



**THE WESSEX CAVE CLUB JOURNAL**

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# THE WESSEX CAVE CLUB JOURNAL

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May 2000

PRESIDENT	RICHARD KENNEY
VICE PRESIDENTS	PAUL DOLPHIN GRAHAM BALCOMBE JACK SHEPPARD
CHAIRMAN	DAVE MORRISON <i>Windrush Upper Bristol Rd Clutton BS18 4RH 01761 452437</i>
SECRETARY	MARK KELLAWAY <i>5 Brunswick Close Twickenham Middlesex TW2 5ND 020 8943 2206 secretary@wessex-cave-club.org</i>
TREASURER & MRO CO-ORDINATOR	MARK HELMORE <i>01761 416631</i>
EDITOR	VERN FREEMAN <i>33 Alton Rd Fleet Hants GU13 9HW 01252 629621 editor@wessex-cave-club.org</i>
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY	DAVE COOKE <i>33 Laverstoke Gardens Roehampton London SW15 4JB 020 8788 9955 membership@wessex-cave-club.org</i>
CAVING SECRETARY TRAINING OFFICER & C&A OFFICER	LES WILLIAMS <i>01749 679839 caving@wessex-cave-club.org</i>
NORTHERN CAVING SECRETARY	KEITH SANDERSON <i>015242 51662</i>
GEAR CURATOR	LAURIE ORR
HUT ADMIN. OFFICER	DAVE MEREDITH
HUT WARDEN	WENDY WILLIAMS
SALES OFFICER	JONATHAN WILLIAMS
WEBMASTER	<i>sales@wessex-cave-club.org</i>
COMMITTEE MEMBER & CLUB PROCEDURES AUDITOR	BRIAN PITMAN
COMMITTEE MEMBER & LIBRARIAN	PHIL HENDY

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WCC Headquarters, Upper Pitts, Eastwater Lane  
Priddy, Somerset, BA5 3AX  
Telephone 01749 672310

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Opinions expressed in the Journal are not necessarily  
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# Club News

Phil Hendy has found a new supplier for binding volumes of the journal. If you require yours bound please see Phil. The cost will be £16 ish.

The Library Data Base is now complete. If you require a copy please see Phil Hendy.

Following a recent theft at the Belfry and attempted theft at Upper Pitts, we would advise you not to leave any valuables unattended at any time.

## **Rich Websell**

**I'm saddened to inform you of Richie's death at the end of February.**

## **New Member**

### **Jane Higgins**

2 Grange Ave, Street, Somerset.

BA16 9PE

Tel: 01458 441013

## **Address Changes**

### **Pat Ruiz De Azua**

41 Abbey St, Faversham, Kent.

ME13 7BP

Tel: 01795 531855

### **Roz Lunn**

"Hobbits", Whites Hill, Stock, Nr Ingatestone,

Essex, CM4 9QB

Tel: 01277 841 130

### **Jules Kingshott**

461 Topsham Road, Countess Wear, Exeter,

EX2 7AQ

## **F. GRAHAM BALCOMBE**

We regret to announce the death of Graham Balcombe on March 19th and we offer our deepest sympathy to his family and friends, and especially to his colleague Jack Sheppard with whom he shared the triumphs and tribulations of the attack on Sump 1 in Swildons Hole.

He joined the Wessex Cave Club in January 1935 which was a short time after its foundation in November 1934 and became a Vice-President in 1987.

He came to this part of the country in the 1930's in connection with his work at the Portishead Marine Radio installation. By training and inclination he was meticulous in all his doings and he always liked to retain strict control over the editing and publication of diving events in which he played a prominent role. Hence the records in our Journals are sparse and in any event most of his pioneering diving took place in the North. Our Volume 1 notes a pamphlet included with Circular No.11 advertising The Log of the Wookey Hole Expedition (using normal marine heavy helmets and boots) but subsequent issues make no mention of Swildons.

Recent Club members who met him may have thought him to be an unusual character by virtue of the fact that he wore a kilt but this was because he had a medical condition that made the wearing of that garment preferable to trousers.

He was a founder member of The Cave Diving Group and one must look to that organisation for a full description of his work. As a non participant in that type of caving I do realise that his principles have guided ALL diving work since its inception. These are that:-

"Caves can be found by diving"

"Diving must be a disciplined activity subject to strict training"

"New techniques must be strictly evaluated and tested"

Of course there will always be accidents in any activity but in general cave diving has had a good record.

To sum up - each generation of cavers has its prominent figures but Graham joins the elite who established markers for the sport as a whole.

Richard Kenney

# Why MRO

## Richard Kenney

This last month of March saw the retirement of Fred Davies as an MRO Warden and the occasion was marked in the usual manner at Hunters. It would be appropriate if he could donate a boot to be hung on the wall, together with a simple label "Fred's Boot". It would be a good talking point.

Why this article? On Easter Monday March 27th 1951 I was involved in a rescue at GB that could have had horrendous results and it is by comparison with the present that I can appreciate the current high standards achieved by MRO in all its aspects, namely personnel, team expertise and equipment and the need for that organisation.

First of all I will describe the event as it happened, then I will note the rescue involvement and some comments on what could have happened in the absence of an up-to-date MRO and then the media reporting. We were very lucky!

The party comprised two pairs of brother and sister with ages 26 & 21 and 23 & 16, and one other male of 23. They had their last meal at home and left Bristol on motorbikes. I am not sure where they left their transport or changed but they stated that GB was entered at 14.00. They had candles, one torch, some magnesium ribbon for the main chamber but as usual in those days no protective clothing. The weather was normal for March with steady but not heavy rain. They were not aware of the new route and reached the bottom of the cave via the Devil's Elbow. On returning they found the chamber below the Devil's Elbow pitch far wetter. They dropped the torch which was lost, their candles went out and their matches were wet. It was now 18.00 and they had no food. One member tried the climb three times and fell on each occasion without injury. They decided that without lights it was not safe to return to the Main Chamber so they waited for rescue.

At 23.59 a resident friend left Bristol for Mendip on a search. He did not know the GB area and could not locate the bikes so rang the police at 03.30 from a phone kiosk. They made him wait there until 04.30 and then rang back to say that they were now ready having alerted the Wells Police Rescue team which involved calling back an officer who was on his way to Plymouth. Police cars arrived at Lower Farm at 07.30, but not their rescue team, where Colin Vowles (joint discoverer of Swildons Black Hole etc), Sandy Steele (an old school colleague) and

myself were staying in Colin's hut in the lower farmyard.

Donning very wet clothes from yesterday's Swildon's we were transported together with the victim's resident friend Frank Brooker by the police. We must have entered the cave at 08.00. We all went to the bottom via the new route and Sandy and I returned via the Oxbows etc to the surface after one hour to report "*not yet found*". Remember that the Ladder Dig etc was not yet open. Colin and Frank returned via the old route and located the party. Sandy and I returned to the Gorge and turned up the old route and met the party coming back to the Gorge. Sandy and I then returned to the surface to report "*found with no casualties*". We were all out of the cave by 09.30. The party were transported back to Lower Farm by police car leaving us to walk back!

Being March and dark in the early mornings the bikes were not spotted but in later years some farmers became more aware of their caving parties and reported possible problems. I am not knocking the MRO as it then existed but here are some relevant comments. The list of wardens included "time servers" who may have limited their caving to Saturday afternoons at Badger Hole for example. However, they knew what caving was all about and may have been able to assemble a reasonable party after perhaps a few hours. Specialist equipment was not available and they would merely have turned up with normal caving gear. The Police Rescue team could work effectively in a quarry but down a cave? -- no! The time from 03.30 to 08.80 to get people into the cave highlights the prevailing conditions. At no time during or after or in the media was hypothermia mentioned. I doubt that any of us were aware of its clinical manifestations. I was severely criticised afterwards for not waiting until an MRO warden had appeared on the scene. My assumption was that with the Police present then the MRO must have been called. However, my task was "Locate and Report" which I did. The next task of "Immediate rescue if possible" was also done. We could have had five hypothermia casualties or victims plus one casualty with broken limbs. I don't think that MRO had appropriate stretchers or body bags available and certainly no resuscitation gear so at worst my choice of "horrendous" would have fitted the bill. The Warden was the only other caver who turned up.

Communication between the accident site and the surface by alternating from one to the other is warming work!

