

MCG News

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group



Number 319
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web version

www.m-c-g.org.uk
Founded 1954

Discovery and digging report of Carcass Cave (part one)

In the light of recent accounts of discoveries at Carcass Cave in the MCG newsletter and elsewhere it was thought that an article on the early days of the Carcass dig might of interest to the wider MCG membership. Over the next few newsletters, in the form of logbook entries, the main protagonists will outline how the dig progressed.

The ramblings of a landscape gardener by Douglas Harris

In this first article, Doug's log describes the discovery of the entrance, the removal of some delightful rotting animal carcasses and the start of the Carcass Shaft dig.

Sunday 1st September 1996

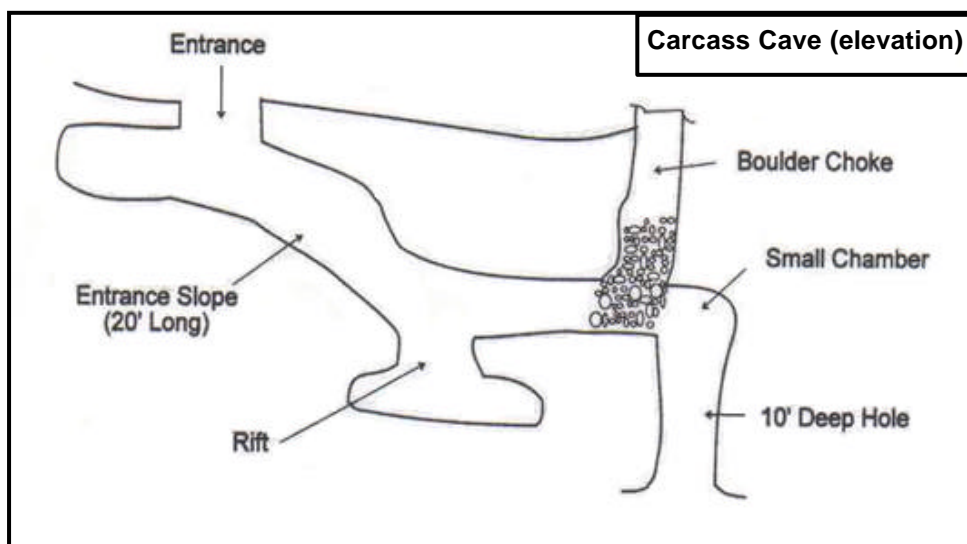
Michael Norton showed me a hole about three hundred feet to the right of the entrance to Shute Shelve Cavern. Mick pointed out that we had to de-bone a cow carcass first to get into the hole, and then next about ten minutes later we found a sheep's carcass and dragged that out as well. After sliding down the twenty feet long entrance slope there was a small rift to the right, which was blocked, but to the left was a boulder choke.

Mick removed some large rocks to discover a small chamber. This had a person sized hole about ten feet deep the other side. The choke was sliding down slowly so we left it for another day. We decided to name the hole "Carcass Cave".

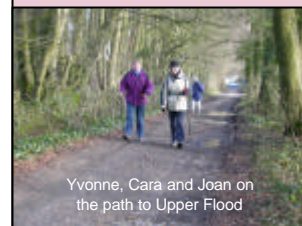
Tuesday 31st December 1996 This was Alan Gray's first digging trip for a while. He refused to enter the hole until Mick and myself had removed the remaining carcasses. This done we all descended into the hole. Alan then levered several large rocks out of the boulder choke. Mick lowered himself down the body-sized



The entrance in November 2001



From the Editor



Yvonne, Cara and Joan on the path to Upper Flood

So here we are. Our 50th anniversary has arrived at last after much planning and organising. It must seem quite poignant for those who joined the club all those years ago. I know it is for me and I'm only celebrating my 21st (21 years as an MCG member, that is!).

I am really looking forward to seeing lots of past members, and current members not oft seen, especially those from my earlier caving days, and reminiscing about 'old times'. I am also looking forward to the various events that are being laid on, formal and otherwise.

I hope all of you who attend the year's events have a really lovely time. *And let's drink to the next fifty years.*

In this issue

- 1-3 Carcass Cave
- 3 Slovenia 2004
- 4 Somerset earthquake
- 5 Diving Swildons
- 5 Bat boxes
- 6 Cottage work
- 7 Virtual pub
- 8-9 South Wales 1954
- 10 Group information

MCG doings**Re-joining us:**

Cara Allison

Bill Richards

Adrian Thomas

Change of category:

Bill Richards and **Lynn Furneaux** are now Associate members

Welcome:

to the following Probationary members:

Brenda Wybrow

Martin Peck

Resignation:

The following member has left the group:

Gary Woollacott

shaft describing the small chamber as being about ten feet long, six feet wide and four feet high. Whilst climbing back up a rock became loose and jammed against his stomach, so he had to drop back down the hole dragging the falling material with him. After Mick's return Alan bravely followed suite to view the new chamber. Alan suggested for safety's sake that the choke be dug from the surface. Outside, being the middle of winter, the ground was frozen, so we left this new find for a subsequent visit.

