cairns, not to go alone into darkness. He pictured his message on the board and swore out loud. He climbed to the High Fell where the heather scratched his legs and bogs sucked at his boots. Ahead, reared the sweeping ridge where moorland aspired to mountain, and coarse beige grasses swept up to an azure sky. Within the gentle folds of that escarpment was a cove, a natural amphitheatre, or as Smithy perceived it, a funnel. For it faced to the West, confronting the approaching rain clouds and channelling their torrents to one single point where the ground consumed them. He had never walked this hill before, but the landscape directed him infallibly, towards High Fell Pot. He could see stream beds, gathered and combined from the runnels of the upper slopes, converging in a crater at the base of the cove; a funnel within the funnel. He reached the edge and scrambled down a steep and rocky bank. Below, a little water seeped and trickled between glistening cobbles. It crept and dribbled across beds of bare limestone, down to the lowest point where a low black slit consumed it.

Nature's storm drain he thought. Highly efficient and deadly dangerous. No matter how swollen and furious this mountain stream became, it would be swallowed, gulped down thirstily, by an ancient open mouth that men had called High Fell Pot. If the sky was not so blue, if the stream not a benign trickle, there would be good reason not to go. If only. For all the determination and bravado of the night before was fading fast. After all, what did it matter what they thought? He didn't need to prove anything to anyone. Except maybe to himself. He shook the contents of his rucksack onto the ground; helmet, karabiners, jammers, ropes, a muddy oversuit and a jumble of clothing. He dressed himself, thermals first, then the fleece suit

and finally a patched and battered PVC oversuit. Neoprene socks were pulled on and squeezed into Wellington boots, before the harness with its jangling hardware was buckled around waist and thighs. With knee-pads fixed, helmet donned, and a tackle bag slung from the shoulder, Smithy stood ready.

He stood still and felt the warmth of the sunshine and the fainter cooler touch of a whispered breeze upon his cheek. He could hear the distant bleating calls of ewe to lamb, and the faint cry of a curlew. He gazed at the cave entrance, watched the trickle of water vanishing, listened to it murmuring in the darkness beyond, and another feeling welled within him. He wanted to shine a light into that blackness, to follow the passage onwards, to peer around each corner, to see how it changed, grew and shrunk. What chambers and grottoes lay beyond, what secrets rested invisible in the deep heart of the High Fell? That desire, that craving to know, that taken him underground at every opportunity for ten years of his life, possessed him and burnt away all reluctance. He lifted his hand up to flick the igniter on his helmet, and a brilliant yellow carbide flame burst forth. He stooped down and crawled, on hands and knees, into High Fell Pot.

The carbide lamp hissed, the oversuit rustled and the tackle bag dragged noisily along. The rock was grey but seemed warm in the carbide glow. The floor was smooth and rippled, scoured clean by a thousand floods. He crawled on easily until the passage changed shape and allowed, first, an awkward stoop, then a winding sideways walk.

He knew he must be nearly at the first pitch and expected at every corner to emerge over some great dark pit. When, finally, he found himself on the brink, a surprise awaited him; another rope was already rigged. It was new, clean and the bolt hangers uncorroded. Apparently then, despite Smithy's early start, there was another group already in the cave. This was not a popular trip. It was long, floodable, arduous and consequently seldom visited. The journey ahead seemed less solitary as Smithy rigged his own rope alongside the other and then abseiled into the void.

Thirty metres down was a clean washed floor. The only exit from the great gun barrel shaft was on hands and knees following a trickle of water. He crawled for a few metres and the passage turned

abruptly left, another few metres and it elbowed right - a joint controlled pattern following the grid of cracks and fissures through the limestone bed. He crawled on, a steady rhythmic placing of hands and knees only interrupted by the frequent right and left turns. In almost every crack rotted twigs were wedged draped with limp blades of grass still faintly green. There was a faint, dank, musty odour of mould and decay.

