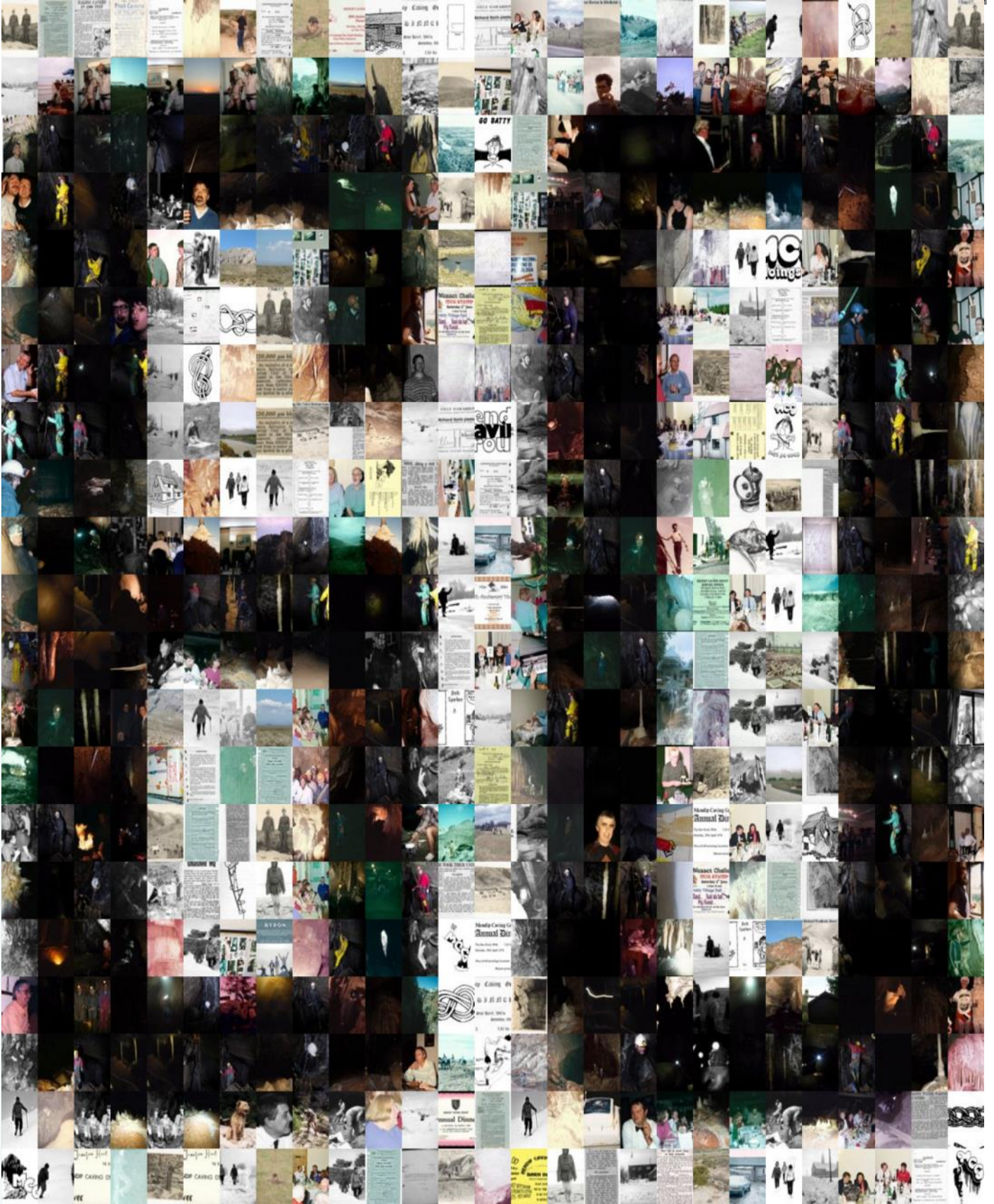




MCG NEWS



THE MCG AT 60

INTRODUCTION

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Welcome to this bumper edition of MCG News to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the formation of the Group along with various people's memories of the different cottages.

Having only been a member for 1/20th of the groups existence I can only rely on others to tell the stories of the MCG's formation and past; I would like to thank everyone for their assistance in producing this publication.

Looking back at the newsletters of yesterday and the occasional publications, such as MCG, A Retrospective and the Story of Upper Flood amongst others, I decided to try to avoid too much copying of already told stories.

Tony Knibbs gives us a fresh view of the formative years of the Mendip Caving Group in his piece; From Manor Farm to Velvet Bottom.

Joan Goddard has spent a lot of her time researching the histories of the various homes of the group and recording these

Ed Waters has managed to gather kit and equipment for every decade of the MCG's existence and with the assistance of some models and Charlie Allison's photography produced a very interesting look back at how the gear has changed over the years.

Finally with the help of some current members and with the excellent archive of past and present member's reports, writings and information, I have put together a brief look back of some of the events of the last 10 years.

I hope you enjoy this commemorative publication for the 60th Anniversary of the formation of the group.

Thanks to all who make, have made and will continue to make the MCG what it is!

Tom Harrison April 2014
Get2_tom@hotmail.com

MANOR FARM TO VELVET BOTTOM (1953–1959)

BY TONY KNIBBS



Denise and Tony Knibbs at the 50th

In 1950, while on a family holiday in Torquay (the first since the war) I visited Kent's Cavern and was totally beguiled by the cave. Although I did not know it, several other people destined to become MCG members had a similar experience.

A few years later, while trawling through the shelves of the children's section of my local public library, I spotted a book title, "My Caves" by Norbert Casteret. This was my launch- pad into caving. A word with the librarian revealed that there were numerous other books on caving. She explained that the library's Dewey reference code 551.44 identified the topic of caving, and offered me a list of titles to choose from. I chose "Exploring Caves" by Cullingford. This book spoke of caves in Great Britain, which brought the topic to my doorstep, as it were.

In addition to providing a general overview of limestone caves in Britain, "Exploring Caves" mentioned numerous mines in the Surrey /Kent area. In the early 1950s I was a keen cyclist, so sites such as the hearthstone mines

near Godstone in Surrey were easily accessible from my home in Walton-on-Thames. The first site that I visited was a chalk mine at Westhumble near Dorking. This was mentioned to me by two brothers, who lived nearby, and who were both scouts. It is worth mentioning that the Scout movement was responsible for much propagation of cave exploration with a school friend. With a school friend I cycled to Westhumble and explored the chalk mine, which I surveyed using a very crude home-made instrument. The mine was only a few hundred feet long, and my interest soon took me to Godstone, where there were several mines in hearthstone, of greater length and complexity; here I was lucky enough to start meeting other cavers who were either members of recognised clubs or who had knowledge of caves in limestone areas. I was a member of a youth club, which was involved in a weekend camp on Mendip. Apart from introducing me to East-water Cavern and Swildon's Hole and numerous cavers, I discovered the joys of accommodation at Manor Farm on Priddy Green. The farmer, Albert Maine, used to allow cavers to stay free of charge in a loft above the cowshed. The only fee he ever levied was the one shilling (twelve old pence) goodwill fee to visit Swildon's Hole on his land.

From my home to Priddy was about 105 miles, which was a bit too far to easily cycle. Luckily there were numerous cavers who used Maine's barn, who came from the area of West London/ NW Surrey and we soon set about organising joint transport. Once we got to know each other the problems of transportation were soon solved. Our enthusiasm knew no bounds and very soon we were meeting socially and forming lasting friendships.

Very few of us had any form of transport, so sharing vehicles and petrol costs was the norm. Some people joined Mendip clubs, but a larger number became itinerant users of Maine's Barn; from these, there sprung a group, of whom Malcolm Cotter was a prominent figure. He put forward the idea of forming a new caving club: Mendip Caving Group. The name was formally adopted at the first AGM, held at our campsite in Velvet Bottom in 1957. When I first met Malcolm, he was serving his two-year period of national service at RAF Little Rissington (Gloucestershire). He had already started caving in Yorkshire and had acquired some knowledge of geology. Together with Dennis Hemmings, who was also serving in the RAF, he became part of the Maine's Barn group. For reasons, which I no longer recall; a member of BEC was attracted to our embryo group, this was Tony Crawford, who brought considerable caving experience and engineering expertise. But, sadly, Tony passed away in 2012, he was a first-class engineer and was responsible for the design and construction of our first wire ladders and tethers.

We all spent many hours walking around Velvet Bottom and Burrington. Velvet Bottom was particularly interesting from a mining and potential caving point of view. One section of the valley immediately adjacent to the rain gauge just before the junction of Velvet Bottom and Longwood valley was particularly appealing from the camping point of view.

By early 1953 we were eager to formalise the Mendip Caving Group and acquire our own separate base for weekend meets, by dint of walking all over Western Mendip, we had obtained a good knowledge of the area and decided that camping in Velvet Bottom would give us a good base for operations as a group. We discovered that the owner of a piece of land, that most attracted us as a desirable campsite was Mr Brice of Round Oak Farm, Cheddar. He was happy to give us permission to camp on our preferred site and suggested that the first person to arrive on a Friday evening should call in at the farm to collect a key (the gate at Black Rock was locked by a padlock and chain). There was also a shakehole nearby, which he gave us permission to dig, this we named Timber Hole because it required a lid, which we built from timber bought by Tony Crawford and transported on his motorcycle combination by removing the sidecar. Several of us now had motorbikes: these were a motley collection of machines, but provided affordable (if somewhat uncomfortable



Malcolm and Norma Cotter at Timber Hole in 1957

and unreliable transport for the hundred or- so-mile journeys to Mendip). Tony's engineering skills were often called upon to rectify a fault.

The ground at our chosen campsite near the rain gauge was ideal; it easily accepted tent pegs and the grass was soft. There was a cattle trough nearby from which we could get water. Leaving the tent each morning we would disturb the considerable local rabbit population. In an effort to reduce the items carried on the motor-bikes, we began to leave tins of paraffin (for the Primus stoves) hidden in the drystone walls. I think some of them may still be there!

Having obtained the necessary permission, we started digging in Timber Hole in earnest, but at a depth of about 20ft it was obvious that we were excavating a cross-joint of diminishing dimensions and without the encouragement of a draught or water flow we finally decided give up. The nearest sizeable cave was the Longwood/ August System, only a few minutes walk from our tents; we quickly became very familiar with this superb cave and later made a high grade survey, which was directed by Mike Rennie, following his impressive CRG grade 6 survey of Goatchurch.

We made an error in our initial selection of committee members: Les James was voted Treasurer, and he successfully made off with the funds! We spent many hours exploring the upper reaches of Velvet Bottom where the modest stream from the lake adjacent to Nether Wood flowed along a man-made channel (leat) before sinking in a small swallet (Blackmoor Swallet). Originally there was a wind-pump at the northern end of the lake. Traces of mining activity fascinated us, especially the rakes near Bleak House. There was also the partially rock-filled Blackmoor shaft (now known as Stainsby's shaft) in the left side of the valley. While grubbing about in the shaft in-fill Don Searle discovered an interesting little grotto against the solid wall; it had a few small formations and was christened Don's Chamber. It gave a suggestion that there was a connection with a cave at a lower level. There were so many things to do in those first years in Velvet Bottom that we waited almost ten years before starting to empty Blackmoor shaft of its infill. To facilitate this task, we constructed a swivelling steel jib, which was installed at the head of the shaft and obtained a small petrol hoist to raise the individual rocks. The work took about two years to reach to reach roughly the present depth. While working in the area of Blackmoor, we noticed a derelict cottage on the edge of Nether Wood. We eventually found out who owned the building and ultimately obtained permission to renovate it for our own use. This coincided with the start of my national service call-up, which took me away to Ayrshire and out reach of Mendip for two years. The Group occupied the empty shell of Nether Wood Cottage in 1958.



Netherwood Cottage in the 1960's

The need to carry camping equipment in addition to our caving gear was partially overcome when we persuaded Mr Ball of the Lion Rock Hotel Cheddar to rent us a small shed. Shopping in Cheddar was more interesting than at Priddy Stores, run by the Glover family. We would often walk down the gorge into the Cheddar, enjoying the magnificent scenery. We soon came to know the small caves in the gorge. Because access was officially denied, we used to make after-dark visits to Gough's Old Cave and Great Oone's Cave, near the show cave at the bottom of the gorge. I was obliged to serve my two years of national service from November 1954 to 1956, so I was not around when the Group obtained the use of Netherwood Cottage. Being stationed in Ayrshire made visits to Mendip impossible during army service.

