THE WESSEX CAVE CLUB JOURNAL

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Contents

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Club News

We have received a 75% discount on our **rates** for 4 years, based on the submission put together by Tuska and Mark Helmore. This is the highest rate given to non-charities.

Dave Meredith has resigned as **Hut Admin Officer** for personal reasons. The committee passed a vote of thanks for Dave for all the good work that he has done. Ian Timney has been co-opted by the Committee in his place.

Please make sure that all lights and gas are turned off **when leaving the building,** and that all the doors are locked.

Bolts, hangers and maillons should be booked in and out of the store in groups of tens. This makes checking for the bookee and the tackle master much easier.

Please note that if you want to dig in **Burrington,** the procedure is to contact the UBSS for permission first, as they act on behalf of the landowner. This is following on from a recent occurrence - see piece in Descent for further details.

Thrupe Swallet dig has been added to the list of official Wessex digs.

Bad news we won the Wessex Challenge. But well done anyway to the Wessex Warriors

I've received a call from Claire Morton offering an open invite to any Wessex member to her **wedding** to Jack Bateson. Details are: 26th August, 2pm Herne Hill Church, Herne Hill nr Faversham. Anyone interested please call Jack first on 01227 751723.

New Members

Jane Higgins
2 Grange Ave, Street, Somerset.
BA16 9PE Tel: 01458 441013

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Pete Mulholland
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New Video

Laurie Orr (with the help of a few others) has produced a short video of Swildons. This covers from the entrance to, & through, Sump 1.

This is for sale in the WCC sales store, or contact Laurie.

It was shown at Mendip 2000 Slide show and at the BCRA meet on the Saturday & received favourable comments.

Address Change

Louise Hilton
louisemarie@ic24.net Tel: 01923 853125

The Craven Pothole Club **Gaping Gill Winch** will be running from *Sunday 20 August - Sunday 27 August 2000.* Although it will be open until midday on Monday 28 August, no trips will be permitted outside the main chamber because of the need to start dismantling the winch early in the afternoon.

Mendip 2000

Penderyn 2000
Webspy

Despite fears that numbers would be down, following the Ireland trip (no doubt a report will appear of this in the Journal), 18 members made it to the WSG cottage over the May Day weekend.

Steady overnight rain on Friday depleted the number of tents but Saturday started dry and the following days were warm and sunny.

With many caves flooded, choice was limited but a stalwart party set out for Pant Mawr. Unfortunately, others had the same idea and it was over an hour before the Wessex team could descend.

Daniel Timney made his first SRT descent under the watchful gaze of a dozen spectators.

that half this time was taken up with photography. It was an ideal studio to try out some large flash bulbs, using Brian Prewer's cables and holders. It's nothing like as easy as using Fireflies but some excellent stereos were obtained.

Other parties undertook more exciting trips. Andy Sparrow came over for the day and he led Cookie, Neil and Nic-Nak into Smith's Armoury.

In addition Leg And Al were able to get airborn with their paragliders. Once again the Penderyn weekend was a great success and it must be hoped that the caver-friendly landlord is still at the Red Lion next year.

The ale in the Red Lion was up to its usual standard, however the Saga Team were up early for a potter into OFD on Sunday. With his uncle Malc away diving in France, Mike Thomas took on the role of duty minder. Maurice, Judy, Alan and John duly set a club record for a trip to Gnome Passage (unless you know of anyone who has taken more than three hours). In fairness it must be said

The Ultimate Caving Adventure

The potential importance of caves to the long term survival of mankind through the colonisation of space.

Rob Taviner

'We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time'
(T.S.Eliot)

Caving is one of those past-times generally considered to belong to the lunatic fringe, rarely making headlines other than those of the 'Geography teachers survive caves of doom by singing folk songs whilst huddled up in outsize rainbow jumper' variety. However, we may yet have the last laugh, for the very survival of the human race itself may one day depend in part on caves and by extension, the cavers who explore them.

One billion years from now, the ever brightening Sun will melt Earth's ice caps, triggering catastrophic climatic changes. As the inexorable rise in temperature progresses, the oceans will evaporate, and all life will cease as the last vestiges of the atmosphere dissipate into space. Ultimately, even the very rocks themselves will melt as Earth is consumed in a final fiery Armageddon, beyond even biblical proportions. Not that mankind will have anything to worry about, for we will have been long extinguished by any one of a veritable army of nasties that prowl the cosmos - super volcanoes, comet or asteroid impact, nearby super nova and gamma ray burster - to name but a few. So, when people question why we go to space, the answer is that if as a species we wish to survive, we quite simply have no choice.

Man's first tentative steps along the road to the stars were taken long ago. From the moment we first looked up to the heavens and wondered, the process became irreversible. The landmark flights of Montgolfier and the Wright Brothers, Gagarin and Armstrong were just small steps forward toward our ultimate and inevitable goal, a process continued today by our robotic emissaries in the far-flung corners of the solar system. Given the frailty of the human body, it may be that ultimately only such machines will prove capable of crossing the vast distances of interstellar space. Man's immediate future seems more modestly aimed at less hostile environments, namely a return to the moon and onward, to the colonisation of Mars.

Thirty years have elapsed since man last trod the moon, and many people have questioned why we haven't gone back. Whilst there may be many good scientific reasons to do so, none that can't be achieved on Earth or in near Earth orbit seem sufficient to justify the huge outlays involved. Regrettably, history suggests that only good political or economic imperatives will supply the motivation necessary for the establishment of permanent lunar colonies, which following the end of the cold war, seems unlikely, especially given the moon's surprising lightness in mineral resources (the result of a water paucity testament to the colossal impact temperatures generated following its birth through collision between Earth and another large body).

That said, there are enough characteristics unique to the moon to provide at least some grounds for optimism. The lifting of large amounts of rocket propellant out of the Earths gravitational field, requires huge amounts of prohibitively expensive energy. Upward of 300 million metric tons of water ice has recently been verified in the permanently dark craters of the moon's south pole, which when separated into liquid oxygen and hydrogen, offers a potentially cheaper source of propellant, which could be used for returning strip-mined Helium-3 to Earth. This rare element is plentiful on the moon, trapped in rocks replenished by a solar wind unhindered by a strong magnetic field. Capable of providing much safer fusion power, this could supply Earth's power requirements for millennia. Alternatively, the propellant could be used to refuel rockets bound for Mars, a body ripe for exploitation and colonisation, which compared to the rest of the solar system, has a reasonably benign thermal environment. The Martian surface contains many, if not all, of the resources needed for self-sustaining colonies, including energy, available in the form of wind, solar and possibly geothermal power. Extraordinarily, the introduction of CFC's and micro-organisms into the environment may

generate enough greenhouse gases to warm Mars sufficiently to make it habitable for plants within less than one thousand years, although it would take millennia more for these plants to generate an atmosphere oxygen-rich enough to be breathable by humans.

To successfully colonise the moon and Mars demands large surface habitats, the construction of which will require huge technical advances and an enormous outlay in the transportation of materials. Even if these obstacles can be overcome, the problems associated with establishing such bases are legion. Neither body has a global magnetic field to ward off solar flares or coronal mass ejections and whilst Mars does possess a tenuous atmosphere, it is not enough to prevent dangerous levels of radiation and meteorites from reaching the surface, a fate to which the moon is totally exposed. Solar flares and coronal mass ejections trigger huge surges of electrical current, wreaking havoc with machinery, whilst radiation (X-Rays, Gamma Rays and UV Rays from the Sun and Cosmic Rays derived from gamma ray bursters, supernovas and neutron stars beyond the solar system) lead to long term cancers and irreversible cell death. Surface temperatures endure huge diurnal fluctuations (+100C days to -172C nights on the moon, +16 C days to -143 C nights on Mars), requiring the expense of large amounts of otherwise useful energy in providing an environment stable for both people and machinery. The all-pervasive lunar dust which plagued the Apollo missions, is multiplied a hundredfold on dust-devilled Mars, where huge storms can engulf the whole planet in dust for months on end.

