



Number 323
October 2004

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

Tuscany 31 July to 14 August 2004

by Roy Kempston

All those readers with a good memory (i.e. one that has survived the onslaught of repeated doses of alcohol over the years) may remember that two years ago I produced a stunning article for the MCG newsletter that detailed two visits to showcaves made during our family holiday to Western Ireland! As that article was met with such widespread 'appreciation', I have been encouraged to detail the family's visit this year to Tuscany!

For this family holiday we (Fiona, Ellen, Neil and Nicholas) decided to visit Tuscany, (that's not strictly true – Fiona decided and I and the others went along with the decision). I apologise now that this article also does not contain any mention of real caving, but we did visit a showcave. It's rather difficult to go on a two weeks holiday by a charter flight, followed with five in a hire car and have room for caving gear as well (anyway that remains my excuse!). Note for all those who get bored easily, the cave information starts at the asterix (*) below.

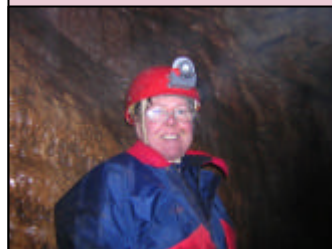
Once we had decided to go to Tuscany, a long time was spent researching the area that we wanted to visit – Tuscany is quite large with an area of nearly 9000 square miles, so there were no plans to cover every part of it in two weeks. We finally settled on the north of the region where there were mountains including the limestone Apuan Alps, which produce the best marble in the world ('a Triassic limestone recrystallised under the pressure of folding movements'). The villa that we finally selected was about 75km north of Pisa airport, but more importantly it was about 300m up in the hills, which provided cool nights (and allowed ideal conditions to sleep off the effects of any alcohol sampling that may have occurred during the evening!).

The patio was at the front of the villa and at its edge there was a drop of about 6m to the mountain road below, and on our first evening at the villa we were relaxing on the patio following a meal as dusk started. As we sat admiring the views we became aware of 'things' flying around, which on closer inspection were bats – these were feeding on insects above the road. We went and stood on the edge of the drop and watched at least 20 bats feeding as close as arms length away, a wonderful display of aerobatics as the insects ducked and weaved. The bats reappeared every evening just for our enjoyment! This was also a good indication that there were roosts nearby.

* After a day to relax following the journey we prepared to visit the Grotta del Vento (The Wind Cave), which was about 15km from the villa. The drive was very interesting on the narrow winding roads that we had to share with car driving Italians and large lorries loaded with massive lumps of marble. The views from the valley gradually opened up to the limestone mountains of Mt Pania del Croce (1858m) and Mt Pania Secca (1709m), with the cave at 627m. The showcave is interesting (if not unique) in that you have to select from the 1, 2, or 3 hours tours – these generally cover three separate parts. The first part which is generally flat with many formations, the second having a deep 'abyss' which down slope gets to the small river, and the third with large chambers and a long vertical shaft.

Being young, fit and hard cavers (well one of us is young, and between us we make up at least one fit person, and also thought we once knew a hard caver!) we elected for the 3 hour trip and had our €17 tickets annotated by hand with 'GB' and waited at the entrance for our guide. We were joined by two ladies whose tickets were also GBed, but they turned out to be from the Netherlands and hence spoke good English. Our tour guide was a lady who spoke immaculate English, even with

From the Editor



It was a real treat to have the Hidden Earth Conference in Kendal, so close to home. There were eight of us from MCG which is not a bad turnout when you consider how far some of them had to come. As always, it was a good opportunity to catch up and socialise with cavers from other parts of the country and to find out what they have been up to both at home and abroad.

It was a good weekend filled with the usual workshops, competitions, trade stands and lectures (see pages 7-9), and it was lovely to be able to go home to our own bed at the end of each day, especially as the campsite (farmer's field) was a good half-hour's walk away and it poured with heavy rain most of the weekend. HE 2005 is on Mendip, so hopefully lots more MCG members can take part - see page 9 for more details. *Yvonne*

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MCG doings

Cottage warden As Wayne is no longer on email, messages for the cottage warden are now routed to secretary@m-c-g.org.uk

Hello

Andrew Brander and Andrew Gallon have been accepted as probationary members.