Wednesday 28th May 1997 Mick and myself took a tourist trip around Shute Shelve Cavern. After we finished we took the group to see Carcass Cave and started to dig from the surface but due to a lack of tools made little impression; or is it depression? At this point I managed to con Michael Palmer, Conan Fox and Gloria Chapman into digging on the following Sunday morning.

Sunday 1st June 1997 Gloria, Conan, Mike and myself, armed with nailbars, spades, shovels, drinks and chocolate biscuits ascended the hill, past Shute Shelve Cavern towards Carcass Cave. We started to dig straight down in a five feet diameter circle. Within seconds of swinging the pickaxe Mike stripped down to his waist. After an hour the hole seemed a lot deeper. Mike used the five feet builder's bar to loosen up the rocks and soil in the bottom of the hole. The hole was now about five feet deep. The bar went straight down and through, with my hand still attached to it; Conan descended the main entrance to locate the other end, quickly pulling the bar out of my hand. Success! We were digging in the right place. Gloria's turn with the pickaxe next, "stand clear!" shouted Conan, two swings later came "this is hard work" from Gloria. It didn't last long so she returned to shovelling. At approximately 12.30p.m. on Sunday 1st June 1997 Michael Palmer, from the surface dig, entered the cave below the boulder choke. At this point we called it a day and retired to the pub.

Wednesday 4th June 1997 Mike and myself removed more soil and rocks. The hole is getting deeper!

Sunday 8th June 1997 At the Axbridge Caving Group meeting, John Dobson suggested that we obtain consent from the National Trust before we continue further.

Wednesday 9th July 1997 John rang me on my mobile to say that the National Trust had agreed for us to dig, but we are required to erect a fence around the shaft, as it now posed a threat to animals straying into the wood.

Tuesday 15th July 1997 Michael Norton and I took an old S.R.T. rope up to the cave and tied it between two trees to form a Y-hang to connect a pulley to. We then proceeded to remove twenty five drums of soil and rocks. Progress was now increasing.

Wednesday 16th July 1997 Christopher Castle accompanied me this time and showed a great deal of interest in the shaft. We removed fifty drums in an hour and a half on this visit.

Wednesday 23rd July 1997 Elaine Johnson made her first digging trip this year and between us we removed twenty-five drums. Elaine descended the further hole to the bottom of the cave. (The first woman!) The shaft is now nine feet deep.

Wednesday 30th July 1997 Mick, Mike and myself rigged a second pulley to form a twin pulley system. With the aid of some chains Mick had borrowed, we were able to remove two large rocks. The shaft was extended by two feet in as many hours.

Sunday 2nd August 1997 Mick, his daughter, Kathleen, Martin Rhys and Chris Castle joined me for this visit. Martin had brought a part roll of stock fencing to make safe the shaft. While Chris, Kathleen and I put the fence around the hole, Mick showed Martin the cave. We stretched the fence around the four rather con-

veniently positioned trees, just managing to close the hole off, and secured it to the trees with fencing wire. Martin departed. The rest of us remained to remove a further twenty-five plus drums of spoil. Another two large rocks were removed too.

Wednesday 6th August 1997 Andrew Tyler, Elaine, Mick and I went to the dig with the intention of reducing some of the larger boulders into something a bit easier to handle. Andy had brought his cordless drill and some Hilti caps which were used to great effect to reduce several large rocks into smaller rocks. Twenty drums of spoil were removed on this occasion.

Monday 11th August 1997 Mick's last evening on Mendip before the end of the summer hols was spent at Carcass Cave removing another twenty-five drums and three large boulders.

Wednesday 13th August 1997 Mike, Elaine and I spent two hours removing thirty-three drums of spoil and lowered the floor by another foot. We discovered a shelf/ledge, two feet wide and semi-circular in shape. Shaft continues to go straight down and is now approximately fifteen feet deep.

Wednesday 30th August 1997 Mike and I lowered the floor by a foot or so in two hours, removing twenty-five drums.

Monday 1st September 1997 Mick, Mike, Kevin Wills, Louise Kemp and I removed thirty-five plus drums and lowered the floor by another two feet in about two hours.

In the next issue: How the shaft was fenced, a surface survey is conducted pinpointing the location of Carcass in relation to Shute Shelve and the shaft is dug to over 12 metres.