For human beings to construct such habitats under these overwhelmingly hostile conditions is clearly impossible, and whilst intelligent replicating machines - capable of building such bases with no human intervention - may be available in the future, it would for now require decades of work by engineers using remotely operated machines to construct anything even vaguely adequate on the relatively nearby moon, let alone on Mars where the problems are disproportionately accentuated by the increased distances and consequent time delays. Happily, there may be an alternative - an easily accessible, low cost, indigenous habitat, requiring little construction, featuring in-situ building materials, a natural environmental control to counter the huge temperature fluctuations, and a shield to safeguard against harmful radiation, meteorite impact and the all pervasive dust. As man once abandoned his caves to conquer the earth, so he may one day return to them to conquer the moon and Mars.

Terrestrial caves exist in many forms, but on the moon and Mars the only suitable caves will be lava tubes. These form where rivers of fluid molten rock, flowing down shallow slopes, cool as they flow away from their source. Given that this cooling is greatest at the surface, under the right conditions a crust may form and solidify. This acts to insulate the lava within, allowing it to flow with a minimum of heat loss, for many kilometres more than it otherwise would. When finally the flow source stops erupting, the last vestiges of lava drains out, leaving a hollow tube. On Earth, tubes only form in very fluid lavas, originating from deep within the mantle. Although this type of lava can occur where floods of sheet basalt erupt from fissures where the crust is thin, such as the mid-ocean trench volcanoes of Iceland, they are more normally associated with shield volcanoes, enormous volcanic piles built up by successive voluminous outpourings of fluid lava from around a central vent. Although only a fraction projects above sea-level, Hawaii's Mauna Loa - home to many of the world's longest lava tubes - rises a staggering 9.1 km from the ocean floor, making it the highest mountain on Earth. This enormous height would appear at first glance to negate the other main requirement for the formation of lava tubes, namely a shallow slope (On steep slopes lava flows too fast for a stable crust to form, on flat surfaces lava just spreads out). However, Mauna Loa's height is more than offset by its huge girth, which at 400 km diameter gives it an average slope of a gentle five or six degrees. Although terrestrial tubes tend to be relatively short-lived - being either filled, buried or collapsing within a few thousand years - given an almost total lack of weathering on the moon and Mars, supposition for the probable existence of lava tubes on either of these bodies, requires only that pertinent conditions - i.e. volcanic activity, gentle slopes and fluid lava - existed at some point in their history.

Volcanicity, the process whereby radioactively heated solid, liquid or gaseous materials escape on to the surface, is common to all solid planetary bodies, and evidence for past volcanic activity on the moon and Mars is ubiquitous. By far the most obvious lunar volcanic features are the maria - the dark seas of the moon - which are huge areas of flood basalt oozed out from fractures in the thin lowland crust to fill the giant impact basins responsible for causing them. Martian volcanic features are much more dramatic. Mauna Loa may be the biggest mountain on Earth, but by Martian standards it is positively puny. The Tharsis Bulge, a huge up-welling hump of mantle, is crowned by a row of giant shield volcanoes, of which Olympus Mons, rising 26 km (85000 ft), above the surrounding plains (i.e. three times the height of

Everest), is the highest and largest known mountain in the solar system. Ringed by a cliff 6 km high, this giant volcano is 500 km in diameter, which, with an average slope of between two and five degrees, comfortably satisfies the prerequisite for shallow slopes, whilst fluid lava is a natural product of low-gravity worlds - viscosity partly being a function of gravity.

Another function of gravity governs the diameter of lava tubes, namely the lower the gravity, the bigger diameter of roof can be supported. Whilst, on Earth, tube diameters averaging 30 metres are known, theoretically, given the apparently near perfect conditions for lava tubes on the moon and Mars, these lower gravity worlds (respectively one- sixth and one-third of Earth's gravity), should be able to support correspondingly larger diameter tubes, and it is estimated that tubes in excess of 300 metres wide may exist near the surface of the moon, and around 100 metres wide on Mars.

Terrestrial lava tubes are normally entered through skylights, formed where the crust of a tube too thin to support its own weight, collapses. Occasionally, whole sections of roof may collapse to create lava trenches. Clearly visible from Earth, the lunar surface is criss-crossed by numerous long winding channels. Normally flowing away from small pit structures, these 'sinuous rilles' (which were amongst the first extraterrestrial volcanic features identified), are vast lava channels, up to 1.5 km in width, some of which may in fact be just such collapsed lava tubes. Many of these open rilles are interrupted by smooth surface sections, suggestive of still intact sections of tube along the course of the channel. Recent, high-resolution images from the Clementine and Lunar Prospector spacecraft, show unmistakeable tube related features flowing through the maria, ranging from discontinuous rilles to networks of merging ridge like structures and small pits or skylights, marking where underlying tubes have collapsed. Viking and Mars Global Surveyor images reveal similar clear evidence of tubes, channels and rows of skylights amongst a host of tube and tube related features surrounding the shield volcanoes of Mars. Dwarfing their Earth counterparts, some of these features run for hundreds of kilometres across the extensive lava fields. Probably only the very largest Lunar and Martian tubes have been identified to date, and these are likely to be the most unsuitable, being difficult to seal and potentially more unstable (Although terrestrial tubes tend to be short-lived, on bodies where large-scale volcanic activity has been dormant for eons and the only significant form of weathering comes from meteorite impact and wind-borne sand, tubes may survive unchanged for perhaps billions of years. Sudden collapse of such tubes seems unlikely). Smaller, as yet unidentified tubes, awaiting discovery by higher resolution and infrared observations or ground-penetrating radar, will prove more suitable for habitation.

Lava tubes offer significant advantages over surface habitats. Their sealing and pressurisation could be achieved at a fraction of the cost and effort of building a surface habitat. Cave roofs - tens of metres thicker than on Earth, and hundreds of times stronger - offer exceptional shielding from radiation, meteorites and in the case of Mars, wind and dust storms. As on Earth, temperatures below ground (measured at a cool, but comfortably habitable -20 C on the moon) are constant and thus less stressful on equipment and more energy efficient than in the wide diurnal swings to which the surface is subjected. Stable temperatures also allow for flexible, fatigue minimising spacesuits, which will be essential for humans to work successfully over long periods. Tubes are spacious enough to house both the largest machinery, and major structures - for which in-situ basalt blocks could be utilised - whilst the hard basalt floors (bedrock is a resource rarely exposed on the dust covered lunar surface), provide solid anchoring in a low gravity environment. Long sections of intact tubes will probably have extensive areas free of the abrasive and irritating dust endemic to the surface of both the moon and Mars, whilst their gentle slopes could be utilised for a host of utilities and industrial processes. Once established, rather than suffer the expense of building further surface habitats, communities could expand simply by opening up further sections of tube, which in the case of Mars may be hundreds of kilometres long. Furthermore, the homogeny of lava tubes between Earth, the moon and Mars, provides ideal conditions for testing. Equipment and techniques could be designed and tested safely and cheaply in lava tubes on Earth, then transposed to the nearby moon for 'hostility testing', to eliminate potential nasty surprises prior to final installation on Mars.