Goodbye

Mike Gould's membership has lapsed (due to non-payment of subs)

Charterhouse Cave

Richard Carey is now a leader for Charterhouse. Charlie Alison is our other leader. Charterhouse is noted for its fine formations.

Can anyone smell gas?



If my memory is correct, 31.12.04 will be the 25th anniversary of the explosion which destroyed Nordrach Cottage. And we've nearly completed the rebuild!

the caving terms. We had to wait for the one hour trip to get ahead and were then lead into the natural cave entrance and at about 10m in met a solid steel door. When this was opened by hydraulic rams the most almighty outward wind ensued (hence 'the Wind Cave') and was eventually stopped when the door was closed again, (a phenomena caused by two entrances at different heights).

A 60m to 70m length of downward sloping passage then leads to a sump, which opens depending on the weather conditions, but is now bypassed by a short length of blasted passage.

The photo, below, shows the sump (siphon) with, in the distance, the start of the last hour of the three hours trip – of which more later. A large uphill gallery follows, passing the Crystal Lake, Pendant Room, Pink Chimney, and Monument Room to reach the top of the Giant's Abyss.



'The initial siphon' from 'Discover Garfagnana' published by Grotta del Vento.

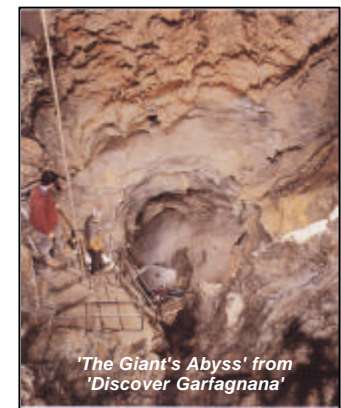
This is the second part and goes down at about 70° for 45m to the Hall of Voices, and is followed by some low parts that involve a lot of bending to reach the point where three streams join to form the Acheronte river which is followed for quite a while to the inevitable sump.



Fiona wearing a bright white jumper and standing by a particularly white formation in the Crystal Gallery



The Pink Chimney' from 'Discover Garfagnana'



'The Giant's Abyss' from 'Discover Garfagnana'

The return from this point to the start of the third part is up a 'path' that clings to the side of the passage, the latter being covered by numerous grey formations 'which remind us of miniature pine forests, a procession of monks, underwater vegetation and groups of mushrooms'. These appeared to be made of mud, and up to about 5cm high. The photo, right, is one of mine – the organisers allow photos to be taken for personal use.



The next part of the cave is different to the rest and is reached through some decorated passages and rooms, the last having many decorations. Climbing a few steps brings you to the bottom of a 90m shaft –' the Shaft of Infinity' which has very few formations. The path climbs up the side of the shaft via natural and man made bridges with a very impressive view to the bottom at about 40m. From here the trip goes into 'the Hall of Infinity' with a fine vaulted ceiling 50m above.

This is the end of the trip, but the path back down the shaft is very interesting – ask Fiona ! It was quite a shock to the system when leaving the cave at 11°C and instantly being in the high 30s – this demanded a sit down with some food and a drink, so it was lucky that there was a good restaurant opposite the cave complex.

This was a very good 3 hour trip to a well kept showcave, and well worth the money, with a very well informed guide. For those who are still awake (and want to know more) there is a good website at <http://www.grottadelvento.com/>, which has lots of history, a cave guide and photos as well as links to show caves in the world (very useful to any readers who have become armchair cavers !).



The Wind Cave is open every day from the 1st Apr - 30th Sep; Sat and Sun only in Oct and Nov and Sun and Public Holidays during the remaining period.

Direzione "Grotta del Vento"
I-55020 Fornovalasco (LU)
tel. +39-583-722024 fax 722053

MCG's 50th Anniversary Summer Celebrations

by Ann Pittman

Friday 2nd July started by being wet and windy, not the type of weather needed to commence the 50th Celebrations, especially as the first activity was to be a barbeque in Netherwood at the site of the old cottage. Late morning we (Bryan and I) met up with Linda at the cottage and a few (Jenny and Mike Lovell, Bob Templeman, Bryan Pittman, Linda Milne and myself) commenced the task of putting up a small marquee in the garden. This was not easy due to a gusty wind, the tent requiring the erection of poles around the exterior and down the middle, and the number of poles to be erected exceeding the number of hands available. Eventually after much cursing and hilarity the task was accomplished.