MCG overseas meet, Slovenia, 31st Jul-15th Aug 2004

For those arranging flights to Slovenia, Easyjet have very kindly announced that they will start flying from Stanstead to Ljubiana on 1 May this year. Just in time for the MCG summer holiday trip. They are taking bookings now and Julie Hesketh has already booked 2 seats plus an infant for a total of £105 return. An absolute bargain. If you want to fly, get onto the website early and check out the cheap deals.

Ljubiana is a beautiful city - lots of art deco, very warm in summer, rivers and cafe culture galore. A great place to spend a few days in itself on the way home from a caving holiday. It is a couple of hours from the caving region by car. Trieste in Italy is still closer to the caves but Ljubiana makes a great place to stay.

Another tip for those wanting to do their own thing as well as cave is that Ross and Julie have used a travel company called Slovenia Pursuits (0870 2200201) and can recommend them to help you find hotels and guesthouses and farm accommodation - at not too high a rate of commission. They used them for their honeymoon and say they were efficient and 2 out of three of their hotels were great - and they did warn about the 3rd before they accepted it.

Julie now has deposits from 12 people so far and around another 6 people have said they will come and need to pass on a deposit. There is plenty of space still left in the bunkhouse.

Martin and Yvonne Rowe are travelling by Landrover, and still have room for passengers, or to take gear/tackle for those who are flying.

Useful links: Easyjet https://www.easyjet.com/EN/news/20040212_01.html
Slovenia Pursuits <http://sloveniapursuits.com>

Library Additions

Tony Knibbs had kindly donated a copy of "**Reseau Felix Trombe - Henne Mort , Massif d'Arbas - Pyrenees Centrales**" by *Sylvestre Clement and Pierre Vennarecci, 2003*. An impressive 350 pages of which over half comprise the survey and cross sections. In French.

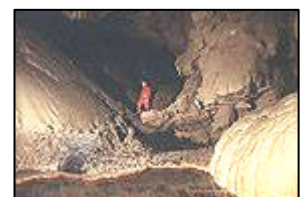
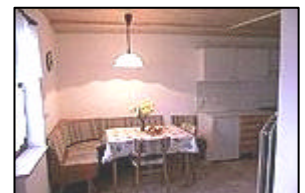
And after a walk in Longwood Valley, when we found several types of fungi, Yvonne Rowe has donated a copy of "**Collins Gide to Mushrooms and Toadstools**" by *Morten Lange and F Bayard Hora*.



Scarlet Elf Cup



Above and below: our accommodation in Laze



Above and below: typical cave passages





Seismic events: Bridgwater, Somerset 29 Jan 04 10:56 & 20:23 GMT

BGS received several reports from residents in Taunton, Wedmore, Ilminster and surrounding areas reporting felt events at approximately 10:50 and 20:30 GMT on 29 January 2004. Felt reports described, "the floor moved and there was a deep rumble" and "the floor was shaking" and "the whole house shook".

The BGS analysed the signals recorded from their seismograph stations in the region. A total of four earthquakes were detected and located about 12 km northeast of Taunton and about 5 km south of Bridgwater. The four events were located within about 200 metres from each other. The joint location is 331.407 km E / 132.647 km N (British National Grid reference). The events occurred at a shallow depth of about 6.5 km.

| Time (UTC) | Local Magnitude | Intensity |
|------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 10:56:01 | 2.7 | 3+ |
| 10:56:53 | 3.1 | 3+ |
| 20:23:35 | 3.1 | 4+ |
| 20:23:42 | 3.0 | 4+ |

Yv's droppings

RC: You're going to burn in hell.

TF: Well, at least I'll be underground.

ANON: Have you caved much recently?

YR: We caved every time we come down to Mendip.....it's just we haven't been down for months!