The accident was reported by Colin and I to the Wells Journal but prior to that the following papers, with cuttings supplied by friends, picked up the news.

Bristol Evening Post  
Somerset Evening World  
Bath & Wilts Chronicle and Herald  
Leicester Mercury  
Evening Standard  
The Star  
Evening News  
Daily Graphic  
Daily Telegraph and Morning Post

It was obviously reported all over the country — a good "return to work" story for the press, sadly for them, with no casualties.



Colin, self, Frank, Sandy

---

## Library Report

### Phil Hendy

LIBRARY - RECENT ACQUISITIONS As at  
23 March 2000

Axbridge Caving Group Journal (Dec 1999)

Chelsea Speleological Society Newsletter  
42, 1 (Jan), 2 (Feb), 3 (Mar 2000)

Craven Pothole Club Record  
No. 57 (Jan 2000)

Descent  
No. 151 (Dec 1999/Jan 2000)  
No. 152 (Feb/Mar 2000)

Georgia Underground  
Vol. 35 No. 3 (Dec 1999)

Grosvenor Caving Club Newsletter  
No. 100 (Jan 2000)  
No. 101 (Feb/Mar 2000)

Mendip Nature Research Committee Newsletter  
No. 76 (Feb/Mar 2000)

N. S. S. News  
57, 11 (Nov 1999) 12 (Dec 1999)  
58, 2 (Feb 2000)

NSS Jnl. Of Cave & Karst Studies  
61, 3 (Dec 1999)

Speleologia (Italy)  
No. 39 (Dec 1998) (Index 1979 - 98)  
No. 40 (?Jun 1999)

University of Bristol Proceedings  
21, 3 (1999)\* + Index to Vol. 21

University of Bristol Newsletters  
15, 2 (Feb 1999)  
15, 3 (Summer 1999)  
16, 1 (Xmas 1999)  
16, 2 (Spring 2000)

Westminster Speleological Group Newsletter  
30 (Aug 1999)  
32 (Dec 1999)

The Way Out (Newsletter of West Brecon Cave  
Rescue Team) Edn. 6 (Oct 1999)

**Please note that periodicals should not be removed from the Library without checking first with the Librarian. This particularly applies to current issues. I cannot find the two bound London University Caving Club Journals (hard bound). Has anyone borrowed these without logging them ?**

*\* Includes sites around Bathford and Sally's Rift, with some new sites.*

# Work with the WCC/CDG 1st - 9th April' 94

Andy Kay

Previously published in *Speleo-Dordogne* 2nd Trimestrial 1994. Translated by Andy Kay

Four members of the Wessex Cave Club and the Cave Diving Group are present with a number of objectives in view: dives in the Cele (Lot), continuation of sump 5 in the Font de La Doue <sup>(1)</sup>, near to our house, etc. Abominable meteorological conditions were to modify the plans.

1 April: Font de la Doue (St Raphael) Although more than four times the amount of water encountered last year seems to be pouring into the basin fed by the spring, the level is only five centimetres higher, and everything looks good for the dive. Having prepared everything for the arrival of our friends from Britain, I go to Perigueux for the monthly meeting of the SCP <sup>(2)</sup> after a call saying that they will be eight hours late arriving due to storms in the Channel.

2 April

Everyone has arrived. Andy & Christiane leave them to rest and go to St Michel de Montaigne to participate in a deceptive 'exploration'. (Sinkhole full of fridges, old cars, etc).

In their own time, the others prepare the material: two compressors, 18 tanks of assorted sizes, 4 dive computers, numerous valves, etc.

To get into form, and unaware of the recent access problems, they pay a visit to the Grotte de La Reille (Nailhac) down to the second sump <sup>(3)</sup>. Water was already cascading into the sinkhole entrance, sign that the ground is over-saturated.

3 April

The divers depart for the Lot, estimating that the Fond de La Doue can wait a couple of days. This turned out to be a bad decision. Personally, my day was spent at the Gouffre du Soulier (Anliac), where Stephan Renaud de Lage and his friends from the Gironde continue digging in search of a big collector system. Today the prehistorian A. Morelat is with the group, come to authentify the cave-bear traces, which he finally pronounces as being of 'recent' origin: 15,000 years old or thereabouts!

4 & 5 April

Our friends dive various locations in the Lot, without having made any of the much hoped-for breakthroughs. At the Ressel, they meet Jean-Luc SIRIEIX, diving there as well. Persistent rain drives them back to the Dordogne the evening of the 6th.

6 April

With this weather, it's evident that a dive at La Doue will be 'limit'. I make a visit, and see that the level has risen by a centimetre, although the water is still clear. Afterwards, a trip to the entrance of the Trou du Petit Homme (Cherveix-Cubas), to check that the sinkhole entrance has not collapsed. No change, despite the quantities of water tumbling in.

7 April

Malc and Richie go early to Font de La Doue: it's in full flood. Muddy water is even roaring from the 'fossil' entrance, and the banks of the basin are submerged. Project cancelled.

The afternoon, we go to the Petit Homme. Having left one ladder behind, an attempt is made to equip the 15 metre pitch with one ten metre ladder attached as low as possible. It's all a bit kamikaze, and having descended, I find that it just won't work! Remake of the discovery of the cave.

So instead we pay a trip to the Plansonnie/Poirier system (Azerat), where the water level is impressive compared to the usual feeble flow.

Arriving at the climb that gives access to the upper levels, we find an aluminium rigid ladder, brand new if a bit muddy and set up backwards. Could it be that 'commercial cavers' have been visiting the cave?

Beyond the water - well the right hand inlet is flowing strongly but emitting some very unpleasant odours. Obviously La Plansonnie is becoming a cave 'at risk'. After exiting, we descend to Les Douymes (Azerat) where the flow is so impressive that even our guests (who are divers) don't attempt to enter due to the torrents of water emerging.





8 April  
 Visit to the Fontaine de Bugeaud with the intention of doing a spot of underwater digging. However the floods have reduced visibility to zero and the plan is abandoned.

Return to the Petit Homme, this time with the necessary amount of ladders. In the

pouring rain the Land Rover requires a helping push to make it to the entrance. During the trip, which lasts about six hours, Malc and Mike discover approximately 150 metres of new passage during a very exposed high level traverse in fossil passage near the cave's terminus. In this sector the

indications of high water are very interesting, and a dye trace should be performed in the near future. It's a shame that a decent survey of this cave has yet to be published. We take some photos in the decorated upstream section.

9 April

Washing and packing of the kit. Exchanges are made: English beer for French beer, curries for pate, a complete collection of the Wessex bulletin for several 'SpeleoDordognes'. The 8 tanks which were destined for the further exploration of Font de La Doue are bled down ... until the next time.

R. (Farmer) BROWN, C. DEVAUX-'KAY, M. (Beer Monster) FOYLE, A. KAY, M (The Boy) THOMAS, R. (Dwarf) WEBSSELL

1) After the visit in 1993, the point where Mike & Keith turned around was passed by Jean-Luc SIRIEIX of the Speleo-Club de Perigueux, who made an estimated 80 metres more before being stopped by a 'real' sump. Jean-Luc, a highly qualified cave diver, was to lose his life in 1995 after an accident at another local cave.

2) Speleo-Club de Perigueux

3) Luckily the Gendarmes didn't notice their car.

## Letter to the Editor

1st March 2000

Sir,

the Daily Telegraph of February 15" (and other newspapers) carried a piece describing how conservationists have found what they believe to be Britain's oldest bat. This geriatric, ringed nearly 24 years ago, was found in Browne's Folly Mine, and is estimated to be over 27 years old. Browne's Folly Mine is currently being gated in the name of bat conservation.

This discovery raises two pertinent points. It is recognised that bat roosts can be very old, and are returned to, year after year, by the same individuals. It would appear, therefore, that cavers and others who explore these old mines (and worse) do little in the long term to disturb bats. Indeed, unless you look for them, they can be difficult to spot, and even harder to approach.

Secondly, what do these bat botherers really achieve by continually capturing bats and subjecting them to 'scientific' investigation? ' Surely we know enough about bat biology by now and it is enough to know where the roosts are, and occasionally perform a head count, without actually catching and handling the poor creatures. How many times has our geriatric fluttermouse been manhandled in its lifetime, I wonder?