It was a long and tedious crawl that gradually gained in height but reduced in width. Here were the Stoops; long sections of a frustrating sideways shuffle at an awkward height, still with that continual shifting of joint to joint, from corner to corner. An hour into the cave he reached larger passage and walked easily beneath the arched roof of a meandering gallery. Wet mud deposits lingered on the wall, a constant reminder that there could be no refuge here from a flood. The water began to deepen its chill embrace rose up his legs from knee to thigh to waist. The water was as cold as any that lingers long underground and he surged on splashing noisily in search of drier ground.

Ahead the roof lowered until it touched the water surface but to the left of this sump pool a ramp of boulders led out of the water and up to a dry boulder strewn gallery. The rocks were clean and the passage spacious. The walls were still dark, almost black, and the atmosphere depressing but at least this shattered corridor was safe from flooding. It was tedious work, as always, scrambling over and between the fallen blocks, but the fibre pile suit was draining and body heat regenerating.

The murmur of flowing water grew louder. The stream re-entered from an inlet sump and the Main Stream Passage began. Despite its spacious dimensions it was tedious as great fallen blocks created frequent barriers. An hour of boulder scrambling relented when the stream vanished into another flooded tube and the passage lowered to a crawl. A chamber lay ahead, a funnel of mud and boulders dominating the floor. He slid carefully down into a spiralling boulder choke which hung poised over the second pitch where another rope was rigged. So, the other cavers were headed to the Far Series. Smithy wanted to meet them, or rather for them to meet him, to witness his solo venture. He abseiled down the twenty or so metres to the Great Choke. Here was a jungle of boulders, notoriously loose and fickle, where the route was said to change from week to week.

Fragments of guide rope and smeared muddy trails led him down through the huge choke to solid

passage below. And here there was a transformation - the black depressing limestone of the upper cave was replaced by pale, creamy beds that seemed almost warm in the complimentary flicker of the carbide flame. He was in an arched passage with the stream murmuring around his ankles. Black space beckoned ahead.

The stream gurgled away into a side passage leading to a final low and silty sump, but ahead the cave continued. A scramble up into an old sandy passage led on to luxurious walking in a high majestic rift. After an hour of easy going the roar of water rose above the hiss of silence. The Far Streamway began with an inlet cascading from a lofty shaft and continued high, meandering with energetic waterchutes. It seemed to promise a long and fascinating traverse through the mountain but instead offered only scummy deepening water and the dismal Far Sump. It was the end of the cave.

Smithy contemplated the depressing pool. Three miles to the resurgence and 600 feet of depth to go - what a prospect. But there was no way through this sump, the divers had tried. No sign of the other cavers, no witness to the moment. He turned and began the long journey back to daylight. He had gone only a short distance along the streamway when suddenly amongst the whispering voices of water there was an alien sound, a whine, a faint rattling. Distant, now stopped. He halted and listened. The noise came again.

He turned back along the streamway scanning around, looking, listening, and noticed a high level passage. It had the look of an oxbow but was a good size and warranted closer inspection. It was an oxbow, walking passage, and there were objects on the sand floor ahead. A sleeping bag primus stove, and BDH containers lay before him and again came that strange rattle and hum. Smithy looked back towards the streamway and spoke aloud. 'Where?... And who?'

He continued upstream eyes on alert, searching all around. There were chockstones jammed in the rift above and one had mud streaks. He straddled up and traversed to the rock. He saw the bootprints leading on along a further traverse and he heard the sound again. Now the route climbed on more chockstones to a rooftube where a traverse line began. Cowstails clipped in Smith, followed the bolted rope towards his quarry. He saw a pool of light ahead and heard the now unmistakable rattle of the cordless drill. He estimated that the rooftube was just above Far Sump when he saw the other caver.

