

MCG NEWS

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group

Departure Lounge, Upper Flood (by Charlie Allison)

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A Beginners Guide to Upper Flood

For those of you who don't know me (which is most of you!), I have been caving for just over a year and joined the club in December. What follows is an account of my first visit to Upper Flood with Mike Richardson and the digging team at the June members weekend.

When I arrived at the cottage, I didn't know which trip I would be joining. There was some talk on the newsgroup about me going digging, but I didn't think I would be

ACTUALLY doing it! Prior to this, the longest and hardest trip I had completed was the round trip in Swildon's. If I could handle that including the Troubles, Birthday squeeze and sump 1, then this would be fine....wouldn't it?? Anyway, I met Mike and was duly handed the squeeze box, which I fell through! I had just passed the point of no return.

Fast-forward to the cave. I knew very little about Upper Flood before hand, which actually proved to be a good thing.

Lesson 1 – read about how strenuous a cave is AFTER you've done it! The 'old' part of the cave does several things very well, formations certainly, but especially crawls. Crawl after crawl after crawl, muddy ones too although I was assured that it was normally much wetter!

Lesson 2 – be thankful for small mercies.

Now at this point I must apologise for any mistakes I make in my descriptions. I am still learning so please make allowances.

Back to the formations. All of that crawling does reward you and the formations are truly astonishing be they stalactites, straws, flowstone or crystals. Their variety and complexity really need to be seen to be believed, but there was digging to be done!!

After about two hours and several harrowing squeezes (which I will come back to later), we arrived at the East Passage dig. This currently comprises of a 10m crawl which narrows alarmingly until you are faced with a dead-end and a spade. The only way on is to dig. I

foolishly though that as a newcomer, I wouldn't actually have to do any digging....WRONG!! I was informed that I would need to fill five trays before I could come out again. Have you ever tried using a spade whilst laying on your



From the
Guest Editor

What a strange name is Nordrach. Where on earth did the word come from? My first thought was that it was Norse, but they didn't get that far west. Google is the answer to all problems these days, so I looked it up. I found a book *Below the Magic Mountain* by Linda Bryder and discovered the answer. A German physician called Hermann Brehmer working in Silesia developed the concept of fresh air and exercise as a treatment for tuberculosis. His institution became famous and others were modelled on it, including one founded by Otto Walther at Nordrach-in-Baden in the Black Forest. His influence on British TB treatment resulted in the names of three sanatoria, Nordrach-on-Mendip Sanatorium (1899), Pendyffryn Hall Caernavonshire (1900), (commonly known as Nordrach-in-Wales), and Nordrach-on-Dee Sanatorium, Banchory, Scotland (1900). So well, the MCG cottage is in a German outpost. If you like the Nordrach-on-Mendip Sanatorium or Nordrach House as it is now known, it would appear you could get it for £1,500,000. I was last in it in about 1959 after the cottage warming party sleeping in the straw belonging to Farmer Tucker which filled the place then.

Richard Woollacott

front in a hole not much bigger than your body?? It is exhausting and very awkward which isn't a great combination trust me.

After a while (all sense of time was long gone), Mike abandoned the dig due to bad air. It had never occurred to me that I might have been sharing that tiny space with not only a spade, but nasty Carbon Dioxide too!

Lesson 3 – *sometimes ignorance really is bliss.* We convened at the West Passage Bar & Grill for chilli and tea, which was nearly chillier than intended due to dodgy stove, before the return journey.

Now, back to those squeezes! Three of them will live with me until my dying day. Easy Squeeze, Not Easy Squeeze and 3D Squeeze. Easy Squeeze was clearly named by a dangerous maniac, Not Easy Squeeze doesn't really allow you to breathe and move at the same time and 3D Squeeze nearly finished me. This evil little (censored) introduced me to an interesting combination of feelings that I have managed to avoid up until now....fear and exhaustion. I can handle either of those on their own and a certain amount of fear is probably a good thing underground, but together they are truly terrifying. It's quite humbling when, for a split second, you genuinely believe that you will never see daylight again, but it's also quite remarkable where you can muster strength from when you thought you had none left! I learnt an awful lot about myself in the 30 or so seconds I spent doubled up in there I can tell you!



