





# THE WESSEX CAVE CLUB JOURNAL

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# Club News

## **Geoff Tudgay**

*A founder member of the Wessex Cave Club, passed away recently. Our condolences and thoughts go to his family and friends.*

## **Club Events and Meets**

It's Easter next weekend, so if you're thinking of going to the usual **Yorkshire** meet, have you remembered to contact Les to book a caravan? .... If not, do it now!

In the back of this Journal there is a list of the **Yorkshire bookings** made for the Wessex. If you would like to use any of these bookings, please contact Keith Sanderson - phone number in the front of the Journal.

## **1998 WCC Rescue Practice**

**Saturday 9th May**

**Upper Pitts 10am**

**SRT Kit Optional**

An updated **WCC Membership** List is currently being produced by Vern Freeman. Unless you have stated previously, phone numbers will be issued in this list. However, if you **DO NOT** want your telephone number to be included in the list please contact him ASAP

All ready for the **Geological trip round Mendip** on Saturday 25th April? Details are in the previous Journal, but basically

- meet at Upper Pitts 9.30am
- please try to car share
- pub lunch (of course)
- suggest wearing sturdy walking boots and bringing waterproofs?

For both the **Bank Holidays in May**, meets have been arranged. First one is at the WSG in **South Wales**, and the second is in **Belgium**. Suggest you contact the Caving Secretary for the Belgium meet but contact any of the committee members for details on how to get to the WSG.

The **North Wales Meet** will be held on 6th and 7th of June, with camping at the Red Lion at Rhosemor - details in the last Journal. Plenty of caves, mines and walking in the area.

A **Banwell Caves** trip has been organised for Saturday 20th June - this will include Stalactite Cave and Bone Cave. Meet at Upper Pitts at 2pm.

Any ideas for different meets are always welcome. Contact the Caving Secretary if you have any suggestions.

Please note that the **Craven Pothole Club**, with which the Wessex have reciprocal rights, is now totally non-smoking in the hut.

Thanks to Vern Freeman for the donation of a **microwave** for the kitchen at Upper Pitts.

Mike Dewdney-York is planning a **stock-take** of the books, journals, etc, in the **Library**. Therefore, if you have borrowed anything, please could you return it to the Library by 1st June to enable an accurate stock-take to take place - *thanks*.

Les Williams is aiming to set up a **Wessex Cave Club web-site**. If you have any ideas or items that you would like to see on it, please contact him.

## **Wessex People**

Congratulations to **Sheila and Brian Pitman** on their 25th Wedding Anniversary on the weekend of 28th February and to their daughter, **Tina**, who celebrated her 21st Birthday at the same time

Congratulations also to **Maurice Hewins** who celebrates his 60th Birthday on Saturday 4th **April**, - probably as you're reading this! You can read about Maurice's fond (?) memories of Mendip on page 149 of this Journal.

## **New Members**

### **Jonathon Andrew Damrel**

Tamboran, 17 Woodborough Rd., Radstock,  
BA3 3HY Tel: 01761 437618

### **Mark David Dobbyn**

139 Cromwell Rd., St. Andrews, Bristol, BS6 5EU  
Tel: 0117 924 5768

### **Naomi Jones**

White Hart House, Chitterne, Warminster, Wilts.  
BA12 0LL Tel: 01985 850336

# Caving News

## Mendip

Someone has dug out Binney's Link (the direct route into the dry ways in **Swildons**). The passage was easy enough as a bit of a wriggle – it's now nearly hands and knees size. This may be no big deal but the Mendip principle has always been not to make existing passages easier just for the sake of it – after all where does it stop? Possibly the same persons have tried to open the hole under the hollow tree at the entrance - this will be noticed by the landowner who may not be best pleased at the modification of his property. Anyone out there who knows the culprits please have a word in their ear!

There was a lot of rain over Xmas and New Year resulting in some very high stream levels. Swildons was up to the second pipe and there was local flooding in the fields by the pumping station.

Syringe needles and used condoms have been found in the changing area for **GB**. The area has been cleaned up but there may still be more buried in the mud or the culprits may return, so caution is required.

A meeting was held at the Hunters Lodge on Saturday 31st January 1998 to try and hammer out a bolting policy for Mendip. General conclusions were that re-bolting with resin anchors will generally only be carried out when existing anchors are no longer safe - ie: no program of systematic bolt replacement, although Rhino Rift is an exception as CCC have already approved a complete re-bolt. **The Mendip Technical Group** will not have an independent identity (not another caving committee) but will be a loose association of cavers prepared to get involved. Further details from Andy Sparrow.

**Hunters Hole** - there is a massive digging operation in the bottom and much equipment left in situ. Several bolts are stripped and replacing these with P hangers will be an early objective of the new Technical Group.

**Frog Pot** is at Chancellors 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. A short length of natural passage (10-20 metres) has been entered.

Work is continuing on **Mud Sump** in Swildons. There is now an air space, but bailing is still difficult and care should be taken when passing the Sump. More work is still needed on the drain hole so if you have some spare time please offer your services. For more information or to offer help, contact Les Williams.

## Derbyshire

The rope on Millers Chamber in **Eldon Hole** is in a dangerous condition. Also the upper of the two bolts at the head of the first pitch in Millers Chamber is loose.

Repairs are needed at the head of the second pitch in **Oxlow cavern** on the unstable slopes. Please take care until they are completed.

## Yorkshire

The entrance to **New Goyden Pot** has collapsed, and the entrance is in a dangerous condition. The Black Sheep Diggers have stabilised the entrance so that the cave is now open, but care is still needed.

The installation of Eco Hangers in **Hurnell Moss Pot** is now complete and a rigging guide will be on sale soon.

## Wales

A rock fall has taken place at **Porth-yr-Ogof** near the entrance. If you are visiting this cave care should be taken when entering and leaving.

The Cambrian Caving Council have brought out the **1998 Handbook**. This contains information on access arrangements for caves in Wales, the Forest of Dean and Shropshire. It also contains information on accommodation etc.

## Devon

**Pengelly Quarry Caves** have been temporarily closed due to loose rock on the quarry face.

# Single Rope Controller

By Dominic Sealy

I have recently had the opportunity to have a play around with an S.R.C. belay device both climbing and caving. As a belay tool designed to be used attached directly to a harness, it is extremely effective when used with the appropriate round section H.M.S. krab. The compatibility of krab with S.R.C. is important as it is the action of the krab locking against the body of the S.R.C. which results in the auto-locking action. The wrong krab with the device could lead to it failing to lock correctly.

Developed by the staff at the Foundry Climbing Wall, this belay tool represents a cheap and effective alternative to the Petzl Grigri - L'15 as opposed to L'50. As a substitute for an Italian hitch or Petzl Stop/Grigri used at head-height, rather than the recommended waist-height, the S.R.C., at first glance, seems a good substitute; it is autolocking (?), has no moving parts, and all importantly is cheap.