The drill was screaming and its user was engrossed in his task. Ahead lay a short section of smooth walled traverse and then a gaping tube. Smithy's light fell upon the caver. The drill went silent as his face glanced towards Smithy. There was a flash of hostility, resentment, before he spoke. 'Thought you'd gone'. He turned back to his work and the drill burst into life again. When he stopped he glanced back at Smithy and spoke: 'On your own?' 'Yep. Supposed to be a club meet but they all bottled out' 'Like they do' muttered the stranger and the resentment seemed to ease for a moment. 'I'm Smithy. Northern speleos.' The stranger was silent. He concentrated on fixing the new anchor and spannering in a hanger. 'I'm Rigger'. Rigger tied off to the new bolt and advanced a cowstail length towards the tube. His light briefly revealed the way ahead, a glimpse of scallops arching perfectly over an untrodden sandy floor. The drill roared again. 'That's a fantastic lead' said Smithy when silence resumed. Rigger flashed him a resentful glance and resumed his work. The tone of the drill changed during the next hole as the battery ran down. There was 5 metres left to bolt when Rigger packed his kit and started back along the traverse. Smithy looked at the final unrigged section. 'I could straddle that.' Rigger hesitated and then, with some resignation, replied. 'It's all yours.'

Minutes later he was hanging from Riggers final bolt trying to ignore the 20 metre drop below. He was no brave climber and struggled to control his nerve. Given the choice he would come back another day and continue bolting, but he guessed that his companion would prefer to complete that task alone. If he was to share this lead the privilege would have to be earned.

He glanced back to Rigger at the other end of the lifeline who signalled his readiness. It flashed through his mind that he knew nothing of this man's ability to hold a fall. 'Climbing.' He concentrated on the passage ahead and straddled over quickly before fear could grip. The rock was greasy, the footholds sparse and he almost lunged the last metre landing face down on the sandy floor. His hands shook as he tied the rope off around a rock bridge. Rigger quickly joined him and, for the first time, smiled. 'That was well done' he said, 'didn't need this after all'. He pulled the spare drill battery from his bag and grinned before setting off along the virgin passage.

It draughted strongly and continued as a stooping and walking sized tube. The floor changed from sand to shiny cobbles and flowstone glittered on the walls. Rigger stopped and motioned Smithy to silence. There was a rumble in the distance. They

set off again, running now, towards the sound. A deep rift yawned in the floor ahead and a crashing of water echoed below. The Far Sump was bypassed.

They tied what rope they had together and rigged from a solid chockstone in the rift. Rigger descended, abseiling down the centre of a widening rift. There were grunts and metallic clicks as he passed a knot midpitch, then the rope went slack and his voice sounded from 30 metres below. 'Rope free... and what a streamway!' Smithy threaded his descender and slid down the first narrow metres of the rift until the walls parted and he hung suspended. A great void lay around him, a gothic rift extending into fathomless shadows. Rigger's light below revealed a lively stream spilling from pool to waterchute. He passed the knot and abseiled the last few metres. They stood together for a minute gazing downstream into passage where no light had shone. They were at the heart of the mountain in a magnificent streamway, three miles to the resurgence and 600 feet to drop.

They set off, wading waist deep through milled pools and feeling the current lash at their ankles between. A hundred metres and the passage levelled. Great cobbles lay strewn and an arched roof descended and lowered. The sump was a bitter blow when it came. 'No mud, no flood debris' muttered Smithy, 'It's perched., and damn short I bet. You dive?' Rigger shook his head 'No. You?' 'No. But I know a man who does...'

#### ***To be continued in the next Journal***

This space has been reserved for any last minute bits of news. As no-one (apart from Les, who has his own special space on page 124) has any, please use it for whatever purpose you want. You never know, you may even get inspiration to write an article!