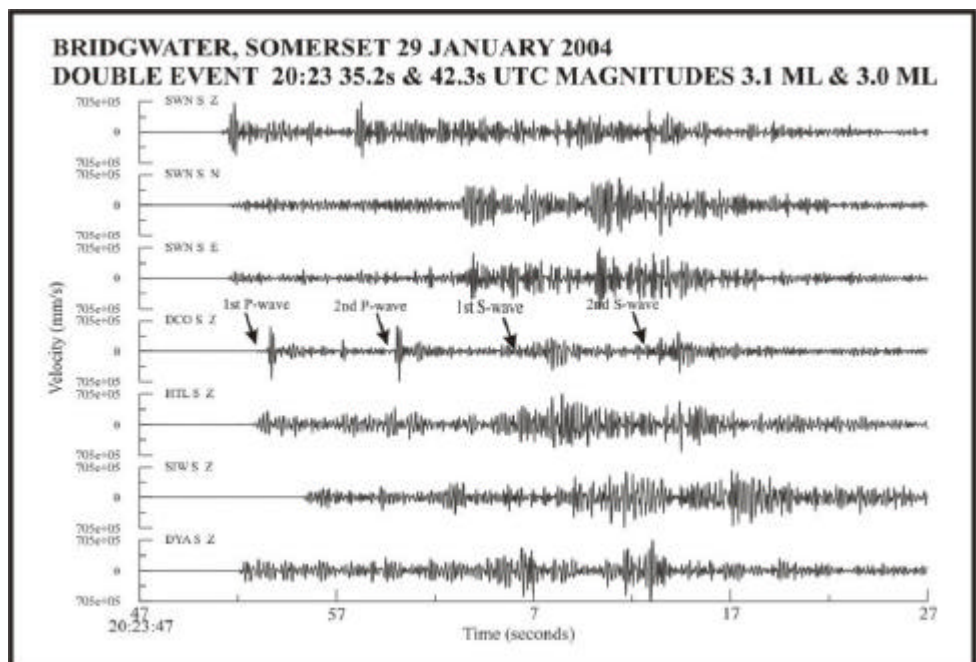
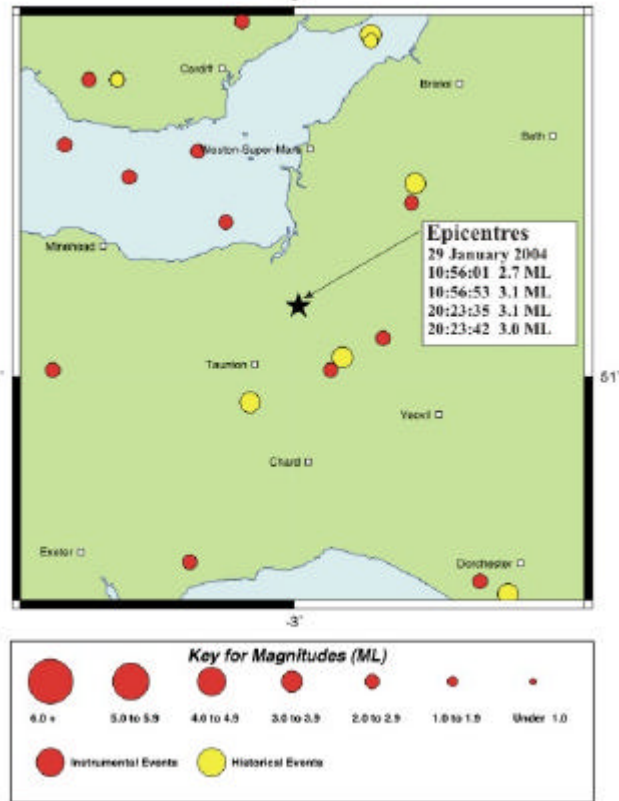
Earthquakes shake Somerset buildings

A series of earth tremors has been felt in Somerset. Edinburgh-based seismologists registered four tremors in and around Taunton on 29th January 2004, all measuring around 3 on the Richter scale. The first was at 1056 GMT; then one a minute later and the other two at 2023 GMT - just six seconds apart. No-one is believed to have been injured in any of the tremors, and there was no damage to any buildings.

An officer at Somerset Fire Brigade's headquarters, north-east of Taunton, said its floor had moved during what sounded like a "loud roll of thunder" in one of the later tremors.

He said: "I felt a tremor. The floor moved noticeably and there was a deep rumble like a loud roll of thunder for about eight seconds. The windows didn't move so we knew it wasn't Concorde. It was just the floor shaking."

A spokesman for Avon and Somerset Police added: "We received numerous telephone calls from as far apart as Cheddon Fitzpaine, Monkton Heathfield, Langport and Street, as well as the centre of Taunton."



Diving Swildon's Sumps

By Fiona Crozier

I had a fab trip down Swildons Hole on Monday 1st March. I went down and did Sumps 2 & 3 on air with Richard from the Cave Diving Group. It is amazing what lies beyond the sumps - the cave changes and the polished rock disappears, as the route is used much less.



I had been told quirky stories about the sumps, especially Sump 3 so was a little respectfully nervous before entering. I sat and put on my lead weights at the bucket before Sump 2 and rigged up my 3 litre bottle. My mind was wondering what lay in the sump before me. Was it really that bad?

I entered the sump nice and slowly with my tank and the guide line in hand. I gently pulled on the guide rope. There was no visibility in Sump 2, but my head-mounted lights gave a nice white glow. I missed the bit of rock on which most people hit their head, then popped up into the air bell, gave 3 tugs on the line and my buddy followed.



