



MCG News

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group

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Founded 1954

Graecum est; non potest legi* - Holiday Caving in Greece, 2002

By Tim Francis

Well normally at this time of year we're off to Mallorca for our winter caving, but for various reasons we ended up doing something different. The sum total of my literature and web searches for caving references had turned up almost nothing on Greece but eventually I was able to make contact with Stefanos Nikolaidis from the Hellenic Caving Club. There are no cave descriptions or surveys in English so the attached email was pretty all we had to go upon before our arrival.



-----Original Message-----

From: Stefanos.NIKOLAIDIS@pechiney.com

Sent: 22 August 2002 07:05

To: T.Francis@research-int.com

Subject: speleo info

Exquese me for the delay to ansuer you....

How many cavers will you be coming and what date? I suggest that when you come to Greece, visit our club so you can take a look in our archives and then you decide your trip. There are caves almost all over the country. Most variety and deeps are in Creta. Many deep vertical pits are in Epirus reagon too, in Mani and Taygetos mountain (Peloponnese) are many with beautiful formations, in mainland are also nice caves and pits(Parnassos, Evoia, Macedonia e.t.c.) Legaly you have to inform the arhaeological dep. and the Greek federation, but this is something that we can arrange. We also can sugest you to visit just 5-10 nice caves from deferent plases in country. At the end of September (21-29) we make an expedition in north Greece for a week. Maybe you like to join....

Hope to hear soon from you
Regards, Stefanos Nikolaidis, vice president

So it was with some trepidation that we arrived at Athens airport on the afternoon of Saturday 19th November. But we needn't have worried. Three carloads of Greek cavers were waiting for us at arrivals complete with a huge club flag. We were soon whisked off into the Athens traffic and onto the club's headquarters via the hotel. That evening we had a long discussion with the club as to the possibilities but eventually were agreed on a possible plan. One member, Anastacia, kindly volunteered to run off some copies of the surveys and contact the Ministry of Archaeology to arrange for a permit. This was to be faxed through the following day although ideally we should have arranged for a permit in advance (slightly tricky when you don't know what caves you're going to be visiting and a permit is required for each cave).

Then before heading off to a welcome dinner another member of the club, Georgia Tartari, recently retired, asked us if we'd like her to accompany us for the whole 2 weeks! This seemed ideal, as she knew where most of the caves were and communication would be so much simpler with someone who could speak Greek. So unbelievably there we were, five hours after arrival, with a selection of caves to choose from, swapping tales of caving adventures and enjoying plate after plate of mezéd-

* "It's all Greek to me" is usually attributed to William Shakespeare, in *Julius Caesar*: "Those that understood him smiled at one another and shook their heads; but for mine own part, it was Greek to me". But virtually the same phrase had been used the year before in 1600 by another Elizabethan playwright, Thomas Dekker: "I'll be sworn he knows not so much as one character of the tongue. Why, then it's Greek to him". Actually, the phrase is older as it comes from a Mediaeval Latin proverb "Graecum est; non potest legi" (It is Greek; it cannot be read). Both the Latin and the English meant then just what the phrase does now, to refer to something that is unintelligible.

hes at a nearby restaurant. It still amazes me how caving trips just seem to slot into place. But don't ask me about the wine as this was about as good as it got. My recommendation is to stick to the beer!

The Sunday was spent doing a spot of sightseeing, 'restauranting' and checking out the prices in the outdoor gear shops. Not that cheap really. We also managed to get an excellent deal on a hire car. I say hire car, but this was more of a minibus á la Moles en vacances.

So bright and early on Monday we were off for our first cave. We picked up Georgia at the caving headquarters, a few dodgy ladders (more of that later) and after a supermarket stint braved the rigours of the Greek roads. The only comment to make here is that the roads aren't as bad as they used to be but the drivers are probably worse than ever. Monday's plan was to head North to visit Baroutospilia, only 3 hours drive from Athens and then spend the night at Stefanos's house.

Baroutospilia

This makes for a gentle introduction to Greek caving and involves more walk in and tussling with goats than cave. However the entrance is a sort of Greek Bournillion and as such is the largest in Greece. Park just outside the village of Polidrosos, north of the Mount Parnassos national park and walk up the small valley. There's a faint path that runs right up to the entrance as until very recently the local farmers used to use the guano as a base for explosives. The huge fossil entrance that lies half way up the mountainside on the right hand side is easy to spot. At the back of the main entrance the cave closes down to a complete choke barely out of sight of daylight. There is an interesting climb up on the right hand side that leads to a small continuation (fixed hand-line), but again it soon closes down. The most interesting part of the cave lies behind the secondary entrance on the left. An attractive section of large fossil gours leads to a small pot and decorated grottos. Total trip time including allowances for the photographic tendency was little more than an hour and half, which was ideal considering that we were benighted on the walk back down to the bus.