The winter of 1963 was very hard indeed, the deep snowdrifts making travel difficult and freezing the lake enough to allow us to go skating. It was in this winter that I and Geoff Davies discovered Charnel Shaft, from which warm air was draughting through blowholes in the snow just beyond the southeastern limit of the rakes. In the prevailing conditions of deep snow, we decided to refill the entrance to avoid walkers or animals falling in. Attempts to later relocate the site have been unsuccessful.



Tony Knibbs, Polnagollum '92

Peter Munt's bubble car was trapped at Netherwood Cottage from late December 1963 until the end of March. In July 1968 there was a fantastic rainstorm, which produced enough surface water to wash away the causeway carrying the road across Velvet Bottom. This event also opened the entrances to Waterwheel, Grebe and Upper Flood swallets.

Tony Knibbs

THE COTTAGE IN THE WOODS

by Joan Goddard

INTRODUCTION

My first recollection of the cottage was in Summer 1962. We had just finished exams and wanted to do something exciting. One of our group was a caver and he offered to take us down Swildon's Hole.



Cottage in 1962 [photo: Tony Crawford]

The Cottage in 1962 by Tony Crawford

We drove out from Bristol on an assortment of motorbikes, turned off the tarmac at Charterhouse crossroads and followed a bumpy track to a little cottage in the woods with a sign by the gate - "Mendip Caving Group"

This was the beginning of my association with Netherwood Cottage and the MCG.

Many years later, after we had moved to Mendip, I was introduced to someone who had spent his school holidays at the cottage (then called Gardener's Cottage). During the 1930s he stayed with his cousins whose father was the head gardener at Nordrach House. This

chance meeting set me thinking about the history of the cottage and the need to write down a few facts and memories.

LOCATION

Grid Reference: ST 5062 5598 (ST55NW). Approx 243mAOD

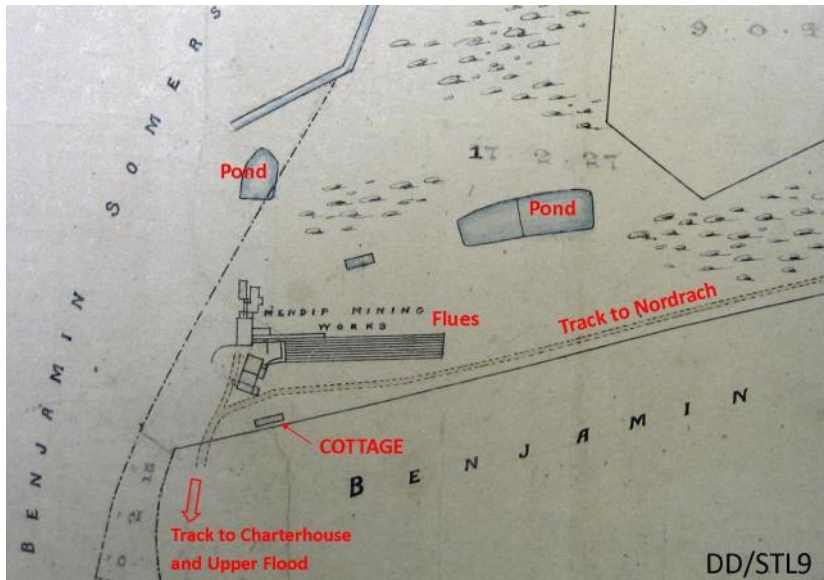


© 2013 Google. Image © 20144 Getmapping plc

Location of the old cottage in relation to Upper Flood entrance and Nordrach Cottage.

HISTORY

THE MINING COTTAGE



First documentary evidence of the cottage is on an undated plan at the Somerset Record Office (Document DD/STL9), which has been estimated as being drawn between 1865 and 1874. (Vince Russett, pers com)

[Thought to be produced by the Mendip Hills Mining Co Ltd]

Somerset Historic Environment Record (HER) No 15957 records that the building was possibly constructed during the **c1847-1850** period of lead working by the Mendip Hills Mining Company Ltd.

At this time the slags and slimes in Ubley and Blackmoor grounds had become very important and the Charterhouse I

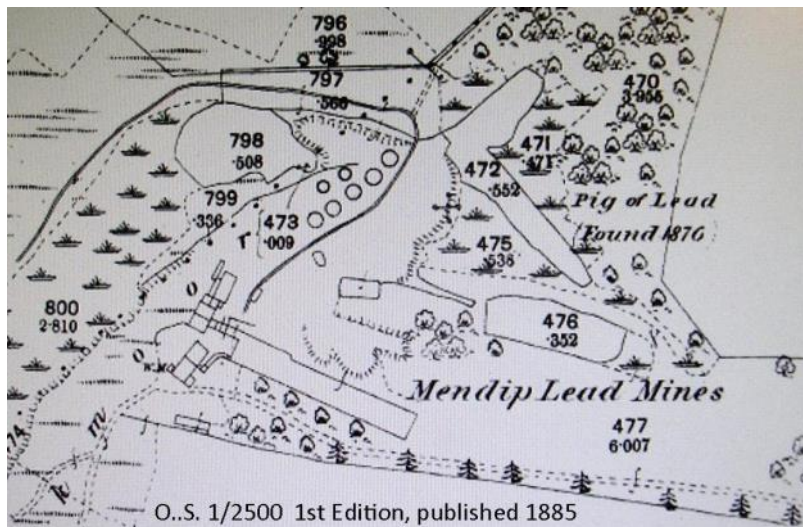
smelter in Velvet Bottom was experiencing difficulties with the supply and disposal of its processing water. In October 1849 Capt Harpur (Mine Captain from 1846) called for offices, stables, a store and reverberatory furnace to be built near the Ubley floors near Stainsby's Shaft ('floors' are where the slag and silts were processed before being smelted). It is likely they were built where the existing remains of the flues and cottage are situated. Previously it has been suggested that the building was an office but recently uncovered flooring suggests it was, in part at least, a stable

Smelting was in reverberatory castilian furnaces in which fans driven by a steam engine forced hot air over the slag; the vapourised lead passed through the flues where it condensed on the walls and was removed by hand with remaining vapour escaping up a chimney.

Gough (1967, p. 193) states that the Mendip Hills Mining Company Ltd passed into the ownership of Treffrey & Co. probably in 1861. Treffrey was a St Austell firm operating lead smelting works at Par, Cornwall (Stanton & Clarke, 1984, p. 42). Treffrey either constructed the smelter and flues at Blackmoor between **1867-73** or improved earlier ones built by Harpur, and the cottage would have been built at that time. Due to falling lead prices the company ceased operations in **1874**. The works were sold as part of the Willoughby's Farm estate, although lead processing in the valley continued until at least 1884 with the concentrated lead slags being transported to Bristol for smelting, along the track to Nordrach.

The Bristol Mercury (2nd Jun **1874**) contained an advertisement for the auction on July 14th, of Willoughby's Farm (65 acres) of which just over 31¼ acres "are occupied by the Mendip Hills Mining Company (Limited) for the purposes of their works in getting, washing and smelting the slags, slimes and other deposits of lead and on this portion of the Estate have been erected at great expense, the valuable Works, Relining office, Assay offices, Engine Houses . . ." mining equipment . . . mineral rights . . . etc. Also included was "a newly-erected three-story Dwelling house or Manager's Residence"

The property was bought in **July 1874** by Dr William Wood of Harley Street and the Priory, Roehampton. He was also Chairman of the Directors of the MHMC Ltd from 1870-1874 and was appointed liquidator when the company ceased operations in 1874 (R.L.Burgess, 1978). He used the newly erected 'Manager's Residence' as a summer holiday home for patients from The Priory but the flues and mining works seem to have been left to decay. He died in 1892 and the property passed to his wife.



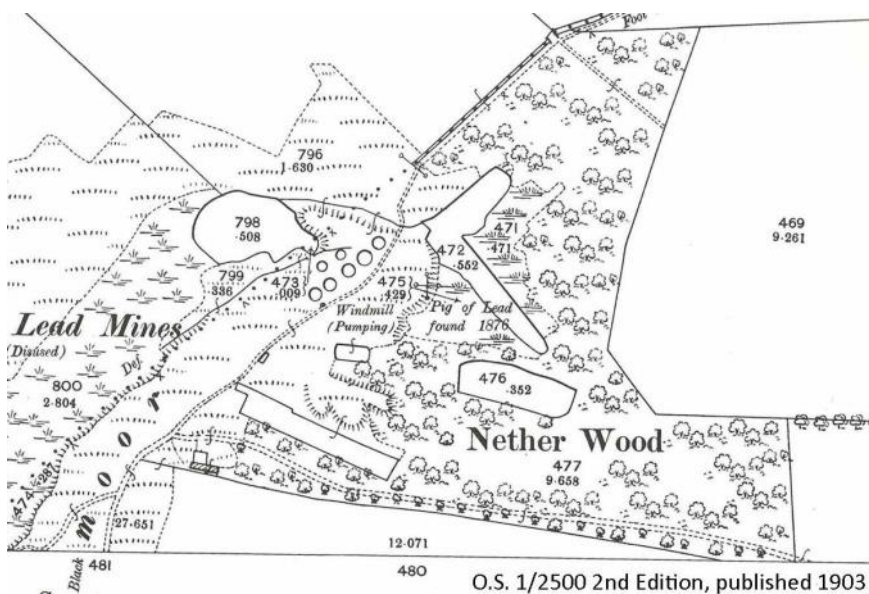
OS 1/2500 plan, First Edition, published 1885.

The mine buildings are very similar to the MHMC plan but with a further reservoir to the north.

In **1899** two English doctors Dr William Thurnam and Dr Neville Gwynn, who had been successfully treated for Tuberculosis at a sanatorium at Nordrach in the Black Forest, decided to open their own TB sanatorium in Somerset

Together with H.J.Trenchard (a Bristol bank manager) they bought the estate and enlarged Willoughby's Farmhouse to form Nordrach Sanatorium which we now know as Nordrach House (opposite our current headquarters, Nordrach Cottage).

There's a whole story behind 'The Sanatorium' but for now we are more concerned with ownership of the land and cottage by the flues. The Sanatorium employed gardeners to grow produce for patients' meals and to maintain the pleasure gardens where they were encouraged to walk.



The flues are shown but most of the buildings at their western end are no longer there.

OS 1/2500 plan, Second Edition, published 1903, surveyed 1883, revised 1902, archaeological information amended 1930.

Note a small enclosure to the north of the cottage. Could it be an animal pen?

THE GARDENER'S COTTAGE

1901 Census – William Charles Parker (Gardener) and his wife Clara Eliza are listed as living at Cosy Corner. This is known locally as an old name for the road junction at Nordrach. Therefore it is unlikely that their cottage was the Gardener's Cottage in Nether Wood, of which there is no mention.

1911 Census - The recently available Census of England and Wales, 1911 records Gardener's Cottage at Nordrach Sanatorium, Blagdon, Bristol, in the Civil Parish of Ubley. The Head of the household was Stafford George Smith, aged 32 whose occupation is given as Gardener (Domestic). His wife was Rosina Smith, aged 31 and they had a daughter and a son; Daughter Evelyn Smith was aged 8 and was at school, son William Stafford Smith was aged 3 months. Stafford and Rosina were both born in Westbury, Wiltshire and were married in 1902. The census form records that there were four rooms in Gardener's Cottage (excluding scullery, closet, lobby etc)

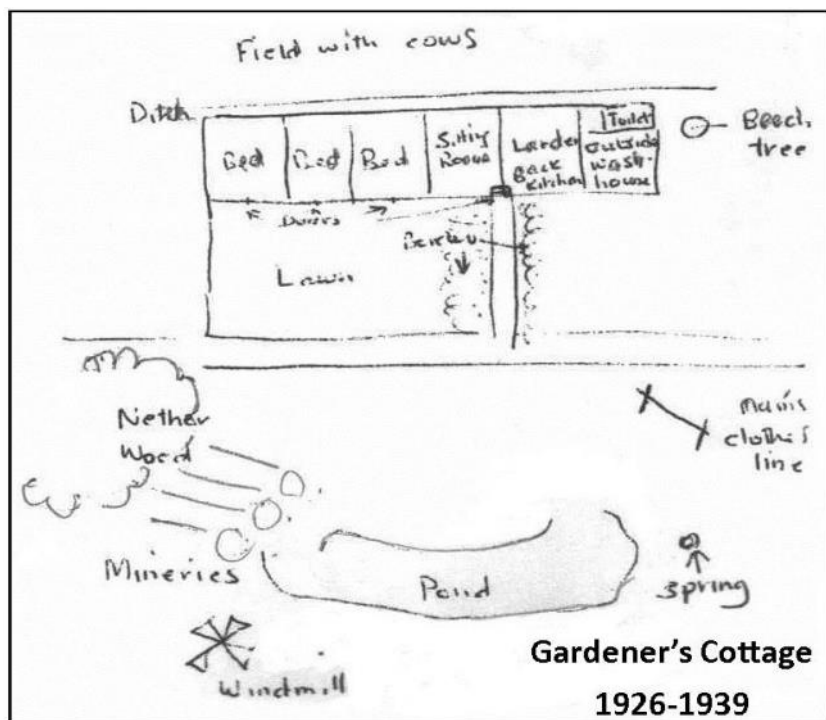
1926 – 1939 -The next period for which information is available is when the Bruce family were in residence. Details for this period are based on information given to me in 2006 by

- Hubert McCannock, (much younger step-brother of Flo and uncle to Peggy, Beryl and Brenda) and Judi Grant (his daughter), who I visited on 11th October 2006 at their home in Keynsham. Hubert used to stay at Gardener's Cottage during his holidays from Bristol Cathedral School and at weekends.
- Notes made by Brenda in October 2006, in consultation with her sisters, and forwarded to me via Hubert and Judi

Between 1926 and 10th March 1939 Herbert William Bruce ("Bert"), his wife Harriet Florence Bruce ("Flo") and their two daughters (Peggy and Beryl) moved to Gardener's Cottage from Frampton Cotterell which is north of Bristol. At the time Bert was c.30 years of age, Flo was c.28 years, Peggy was c.4 years old and Beryl was c.2 years old. Brenda was born in April 1935 (in Bristol) while the family were living at the cottage.