We then progressed through the air bell and duck on to Sump 3. This sump was much deeper than 2 but more enjoyable. We had good visibility on the way in and could see what lay inside the sump. I gently pulled at the guide rope and progressed through the sump. We then went on to have a look at Sump 4. The return journey was just as good. My mind turned to the quirky stories that had been told about Sump 3 and discovered they were unfounded. Looking forward to doing Sumps 4 5 & 6 on my next trip.

Go batty for special bricks

From Gardeners' World March 2004

Bat experts hope that hand-made bricks punched with bat-sized holes will help stop the mammal's decline. Bat bricks have cavities that mimic the crevices of a cave, and can be inserted into the walls of suitable buildings. A special 3-holed bat brick has been commissioned by the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trusts, which hopes to provide alternative roosting and hibernation places for this threatened mammal. Early signs show the bricks work, as some are already home to rare Natterer's and Daubenton's bats.

You can sponsor the Wildlife Trusts to install a bat brick for £10. Call 01727 858901 for details. If you would like to buy a bat brick, a 6-holed version is available from the Bat Conservation Trust, costing £9.51. Visit www.bats.org.uk to order.



Our man in Man

This is (part of) a reply Joan had from Bill Platt when she invited him to the 50th Dinner. Bill writes:

Unfortunately the 27th of March is at the end of a week where I am already away with a school on an adventure week and I cannot reasonably be away from home for another few days, even for such a great reason.

Please pass my regards and best wishes on to any of the "old uns". I still have happy memories of the weekends away, the caving, the Hunters, the games. I have few regrets about living in such a beautiful place as the Isle of Man but one of them is the distance between here and any possibility of getting to the Mendips and the caves. Of course age and a lack of physical exertion would make caving a more painful experience than it used to be.

Again thank you for thinking about me, sorry I can't be there but I hope everyone has a brilliant and safe time.

Annual Subs and Public Liability Insurance

This is a final reminder for those members who have not yet paid their Annual Subs or PLI. Every member of this club must pay a PLI premium of either £18 (if you intend to go caving and this is the only caving club you belong to) or £6 (if you do not intend to go caving or have paid a full premium through another club). Anyone who has not paid their Annual Subs and PLI premium by the 3rd April will be deemed to have lapsed membership.

Earwig in on the committee meeting held on 06/03/04

Bone Hole access. Now that the public liability insurance has been resolved, it is intended to discuss what to do next at the AGM.

Cottage heating. The storage heater in the library is wired in and working. That in the changing room is fitted but not yet wired in, and the upstairs heaters remain to be done.

PLI. The Group is now insured through the BCA scheme. All paid-up members are covered, in order to indemnify the committee. As a property-owning group, we have paid the additional premium required. And as an access body (Upper Flood, Bone Hole, and Pinetree Pot) we have paid again! Copies of the policies will be displayed in the Cottage.

Library shelves. Additional support is still needed to take the weight. More shelving is to be provided near the computer.



Tackle. More spreaders are to be purchased, and the oldest rope will be replaced.

Expenditure. Members are reminded that they must have authorisation for group purchases that are expected to be reimbursed.

Long stays. Members may stay at the cottage for a maximum of 2 weeks in any quarter. Longer stays must be approved by the committee in advance.

Payphone. 118 calls are to be barred from the cottage phone.

Cottage work weekend

With less than a month to go before the 50th dinner, we thought the cottage should be spruced up a little. So, on the March members' weekend, a group of us set to.

Simon Goddard had already rebuilt the wall on one side of the front gate a couple of weeks earlier. The other side still needs doing - the stones there are very large and heavy and will require more than one person to handle them.

Jacky Ankerman thoroughly hoovered the cottage. Yvonne Rowe and Cara Allison cleaned and sorted the glasses cupboard, crockery cupboards, pan shelves and de-cobwebbed and washed the kitchen walls. Lee Hawkswell pressure-hosed the showers. Joan Goddard polished the floors upstairs. Linda Milne, Martin Rowe, and Joan (again) tidied up outside - removing brambles, and leaves and branches from the beech tree (and having a huge bonfire with assistance from Richard Carey). Doug Harris climbed the tree to check it is not diseased - it isn't, and should last "another 50 years".

Others turned up at various times and did their bit - apologies if we have omitted to mention you.

In the evening, Jacky prepared a curry for us all and we spent the rest of the evening playing cottage games.

Has anyone any surplus pillowcases? We need about 15 to 20 to replace the existing pillowcases while they are being laundered. Leave them in the 6 room for collection, or give to Joan.