The Pindos Mountains

Although we probably ended up doing a lot more driving than was ideal for a two weeks holiday, I was quite keen to visit the entrances of Epos Chasm and Provatina. So after dropping South to Stefano's house on the coast at Itea we then had a lengthy drive to the Pindos, which are North of Ioánnina, the regional capital. This took seven hours plus allowing for the meandering of the coastal road, police speed cameras, Albanian refugee roadblocks and lunch in a traffic island in Nafpaktos. Our base was to be the mountain hamlet of Kapésovo where Georgia had booked some rooms in a mountain B&B. For some reason every hamlet around these parts starts with a 'k', which made for entertaining route finding. Our accommodation was certainly a talking point of the trip. It was decorated with some intricate hand painted wallpaper by the deceased husband of our host. But it was quite expensive and rather claustrophobic due to the owner and her friends popping in and out as soon as we arrived. On the first evening we met up with another member of the Hellenic club, Manolis Dianantopoulos, who was working as an adventure guide and hence living nearby. Through the blurred gaze generated by the local spirit (quite nice actually) we gleaned a few more cave descriptions. The plan was to do one of these small pots before heading off to Provatina.

TZ14

This was chosen as it seemed fairly easy to find and had few nice pitches. But as is always the case caves are always easy to find when you know where they are. The start of the walk was a small mountain track just down valley from Kapésovo. This was easy enough but the critical directions started from the chapel of St. George. Now there were two small mountain churches indicated on the map and I'm certain that the local caver pointed to the wrong one. So we spent the first afternoon thrashing around on wooded hillsides looking for the damn thing. The church was locked up so Georgia couldn't even pop inside to check whether we were starting from the right saint. It was a classic case of trying to make the terrain fit the description. I mean, what exactly does a small plateau look like? After many hours fruitlessly searching we eventually decided to wander further up the hill to just check that we shouldn't be looking around the vicinity of the other church. Typically once at the second church everything slotted into place and we found the cave in less than half an hour.

So it was back the following day to actually do the thing. The entrance is a fine 30m pothole in a limestone pavement. There were plenty of naturals to start the rig but once over the lip I could find absolutely no bolts to create a free hang. Ah yes, I remember now – continental rigging. Not keen on this approach I thrashed about in an overhanging tree and was able to select a suitable bough for the descent. The rest of the cave was pretty straightforward. A couple of small pitches drop into a little pool, which proved highly entertaining depending upon how bothered you were about getting your feet wet. Beyond was another 30m+ pitch for which we had insufficient rope. The locals had mentioned a traverse to a draughting rift and possible continuation. I had a tentative look at this but the crumbly cal-

cite naturals looked too suspect for my tastes.

The walk to Provatina

Although we were essentially equipped only with holiday caving gear, we had brought a few tents and decent sleeping bags. So we'd set aside a couple of days to walk up Mount Astraka to go and see the historic entrances of Provatina and Epos Chasm. The walk starts at Papigo and makes for an extremely pleasant hike. There are plenty of springs in the lower slopes to refill your water bottles and all routes are well signposted. We arrived at our projected mountain camp and just had enough time to whizz over to look at Provatina before dusk. The entrance is an imposing gash in the cliff edge and awkward to climb up to. It must have been quite an effort back in the '60's lugging all the kit up there. As an aside, a few days later we bumped into an old farmer in the bar in Kapésovo who actually remembered Jim Eyre. Apparently he owns the stone hut that overlooks Epos Chasm.*

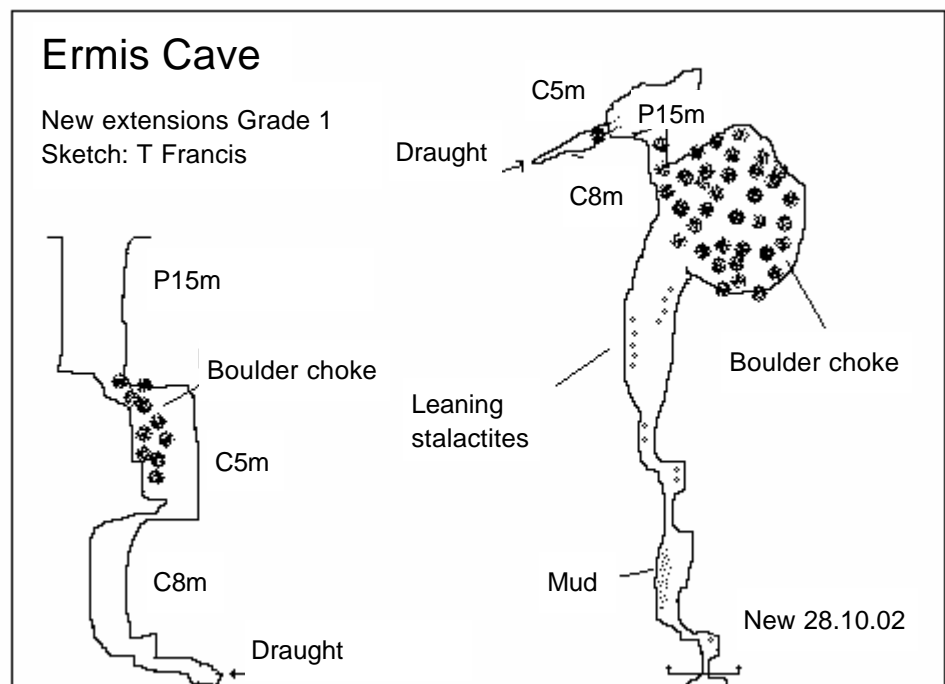
That evening it fell to well below freezing and we all wore every item of clothing we had with us. Not quite the Mediterranean trips we normally indulge in. So we were up pretty early to try and get some warmth back into our bones. Before descending back down to Papigo we ambled over to the other side of the mountain to look at Epos Chasm. This is an extremely dramatic entrance. A sinuous gorge meanders to the base of large doline and is very photogenic. The entrance pitch is right down at the bottom of a rift and it's quite an easy daylight climb to the bottom. And just looking over the lip of the entrance shaft is quite a sight let alone actually abseiling in. After a spot of photography Julie enlivened the day by bashing her head quite nastily on a jammed boulder. Helmets, helmets.