Bert (who had fought in the First World War) was Head Gardener at the Sanatorium and there were two under gardeners, one being Bill Fowler. They grew vegetables ("very good celery" according to Hubert) and flowers for the Sanatorium. Flo did washing for doctors/nurses and possibly patients at the Sanatorium and also did housework for Dr. Thurnam and Dr. Tippet.

Memories of the cottage and surrounding area by Brenda, Beryl, Peggy and Hubert



A plan of the cottage was provided by Brenda (aged 71) after talking to Beryl (82) and Peggy (84). It had 3 bedrooms and a sitting room in the main part of the house, a larder and back kitchen and an outside washhouse with toilet. Each of the bedrooms had a door to the front garden and the main door from the sitting room led down a garden path to the track.

Brenda's notes record that the cottage was down a track from the Sanatorium, and had a galvanised roof, three bedrooms, a sitting room with coal fire and a kitchen with stone floor, Welsh dresser and a kitchen range for cooking (which Hubert thinks was in addition to the open fire in the sitting room). There was an outhouse and an outside bucket toilet - the toilet required sawdust after use. A tin bath was used for bathing. There was a wash basin in the bedroom (presumably water had to be brought to it and waste water probably collected in a bucket under the basin as was common

in those circumstances). Rainwater was collected in two water butts at the front, one by the wash-house and one at the other (east) end of the cottage.

There is no recollection of an inside tap and drinking water was brought in buckets from 'the spring by the pond'. Hubert recalled that there was room for a bucket to be put under the spring to collect the water.

[The position of the 'spring' as shown on Brenda's sketch plan has not been located (March 2010). It may have been where the small stream enters the pond from the north as it would have been possible to channel the stream so that a bucket could be placed under the flow. Peggy mentioned water being fetched from the stream.]

Flo's washing line was beyond the garden, across the other side of the track. Bert had a motorbike and side-car, otherwise they had to walk to Blagdon to catch the bus from the Seymour Arms. There was a little wooden dinghy with oars on the lake but it wasn't used much.

Hubert and a friend frequently used to cycle up to Nordrach from Bristol. When his mother came they either caught the train from Bristol to Yatton and Blagdon or came by bus from Bristol to Blagdon where they would hire a car from Mr Marsh to take them to Nordrach. He recalls sawing wood under the big beech tree next to the cottage with his brother-in-law "Bert", using a big two handled saw [*This tree is still standing*].

Tradesmen took orders and delivered to the cottage every week; they came via the Sanatorium along the track to the cottage.

- Groceries were provided by Mr. Redwood from Blagdon and Mr. Payne from West Harptree (alternate weeks)

Fresh fruit and vegetables by Mr. Reynolds.

[It is interesting to note that in 1958 Bert Reynolds from Cheddar delivered to the cavers when they rented the cottage – was this the same firm? See photo of Pete with Bert Reynolds.]

- The Baker was Mr. Cole. Several sons worked for him and they made "lovely pastry and lardy cakes"!
- The postman, Mr Attwell, came on his bike
- The barber came to trim hair (Mr. Austin Wookey, who lived in East Harptree)

Coal may have been provided by the Sanatorium as part of Bert's remuneration.

Lead Mines: There was a windmill by the pond near the mineries. The windmill was used to pump water up to the Sanatorium but when there was insufficient wind they used a horse gin which was behind the Sanatorium [*Apparently this is still visible behind Nordrach House but was moved slightly when a recent extension was built*]. Nearby were "three big round wells set into the ground, bricked inside and about 18 inches deep".

Shooting: Local farmers (and probably poachers too) used to shoot on the land around the cottage and the pond. They would come for rabbits at night. Bert Bruce used to shoot wild ducks on the pond and his gun-dog, Gyp, retrieved the game.

Once, when the family were in Bristol, Gyp was frightened by a firework and ran off and they had to return home without him. He arrived back at the cottage about two weeks later, very thin, claws worn down and sore pads, after having apparently followed the smell of the lorries taking animal skins to "The Fat House" – the animal skins were carried on open lorries and smelled dreadful. They were used to make tallow [*The Fat House stood where the Mendip Wood -Shavings factory is now*].

In **March 1939**, when the children were 17, 15 and 4 years old, the Bruce family left the cottage to run a pub in Chipping (near Buntingford, Herts.) which was owned by Bert Bruce's father who was retiring. *Apparently Brenda was allowed to go to Charterhouse school when she was only 3 because she cried so much when her older sisters went (information from Jack Foord and Mary Smith). Mary Smith, who lived at Tynings Farm, said they called Gardener's Cottage "the tin house" (because of the corrugated iron roof)*

THE DORMANT COTTAGE **1939 – 1958**

Mary Smith didn't think anyone lived there after the Bruce's left. However, at a local history display in 2011, at which a photograph of the cottage was displayed, a Mr Phil Routley recognised it and said his parents used to live there, but before he was born. They were a family with seven children and the father worked at Springfields (the Fat Factory) and later at Charterhouse Outdoor Centre. I have not been able to confirm that they lived at Gardener's Cottage but apparently they did live in a similar small, tin-roofed cottage along the road from Charterhouse to Tynings Farm. Maybe the two cottages became confused?



Pete Goddard & Bert Reynolds,
1958 [photo: Pete Goddard]

**1958 : Pete Goddard with
Bert Reynolds by Pete
Goddard**

While the Bruce family was living at Gardener's Cottage the estate changed hands. In **1934** Thurnam, Gwynn and Trenchard sold the estate to Leonard Guy who lived at The Caves (a house built above Banwell Bone Cave) and who also owned Weston-super-Mare Grand Pier between 1930 and 1946. The buildings continued to be used by Thurman, Kennedy and Trenchard.

In **March 1941** Leonard Guy sold the property (including the flues, cottage etc) to the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the City of Bristol ('the Corporation') for £6000. During the war patients from Bristol Children's Hospital were evacuated to Nordrach Sanatorium and the flues were used to store some of Bristol City's important documents. It closed in 1946 but with the introduction of the National Health Service in 1948 the Sanatorium was allocated to Ham Green Hospital (located north west of Bristol) who transferred their TB patients to Nordrach while they were recovering and awaiting discharge. It finally closed in 1956 but was used for a short time to temporarily house refugees from the Hungarian Revolution.

On the **11th July 1958** The Ministry of Health sold the whole property to Messrs Wadsworth and Tucker. At that time there were a number of chalets in the grounds which had been used to enable patients to take full advantage of the fresh Nordrach air. Mr Wadsworth demolished and sold them but the remaining buildings and land became Mr Tucker's. It was at this point that Mendip Caving Group became part of the story.

THE CAVERS' COTTAGE - NETHERWOOD COTTAGE **1958 – 1964**

The cottage was unused and very dilapidated but it still had a roof. It was owned by a farmer, Mr. Tucker, who lived in Frome and members of the Mendip Caving Group called to see him to ask if it could be rented. Previously members of the Group had camped in Velvet Bottom near Black Rock Quarry.

Secretary Richard Woollacott wrote in Occasional Publication No 5.

"When asked if we could rent the cottage Mr Tucker replied, in a lovely Somerset accent "Well, I were goin to put a tractor in there, but if you wan 'er, you have 'er". That was the end of the matter. We used to pay a guinea a year rent and send him a bottle of Scotch at Christmas. That was it."

When the cottage was taken over in Summer 1958 it was in a very dilapidated state indeed and the far room had an earth floor (but also a wooden ceiling). We did a lot of work on it; the roof was pretty OK, but there were large pieces of wall missing and no doors or windows. During the August meet a very creditable amount of work was carried out, such as

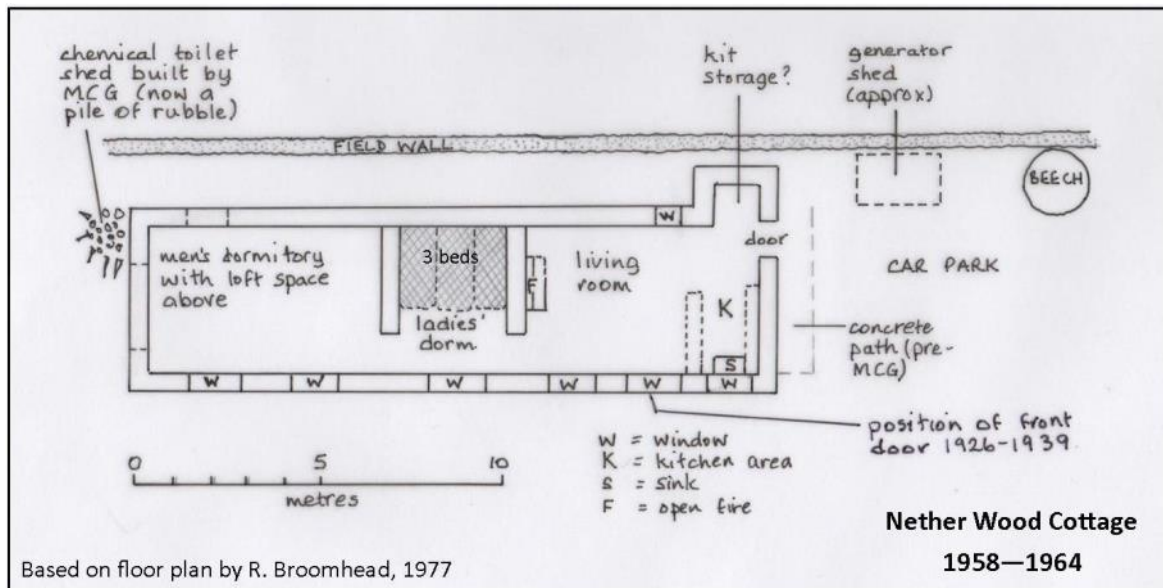


1958 [photo: Malcolm Cotter]



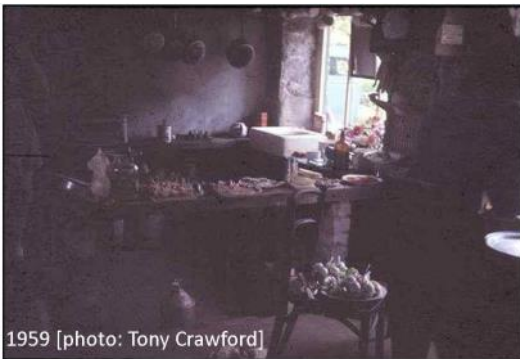
1958 [photo: Malcolm Cotter]

bricking up the large gaps in the wall and installing windows. The chimney was rebuilt and a large chimney pot was generously given by a Cheddar building firm [W.C.Maunders]. The problem of security was overcome when Mr Fry (of Stirrup Cup Garage) kindly gave us a wooden corn elevator which was speedily ripped to bits and knocked into very sturdy shutters....."