The locking action when used attached to the waist appears almost automatic - however it is not. The fact that the rope naturally drapes to the ground assists the locking action, such that it will stop a fall on occasion without the belayer holding onto the rope. This leads one to believe that the device is auto-locking in the manner of a Grigri. The Grigri differs in an important way, in that the camming

action of the cam against the rope is assisted by a spring in the mechanism, whereas the camming action of the krab bar and the S.R.C. is dependent on gravity. In an inverted position, gravity is effectively removed and the device behaves in an altogether different way, failing to lock unless the control rope is lifted above the device. So, as you can see, it fails to be the amazing auto-locking gizmo when used at waist height, and reverts to being a belay tool requiring much the same controlling action as a Stitch Plate. Additionally, if you try to convert to a Z-Rig as you can do using the inverted stop or Grigri, the S.R.C. simply acts as a pulley.

In conclusion, the S.R.C. suffers from all the limitations of a Stitch Plate and more, in that its auto-locking quality (when used attached to a harness) could lull you into a false sense of security, leading you to think that it will behave in the same manner when used at head height. From my own limited trials of the S.R.C., I would suggest that it is a device best kept for climbing - shame, as for L'15 it would have been a much cheaper alternative to the Grigri. Also, my own experiments have reminded me of the value of testing all new equipment out (especially that designed for other disciplines) before using them in anger.

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## Editorial

You might have noticed in the last two Journals, that there have been no logbook extracts! This is for a couple of reasons:

1. Not many people are actually writing their caving trips up, and
2. Some a...hole has ripped out two pages of the logbook.

Now, you may not realise but the logbook forms part of the history of the WCC and is irreplaceable. Therefore, if there is someone out there who, for whatever reason, mutilated part of the Wessex's fine name, would they please put the pages back in the Logbook or return the pages (anonymously if required) to anyone on the Committee - no questions will be asked.

In a Club of well over 200 members, is it not possible that someone has got something to write about? You don't have to be a novelist, just scribble something down about your caving exploits or a topic in which you are interested - better still, put it on a disc (preferably in Word6) and enclose some pictures or drawings and see your efforts in print!!!!

For all of you who have contributed articles over the last few years, I do still have your discs and photos at the Wessex, so next time you're down, why don't you ask me, if I don't remember first, and you'll get them back. Anyway, until next time, have fun caving and keep writing

*Rosie*

# **Floodpulse *Part2***

## **A short Story by *Andy Sparrow***

A week later Smithy was striding across the High Fell with a significantly heavier rucksack than before. This time he was not alone. Close behind trailed another man, bearded thick set and, on this morning, prone to scowling. He was called Alex and he was far from happy. 'High Fell bloody Pot, you could have said'. 'Sorry Alex, had to get you along somehow' said Smithy over his shoulder. He had recruited the best diver he knew. Alex had already pushed the two known High Fell Sumps without success, endured a gruelling carry in and out of the system with minimal sherpas and sworn never to return. Devious tactics had lured him out to dive 'at a secret site', now the penny had dropped as to where that might be.

After the previous weeks breakthrough he had left the cave solo. They had arranged to meet a week later and for Smithy to bring a diver. Any suggestion of meeting on the surface was greeted by Rigger with icy distaste. He would be at the camp. Smithy had wondered if Rigger intended to leave the cave at all during the week.

They abseiled down into the cave and set off along the crawls. They carried an air bottle each, towed behind in a tackle sack, as well as the valves, line reel and other essentials. It was slow work until they reached the streamway and shouldered their packs, and even then the excess weight took its toll. It was nearly four hours later that they heard the rumble of the Far Streamway ahead.

They climbed up into the sandy oxbow where Rigger camped. Around a corner ahead a warm flickering glow greeted them. Rigger lay between two candles, snug in sleeping bag, reading a book and nodding vaguely with the tinny beat of a Walkman. He looked up, removed the earphones, and motioned towards a saucepan simmering over a primus flame. 'Lunch?' he enquired.

As they ate a thought crossed Smithy's mind. He looked around at the camp, and at Rigger sat at ease on his bed. And it occurred to him there was one fundamental difference between them: He, Smithy, went underground because it was wild, hostile, dangerous; a journey into the wilderness with often more pleasure in the return than in the going. But Rigger? Alone and far from daylight what did he feel? Safe, secure, peaceful? Perhaps to him the wilderness lay in the world above. Alex spoke to Rigger. 'Didn't you hang around with the York Club a few years back?' Rigger shrugged but evaded Alex's eyes. 'Maybe, sometimes, I knew a few of

them' The old crowd? Jamie, Bish, Alan...' 'Yeah. The old crowd. Let's get organised..' Rigger shook off the cocoon of the sleeping bag and rummaged amongst his caving gear. They set off for the sump. The traverse Smithy had led a week before was now well bolted; Rigger had been busy with his drill. With a clicking of cowstail krabs Alex stepped from the traverse and into the extension. He gazed along the walking sized tube stretching ahead and then at Smithy. With a hint of a smile and an approving nod he shouldered his pack and set off. Bolts had now appeared at the new pitch and a longer rope dispensed with the knot pass. One by one they abseiled down into the roaring streamway.

By the time they reached the sump Alex was more animated than Smithy thought possible. 'Short and shallow. It's got to be.' He stated, almost willing it to be true. He kitted up with shaking hands - excitement, not nerves, thought Smithy. They were all on edge as he lowered himself into the sump pool. There was an almost tangible air of uncertainty; a craving for success, a sense of risk... 'It's not big' said Alex probing the passage feet first. He tested the valves which hissed reassuringly, placed one between his teeth and the sump swallowed him. A few bubbles broke surface. The diving line twitched for a minute and was still.

They waited in silence as time passed. Ten minutes. Twenty... Thirty..... Absolute success? the sump passed? or absolute failure; Alex dead? It was now one or the other. 'Listen' said Rigger. 'Listen'. There was a distant rumbling. 'It's coming from the sump.' said Smithy with disbelief. The rumbling became a gurgling. 'The level's dropping!' 'Christ it's opening' They scrambled into the sump pool together and with faces half submerged stared through at a grinning Alex just two metres beyond. Told you it'd be short.' he shouted through, 'Only held here by a cobble dam.' Smithy took a breath and plunged through. Rigger followed so close and fast he bowled Alex and Smithy over. They wallowed together in a waist deep pool laughing like kids; high on the released tension, ecstatic with success. 'Pitch downstream' stated Alex, 'worth a look'.

Rigger and Smithy raced off along a canyon streamway leaving Alex to continue his work lowering the sump. The water sped on, foaming, accelerating towards the pitch. Soon they were traversing above the waterchute and then above a spray flecked darkness filled with thunder. They shouted above the roar and shivered in the blasting

draught. '30 metres?' 'More like 60!' 'Better get the drill charged up'

Two hours later they were back at Rigger's camp fortified with coffee and soup. Smithy was damp and chilled, Alex cramped within his wetsuit. Rigger though, was snug back in his sleeping bag. 'Same time next week then' he asked them both. Alex shook his head. 'I'll leave that to you boys. Just get there and find me another sump.' 'I'll bring some rope.' said Smithy 'I've got plenty of 9mm.' 'You'll need something else too,' said Rigger, 'a sleeping bag'.