Finally, there may be one other huge advantage for favouring lava tubes over surface habitats. The deposits of water ice discovered at the moon's south pole, have only survived because they lie in deep craters, permanently hidden from the sun. Speculated as being a relic of accumulated cometary impacts over billions of years, supplementary deposits may well have accumulated in caves. Although the porosity of basalt tends to inhibit pooling - which is precisely the reason why lakes and streams are rare in lava tubes on Earth - isolated reservoirs of water may lie trapped within impermeable dykes and sills (as is

the case on Mauna Loa). Lying quite literally on the doorstep, such deposits could be mined far more readily than could the kilometres deep deposits at the south pole, and would prove indispensable as a water and fuel supply. In addition to cometary ice, Martian tubes may contain remnants of the once plentiful water that blanketed Mars, some of which is believed to lie locked deep in the ground as permafrost.

One day the first 'speleonauts' will take the pioneering steps into a cave on another world. Using techniques and equipment developed in terrestrial lava tubes, they may establish subterranean lunar colonies to extract fuel from relict cometary ice ready for the journey onward to Mars. Through the introduction of greenhouse gases and micro-organisms, Martian tube colonies can begin to 'terraform' Mars. Wind, solar and possibly geothermal energy may be used to melt the permafrost and partially flood some tubes to provide a reservoir of irrigation water. Forests and fields could be planted beneath domed skylights (Mars is the only place beyond Earth where large-scale greenhouse agriculture is possible in natural sunlight), for food and air replenishment. Within a thousand years the thick manufactured Carbon Dioxide atmosphere will warm Mars sufficiently for plants to be established outside in the fertile nutrient rich lava and ash soils. Rivers, lakes and oceans will form from water melted from the polar ice caps. Although the atmosphere will not yet be breathable, man will be able to survive on the surface without spacesuits. Ultimately, the plants and micro-organisms will produce enough oxygen for man to abandon the lava tubes forever, and a new Earth will be born.

Science fiction? Maybe. However, it might interest you to know that there are groups in the States who have taken such proposals seriously enough to have conducted preliminary field tests in terrestrial lava tubes. Whilst caving seems destined to remain part of the lunatic fringe for the foreseeable future, we may yet have our day in the sun. Or should that be suns?

Library Report

Phil Hendy

LIBRARY - RECENT ACQUISITIONS

As at I June 2000

Somerset v Hitler (Secret Operations in the Mendips 1939-1945) *Donald Brown*

BCRA Caves & Caving No. 86 (Winter 1999)

Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter
No. 1/2000/1 (April/May 2000)

Chelsea Spelaeological Society Newsletter
Vol. 42 No. 4 (April 2000) No. 5 (May 2000

Craven Pothole Club Record No. 58 (April 2000)

Derbyshire Caver
No. 103 (Autumn 1999) No. 104 (Spring 2000)

Descent No. 153 (April/May 2000)

Devon Spelaeological Society Journal
No. 158 (Spring 2000)
Newsletter No. 18 (April 2000)

Georgia Underground Vol. 35 No. 4 (Feb 2000)

Grampian Speleological Group Bulletin
(3rd Series) Vol. 5 No. 3 (March 2000)

Grosvenor Caving Club Newsletter
No. 102 (Apr. 2000) No. 103 (May 2000)

Mendip Nature Research Committee Newsletter
No. 77 (April/May 2000)

NSS Journal of Cave & Karst Studies
Vol. 62, No. I (April 2000)
News Vol. 58
No. 3 (March 2000)
No. 4 (April 2000)

Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club Newsletter
No. 124 (Feb. 2000)

Shepton Mallet Caving Club Journal
No. 6 (Autumn 1999)

South Wales Caving Club Newsletter
121 (Feb. 2000)

White Rose Potholing Club Newsletter
19, 1 (March 2000)

I have now found a bookbinder who will bind volumes of the Wessex Journal for £ 16.00 each. They will be bound in black cloth with gold lettering in the spine and the Wessex dragon blocked on gold on the front cover. Volumes should be unstapled, with pages in the exact order in which they should be bound. I am willing to arrange binding for members, so please contact me. Cheque made payable to me. or cash. It is easier to bind in batches, so there may be a delay while I collect sufficient to make it worthwhile. The job itself takes 6 - 8 weeks. Binding of other items can probably be arranged: please contact me.

Water & Mud 1996 Dive Campaign CDG/SCP

Andy Kay

Previously published in Speleo-Dordogne 2nd Trimestrial 1996. Translated by Andy Kay

The visit from our British cave-diving friends has become something of a tradition, and this year was no exception. Although not all the planned objectives were achieved due to dubious weather conditions (such as the continuation of the exploration of the Font de La Doue) the results were very positive and will lead to further work in the future. It should be noted that all the sites described in the following lines were visited in due form with the authorisation of the landowners: we thank them for their understanding.

27 April

Arrival of Malc, Mike, Myrna, Pete, Robin and Yorkie in two heavily-loaded vehicles. Unpacking of all the panoply of kit necessary for the week: two compressors, sixteen tanks of assorted size, valves, drysuits, computers, etc. Rapid reconnaissance visit to the resurgence at Ste Eulalie, where the water is running clear, as well as to various sinkholes on the massif.

28April

Ste Eulalie - will the entrance have 'cleaned' itself since the winter floods, or will it need digging again? Rob goes in first and returns immediately for a kitbag for dragging out the gravel which has accumulated in the squeeze since last year. After a few shuttle trips with the bag the way is once more open. In turn, Pete goes in, getting past the squeeze, and relays the line to the top of the descending fissure which marked the point of exploration in 1995. He also takes a look up a junction which had been noted previously, but this becomes too tight after eight metres. Then it's Malc's turn ... he doesn't manage to get through the squeeze; to Pete's great delight because it's no longer he who will carry the nickname 'Fat Boy Diver'! Malc does some digging at the squeeze, then back to La Chassenie for lunch and to pump tanks.

Returning in the afternoon, Malc dives to the rift, descends it and comes back up without having found a belay to tie off the reel. Nevertheless, if he can get in, so can the others!

While Pete kits up, we drill a bolt and screw a hanger into a large pebble that he will carry in to belay the indispensable line. This having been done, he continues the exploration at a depth of 9 metres to a small opening in the left-hand wall. Not seeing how to get through, he turns around and surfaces after 22 minutes underwater. During this time, your narrator has decided on a brief dive to the squeeze to photograph Pete on his way out. Unfortunately as Pete returns up the slope enough silt is disturbed to ruin the viz, so the photographer exits, followed a minute later by his 'model'.

It is Rob who finds the way on, having passed the hole in the wall feet first. He lays another five or six metres of line before starting to worry a bit about how he's going to get out again ... this is managed without problem, but the visibility having gone again he decides to exit to the light of day.

Return to La Chassenie where we gorge ourselves on an excellent roast of British beef (Mad Cow!)[1] prepared by Yorkie, our culinary virtuoso. For this first day of diving the results seem good: the cave continues, even if the difficulties are very real. The divers are beginning to feel familiar with the section discovered last year, despite the squeeze that has to be negotiated each time!

29 April
To the Grand Souci at St Vincent sur L'Isle, which Malc has wanted to dive since 1995. The Guen brothers described this as the *deepest pothole in the Dordogne* after their descent to -45m underwater in 1977, depth to which F. Guichard mentioned 'should be added the four metres between the surface and the water level on that day'[(2)]. An interesting site indeed.