Above: Jacky's curry
Left: Doug inspecting the tree
Below left : Dave's version of the broom trick—trying to spin a plate on a broom handle
Below right: Ben tries the original broom trick



The virtual pub

By Martin Rowe

Now that Yvonne and I live in Cumbria, and we are so far from other members, we miss the regular Thursday-night MCG pub meets that we used to attend in Surrey. In fact, I am not sure that the group still has a regular weekly meeting any more?

What we needed was a virtual pub – a place where MCG members, and prospective members, can meet in cyberspace. So I created one. It is called mendip-caving-group and can be found at:

<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/mendip-caving-group/?yguid=177019568>

What is a Yahoo group? Yahoo Groups are free email groups services that allow you to easily create and join email groups. Email groups offer a convenient way to connect with others who share the same interests and ideas. I am the owner of the site, but only because Yahoo say that someone has to own it.

Who can join? Past, present and prospective members of MCG as long as they have an email address and Internet access. You can access the Yahoo Group from college, work, home, internet cafe or anywhere where you have Internet access.

What can you do? Email groups allow you to send email messages to a group of people using just one email address. No more typing in a list of addresses! You choose how to view your messages:

- . Receive individual messages.
- . Receive a daily digest that consolidates all emails into one full-text message.
- . View messages on the web site.
- . Select the "No-Mail" option to halt message delivery while you are out of town.

How do I join? You can join by visiting

<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/mendip-caving-group/?yguid=177019568>

However, it is easier to join by emailing me at mendip-caving-group-subscribe@yahoogroups.co.uk

You will receive a return message from the list moderator (me!) informing you that your membership has been accepted. From this point you will receive all group messages and you can post messages to the group by sending them to:

mendip-caving-group@yahoogroups.co.uk

What can I post on the website? This Yahoo Group will be un-moderated, i.e. you can post whatever you like. You can [Post](#) emails, [Chat](#) with other members, exchange [Files](#) and [Photos](#), follow [Links](#) to other sites, access a [Database](#), take part in [Polls](#), see details of [Members](#) and use the [Calendar](#)

What can't I do? Unfortunately, you cannot get a pint of Butcombe yet, but I am working on it.....

Guidelines for contributors

Articles for MCG News are always welcome, and will normally be printed in the next issue to prevent backlogs building up. Please try to keep articles to a maximum of about 1500 words (equivalent to 2 pages when reformatted for MCG News). Longer articles may have to be split and published over several issues, or as an Occasional Publication. Short snippets, **your photos**, cartoons, weblinks, gossip, news of members, address changes etc are always wanted - don't assume I already know! You can email me or post to me (see page 10 for details). If posting, a floppy is best, but typed and handwritten is also ok (and can usually be scanned). If you get it to me somehow, I'll get it into MCG News!!

Nordrach-on-where?

Duncan Horne found this reference to Nordrach in the London Review of Books, in an interesting essay about tuberculosis:

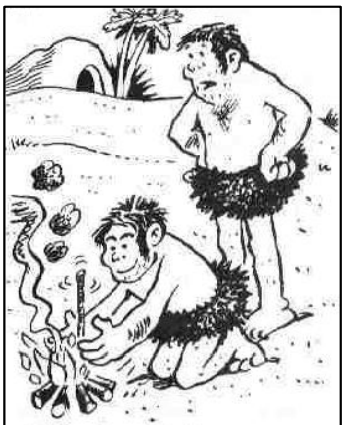
“The best that sanatoria such as Nordrach in the Black Forest and its British imitators, Nordrach-on-Mendip in Somerset and Nordrach-on-Dee in Aberdeenshire, did was to prevent their sequestered inmates from coughing bacilli over the public at large.”

I never knew we had a namesake in Scotland! A quick search of the web revealed that Nordrach-on-Dee is in fact Banchory Hospital — an Edwardian, Bavarian-style, timber sanatorium constructed in 1900 when TB was the biggest killer in the UK, with Somerset Maugham among its many patients. The building featured in the recent BBC series “Restoration” - more at:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/programmes/restoration/property/banchory_prop.shtml



Banchory Hospital



I see you have invented pollution!

Swildon's Hole MCG Commemorative Trip – Friday 26th March

We are planning a trip down Swildon's Hole 1950's style. The trip will be to Sump 1 and back, but there will be options to only go as far as the 20' or via the 40' if you wish. We will need to start gathering on Priddy Green at 1.30pm.

The press have been invited along for a photo opportunity at 2.00pm. 1950's style caving gear would be a bonus (with of course wetsuits/fleecy's underneath!). Any old props such as stinky's, old style helmets, rope, old work boots etc would make for a good photo. Please don't forget your £1 goodwill fee for access.