They left the camp and the sound of the Far Streamway faded behind them. Alex turned to Smithy. 'I thought I knew your mate. I'm not surprised he's so bloody evasive. Remember Deep Ghyll...' 'What the three that drowned?' 'And the one that got away - that's him.'

They rested beyond the Great Choke. 'There was Rigger, his girlfriend and his two best mates. Deep Ghyll starts with a long crawl, then a 20 metre pitch, another crawl and some fossil stuff. They were at the bottom when it flooded. His mates wanted to stay in the fossil system and sit it out but Rigger said to go for it - to get out. So they followed him. He was first up the pitch and into the crawls. That must have put him a few minutes ahead of the others. He made it. They didn't.' 'So it was his fault...' Alex shrugged. 'Maybe. Anyway he thought so. Vanished off the scene and caved solo. He's been seen going down some very floodable systems in dodgy weather. Really chancing it...'

Smithy fought with the bags, kicking one ahead and dragging the other at arms length. He had already struggled his way through the cave for four hours and his patience was stretched. The squeezes and contortions of the Great Choke were demanding enough without this double handicap. The bag ahead dropped between the boulders and jammed. Smithy couldn't shift it and had to slide over it, pushing it even harder into the crack. That left both bags trapped behind him without enough space to move either. A barrage of swearing echoed through the choke....

Two hours later he stumbled into Rigger's camp and threw the bags to the floor. Rigger glanced up from a two day old Daily Mirror at the slightly swaying figure damp with sweat. 'Good trip in?' he grinned.

They ate in silence. There were words Smithy wanted to say. To tell Rigger that he knew about Deep Ghyll and that... that what? That we all make mistakes, misjudgments, that it's just luck how it turns out? And then you face the man who's

mistake lost him his girlfriend and two best mates and.... you say nothing. Maybe you keep out of his way because there's nothing you can say. So his friends drift away not because they condemn but they're just...embarrassed.

Within an hour exploration fever had cured all ills and ropes, hangers, bolts and slings were being sorted. The precious drill was packed almost lovingly into Riggers bag and the pushing trip began.

The route to the sump was almost familiar. The sump itself was now a low partly flooded arch with enough airspace to keep most of the body dry. Ahead the waterfall boomed. Smithy, leading stopped and looked ahead in surprise. A traverse line was bolted out over the pitch to hang bolts where a full rope bag hung suspended. He stabbed a look back at Rigger. 'Thought I'd speed things up a bit.' shouted Rigger above the roar. 'It's alright. I've not been down.' He motioned to Smithy to make the descent.

Generosity or cop out? Smithy mused as he threaded the descender and stared down into blackness and spray. He clipped the heavy rope bag to his belt and sunk down the first few metres. He was still above the stream inlet which spat angry water into the void below him. It was a great gun-barrel shaft belling slowly out. He needed to stay close to the far wall if the descent was to be safe from the hammering torrent. About ten metres down a buttress of rock reared up into a pinnacle. That was the key.

He abseiled down close to the waterfall feeling the first rain drops of spray. He needed to be level with the pinnacle, another five metres lower, but that would take him under the waterfall. He glanced up at the pool of warm light that was Rigger in the rift above. They could rig the traverse out further; that would drop him down the right line in the dry. But that was time, battery power, bolts and more rope. No more delay.

He switched on his back-up electric light which flickered uncertainly into dim life. Then it was down under the waterfall abseiling fast. The water beat his head and stole his breath. It clattered on his helmet and probed into his sleeves and collar with chill fingers. He felt the wall of the shaft with his feet and pushed. The torrent abated as he pendulumed and he groped desperately for the pinnacle but - was still two metres lower. The inevitable return swing reunited him with the cold hammer blow of water. He abseiled again, kicked again, left the spray behind and closed his fingers around the pinnacle.

He clung on with one aching arm while fumbling to release a sling and krab from his belt. He shook it free and looped the tape over the spike of rock and krabed it to his own tensioned rope. Then, the manoeuvre complete, he relaxed and hung free below the deviation.

There was free space below now; a black gulf free of spray but beyond the range of his lamp to probe. He unclipped the rope bag from his belt. It was heavy with wet rope - a good 60 metres he guessed by the feel. He let it fall.

With an unravelling whir it vanished. After perhaps three or four seconds came the smack of PVC on limestone and Smithy knew the rope was long enough. He abseiled down between fluted cliffs of honey coloured rock to land 50 metres below on a great plinth of eroded stone. 'Rope free!' he bellowed, but the echo and the thunder of water stole his words. He tugged the rope three times, glanced up and saw a tiny silhouette in a little blur of gold light raise an arm in response.

He clambered down to join the stream in another tremendous canyon. Within a few strides it was cutting a trench and gaining momentum again. Smithy clambered up onto a terrace above and traversed forward in an old stream bed between flakes and fins of rock. The passage ended abruptly overlooking the stream canyon again. Below the water hurled itself into space and was lost in another deep pitch.

Rigger arrived and within ten minutes the drill was screaming as Smithy bolted the pitch head. There was a good natural flake backing up a bold step across the rift into a little remnant of oxbowed passage that debouched back into the void after a metre or two. From here the take-off would be perfect. The drill fell silent as the bolts and wedges were hammered home and hangers screwed in. With another heavy rope bag suspended from his belt Smithy descended.

A few metres down he got his first view of the spectacle below. The torrent poured bodily in a corner of the rift and crashed into a suspended pool 20 metres down. It boiled here for a moment before spilling over and dropping a final 10 metres to the floor below. He descended until he was just above the pool. Below the cataract spilled out directly onto his line of descent and he hung suspended above the roaring turmoil of spray.

A bottom anchor or tensioned line could pull them into the dry but someone would get a soaking first. That had to be a last resort. He tried to pendulum across the pitch and to find a deviation belay but the walls were smooth and holdless. He knew it was

possible to jam a knot in a crack so he fumbled for short rope sling. He swung again to the far wall but could not find a crack to hold the knotted sling. The harness was biting his thighs and his legs were numbed by the restricted circulation. The roar of water deafened and chilled. He wanted to get off the rope urgently and that meant the quick decisive drop through the water. He groped for his electric back-up and twisted the switch. It was dead. He banged it with his fist; there was no response. He could wait no longer and abseiled straight down.

The carbide flame was drowned under the deluge. He fed the rope through frantically in total darkness as the full force of the water hammered at him. And then he stopped. Blind and breathless he groped desperately at the descender and felt the knot. End knot. End of the rope. Idiot, idiot, he told himself, not to check, or drop the bag first. He reached frantically to his right side. Images flashed like single film frames in his mind. Snatches of voices. He was back learning SRT hanging in a tree under a blue sky. 'Always put the foot jammer in the same place; the right hand side' He grasped and probed with numbing fingers. Where it should be... nothing. 'One day you'll have to find it in the dark'.