So, nine hours later we emerged and I was able to reflect on what I had just experienced. Upper Flood really is an amazing cave in every way from the incredible formations to the crawls and the squeezes. It is easily the most physically and mentally demanding thing I have ever done and I really admire the diggers who do this trip week after week without a second thought. I feel very privileged to have seen so much of Upper Flood, but perhaps something less intense next time. Swildon's anyone?? Paul Williams



The New Stove

Lexicography

It was recently announced that the millionth English word had been coined. I am pleased to tell you however that the total is now 1,000,001 thanks to the MCG.

The new creation is the verb to Biffle. Its definition (which will be notified to the Oxford Dictionary) is -

The modification of a course affording passage from one place to another to improve ingress as in -

"We biffled the rift from Golden Chamber to Streamway Regained."

Beginner's Weekend

We had a very successful Beginner's Weekend with eleven people (6M, 5F) as well as nine MCG members who helped organise and run the weekend. Some of the beginners had ventured underground at some time in the past although for number this was their first time. We had three trips on the Saturday and two on the Sunday, two of the Saturday trips went to Swildon's Hole (see pictures below) and one to Goatchurch, both of the Sunday trips were to Waterwheel. Below is the write up by one of the beginner's, Mandy Bristol;

I'd never been caving before, although it was something that always appealed to me. When I moved to Oxfordshire last year, a caver friend mentioned that the Mendip Caving Group was friendly and that I should finally take up caving, as I'm now close to one of the best caving areas. I visited the MCG website, saw they had a beginner's weekend coming up, and sent an email saying I'd like to come. A reply came back straight away from Jeremy, and all the following arrangements were made by email. This suited me well because I sit in front of a

computer all day! I was told to bring old clothes, wellies, and a pair of gardening gloves.

After an impatient wait for the caving weekend to come around, I drove down to the MCG headquarters at Nordrach Cottage and I was parking, another car pulled in. The driver turned out to be Adam, the very friendly and helpful leader of my caving trip that day. At the cottage, Jeremy introduced himself and I had a few minutes to talk to some of the other beginners before being kitted out with an abrasion-resistant oversuit, a helmet, a light and a battery



pack. I also took a drink pouch in my pocket. My first trip, with Adam leading the group of five (I was the only one who had never been before), was Goatchurch Cavern. The entrance is easy to reach along a path through some woods and, whilst our eyes were adjusting, Adam pointed out the cave spiders that live near the entrance and feed on the cave flies. Goatchurch is very popular with beginners, and used to be a Victorian show cave, and we had to be careful on the slippery polished rock for the first few metres. I immediately decided that I needed wellies with a better grip! Once we were a bit further into the cave, Adam squeezed into what seemed to be a very narrow gap, but it was obvious that if he could fit, then so could I. After that I can remember a confused blur of scrambling over rocks, squeezing

through cracks and having a fantastic, exhausting time. Finally, we reached the Drainpipe, a long smooth oval tunnel with pebbles at the bottom, looking exactly like the water passage it must have once been. At that point, my muscles were objecting but I managed to crawl through, feeling glad that a couple of the group were already at the far end checking I was OK. After a quick look round, we started back through the Drainpipe to the surface. I wondered if I'd feel really glad to be out of the cave, but that wasn't the case, and if I'd been less tired, I would have happily gone back down. That evening, MCG had a social evening and a barbeque. Everyone was friendly and relaxed and I felt at home in the group, even though most people were new to me. My friends on Facebook were demanding caving reports and so I sent off a few messages from my mobile whilst drinking a couple of beers. By then, I realised that my knees were the only part of me that hadn't enjoyed the experience, I really had to borrow some knee pads for the trip the next day.

On Sunday, I got up quite early and was pleased I hadn't seized up too much. The day's trip was to Waterwheel Swallet, led by Brian, another very friendly and experienced guide. I borrowed his old pair of kneepads, which were very welcome. The entrance to Waterwheel was a bit of a surprise, a metal hatch opening into a concrete tube with a few metal foot/handholds, but it turned out to be easy to get into the cave by leaning back against the concrete wall. After that, it's a steep scramble most of the way down into Waterwheel but, although I was a bit unsure of some sections, it was great fun and always looked more difficult than it really was. Part of Waterwheel used to be a lead mine and so some of the formations are black, or striped black and white. There are also some incredibly delicate white stalactites and a pretty cascading waterfall. The best part of this trip was crawling through the swimming tunnels after Brian had let out some of the water by pulling a bung out of one of the dams for a few minutes. I'm not sure why crawling through tunnels partly full of cold water was such fun, but it was, and we laughed all the way through. At the furthest point of our trip, Brian unrolled a steel ladder at the top of a 30' drop into fairly deep water. An experienced member of the group climbed down and let out some of the water, and a couple of us decided to have a go at climbing down. It was awkward, getting on to the ladder and avoiding trapping fingers between the ladder and the rock, but it did feel quite safe thanks to the life line clipped to my belt. I reached about halfway down, but decided that tiredness was making me a bit clumsy, and so I climbed up. Finally, it was back through the tunnels, past the other beginner's group from MCG, and the scramble back to the surface. On the walk back to the cottage, Brian showed us the remains of the lead flues built by Cornish miners in nineteenth century.