But the place has a bad reputation: littered with rubbish and dead trees, muddy, bad visibility, etc. Another British cave diver, well known to our guests [(3)] had turned his dive in there the previous year, swearing never to go back to the place[(4)]. There was only one way to prove or disprove these legends: go and take a look.

The surface team (Rob & Andy) equip the hole with a kevlar cord strung between the trees on each side of the pool, with the dive line (British style 4.5mm nylon) attached to a loop in the middle. Malcolm has the honour of going first, and let it be said that in this kind of exploration, cave diving is not a good spectator sport. Rapidly the air bubbles coming to the surface become diffuse, as if coming though a sieve of dead branches or other obstructions. So it's with a certain relief that we see the explorer back at the surface after half an hour of worrying, and the smiles get broader following his report. He'd unreeled the line through a narrow section down to -12, after which the walls were no longer visible: hence the diffusion of his exhaled air was caused by it being broken up by this overhang, as his descent wasn't impeded by any other obstacle. He touched down on a talus slope at -38, which he had followed to -47 before turning his dive on thirds. Nowhere from -12 were any walls visible and the talus (maybe part of a cone) continued down at an angle of 65°. A good push.

Now it's Pete's turn and he kits up slowly: in fact he admits to finding the site a bit sinister and the sound of church bells in the distance do nothing to reassure him! He descends, unreeling the line for which Malc had found no belay. This time those on the surface are less worried, knowing that Malc had found no tangles of branches or anything like that, and after twenty minutes Pete is back at the surface. He was carrying bigger tanks than Malc, and also wearing a drysuit, but told us that he had turned around after feeling some symptoms of nitrogen narcosis and also wishing to avoid too lengthy a time on decompression stops. We photograph his two depth gauges: -53m, and still it goes down! The visibility at his deep point was maximum three metres, although none of the walls were visible. Obviously Le Souci is a major cavern: imagine Proumcyssac full of water ... furthermore, there's all the massif behind, with 4 kilometres as the crow flies to the Cubjac sink ...

Lunch at la Chassenie, but no chance of a siesta because Pete is on top form today! Return to Ste Eulalie, where he gets through the 'window', runs out and belays the five metres of line from the reel that Rob had left, and on his return, as the cherry on the cake, retrieves the line and reel that he himself had left in the 'too tight' side passage. Emerging at surface, his dive computer indicates that he can't take an aeroplane within the next twelve hours, but that's hardly his intention because at the end of this busy day of caving, he's beginning to ask me about house prices in this part of the Dordogne ...

30 April
'Tourism' day because Pete, who doesn't know the area as well as the others, would like to do something less tight and with a bit of visibility. Malc, Myrna, Pete and Rob depart for the Ressel in the Lot for a three-man dive. Despite only carrying two tanks and wearing a wetsuit it's Malc, who knows the cavity well, who goes the furthest, turning on thirds about 500 metres into the sump just after the -44 drop-off.

From the 'stay at home' contingent, Andy and Yorkie pay a visit to the Font de La Doue, where although the water level is relatively low, worries about the weather give cause for concern.

1 May
Le Puits de Fontas (Creyssac). This site, mentioned in the 'Bible' (Cavernes en Perigord) has intrigued me for a long time, and despite everyone saying that it is impenetrable, what better idea on this bank holiday than to take a picnic in the Boulou valley, visit the old cliff-dwellings, and dive this interesting vauclusian millpool? With this in mind the (Danish) owner of the site had been contacted some time previously; the caretakers (English) were aware of this, and also a Portugese friend of Christiane's was coming with us: in all, a very cosmopolitan group!

After the picnic, the beautiful skies covered, and the numerous 'spectators' at the side of the millpool probably got as wet in the rain as Rob, Pete, Malc and Andy who dived to see what could be seen. Three inlets were found, two filled with 'dancing sand', but more consequential material than that which we had would be needed to find the way on. Return [to La Chassenie] under torrential rain. Pete asks how much it would cost to rent the mill...

2 May
Grey skies. Some visit the local market while others go to La Doue, where the decision is made to play it safe as diving kit or not diving kit, it would be bad to be at the far end if a floodpulse arrived ... Not the same for Ste Eulalie, so later Mal dives, and getting through the window to continue the exploration, finds himself at a cul-de-sac, with a rising fissure ... in turn, Pete has a go, gets up the fissure only to lose all viz at -4, where evidently there is no flow, although returning to -7 the water is clear again. On his left he notices another rising passage; could this be the way to an airspace? It's Rob's turn to try to unravel the mystery, but this time he finds himself unable to pass the window, which causes a lot of laughs when he surfaces because the 'Fat Boy Diver' nickname has changed once more, even if Robin is the thinnest of the group! Furthermore, it is his line reel that has been left at the furthest point.. [5]

3 May
The previous evening had been full of technical discussion as to how to safely equip the Grand Souci. Today we put this into practice. On the way there we eyeball the sink at Cubjac, where assorted detritus covering the grills shows the level of recent floods. Also we stop at Ste Eulalie, where the water level has risen by 30 centimetres and is running with silt: no question of diving there now!

The Grand Souci is no more attractive than it was the other day. But now we have some 'heavy equipment': this time the dive line is attached to a breeze block and is lowered by aid of a pulley attached to the kevlar which traverses the pool. Malc (this time in drysuit and with his big tanks) accompanies the breezeblock down to a certain depth ... His plan is to measure the diameter of the cavity without trying to touch the bottom this time. Once the breezeblock has stopped, he follows the line to -35m and then starts a circular reconnaissance with a supplementary line. Having unreeled about 30 metres of line before finding a wall, he follows this in an estimated arc of 160° before returning to the shotline. On his way he encounters, with his own line, a French-style 'bootlace' line, which while returning he attaches to the shot in order to reduce the risk of entanglement. His ascent is slow due to the time passed at depth which make 25 minutes decompression at -9 and -3 obligatory. During his last stop he sends a message requesting some slack in the shotline so that he can attach it to a bolt at -3.5. He's out after 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Pete's turn now. Everyone has his own system of carrying his kit, although all these Brits wear their tanks side-mounted, which has great advantages when passing low passages compared with the European backmounts. Pete uses a kind of 'bastardised American rig' which makes getting into the water a lot easier, especially for your narrator who, on rope, is relaying the kit to the diver! Pete's

tanks are also not so heavy. He immerses.At -15 he departs on a spiral course in search of the walls and possible passages. All he finds, contrary to the Le Guen brothers' description, is vast interstices between van-sized blocks sticking out of the walls. He descends to -40 before turning back to avoid too much time on decompression.

Robin admits to having a 'trembling sphincter', but it was he himself who had planned the profile of the last dive! Once equipped, he descends rapidly. Big bubbles, then the 'soda water' on the surface which worries us less now, knowing that he is going deep. Thirty minutes later the form of the bubbles shows that he's back at -4 on his deco stop. Three pulls on the supplementary line attached to the bailout stage bottle indicate that he has no need for it, so we pull it out. Some minutes later the movements on the shotline show that Rob is cutting it as planned, to leave it attached to the bolt at -4. He returns to the surface with -57.5m registered on his depth gauge! So what if he has left a (brand new) line reel (made by Yorkie) at his furthest point, the Grand Souci is now not far from being *really* the deepest pothole in the Dordogne! He had only turned back because of certain doubts regarding his buoyancy system, but in this context it is better to play it safe(6).