He grabbed at the rigging gear, krabs, slings.. And there it was - the jammer. He wrenched it free sending a shower of kit down the pitch. His hands were almost too cold to open the cam. He reached up and snapped it shut around the rope. 'You must be able to changeover in the dark' said the nagging voice, 'Your life may depend on it one day'. Now the footloop was tangled. He felt films of cold running against his skin stealing his life away. The effort of breathing had become so extreme that he wanted to simply give up; to stop the struggle and wait for oblivion. The foot was in the loop. He stood up clawing at the body jammer until it opened, fumbled the rope inside and snapped it shut. He struggled up against the weight of the torrent, energy sapping, and then felt the pressure ease. A final effort brought him free of the water and with cramped, claw like, hands he flicked the carbide flame back into life. From below came a sound of water drumming on PVC. It was the rope bag, dropped during the struggle, on the floor of the pitch. This pushing trip was over. He had dropped their total reserve of rope which now lay taunting him on the rocky floor below.

One careless act had come chillingly close to killing him. As he prusiked wearily back up the pitch he reflected grimly on his error. It was just like they said; big wet pitches are dangerous. Bloody dangerous. And errors not lightly forgiven.

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



Our first trip together John on left, me 2nd left 1958



John in Lamb Lair 1959 our first photo trip



In Swildons 1959



The Hillgrove Hut 1961



Wessex Recruits in Goatchurch 1959  
John on the Left



Cine filming on the 40 1964

# Forty Years on Mendip

## A Personal Reflection

### Maurice Hewins

I first arrived on Mendip one April day in 1958, in the back of a canvas-covered lorry. Our group from Farnham Youth Club included novices and second-timers. John, who was one of the latter, endeavoured to scare us with tales of the Goatchurch Drainpipe and a great 40ft. waterfall.

As our truck stopped at the Hunters to pick up our guides, I had my first sight of cavers. They were a scruffy pair and one bearded fellow had a hook where a hand had been (Yes, it was Black Wal).

Our tents were soon pitched behind Maine's barn, where a bent-backed Albert Maine made us welcome. A kitchen was set up and after a hurried meal, parties set out to experience the subterranean world. I have clear memories of that first trip to Swildons and it remains my best-loved cave. We were led by an elderly BEC member called Jonah, while Black Wal took John's "veterans" to Eastwater. We entered Swildons by the Zig-Zags, then the usual way, and it all seemed incredibly tight. Water roared over the 40 and we were soon shivering in our wet clothes. That day I got below the 20ft pot.

Next morning, John and I experienced the joy of putting on wet gear and joined forces for a trip to the sump. For some reason I had been allowed to cave in a soft hat and on the way out cracked my head. In retrospect, it could well have been my last trip but I was hooked and went out to get some proper kit.

We bought Premier carbide lamps, improvised electric back-up and located a supply of Goon suits at an army surplus dealer in Aldershot. Nailed boots were the norm, until "Commando" soles came in. Wellies were regarded as unsafe and SRT frowned on.

Many readers must have had a similar introduction to caving. For all the cynicism some express about character building values of caving, we both have fond memories of the Surrey Youth Leaders. It will be very sad, if the current attitudes to risk and attributing blame, prevent people from taking youngsters caving. Paid caving instructors can never fill that gap.

Our youth group returned to Priddy at regular intervals but some of us wanted independence.

Fortunately Norman Tuck took us under his wing and suggested we join the Wessex. He generously vouched for us and we were admitted in 1959. I believe that learning the necessary skills within a club is the best way to start caving and find it worrying that fewer young people are joining the Wessex.

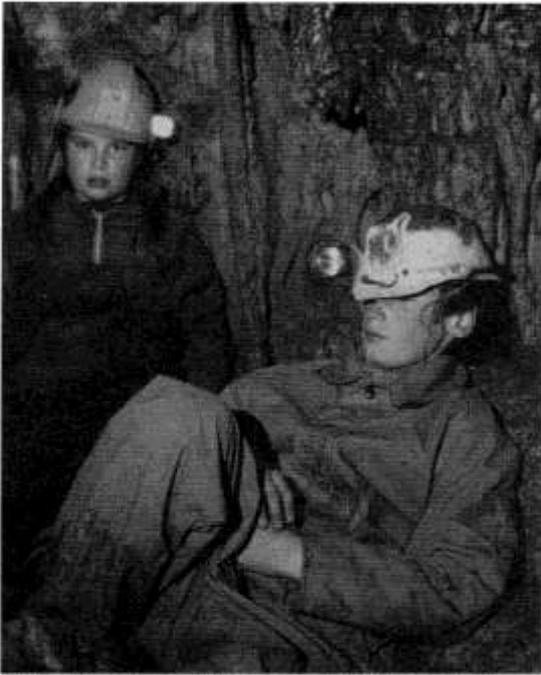
Our Farnham Group learnt our caving with the hut regulars, particularly from George Pointing and Dave Berry. Then for a time we teamed up with Julia James, who led us on our longest trip into Aggi. However we were not man enough for her and she went on to better things.

It may be nostalgia but the early 60's seem a golden age on Mendip. The Hillgrove hut, with its coke stove was certainly pretty basic. The Elsan always wanted emptying and the limited water supply, collected from the roof, was a good excuse for not washing over much. However those of us remaining, Bob Pyke, Rich Witcombe, Hut Warden York et al, remember it with affection. This time was also the heyday of the Hunters, with its singing room in what is now the lounge bar. We all knew "they words" then and topical new verses to caving songs appeared every week. Alfie would produce another Spelaode, Ken Dawe would lead a chorus of the Boatswain and Bob Lawder quoted from the Book of Daniel.

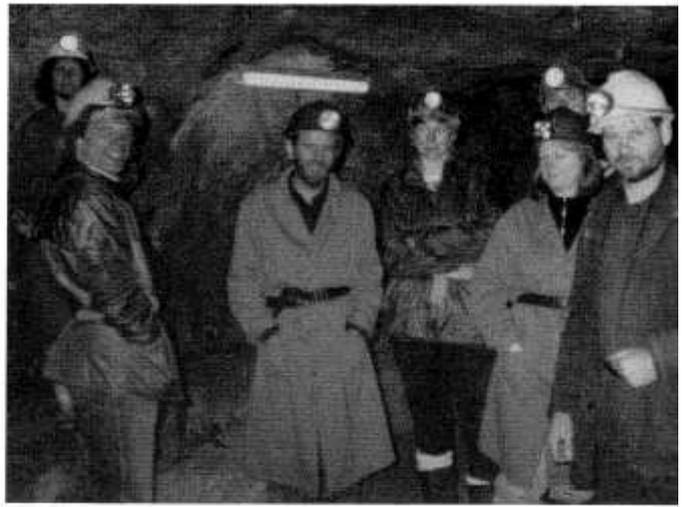
John and I first took a camera underground in Lamb Leer and were soon getting reasonable results. By accident, almost, I began by using "B" setting because I had no flash fitting. Then, in 1960, we tried out my old 8mm cine-camera. By borrowing 12 motorcycle batteries from the youth club lads, we mustered 3 banks of 4 batteries and powered some 24 volt bulbs. With hindsight they were under run but we got 5 minutes of film that now seems to capture the feeling of the time so well.