Neither Linda, Bryan nor myself had inspected the site at Netherwood that day but we were informed by Mike and Jenny Lovell that the paths leading to the site were extremely muddy. This, the threat of rain and that some members seemed to be viewing a trip to the nearest hostelry to be a better proposition, prompted a decision to abandon the barbeque at Netherwood and to have the barbeque at the cottage. A gazebo was erected, increasing the covered area and the food laid out in the marquee. About 7.30ish the barbeque commenced with about 40 people attending.

Later that night when everyone had supped and dined, the quiz (courtesy of Tony Knibbs (thanks Tony)) commenced after everyone present had divided into impromptu teams of 4 - 5 people. The quiz was in 4 sections, UK Caves, General, Music & Caving Songs, and Caving Literature. By this time the caving cottage lounge was full with very little space left, even for people standing. The quizmaster was myself and I could have done with a microphone but we managed. The quiz was accompanied with much jollity and backchat adding to the atmosphere. The third section on caving songs was an area where I thought that the older members may have had an edge on the slightly younger ones. However, I had not taken into consideration the help that was to be provided by John Evans who by this time was very 'happy' (being diplomatic) and used each of the questions as a cue for the rendering of the appropriate caving song, therefore supplying the answers to all present. This proved to be a very fitting and hilarious end to the quiz, which was won by Tim Francis's team who collected a small trophy now on display in the caving cabinet.

Saturday commenced with a communal breakfast for twenty five people, which was cooked by a small team with everyone else mucking in to help wash and clear up.

During the day most people went their own way, a small party (Norma, Malcolm, Agine Evans and Bob Templeman) visited Wookey Hole.

50th anniversary

A 'Scrap book' containing copies of all the flyers, press releases, competitions, guests lists, Auction list, etc from the March weekend has been produced by Jacky and a copy is available in the library.

Work weekend – it's an inside job

A work weekend will be held over the February members' weekend to tackle some of the indoor tasks. It will be followed by a communal curry. You don't have to be 'Handy Andy' to attend - the more helping hands the better.

The beech tree - r.i.p.

Regrettably, the large beech tree outside the library is to be felled. Worries over its health have been expressed by a number of people including our own resident tree expert, Doug Harris. It has since been independently assessed by the local council Tree Officer who has recommended that it be taken down. The tree has a fungal infection and has suffered root damage which has rendered it dangerous. The small tree next to it may also be removed as a measure to restrict any spread of the fungus to the other beech trees along the avenue.

Beer and skittles

This year we went back to one of our old haunts – The New Inn, Priddy. The turn out to the Beer and Skittles seems to be improving each year. With 30 – 40 people turning up we didn't have much room for the bowling, but that didn't seem to matter! By the end of the evening people seeming more intent on the socialising than the skittles. Can anyone remember which team won, Swildons' or Thrupe?

Digging...

As reported in MCG322, Tim and Peat recently broke through at the dig in the Red Room to find "Golden Chamber". Quite a relief really as it



has taken 19 years of digging to get through the choke, yet only six trips were made to this particular spot. Digging at the end of Upper Flood has never been popular as you are soaked to the skin by the ducks just before you arrive. Coupled with a nice cold draught, this means volunteers are thin on the ground, especially in the winter. Spoil removal from the chamber will be extremely arduous as it will have to be hauled through the boulder choke and into the Red Room.

... and lidding

After many years of being on the 'to do' list, Bone Hole Cave finally has a secure entrance. A volunteer workforce comprising Richard Carey, Doug Harris, Keith Knight, Brian Snell and myself, along with support (tea, food etc!) from Jacky Ankerman and Joan Goddard set off to achieve this on Saturday 12th June.

I had prepared some shuttering for the concrete lid, and we spent most of the day drilling reinforcing bars into the surrounding rock walls. Just as we were about to pat ourselves on the back for making good progress, the hinge mechanism on the metal door securing the cave entrance fell off because it was badly rusted!

