

# M C G NEWS

**NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP**

**NUMBER 264**

**SEPTEMBER 1997**

## Summer Trip to Ireland

Tim Francis

As a result of the Picos trip having been cancelled at the last minute Ireland was chosen as an alternative destination. Four of us (Joe, Tim, Steve and Pete) squeezed into a hideously over-loaded Fiesta and successfully made it to Doolin in one piece. Julie elected to fly to Shannon and arrived the following day. We had decided to do one week in Clare and then drive up to Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, for the second week.

### County Clare

After considerable flaffing we decided to camp at Doolin as other options were not really practical. For the first couple of days the weather was fine so we managed to knock off a couple of trips. The most obvious trip to do was the *St. Catherine's to Fisherstreet Pot* through-trip as this was within walking distance of the camp site. Just after we had finished rigging the Fisherstreet entrance Cara and the NWCC emerged from the cave so we got a lift up to St. Catherine's saving us from an hour long walk. Most of the trip is walking sized stuff with some fine canyon passage in the lower sections. The trip is only marred by some rather noxious pollution at the downstream end. That evening it started to rain, and it rained for virtually all of the rest of the holiday.

To start with there were a few sunny intervals so we did *Pol-na-Gcéim* and *Faunarooska* before the rain really started coming down. *Pol-na-Gcéim* provided Steve with some useful SRT practice and a sharp reminder to the rest of us regarding a certain authors reliability. After this trip was cut short near the bottom we went for a wander over the Pollballiny depression. There is good potential here for a dig to connect with *Pol-na-Gcéim*, downstream of the sumps. We saw two excellent locations which look like they haven't been dug before. *Faunarooska* is in the same area and is a lovely streamway cave. No tackle is required except for right at the bottom and we did not bother with the pitch. The moonmilk formations near the end are particularly fine. On the way out Steve and Pete made the classic mistake of crawling past the normal entrance and continuing upstream for another ten minutes. Our laughter turned to slight concern as the rain turned torrential but they turned up eventually.

Extra-curricular activities in Clare tended to be centred on the Doolin Café and the local hosteleries. During one particularly riotous evening in McDermotts Bar certain MCG members were seen swinging from the rafters! We decided to leave for Fermanagh a day early if only because Joe had abandoned his sodden tent for the relative comforts of a hostel. Free tea, coffee and a spin dryer so he tells us. Julie headed off to Switzerland via Shannon airport and her place in the car was taken by Cara.

### County Fermanagh

As we left Clare the weather looked like it might improve but the forecast predicted more of the same. The forecast was right! This time we escaped the rigours of camping for the charm of the Aghnahoo Cottage. We soon gave the cottage the MCG treatment making it virtually habitable. We were able to check the weather forecast and recharge lights at the Marble Arch show caves. This area of Fermanagh has an intriguing micro-climate. The caves flood approximately five hours after rainfall but drain quickly. Unfortunately they all flood so there is not a lot to do when it rains. We did the full tourist bit taking in numerous sites of interest, visitor centres, scenic drives and the delights of Enniskillen - the swimming pool, the cinema and the Indian.

As in Clare we managed to visit only a few caves during the week. The first of these was the excellent *Tullyhona Resurgence*. This starts off with an awkward squeeze but soon develops into a fantastic streamway. This has low ducks, cascades and a perched sump. The sump is easily bypassed and leads to a well decorated streamway. This eventually breaks up into a series of inlets which all close down in some drafting chokes.

continued on page 7

## Summer Trip to Ireland *continued*

Our next choice of cave was the *Marble Arch System*. Water levels were high so most of the show cave was closed to tourists but we were still able to make it upstream to enter the rest of the cave. An interesting feature of Marble Arch is the Conservation Trail which aims to highlight the unnecessary damage that cavers have inflicted on the cave in the past. My only concern with the signs is that they tend to make the cave rather touristy even in the further reaches. Overall Marble Arch is a fantastic trip especially if you swim out of the Lower Cradle entrance as we did. Very refreshing if you're wearing furries! Later on in the week the weather meant that we did a lot of walking and dig spotting. Steve and I managed to nip down *Pollnarees* for an hour. The whole thing floods horrendously so we didn't stay around for long. Just a quick bash to the sump and back.

So with time on our hands I decided to have a look at a small resurgence, *Springwell Rising*, just downhill from the hut. Clearing away the foliage I squeezed in a bit and quickly noted that knee pads would be required. A quick dash back to the hut for the missing kit and Pete and Steve were persuaded that really did want to have a look. The previous limit of this cave was 15m ending in a choke. After some typically desperate digging I managed to remove a section of roof to squeeze over the offending boulders. Myself and Pete then dug and crawled for about 150ft until we called it a day at a large choke. Steve followed on later but was defeated by a rather awkward twisty manoeuvre. The passage alternated between low wet thrutches and small fossil chokes. Most of the streamway was well decorated with a few unusually shaped blobs of stal. The final 20ft section involved lying flat out in the steamway (or rather the streamway flowing through you), helmet off and slowly progressing by means of tapping off roof pendants and removing streambed cobbles. Unbeknown to me Pete was going to abandon me to my fate but luckily the duck popped up into a small dry chamber. This was completely blocked by a choke which I think must be associated with a small cliff feature on the surface. I think there could be a way over the top of the choke but by this stage we were both rather cold and had abandoned the digging kit a while back.

The extension has not been surveyed but a brief description will appear in the new Fermanagh guide book which is out in the next month or so. Perhaps next time we're in Fermanagh we'll have another dig at the end as I suspect no-one else will bother.

Team: Cara Alison, Pete Bennett, Joe Frampton, Tim Francis, Julie Hesketh, Steve Jones.

\*\*\*\*\*