If you are planning to take part, please let Lee Hawkswell know

2004 MCG AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Mendip Caving Group will be held on Saturday 27th March 2004 starting at 10:30 am in Back Room of the Hunters Lodge Inn.

2004 MCG Dinner

The coach will pick up from the following points:

6.15pm Wells Bus station
6.25pm Hunters Lodge Inn
6.35pm Nordrach Cottage

Return trip: 1am dropping off at the same points as above.

Cost £5 per person. Please book your seat on the list which will be on the notice-board in the cottage.

My first visit to South Wales 1954

By Tony Knibbs, from his 1954 logbooks

On Saturday 18 September 1954 I must have got up at a truly unearthly hour to catch a train from Walton-on-Thames to Waterloo and thence to Victoria to board a coach for Cheltenham. I arrived at 03h15 to meet Malcolm, then we took a coach for Merthyr Tydfil at 04h00. At that time Malcolm was stationed at RAF Little Rissington in Gloucestershire; I was awaiting a November call-up for two years of National Service. The streets of Merthyr were echoing to the sound of miners' boots as they went to work on that still, cloudless blue morning. We went into a café to decide our next move. The "plan" was to spend a week camping and caving, either at Ystradfellte or Glyntawe. Probably the only information we had would have been very basic indeed, perhaps based on data obtained from "British Caving" (published in 1953) in which the photographs alone were enough to whet the appetite for South Wales. Glyntawe was decided upon and we duly caught the train to Craig-y-Nos (Penwyllt). The journey through the Brecon Beacons via the towns of Brecon and Sennybridge was magical in such beautiful weather. We arrived at Craig-y-Nos station at midday and made our way downhill towards Craig-y-Nos. The first likely place to camp was the Greithig farm next to OFD entrance. We obtained permission to put up our (Malcolm's) tent on a grassy knoll just across the narrow approach road between the farm and the river Tawe. That evening we crossed the river near the Adelina Patti hospital to look at the Dan-yr-Ogof resurgence. On the way back we called in at the old SWCC HQ at Pen-y-Bont. Here we met Noel Dilly and other SWCC members and obtained some detailed information about our impressive new limestone surroundings.

The next day SWCC members took us to the recently discovered Tunnel Cave. The low horizontal entrance passage contained some water but gave no clue to the size or type of cave we were entering. The passage took on the form of a rift before opening out into the immense Davy Price's Hall. We continued between the sand and mudbanks enjoying the vastness of everything and eventually reached a cross-joint, at which we turned left towards Cascade Aven. We climbed the Cascade and were lucky enough to find about 200 ft of new passage terminating at a circular grotto beyond a very tight squeeze at which we tried some clearance work in order to pass. At this point I was reduced to my underwear; the squeeze would not go, so we reversed a tricky climb and made our way out of the cave. As we were still in our caving clothes we decided to explore the nearby Dan-yr-Ogof resurgence cave. With one SWCC member we followed the river upstream to a sump. On the return journey I had my first underground swim when I missed a foothold; after exploring a couple of side passages we left the cave and returned to Pen-y-Bont to change our clothes.

On Tuesday 20 September Malcolm and I joined Noel Dilly in a surveying trip into Downey's Cave, some 200yds north of the OFD entrance. The first 200 ft of the cave took the form of small solution tubes with some dry formations. Bailing a "nasty little pool" and passing a very tight squeeze led into a roomier bedding cave with a pleasant gour floor and some good stalagmites. The passage sloped down to a large gour holding back a shallow pool fed by a small trickle from a tight squeeze in liquid mud. Noel informed us that the squeeze connected with OFD and was passable (it didn't look very inviting). I inserted myself into this wet rathole and quickly found difficulty in breathing as my lower body effectively dammed the trickle to produce a pool just deep enough to cover my mouth and nose. Luckily the squeeze soon tended upwards and I struggled up the last couple of feet out into the larger passage in OFD where Noel (having exited Downey's and quickly dashed into nearby OFD) greeted me and I was pleased not to have to make the return squeeze!

Tuesday started with a shopping trip. We then walked up to the quarry and explored a couple of small caves and went walking on the "millstone grit" above Penwyllt. We then walked northwards towards Pwll Byfre. We never located Pwll Byfre itself but noted "many likely digs" We followed the Afon Llynfell stream down to the railway line which we walked along back to Penwyllt.