When in 1962, a 40 ASA colour film appeared, we went on to make films in Lamb Leer and Swildons. Dennis Warburton, who roped us in to help reopen Cow Hole, was also filming, as was Oliver Lloyd.

Transport in the 60's was not always reliable and we had many breakdowns. Once, when Titch Hall and I brought a sack of coke up Rookham in a Bond



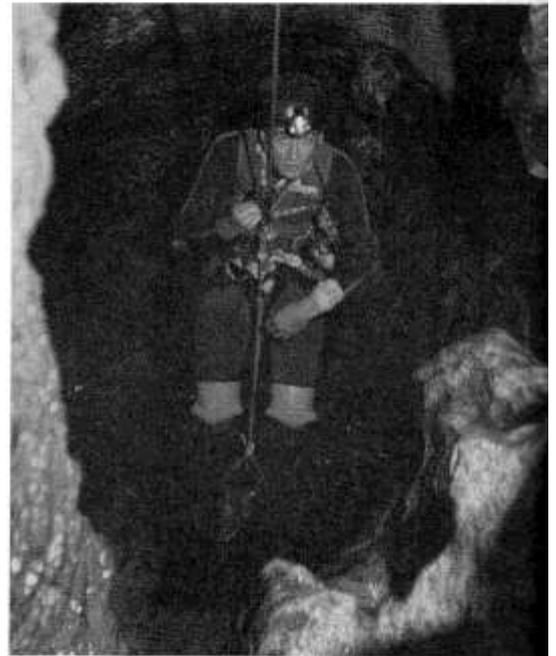
Mike Thomas and Eleanor 1984 Old Grotto



Tuskar's Tour to Geevor Mine 1991



Judy in Long Churn 1995



Mike on the old 40 Swildons 1993



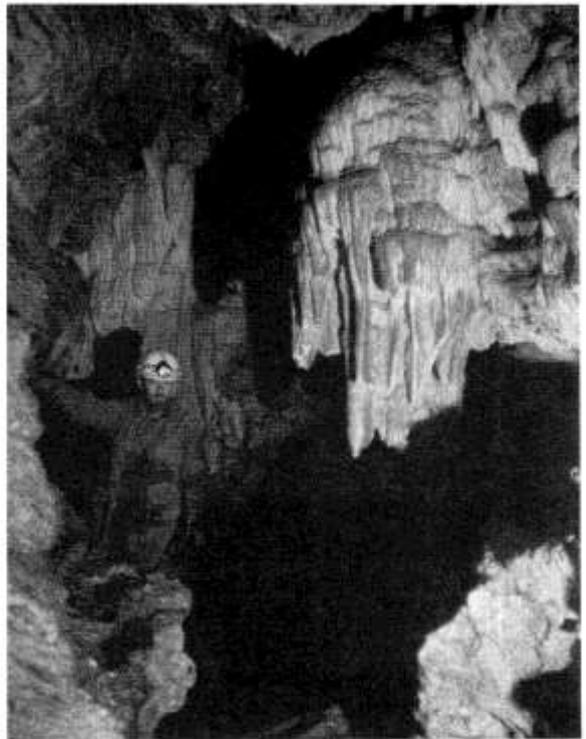
An Edixa stereo shot of me in Swildons 1994



Brian



Porth Resurgence 1997



Paul Weston 1992 Swildons



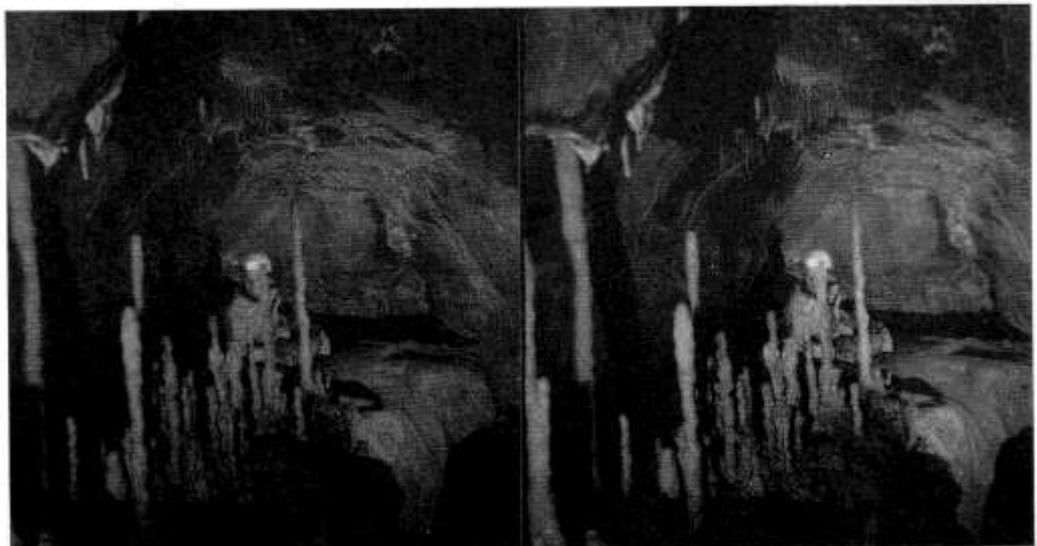
Prewer Swildons 1992



John's Sump 1 epic 1994



91 G.B.



Vern Freeman at the O.F.D. Minicolumns 1998

Minicar (197cc two-stroke) we seized the engine twice. Our first trip to Yorkshire was on a joint Club coach trip, arranged by Brian Prewer. The overnight journey took 10 hours. South Wales trips took longer then as there was no Severn Bridge. One Easter, John, Pete Greenfield and I went to Co. Clare by public transport. The travelling was more of an epic than the caving.

The three of us explored Pollnogollum, gazed in wonder at the big stall in Poll-an-Ionian and enjoyed a memorable race in inflated goon suits down the flooded Doolin River.

We first met Les Teasdale at an MRO film show at RAF Colerne where Les was a National Service Officer. He left his rank behind when he brought his lads to Mendip and with George Pointing, Dave Berry and Nick Hart he teamed up with our group on some of our hardest trips.

Then in 1964 I went to Ireland with Les and his team on a club trip, A great character, known to all as "old" Atty (though he was much younger than me now) was with us. Despite his deafness, he was a pleasure to cave with and he appears in one of my best movie sequences taken in a little cave we found. We did a few other trips but there were some minor accidents and in truth, the Guinness won. If things had turned out differently, that might have been the end of my caving.

Following a couple of bad experiences, I decided that hard caving was not for me and soon after returning from Ireland, I met Judy. For many of my friends, a woman's thumb had been the principle cause of their retirement from the sport. However, Judy developed a love of Mendip and she passed all the tests. She stayed at Hillgrove, got wet in Swildons and even walked in knee-deep cowsh across Gibbons' yard when I was summoned by NASA elders to help put pipes in at North Hill.

By taking a succession of novices trips and fitting in a bit of digging at Fairman's Folly and Thrupe Lane (Tony Dingle promised that it would go gently down the dip!) we kept in touch. After all, the social life on Mendip has always been good and in the pub, we could still sound like cavers.