The Peloponese

After the Pindos we were keen to establish a base in one location and do a solid weeks caving. So rather than drive all over Greece madly ticking off sites we decided to head South to the Peloponnis to base ourselves at Georgia's house near Sparti. Again this was quite a drive so we decided to break the journey up by staying at the resort of Xilokastro just after the Andírio ferry crossing. The coastal road that runs along the North of Peloponnis is a nightmare of a drive. It's a two-lane A-road that has been converted into motorway status by judicious use of the hard shoulders which double up as the inside line. However you can also overtake on the opposite 'carriageway' if that takes your fancy. Add in a few broken down vehicles, Greek driving and motorway speeds into the mix and it's a recipe for disaster. We were extremely glad to reach Xilokastro in one piece. This is a popular beach resort with Athenians but was reasonably quiet on our stay as it was now out of season.

Ermis Cave

Before pitching up at Georgia's we decided to visit the Greek version of Goatchurch on the way. This is extremely easy to find as the forestry commission has handily installed tourist signs in the last couple of years (nearest village is Trikala). Ideal for all those nice young kids who wouldn't honestly think about trashing a cave would they? On our exit we cleared out the whole cave of rubbish, spent torch batteries and bales of twine. But judging by the dates on the graffiti I fear that this cave will soon be ruined. The massed hoards were already in the cave when we arrived, all equipped with bails of twine and the odd pocket torch. We preferred rope to twine but none of the



* Ref. Eyre, J. (1981) *The Cave Explorers*. The Stalactite Press, ISBN 0-9690790-2-8

climbs actually needs an aid. We had a good old rummage around, particularly in the last chamber, which seems to have escaped the worst ravages, presumably protected to some extent by a low squeeze. It was immediately apparent that Ermis has a strong draught and it wasn't long before Julie had spotted a way on at the end. I bashed a way through and was soon wriggling into new passage. This was not what you'd expect at the end of Goatchurch. Everything was well decorated but of particular interest was a forest of stalactites hanging far off the vertical, presumably due to earthquake disturbance. After 10-13m or so a boulder choke was passed to reach the head of a reasonably sized pitch.

I steamed back to the minibus to go and pick up the kit whilst the others struggled with the squeeze. Julie, pregnant and showing, reluctantly decided not to follow unless we found something absolutely massive. Peat and I did an extremely rough survey and then rigged the new pitch. A bit of gardening was needed and rather a lot of nerve: one of the Greek ladders had previously snapped and been repaired a few centimetres off set. Hmmm. The pitch was 14m and followed by a choke and another 8m pitch, free climbable. Unfortunately the draught was emitting from a small crack which will need a hefty lump of persuasion to pass.

Armitsa

This was undoubtedly the highlight of our caving in Greece. Last year, whilst excavating a new mountain road a digger had uncovered a new entrance. This literally lies at the edge of the road and the first cavers in had used their vehicle as the belay. Only six people had been into Armitsa before our visit so we were treated to some spectacular formations in pristine condition. These formations were only marred by a small pile of carbide in the final chamber. Georgia was soon on the telephone to the culprits when we reported our discovery. The entrance is a fine 50m pitch but the way on to most of the cave is via a gallery leading off from a window at -30m. Whilst waiting for the others to descend the entrance I rigged up a traverse around the pot to reach another passage that I had spotted on the other side. This proved to be another well decorated series of chambers and galleries although quite small. A couple of sporting free-climbs and this new discovery allowed a new route to the bottom.