Perhaps gating these mines is not such a bad idea. They should be under the control of the CSCC. to limit the interference with cave life by so-called conservationists.

Yours Sincerely

*Phil*

Phil Hendy

# The WCC/CDG In The Dordogne 14th - 22nd April' 95

Andy Kay

Previously published in Speleo-Dordogne 2nd Trimestrial 1995. Translated by Andy Kay

14 April

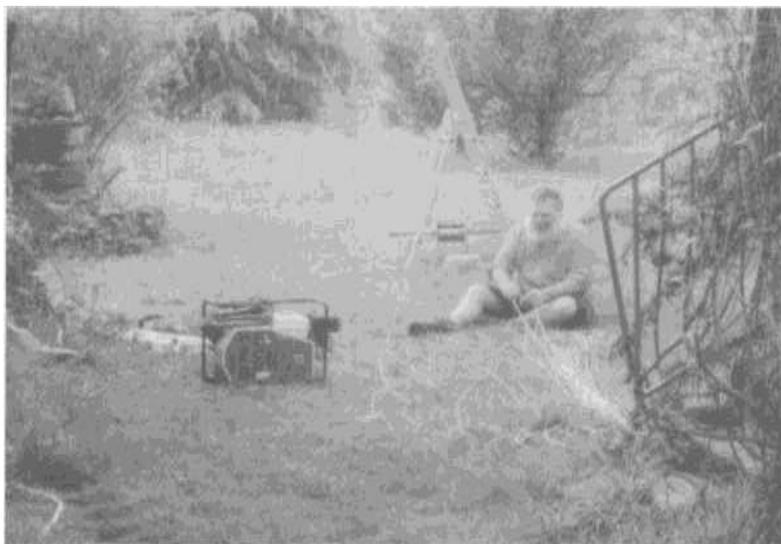
Arrival at La Chassenie in the late afternoon, of Yorkie, Male, Rob, Mike, Pete and Myrna. A vast quantity of kit is unloaded and two compressors started immediately. Quick stroll to the Fontaine de Bugreaud, resurgence of the Trou du Huguenot. Pete instantly decides to do some underwater digging. However, at three metres depth the roof of the spring is found to be dangerously unstable, so his work is rapidly curtailed!

15 April

Continuation of the exploration of La Font de La Doue, one of the principle objectives of the week.

It's a trip full of surprises. First the water level is surprisingly low considering the recent rains. Then Malc, in the lead to the sump 1 chamber encounters a Coypu. Unaware of the true identity of the creature he starts yelling:

*"An Otter! I've just been attacked by an Otter!"*



This provokes such general hilarity that those without diving kit, 'sucking the ceiling' coming through the ducks almost drowned laughing.

The dive line, in bad shape since the floods, has to be replaced, then Rob and Mike push on ahead to attempt to force sump 5. Approaching the sump they are bothered by increasingly malodorous air, found to be caused by the presence of two further Coypu, no longer living in this case, Robin, promising his sherpa not to leave him for too long in these unhealthy surroundings, dives the sump, which turns out to be six metres long, and emerging into passage similar to that which he had left; low, aquatic, carpeted with mud. He turns around after about 70 metres, without having encountered any particular obstacle: the cave continues.

With this push, the cave's known development is of

the order of 940 metres. It is decided to put off further exploration until the air and the water are a bit cleaner. To my knowledge this is the first time that Coypu have been encountered in a Perigord cave, and their presence as distant as sump 5 is as inexplicable as the reason for their expiry ...maybe the kilometre will be attained in 1996 <sup>(1)</sup>

Unexpected arrival of Liz & 'Fish' Jeanmaire in the evening, the latter being the chairman of the Cave Diving Group.

16 April

Easter Sunday tourism. For some it's the Vezere valley, Font de Gaume, and the Abri Pataud. For Mike and Pete it's a trip to the Fontaine de St Georges in the Lot where they dive most of the first sump, but turn around due to doubts about their remaining air: these doubts turn out to be unfounded, but better to play it safe ....

Andy, Malc and Rob make a tour of sites in the valleys of the Auvezere, the Loue, and the Isle. The Vergnes resurgence (not flowing at present), the Perte du Souci at Cubjac, and the Grand Souci de St Vincent, which Malc says he'd like to dive later.

We also take a look at the St Eulalie resurgence, which straight away becomes another objective. Although mentioned in 'Cavernes en Perigord', it has never been dived, and there's a good underwater digger amongst us!

17 April

More tourism: archeology and Lascaux 2 for the hightbrows, Fond del Truffe in the Lot for the divers, the Gouffre du Pre for Andy. The latter, all alone, arrives in the 'terminal' chamber and scrutinises a vertical descending squeeze: surely that 'goes', in fact, after the squeeze only five more metres of

passage are found before it gets really too tight, and getting back up the tight bit turned into an epic! If I'd thought of installing a bolt and a stirrup before descending, I might not have found myself obliged to remove both my oversuit and my furry suit to get back through ...

18 April

The assault of Sainte Eulalie! An initial look brings good news: as hoped, there is a departure at floor level that previous non-diving explorers hadn't seen. However it needs digging. Mike, Malc, Rob and Pete take turns diving and bringing out blocks until the air reserves are too low to continue. The compressors work overtime that evening.

19 April

The work continues in the morning and the afternoon, with tanks being pumped during lunchtime. Underwater digging uses up a lot of air! It looks like the squeeze is passable, but Malc insists that it must be 'bombproof' before anyone attempts it.

20 April

It's now or never, as the holidays are drawing rapidly to a close. It is decided that a normal dive line won't do for this underwater squeeze: a bolt must be placed to install a haul-rope. No sooner said than done (almost). Drilling a bolt is one thing, drilling a bolt underwater is another, and it's a good thing that this was performed only 4 metres from the surface, because Rob, to whom the task fell, had to deliberately redefine the rules regarding air margins to get it done! But the way ahead is now open, and Pete has the honour of going first. Twenty minutes later he emerges with a story of a 'big tunnel' and -6m marked on his depth gauge. However, visibility had been reduced to zero on his return, so we go to lunch and to pump tanks while the water clears.

This afternoon I make a modest entry down to the squeeze to have a look before the viz turns bad. Probably a world record for short-duration cave diving: maximum of a minute to -3m at 4 metres from the entrance. However, it is a very interesting and instructive experience: one's mind starts working very fast, and a minute is long enough to record a multitude of impressions! The way on looks very tempting. Now, it's the turn of the 'pro's'. Malc goes in with a 'just in case' bailout bottle left after the squeeze, lays twenty metres of line, and stops at a sort of descending fissure. Suddenly this small cave looks as if it may become technically challenging: there's no natural belay for the line, and to put in a bolt at -8m, and having a severe squeeze to pass with only the smallest tanks available, is hardly an encouraging prospect, with time inexorably passing.

Mike then dives to survey and look at an inlet passage (too tight). Finally it's Rob's turn: his task being to retrieve the line reel and the bailout bottle.

35 metres of cave down to -8m may seem like a modest achievement, but it's just a start, and between this year and next there will be the time to figure out how to safely continue, that is, if we the locals haven't already pumped the sump out during the summer, when it doesn't flow, which would nevertheless be a massive operation<sup>(2)</sup>.

Passing the squeeze with French-style backmounted tanks is impossible: to drag or push one's kit through probably an unacceptable risk. Furthermore the landowner, whose authorisation for access to the site is primordial, and who has been very interested in the explorations made, insists that access for now will only be granted to this CDG/SCP team.

21 April

More tourism! Mike and Rob to St Georges, to pass sump 1 and do a bit of sump 2. Others travel to Perigueux to purchase wine and beer to take back to Britain<sup>(3)</sup>. In the early evening, most of us make a trip to the Grotte des Borderies, to take photos of the 'pretties' and wind up the week. Access to this cave is still very strictly controlled: luckily we are on good terms with the Mournay family, who farm the land.

22 April

Unfortunately the moment to say farewell always arrives: "so 'til next year, unless we meet at the Berger<sup>(4)</sup> or if we should be in Britain"<sup>(5)</sup>.

Participants in this fine week of caving:

SCP Christiane DEVAUX-KAY, Andrew KAY

WCC/CDG Robin 'Farmer' BROWN, Mike 'Yorkie' DEWDNEY-YORK, Malcolm 'Beer Monster' FOYLE, Liz & 'Fish' JEANMAIRE, Pete 'Fat Boy Diver' MULHOLLAND, Myrna du RU, Mike 'Aquatec' Thomas

(1) It wasn't!