Returning home, we observe a few resurgences: Ste Eulalie in flood and muddy, La Clautre high but clear, Fond de La Doue paradoxically still level and clear.

4 May
And the mud? There's been a lot of water this week, but not much to get the oversuit dirty!

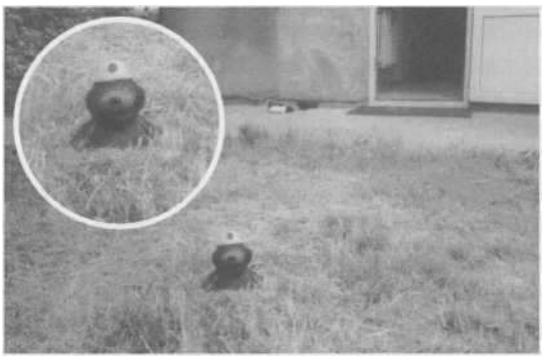
'Tourist' visit by Rob, Pete, Andy & Malc to the Grotte de La Brauge (Plazac) for a change in ambiance. As always, quantities of liquid mud: a few isolated bats spotted, and numerous photos taken.

5 May
Too soon, too soon, the 'goodbyes'! The week has passed incredibly fast. And maybe a year will pass before the other sites we've seen will be dived. Photos of all the group around the twenty thousand quid's worth of kit laid out on the lawn before it gets loaded back up in the cars. Next year, *truly* the 'deepest pothole in the Dordogne'!?

R. (Farmer) BROWN, M. (Yorkie) DEWDNEY-YORKE, C. DEVAUX-KAY, M. DU RU, M. (Beer Monster) FOYLE, A. (Special) KAY, P.(Nolongercalledthefatboydiver) MULHOLLAND

(1) Imported totally illegally into France during the embargo!
(2) Speleo-Dordogne #85,pp27
(3) 'Scoff Schofield
(4) Only to change his mind, and accompany Malc later in 1996!
(5) The kit is still there: following the accident which cost the lives of J-L Sirieix and A. Maire at Tourtoirac, 3 kms distant, the owner of Ste Eulalalle resurgence has banned access to the cave
(6) During his time underwater, the surface crew found time to dissimulate labels of a certain well-known cheese in all the corners of Rob's car. Mad cows! (He's an agricultural specialist). This act was not very safe for the culprits when discovered.
(7) In fact, it was to come sooner....

Serious Mole Problem



The Moles have moved into Upper Pitts!
Take Care

Upper Pitts

The SRT and Training Tower is almost complete. The only outstanding work required is the re-doing of the joints, once the parts have been acquired.
Therefore, if you use the tower, please take care.

We have also acquired a *picnic* table?

The Grand Souci - A New Record Saint Vincent L'Isle.

Andy Kay

Previously published in Speleo-Dordogne 3rd Trimestrial 1996. Translated by Andy Kay

Dear reader, search in your copies of Speleo-Dordogne and tell me which is the deepest cavity in the department. Bouzic, I hear you say! But let's reflect on this a bit; Bouzic's 104 metres includes climbs, etc, and the actual descent from the entrance is only 60 metres.

OK, in that case it's the Hydze du Raysse, if we judge things like that, will say the purists (and with reason, because it's 61 metres was measured in pure vertical depth from the entrance, even if the depth at the terminus changes from time to time, depending on the amount of digging spoil there is, the state of the weather, and the amount of walnut wine consumed outside).

Maybe others will join in mentioning the deep point of the Doux de Coly, where a depth of -60.5m was registered on the dive computer of one of the team (knowing that this team member, who shall remain nameless, likes to scrabble a hole in the floor and put his arm as far down as possible in order to register the maximum possible depth on his gauge - and I hope he won't read these lines or your author is in trouble!).

Anyway, since recently we can now affirm that the deepest cavity in the Dordogne is the Grand Souci de St Vincent with a depth of *at least* 66 metres from the surrounding ground level to the deepest point reached. And it continues! Worse, it was an Englishman who performed the feat, and if anyone takes the author for a chauvinist wishing to remind people of the story of SC3 and the Pierre St Martin, so be it! For this was an adventure, and I am happy to have participated in it. Here are the details.....

Already, since the advances made on 29 April and 3 May, Malcolm was talking about returning to the Souci if for no other reason than to retrieve the line reel that was left there. Arriving on holiday with his companion Rita, it was impossible to ignore the presence in their car of half a dozen tanks, including two big ones, and a compressor! The fact that 'Scoff' Schofield, (another of the Doux de Coly team) just happened to be camping at St Amand de Coly seemed to be more than pure coincidence. After all, it was Scoffs dive in the Souci two years ago which motivated the dives there last Easter. Contact was quickly established. On Friday 9 August I called Monsieur Zachari, the landowner, [of the Souci] to confirm his accord for another visit.

The same day Scoff, 'Basher' Bates and Malcolm went to St Sauveur in the Lot for a deep 'acclimatisation' dive, Malc not having been deeper than -40m since May. All went well' Malc dived to -72m at St Sauveur, and permission had been granted for the Souci. The project was on.

We meet up at La Chassenie at midday, and after a light alcohol-free lunch (for the divers at least), *en route* for St Vincent. Surprise on arrival at the hole: the water level is about 1.5 metres lower than in May. The first ledge where the divers stood up to their waists in water is completely dry! The water also seems clearer. Passing the kit to the divers is going to become a bit more strenuous, especially in Malc's case as all his equipment must weight at least 55 kilos. Thoughts also turned to getting out of the water: a diver returning from depth is not supposed to immediately perform anything too strenuous. Thus it was decided that Basher would stay in the water to help the divers kit up and dekit, while I would stay on the rope to pass the equipment down and back up.

Finally, all our ladies were there to help, take photographs, and profit from the sunshine(!) plus some 'spectators', Monsieur Zachari and Monsieur Barbary (ex-member of the SCP), not to mention a number of passers-by who stopped to watch this bizarre spectacle of people resembling astronauts descending into something that looked like a murky duckpond.

Scoff is the first in the water, wearing lighter kit, although it is Malc who puts in the line to join up with the attachment of the shot at -3. He resurfaces, and then dives rapidly once more, doubtlessly so that he won't have time to change his mind! Scoff follows shortly after, having been delayed by a slight problem with his computer, leaving Basher languidly floating on the surface doing sleeping otter impersonations.

I recall writing elsewhere that being a sherpa for cave-divers is no sinecure nor a good spectator sport. However by now we've got used to the way the rising bubbles at this site turn into a kind of fizzy lemonade effect, followed by no bubbles at all, so there are not great worries. The reappearance of big bubbles, evidently coming from two sets of breathing gear, reassures us nevertheless: our friends are back at their deco stops. Not *too long*

after, an arm breaks the surface brandishing the line reel rather like the poster advertising the film 'Excalibur' with the sword held above the waters. It's Scoff, to whom Malc had passed the reel while on deco. He also presents us with an antique winebottle (empty) which had been found at -50, and on spitting out his gag says:
"F.....g spooky down there!"

which is difficult to translate into French for the 'spectators'! At the 12m deco stop Malc had seemingly signalled '10 more minutes', but somehow the message can't have been right because there is a twenty-minute wait before he's back at the surface. This lengthy decompression, plus the return of the line reel convinced us that he must have gone deep.