The following week, back at work, everyone wanted to know about the trip. My friends reacted with either horror or envy, all were impressed with my bruised knees (which were fine after a couple of days). I kept daydreaming about the trips and wanting to go back and try it all again, particularly the bits I'd found difficult. Jeremy emailed a copy of the membership form for me to fill in, and I'm now looking forward to going underground again. Mandy Bristol

Family Weekend

There was a great turnout of children to the MCG Family Weekend on 13/14th June. In total there were more than 10 children and 16 adults. Our youngest caver was just 3 years old!

I arrived Friday night and spent an hour playing with Eva, Aiden and Reuben. Then off to bed, though with all the excitement, we took a while to settle! I am sure the grown-ups stayed up much later than us - Not fair!!

On Saturday we went caving in Goatchurch. Reece looked longingly at the entrance but is just too small to go caving, so he went for a walk with his mum and dad and baby sister Melissa. I led the way, as I had been in the cave 6 times before, shouting instructions like an expert, to mind your head or beware of a slippery bit. Sam, Eva, Aiden, Reuben and Finn followed close behind. At times it was hard for the adults to keep up and get ahead at the tricky bits. We reassembled in the Dining Room, where we met another party just coming up from the Boulder Chamber. As we progressed into the Boulder Chamber we met a second group who had to wait for us to clear. Surprisingly after that we did not meet anyone else until near the entrance - just as well, as we were a large party of 6 kids and 7 adults.



We went down the Coffin Lid into the Water Chamber where we had our picnic rounded off with a massive box of straw sweets from Jon, giving us a lovely sugar rush to explore the lower levels. Daddy led us all down to the Waterfall where 5 kids plus Daddy squeezed into the small chamber. The sound of running water then had the usual effect on all us kids.... Then we explored the tubes off the Water Chamber before Sam, Eva and I went down the Drainpipe. I don't know what the grown-ups were talking about when they said it was tight; it seemed very spacious to me....

The way out presented no problems, though we did see one unfortunate member of another party temporarily stuck in the Maze. What a great trip – and what fun splashing down the river on the way back to the car. For a change, no-one minded if we got wet. Sam rated the trip 100 out of 10! Jonathon and Begonia took Aiden and Reuben climbing with Buddy, Jenny and Ollie afterwards, whilst the rest of us went back to the cottage to run around in the sunshine.



On Saturday evening we were joined by Andrea and Carlos (both grown-ups) and Angela, Ryan and Jeremy and even a couple of Nanas and Granddads joined us for the BBQ. The evening was spent running round the cottage, eating the yummy barbeque provided by Jonathon and playing the exciting game of Piñata (taking it in turns to hit a suspended box of sweets until it smashes and then grabbing as many as you can). It was another late night to bed, but we soon fell asleep once Sam was moved to a different room [though I think maybe that was a coincidence! Sorry if we kept you wake Sam].

On Sunday we decided to go to Swildon's Hole. This time we split into 2 groups - Jeremy and Ryan joined by Andrea and Carlos and the younger ones. The older children went first and I went with Eva, Ollie, Jenny and Sam (together with Julie, Buddy, Ben and my Daddy). I tried to lead, but as it was a new cave to me, I did not know the way! Ollie and Jenny showed us the route, going down the Long Dry way first. We passed some lovely formations and took some photos. Once at the Grotto we had a quick rest for snacks and more photos. Ollie and Jenny played in a water-filled pot, but I was not allowed (despite asking several times). Then I led us down to the Water Chamber and on to the top of the 40' pitch and lovely water-hole. My welly fell off here and nearly went over the edge! We made our way back to the Grotto and I jumped in the pot up to my knees. The water was so cold (and I was so tired) that I cried the rest of the Wet Way out and walked straight past Jacob's Ladder – it doesn't look like a Ladder to me! (Mind you I didn't think the 40' pitch was 40' either, but



then like Sam I can't divide!).