(2) This was attempted, but when the entrance to the squeeze was observed. It was considered more prudent to leave things as they were: further pumping would probably have resulted in destabilising the entire zone.

(3) (Speleo-Dordogne's Editor's note) Goodness! Is there no more beer left in Britain?

(4) Due to work, this didn't happen!

(5) This did happen, and we caved on Mendip. (And joined the WCC)

# Mendip - The Fifty Longest and Deepest

Rob Taviner

As a way of welcoming in the new millennium, I thought it would be a nice idea to celebrate the accomplishments of the last, by publishing a list of the Mendip Hills fifty longest and deepest caves.

Whilst acknowledging the contributions of many people, particular thanks must go to Rich Witcombe, Dave Irwin and Tony Jarratt for their assistance. A number of figures carry an element of estimation, sometimes through inaccuracies and roundings handed down over generations, but more often where no complete survey exists. In particular, Swildons Hole, Wookey Hole, Eastwater Cavern and Goughs Cave could differ significantly, although estimates have if anything tended to be given on the conservative side.

Only natural or largely natural caves are included in the list, and only caves on Mendip. Thus, Grebe Swallet and Lamb Leer Cavern are included, but Singing River Mine, Compton Martin Ochre Mine and Holwell Cavern are not. Destroyed, partly-destroyed and filled caves are included in their original dimensions. They did, after all, exist once! There are reasonably reliable historical accounts of further caves being entered by miners, at least one of which is believed to exceed 250m in length. Little about such systems is currently known and as such aren't included.

Analysis of the figures produces much to ponder. No less than fourteen caves exceed 1 km in length and thirteen exceed 100m in depth. Whilst, not surprisingly, the Priddy and Charterhouse areas predominate, East Mendip - with 5 of the 20 longest - also does very well, despite its reputation as a poor caving area. Burrington Coombes' popularity rather outweighs its significance, with no deep caves and only Lionels Hole exceeding 1km in length. A number of popular Mendip caves e.g. Nine Barrows Swallet, Sidcot Swallet, Rods Pot and Pinetree Pot, are in danger of slipping off the list altogether, whilst on a more poignant note, Lamb Leer Cavern - once famously the deepest cave in the world - no longer makes the top twenty deepest on Mendip!.

Although caving in general may be on the decline, the rate of discovery shows no sign of relenting. No less than 30% of the list is made up from discoveries in the last two decades - a record 17% in the 1990's alone. At this rate, the holy grail for

Mendip diggers of a cave having to exceed 305m(1000ft) in length or 46m(150ft) in depth (i.e. Vertical Range) to qualify for the top fifty, will be achieved around 2020. Whilst many eras may vie for the honour of the 'Golden Age' of caving, in terms of discovery, we're still in a Golden Age, any decline in the number of diggers having been more than compensated for by advances in technology and sheer tenacity. How many of these caves I wonder, will still be on the list at the turn of the next millennium?.

## Notes

1 System includes Fairy Cave, Hilliers Cave and the original length of Hillwithy Cave, part of which has been quarried away. Although a continuous system exists, a significant section is currently blocked with sludge.

2 This is the original total for Balch Cave, the central portion and the entrance series having been quarried away. Roughly 350m (1150 ft) remains accessible.

3 Waterfall Cave is partially artificial.

4 More specifically Hutton Cavern No.3. Entrance has been sealed.

5 Depth survey currently in progress. 158m represents the Chamber of Horrors - the deepest surveyed point. The downstream sump in Southbank Series is certainly deeper. Eastwater Cavern may well be the deepest cave on Mendip, possibly in excess of 600 ft.

6 VR is the difference between the highest point in the cave and the deepest point in the sump. An audible connection between Goughs Cave and Great Oones Hole gives a combined Vertical Range in excess of 150m(500 ft).

7 Tankard Hole is completely filled.

8 The often quoted depth figure of 18m for Stoke Lane does not take account of the high level chambers but refers to the streamway only. Depth is Vertical range.

# LONGEST

		Length		Location
1.	Swildons Hole-Priddy Green Sink	9363m	(30700ft)	Priddy
2.	St. Cuthberts Swallet	6800m	(22300ft)	Priddy
3.	Wookey Hole	3660m	(12000ft)	Wookey Hole
4.	Eastwater Cavern	2867m	(9400ft)	Priddy
5.	Stoke Lane Slocker	2236m	(7330ft)	Stoke St.Michael
6.	Goughs Cave	2135m	(7000ft)	Cheddar Gorge
7.	GB Cave	1972m	(6465ft)	Charterhouse
8.	Longwood Swallet	1708m	(5600ft)	Charterhouse
9.	Thrupe Lane Swallet	1417m	(4645ft)	Croscombe
10.	Shatter-WL Cave	1385m	(4542ft)	Stoke St.Michael
11.	Tynings Barrows Swallet	1326m	(4350ft)	Charterhouse
12. 1	Fairy-Hilliers System	1195m	(3920ft)	Stoke St.Michael
13.	Manor Farm Swallet	1067m	(3500ft)	Charterhouse
14.	Lionels Hole	1006m	(3300ft)	Burrington Coombe
15.	Wigmore Swallet	976m	(3200ft)	Priddy
16.	Withyhill Cave	873m	(2861ft)	Stoke St.Michael
17.	Goatchurch Cavern	808m	(2650ft)	Burrington Coombe
18.	Reads Cavern	690m	(2265ft)	Burrington Coombe
19.	Reservoir Hole	671m	(2200ft)	Cheddar Gorge
20.	Sludge Pit Hole	660m	(2165ft)	Priddy
21.	Upper Flood Swallet	655m	(2150ft)	Charterhouse
22.	Lamb Leer Cavern	640m	(2100ft)	Harpree
23. 2	Balch Cave	625m	(2050ft)	Stoke St.Michael
24.	Pierres Pot	463m	(1520ft)	Burrington Coombe
25.	Charterhouse Cave	427m	(1400ft)	Charterhouse
26.	Welshs Green Swallet	421m	(1380ft)	Priddy
27.	Honeymead Hole	381m	(1250ft)	Croscombe
28.	White Pit	370m	(1215ft)	Priddy
29.	Long Hole-Goughs Old Cave	345m	(1130ft)	Cheddar Gorge
30.	Mangle Hole	335m	(1100ft)	Sandford
	Dallimores Cave	335m	(1100ft)	Priddy
32.	Rhino Rift	333m	(1090ft)	Charterhouse
33.	Cuckoo Cleaves	323m	(1060ft)	Priddy
34.	Grebe Swallet	308m	(1010ft)	Charterhouse
35.	Charterhouse Warren Farm Swallet	305m	(1000ft)	Charterhouse
	Bleadon Cavern	305m	(1000ft)	Bleadon
37.	East Twin Swallet-Spar Pot	290m	(950ft)	Burrington Coombe
	Little Crapnell Swallet	290m	(950ft)	Croscombe
39.	Brownes Hole	275m	(900ft)	Stoke St.Michael
	Hunters Hole	275m	(900ft)	Priddy
41.	Banwell Stalactite Cave	268m	(880ft)	Banwell
42.	North Hill Swallet	265m	(870ft)	Priddy
43.	Shute Shelve Cavern	253m	(830ft)	Axbridge
44. 3	Cox's Cave-Waterfall Cave	251m	(825ft)	Cheddar Gorge
45.	Waterwheel Swallet	240m	(787ft)	Charterhouse
46.	Rods Pot	229m	(750ft)	Burrington Coombe
47.	Nine Barrows Swallet	225m	(738ft)	Priddy
48.	Attborough Swallet	220m	(720ft)	Priddy
49.	Sidcot Swallet	206m	(675ft)	Burrington Coombe
50. 4	Hutton Cavern	204m	(670ft)	Hutton