From 1967 there was also plenty to do building Upper Pitts and then we encountered that other reason a lot of people give up caving - Kids. It soon became obvious that little ones and caving huts can be a poor mix - at least ours were. It was then that Bob Pyke suggested a caravan and that was our salvation. Eastwater has served us well for family holidays for 25 years

Sally and Eleanor have been greatly influenced by childhood walks across the Mendip landscape, visits to Priddy Fair, Wookey swimming pool (now sadly closed) and Wells. Happy hours were spent on the slide at the Queen Vic and listening to lunch time Folk sessions in the Hunters back room.

Between 1977 and 1981 I recorded a few caving trips but soon Eleanor was demanding to go underground. We teamed up with John and Mike Thomas for a series of kiddies trips. Sometimes, the Scammells came along with their niece Karen. We began to experiment with single camera stereo and Eleanor became adept at modelling and firing flash guns.

My return to proper caving was brought about by the unfortunate combination of Roger's Butcombe and Brian Hansford. Under the influence, I was talked into a trip to Manor Farm. We didn't get very far but it was enough. With Brian, Prew, Jim Rands and others, John and I revisited the old places. I now had Mike and other youngsters to carry my ammo box and pull me up the hard bits.

The fortuitous finding of a 1950's Stereo camera was the final element in my renaissance. John and I know the years are telling and we have even heard ourselves referred to as "The Old Fossils" But as long as my pictures are still improving and I can get up Jacob's Ladder, there could still be a trip or two in me yet.

*Twice a week the winter through,  
Here stand I to keep the goal.  
Football then was fighting sorrow,  
For the young mans soul.*

*Now in maytime to the wicket,  
Out I march with bat and pad.  
See the son of grief at cricket,  
Trying to be glad.*

*Try I will no harm in trying,  
Wonder 'tis how little mirth.  
Keeps the bones of man from lying,  
On the bed of earth.*

*A E Housman*



Temple 1959 Column now destroyed



Building Upper Pitts 1967



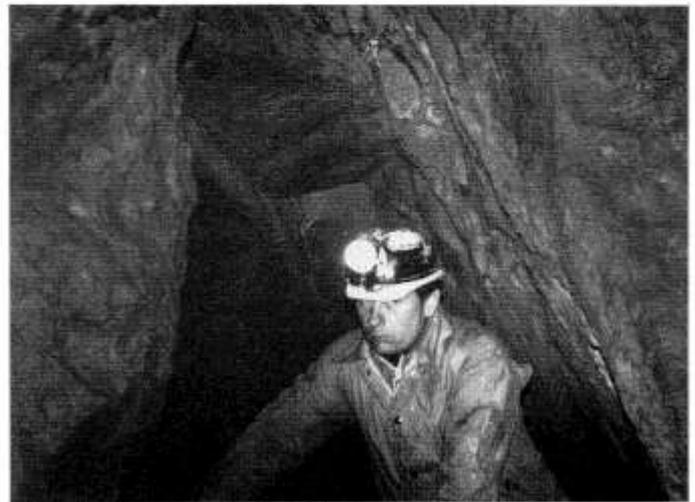
Dingle at Thrupe Lane 1975



Georesistivity at Lime Kiln 1968 John Church



Cornwell's Hillgrove dig 1968



John in Goatchurch 1981 half of a stereo-pair

# Work Required on Upper Pitts

*Some of you may have noticed the more major tasks that have been done around Upper Pitts such as the kitchen, dormitory and changing room. However, there are many, more boring, jobs that need doing, just to keep the hut in working order. Although they don't appear 'as cosmetic', they are just as, or even more, important.*

*The following is a list of these types of jobs, and so if you feel at all able to help, please contact Dave Meredith the Hut Administration Officer who will gladly help to co-ordinate the work. A copy of this list is also to be pinned to the noticeboards in the library and the commonroom.*

The gully leak above the porch received a rain test and failed. This needs repairing.

The Andrews and Leblanc boilers have now been serviced. Now it's just the arrangements for the ventilation which need to be altered.

All the radiators need cleaning out. This needs to be done before Spring, but would be more sensible to be done at the same time as the break in of the new radiators in the upstairs dormitory.

Regarding the floor in the entrance corridor, there are cracks appearing. These have been investigated by Dave Morrison and Vern Freeman and the floor appears to be sound. The space under the wall is to be skimmed and the hole refilled.

Most of the bunks have been finished now, with one end of the bunkroom being completely refurbished. More slats should be arriving soon so that the job will be able to be completed.

All external doors need to be replaced, apart from the ladies dorm fire door. The upstairs dorm external fire door is the priority at the moment. We do have the doors themselves, it's just the fitting of them that we now need! The door by the woodstore has been installed but still needs finishing 'around the edges'.

Can anyone mount the fire extinguishers (no rude answers now!!) on the wall please?

New glass and bars have been obtained for the front door. These still need fitting and a couple of people are liaising to arrange this.

A closer is required on the porch door.

The grill has been returned and investigations are under way to identify the original seller to see if they're interested in buying it back.

The Wessex is currently looking into grants for fireproofing the dormitory, etc.

## Slovenia 1998

*August 8th - August 23rd*

The Wessex are returning to continue exploration in existing areas, possibly some Alpine karst and some of the largest showcaves in Europe

Why not come along - it'll be a superb holiday for all the family

For further information, contact the Caving Secretary, Les Williams

# Slovenia 1997 *Part2*

Ian Timney

Saturday 2nd August and thank goodness it's the weekend - "we can go caving"! After a long lie-in and a lazy morning we were off to Krizna Jama - Russell, Butch, Cookie, Max and myself. This was to be a leisurely day until the end because you have to have a guide for Krizna Jama, and our guide wasn't available until 3pm - a very very nice man called Boris who spoke good English and gave us a brilliant trip.

As we dressed up in long rubber boots right up to the crutch and red boiler suits we all wondered what the hell we were getting ourselves into; especially on entering the cave - a great hole in the rock face several metres high and wide with a steel grid which covered the whole entrance, made it look more like a prison than one would have preferred. The gate was locked behind us and Boris gave me a plank of wood and to some of the others, an oar each. He then led us down onto a beach where a boat awaited us - the plank, I was relieved to discover was a seat, and I wasn't going to have to walk it after all.

He then ferried us across a deep lake where we left the boat ready for our return. We had to walk very carefully in the great rubber waders and watch where we stepped because just below the surface of the water lay some fragile calcite formations and some little tiny underwater porcupines - *Monobistra spinissisima*. We then went stomping down a broad fast-flowing water course and down a side passage which in places became a tricky traverse over deep water, and down to a deep dark hole where only divers can go (see photos). We retraced our steps and onto another deep lake, where another boat awaited us, this time with a powerful light underneath which lit up the whole lake - this was fantastic. We carried on in this mode for about 2 kilometres through this beautiful pristine underground water world.

We had time to get out of the boats and explore and so on the way back explored the Bear's Cave, which was two large chambers with mud floors and bear bones everywhere. Boris told us that archaeologists in the past had excavated enough bones to make up two complete skeletons which was not all that difficult as they lay over the entire floor about 2 metres deep. Many thousands of bears have died in this cave over a period of approximately 150 thousand years, before the bears became extinct.