Although there was a 0.85m concrete apron along the outside of the west wall of the cottage there was no evidence of concrete where the back kitchen and outside wash-house had been when the Bruce family were living there

There was a living room with galley kitchen at one end. The kitchen was equipped with calor gas rings and a sink but water had to be carried in a jerry can along the track from a tap in the yard at Nordrach Sanatorium which at that time was derelict.



Initially lighting was by Tilley lamps but we eventually built a concrete block building to the west end of the cottage to house an electric generator. "This was potentially somewhat lethal in that it was 250 volts

DC, but gave us light. Even in those days vandalism could be a problem so the building had a notice on it which read "Beware - sewage disposal". This seemed to do the trick as it was never interfered with. Around the cottage we built a dry stone wall, a labour of many hours.

There were two dormitories. The ladies room was only just wide enough for three metal beds so if more than three ladies were in residence, one or two unfortunates were balanced on the angle-iron frames between the beds - very uncomfortable and cold, as I can well remember!

The living room had a wooden floor but no ceiling - it was open to the roof. There was an open fire with a wind-up gramophone to the right of it.

An outbuilding was constructed at the eastern end of the cottage to accommodate an Elsan chemical toilet, complete with a wad of torn-up newspaper hanging on a piece of string.

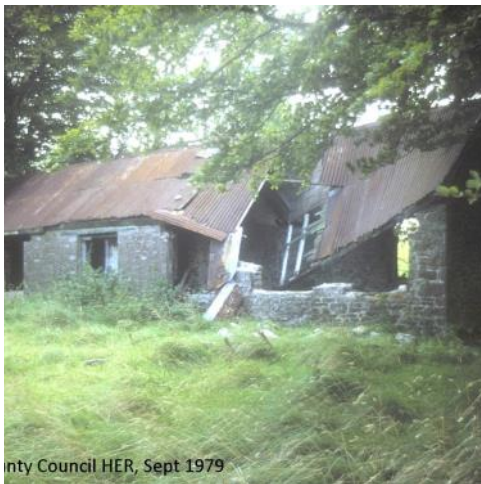


In the summer of **1962** the Sanatorium was bought by Mr W.J. Clarke who in 1963 was granted planning permission to convert the Sanatorium to an hotel, country club and restaurant (but was refused permission for 250 holiday chalets). In **March 1964** he said he wanted three pounds a week rent for the use of the cottage, but that was deemed unreasonable by the Group resulting in our eviction (we moved to an ex-army hut which Mr Jim Fry kindly allowed us to erect on land adjoining Stirrup Cup).

THE ABANDONED COTTAGE **POST 1964**

Shortly after we left the cottage Mr Bob Stickles moved there and lived half in the cottage and half in a caravan parked outside. He was vulnerable there so soon moved to live in the caretaker's rooms at Nordrach, opposite the stables behind the Sanatorium.

Sometime afterwards (but I'm not sure when) Mr Clarke sold Nether Wood (with the cottage and flues) to Somerset County Council, and Nordrach Sanatorium to Mr Taylor who gained planning permission in early **1966** to convert the hospital into a country club and motel with golf course, clay pigeon range, swimming pool tennis etc. Sixty MCG members enjoyed the Group's annual dinner in the restaurant there in **March 1967**.



Nether Wood
Copyright
Somerset County
Council



Nether Wood became a nature reserve and educational facility for Charterhouse Centre which had been set up in the old Charterhouse Ville School as an educational activity centre. The cottage deteriorated and by 1979 half the roof had fallen in.

During June and July **1982** the cottage was used as a base to store equipment and tools while the Mendip Society, Manpower Services Commission and others restored the nearby flues.



The building was largely demolished by Somerset C.C. for health and safety reasons and was ignored until an archaeological survey and report was produced in April **1997** by R.A. Broomhead. This was followed up by the Environment and Property Department of S.C.C. with a letter to Les Davies, Mendip Warden based at Charterhouse Centre. Various options for the site were considered including (1) do nothing, (2) Clear up site and leave as a ruined cottage, (3) excavate and record the cottage and restore it and (4) build a complete replica of the building with a classroom space for school groups and an open end with information panels for all visitors.

Nothing came of it but in February **2004** the subject was revisited, more meetings arranged - but again nothing happened.



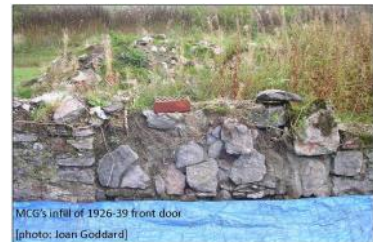
In **2005** I was walking past the cottage when I noticed that the rubble from within the building had been removed to expose the floor in what had been the living and kitchen areas. When MCG used the cottage there were floorboards in the living area and terracotta quarry tiles in the kitchen area.

The boards were no longer there (they had probably been removed for firewood soon after we left) and what were now exposed were small grey square tiles which I associate with stables. The living area had a gutter running west-east with a small square bricked-in area near the centre, which suggests an old drain and possible use as stabling; The grey 'tiles' are actually bricks with two 'tiles' to a brick, each measuring 11cm x 11cm. [4½ in x 4½ in]. Enquiries suggest that they are '2 profile bevelled edged bricks probably kilned at Doultings whose yard was near the "Coach and Horses" on the Frome road (*pers com Ron Penn*).

The red tiles (24cm x 24cm [9½ in x 9½ in]) in the kitchen area were as I remembered them in the early 1960s. A tarpaulin was subsequently used to protect the floor but by the following year it had been blown to one side and the floor exposed.

Also visible were the doorways which led from the original bedrooms to the front garden, including the still partially infilled original front door. MCG's stonework is obvious by its randomness!

As far as I am aware no further archaeological recording was carried out and the tarpaulin which covered the tiles has gone leaving the floor exposed to the elements and vulnerable. Several bricks are now loose or missing.



Evidence that the west end of the building was previously (originally?) a stable is suggested by the type of flooring, a high level opening in the west wall (of the type used to access a hay loft) and a report that "at times a donkey was used" to turn a capstan, which powered the "stirrers" in the "buddles or circular pits" used to wash the ore (diary entries by two Sidcot School pupils of a visit to Charterhouse Mines April 1884)

The Cottage in the Woods has had a long and interesting history, beginning with the Victorian lead industry in Blackmoor Valley and now quietly merging into the landscape, along with the old flues.



A TASTE OF THE PAST

A PHOTO RECREATING EACH DECADE OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP

Article by Ed Waters

As a part of the Group's 60th Anniversary celebrations, a project was dreamed up to create a photograph recreating a caving scene from each of the decades of its existence. It was hoped that as well as providing a little fun, it might also make some of us more modern cavers appreciate the difficulties of caving prior to the luxurious purpose made equipment that we now enjoy.

In order to make this re-enactment go ahead we needed to accumulate sufficient period kit (or in some cases lookalikes) to dress up seven cavers to represent the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. It was also decided that the photo would include a pitch so that appropriate developments in vertical equipment could be illustrated as well. Kit was kindly provided (in no particular order) by Roy Kempston, Joan Goddard, Ian McKechnie, Biff Frith and Mike Richardson. Not all the kit loaned to the project was used on the day, as due to the generosity of the donors we had enough equipment that we could pick and choose the stuff that fitted the models best.



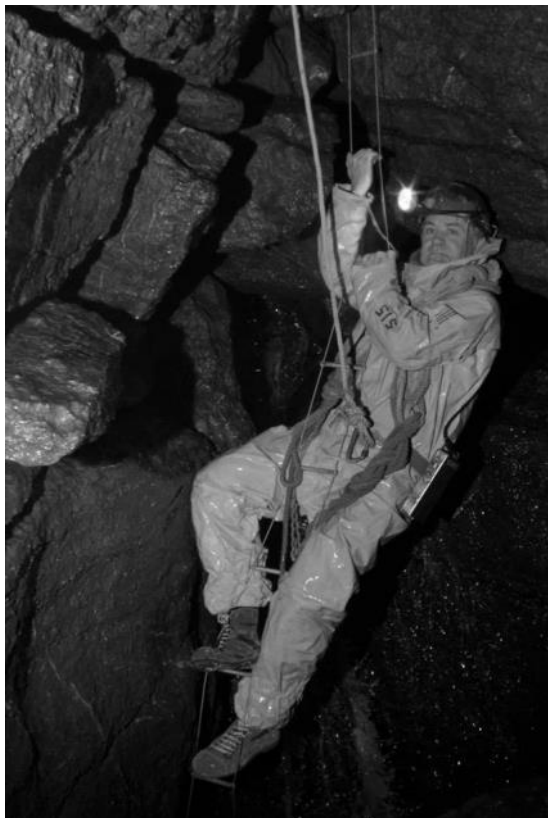
Photos by Charlie Allison



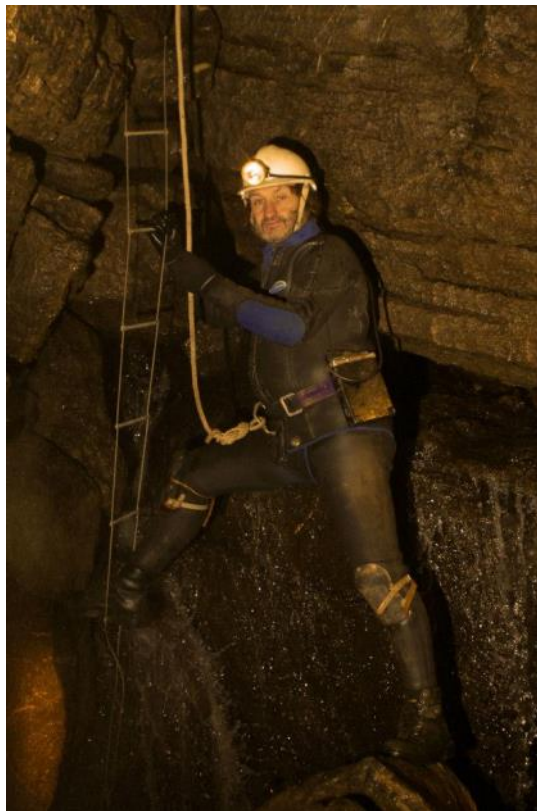
Ed organises the kit at the Cottage

We had originally planned to take the photos on the November members weekend, but in fact organisation was a little harder than expected and this was delayed to the Sunday of the December weekend. Charlie Allison was drafted in as photographer, and after a hectic time sorting out the plans in the cottage we headed underground with a group of seven of us, each dressed in period costume.

Brian Snell starred as the 1950s caver, dressed in a cotton boiler suit and with a carbide caplamp. Biff miraculously found an old hemp and ash ladder and a length of sisal lifeline rope. Under his boiler suit Brian wore the woolly pully he often wears caving to this day!



Bill Chadwick performed as the 1960s caver. Joan found an original Goon Suit, but this was just far too fragile to risk taking underground. Instead Biff provided a fireman's chemical proof suit that can pass as a goon suit on first inspection. Bill was provided with a Texolex helmet and working NiFe cell. He climbed an electron ladder with a hawser laid No.4 Nylon lifeline.



Biff was in his element recreating his lost youth as the 1970s caver. Dressed in a period wetsuit that was ideal, the only possible improvement would have been yellow seam taping rather than blue – but it was more than close enough. He wore a plastic site helmet with an Oldham lamp, using the same ladder and lifeline as Bill.



Tom Harrison took on the role of the 1980s caver, with a green PVC oversuit recreating one of the original Petzl oversuits (or a Malcolm Cotter special if you prefer). He was equipped with a Petzl expedition carbide light fitted to a JB fibreglass caving helmet (still Mr Richardson's regular headgear). For the vertical part we recreated early SRT with a Bluewater rope, Rack and Jumar ascenders.



Hayley Clark wore her 1990s kit, in the form of a TSA yellow PVC oversuit and illuminated by a Speleo Technics FX-3. She wore a standard Petzl SRT rig with Stop descender and Edelrid SRT rope.



I took on the 2000s with a Warmbac oversuit and Speleo Technics headlight and similar SRT gear to Hayley.

Finally Charlie Allison wore the very latest in 2010s caving fashionable equipment to bring the story up to date.





Once the pictures were taken, Charlie handed them over to me and I began the process of editing them to produce some prints to put up in the cottage. An attempt has been made with each of the photos to recreate the feel of the era by the look of the photo. 1950s with a sepia print for example and the 1970s made to look like Kodachrome film.

All in all it was a really fun and interesting day. I for one had completely forgotten how much caving equipment has moved on even in the 25 years I have been in the sport. Hopefully the prints (which I hope will be up in the cottage soon) will be a lasting reminder of where the group has come from, and perhaps be just a little aid in helping into the future as well.