Once in the Sunshine I soon found my energy and despite saying I did not like the cave, I think now that I might venture down there again sometime soon. So when is the next Family Caving Weekend Julie? Thanks to everyone for a fantastic weekend, especially to Julie and Jon and those who helped with the BBQ, Piñata and cleaning up.

I don't remember the car journey home. I was asleep and dreaming of more caving!



The explorers:

Melissa (7 months) Ryan (12) Gilson Jenny (7) Finn (7) Ollie (5) Marjoram Sam (5) Cooper Reece (2) Ross (3&7) Laird and Eva (6) Hesketh-Laird Reuben (5) Thomas (4) Brander Aiden (3) Chamorro-Ramos Thomas.17/6/9

Log Books

To all you keen, young (and not so young) cavers,

Can I please ask you to write something in the logbook after your caving trips? I know many of the trips are written up on the newsgroup and in the newsletter but an entry in the logbook immediately becomes part of the club archive.

Minimum requirements are:

DATE PARTY MEMBERS (full names preferably or Christian name plus surname initial)

CAVE VISITED and which part (e.g. Swildons, Blue Pencil) DURATION OF TRIP

but of course, a longer description would be far more fun to read especially if it isn't being reported elsewhere. Please also sign your name at the end of your report and, if possible, write legibly!.

While I was delving into the Group's history (for the 50th anniversary) it was fascinating to look through the old logbooks - but frustrating where there appeared to be gaps (for some reason or other there has always been a shortage of mid-week trip reports). With so much caving going on at the moment and so many new members, now would be an ideal opportunity to get into the habit of recording trips - even short trips to common caves.

Thanks, in anticipation.

Joan Goddard (reluctant armchair caver and frustrated archivist)

Log Book Extract

Swildon's Hole - May 16th 2009



Dawn & Elysee Walsh, Linda Milne, Ed Waters, Hayley Clark.

Dawn's first caving trip after 23 years and a second ever trip to Swildon's – still as fantastic an experience as I recall; made even more special this time as I had my fourteen year old daughter with me who enjoyed the trip as

much as I did.

Ed Waters exiting Swildon's the hard way



Ed made the trip an educational one for the both of us. We saw white Cyanobacter and gold Actinobacter, the mat of bacteria which looks glistening in the light of our lamps. We also saw shrimp-like creatures in the pools of water on the way through.

Wonderful on so many fronts, expanding the mind, body and personal satisfaction – caving is definitely something everyone should have the opportunity of trying. This was a brilliant weekend which gave me the chance of spending time with my daughter and wonderful friends. I shall certainly be back and spreading the word.

Dawn & Elysee Walsh — Swildon's



Dawn Walsh

Pictures by Linda Milne

Where we have rested our heads

And in the beginning



And then ...



On the move



DIY—Oh dear!



And Now ... But where will Matthew be in another 55 years

New MCG Member

Congratulations to Andrew and Sarah Brander. A new baby brother for Thomas and Sophie - Matthew weighing 9lb 10.5 oz born on 6 May 2009.



Fourth Time Lucky?



I have always been interested in Otter Hole, as a child I remember sitting with my parents and watching the Sid Perou film, astonished that such a tight muddy little cave could have such amazing formations. I remember my brother telling me how hard a trip it must be to go and see them and all the obstacles that had to be overcome to get there. Despite this I just had to go one day...

My first attempt was back in the '90s when my brother and I were offered a trip whilst digging in Slaughter Stream, sadly the trip was cancelled the night before as thunderstorms were forecast, the rain never came and we ended up going to the Antlers in Daren instead. The second trip was again organised on a digging trip in the forest, we got to the carpark with all our gear...and it was called off. This time we had a more sensible alternative; we sat in the pub and watched the rain outside.

So Sunday 7th June saw an MCG trip to Otter Hole, Giles, Ed, Steve, Russ H and I arrived at the carpark. My spirits had already been dampened by a conversation with our leader Dan who was not optimistic that after heavy overnight rain the tidal sump would open enough for us to pass safely, the trip the day before had also been cancelled so it wasn't looking good.