From the -30m window was a fantastic passage complete with stal windows, cascades and even a gour pool with floating calcite. A second pitch follows (20m), which is rigged off a large boss at the top. I rigged up a typically nifty thread through a flowstone cascade for a rebelay to reach the bottom. From here no more gear is required and we just wandered about admiring the formations. A delightful section of crystals and 'eccentrics' leads to the main bore at the bottom of the cave. We needed to pass by with a delicate manoeuvre to reach the bottom but from there it was a straightforward wander upstream and downstream. Water levels were considerably lower than those indicated on the survey and the terminal lake was non-existent. I put up a mad free climb into an aven in the roof at the end but it definitely closes down.

Selinita

We had hoped to visit a variety of different types of cave in the Peloponnis, and Selinita was our recommended choice for a storming walking cave. The cave is located literally right on the beach and right under the road at Agios Nikolaos, along the coast from Kalamata where the olives come from. We moved the van back a bit when we realised it might be in danger of joining us in the cave. Although now dry the cave must have once been an enormous resurgence as the whole thing is one big stomping passage. There are a few wriggles in the floor and a fun aven round trip on handlines but nothing extensive. The cave is essentially phreatic with large scallops and sweeping meanders. The earlier sections are heavily graffitied but towards the back of the cave after several hours of walking and scrambling evidence of how beautiful it must have originally been is apparent. There are huge wedges of helictites in the roof and walls. The back end is almost entirely choked and might repay a spot of digging. But there are pockets of bad air throughout the cave so the continuation may well be heavily choked. The Greeks have only surveyed the first few hundred metres so this would make a nice mapping project for anyone so inclined. We bombed out of the cave in just over an hour to fit in a spot of swimming on the beach.

Varvarus

Georgia had planned a hearty mountain lunch for us at her uncle's hut in the hills near her village of Xirokambi. So as well as a pleasant walk in the hills she showed us a nice little cave near to her house. This was very hot and humid with no draught but we still had a good dig at the bottom. For me though it was interesting looking up at the Taigebos range above and seeing how much unexplored limestone there is around here.

Tripa tou Voria

Our final cave, and what a finale. Again this was a hefty drive and the roads down South get increasingly sinuous with nowhere to pass slower moving traffic. After grabbing some lunch in Molai the plan was to meet up with yet another member of the Hellenic club in the village square at Metamorfosi. Whilst we were waiting Peat did his best

to surreptitiously photograph the local priest decked out in traditional garb. Our local contact turned up in a monster quarry lorry and we were instructed to follow the lumbering beast down a few small lanes. The trip just got surrealer. Now we knew that the entrance had a secluded 47m pitch and was only ten minutes walk from the farm so we guessed it would be reasonably high up the hillside, bearing in mind that we weren't that far above sea level. Where we were parked looked pretty much like an ancient coastline to me. But surprisingly we had barely walked ten minutes up a shallow river valley before we were at the entrance. The small round entrance literally lies in the riverbed and draughts a hoolie. Rigging was fun as you were continually blasted with sand at the cave mouth. It was quite a tight pitch head, especially for Ben, but once through the abseil to the chamber below was a classic including a well positioned rebelay just before it bells out.

Now the intriguing thing about this cave was that we had been warned of a particular hazard that Georgia had had difficulty finding in the dictionary. Some sort of explosives apparently. So once off the rope I went for a little wander to see what she meant. Only ten feet away from where the rope touched the floor I came across a carefully placed cluster of World War II hand grenades. I beat a hasty retreat to the relative safety of the other side of a house-sized boulder. Ben was left to do the honours with the camera.

Despite the apparent lack of passage this cave proved quite hard to navigate in. The chamber was so huge that you felt like an ant picking his way through grains of sand to find the way on. Beyond a tricky traverse and boulder section the back of the cave is again well decorated; some of the stals are still active. We dropped down to the head of the final pitch (50m) but we didn't have enough rope to finish off. Apparently the back end had been pushed by a group of Italian cavers, as testified by the excellent survey, but we're pretty certain that there are a few leads to push. It just seems so odd that the cave can drop that deep when the entrance lies at such a low altitude.

Concluding thoughts

If you thought there was no caving to be had in Greece then think again. Obviously most people are put off by the lack of available references either in Greek or English. But just speak to the local cavers who are exceptionally helpful. All of us would like to extend our thanks to them. Oh and we did do other things apart from caving such as visiting the Acropolis, the historic city of Sparta, and attending the inauguration of a new caving club complete with an Orthodox priest in attendance. Ah the joys of holiday caving.

Library Additions

Secret Underground Bristol by Sally Watson, October 2002, *Broadcast Books*.

This replaces a 1991 edition and has been radically updated and extended. The first two chapters cover Bristol's grottos [Goldney and Warmley] and caves [Redcliffe Caves (mines), Pen Park Hole, Avon Gorge – including Pono's Pot and Knicker Knitch named after articles found within! and Giant's Cave, reached via a tunnel from the Observatory and overlooking the Suspension Bridge]. There are interesting descriptions of the hot springs and the Clifton Rocks funicular railway excavated through the limestone from the base to top of the gorge in 1891 and converted to an emergency wartime broadcasting studio by the BBC.