The videocamera was already running while Malc recovered the junction line to -3, and a number of photos being shot. But on emerging he didn't look very happy: however a glance at his computer changed everything: -61.5 metres! Of course this figure only indicated the underwater depth, so adding the five metres between the surface and the water (estimated since the drop in level), and being aware that the gauge had been at the level of Malc's waist rather than his feet when he had 'turned' his dive, we were sure that the record was beaten, even if this was not the principle aim of the exercise. Nevertheless our friend still didn't look overjoyed, and it was shortly afterwards, sitting on the grass in the sunshine that all was explained ...

His descent of the shotline to -40 was rapid. He had quickly followed the line down the talus slope to the reel at -56, where he met a problem: the reel had been rather too well tied off. Bleeding out some buoyancy air in order to stay 'glued' to the slope while he struggled with the knot, his efforts disturbed the sediments enough to destroy all visibility. Having released the reel, and despite the conditions and also being slightly 'negative' he continued downwards, half floating, half climbing down the slope. A few metres further on the descent became vertical again, and before he could hit his 'inflate' button Malcolm felt himself starting to slide towards unknown depths. He did not dare pull on the line in case it became detached, and already feeling the effects of nitrogen narcosis, the diver had practically lost all sense of orientation, being unable to see his instruments in the zero-visibility. In the circumstances it was necessary to re-establish buoyancy with great care, in order to gently return to the weight anchoring the shot while winding the line back onto the reel.

Hearing Malcolm recount these events which had taken place no more than 45 minutes previously, gave us goosebumps, especially when he said that on encountering the shotline anchor at -40 he had felt as if he were 'almost out' already! Equally, his tale was interrupted from time to time by worrying 'beeps' from a second computer, belonging to a friend, that he had taken with him. This friend thought there was something wrong with the instrument, and with reason: according to its display Mal had dived to -105 metres, was still at -27, and still had 99 minutes of decompression to do. It was tempting to throw this irritating object back in the pool, but it was destined to be sent back to workshops for re-calibration.

Seated around the table that evening, (where naturally the event was toasted), serious discussions were held regarding the possibilities of continuation. The next objective will probably entail running a horizontal line from the bottom of the shot and surveying the walls, in an attempt to find the famous 'passage' which the first divers of the site, the brothers Le Guen, thought they had seen in 1977. Maybe this approach will diminish the problems caused by bad visibility descending the talus. Most likely mixed gases will be needed, as the dangers of narcosis at depth in the Souci are very real. Return planned for Easter 1997.

PARTICIPANTS:
M. 'Basher' BATES, BPC/CDG (Surface support and back up diver)
M. 'Beer Monster' FOYLE, WCC/CDG (lead diver)
KAY, SCP/WCC (surface support)
'Scoff SCHOFIELD, BPC/CDG (diver) Christianne (SCP), Pam, Rita & Rowena (photos, moral support and picturesque sunbathing)

THANKS TO:

J-CZACHARI (Landowner)

BPC = Bradford Potholing Club
CDG = Cave Diving Group
SCP = Speleo-Club de Perigueux
WCC = Wessex Cave Club

Mark & Bean's French Hols '99

Mark Helmore

Day 1

Following some Pub conversations on the merits of caving in the southern parts of France (based in the main part on my experiences in the Vercors during the last WCC Berger trip in '95) it came as no surprise to find Bean and myself setting up camp at the municipal site in Pont en Royans on a hot sunny October day. Bean, who had never travelled to this area of France before, was already well impressed with the Scenery and had seen nothing yet! Following a walk around this superb town, and with good weather forecast for the next day, plans were made and beer was drunk.

Day 2

Arriving at an empty car park at Grotte de Choranche further up the Bourne Gorge with plans to do the Grotte de Gournier we first checked water levels with the show cave, as there had been heavy rain the previous few days. River levels were high, but dropping, and with the management's permission the trip was on.

Stood in the entrance chamber we soon had the dinghy inflated and were off across the Entrance Lake. On reaching the far side of the lake we peered through a small triangle of air space! *~#@ that we thought, and turned around. It was then that we noticed the obvious climb up the wall! A traverse around the wall at the top of the short climb is best tackled with a 15m rope belayed to natural/existing belay points. The fossil galleries and passages that followed were outstanding, with formations too big even for my garage! Hearing and feeling the river rumbling below us we searched for a way down. After a couple of blind leads we were soon greeted with a superb sight. Pale limestone walls met green foaming water and with much hooting we were in like Flynne and battling our way upstream.

Passing through a choke into larger river passage we then passed under further links to the fossil passage above and on up the streamway. An outrageous sporting/fun trip followed in what is possibly the best streamway it has been my pleasure to encounter (including OFD). With deep pools and cascades to traverse we were thankful, I think, for the fixed? wire traverse lines. We eventually reached the base of a high windy waterfall, the end? No! On looking up Bean spotted more dodgy old tat masquerading as fixed aids. Oh ~~Bell~~ Great I said, or words to that effect. Up and over this obstacle we next encountered a high aven with the streamway showering down from above. With no obvious way forward out heads were switched on and, with less traversing and more swimming we were soon sweating our way through the fossil series, across the lake and back to terra firma.

It must be said that this trip ranks in my top ten trips to date! Don't miss it, it only takes a couple of hours, and the adjacent show cave complex has a rather pleasant cafe attached, for apres-caving refreshments.

Day 3

Waking to the sound of heavy rain meant a change of plans. With canyoning out we decided to pack up and head further East. Calling in to see the show cave at Sassenage we weren't altogether surprised to find it shut due to flooding. On reaching Briancon, near the Italian border, we turned South and then West into the Ecrins, a high mountainous area with no caves but plenty of excellent walks. With tent put up and the rain still pouring we retreated to a local bar (as you do) and with the place to ourselves we started chatting with the barman - this turned out to be one of the best moves of the holiday! This chap was a veritable font of local knowledge as well as speaking very good English. He soon had us organised with plans for the next couple of days, although we were forced to drink a few scoops of local ale to keep his attention, shame that.

Day 4

Peering out of the tent in the morning I was surprised to see blue sky overhead. With high snow-capped mountains all round we quickly packed up, and with essential supplies carefully packed (beer!) we started up towards the Glacier Blanc and the CAFF refuge. Dumping the heavy rucksacks at the refuge we walked onto the glacier towards the next refuge. With darkening skies threatening to dump on us we retreated to the refuge for tea and some socialising with our fellow campers - three Dutch guys and an Australian couple (we didn't share the beer with them though!).

Day 5

Perched at nearly 4000m up in a snow-filled gully, my thoughts turned to the crampons and ice axes that would have come in useful about now - next time I'll definitely take them! Down heads were

swiftly turned on and in no time at all (lie) we were back at the car and off to our next adventure - the via ferratas described to us the previous evening by our genial host.

Following the well-marked route we soon found ourselves completely bedevilled! (Well neither of us can actually read French). Another try and we were soon clipped onto the wire and on our way up the climb. It started off gently enough but all too soon it went pear-shaped. Stood on a metal spike looking down several hundreds of feet to the valley directly below the undercut cliff, about to climb a ladder fixed sideways on to the cliff was exhilarating stuff, but we were pleased to see the final scramble to the top. *"Thank Goodness for that" we* both said (or something similar!)

Day *6*
After an overnight stop at Gap we arrived back at the Vercors and found a pleasant campsite on the outskirts of Villard de Lans. With hot showers, proper toilets and even a drying area for clothes and caving gear it was perfect. Too late for caving we scrubbed up and hit town for fine French cuisine - steak and chips tres bien cuit!

Day 7
Struggling to light the Trangia in the morning due to an alcohol problem - too much the night before - our neighbour, a retired carpentry teacher, invited us into his caravan for coffee, ooh err, still when in France! He spoke about as much English as I speak French so a rather animated conversation followed; I'm still not sure what it was about!