Ed Waters



MCG: THE LAST 10 YEARS

THOUGHTS AND MUSINGS ON THE PAST 10 YEARS IN THE MCG BY BRIAN SNELL

I was asked if I could write an article about my thoughts on the last decade of the MCG. Initially my thoughts went back to the 50th anniversary celebrations. It was great to be involved in such a wonderful event with the dinner being held at a lovely venue. Then I was shocked at how quickly the last 10 years seem to have flown by. It was a thought depressing enough to make one melancholic. But clearly it is unfair to dismiss a decade with a wave of a hand, so I concentrated on thinking more deeply about the things which have happened in that time. True perspective began to rule my thoughts. In 2004 I was in the process of leaving the IT profession I had been in for over 20 years and was about to start a new business in Property Improvements. I was looking forward to doing something completely different but satisfyingly constructive. I was equally concerned about whether I could make a living from it. My thoughts then turned back to caving. I first started caving in 1967. My main love at the time was climbing though. After getting married my time to do both and share equal time with my family became more constrained and something had to go. Eventually I gave up caving in favour of the cliffs and mountains. However, some 8 years later I had started a new job where I met Roy Kempston and Linda Milne (nee Gates). During a conversation with Roy over a coffee break about the activities of the previous weekend, I found my self being literally seduced to the dark side when I was invited to a weekend's caving from Nordrach cottage. For me the cottage was heaven. Previously I had camped on caving weekends and washed under a cold dribbling excuse for a shower on the camp site. To come back to the luxury of hot showers, a warm fire, great company and comfortable beds was something else entirely. It proves to me how important the cottage is and how important it is to take care of and enhance it.

So early in 1987 I joined the MCG. It was about that time that digging efforts in Upper Flood had been rewarded with a break through into Midnight Chamber and the decorated streamway beyond. After returning from the Hunter's one Friday night, the idea of going to look at this new stuff was suggested. Several pints of beer had made the decision easy and a group of us went down at 1.00am in the morning and saw the fabulous decorations in the streamway. We came out at 4.00am to a hard frost and a sky so full of stars it was difficult to see the constellations. Mendip has its magic even at night. Later that morning, after about two hours sleep, Tony Knibbs was reluctant to take me on a scheduled trip to St. Cuthbert's on the grounds that the night's foray would leave me a liability. I was grateful when he was persuaded that I would be fit enough regardless. Cuthbert's is a great cave.

Moving forward 19 years to 2006 a massive effort in Upper Flood was rewarded with the exceptional cave we know today. I remember two years previously at the 50th anniversary dinner talking to Malcolm Cotter about the progress which was being made in there. Golden Chamber had been entered and named in acknowledgement of the anniversary. But hearing the descriptions of the delights of a soaking in the muddy 'Lavatory Trap' and the chokes beyond being penetrated via tight squeezes, I was left feeling at the time that nothing over special would come of it. How wrong I was. Also, how sad that Malcolm didn't get to walk down the streamway that was to be named after him.

Continuing my thoughts of the decade I now found myself remembering so much, that if I put it down in this article, it would no doubt become tiresome. The one thing I would acknowledge though is the people who have joined the MCG in that time. People who have brought more to the club than just active caving. They have provided wonderful personalities and great skill contributions which help maintain the cottage and everything within it. It all helps to keep the MCG, a desirable group to belong to. We should all value the friendships we have made in a place of relaxation and shared passion. My only wish would be to see the cottage full on a Friday night again, with all the anticipation and atmosphere of a good weekend's caving to come. I understand about family commitments. But I feel that we are going the way of the American ethic of work taking priority over play. It's a shame; we only have the one life, so enjoy it and put work second occasionally – if you can.

In the last couple of years I have felt the early signs of age chasing me and I find myself having to listen a bit more to my body's protests. I have no excuses though, when I see how well some of the people I cave with manage and who are much my senior. So I now I just pace myself more carefully. Recently I led a trip down to the 'Landing' in Swildon's Two. Swildon's was the second cave I did back in '67 and will remain one of my favourites, even though something special was lost when the '68 flood created a bypass to the 40ft pot. It is such an 'alive' cave with interest at every turn and with tactile bits too. There is some flowstone on the left just after the con-

striction below 20 foot pot. I call them the kidney stones as they remind me of them. They are a welcome sight, on return from a deep trip into the cave, letting you know that the 20' is just short distance away.

So, what a decade it has been for so many reasons. There are lots of stories I could relate but it would get monotonous. The MCG have made fantastic discoveries and hopefully will continue achieving more. At the other end of the spectrum and nothing to do with caving, the International Space Station has grown from a couple modules to something the size of a football pitch. The guys up there can look down on what a beautiful world we live on and hence how pathetic it is when someone decides to grab land to increase their territory. For what justifiable reason?

I hope that the 60th celebrations go well and I would like to think that I will still be around to enjoy the 70th anniversary. Indeed I hope the centenary celebrations go well, although I will probably only be there in spirit, but I will be there.

Cheers to all,

Brian

RECOLLECTIONS BY KAREN FENDLEY

I joined the Mendip Caving Group almost 10 years ago. Its Linda Milnes fault! We were working together at the time and she thought I might enjoy it. I had no idea what to expect but said yes. It proved to be a good choice in my view.

The weekend I came down was a work weekend and was just after the death of Malcolm Cotter in Upper Flood. What a start! I helped to clean the shower room, apply preservative and then paint the name into the Beech wood sign at the gate and paint window frames. In the evening it was a bit raucous with what I came to understand was standard games stuff (table traversing, squeezing through the blade turned inside out, lots of beer etc.) This was before the time of the Upper Flood squeeze box so I was saved that!

The next day I was allowed to go caving. Linda took me into Goatchurch. I had a boiler suit, spotty willies [*I assume you mean 'Wellies' Karen? - TH*] and a borrowed hat and light. I had no idea what to expect and it blew me away. It was much harder than I anticipated but exciting all the same. We crawled down to the end of the Chimney and then turned our lights off. It was truly amazing, I had never experienced total darkness. I think we may have even eaten a Mars bar in the dark (again, harder than I imagined it would be!). I came out hooked and couldn't wait to come back.

That time in the clubs history was a time full of news. Malcolms death (although I didn't know him) was an obvious tragedy but then it was followed by the amazing revelations so soon after of the breakthrough. The club was suddenly digging everywhere too. I helped out on a few occasions in the Biff squad (digging Stainsby's, even being allowed at the 'Coalface' on one occasion although I was a very slow digger!!).

The following year I was part of the party that took breakthrough 'Birthday' cake to the Red Room and Golden Chamber. We lit the candles, ate the cake, remembered Malcolm and marvelled at the distance found since. Today it is a veritable playground for the intrepid explorers. I have since been in again and looked at the front of Neverland – amazing.

In my time in the club, I have been on a few of the trips to Yorkshire, Derbyshire, South Wales. All of them have been great fun and I have learnt a bit about SRT into the bargain. The people who organise these trips put such a lot of work into them and we probably don't thank them enough. A couple of the trips were memorable –Yourdas (Ed said it was an introduction into SRT, it was a fine example of the most technical aspects of SRT possible!!). The Jangling Tree (?) (Biff said it was absolutely fine to abseil down into a black hole off a tree that had fallen over the top of the hole! It was, of course, but sounded dubious!). I will skirt over my exploits in South Wales which resulted in me accidentally posting a picture of most of my backside on Facebook! We also had the amazing cave wedding of Angela and Jeremy Gilson in Dan Y Ogof to which I had the honour to be a Bridesmaid. A brilliant day and evening.



For me, the biggest success of the MCG is the people. I have never known such a variety of different people, each with their own talents, who are so willing to help other people with their caving and to keep the cottage and club going. The social aspects are also a very important part of the club. A few of the members also do so much behind the scenes, and again probably don't get thanked enough. Some of the members weekends (both at the club and when away) have been such fun. I always look forward to them very much.

The last ten years has seen many changes to the MCG. The cottage now has some double glazed windows, a wood burner, gas heating and excellent showers. The campaign for shower cubicles goes on of course!! The membership has changed too. Some people have left, some joined. The requirements for the club and what it should provide seems to be changing too. We need to keep up with them if we are to stay as strong as we are. The committee are always looking for people to stand and I would urge anyone to do so. It doesn't take too much time and it really helps the club! (Brian don't shout!)

We now have the 60th Anniversary weekend (including the AGM) to look forward to at the end of April. Hopefully there will be many people there and some great photos to share afterwards.

Keep Caving!!

Karen

MCG: THE LAST 10 YEARS

SNIPPETS FROM THE LAST TEN YEARS BY TOM HARRISON

In 'MCG a retrospective', Tony Knibbs wrote an article recording the major events of the first 50 years of the group. Here, with the help of some of the current members and using material from the Newsletter and Logbook archive, I attempt to continue his work, with a look back over the last 10 years.

I haven't been able to include every event. If there is something that I have missed which you feel is important then I can only apologise. I have worked mostly from the excellent job that previous editors have done in recording the group's activities and to them I owe a great deal of thanks. The reports may have been shortened to give an idea of the event.

2004 : The 50th Anniversary Year

2004 was of course, the celebration of 50 years of the Mendip Caving Group. The main celebrations took place in March with a weekend of activities culminating in a formal dinner held at Coombe Lodge, Blagdon.

50th Anniversary Dinner

"And we were worried that no-one would turn up!!! When we began planning for the 50th dinner 2 years ago, nobody had any idea what a success this would be.

We thought we might have up to 100 at the dinner if we were extremely lucky, in the end it was 140. Although many people were involved in the planning, special thanks must go to Linda Milne as Social Secretary for bringing it all together.

The weekend began on Friday with a trip down Swildons, as reported in the Wells Journal. In the evening, the cottage was crowded as Malcolm gave a slide and film show.

The AGM at the Hunters on Saturday was attended by the usual suspects, and numerous caving trips followed, then it was back to the cottage to prepare for the main event - the Dinner."

Yvonne Rowe



Carcass Cave Digging Continued

In 1996 Michael Norton showed **Douglas Harris** a hole near to the entrance of Shute Shelve Cavern. A cow carcass and a sheep carcass had to be removed and deboned to get into the hole, hence their decision on the hole's name. The digging continued during 2004.

Yahoo News Group

YAHOO Group set up by Martin Rowe – A place to discuss the weather, social events, local news and sometimes caving. 21,250 messages sent to date!

MCG return to Argentina

3 MCG'ers Peat Bennett, Tim Francis and Richard Carey travelled to the South American country for MCG's 5th Visit. This time they explored Las Salinillas, finished off Poti Malal, visited Caverna de las Brujas and discovered a whole new gypsum area at Las Leñas. At least 12 new caves were found and 900m of passage surveyed.

"There are numerous tales (from the Argentina trip) there. I particularly liked the incident where we got stopped at a police road block and Peat was accused of being a Chilean illegal immigrant. And despite us knowing some of the policeman. We were near the border, unshaven and covered in gypsum dust from the caves. I had to wait with Peat whilst Richard drove many miles into town and back to find Peat's passport to prove he was British."

Tim Francis

Wretched Rabbit / Pool Sink Exchange - 12th June '04

"Wretched Rabbit team: Rupert Knowles, Martin and Yvonne Rowe. Pool Sink team: Julie Hesketh, Tim Francis, Duncan Horne, plus Natalie Field (guest), Alan Jeffreys (GSG)

Julie had organised this trip so we could get together and brush up on various caving techniques before the MCG Slovenia trip. She booked bunks at the Yorkshire Speleological Society hut at Helwith Bridge for Friday 11th and Saturday 12th June. The hut has all a caver needs for his/her creature comforts, but best of all it has a pub right next door! "

Yvonne Rowe

Phil Ingold Cottage Warden (1971-1973) and Tacklemaster (1977 – 1983) passed away June 2004.

Breakthrough in Upper Flood

"On the weekend of 28/29 August 2004, Tim Francis and Peat Bennett broke through at the dig in the boulder choke and found a new chamber. It is quite small but extremely well decorated: a sloping flowstone floor, straws in the roof and delicate crystals on a ledge on the left. They have definitely passed the boulder choke as the walls are solid, presumably in the fault. The way on could be through boulders in the floor or perhaps straight ahead through the sediment bank. Water levels are very low so they couldn't check whether the streamway can be heard or not. It does draught but progress has been halted until taping and photography can be completed before carrying on. The route into the chamber is desperately tight at the moment but as the floor is made of mud it will be easily enlarged. The extension has been named "Golden Chamber" for the MCGs 50th anniversary year."