Details of the underground rivers, sewers, drains and coal mines below Bristol all make fascinating reading, especially as I spent three years living in Bristol before I became interested in the subterranean scene and was oblivious to all beneath my feet.

The book extends beyond Bristol's boundaries to cover Combe Down Stone Mines, which are currently being investigated and stabilised because of the danger of homes collapsing into them, and the old Bath stone mines which were commandeered in World War II for a variety of uses. Royal Enfield built anti-aircraft and radar equipment in Westwood Quarry and continued their motorbike operations there until 1970.

Although not strictly about caving, this book is an eye opener with regard to underground Bristol. I found the presentation a little unusual as initially it appeared to be aimed at children. However the content is detailed and photographs abound. The book costs £14.95 which seems quite a lot for a paperback - but there are 128 pages and I found it interesting enough to buy my own now that I have read the MCG copy! JG

Cave Gating by *The National Speleological Society, Second Edition 1981*

The saga of Bone Hole prompted me to pick up this book in Bat Products recently, but on leafing through it I thought it contained some useful information and diagrams. There is no single ideal cave gate but this book illustrates designs which can be used or modified for individual circumstances. Consideration is also given to bat flights and air and water flows into and out of cave entrances – important points which are sometimes overlooked. JG

WANTED! PHOTOGRAPHS OF CLUB ACTIVITIES

It can't have escaped your notice that the Group celebrates its 50th birthday in 2004. Various projects are afoot, one of which is a display of photographs – old and new – of our exploits since 1954. We have achieved much over the years, and continue to do so. It would be good if we could rustle up at least one photo of each member of the club.

Please have a look and see if you have any photographs which would be suitable

UNDERGROUND AND OVERGROUND

SERIOUS OR FUNNY DIGS AND DISCOVERIES

COTTAGES AND CAMPSITES

PEOPLE AND PLACES HOME AND ABROAD

I am coordinating the display and material can be sent to me, Joan Goddard, at Wayside, 3 East End, North Leigh, Witney, OX29 6PZ. If you are worried about committing original photos to the post then I am normally at the cottage on members' weekends. Alternatively, scanned images (jpeg files) can be sent to me at pejogoddard@waitrose.com



La cueva hallada sería parte de un gran sistema de ríos subterráneos

Walter Aquindo
corresponsaliasur@losandes.com.ar

La expedición anglo-argentina de espeleología que descubrió la caverna de yeso más extensa del país (Los Andes de ayer) y posiblemente de América Latina, espera poder profundizar los estudios de esta "maravilla", como ellos la definieron. A su regreso a Malargüe uno de los integrantes, Ariel Benedetto, detalló aspectos del descubrimiento que abre distintas posibilidades de investigación y se agrega a recientes hallazgos similares en las inmediaciones. El descubrimiento lo hicieron el martes 11 de febrero, los espeleólogos **Tim Francis**, Rubén Cepeda, **Richard Carey** y el mismo Ariel Benedetto durante la tercera Expedición Anglo-Argentina en el sur mendocino.

Se trata de una caverna a la que sus descubridores la denominaron "Miranda" por el apellido de un criancero de la zona, en la que solamente pudieron recorrerse unos 800 metros de galerías subterráneas, pero en la que se calcularon varios cientos de metros más. La caverna está en gran parte recorrida por un frío río subterráneo, con numerosas estalactitas y una morfología muy parecida a las cavernas de caliza.

El equipo que halló esta nueva cueva no contaba con ropas térmicas ni aislantes, por lo que solamente pudo realizar una topografía aproximada y estimativa de la misma.

Asimismo hizo una exploración de superficie, descubriendo que a más de un kilómetro de distancia cerro arriba se sume un río, que podría ser el mismo que emerge de la caverna descubierta, pero se trata de un dato aún no confirmado.

Según dijo Carlos Benedetto, del Instituto Argentino de Investigaciones Espeleológicas con sede en Malargüe, "se está esperando el ranking de las cavernas de América Latina, pero no tenemos dudas que es la más grande de Argentina".

Agregó que "los trabajos conjuntos con los ingleses se iniciaron en el 2001", cuando comenzaron a investigar cavernas y cuevas en la zona de **Poti Malal**, a 100 kilómetros al suroeste de esta ciudad. "Es que esas cavernas configuran un gigantesco sistema hídrico subterráneo", puntualizó.

Por eso y aprovechando este nuevo encuentro anglo-argentino -que contó con exploradores del **Mendip Caving Group** (MCG) y del INAE-, un grupo decidió explorar las adyacencias de otra conocida caverna de la zona: San Agustín. Y a escasos 700 metros de ésta, descubrieron una pequeña cavidad de la que salía un curso de agua y que resultó ser difícilmente transitable por la baja temperatura del agua, la poca altura del techo de entrada y lo escabroso del piso.