We went back on the Sunday to mix and lay the concrete which was hard work, but again went well. Another trip took place the following Saturday to drill new hinges onto the door. I'm relieved to say the job is now finished and a new chain and padlock have been installed. A big thanks must go to everyone who helped make this finally happen!
Lee Hawkswell

The evening saw the commencement of the barn dance at Chewton Mendip village hall. The intention had been to have the barn dance at Priddy village hall but the venue had to be changed when it was decided to close Priddy Hall to repair the roof. Chewton Mendip has been used many times in the past for activities so this venue fitted in nicely with the 50th celebrations. Seventy five people attended and music was provided by a mix of the back room band joined by Don Vosper and John Puddock. When the first dance commenced so many people got up to dance, for a moment I thought the hall was not big enough. However all dances brought up a good number to dance and very little cajoling was needed to fill the floor. The band was excellent and Bevis a very good caller. Food was included in the price of the ticket and was supplied by Sue Gray. The catering was superb, especially the desserts, and all tastes catered for. Joan had been collecting raffle prizes for some weeks and I think we must have had 50 good prizes. Because we had so many, a decision was made to draw the raffle during the interval whilst everyone was eating. This proved very successful and succeeded in wasting no dancing time. We were also entertained during the interval to a solo by one of the band (fiddler) and two songs from Wayne and John in Phil Ingold's memory. All too soon the evening came to an end; time to clear up and catch the coach or car back to our respective abodes. I think I can speak for all present that it was probably one of the best barn dances that the club has had.

Sunday morning commenced, again with a communal breakfast, then people either went their own way, went for a walk (organised by Joan) or a cycle ride.

I think the general opinion of all who attended the weekend was that it was very successful and all I can add is to thank all who attended, all those who helped - whether in a small or big way - to make it a success, and to apologize to anyone I have left out who participated in anyway that I should have included.



14th INTERNATIONAL
CONGRESS of SPELEOLOGY
August 21-28-2005



The Hellenic Speleological Society and the Hellenic Federation of Speleology invite you to participate in the 14th UIS International Congress of Speleology from August 21-28, 2005 in Athens, Greece.

Congress will include scientific, exploration, entertainment, and social activities as well as paper presentations, exploration reports, caving techniques, speleo equipment, films, media, art, and more. There will be meetings, conferences, exhibitions, photo contests, leisure events, tourist visits, and many excursions to explore and tour caves, archaeological sites and other attractions. And of course August is the perfect month to combine holidays on the beaches or the mountains with caving all over Greece and in neighbouring countries. With more than 10,000 recorded caves, Greece still has many unexplored that are awaiting eager speleologists.

Register early to take advantage of reductions and stay informed of all the activities. The Organizing Committee and all Greek speleologists await you in 2005 for the best Congress ever! Details at <http://www.14ics-athens2005.gr/english.php>

Log book extracts, April 2004 to May 2004

03.04.04 Burrington Coombe 8-cave day. (Lee Hawkswell, Jacky Ankerman, Richard Carey, Tim Francis). No one really on form so we went to pick off some of the rarer sites in Burrington - **Milliars Quarry Cave, Avelines, Sidcot (TF & Lee), Whitcombe's Hole (Jacky and Richard), Tunnel Cave (Jacky & Richard)**. Met up again at **Twin Tweens**, then **Foxes Hole** and a look at dig site in **Goon's Hole** - draughting well. [RC]

04.04.04 Put extra layer of insulation in library loft – thank God that's off the minutes! [TF]

15.05.04 Longwood/August (Fiona Crozier + Bracknell CG) Down through Longwood as far as the cave goes, then came up the chimneys where the water rains upon you giving you a nice wet mixture to breathe. The S-bend is still a bugger. A lovely trip. All the nice bits seem to be found at the end of the cave. [FC]

16.05.04 Swildon's Hole (Fiona Crozier + 2). Went down to Swildon's Sump 9 and left a 3ltr cylinder for my next trip into 12. Dived through Sump 1,2,3,4,5. Sump 6 proved quite interesting. Followed the guideline and came to what seemed to be a dead end so backed up a bit - and found the rope had caught a bit on a rock. So after freeing it, found the way on; this sump was quite an undertaking as bits of rock were sticking out everywhere. Sump 7 was not sumped. You come to a lined T junction. One must go left into the letterbox bypass. Sump 8 was tight. Between Sumps 7 & 8 there is a mountain to climb - It was difficult with the cylinders. Made it to Sump 9 and placed a full 3Ltr ready for my next trip into 12. I really enjoyed this trip but it was very tiring – it takes everything one has but is well worth the effort. Went in cave at 7am and out at 2pm. [FC]