Ben Cooper wrote " The team are extremely optimistic about the potential for another breakthrough.

We've taken a bearing along the passage and its trending towards the end of Waterwheel.

However the considered consensus is that we expect the cave to take

another sharp left before too long. There has long been a theory of another old

swallet lying somewhere in the valley between Black Shale Rift and Blackmoor

Swallet, which suggests that we may meet up with another small streamway coming

in from the right. But enough of the armchair hypothesising, lets get on with the

digging. And it is fingers crossed though because knowing Upper Flood it could be

another ten years before we get any where. Here's hoping..." (Well the hope turned out to be well founded!!)

Bone Hole Gets a Lid

Mallorca 2004

Another MCG trip to a favourite location of the group.

Open access in the Mendip Hills AONB

In December 2004 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) gave the right of pedestrian access on mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land.

2005

Limekiln Dig (Roman Rake)

A Professor Todd wrote in 1994 of three small trenches being excavated in the Blackmoor Valley, which were shown to be deep cuts into the limestone filled at the top with spoil from the 1st Century AD. These cuts encountered some natural Cave. After Professor Todd finished his dig, local mining expert John Cornwall took over the excavation which is in a rake-type depression on the land that lies between Waterwheel Swallet and the Charterhouse Centre. He didn't find much of archaeological interest, but got a bit of a surprise when the dig encountered a deep void.

"Mick Norton volunteered MCG to further explore this and Malcolm and Norma Cotter obtained permission to dig.

Over the weekend of 8/9th May a team, made up of seven committee members, two other members and a prospective member, and Doug's dog Buddy descended on the site and began to remove the old timber covering from the dig. RSJ's, grilles, scaffolding, cement, aggregate and water all had to be carried up to the dig from the car park near to Upper Flood. After a lot of hard work a grille was installed and the entrance made safe so that digging could commence. John Cornwall and his wife spent some time watching and chatting to us. When we were discussing possible names for the dig (Roman Rift, Rakes Rift, Lizard Dig, Picnic Pot...) John pointed out that there was a limekiln only a few yards away in the old quarry. Limekiln has since become the "working title" for the dig."

Yvonne Rowe

Geoff Davies Passed Away July 2005. Geoff had joined the Group in July 1961.

Hidden Earth 2005

"Ten MCG members attended the conference this year, which was held at Churchill Community School – almost on our doorstep! There was the usual fine selection of talks and expedition reports, including an excellently presented talk by Tim on the five visits made by MCG members to the Andean foothills in Argentina."

Joan Goddard

Upper Flood: beyond Golden Chamber

"Well, Tim describes it as a "breakthrough" so who am I to argue?

Tim Francis, Peat Bennett and I went digging in Golden Chamber in Upper Flood today. Malcolm Cotter had to drop out on account of a hand injury (I think I've got that right), and Julie Hesketh couldn't fit in, in the time available so that's two annoyed people. Tim excavated down into the hole at the back of Golden Chamber, where he, Louisa Minahan, Malcolm and I had last been digging in October. We'd expected to spend an unpleasant time pulling rocks and mud out without doing more than deepening the hole further, but after but a few minutes removal a void could be seen around each side of a large rock. Herculean efforts by Tim removed the rock, which surprisingly then split in two without too much effort. Further clearing of muck allowed Tim to climb down into a Tim-deep hole at the back from whence a large number of rocks were removed. More Herculean efforts.... super-Herculean even!"

Mike Richardson

Return to Cow Hole – access report

"Since the filling in and re-piping of Cow Hole in 1990 it has always been assumed by the Mendip caving fraternity that the cave was inaccessible. Reports of a huge collapse and dangerously unstable boulder choke just below the entrance have resulted in no trips into the cave for over 15 years. Certainly the last MCG visit was way back in 1989 when a small amount of dodgy 'passage' was found off the roof climbs near the bottom. When talking to MCG members who had visited in the past we were given mixed views as to the appeal of the cave: "the cave has a great pitch", "the second most dangerous cave on the Mendips after Tankard Hole, now thankfully filled in and forgotten". So we have never been that excited about exploring the cave despite the appeal of a 60 foot pitch"

Tim Francis

2006: All the years of hard work pay off in Blackmoor Valley

The rediscovery of Charnel Shaft Or Not!

"After almost 43 years, Charnel Shaft has been rediscovered. The shaft was originally found on Sunday February 24th 1963 when Tony Knibbs, Pauline Knibbs, Geoff Davies and Anne Davies went up beyond Bleak House to probe blow-holes in the snow over the clints. Tony laddered Charnel Shaft, just north west of the clints and described it the MCG Logbook as follows:

"Forty foot pitch to charnel slope in high rift. Many animals litter the floor and care is needed in stepping off ladder. The delineation of the rift is north to south. Passage goes for 20 feet south to another rising rift. Passage here goes west and downwards for 15 feet to mud and rock choke. Below ladder landing a small hole descends for some five to six feet to choke of mud and rocks with some old fence posts. Northern extension of rift chokes up after 12 feet or so but an air current can be felt coming from somewhere here." It was assumed the entrance had been lost for good. However, on a walk across Mendip in 2005, Tony was surprised to come across the shaft once again and wrote it up in the MCG Logbook. Using his description, a party of MCG members returned to the shaft on 07/01/06 and emailed photos of the find to Tony to confirm it as Charnel Shaft."

Martin Rowe

"Later on what was thought to be the lost shaft of Charnel turned out not to be!! "On hearing the news, a member exclaimed "I can't believe it's not Charnel." Henceforth it shall be known as ICBINC Shaft."

Yvonne Rowe

Malcolm Owen Cotter – 1934-2006

"It is fitting that Malcolm's name heads the list of members. His date of joining is noted as January 1954. It was while caving on Mendip with a small group of friends that Malcolm proposed the formation of the Mendip Caving Group. In early 1954 Malcolm met Tony Crawford by pure chance as he was walking with his rucksack on the road between the Hunter's and Priddy. Tony mistook him for someone else, but gave him a lift to Main's Barn on his motorcycle. The two became friends and the birth of MCG was assured: Malcolm providing the enthusiasm.

Tony was already a member of a caving club (the BEC) and an experienced caver, he was also a talented engineer. The combination of Malcolm's boundless enthusiasm and Tony's practical abilities provided a formidable partnership from which the MCG drew its initial strength.

My own personal memories of Malcolm are of a completely committed caver whose enthusiasm knew no bounds. He had a sound caving technique and an abundance of energy. For a man of modest height, he possessed an incredible walking speed and endurance. While I had to concentrate to avoid being left behind, he would be striding along explaining his theory about some aspect of caving.

Without Malcolm there would have been no MCG."

(Abridged)

Tony Knibbs

More Golden Chamber extensions

"The story so far: the floor of Golden Chamber was dug through on the 5th February 2006. Beyond a too tight rift we could hear the streamway rumbling up ahead and see tantalising glimpses of muddy boulders."

Tim Francis

This breakthrough turned out to come to the notorious Boulder Choke

Trips to Clearwell Caves & Avelines Hole

MCG in Mallorca, December 2005

"The usual fun and frolics in Mallorca. This year's visit was just before Christmas so no surprise that it was quite cold and blustery. Luckily the villa is now extremely civilised with the wood burning stove working well. Again it was the case that actually finding the caves was far more challenging than exploring them. But we have managed to add to our repertoire of caves visited over the years since the "Tour of Individuals" in 1992."

Tim Francis

Yvonne's & Tony's joint 130th birthday bash – July 7/8/9th 2006

“What a cracking weekend! It was a bash to celebrate Yvonne's 60th and Tony's 70th birthdays. They both agreed that a barrel, copious amounts of wine and a barbeque would be a great way of having a good party. Yvonne also decided that a nostalgic trip from the early 80's, when she first started caving, would be a good idea. Tony was secretary of the Group at the time so it was sort of fitting for him too.”

Yvonne Rowe

Upper Flood

Well I don't think I need to write much about this!

Tim Francis wrote in MCG News 335 of adding approx. 70ft to the cave in the boulder choke.

What came next will go down in Mendip Caving History.

The discovery of the Blackmoor Valley Master Cave

“Yesterday (10/09/2006) Mike Richardson, Julie Hesketh and I did another one of those Sunday afternoon sessions in Upper Flood. Hopes for another breakthrough were high but nothing on the scale of what we have actually found. Mike busied himself widening the most recent batch of squeezes - these are now passable - whilst Julie and I headed to the end. This was a nasty looking bit of choke that Peat Bennett and I left last time. The expected way on looked much too dodgy but I spotted a small crack on the right hand side. This was excavated and hammered for 30 minutes or so before a desperate vertical squeeze was forced. Julie followed after I had confirmed that the breakthrough really was worth seeing.”

Tim Francis 2006

The caving trip of my life

“To say I am flabbergasted is an understatement. Who would have believed that we would make such a find in Upper Flood! Yesterday (10/09/2006) was the caving trip of my life! I would have been happy with 10 additional feet of boulder choke - what I had expected to find. The dig into the boulder choke was impressive enough and there is a fair old amount of (pretty unpleasant) passage between Golden Chamber and the latest breakthrough point. So to find what we did was just unbelievable!!!! Hundreds of metres of yomping passage in Upper Flood! The new section of Flood partly reminded me of GB in parts (in scale and prettiness) and in parts is reminiscent of Longwood (the stream) and the rift-like nature of the final part of the cave is very typically "Upper Flood like" as the stream heads off into a dark rift ahead (though definitely a "going" rift).”

Julie Hesketh

“The Upper Flood breakthrough has to be the most significant even of the MCG in recent years. And certainly standing at the top of the Departure Lounge and looking into the black is something I will always remember.”

Tim Francis 2014

Neverland

“At Royal Icing Junction we split into two with Mike and Tony heading off down West Passage to assess and encourage the West End Choke whilst myself and Bill had planned to survey in the East Passage area. Before we did that however I thought that I would satisfy my curiosity and take a look at the “Neverland” Grotto just off the start of West Passage. This incredibly beautiful grotto had been so named as we had considered it too beautiful to take cave traffic and we had thought that perhaps it might want photographing and then taping off for conservation reasons. I took off my helmet, wellies, oversuit and gloves and carefully crawled forward on my fingers and toes through the passage guided by instructions from Bill “left a bit – mind your back!” The passage turns a corner, lined with white crystals running along the walls suggesting it was once filled with water. On it went for around 30m of the most exquisite and unusual formations I have ever had the privilege to see – gossamer thin icy curtains, club shaped formations 20-30cm long (pom-poms) hanging down from the walls completely made from ice-white crystal and one stunning carrot shaped crystal encrusted formation again 25-30cm long hanging from a tiny straw, luckily set slightly away from the main drag of the narrow passage.”

Julie Hesketh

Media interested ensued and Descent, The Mendip Times, and the BBC among others featured MCG's achievement.

Las Leñas: MCG in Argentina 2006

"What with all the excitement surrounding the Upper Flood discoveries it seems an absolute eternity since our last jaunt to Argentina - our sixth so far. This year's team in Malargüe in February 2006 was just the usual three of us from the UK - Peat Bennett, Richard Carey and I - plus our friends from INAE.

At Cueva del Colibri (A Colibri is a small brightly coloured hummingbird, indigenous to this area) I opened up a drafting hole within a matter of minutes. Another hour's digging on the following day and we were in entrance collapse had been bypassed. The cave is low and wet and small. A couple of rubbly squeezes dropped us back down to stream level - On the surveying trip Peat spotted that the main streamway was actually coming out of a low scoop on the right-hand side. We duly surveyed into this but the streamway got lower and lower. Peat commented "*this turned out to be a surveyor's hell involving crawling in freezing cold water. Enough was enough when I could hardly move my limbs due to the cold.*"

Cueva de las Cascadas This was found on day two of the trip and I think it's the best cave in the province of Malargüe. And it really is a classic. The cave is so-named because of a fine crashing cascade at the end of the cave. This is the only large streamway and waterfall that we've come across in Argentina. The cave's length is around 400m." *Tim Francis*

2007

Unsurprisingly Upper Flood dominated the early part of 2007. Leads were explored, further passage found, photos taken, surveys undertaken, exploration discussed. Wall Street, Upper Flood was discovered in June 2007

Novice weekend - 5/6th June 2007

"Seven people turned up for the novice weekend. Some had caved before at some time in the past so they were not all strictly novices. There were also a good number of members who volunteered their time to take the novices underground."