# DEEPEST

		Vertical Range		Location
1.	Longwood Swallet	178m	(584ft)	Charterhouse
2.	Swildons Hole-Priddy Green Sink	167m	(549ft)	Priddy
3. 5	Eastwater Cavern	158m	(520ft)	Priddy
4.	Manor Farm Swallet	155m	(511ft)	Charterhouse
5.	Wookey Hole	152m	(500ft)	Wookey Hole
6.	Rhino Rift	146m	(481ft)	Charterhouse
7.	St.Cuthberts Swallet	145m	(477ft)	Priddy
8.	GB Cave	134m	(440ft)	Charterhouse
9.	Tynings Barrows Swallet	132m	(433ft)	Charterhouse
10.	Thrupe Lane Swallet	120m	(394ft)	Croscombe
11. 6	Goughs Cave	120m	(392ft)	Cheddar Gorge
12.	Reservoir Hole	119m	(390ft)	Cheddar Gorge
13.	Wigmore Swallet	110m	(361ft)	Priddy
14.	Little Crapnell Swallet	92m	(301ft)	Croscombe
15.	Cuckoo Cleeves	85m	(280ft)	Priddy
16.	White Pit	78m	(255ft)	Priddy
17.	Banwell Stalactite Cave	76m	(250ft)	Banwell
18.	North Hill Swallet	70m	(228ft)	Priddy
19.	Twin Titties Swallet	69m	(226ft)	Priddy
20.	Charterhouse Cave	68m	(225ft)	Charterhouse
	Reads Cavern	68m	(225ft)	Burrington Coombe
22.	Lamb Leer Cavern	67m	(220ft)	Harpree
23.	Cow Hole	65m	(213ft)	Nordrach
24.	Sludge Pit Hole	62m	(203ft)	Priddy
	Shute Shelve Cavern	62m	(203ft)	Axbridge
26.	Heale Farm Cave	59m	(195ft)	Downhead
27.	Hunters Hole	58m	(190ft)	Priddy
28.	Long Hole-Goughs Old Cave	57m	(186ft)	Cheddar Gorge
29.	Waterwheel Swallet	56m	(184ft)	Charterhouse
30.	Goatchurch Cavern	55m	(180ft)	Burrington Coombe
	Dallimores Cave	55m	(180ft)	Priddy
32.	Grebe Swallet	54 m	(177ft)	Charterhouse
33.	Charterhouse Warren Farm Swallet	53m	(175ft)	Charterhouse
34.	Honeymead Hole	52m	(171ft)	Croscombe
35. 7	Tankard Hole	52m	(170ft)	Priddy
36.	Drunkards Hole	48m	(157ft)	Burrington Coombe
37.	Hutton Cavern	47m	(155ft)	Hutton
38.	Rods Pot	45m	(149ft)	Burrington Coombe
39.	Balch Cave	44 m	(145ft)	Stoke St.Michael
40.	Bleadon Cavern	44m	(144ft)	Bleadon
	Nine Barrows Swallet	44m	(144ft)	Priddy
	Attborough Swallet	44m	(144ft)	Priddy
43.	Lionels Hole	43m	(141ft)	Burrington Coombe
44.	Fairy-Hilliers System	43m	(140ft)	Stoke St.Michael
	Mangle Hole	43m	(140ft)	Sandford
46.	Bos Swallet	42m	(137ft)	Burrington Coombe
47. 8	Stoke Lane Slocker	41m	(133ft)	Stoke St.Michael
	Pinetree Pot	41m	(133ft)	Nordrach
49.	Upper Flood Swallet	40m	(130ft)	Charterhouse
50.	Ubley Hill Pot	39m	(127ft)	Nordrach

# N.H.A.S.A. Dinner and Annual Report to Shareholders

Phil Hendy

This was held on January 8th at the Burrington Inn, a pleasant watering hole. The least said about transvestites the better. About fifty members of N.H.A.S.A., with various friends, partners and companions, sat down to a convivial meal, after which Fred Davies, acting as MC stood and welcomed our Guest of Honour, Sheila Bateman of Lodmore Farm. He then proposed the Loyal Toast, after which he reminded everyone that we were in a No Smoking Restaurant. After that, Phil Hendy read the Annual report to Shareholders, reproduced below:

"May I take a few moments of your time to read the Millennial Report of NHASA, for the benefit of shareholders.

Lodmore Swallet is of course our only fixed asset, though we have acted on a consultancy basis at other sites such as Frog Pot and His Lordship's Hole. On occasion we have subcontracted work to itinerant labourers from Yorkshire, when they can be spared from vital national work such as hop picking and potato lifting.

First the financial review.

Ladders were generally static, though a bit shaky at the lower end of the market, but shoring held up well. Cement went down, winches fluctuated up and down, while rocks and mud went up steadily throughout the year, reaching a new high on the retainers. Parts of the ruckle underwent a small fall earlier in the year, though this area has now stabilised. Lighting continued to grow slowly downward. Walls held solid, in fact our fixed assets did not suffer from the collapse predicted by some less experienced dealers. Staffing is a continual worry, and a recruitment drive has only been partially successful.

1999 started with the Lodmore dig being measured at 83 ft deep, which was less than the depth previously measured. The discrepancy is probably accounted for by the fact that we are now using metric shovels. Throughout the early part of the year we were sure that we had an inwards draught,

though this was lost as we went deeper. We finally proved that the alcove in the main wall was just that, an alcove, not the beginning of an undercut.

However, in June, with the alcove six feet above us, the floor suddenly settled, revealing a void estimated at 10 - 12 ft deep, offset to the right of the main shaft. The next week this was entered. The loose boulder floor had a couple of partially open leads, but much more digging was required to stabilise this and move on. Above us, we found a hanging death jammed in the narrow rift, and holding back a loose ascending pile of rocks from a cavity in the roof. The occasion was marked with a barbecue at the Pithead in July. Later the hanging death was stabilised with cement, and over the course of the next six months the floor of the main shaft was taken down another ten feet, exposing a piece of isolated bedrock jammed in the rift, and the main bedding wall beginning to be undercut. As the dig stands at present, the way on, (which incidentally seems to be exactly where John Hill predicted it would be by dowsing) continues to remain visible, but access is still prevented by loose boulders, which only three days ago were plastered with cement (this being better than cementing with plaster).

Digging in the last year has taken us down approximately another fifteen feet. The digging is easy, but it takes a lot of time and manpower to lift spoil to the surface. There is also a need to build strong retaining walls, as by my estimation we are now about 130 ft down. We have yet to discover Millennium Chamber, but Lodmore Swallet must be one of the deepest, if not the deepest surface dig on Mendip. It is well appointed, with fixed ladders all the way down, and electric lighting. Recently the Inside Broadcast Unit has started experimenting with cave endoscopy and computer imaging. Shareholders in N.H.A.S.A. need have no fears that their investment is well founded, and growing larger on a weekly basis. We look forward to a productive year ahead."

# Reconnaissance Trip To The Herault 1999/2000

## Michael Thomas

TEAM MEMBERS: Malcolm Foyle WCC, CDG  
Michael Thomas WCC, CDG  
Pete Hann WCC  
Fish Jeanmaire BEC, CDG

Making the decision to go on a trip to a new caving area is not always easy, especially when you know very little about the area you plan to visit. 'Will the caving be any good?' and 'Are the caves themselves easy to find?' are just some of the questions that need to be asked before you commit yourself and some precious holiday from work. But if you don't make the effort to visit new caving areas you end up going back to the same old places again and again, which in the end gets a little boring. If you're interested in an area, plan a short reconnaissance trip with a few people, so you can get a good feel for the area and a taste of the local caving and beer! But be prepared to do more walking and map reading to find the caves than actual caving! Especially if you're into complaining about short walks to the pub!

We have been interested in the Herault region in southern France for a few years but had never made the effort to visit it. This neglect on our part was corrected by a kind invite from Fish and Liz Jeanmaire to join them for a year 2000 party at their house in the Herault along with our better halves. It also gave us the chance to explore the area and do some caving and cave diving. What follows is the story of our caving, in what turned out to be an exceptional area.

27-12-99

It was like 1944 all over again as the overnight ferry from Portsmouth to Caen docked at 7.00 am, the doors opened and the ramp dropped, our little convoy of two landrovers and one car started its lightning dash to southern France.

Well, we did not get very far very fast, on Boxing Day: Northern France was hit by storm force winds and serious flooding, there were trees down everywhere and not a bloody signpost left standing between Caen and Le Mans! Not to mention several houses with their roofs all over the road.

The journey to the Herault is a long one, it's about 550 miles and 12 hour's driving including two or three brief stops. We had a bad journey, apart from the chaos in northern France we drove through

torrential rain and snow and blizzards on the high ground, for at least six hours.