Time for caving and we were soon following Des Marshall's wonderful(!) instructions on how to find the Glaciere d'Autrans, but we still found it anyway. Passing the neve in the entrance Bean started rigging well before the first pitch, a good move as the ice covered floor leads straight to the top of the thirty two metre pitch, the first few metres of which is against an ice flow. Further pitches followed, gradually getting wetter and colder. Job done and time for out to glorious sunshine.

Sat in a bar in Villard de Lans that evening we soon found ourselves socialising with some friendly French trainee chefs, one of whom had a strong Mancunian accent! - but that's another story. A tour of the Liqueurs of France followed, which will never happen again .....honest.

Day 8
Morning arrived with a bang! Both Bean and myself had obviously been mugged during the night - with raging headaches and empty wallets that was the only possible explanation!

Sat in our neighbours caravan having coffee and bickies we tried hard to be sociable, but failed miserably.

Arriving at the entrance to the Scialet de Malaterre we stood on the iron bridge that spans the one hundred and twenty-metre shaft and realised that we had other more important things to do - anything else was more important at that moment! After a stroll in the morning sun and some bread, cheese and a brew we were ready. With kit on we stormed? over to the entrance. Bean volunteered to rig and who was I to stand in the way? Rigging out towards the centre of the bridge he then started down, oh dear oh dear. Having dropped about eighty metres he eventually realised that he'd missed the rebelay at fifty-five metres and started back up towards it. I thought that mentioning to Bean that the rope was rubbing against the bridge below the Y hang was a good idea - he didn't! Modifying the rigging slightly let him join me on the bridge. Hangovers having returned, we lost the plot and settled for a walk in the mountains instead.

Day 9
Time to head homewards stopping off en route to pop into Grotte Favot. Again Des Marshall's description proved invaluable, it was the only one we had! A very steep scramble through the woods led to a railway sized tunnel heading back into the mountain, with a balcony overlooking the valley far below. Several short pitches followed in a rather gloomy cave, and we soon reached the sump pool marking the end of the trip. (Note: you need twice as many bolts than the guide book details!)

A somewhat circuitous route home followed, passing over the Massif Central, stopping off to clamber up Le Puy de Dome, in the volcanic area near to Clermont Ferrand - well worth the detour if you have the time.

Cave information

Grotte de Gournier	Map ref X: 840,78 Y: 313,04 Z:580
Grotte Favo	Map ref X: 848,52 Y: 323,41 Z:880
Glaciere d'Autrans	Map ref X: 853,12 Y: 330,96 Z: 1398
Scialet de Malaterre	Map ref X: 848,62 Y: 309,56 Z:1418

Des Marshalls book *Vercors Caves* proved invaluable as a field guide - just allow twice as many bolts and read the directions very very carefully!

Good Caving

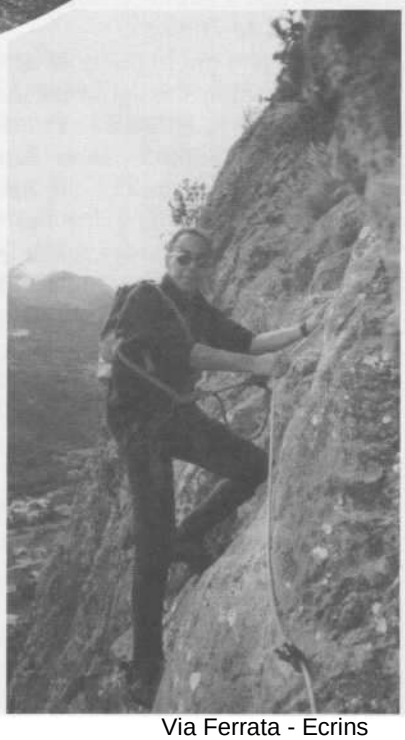
Ice Formations - Glaciere d'Autrans

Oh Dear, Oh Dear
Scialet De Malatere

I can't find the way on boy?
Grotte Favot

Glacier Blanc

Via Ferrata - Ecrins



Via Ferrata - Ecrins

Logbook Extracts

1.4.00 - Rhino Rift
NBW, Laurie, Tommo, & Jon
NBW arrived on time but the others were 40 minutes late. By the time they had arrived NBW had talked his way onto a trip with the UBSS. However, on seeing the crap rigging of the UBSS, Jon decided to rig it properly Wessex style, using the left-hand route. (UBSS rigged it left, but used deviations from the right-hand route - no use whatsoever). After waiting an hour for the UBSS to rig & descend we started to go down. It was clear that another similar wait was going to occur before we got onto the second pitch. The executive decision to show Rhino Rift 'the arse' was taken & we reversed & left. Russ wisely decided to 'bottle it' before getting changed. Did some top quality shopping & tea drinking instead.

1.4.00 - Devon: Pridamsleigh
J Thomas, M Thomas, R Brown, P Mulholland
Wessex 'Saga' member J Thomas was taken on a tour to Devon assisting a major CDG team to probe the depths of Pridamsleigh Cavern's final lake. 2 hours.

2.4.00 - Eastwater
Bean & NBW
Twin Verticals/13 Pots trip
1 hour 50 mins. Nice relaxing trip.

7.4.00 - Trat's Crack, Pierre's Pot
R Brown & M Thomas
Aim to try and get to the downstream sump & dive it. Unfortunately the tight vertical rift into the lower cave refused to let us in! We did try, honest. A return trip in boiler suits is planned with a few dwarfs to help us get out. To save a little face we checked out the sump at the bottom of Trat's Crack on the way home to clear up an inconclusive report in the Somerset Sump Index. The sump is 2.3m deep, 4m long & ends in a choked rift, very narrow. The 'vis' was zero. Don't bother diving here.

7.4.00- Pant Mawr Pot
Jonathan, Russ Brooks
Splendid sunny day, just perfect for the hour walk over the hills. Pant Mawr as pretty as ever.

8.4.00- OFD
Jonathan T, NBW
(Teach yourself OFD Part III)
After digging snow out from the Top Entrance strolled around top down to the streamway & out via pretties in Selenite Tunnel. Nice leisurely 4 hour trip. General mincing, no running or stopping conversation trip.

8.4.00 - Dan yr Ogof
Dudley & John (leaders), Mark, Bean, Vern & Rosie
Just to the Risings & back. Nice swim in the Green Canal but back via Lower Series. Classic cave, lovely formations but our wetsuits seem to have shrunk for some reason.

21.4.00 - Cox's Cave
Maurice & Judy Hewins
Cave photos the easy way. Tourist trip. Actually some very fine & unusual pretties. Finally mastered my bulb flashgun. Out via the 'Crystal Quest' but too frightened to touch the crystal. On to Gough's, because we had had to buy a combined ticket. Used up some more flash bulbs.

22.4.00 - Swildon's
Cobbett Family
A 'sporting' trip due to high water levels which at least meant that we had the cave to ourselves. Some problem route finding in Upper Series, as there were big streams in places no streams should be! Some person nicked my 'stinky' left on blockhouse roof.

25.4.00 - Swildon's
NBW, Kathy
To Sump I & out! Used ladder on this sporty little trip. Reasonable amount of water, including a good stream down Jacob's Ladder. Total trip time- 1 hour, but this was at our leisure. Couldn't see the sump itself due to all the foam. This was my first Mendip trip with my new LED7 lamp. The large amount of water spray caused a lot of 'white-out' in places - especially in the climb up to the Water Chamber where the inlet stream blocked the passage.