Yvonne Rowe

"Hillier's Cave - Fern & Phil Labram, Linda, Richard and Mike

I panicked at the entrance! Found it very challenging physically and mentally, but really pleased I didn't chicken out! Thanks to the calm encouragement of MCG members. Fantastic grottos - very pretty - and good variety of formations and crystals. It felt really good to see them in a natural state rather than in a show cave.

Lots of variety on the trip with crawling, climbing - a good workout. Thanks MCG"

Fern Labram

MCG at Hidden Earth

"Having made probably the most important discovery on Mendip for 50 years, we felt obliged to put on a good showing at BCRA's Hidden Earth which was held this year in Tewksbury from 21st to 23rd September."

Stand highlights included, guess the weight of the boulder ruckle cake, the easysqueeze, squeeze box, many photos, and the best designed T-Shirt winning T Shirt!"

Yvonne Rowe

Upper Flood Dec 07

"Team dig: Mark Tringham (Grampian), Peat Bennett, Brian Snell, Bill Chadwick, Mike Richardson. Team survey: Julie Hesketh, Ben Cooper. Team dig set off to West Passage armed with a full size shovel to look at the soil pile at the first corner of the oxbow. Stopped to bail out the Lavatory Trap back behind the dam. Lots and lots of water; stream in 550m Way was higher. Brian and Mike started digging while Bill took Mark to see the East Passage sights. Shovel very effective but mud very wet and gloopy; Peat arrived and took over; got to stage where there is a low draughting continuation. Meanwhile Bill and Mark investigated hole just short of oxbow. Large stream entering from above, so they knocked out some rocks and climbed up, reaching a calcite roof about 5m above passage. According to the survey this must be very close to Neverland. Set off out and met Julie and Ben at Walk the Plank. Ben very, very cold having excavated stream to a duck. Brian assumed Ben had been through and went for it. Mike ditto. Brian re-

turns:

Brian to Ben (roughly): "That's an impressive chamber"

Ben to Brian: "What chamber?"

Brian to Ben: "The one you found beyond the duck"

Ben to Brian: I haven't been through the duck"

Transcription actually sounded more like "Oi you bastards, that was my 'effing breakthrough!" - so likely to be called "Thief chamber"."

2008

Stainsby's Shaft updates

22/03/08 Mike Richardson, Biff Frith, Mark Ireland (ACG), Mark Ward, Mick Norton.

"It was extremely cold in the wind and snow, walking to the dig. The winch was re-installed (after Biff had taken it home for rebuilding). More scaffolding was added at the dig front at the bottom of the internal shaft. A good metre of depth was gained. Digging was easy, warm and dry.

05-06/04/08 Mick Norton, Mike Richardson and Pete Bennett on Saturday and Mick Norton, Russ Porter and Mark Island (ACG) on Sunday.

We lifted over seventy drums of spoil and many netted rocks, I used over fifty hilties and then we were able to fit more much needed scaffolding, progress looks good with voids opening up between boulders and we had a good draught at times. (Note it was a cold day)"

Mick Norton

"The winch system is working perfectly, all the preparation work was worth it. We are now digging virgin ground and if we get lucky we might break in to the 19th century stopes that were said to exist. These may have been driven up from the 18 fathom level. The other possibility is we may be able to find a way back to the main shaft as it is only metres away.

One of the old digs on the other side of the shaft ends in the main shaft at about the same depth the new dig has reached. There is a shaped socket in the solid wall that would probably have been used for the shaft ladder staging. The shaft is back filled even at this depth, but even though it draughts well it would be suicide to dig here. So our present dig is the best and safest option."

Biff Frith

The Lost Swallet

"Tony Knibbs described a Swallet in Velvet Bottom that sucked in vegetation during the 1968 Floods. He also suggested pursuing Bone Hole, "it would still be interesting for fresh eyes to look into Bone hole. It is an impressive site which may still hold possibilities. Anyone with half-an-hour to waste could also find peering into White Spot Cave in the Gorge interesting if it is still accessible.""

Yvonne Rowe

Roman Rake

(adapted from the MCG Newsgroup messages of Mark Ward)

Following heavy rain and the floods on Mendip, what was left of the mud slide collapsed. The surface ground had been undermined, with only a few feet of earth, mud rocks and open cave.

On **31/05/08 Mark Ward** meshed and braced almost up to the surface and filled some of the void with rocks. This will need taking up to the surface to stabilise the ground. Never has such a small cave had so much scaffold...though all necessary.

On **04/06/08 Mark Ward** dropped the floor 3 feet, back into the hole that he had originally dug in 2006 next to the (now gone) boulder. The 'orrible' sticky mud has gone and he is now back into the bang spoil. There are a lot of rocks that have to come up to be placed behind the mesh. The dig now needs rock nets ... and a strong pair of arms!

40 Years of Upper Flood Celebrated with a 60's Themed Party



July 2008 40th UF
Anniversary
Photo by Joan Goddard

Battery Swallet

“On 16/08/08 Doug and I spent an hour walking the 'bomb craters' with the very amiable Duncan Massey of Swallet Farm. He was very keen for us to dig Battery Swallet, located in a basically untapped area between Wigmore and Lamb Leer, with great potential. However, the cave lies on the Wookey brothers' land and this was going to prove a bit harder work! The brothers were not impressed when we introduced ourselves as MCG members. They said they were unhappy with the previous fence that had been erected around the trees and that they had lost a cow down the pit? This was later borne out when we dug out a few cow bones from the entrance. One can only speculate how they actually got there? However, with lots of charm and promises, we managed to get them to agree to us having another go! The proviso was that before we did anything, we were to erect a proper barbed wire fence. We returned on 17/08/08 and achieved this although a few more strengthening posts and a stile are required. We are going to give the brothers a couple of pictures and ask them to approve what we have done. We also have to maintain the fence. We have cleared a lot of vegetation from around and above the cave. The next step will be to dig the pit back in layers and build a scaffold and mesh cage to hold it all back, before we can clear the entrance and start digging. We had a squirm inside and a thrutch into Vee Swallet and both look good prospects.”

Mark Ward

MCG weekend at SWCC 18-19th Oct 2008

From the MCG: Geoff Beale, Brian Snell, Keith Thomas, Keith Knight. From the SWCC: Mick Davies. From Texas: Terry Holsinger (yes that's his real name).

We all arrived Friday night to an almost deserted SWCC cottage but this didn't last too long as a minibus turned up with a load of students from Kent University and another mini bus from Imperial College turned up at 2:30am; noisy sods.

OFD1: Geoff, Brian, Keith T, Keith K, and Terry.

We moved off on our way admiring the helictite formation known as The Fingers, sadly not looking as good as they were when first seen. With Geoff doing his admirable tour guide bit we set off and made our way through some tight rift passage and up the boulders into Roundabout Chamber. There are some small but pure white decorations around the wall and some very nice straws and pillars which appear to be bent.

Soon we got to a bedding-plane crawl. Geoff said the accepted way to negotiate the crawl was to roll over and over like a log. We all adopted the hands and knees approach except for Brian, who took a short detour here but soon re-located the way on. After a short break we moved on into Rawl Series, taking care around the deep pits in the floor. We reached Pi chamber and descended through an unpromising little hole in the boulder choke and down a nasty awkward drop. From here a short section of passage leads on to another tight bit but after a little gardening we all got through. The way on was down a nicely polished tube, descending at a sharp angle. Geoff suggested that the best way to negotiate this was to just slide in a controlled descent. It was very smooth and would be quite difficult if you needed to try to climb back up it. As the passage starts to go horizontal you can hear the roar of the main streamway below and in front is the steel cable which gives the traverse its name.

Clipping into the steel cable we climbed down to the ledges above the main streamway. Here a dilapidated fixed iron ladder leads on to the jammed boulder some considerable height above the main streamway. Geoff said we were about 40ft above the stream at this point but it looked more to me. Here we saw a party making their way in the streamway below who were a little surprised to hear voices from above. At this point there is an iron girder section helping to prop up the boulder and also serve as a very narrow walkway which we were able to use, clipping our cowstails into the traverse wire as security. Geoff went first and showed Keith T how to negotiate the traverse, again on nice new steel cables but with very smooth and polished ledges to walk on. At the end of the Wire Traverse Keith T took more pictures and then we set off along the passage that meandered above the streamway and finally closes down to a crawl. Beyond, you reach the shaft below the Dug Out Link. Once up through the Dug Out we reached some more crawling-size passage which descends gradually to meet the main entry series of OFD 1. The floor of polished wet flowstone did make for an easy descending slide and led on through to the last muddy puddles. A short stomp back to the entrance and we were back out into the glorious grey South Wales afternoon. All agreed it was an enjoyable trip.

A good weekend, as you always find in Wales.”

Keith Knight

2009**MCG Yorkshire Weekend April 2009**

"Great to see a really big trip to Yorkshire attended by (take a deep breath) Jeremy, Angela, Russ, Karen, Biff, Adrian, Giles, Ed, Hayley, Geoff, Debbie, Emma, Angus, Julie, Mike, Linda, Jon, Bego and Miguel and visiting Alum Pot, Sell Gill, Upper & Lower Churn, Ireby Fell, Bull Pot, Swinsto, Great Douk !The trip was such a success, that a similar extravaganza has now been planned for the Autumn in Derbyshire."

Bill Chadwick

Sell Gill Hole

"This was my first SRT trip and as such I was pretty nervous of how I was gonna deal with dangling off the ground dependant entirely on equipment. Once I had got to the edge and realized the chances of any-thing going wrong due to equipment failure were pretty damn low I relaxed and concentrated on what I had to do. Because it is open to the sky pretty much you can see all around you. It is an amazing experience to lower yourself vertically down into a cave, down where the water fell or still falls, one which I feel privileged to have experienced. "

Jonathan(?)

Stainsby's progress

"Over the weekend of 22/23 Feb we dug down in Stainsby's nearly 4 metres with voids all over the place. We don't have to remove the spoil anymore, just rearrange it. We need more scaffolding again to make it safe. We have taken to using a safety line for the digger as the floor might drop out. We have heard movement below us so who knows it might be deeper next time we dig?"

Biff Frith

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."

Richard Woollacott ?

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!"

Richard Woollacott ?

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 Ward

Bone Hole - the latest

"Back in June a project was started to finish off some long overdue conservation work in Bone Hole, Cheddar

Gorge. As part of the access agreement for the site, the MCG had agreed to protect the archaeologically important bone slope which lies just below the entrance shaft. For one reason or another no one had managed to get around to this. In addition the original wooden shoring in the entrance shaft had deteriorated severely and needed replacement. The walkway is now almost complete, and is safe to use. There does remain some more conservation work though, namely the removal of old timber and digging kit left by previous generations of cavers, and the calcite flows on the walls could do with a good clean - volunteers will be welcomed! Most of the work was carried out by myself and Buddy, with lots of help from Mark Ward, Russ Porter, Paul Ketcher, Doug Harris, Joan Goddard and Hayley (apologies to anyone I've missed). A very special thanks is required to Biff, especially for the provision of all the materials, as well as underground engineering expertise.

As a postscript, the opportunity was taken during the work to have a good look around the rest of the cave. The long fixed ladder down to the old dig could do with replacement, though that is not on the shortlist of jobs to do at present. I think all of us were impressed with the draft in the cave, and given its location it clearly has a lot of potential. After much deliberation a dig has been started in the part of the cave above the gate (i.e. away from the archaeologically sensitive areas). The aim is to work down the top of the choke, and hopefully enter the Cheddar river cave which must lie somewhere beneath. To date we have excavated down about 4m through boulders against a solid wall. Digging is almost unbelievably easy, and the draft is very encouraging. Even more exciting is that the new extensions in Charterhouse Cave have headed directly towards Bone Hole. It is so promising that the Charterhouse explorers have asked to come and have a look... Digging has become a regular event, and anyone interested in joining in please let me know."

Ed Waters

Hidden Earth 2009

"The MCG won the much coveted 1st prize in the stand competition. Much effort went into its preparation and thanks must go to Martin and Yvonne for achieving what may be a first for the MCG. The stand was a reconstruction of the MCG cottage lounge, complete with call out board and photo board. 'As soon as the stand was set up it was obvious it would be a success. Members and visitors soon made themselves comfortable and we began serving tea (brewed up in my Landrover in the car park) and biscuits'. Yvonne's famous Boulder Choc Rock Cake went down very well with visitors. 'I think the judges were impressed by the atmosphere we created. It was genuinely like being in the MCG lounge'."

Linda Milne



Hidden Earth 2009

Photo by Joan Goddard

2010

Perforation Choke, Bone Hole

"MCG members have been actively digging a new site in Bone Hole. Now known as Perforation Choke due to a series of minor Hilti induced injuries to members of the digging team, progress has been rapid, with the cave extended by some 18m to date."