No obstante, y asumiendo todos los riesgos, los espeleólogos decidieron incursionar en su interior. Allí y para su sorpresa apareció esta nueva caverna, que tiene no menos de 750 metros de desarrollo y por sus dimensiones es la más extensa del país. Además determinaron que la denominada boca de "entrada" en realidad era la salida de un arroyo subterráneo, que todavía no se sabe a ciencia cierta de dónde viene. Esa exploración, es decir buscar el origen del río, será motivo de nuevos trabajos dentro de un año.

Pero también los investigadores aprovecharon para realizar otros trabajos. Así se montó un campamento frente a la Caverna San Agustín y en su interior se realizaron tareas de muestreo biológico y exploraciones en los costados de los lagos descubiertos en la expedición argentino-croata de octubre último y de los cuales ya hoy se cuenta con los mapas confeccionados hace dos meses por los buzos de MendozaSub. Asimismo se realizaron exploraciones en las cavernas "Federación" y "Doña Palmira", todas en la margen derecha del río Poti Malal.

El campamento fue el centro de operaciones del equipo binacional durante tres días.

Claro que no es el único descubrimiento de los últimos tiempos. Vale recordar que en octubre del año pasado, con la llegada de un contingente de croatas, se hallaron tres nuevas cavernas en el mismo cerro donde se encuentran las de "San Agustín" y "Federación" y también dos lagos a los que bautizaron Croacia y Argentina con una profundidad de 12 y 18 metros, respectivamente. En el recorrido por el lago Argentina los buzos hallaron varios túneles.

Julie pushes it to the very end

At last the news we had been waiting for...



Julie Hesketh and Ross Laird are now the proud parents of a baby girl. Ross said: "She's absolutely perfect and in good health. We don't have a name yet, but we're working on that bit now."

Julie gave birth at 6.19pm on Easter Monday with 'baby' weighing in at just under 7lbs. Both Julie and 'baby' are doing well and were due home from hospital to start a new family life on Tuesday 22nd April.

AGM Yv'sdroppings

JH: "What's our membership like? Is it going up, going down, or is it static?"

WH: "It's static. Look around you!"

ML: "Cottage bookings sheets have improved since my day."

RC: "Why? Are they using different paper now!"

Unpaid subscriptions 2003

It was stated at the AGM that 28 members had not paid their subs yet for this year. If you are one of them, please pay your subs now.

It's not the job of the Treasurer to chase members for their fees. Richard has enough work to do just keeping the books. Subs were due by the end of January so no more excuses—cough up!

AGM Doings, from the meeting held on Saturday 5th April 2003

There were 28 members present including all 8 Committee Members, 3 Trustees, and two who travelled from afar, (Tony Knibbs, France and Pat Newman, USA). The meeting this year was held at the cottage which many members present said they preferred. A précis of the proceedings follows (a full report will follow in the AGM minutes):-

Secretary's report: There were fewer committee meetings last year as it was not always possible for committee members to get to Mendip. It was suggested that the committee thinks about somewhere more central to meet, but the cottage remains the best venue; wherever the committee meets it will always be a long journey for someone.

Treasurer's report: Richard will be going to work in Argentina in July so will be standing down. There was a vote of thanks from Mike Lovell, a previous treasurer. Malcolm Cotter said that our investments are in the top group of well performing shares. They were bought well below the top so in recovery we should do well.

Meet Secretary's report: We are getting new members but we are not retaining them. Linda Milne suggested trips for new members so they could meet each other. It was suggested that we advertise one trip per month, meeting at the cottage, and a 'new members' weekend with something social as well. Many new members don't get beyond probationary membership. We have many active cavers, mostly diggers, but they don't come to AGMs, they just want to do their own thing. Perhaps more away trips like OFD might attract new members to come together on organised trips. If members are planning a caving trip in a few months time, why not advertise it in the newsletter? We need to encourage local members to come on members' weekends – if only for the social side.

Cottage Warden's report: Ben Cooper said new storage heaters will be installed, the priority being the kitchen, library, changing room and bedrooms to protect the cottage from frost. Later, we may put in central heating but we will upgrade the storage heaters first. Modern heaters are more efficient therefore we can afford more, smaller ones. Ben is to talk to SWEB about our electric supply and SWEB's duty to us if that supply is disrupted.

Tackle Master's report: No questions or comment from the floor. Dave Tooke commented that we had loads to say about the heating in the cottage, but nothing to say about caving tackle!

Editor's report: Currently, if members want the newsletter e-mailed they have to apply for it. Julie Hesketh said that the Grampian Caving Club e-mail their newsletter and members apply if they want it posted. There was a discussion about the cost of printing, enveloping and stamping, the newsletter being one of the most expensive outlays to the Group. Richard said the Group could afford it. Mike Lovell reminded him that he gets the printing done for 2p per sheet (£15 per monthly issue), whereas commercially it would cost 10p or more per sheet. The newsletter is an essential running cost. Members should have their newsletters delivered as they wish. Some said getting their newsletter through their letter box makes it more tangible and reminds them that they are in the Group; others said

we should encourage more to receive it by e-mail.