By the time we reached St Privat, the village in which we were staying, the drivers were nearly incoherent and could barely mumble thanks as Fish thrust beer into our hands while he struggled to open a bottle of wine, which we thought was odd for a BEC member. We thought they usually just smashed the top off!!



28-12-99

We awoke midmorning after a good night's rest to a beautiful day, blue sky, lots of sun and no rain. Liz told us the weather was supposed to be stable for a good few days. Maybe we would get some caving in after

all! Because for several hours yesterday we thought we would be spending the entire week in the local bar looking at the rain. Most of the day was spent on a large shopping expedition and a guided tour of the local area.

At the end of the day Liz and Fish took us to see the Source De La Bueges. This was a superb cave diving site with 111m depth and 190m development. Unfortunately due to the careless actions of divers not requesting the proper permissions, the local mayor employed the services of a JCB to fill in the entrance. So now all that can be seen is crystal clear water welling up through a small hole at the bottom of the resurgence pool, which by the way looks as though it could be accessible after a couple more heavy floods and a bit of digging! I think there is a lesson here somewhere. The group returned home in a thoughtful mood, but keen to visit other sites and get underground.

29-12-99

We, the active cavers amongst our group decided on a day's caving and the Grotte du Sergent in the Herault Gorge, was our chosen site. According to the guidebooks the cave is situated high up on a limestone crag a short distance from the car parking area. The photos showed the passages to be

typically French i.e. big with lots of formations. It looked like a good trip and the entrance should not be too hard to find.

The first mistake Malcolm, Pete and I made that day was forgetting the 1-25 000 OS maps of the area. The valley and the cave are marked on a road map, but that did not help us locate the cave once in the valley. The second mistake was forgetting the English version of the cave description and how to find it. We only brought the French guidebook that we could not understand! After a good two hours of running up and down the valley looking for the entrance and getting very hot and irritable, we sat down, back at the car and considered defeat!

"Maps that's what we need" said Male. "We're fully aware we need bloody maps" was the reply. "But where the hell do you think we are going to buy any in the Herault Gorge" "Maybe in that big show cave (Grotte de Clamouse) we passed down the road" said Malc "Oh" said Pete and I. So we visited the show cave shop and unfortunately they were fresh out of maps. But what they did have were copies of the Herault Sump Index, which I bought because it



had another survey and description of the Grotte de Sergent plus lots of other sites. All written in French of course!

We decided to have one more go at finding the cave. Two more hours passed and with the help of a local hunter who's English was as good as our French we found the entrance. As this is an old resurgence cave the entrance was far higher up the gorge than we had expected, this had not helped our search. If I had just carried on up the dry river bed I had been looking at earlier in the day I would have found the entrance within 50m of where I stopped.

It was now getting late in the day, the hunter was concerned about us getting lost in the dark! And we were getting hungry, so we abandoned attempts at caving for the day. We consoled ourselves with a pleasant drive back home up the spectacular Vis

valley and planned a trip down our new found cave on New Year's day.

30-12-99

After yesterday's exploits we decided that a diving expedition was what was needed and where better than the Gourneyras, one of the best, but least known cave diving sites in France? Even with the help of two separate descriptions and a grid reference, it took the divers 2.5 hours to find it – still that was considerably better than yesterday's attempt and this time we did manage to get into the cave! The resurgence is found by descending a large scree slope for about sixty metres to the top of a 10 metre high cliff. After carefully climbing around the edge of the cliff (still somewhat above the river!) we eventually dropped into the resurgence.

After the usual kitting up performance the divers descended down into the deep blue resurgence pool and located the huge cave entrance at -9m heading back under the hillside. Both divers swam to about 200m at a depth of 53m with 15m visibility, down a very impressive passage that was at least 10m x 15m. I dived nitrox to an air schedule as a safety factor to climb back up the hill to the landrovers and Malcolm dived air to a Foyle schedule and spent all day decompressing to achieve the same result! Pete the resident dwarf did an excellent job of carrying the divers' cylinders back up the hill, but an even better one of moaning about it! Thanks Pete.

31-12-99

During yesterday's dive in the Gourneyras Pete and Sarah located the Gourneyrou which is a n o t h e r stunning dive site – slightly easier to find – 500 metres downstream from the Gourneyras.



I decided that having found it, it would be rude not to dive it, plus Fish was extremely keen to accompany the diver and see the site for himself. After another interesting exercise in scree running and a short climb over boulders we reached the resurgence. The entrance to the Gourneyrou is much smaller



than the Gourneyras, it's about 3m x 2m, but it soon turns into a very grandiose passage. The diver swam to a distance of 300m at -37m again using nitrox for safety. The visibility was about 15m and the passage stunning, 16 minutes of decompression completed an excellent dive to end the century.

After the dive I was very concerned that I might be about to kill the CDG chairman as Fish had picked up the diver's tackle bag and insisted on carrying it back up the hill to the EDF track!

Just to finish off the year the diving party met the rest of the team, responsible for buying the New Year's alcohol, at the Grotte de Clamouse. This show cave is well worth a visit. As we all agreed it is one of the biggest and best we had ever seen.

1-1-00

1st January 2000 came and went, the world did not end, aircraft didn't drop from the sky and Malcolm had a hangover! Some things never change.

What was surprising though, was that three Wessex members were slowly climbing up to the entrance of the Grotte de Sergent by 11.00am on New Years day! It was a hot day and when we reached the entrance we were desperately looking for water to drink and for the carbide lights. (Yes we had left our water bottles behind!) Several frantic minutes of searching found a small muddy puddle, this sorted water for the lights anyway.

The entrance to the cave is at the top of a 10- metre climb, although an easy climb, this is apparently where all the accidents occur. The cavers followed the main route through stal pillars on the left in a passage 4m x 4m to a prominent junction. In this area of the cave it is possible to do several small loops at various levels, it took us 45 minutes to locate the main drag and continue on our way. We carried on walking down a well decorated passage and passed three small crawling size passages on the right, until we reached the impressively large Salle du grand Pilier. The Pilier is a round and very large stal pillar situated in the middle of an equally large chamber.

By now we were very thirsty and very hot, we were all caving in tee shirts, as the cave temperature showed no sign of cooling. A few small trickles of water flowing down the walls and into pools were quickly lapped up to quench our thirsts.

The passage continued on the far side of the pillar chamber down a steep and slippery 3 metre climb, Pete suggested that vertically challenged people might like a hand line on this climb! From the base of the climb a short section of passage leads to the

Galerie du Reservoir where a sand choked sump terminates this area of the cave 575 metres from and 83 metres below the entrance.

On the way back to the entrance we decided to try and locate the extensive Branch Nord series, this had to be down one of the small crawling size passages we noted on the way in. The first passage we investigated led, after 50 metres, to a crystal clear sump with no dive line, this we found odd, until we consulted the guidebook. In the summer this sump is a low crawl in water but usually floods in winter, effectively cutting off the Branch Nord series until water levels drop. We decided to check out the other two crawls to see if they bypassed the sump, unfortunately neither of them did. The second passage looked promising until it doubled back to the sump again and the third was basically unpleasant. Only Pete got to the end of this passage (back at the sump again) due to the restricted size of this crawl and one squeeze that was only just dwarf size and definitely not diver size! There was no other choice of passages left to us now, so we decided to head back to the surface and soak up the late afternoon sun, while we contemplated a return trip in the summer.

2-1-2000

Today was the day we had to bid our hosts an unfortunate goodbye and head north. Malcolm, Pete and company set off at the crack of dawn to catch the evening ferry back to Portsmouth. Sarah and I had the luxury of an extra day's holiday and decided to do the trip in two days and do some sight seeing on the way home. Although before the cultural tour of France took place, the first job on the way home was to find another cave diving site, the Source La Sorgues.

Using an OS map and following the access instructions we found this site with no trouble at all! This is a resurgence cave that is 220m long and -30m deep it ends at an ascending rift with no way on, yet. No diving was done here because of an overriding desire to go and be cultural! It is worth noting that the site looks very private with a chain fence around it and lots of signs. Asking permission at the large house is a must.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

The Herault region of France is a superb area for both cave divers and caver's alike, there are many more sites both wet and dry that we did not visit in our short trip. There are also plenty of SRT trips to be done as well some pushing trips on offer. I doubt it will be very long before we return to the Herault. Our thanks must go to Fish and Liz for inviting us in the first place and then housing us for the duration.