We enjoyed our trip so much and got on so well with Boris that we invited him to join us in a pizza. He took us back to the cave centre where we sampled his Father's home-made Slivovich, then on to his favourite restaurant - the pizzas were wonderful washed down with lasco pivo'. "Excellent good, good excellent" Russell was heard to say, not for the last time. It was so cheap to eat out in Slovenia that we paid the bill including our guests share and it still only came to £8.40 per head.

On Sunday 3rd had another early start with Butch and Max. Went to Logarcek Cave 28, which was another cave on the cave walk, and Butch rigged the 20m entrance pitch. It was a very hot morning we were sweating like hell after our hike to the cave so we tackled up and abseiled into the cool of the cave as quickly as possible. We had an interesting couple of hours exploring this almost Mendip-like cave, scrambling over boulders, climbing chimneys and down a very muddy, very steep slope for which you need a 40m rope. There were several big chambers, plenty of formations, plenty of mud and a good variety of caving was enjoyed by all. Then back to camp for a shower and some lunch.

In the afternoon we all went to Rakov Skocfan National Park where we abseiled off a natural arch 42m into a massive collapsed cave. The River Rak runs through the bottom with several caves and tunnels to be explored so you can scramble back up steep pathways to the top to abseil back down again. Andy and Les were reluctant to rig this daylight pitch because it is so exposed, but Andy mustered the courage and we all had an amazing thrill - "What a beautiful place" - as we entertained hundreds of tourists all afternoon. At one point we were all standing at the view point the other side of the arch when Mark Humphry came abseiling into view with an inflatable dingy hanging from his arse. What a nutter ... which reminds me, the other nutter (Russell) wasn't with us; just as well really as he doesn't do ropes. Russell had gone off alone the previous day to climb Triglav, Slovenia's highest mountain 2864m high, more of which we would hear the next day.

On Monday almost all of us went up into the Soca Valley to a place called Bovec where we knew that you could go white water rafting - it was a lovely summers day and so whilst Les and Andy went to

book the rafts for us all we decided to quench our thirst at a roadside bar, write some post cards and chill out. We were on our second beer when who should I spot strolling down the road completely oblivious of our presence was Russell:

*"Oi you" I shouted, "Where the hell are you off to?"  
"Nowhere man, fancy seeing you here! what's going on?"*

*"Well we are going white water rafting".*

*"Well I'll just come with you if you don't mind".*

About this time, someone spotted Les and Andy returning so we quickly sat Russell at the table amongst us all and told him to be quiet. Les and Andy were stood at the side of the table telling us all about the booking when gradually it dawned on them that Russell, like an apparition, was sat there drinking beer, you should have seen their faces. Anyway we heard about Russell's failed attempt at Triglav, finished our beers and off we went.

The stretch of river that we rafted was about 6 kilometres long with loads of huge boulders to manoeuvre around at breakneck speed. Apparently the best time to go is in the spring when the water level is much higher, but this was good enough for us beginners. We stopped halfway down to swim and leap off the boulders into deep pools and at the end we swam again and shot some rapids without a boat.

In the evening we drove in convoy up into the Julian Alps - it was absolutely stunning with very high mountains all around us - one tends to run out of superlatives to describe all that we saw and did. Late at night we stopped at a high mountain hotel. All we could get to eat was a bowl of barley potato and sausage stew and more lasco pivo. Unfortunately for some it was a very long journey home but for me I was asleep in the back - we arrived back in camp in the early hours of the morning.

Tuesday started late. Some of us went shopping to Logartits - as the local town was now affectionately called - back to camp for lunch and lots of discussions about what to get up to next. After yesterday's mass excursion, several groups formed up to do different things. Andy Morse, Mark Humphry and maybe one or two others went searching for new caves in the forest and found a very large shaft at the bottom of a very large doline, rigged and descended the shaft and left it rigged for the survey the next day.

Christine, Max, Butch and myself went back to Planinska Jama (Puka River) again, on a photographic trip. We met a bunch of Germans in

the Paradiz System who entertained us with more sophisticated photographic techniques whilst Les and a large party saved themselves for an evening guided trip beyond the show cave in Postajnska Jama which has a long train ride into the cave They started their trip at 8pm and returned to camp at 2am the next morning.

Staggered out of my tent late Wednesday morning, still a bit pissed from the night before. As my eyes became accustomed to the bright sunlight I caught a glimpse of something fast moving a little way off; blimey, it was Cookie bounding up the slope from the shower block like a gazelle, wondered what he had been up to in the night? He couldn't have been getting shit-faced Slovenia style like the rest of us. It wasn't until we returned to Mendip that I discovered the cause of Cookie's state of euphoria, he had been up to something that night with a pretty young French girl!

I sobered myself up with a shower and some breakfast and went off into the forest with Les, Andy, Cookie, Butch, Biff and Mak to do a Grade 5 survey of "Deer Leap", the new cave that Andy had found the previous day. The shaft turned out to be a 36.6 metre descent to a large boulder choke, a large snow plug with a fallen tree trunk wedged across it and a steep slope down the boulders to a spacious chamber at the bottom We carried out the survey quickly because it was very cold down there and then prussiked up the impressive gun barrel of a shaft in torrential rain. The deviation at the top was an absolute bitch for a short arse like me, having been rigged by a much taller Andy Morse. The deviation was 12 7 metres long, the longest I had ever seen and was rigged from two trees part way down the side of the dolines - on that basis I would calculate the doline is about 60 metres across and almost as deep. There are thousands of them all over the forest - it's a very strange and wonderful place.

Thursday 7th finally arrived - our last day - what a bummer! There was so much left to do - we had only seen the tip of the iceberg. Slovenia is a country the size of Wales with over seven thousand known caves and many areas left to be explored. It has been estimated that by the time the whole country has been explored, it is likely to produce in excess of seven thousand **more** caves and they desperately want clubs like the Wessex to help them with the exploration. Anyway, it's time to go caving.....

There are lots of trips being organised today, as there has been most days. The trips I have mentioned are only the ones I have been involved in; there were many more. Cookie, Russell, Butch

and myself decided to go to Skojanske Jama, the most incredible show cave I have ever been to. It is one of the latest UNESCO heritage sites and it really is one of the great wonders of the world.

As you enter the show cave via a man-made tunnel you pass through huge, wonderful chambers festooned with the most unbelievable formations. We had wandered for about an hour when we became aware of a very deep rumbling sound which could only be caused by a large waterfall or a huge river - it wasn't long before we discovered the cause. We descended a steep winding path to a huge canyon with a large manmade bridge across it called the "Hankes Bridge". Here, the river "Reka" rushes so far below you and the roof is so far above you it's hard to put things into perspective - apparently it's 100 metres from the roof to the river. The whole thing is flood-lit and you can see fixed traverse lines with steps cut high up the canyon walls.