We changed and walked down the hill and through the jungle to the cave (well it was like a jungle anyway!). Dan opened the cave and we entered. For those of you who do not know Otter it starts as it means to go on, straight into a bedding plane squeeze, down a climb into mud, crawl downhill, up through a squeeze along a tight shelf and down a climb into more mud. Then there is the muddy bit and then an even muddier bit! Secretly I loved all the mud, bring it on!!

Finally we arrived at the sump and sat there for 40 minutes while it made strange noises, some booming and a noise that sounded like water going down a giant plughole in a metal bath. But it remained defiant; the eyehole was open and taunting us but no archway to go through. Gutted!! And so ended my third attempt. We returned through the mud, enjoyed the cave we did and I vowed that I will return, hopefully to make it fourth time lucky!!

Jeremy.



Wells Museum

18th July to 2nd August display about Bone Hole and Hunters Lodge Inn Sink. It is being prepared by archaeologist Hannah Bell, a volunteer at the Museum - with a little input from MCG and others.

Legacy from JRat

Just to let you know, JRat left the club some money in his will and I have received a cheque for £93.89. His stipulation is that the money is used for digging.

I feel it should be used on something that can go into and out of all the digs not just taken into one dig and left there. Also it would be nice if we could have some kind of indication where this item came from i.e "Keep on digging" inscribed on it.

I invite all suggestions and discussions on this so that hopefully we come up with a really good idea and this money will help to keep him with us.

Karen Fendley

MCG Rescue Practice 2009

The rescue practice is in Water Wheel Swallet

Saturday 8th August 10 am - Meeting in the car park below Charter House Centre. Martin Grass from the MCR will be along to give a quick chat and is bringing along some of the rescue kit to show us.

We will be doing a carry out from the top of the ladder pitch, to the entrance but this is dependant on numbers. I also need a volunteer for the casualty.

Can I ask any interested members to email me "kw.knight@tiscali.co.uk" so I can get a rough idea of how many may turn up?

This is a worthwhile exercise as you may one day be called upon to render assistance at a real rescue. Remember cavers rescue cavers. Ta Keith



Battery Swallet

Progress continues at Battery Swallet, slow but full of enthusiasm! The cave lies in the red Mercia mudstone near Swallet farm and is in the middle of a deep Triassic Wadi. We are at present possibly in a hard Sandstone bed cemented by Dolomite?

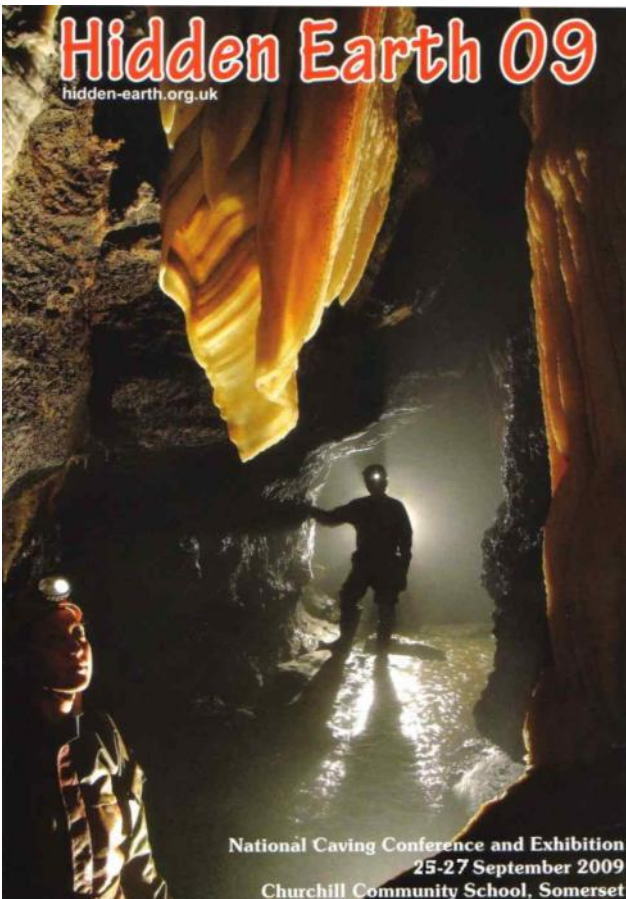
directly under the red mudstone. We are following a very tight streamway, enlarging as we go, to facilitate easier digging.