# Blast From The Past!

(taken from Wessex Journal No 62 Vol 4 May 1957 Page 197)

## Cave owners and their caves

I have often wondered how many of the cave owners have been down their own caves. Not just the show caves, I mean, though even there they have had adventures. Wing Cdr. Hodgkinson once got stranded in the upper series of Wookey Hole without a light. Mr. Stock has been through the sump in Stock Lane and holds his cave in affectionate regard. Mr Maine has the same feeling for Swildon's, which he often descended in his younger days. Mr Young has often been down G.B. Cave but not, I think, down Longwood or August Hole. I wasn't at all sure whether Mr. Weeks had been down Eastwater. One day when we were changing in his barn, he was driving in his cows for milking and he came in to have a chat with us:

"When did you last go down your Cave"? said I

"I've never been down it."

"Would you like to come down with us this afternoon?"

"Would you like to milk my cows?"

Cheramodytes

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## Editorial

Before I forget, apologies to Duncan and Lydia Frew. I made Rufus, their new child, -7 days old in the last Journal - it should have read 7th November - sorry.

Thank you to all of you who have submitted articles and please keep sending them in - the threat of cooking recipes and travel tips obviously paid off! However, despite my pleas for more articles it would seem that the majority of people have forgotten how to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard)!

It would be nice to have some more technical articles, surveys, etc so if you feel like writing, why not give it a try. For all those new/rejoining members who think they couldn't possibly write

anything, why don't you just try it - you may even enjoy it!

If you have access to a computer, why not send them to me on computer disk; preferably saved in Word 6, but most formats can be translated. A hard copy would also be appreciated for checking spelling, layout, etc. If you have any photos or drawings to accompany the text, why not send them in as well - they will be returned (eventually).

A final note then. This Journal is about you, the Club and what you've all been getting up to - no smutty answers now! I can't make all of it up so if you want to continue receiving a Journal, please start writing.

*Rosie*

# Extracts from Mark Helmore's Caving Log

*"It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time"*

OR

*"A Trip to Maypole Series in St Cuthberts on a Wet Weekend"*

I don't know whose idea it was (not mine surely), but as Vern was the leader then he must be to blame. A trip to Maypole Series in St Cuthberts seemed like a good idea at the time even though Noah had been seen in the area with a load of wood and nails. Still, after gathering together the vital components for the trip to come - including ladder, lifeline, boot lace and most importantly a broken traffic cone - Vern, Mak and Jo, Cookie, Butch (no, not that Butch) and myself, made our way to the entrance.

After volunteering?? to plug the upper dam I swam across the lake and dived down (well nearly) to plug the hole with my big pointed thingy (no - the traffic cone) and after Butch successfully shut the lower dam valve we were at least assured a dry start to the trip.

It became apparent after surfing down Pulpit Pitch that a rather damp trip was to be expected. On reaching the start of Maypole Series and seeing the volume of water coming down the first pitch, Jo tried to blend in with the rock, but she was spotted. Once up the short scramble we stood at the base of the first pitch proper. A few choice comments were made but Vern still insisted on rigging the adder and being first up it. Amidst howls of laughter, sorry support, Vern reappeared from the waterfall to reach the top of the pitch a cleaner

person (well in body anyway). The rest of us realised that we were now committed - or should have been - and joined Vern at the top of the pitch, similarly baptised.

A few more wet pitches were scaled and we achieved our objective - to get cold, wet and miserable? - no no, to enjoy ourselves and reach the end of the Series. A quick descent of the pitches saw us heading for Wire Rift and out. A well-practiced move saw myself at the front (oldest first and all that) heading for daylight. Nearing the top of Wire Rift I heard a shout from behind "get out as quick as you can and check the dam", well I'm sure that's what was said and Mak must have heard similar as he was right behind me (I later found out that it was actually "don't forget the rope from Pulpit" - funny that!!)

All out safely we rounded on Vern to lynch, sorry, thank him, for a classic trip, cheers Vern (somebody remind me not to speak to Vern in the pub on a Friday night).

Oh the boot lace - that's for rigging with!!