Our pathway winds up and along the far wall seventy or eighty metres above the river and eventually you come out to a classic arched cave entrance which is massive and many varieties of bats live here. The sun is beaming into this huge

entrance chamber, but as you exit the cave and find yourself in another canyon with this white water river rushing through, you realise you are walking through a massive collapsed cave. After about twenty minutes walking through this collapsed cave you come to a cable car which will take you to the surface. It is possible to organise a leader to take you beyond the show cave, weather permitting. There is also a high water mark in the cave 63 metres above normal river level - what a grand finale!

We had a good lunch at the show cave restaurant and then drove down to the coast. It was like being at Butlins holiday camp. That night we went out to our favourite pizza place and the food was excellent, but the waitress was the most exquisite,



White Water Rafting from Bovec



Boris, Butch and Myself in Krizna Jama

**Spelo Camp Laze Aug 1997**

*Back Row Left to Right*

Morse, Dan, Mark-Dave, Ian, Mad Al, Even Madder Russel, Cookie, Butch, Ginny, Jane (Quite Mad), MAK, Kieran.

*Front Row Left to Right*

Biff, LB, Jo, Jenny, Les, Keir.



# Blast From The Past!

(taken from Wessex Journal No 121 Vol 10 February 1969 Page 243)

## A VISIT FROM RUDOLPH

by W.I. Stanton

It is a Saturday morning in April, 1968. Two Wessex men are changing in Cheddar Gorge, preparatory to descending a certain hole notorious among slaves and their drivers. They are approached by a smart young Youth Hosteller carrying a large rucksack.

"You are potholers, no?"

"We are potholers, yes."

"I too am a potholer. I am Rudolf."

"Hullo Rudolph. You must be from Austria or somewhere."

"I am from Switzerland. In my country I explore many potholes. Now I am wanting to explore potholes in England. Where is your Society that I can have a torch and a suit, to explore with you your pothole?"

"Alas, Rudolf, our club hut is far away and it will be empty on a Saturday morning. We have only one torch each, or we would gladly lend you one. But you would not like our pothole, which is small and muddy, and we go only to dig, not to explore."

"What is to dig? In Switzerland I never dig, only explore."

"At the end of our pothole the roof has fallen down, and we are digging through the boulders to find the great caverns beyond."

"Ah, that is very interesting. Perhaps I go now to Cheddar to buy the torch and then maybe I join you to dig in your pothole."

"Well, that would be great, Rudolf. There's the entrance, up there. But you'll get your clean clothes terribly dirty."

"Maybe I see you then. Goodbye."

He marches off down the Gorge, and the Wessex man do not expect to see him again. They enter the hole, lay and fire a large bang on an obstacle half way down, then, noting that the gentle draught is carrying the fumes outwards, continue to the bottom of the terminal dig, a shaft 50' deep. Busily working, they suddenly hear coughing and a whistle up above.

"Hullo! Who's that?"

"It is Rudolf!"

"Good gracious! Come on down, Rudolf, it's quite safe."

Rudolf arrives in a shower of stones.

"See, I have bought a fine torch. But there has been an explozeeon, no? I come to the entrance and she is full of gas!"

"Yes, there was an explosion. Did you see if there was much damage?"

"I think there was no damage. But I think this is not a pothole, only a mineworks! When I can see through the gas, all I can see is stone walls." "No no, it really is a cave. We've been digging here for 15 years, that is why there is so much debris."

"You are digging here since 15 years and the cave is still so small! That is very interesting. All the time in Switzerland I have never seen so small a cave!"

"Oh. That is very interesting."

Rudolf joins enthusiastically in the digging, and has to be restrained from prising out rocks that seem to be supporting everything up above. He announces that when he needs bang in Switzerland, he makes it himself! The Wessex men marvel at his tales of the 'Holloch', but point out that the caves beyond the boulder choke are likely to be even bigger. At last it is time to go. In the Gorge, Wessex is astonished to observe Rudolf peel off his muddy trousers and throw them into a rubbish bin. His shoes follow the trousers.

"Rudolf, in Switzerland do you always throw away your caving clothes after only one trip?"

"Ah, no. Here I do not wish to soil my good clothes, so after I buy my torch, I look in all these baskets and i find the trousers and the shoes. I wear them down the cave and now I put them back!"

"Very sensible. Well, we must be off, Rudolf. How did you like digging?"

"To me it is great happiness. Next year I think I come back to England with my friends, and we dig and we find a big cave for you! Goodbye!"

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## WCC History

Your Hon. Librarian, come bookbinder, has been continuing his task of ensuring that the Club's history is kept in the best possible condition, and has, with the hut reconstructors discovered a box in the roof space with the old minute books, somewhat disbound, and a little damp. The moisture has been removed and the next task is to recase as near as possible to the originals. Here are some little gems:

### **Second meeting - Nov 4th 1934**

The club badge shall consist of the Wessex dragon in red holding a white candle on a black background, circular surrounded by a yellow rope pattern. The name of the club to appear in the circle above the dragon. Page 7 has the chosen design pasted in.

### **16th Committee meeting - Feb 12th 1935**

A suggestion has been put forward that some members of the Cardiff Naturalist Society might form a branch of the club in South Wales. The Hon. Sec. is to confer with J Braithwaite in the matter.

### **21st Committee Meeting - July 9th 1937**

We have received a report from T A J Braithwaite concerning the formation of a branch of the club in South Wales. We wish Braithwaite to proceed in this matter.

### **22nd Committee Meeting - 3rd Sept 1927**

It has been reported that G Platten is claiming the exclusive right to explore a Survey Dan-yr-Ogof on behalf of himself and the YRC. As members of this club have already undertaken the Water Survey, for the Minery of health in this area, this Committee feels that this is an infringement of our rights. Platten is to be approached in this matter. (Politics already seems to have reared its ugly head back in the late thirties).

### **28th Committee Meeting - 28th March 1938**

Cow Hole - while the Committee cannot agree as to the desirability of opening up the top of Cow Hole, we have no objection to the "Dragon" Group doing this work themselves should they see fit to do so provided that no responsibility shall attach to the Club in the matter.

### **33rd Committee Meeting - 1st Sept 1938**

T A J Braithwaite is to approach Michael Pritchard as acting Secretary in the South Wales Group.

### **34th Committee Meeting - 15th Dec 1938**

T A J Braithwaite be appointed Hon Secretary of the Welsh Branch of the Club (WCC Welsh Section).

# Yorkshire Bookings

## April

11th Gaping Gill System  
12th Disappointment Pot/Bar Pot

## May

9th Top Sink/Lancaster  
10th Cow Pot/Wretched Rabbit

## June

21st Birks Fell

## July

25th Pool Sink  
26th County Pot

## August

29th Rumbling Hole  
30th Notts Pot

## September

12th Gingling Hole  
13th Hammer Pot

## October

10th Pen y Ghent Pot  
18th Little Hull Pot

## November

21st Lost Johns

## October

12th Dihedral Pot/Stream Passage Pot  
13th Flood Entrance/Bar Pot

# Caving Events

## 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  
16th BCRA Regional Meeting, Llangollen  
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  
18th/20th BCRA Conference, Southport

## October

17th/18th Wessex AGM and Dinner weekend