# Letter to the Editor

Vern

Nigel Grahams letter in WCC Journal #268 raised some interesting points, to which I would like to respond.

Digs

As Nigel well knows, the Swildons dig described in Descent is not the only WCC dig on Mendip. Furthermore, the dig described is not the Lowbow dig, started by the Moodys. The dig in question was started by Les Williams and myself and (for want of something better to write about in his Descent column), Les went public against my wishes. I would prefer it if the dig (like most others) was kept reasonably secret, but I suppose it was Les' idea to start digging there in the first place.

However, I would agree that there is probably less digging going on than previously and it does suggest the possibility that maybe digging no longer has a fascination amongst the majority of club members. Changing attitudes is in itself not a bad thing and is probably only a reflection of the changes taking place within our sport.

Having so many members living off Mendip, who can blame people for not wanting to go digging? Nationally, caving is in decline and statistics published in Caves and Caving recently confirm that not only are less people taking up caving as a sport, but the average annual caving experience is five trips per caver!!!!!!

Computers etc.

I agree that email, websites and the internet in general (like television) is no substitute for real life. The Journal is an essential (if expensive)

piece of communication and I hope its future within our club is firmly secured.

As someone who remembers the internet when it used to be fun, it may surprise off-line club members that they aren't missing out on much really! Yes we have a club website, but the reality is that it has only been updated once this year (at the time of writing and that was after I complained to the Webmaster!).

(At the time of writing, the Wessex website gives you the fantastic opportunity to contact the Caving Secretary, if you want to go on the French trip on 10th March 2000 !!!!)

Whilst the internet provides new forms of almost fluid communication, WCC and its members have very little tangible benefit to gain from the internet in its current form, in respect of caving. This might change, but there's still a lot of REAL caving to do in the meantime !!!

Whilst it is possible to obtain some useful pieces of WCC information from the website out of convenience, the current WCC website is little more than an obligatory presence (because other Clubs have a presence).

Whilst we may receive some hut bookings via the website, we used to receive a similar amount of hut bookings BC (before computers). Essentially, we are still competing with the same other clubs for business.

I'm sure that real life will have a place in the Wessex for a while to come.

N.B. Wooldridge  
millennia@eclipse.co.uk

# Logbook Extracts

## 1st JANUARY 2000

The New Year has started and the World doesn't seem to have come to an end, but it's a long night so who knows what could happen. It was quiet at the Wessex, even the pissed ones were quiet.

### 1.45pm Jonathan & Mark T (Little Chef)

First caving trip of the New Millennium - Swildon's One. Jonathan ran over the Wessex bonfire beacon, no one else was that stupid. Except Leg, Bean, Mak ...

### 1.1.00 - 10.00 a.m. Swildon's

*Prew*

Solo trip to Upper Swildon's just to check that it had not "crashed". No "Millennium Bugs" found. Surprise, surprise no one else down there. Interesting little trip - plenty of water flowing down Jacob's Ladder.

### 2.1.00 Swildon's

*Suntan, Bruce, Pete & 2*

This vast adventure to the depths of the earth was cut short when 'not so slim' Pete became stuck in Birthday Squeeze - one Xmas pudding too many perhaps!

### 2.1.00 Swildon's Sump 1

*Emma & Kev*

Horrendous! Post Xmas pudding & New Year trip. A harsh reminder about staying fit if you want to go caving.

### 3.1.00 Hunters Hole

*Jon, Kathy, Chef, NBW & Nic Nak*

SRT dangle

### 4.1.00 Lionels

*Mark & Bean*

Found the dry route through to Suicide Rift. That was nice. Out the same way - sort of!

### 6.1.00 Swildon's

*Mark & Bean*

Trip to wash off the mud from Tuesday's trip. Cross pollination done. Mud Sump still well out of order.

### 8.1.00 Eastwhere

*Mark H, Rosie, Vern & Cookie*

Bottom of the 13 Pots and out - which was nice.

### 11.1.00 Lionels

*Mark & Bean*

Return to do fabled Round Trip. Job done & out

### 13.1.00 Swildon's

*Mark & Bean*

Another cross pollination trip! Which was nice.

### 14.1.00 Waterwheel

*Weston Brothers*

Mendip Millennium Rampage (Saga Branch) to Waterwheel. Halted by water too deep and cold for boilersuits.

### 18.1.00 Eastwater

*BIF & JD*

Quick visit to see the Tuesday night racing snakes in action, but they didn't show. Thirteen Pots & pub for chilli.

### 22.1.00 W/L Fairy Cave Quarry

*Maurice & Judy, Prew*

Photographic trip.

### 22.1.00 Devon Trip

*Good turnout. 14 of us*

The mystery trip came early this year, sorry Tusker! Got to Radford Cave late p.m. Radford Cave's a good slippery 'ole thing. Back to pub & game of virtual crib: Les, Shag, & Steve. Steve won - no cards, no matches, just good imagination & lots of beer. Oh yeh, Bif kept score!

Sunday - Penrecca Mine, quick through trip - Simon & Neil were the tigers going through twice.

### 26.1.00 St Lukes

*Aubrey Pete, Steve, Keith F & Bob S + others*

Still going down, more cementing to stabilise roof, walls etc. Strong draught going in which disappears to one side of the chamber. The bottom is always clear & fresh, apart from the odd fart. We still have about 2m of cable left before we need to worry about technical problems, such as; 'will the winch pull up boulders on a single run of wire?'

### 26.1.00 Swildon's

*Neil, Kathy, Chris & Teresa*

Swildon's trip once we'd found it in the fog! Down to Sump 1.

### 29.1.00 Eastwater

*Neil, Kathy & Jonathan*

Neil, the photographer, Jon, the cameraman & Kathy, the light assistant. Good trip all round.

### 4.2.00 Swan Mine

*Weston Brothers*

Explored just about everything available in five

hours then spent the same time in the Swan Inn!

### **6.2.00 St Lukes**

*Aubrey, Pete, & Keith*

Applied chemical hammer to boulder in the floor.

### **9.2.00 St Lukes**

*Aubrey, Pete, Bob S, Mr Fielder, Steve the non-member, & Paula.*

Not so much digging, but the first time Mr S, Steve & Paula had been right to the bottom. It's a long climb back up, Mr S took a couple snaps & decided that "tiger status" must have left him approx. 10 years ago, and he has only just realised it. Even with no work done it was a good night. More cementing to do next week to stop boulders moving.

### **19.2.00 Gough's**

*London Syndicate again + one & Cathy*

Classic after hours mince about in this show cave. The Firm approved. Back to Vallance Road for tea & cakes. *PS Some other Wessex members also attended.*

### **19.2.00 Gough's again**

*Phil H, Dan, & Paul W*

Went up Makin Progress on a photographic trip. Exercised a few muscles. Next morning, stiff in all the right places - knees, elbows, back etc. Also looked in Saye's Hole - the archaeological potential is amazing - cave painting on the walls, and piles of flints waiting to be knapped.

### **20.2.00 Singing River Mine**

*Jon & NBW (Good old London boys, who love their old mum), Thomo & Kath*

Typical Sunday afternoon mince about in this wildly unspectacular mine. Three caves, two countries, two days, one weekend & one pair of underpants, no shower & always dry feet. These London boys are hard. Who needs lock, stock & two smoking barrels?

### **12.2.00 OFD**

*Mark & Bean*

A no tarts or fat blokes trip to Smith's Armoury & back (obviously). Wall-of-Death wasn't, Traverses were. Streamway to the Armoury was well wet with foam on roof - which was nice! Out via Timo's Table - 5½ hrs

### **26.2.00 Cuthbert's**

*Duncan, Rosie & Vern*

15 years since I last ventured down Cuthbert's. Still horribly fresh in my mind. A good womble round & about. Lake Chamber & the Gours. At least Vern knew where he was going most of the time. Plenty of mindless gymnastic exercise.

### **26.2.00 Brown's Folly Mine**

*Jack, Malcolm, Claire & Liz*

Nice wander round, helpfully aided by the mass of graffiti.