Ed Waters

A Weekend in the Dales

"As some of you will know, I am a relative newcomer to both the MCG and caving, I was bitten hard by the bug in summer last year and have been scrambling to learn as much as possible about the sport ever since.

I don't think an enthusiastic new caver could possibly find him or herself in better company than the people of the MCG. Everyone I have met at the member's weekends, caved with or even just exchanged correspondence with have offered freely of their knowledge, experience and practical assistance, enabling me to progress. Buoyed with confidence after Bull Pot, on the Sunday I rather cockily suggested to Ed that he allow me to have a go at rigging Alum Pot. Humoring me, he agreed, but added the caveat that the sense of exposure at Alum would be significantly greater! Sure enough, at the pitch head I found that I'd lost the ability to tie any sort of knot and we both quickly concluded that it might be better if I just concentrated on doing what I needed to do to not die! I'm pretty sure Ed had

known this would happen, but bless him, he'd not wanted to burst my bubble!

The sense of exposure truly was quite staggering. I don't have any particular fear of heights, but this was quite something else! I guess the fact the shaft is day-lit for pretty much its entire depth doesn't help matters. Luckily, I was able to focus through the adrenaline and was soon whooping and hollering my way down the truly awesome abseil.

I deliberately stopped and locked off a couple of times, just to take in the majesty of the location. My initial fear had faded somewhat, though a healthy respect for my situation remained!"

Kev Speight

Rescue Practice Report

"Combined MCR / CDG Rescue Practice Gough's

Cave Cheddar 17.04.10

Anna had been petrified sat at Lloyd Hall and needed plenty of reassurance as she was strapped in tightly to the spinal board and drag sheet. Moving her down the 45 degree tight bedding plane was slow, but she was in good spirits as we all chatted to her constantly. She said she felt 'very safe with all these strong men'. Some deep muddy puddles had to be sat in to keep the 'casualty' dry, so we were extremely wet and muddy when we surfaced.

The haul went very smoothly and we were soon out into the show cave, much to Anna's relief...and the flashing cameras of the general public! Anna's parting words were, 'thank you all so much for getting me out safely, but I'll never cave again!'

Doug and I went to the debrief where it was agreed that it had been a very successful rescue practice.

We are all keen with Miguel to now have a regular team at these practices and fly the MCG flag."

Mark Ward

Dales Meet April 2010

"Over the weekend of 16th to 18th April, a group of MCG members had a great time caving in the Dales. Based at the Yorkshire Subterranean Society's hut at Helwith Bridge, a great weekend was had by all. Activities included drinking in the excellent Helwith Bridge Inn, walking, toy shopping in Ingleton and even a little bit of caving..."

I think all of us who attended would like to thank

Jeremy for organising this superb weekend."

Ed Waters

The OFD Trip Crew.

"The trip itself passed in something of a blur, although my overwhelming impression was of things being somewhat different to your typical Mendip 'ole! Without doubt, the highlight of the trip was the Marble Showers series in the main streamway. Utterly stunning ribbons of white in stark contrast with the black limestone made this a place I will not forget in a hurry."

MCG Andalucia 2010

"Almost since he first joined the MCG, Miguel Tome waxed lyrical about caving "back home". Whilst up to our eyeballs in mud and freezing water digging away in Battery Swallet he could be heard to exclaim,

"There is no mud in the caves of Andalucia..." Finally in September 2010, he managed to cajole a group of MCG cavers over to Spain for two weeks to sample the delights of his caves.

A group of seven drove down to Andalucia in Biff's minibus, taking the ferry from Portsmouth to Santander. The crossing takes 24 hours, followed by about 12 hours driving to reach Villaluenga del Rosario on the Sierra Grazal-ema.

Sima GESM

One of the primary objectives of the expedition had been to aid local cavers with exploration work in Sima GESM. This is the most famous cave in Andalucia, as well as being both the deepest (1,101m) and longest (currently about 12km explored) cave in the region. A full description of the cave is impossible to provide in this Newsletter whilst keeping it to a manageable size! However, a trip to the bottom of the cave takes 3 days (there and back) with the cave pre-rigged. John Crowsley, Tim Francis and Kev Speight held the group's end up by volunteering to carry out the work of installing a permanent survey station.

On the first trip to Andalucia, Kevin, John Crowsley and I did a couple of days into Sima Gesm and camped down at -1000m. An usual experience was being overtaken on the way down a 145m pitch, called Pozo Paco de la Torre, by crazy Spaniard who was shouting and hollering and totally off his head on marijuana. He chain smoked the stuff for the whole three days. Scary stuff.

Sima de Villaluenga

A few yards inside the vast entrance arch the floor drops away into an awe-inspiring pitch of some 50m+. Not only is it deep, but the walls on the far side are only just visible."

90th Birthday of honorary member Ron Saunders

2011

Upper Flood Update

No major discoveries to report, but digging continues at various points in the cave including Walk The Plank (towards the expected link with Stainsby's Shaft), Mud Out Passage and Wall Street. At the latter site, a digging has revealed a superb grotto, named "The Honeypot".

SRT Self Rescue With John Crowsley

Rigging, Cut Rope rescue, Mid Rope Rescue and Self Rescue were all practiced by the group.

"SRT training with John, what a treat and something which I had been looking forward to for what seemed an age. So the gang: Kev, Biff, Jenny and myself headed off to Goughs with John leading the way."

May Yap

Beginner's Weekend April 2011

"With a healthy number of requests for beginner's trips furnishing my email inbox, it seemed that a dedicated trip was called for. You just can't beat Swildons for getting people hooked on caving, so a trip to the Upper Series, with a possible extension down the Twenty for the more adventurous, was pencilled in for the April Member's weekend.

From the MCG, Sue and Myself, Russ Porter, Karen Fendley and Andrea Russe were on hand to offer inspiration and guidance. The victims were Jackie Harrington, Steve Tibbert and his pal, Richard, Michael Fendley and Andrew and Benji."

Kev Speight

"Caving at the Mendips was an amazing experience for the both of us. We knew the challenges ahead, but as the say, you never know until you try it! I fell at least 3 times trying to climb over the little waterfall, and nearly slipped into crevasses now and then. I found the way back a little more difficult! Scary stuff! My wife fared better, and she loved it! Will I do it again? Maybe after losing a couple more stones. Do we recommend it? Hell yeah!"

Andrew & Benji

MCG Yorkshire Weekend

"So, who in their right mind would take on an abseil down a cold, raging waterfall for approximately 40 feet on their first full underground SRT trip? Not me – no – never – why would I even consider something so stupid? Well, actually, I confess, yep I did! On Friday April 8th Jeremy, Ed, Hayley, Sue, Karen, Ross, Miguel & I headed to Yordas for an afternoon of rope Dangling

Ed gave me excellent advice at the top of the pitch basically to 'get on with it' and lean back as far as possible to keep out of the water! So with plenty of determination to do as I was told, I set off, pretty well for a few feet and then got unceremoniously knocked off course by the full force of the water which as well as amazingly strong was bloody cold and took my breath away!"

Angela Clulow

Lots go Caving in Wales

"On the 2 March the latest invasion of Wales by representatives from the MCG took place. Sixteen people (Jeremy Gilson, Angela Clulow, Linda Milne, Sue Fennell, Russ Porter, Ross Wheeler, Russ Hunt and his girlfriend Mandy, John

Crowlsey and his daughter Sarah, Debbie Lambert, Tony Smith, Alan McBride, Angus Leat, Paul Davies and myself) met at the SWCC for a weekend of caving and other fun activities.”

Karen Fendley

“Cottage work. Gas tank install. Waking up in the morning to a scene of devastation the lawn totally destroyed. A very big hole surrounded by mud and stone, the phone forcibly disconnected and just to top it all off it was snowing.



The wood burner was put to full use that day along with the kettle.”

Keith Knight

2012

A FOND FAREWELL TO TONY CRAWFORD: A VERY EARLY MEMBER OF MCG

Tony Crawford was a very early stalwart of the Mendip Caving Group who was aged 82 when he passed away peacefully in a hospital in Auckland New Zealand at 11h45 on 24th January 2012

“My enduring caving memory of Tony is going into Swildon’s Hole carrying the ladder for the first 40ft pitch, only to find when we got there that the pitch had been washed away. Tony was delighted to climb down the remnants with just a rope to belay him from above.

He was above all someone whose infectious enthusiasm and dedicated teaching of cave craft made him a delightful companion. Through his engineering skills, Tony made a considerable contribution to the Group while he was tacklemaster.”

Noel Dilly (with minor amendments by Tony Knibbs).

Battery Swallet

“As we were pulling the last drum the water level started rising and within 10 seconds the whole passage was full of water more than 4 inches deep, running down fast as hell. We started making a move back out, climbing Mick’s Cascades wasn’t easy with all that water pouring down the stream, by the time that we got into the turning chamber we could see The Tunnel in flood conditions in almost a third of the air space, the “flat down crawl” was just scary to me.”

Miguel Tome

Members’ Weekend and Christmas Party 2012

“The morning of Saturday 8th December saw a group of enthusiasts raring to get stuck in to the rope work training that John had kindly (bravely? foolishly?) offered to run. The venue, Black Cat Chamber in Gough’s, proved to be excellent. A day underground; in the warm, a short walk to the café/conveniences and no over suit to wash afterwards. Perfect!

Paul, Sarah, Ed, Tom and I are all at various stages of rigging/SRT experience, and John kept us all busy working on developing our skills; up and down the rope, changeovers, passing knots, improvising prussics as we ‘lost’ different jammers and rigging our own ropes. “

Leonie Woodward

2013

Grebe Swallet

“Some MCG members have been helping out with a dig at Grebe Swallet over the last couple of years and although no great discovery has been made, plenty of fun times, mud and exercise has been endured in the name of squalid hardship.”
Chris Binding



Many Trips into Reservoir Hole to see the Frozen Deep

Work Weekend & Barn Dance

“Cottage warden, Russ Porter would like to say a big thank you to all those who contributed to a very successful Work Weekend. Lots of important repairs, cleaning and maintenance were carried out, the benefits of which will be experienced by members and guests in the coming month. The Barn Dance was also a great success, with good food, music, lot's of MCGers and plenty of alcohol! There was even a party game thrown in for good measure.”
Tom Harrison

Summer Yorkshire Trip

“The latest trip to Yorkshire was undertaken on 20 September 2013 when an intrepid 11 people met at Inglesport to descend into Lost John's (Friday) and then Lancaster Hole (Saturday). Those on the trip were Jeremy and Angela Gilson, Debbie Lambert, Alan McBride, Mark Hill, Kev Speight, Russ Porter, Dave Ball, Steve, Tom Harrison, Hayley Clark, Ed Waters and myself.”
Karen Fendley

MCG go wild in Andalucia 2013

“Team flying from Bristol: Chris Bind-ing, Jack Overhill, Dave Barrow, Mike Waterworth, Mike Moxon, Leonie Woodward, Ross Wheeler, Josh Bratchley, Andrea Russe and Richard Carey.
Digging team flying to Gibraltar: Miguel Tome, Tim Francis and Peat Bennett.
Overland from Santander: Noel Cleave

Sistema Republicano-Cabito

This is a monster trip as you are on rope for almost its entirety. If you are not abseiling you are traversing reaching a depth of 198m before climbing up to the extensions.

Sima de Cacao

This is the cave I had come to visit. This time I rigged the 97m entrance shaft. It is surprising how focussed you become when you are suspended 300ft above the floor. At 70m I swung over to the ledge to allow Chris to continue the rigging to descend to Sala Giex. This is a fantastic chamber with 20m organ pipes amongst the formations.”
Richard Carey

2014

60th Anniversary Year

MENDIP CAVING GROUP

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Mendip Caving Group is a registered Charity
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Thanks to all the contributors.

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Mendipcavinggroup.org.uk



Founded 1954

The Mendip Caving Group consists of some 120+ members of all abilities who have banded together to share resources such as ladders, ropes, caving library and accommodation on Mendip.

The Group is registered as a charity in the UK, and our objectives are: For the benefit of the public, the furtherance of all aspects of the scientific study and conservation of caves and their related features.

Membership is open to anyone over the age of 18 years with an interest in the objects of the Group.

Members have use of the Group's cottage at reduced rates, free use of Group equipment and free access to the library. They also receive the newsletter of the MCG and Occasional Publications (a journal-type document published infrequently.)

Please send any submissions, photos, comments, letters to Tom Harrison

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