Andy Farrant's prognosis forecasts the possibility of hitting Conglomerate, followed by steeply dipping Carboniferous Limestone and eventually entering the 'Upper Yeo' on route to Yoxter? To date the cave measures approx 12-15 metres in length and is trending approx South East. We are mainly using Snappers for progress with occasional Hilti capping and even 'bang'. The dogged perseverance is slowly paying off as we are inching our way along the water course with great enthusiasm, now 'real' cave has been found!

There has been some heroic digging taking place with heavy drilling/chiseling equipment in wet, muddy, tight and squalid conditions. We are extremely well set up to dig now, mainly thanks to Biff for supplying a second air cylinder, in line oiler and superior air chisel. Work continues weekly, diggers/helpers more than welcome. No Chili required just yet, but tea and cakes always on hand!

Mark



Upper Flood makes it on to the 2009 Hidden Earth flyer (Picture of The Streamway by Rob Eavis)

The venue for Hidden Earth (25th-27th September) is Churchill Community School, only about 6 miles from the cottage. If you haven't attended a Hidden Earth Conference before, 2009 is a good year to start. There are trade and club stands and photo and art displays in the exhibition area. Also lectures, expedition reports, workshops, competitions, a Saturday night stomp, and lots of beer. The conference is always an excellent occasion.

Further information from hidden-earth.org.uk or Wendy Williams (01749 679839). There is a poster on the noticeboard at the cottage.

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Cottage Bookings All Groups (Members or Guests) should be booked via Mike Richardson or email to bookings@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

Mendip Caving Group
Reg charity no. 270088

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Group information

Weekly Meeting	At The Hunters Lodge, Somerset, first Friday of month from 9pm
Monthly Meeting	At the Group HQ usually on the first Fri/Sat/Sunday of the month
On-line Meeting	http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/mendip-caving-group/
Group websites	www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Cottage Fees	per night: MCG members, members' children, SWCC, NPC £ 2.50 per night: Guest clubs and member's guests £ 5.00
Camping Fees	As for Cottage Fees: MCG, SWCC, NPC: £ 2.50. Guests: £ 5.00
MCG Subs 2009	Full or Probationary member: £30.00. Associate member: £15.00
BCA Subs 2009	Club Caver £16.00, Club Non-caver £5.00, DIM £pay to BCA

Nordrach Cottage Bookings

When under-18s are present, please co-operate with teachers/leaders with respect to sleeping arrangements

Booking Group	Arrive	Depart	Nights	Beats booked by guest groups	
Thomas Gundaker	Fri	10/07/09 to Sun	12/07/09	2	10
Caral Yeoman	Sat	22/08/09 to Sun	23/08/09	1	11
Border Caving Group	Fri	18/09/09 to Sun	20/09/09	2	20

Caving and Social Calendar 2009

Date	Location	Activity
Various dates	Mendip	Digging in Upper Flood/Stainsby's/Battery etc
Jun 20/21	South Wales	Caving in South Wales
Jun 22	Mendip	St Cuthberts Swallet
Jun 30	Chepstow	Otter Hole
Jul 01	Mendip	Burrington Caves
Jul 03/04/05	Mendip	Members' Weekend
Jul 04	Mendip	St Cuthberts Swallet (Fully Booked)
Jul 04	Mendip	Summer 70's theme BBQ
Jul 17/18/19	South Wales	Caving in South Wales
Jul 29 - Aug 2 Big Green Gathering - road closures and restricted access		
Aug 07/08/09	Mendip	Member's Weekend
Aug 08	Mendip	Charterhouse Cave
Aug 08	Mendip	Rescue Practice
Aug 08	Mendip	Pub meal
Sep 04/05/06	Mendip	Members' Weekend
Sep 05/06	Mendip	Cottage Work
Sep 05	Mendip	Curry Night
Sep 25/26/27	Mendip	Hidden Earth
Oct 02/03/04	Mendip	Members' Weekend
Oct 03	Mendip	Longwood Swallet
Oct 03	Mendip	Beer and Skittles
Oct 17/18	Peak District	Caving in the Derbyshire Dales (Fully Booked)
Oct 17	Peak District	Titan (Fully Booked)
Oct 18	Peak District	Peak Cavern (Fully Booked)
Nov 06/07/08	Mendip	Members' Weekend
Nov 07/08	Mendip	Training Weekend
Nov 07	Mendip	Halloween and Bonfire night
Dec 04/05/06	Mendip	Members' Weekend
Dec 05	Mendip	GB Cavern
Dec 05	Mendip	Xmas dinner