Social Secretary's report: Mike Lovell expressed concern that we are more a social club than a caving club. Dinner numbers (35) were low this year with the cost putting people off. Some said that they didn't think there would more than 40 at the 50th Anniversary dinner; others thought 120 people is likely even if it is expensive. Linda asked what price people wanted as Combe Lodge will provide what we were prepared to pay for. Tony Knibbs said that people will not baulk at the cost so long as we get value for money, as they welcome the chance to get together. The 50th needs the Wow! factor. Functions at other clubs are not cheaper than ours. Pat Walsh asked if the dinner was too formal and intimidating. The floor agreed that a maximum of £25 per head was acceptable, £20 was comfortable. There should be real ale, music, transport, guest speakers etc. We need a list of all past members and they need contacting.

Custodian's and Gift Aid reports: Mike Lovell asked if the Trustees ever met. Wayne Hiscox said "There are three here!" Malcolm said that they do communicate.

Election of officers: the post were filled as follows:-

Secretary	Lee Hawkswell	Co-opted
Treasurer	Richard Carey	Unopposed
Cottage Warden	Wayne Hiscox	Co-opted
Tacklemaster	Dave Tooke	Co-opted
Caving Secretary	Tim Francis	Unopposed
Editor	Yvonne Rowe	Unopposed
Social Secretary	Linda Milne	Unopposed
Recorder / Librarian	Jane Baldwin	Unopposed

As Richard Carey is going abroad from July, he stood down and **Jacky Ankerman** was co-opted as **Treasurer**

Other posts: these were filled as follows:-

Rescue Warden	Keith Knight
Consrv/access	Peat Bennett
Gift Aid admin	Malcolm Cotter
Examiners	Mike Lovell Ben Cooper

Motion: Associate Membership. The motion to clarify the benefits of Associate Membership was supported by 16 for, 8 against. As there was less than a 4/5ths majority in favour, it was not passed.

Motion: Committee Structure. The motion was deferred to allow a discussion document to be published in the Newsletter.

BCRA Insurance: Premiums per member have increased from £3 to £5 this year, and may rise again by as much as £20 in the next 18 months. It is proposed that the 2004 subs shall be £25 plus the cost per head of BCRA insurance (currently £5 but possibly up to £25). For: 21, against: 1, abstentions: 3; (motion carried). The meeting agreed to call an Emergency General Meeting in the autumn to reconsider BCRA insurance.

Next AGM: 27/03/04 at 10.30 a.m. in the Hunters Lodge.

Public Liability Insurance

By Martin Rowe

At the recent AGM, there was considerable discussion about BCRA public liability insurance, not to mention considerable confusion about what and who the policy covers. This followed the news that the premium for BCRA public liability insurance cover may be as much as £25 per MCG member within 18 months. There is a suggestion that public liability insurance could be made optional, with MCG only insuring those who want to pay the increased premium whilst those who do not want to pay can remain members without being covered for public liability. As a result, I have done a little bit of research which may shine some light on the subject.

As MCG is an unincorporated association it does not exist in law (this is why the Group's assets are held by Custodian Trustees). This means that MCG cannot be sued. If someone wants to sue the Group they would have to sue the Trustees - either the Custodian Trustees or the Committee or some other Trustee (eg. a cheque signatory who is not a Committee member). Obviously, the Group should take steps to protect all Trustees from being sued personally - if it did not, no-one would be prepared to be a Trustee. The way this is done at the moment is by insuring all paid-up members (irrespective of membership category) for public liability through the BCRA scheme.

Are guests insured?

Caving with the Mendip Caving Group? Are you a paid-up member? Then you have public liability insurance.

If you are caving with the MCG but you are not a MCG member please note that you are not covered by our public liability insurance.

All MCG members should make this situation clear when caving with non-MCG members. Better still, get them to join and they will automatically receive BCRA public liability insurance.

BCRA has been successfully running its Public Liability Insurance scheme for a number of years. As a result of many discussions with landowners and their legal advisors it has gradually been amended or extended and as a result it is now widely considered to be a good policy covering most of the usual activities of cavers and mine exploration societies. All personal members of the BCRA receive this public liability insurance. Identical cover is purchased each year by MCG for all MCG members.

The policy indemnifies you (if you are a paid-up MCG member), the MCG, its officers and members, against costs arising from injury or damage to other persons and/or their property caused through your negligence whilst undertaking sport caving, exploration, scientific research and related activities. The cover is wide-ranging and includes libel and slander actions and professional indemnity. Cave diving is covered, but if you cave professionally, or receive any payment, or have a direct connection with a business operated for profit then you are **not covered**. The cover is world-wide, but excludes North America (so, sorry Pat Newman

and anyone else who visits the USA).