### **25/26.2.00 Birthday Weekend SWCC**

*Tall Graham, Des, JK, Declan, Duncan, & Pat + selection of Irish Clubs*

#### **OFD to Cwm Dwr**

Primed with 5 hours sleep & half a pig between 6 we imported two leaders from England so we wouldn't get lost. Cookie & Les did superbly to ensure that in such a huge cave we ended up flat out crawling a bit too frequently. Just jumping up & down on the Rocking Boulder was fun and the joke on the survey with Dim Dwr meaning 'No water' was lost on those of us who don't read Welsh. Excellent trip, 5 hours. (Still no tarts or fat blokes)

#### **27.2.00 GB Cavern**

*NBW, Bean, Cathy Nathan & Kathy*

Did it, hard as rock. Took my big lamp to light up the Gorge to good effect. marvelled at the helactites. Groovy jazz style - nice.

Bean, Kathy & Nathan up the ladder to Bat Passage. Very pretty, well worth the wet flat out crawl.

#### **27.2.00 Swildon's**

*Jack, Malc, Claire & Liz*

Washed Brown's Folly off the kit, bimbled & left.

#### **25.2.00 Sand Point (Sand Bay)**

*Phil & Dan H*

Some interesting bedding plane caves & a through trip. Worth a trip with kit. (but no bucket and spade)

#### **28.2.00 Welsh's Green**

*Jonathan & Kathy*

Monday morning trip to this classic Mendip cave. Never to be forgotten (or repeated).

#### **5/3/00 Swildon's Upper series**

*NBW & Jon*

Two hour loon (that's what's written in the logbook) around with big spotlight, looking at high level stal stuff & showing off to the millions of scouts & student caving clubs. After yesterday's trip to OFD we didn't fancy Eastwater, but I doubt there was a twenty minute queue at the 35 foot pitch!

#### **1.3.00 Charterhouse Cave**

*NBW, Mark, Nathan & other John*

Nice midweek relaxing trip in this often overlooked little cracker. Having done the trip last week, felt a lot more comfortable about the squeezes. However, don't underestimate this cave - it can bite! Basically did it all & loved it.

### **4.3.00 Ogof Draenen**

*Mark & Bean*

Six hour trip. As the tarts & fat blokes were busy it was just Bean & myself on a steady round trip. The entrance series was much larger than I remember? Excellent trip with the odd detour to look at some possible dig sites. Will go back (somewhen).

### **8.3.00 St Luke's**

The brakes on the winch failed = broken cement bucket at bottom of first shaft. No one was there at the time = lucky!!

### **11.3.00 Group French Trip**

*Laurie, Les, Dan, Russ, Nik-Nak, Pete Townsend, Cookie, Kathy, Jonathan, 5 Dutch crew & 2 BEC*

18 hours underground in a stone mine with little amenities except alcohol. Did manage to speak some French, drink lots & maybe a small amount of caving. Saturday caving trip consisted of a 48m entrance shaft followed by lots of water in the main passage, which dragged on for ever. Good 3 hour trip, then went to eat at a restaurant & gather round empty beer bottles for the rest of the evening.

### **11/12.3.00 Eastwater, Regent Street**

*Kev, Em & Rob (Em's Dad)*

**Saturday** - Looked for Regent Street using guide. Couldn't find it. **Sunday** - Looked for Regent Street using London A-Z guide. Just as helpful. Found it second time - well worth it. Out via Baker's Chimney & Bedding Plane.

### **12.3.00 Eastwater**

*Andy "Legbreaker" Ladell, Rosie, Cat & Mak*

5 hour trip. Would have been a quick trip down Twin Verts & 13 Pots except we let Andy rig so it was a long trip down Twin Verts & 13 Pots!

### **16.3.00 Manor Farm**

*Mark, Bean, Shag, Steve & NBW*

"Abed" in on belay belts & free climbed the rest. No tackle apart from lifeline on the entrance shaft ascent. Where's all the unpleasantness I was forewarned about? A lovely cave & a good trip.

### **19.3.00 Darren Cilau Entrance**

*Nik-Nak & NBW*

Thoroughly enjoyed this lovely cave (didn't bother with the rest of the cave). Right from the start this cave is a right bitch, low, narrow, tight & long; the entrance passage is a major challenge.

Stripped down to underpants & got through the Vice on the 4th attempt. From the last OFD trip a small impact injured my elbow. Recurring pain led to an NHS diagnosis of a chipped bone. For this trip the injured elbow was majorly padded but this restricted movement which is virtually essential in this cave.

However, after the Vice the padding was removed allowing flexibility but major pain of each "elbow step". However, the cold water numbed the pain & the abrasive grit everywhere served as a counter-irritant.

Progress was reasonably speedy even allowing for the low double 'S' bend squeezes in the water. Our progress was eventually thwarted when the big bloke refused the 1st stal squeeze after 6 attempts due to a rib cage problem. Laying down in the streamway in underpants started to have a chilling effect & so an executive decision was made to abort the trip.

With great glee we thus began the return trip. In this \_ kilometre passage there must be at least 4 places where it is possible to stand up. Obviously negotiated the Vice OK on the return & emerged into daylight after 4 hours.

Although beaten by the cave this time, we will return after the bruises & bone have healed. The entrance may be a serious undertaking physically, but it definitely presents a psychological challenge. Apart from that it was easy & we loved every minute of it. After we conquer the stal squeezes the rest could be a disappointment. The large air to rock ratio in the rest of the cave currently does little to address the serious high rock to air ratio in the entrance.

### **25.3.00 Read's Cavern**

*Maurice & Prew*

Big chamber, big flash bulbs, lots of cables, lots of photos, no problems.

### **25.3.00 Goatchurch Cavern**

#### **Wessex Surveying Workshop**

*Guest instructors Arthur & John*

*The instructed*

*Nik-Nik, Capt Les, NBW, Cookie, Uppy & Laurie*  
Had a good trip in this underestimated gem. Had a good laugh at the poor victims of the predatory Outward Bound schools. I'm sure that some of these people would enjoy caving for the rest of their lives given the right introduction but they are destined to think of caves as strange, scary and dangerous environments. Did the Drain Pipe twice. Did the fixed ladder once.

### **26.3.00 Swildon's I**

*NBW, Kathy, Jon, Steve, Matt & Ian*

Scouting & water sampling trip into this familiar, happy hole. Jon & Kathy concentrated on the water sampling after we had lifelined the gang down the 20ft pitch. Went to Sump I & back via Barnes Loop on the inward journey. Matt & NBW came out via "Les's Wet Squeeze" into the Wet Way. Came out after a long trip to find that Mr Cookie & Nik-Nak (other water sampling crew) had changed into their caving kit! Top quality mincing going on.

# SLOVENIA 2000

The Wessex will be returning to Speleo Camp this year from Sat. 29th July to Sat. 12th August.

All levels of caving and touring are catered for, but for those that are hard, we have discovered a cave in our area known as BBH.

It needs exploring. The first pitch is 60m. A rock (or tree - thanks Stop Go) takes 5 seconds to descend the next pitch. Work it out for yourselves.

Contact Dave Cooke or Les Williams if you are interested, details at the front of the Journal.

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## North Wales Meet.

**26th - 29th May**

North Wales Meet. Camping in the Beer Garden of the Red Lion. Visiting the Milwr Tunnel, Ogof Dydd Byraf, Ogof Hesp Alyn, Poachers Cave, etc.

## Mendip 2000

**9, 10, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2000**

A Weekend of Events and Entertainment for Mendip Cavers. At Priddy Village Hall and other local venues

## July date - TBA

WCC vs BEC annual cricket match & BBQ/piss up.

# Events Diary

## May

6th MRO Practice Rescue 9.30am  
6th WCC Committee Meeting 5pm  
26th/29th North Wales Meet, Red Lion

## June

9th/11th Mendip Caving 2000  
17th WCC Committee Meeting 5pm  
16th/18th Forest 2000, Royal Forest of Dean Symposium III  
26th/30th NSS Convention, Elkins West Virginia, USA

## July

1st/2nd Caver's Fair 2000, Derbyshire  
14th/18th Inter NAMHO 2000, Truro  
15th WCC Committee Meeting 6pm

## September

2nd WCC Committee Meeting 5pm  
15th/17th Hidden Earth 2000, Bristol

## October

21st WCC AGM

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## Construction of New Entrances Fairy Quarry

Photo's By Paul Stillman