Tuesday 21 September was to be the much-anticipated trip into OFD with a party

of SWCC. Sitting outside the tent, finishing breakfast, we heard the unmistakable crunch of hob-nailed caving boots on the road leading to the Greithig. We expected the cavers to stop by the campsite, but they continued without pause. Oh, dear! No guides! Luckily the cave was unlocked when we reached the entrance, so we decided to press on regardless. We soon found Pluto's Bath and reached the main streamway. We explored upstream until we reached the waterfall of Waterfall Series, then turned round and walked downstream to where we had noticed a chain hanging down the lefthand wall. This looked like an obvious way on, so we shinned up it into the Upper Series. A hands-and-knees crawl through Lowe's Passage brought us facing a gritty climb of about 50 ft up jammed boulders leading out into the start of the Rawl Series. Things were now getting really interesting! No route-finding difficulties were experienced because we had no idea where we were, and we simply followed our noses to reach Pi Chamber. The feeling of being in a huge system was now firmly established in our minds. Probably having stopped for some refreshment we noticed that there was a passage in the lefthand wall with the words "Escape Route" marked in chalk above it. The dry series of big chambers had seemed to be endless, so we followed this alternative. Eventually we came out in the roof of the Main Streamway and found the fixed wire-rope handline at Bolt Traverse. Beyond the traverse we simply followed what looked to be a beaten track up through the Dug-Out, passing connections back to the Main Streamway on our left (so we at least, knew that we were on the correct side of the stream to reach the entrance). Finally climbing down out of Toast Rack Passage we soon found ourselves back at the entrance. That evening we went down to Pen-y-Bont to hear that the SWCC party had simply forgotten all about us in the morning; they apologised and offered to take us another time. We explained that we had already had a very good trip in the cave; then described the route as best we could (I don't think we really knew many of the names of places we had passed by; apart from the Escape Route). Our description was met by what Noel described as a monstrous hush in the roomful of SWCC members. Apparently the route we had followed was thought too difficult without a leader for ordinary mortals. We had earned our beer!

The following day dawned cloudy. Our first objective was Craig-y-Nos Quarry Cave. It was reached by an easy climb up the quarry face and consisted mainly of small passages and bedding-planes and was extremely tight in places. SWCC had given us a survey from which we located all of the too-tight dead ends and found them to be just as described! Since Dan-yr-Ogof was within walking distance we decide to continue our caving day with visits to Ogof-yr-Esgyrn and Step cave in the cliffs above the show cave complex. Both were found to be small and dry, but connected via an extremely tight bedding-plane. The resultant thirst was slaked at the Gwynne Arms.

Friday 24 September was our last day in the area and it was just possible to squeeze in a visit to Pwll Pant Mawr with SWCC tackle and guides. We enjoyed the spectacular entrance pitch and the impressive dimensions of the stream passage. We were shown the Chapel high up on the lefthand side of the main passage reached by a long scramble up a boulder slope; the abundant helictites made this the most beautiful grotto we had ever seen. We continued on down the vast main passage to where the stream disappeared between gloomy mud-banks into a dismal sump. On the return we were led into a delightful series of grottoes and passages where Malcolm had a mild fall while attempting a rather delicate climb to reach above a ledge on a shaley wall. No damage was done and we continued out of the cave, taking a quick look upstream from the entrance pitch, as far as a waterfall.

This trip had fittingly concluded our holiday and we agreed that this had been yet another superb trip. Our introduction to South Wales had been a great success! We returned to our campsite and packed up our kit; Bill Clarke had agreed to give us a lift back to Merthyr; this had made the Pant Mawr trip possible by saving the time otherwise needed to catch the train from Craig-y-Nos. It also avoided the need to walk up the hill to the station carrying full rucksacks. It was two very contented cavers who caught the coach back to Cheltenham that evening!

Burrington Challenge Sunday 28th March

There are 43 caves in Burrington Combe. How many of them can you find?

The Burrington Challenge will take the form of a treasure hunt to find the entrances. I imagine that most people will know where Goatchurch Cavern is but how about Trats Crack, Elephant Hole or Twin Tweens?

No caving kit required although map reading skills might be helpful. Maps will be provided and the challenge can be done individually or in teams.

There will be prizes for those who find the most in the shortest time but the greatest reward will be to find them.

Start time from 9am. Groups/individuals will set off at 15 minute intervals and the route will take from 2-3 hours to complete. It would be helpful, but not essential, if entrants could register their team and start time at the cottage on Saturday. Further information can be obtained from Richard Carey.

Blackmoor Shaft

Also known as Blackmoor Swallet, this is the large open shaft near Upper Flood. Somerset County Council have recently fitted a grill to restrict access. A CSCC padlock has been fitted, and the CSCC key is kept in the MCG tackle store. MCG retain the digging rights.

Blackmoor log

You are reminded that you are required to complete the Blackmoor Log (located in the tackle store) when visiting Blackmoor Shaft or Upper Flood.