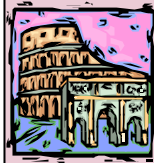
It is important to note that **so long as all MCG members are included in the Group's BCRA insurance** the policy indemnifies Committee members and other Trustees for the actions of MCG members. If we change to a system which allows members to opt out of the Group's BCRA insurance, then the Trustees may no longer be indemnified for the actions of all MCG members. In the case of an uninsured MCG member doing something which gives rise to a public liability claim, someone may seek compensation from the Group. However, as already stated, the Group cannot be sued as it does not exist in law. Instead, the Trustees may be sued and may find themselves considerably out of pocket.

Before changing to a system of optional public liability insurance I would suggest that the committee give careful thought to how Trustees can be protected from claims arising from the actions of MCG members who do not have public liability insurance.

Diary date...

Don't forget Yvonne's Archaeology walk on Saturday May 3rd.

Meet at the cottage at 9.00am. As this is a linear walk from Nordrach to Cheddar, return transport has been arranged. Although we end at a pub for refreshments, you will need to bring a packed lunch for the walk. Stout boots and waterproofs are also advised.



The walk will take in all the Chert house archaeological sites, plus many of the caves along Cheddar Gorge (amongst other things). For a full itinerary see Newsletter No. 311, pages 6 and 7.

MCG meets programme

The idea of a meets programme died many years ago as cavers all have their own cars now, and quite often their own rope. That's fine once you are an established caver with lots of caving mates to team up with. However, new members need the opportunity to build up caving friendships and this is difficult without a meets programme.

From this issue we are including a new feature on page 10 - 'This Month's Members Mendip Meet'.

Each month we will advertise a trip on Mendip. There is no formal leader. Instead, just turn up at the stated time and meet other people who want to do the same trip. Hopefully you won't be alone!



Group Headquarters

Nordrach Cottage
Charterhouse-on-
Mendip, Blagdon,
Bristol BS407XW
01761 462797
Grid Ref ST51475606

This Month's Mem- ber's Mendip Meet

Bat Passage - GB

Meet MCG Cottage
Sunday 4th May 2003
at 10.00am

Non-committee Posts

Rescue Warden Keith Knight

Conservation Officer Peat Bennett 01223 2406333

Examiners Ben Cooper 01344 776306 Mike Lovell 0118 966 3747

Gift Aid Administrator Malcolm Cotter 01784 252643

Booking the Cottage

Please make bookings
for Groups (whether MCG
or Guests) through the
Cottage Warden to avoid
double bookings

GROUP INFORMATION

Weekly Meeting	At The Hunters Lodge, Somerset, Tuesday at about 10pm		
Monthly Meeting	At the Group HQ on the first Fri/Sat/Sunday of the month		
Accommodation	Available at the Group HQ (for members and guests)		
Cottage Fees	MCG members, members children, SWCC, NPC	£	1.50
(per night)	Guest clubs and member's guests	£	2.50
Season Ticket	Available to members only	£	30.00
Subscription 2004	Full and Probationary (excluding BCRA insurance)	£	25.00
	Associate Members (excluding BCRA insurance)	£	10.00
Reciprocal rights	MCG members have reciprocal rights with SWCC and NPC		
	NPC bookings	Nic Blundell tel 01203 713849 (hm) or 01203 838940 (wk)	
	SWCC bookings	Ian Middleton tel 01703 736997 email ian_m@tcp.co.uk	

2003/04 CAVING AND SOCIAL CALENDAR

DATE	AREA	EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
Members W/Es	Mendip	Digging in Carcass Cave	Bill Chadwick	0118 9691812
3rd May 2003	Mendip	Archaeology walk	Yvonne Rowe	01524 762664
7th June 2003	Mendip	Cottage Work weekend	Wayne Hiscox	01749 671282
Autumn 2003	Mendip	EGM - BCRA Insurance	Lee Hawkswell	01985 212690
27th March 2004	Mendip	50th Anniversary Dinner	Lee Hawkswell	01985 212690

THE 2003- 2004 MCG COMMITTEE

Secretary	01985 212690	secretary@m-c-g.org.uk
Lee Hawkswell	48 Deverill Road, Warminster, Wiltshire BA12 9QR	
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Jacky Ankerman	48 Deverill Road, Warminster, Wiltshire BA12 9QR	
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Caving Secretary	0208 392 2572	t.francis@research-int.com
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Jane Baldwin	Brooklands Cottage, Twyn , Glascoed, Usk, Gwent, NP4 0UB	
Social Secretary	01344 774589	Linda.Milne@btinternet.com
Linda Milne	40 Harts Leap Close, Sandhurst, Berkshire, GU47 8PB	

COTTAGE BOOKINGS

Who	Date Arrive	Date Leave	Nights	Beds
Pete Mullins	Fri 12/09/03	Sun 14/09/03	2	24