Seriously, if you get the chance of a trip to this part of the cave it's well worth it, just remember to take your hood with you.

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## *Don't Forget the Sky Hook*

Mark, Les, Cookie, Mike T, Sparrow and Neil  
(foreign bloke)

The day got off to a good start, and we left Mendip almost on schedule, but then it went pear-shaped. We arrived at the Cosy Cafe for breakfast to find it closed! After calming Les down there followed a tour of the closed cafes of the area before making do with cardboard burgers from Esso mmm!!

Penwyllt was as welcoming as ever and we were soon organised with a Cwm Dwr entrance key and the all important sky hook.

Cwm Dwr was as pleasant as ever, Dim Dwr wasn't. Differing routes were taken to Concierge at Picadilly. We were soon in the main streamway and made our way to the first river chamber.

Les and Sparrow shot off (ooh err) to check the connection into Birth Canal Series but soon returned saying it didn't need doing (nothing to do with it being flat out and wet!)

On arriving at the climb up towards Pom Pom Passage, where normally you simply attach the sky hook to the fixed rope to pull up the ladder, Les had to perform his spiderman act - why? - because Sparrow had left the sky hook on the wall at Penwyllt.

With shouts of encouragement ("get up you Pussy!") Les neared the top of the climb where he was then able to feed our rope through the eyebolt and then rig the ladder. Sparrow started up, lifelined of course, nearing the top of the ladder he appeared to slip (apparently on purpose) but the lifeline held (I must have a word with Les about that).

With the rest of the team up the ladder we went in search of the fabled pom pom. After some sightseeing we eventually traversed our way to find a crystalline ball on the end of a calcite straw, I was impressed until I realised it wouldn't fit in my tackle bag, still there is always next time. We gave up looking for the Pom Pom (or for that matter the cheerleader) and headed back to the main stream and marble showers. Here, with stream levels high high, it was good to climb up into the high level traverse route (not everyone may agree with that). We soon reached the interesting climb up into the Upper Oxbow Series, and then followed a tour of the delights of this area, including fine formations, crystal floors, bottomless pits and squalid crawls (for some).

The pull-through abseil at the end of this Series dropped us into Midnight Passage. Here, Les constructed a 'harness' (to use the word very loosely) out of some bailing twine. Unfortunately this proved quite adequate ... On reaching Salubrious, three of us decided on a 'steady' out, while the others visited the delights of the Judge and Trident. Discussions later revealed that Sparrow had got lost on the way out, and had asked Les to keep quiet!!!

All in all a classic trip with good company - what more could you want ..... a good breakfast, a good pint of Butcombe, a good woman, book

Remember - don't forget the sky hook! (or forget Sparrow)

# Club Diary

## February

21st WCC Wookey Hole meet  
meet 6.30pm at Wookey Car Park

## March

1st WCC Committee Meeting  
6th/9th WCC Devon Meet  
7th BCRA Cave Science Symposium  
Keele University, Staffordshire  
21st NCA AGM, 10.30am  
21st/22nd WCC SRT Training Weekend

## April

10th/13th WCC Yorkshire meet (Easter)  
19th WCC Committee Meeting  
25th/26th 3rd European Caving Expedition  
Symposium, Peak District  
25th WCC Geological Excursion

## May

2nd/4th WCC South Wales Meet (WSG)  
16th CSCC AGM Hunters Lodge  
17th Photographic Workshop  
23rd/25th WCC Belgium Meet  
31st WCC Committee Meeting

## June

5th/7th WCC North Wales Meet  
14th Pwll Du CMG meeting, 10.30am  
Gwesty Bach, Brynmawr  
20th WCC Banwell Caves

## July

4th/5th Cavers' Fair, Mendip  
19th WCC Committee Meeting

## August

3rd/7th NSS Convention, Sewanee, Tennessee

## September

6th WCC Committee Meeting

## October

17th/18th Wessex AGM and Dinner weekend