23 to 28.4.00: Various Caves
Ric & Pat Halliwell & 5 CPC
Usual post-Easter visit by CPC. Found Mendip empty and wet, never seen so few people in the Hunter's. Wandered down GB, Swildon's (twice) and Shatter Cave plus digging at Lodmore. Swildon's was impressive with all the extra water, as was the waterfall in GB even though the sump at the bottom of GB was hardly backing up at all.

31.4.00 OFD - Top to Smith's Armoury
NBW, NicNak, Cookie, Andy S, 7 *Dutch, Neil*
Had a nice bright & sunny day for this epic mega trip. Brought along various supplies including lifelines & ladder, of which we made good use. No major incidents throughout the trip, apart for a 20-minute route finding hassle. Squeeze through the

boulder choke was no problem. Scampered over the Wall of Death, Crevasse & the Traverses without problems. Those traverses are deep man! As soon as we hit the main streamway it was full steam ahead to get to Smith's Armoury at the end. Water levels were going down after a previously wet period. Foam on the roof of the short crawl was evident. Total trip time was 6 hours. Not fast, but not bad in view of the party size & safe lifelining methods. Overall verdict - Top Top Tip Top Mega Trip (ie not bad).

31.4.00 - OFD

Maurice, Judy, John & Mike T & Alan Goddard

Saga Section photographic womble into OFD Gnome Passage, led by the intrepid M Thomas. Some fine stereos obtained with Prew's old-fashioned flash kit using big bulbs and lots of wires. So, we took over 3 hours but we are getting slower as we get older.

3.5.00 - Swildon's

Emsie, Jodie (Emsie's mate) & Kathy

Trip to Sump I. Water levels have fallen compared to last week. Lame effort - everyone fell in the Double Pots!

4.5.00 - Swildon's II

NBW Semi-solo

Eastwater racing snakes (Mark & Bean) said they were up for a fast trip so I let them go first intending to meet up the other side of Sump I - I even kept up with them until past Jacob's Ladder. Free climbed the 20' pitch solo & reached Sump I 16 minutes after leaving the entrance. Paused for a few minutes to gather my thoughts & plunged into the sump. Swildon's II is very different on your own! Went to Sump II but not seeing the EW racing snakes I decided it was time for out. The EWRS caught up with me in the Water Chamber & I followed them out & up Jacob's Ladder. Total trip 51 minutes.

5.5.00 - St Cuthbert's

Rosie, Vern, Badvoc (Andy) & Kev

Rocky Boulder Series, out via K2 (through Kanchenjunga), climb down to Coral Chamber, Coral Squeeze, Curtain Chamber & down to streamway plus a few more bits. Andy rescued a frog.

6.5.00 - Swildon's

NBW Solo

To Sump I. In view of Nathan accident last summer this was no race. Entrance to bottom of 20' pitch (free-climbed) -10 mins. Bottom of 20' to sump -10 mins. Sump to entrance 24 mins. Total 44mins. This soloing stuff is really good if a little eerie. Only looked behind me once for the imaginary people!

7.5.00 - Swildon's

Titch, Badvoc, Cat, NBW (Photos By Pete Glanville)

To Sump I, through Tratman's Temple to Mud Sump & out Wet Way

First trip as a member & a lovely little 3 hour bimble. Finally made it down the 20', prevented at the last attempt by excessive queuing. Being vertically challenged made things more interesting (& takes longer) but it was well worth the stretch. Highlight - toss-up between finding a snake face-to-face at the start of the Wet Way on the way out, or watching NBW vanish to reappear outside via the dry ways. Still Badvoc, *"Call me Dr Doolittle",* again practiced his rescue technique. I'm waffling but it's my first time, lots more to come I hope!

7.5.00 - Sidcot Swallet

Simon, Lou, Kev& Cookie

Revisited an old friend - Sidcot was my first ever wild caving trip - and it was nice to find something new to do; the round trip. Down the 10m rift and back out the Lobster Pot. The 10m rift is very committing, but all party members had the guts necessary. Simon also had the absence of guts necessary to reverse the rift.

11.5.00 - Longwood Swallet

NBW, Mark, Bean & Laurie

After bottling this cave (entrance squeeze) last summer, this was a cave I wasn't looking forward to. However, did it OK & had a superb trip. Can't wait to go back. Exercised a few demons, or at least made them get out & walk!

20.5.00 - Yorkshire Dales

Tommo, Jon & Kathy

Set out to Alum Pot but had some kit missing, so joined Russ through Long Churn Cave to Dolly Tubs & out over-looking rest of Alum. Russ's mate, Jim, joined us in the afternoon & went out to Sell Gill.

9.45pm late night caving in Yordas & to the pub.

20.5.00 - Gough's Cave
M Thomas & R Brown
Both divers had an enjoyable swim to Bishop's Palace. Robin's climbs were combined with both RAB & MBT at the scary end. A lack of suitable bolts & a raging thirst forced the divers to abandon the cave after a hard 6 hours. A return is planned soon. The dark hole in the roof beckons.

22.5.00 - Longwood Swallet
Emsey & Kath
A lot of water around so we steered well clear of August. This mid-week caving lark is very mellow.

27 to 29.5.00: St Cuthbert's
Ric & Pat Halliwell, CPC & BEC members
Two trips down a very wet Cuthbert's. Told, jokingly, I think, that I could only sign off the prospective leader trip sheets of the BEC lad as a CPC Cuthbert's leader and not a Wessex leader.

31.5.00 - Lodmore
Maurice Hewins & the NHASA
Half-term trip to Lodmore. Needs to be seen to be believed. To Hunter's for a few pints - Wednesday digging night on Mendip is a unique experience. The bar feels as if it is in a time warp

3.6.00 - Seven Gates of Hell (Burrington)
NBW & Cookie
Seven Burrington caves in an evening - hard or what!
Cookie Hole (unknown Burrington cave -pseudo Nash's Hole?), Sidcot, Goatchurch, Read's, Rod's, Pierre's & Aveline's Hole.

Events Diary

July

1st/2nd	Caver's Fair 2000, Derbyshire
14th/18th	Inter NAMHO 2000, Truro
15th	WCC Committee Meeting 6pm
15th	BEC/WCC Cricket Challenge
22nd	MCG/WCC Rounders Challenge
29th/12th Aug	WCC Slovenia Expedition

August

19th/29th	GG winch meet (Craven)
24th/27th	Speleovision 2000, La Chaelle, Vercor, France

September

2nd	WCC Committee Meeting 5pm
2nd	Geological Excursion (see below)
15th/17th	Hidden Earth 2000, Bristol

October

21st	WCC AGM

Geological Excursion

Due to popular demand I will be repeating the Geological excursion around the Mendip Hills entitled: *"A Geological History of the Mendip Hills".* We will leave Upper Pitts at 9.30am and visit various sites around Mendip to demonstrate the geological history of the area. Stops will be made for tea (Cafe) and lunch (Pub). The excursion is designed for the layman and I will try not to bore you with technical terms. A knowledge of the basic principles of Plate Tectonics would be an advantage, although not necessary. I would expect to arrive back at Upper Pitts at about 5.30pm.

Stout shoes/wellingtons would be an advantage - also coats, etc. This excursion will still run if the weather is inclement although we will cancel if torrential rain, etc. Own transport is necessary.

Please contact me in advance if you intend to participate in this event so that I can get an idea of numbers. I will also try to send out some background reading before the event

Les