22.05.04 St Cuthbert's Swallet (Julie Hesketh + 4 Grampian SG). A very sporting trip to most places – Railway Tunnel and to Sump 2 and back. Very dry, excellent fun. Out into the BEC sunshine and a wake and tree plant for Jok Orr. [JH]

23.05.04 Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink (Julie Hesketh + 3 Grampian SG). Tourist trip around the whole cave. Very impressive, especially the pitch - not wide or spectacular but 35ft deep and slopy. My kind of cave. [JH]

23.05.04 Goatchurch (Bill Chadwick, Hugh Chadwick, Joan Goddard). First trip for Hugh – down to Water Chamber. Hugh and Bill looked into various nooks and crannies. Nice little trip. [JG]

22-23.05.04 - Wales. OFD II (Tim F, Geoff Beale, Brenda Wybrow, Louisa Minahan, Richard Carey) Looked around the Entrance Series and went to gate leading to The Columns. Saw the Judge, Trident, Salubrious Passage etc. Saw various areas of a possible new form of mud formation/sediment (called "Tonkarren"??) – we await the BCRA Conference to find out more! This was Louisa's first Welsh cave and she was very impressed by the size of it.

OFD I (Tim, Geoff, Richard, Louisa). After rather a lot of gentle nagging from Geoff ("I do want to see my wife at some point this weekend") we arrived at the entrance. The cave was fantastic. It was great fun splashing around in the streamway (although it's definitely ankle twisting territory with all those sudden, unexpected potholes). I have never seen rock like it, the white streaks running through it are particularly memorable. I liked crossing the four pots on the metal poles. Good fun! Thank you Geoff. [Louisa M]

29.05.04 - Derbyshire (Tim, Louisa, James Minahan, Mark Singleton). Carlswark Cavern. Beginner's trip for Louisa's brother and Mark. Bumped into a couple of climbers going in the entrance using a rope like Arindres (?read. We were only underground for an hour or two – Mark enjoyed it, James didn't. [TF]

30.05.04 Giant's Hole - round trip (Tim F, Louisa M). Surprisingly quiet for a bank holiday. It's now £2 per person and you leave the money in the lectern in the car park. Low water levels so we made easy progress to the traverse. Louisa's first traverse and she was fine. Peered over Geology Pot and then headed out via Ghost Rift. It has to be 6 or 7 years since I did the round trip so my navigation wasn't at its best, but we found the Windpipe without too many wrong turns. Water levels very low. Back up the ladder which was a bit of a struggle for our new caver – her first free-hanging ladder. [TF]

MCG doings

Nov 5/6/7th Mendip

Caving trips: Various routes in GB Cavern on Saturday. Contact [Richard Carey](#) or meet at the cottage at 10.00 am Saturday

Social event: Slovenia theme, Saturday. Hopefully, there will be a slide show of the MCG summer meet in Slovenia, followed by a meal of traditional Slovenian foods. The menu is likely to be Mushroom Soup, Pork or Venison (according to availability), apple pie and cream. The meal to be paid for before consumption! Amount will be enough to cover costs. More details from [Joan Goddard](#) (meal) and Louisa Minahan (slide show).

Bonfire night & fireworks: Bring your own fireworks to the cottage Saturday evening.

Training: John Crowsley has organised a basic caving skills weekend. (This event is FULLY BOOKED.)

Dec 3/4/5th Mendip

Social event: There will be a cottage-based Christmas dinner, details from [Linda Milne](#)

Glossary of caving terms

Re-reading *Beneath the Mountains* by David Rose recently reminded me of his *Glossary of Caving Terms*. I have printed a selection below. If anyone has any other definitions for caving terms, I'd like to hear them.

Cave: Latin for beware

Choke (1): Device used to start cold vans

Choke (2): blockage of boulders or mud in a cave

Choke (3): passive verb, as in 'the cave is choked with yellow vans'.

Doline: Depression in limestone which may have cave at bottom. Or may not.

Free Hang (1): Ideal position for the rope to fall down the pitch, free of all the walls

Free Hang (2): a penalty imposed by Spanish courts at no cost

Hanger: Device enabling a caver to descend the cave

Hangover: Device enabling caver to avoid descending the cave

Jammer: Device which will slide up the rope but not down.

Jumar: Obsolete form of jammer now used only by climbers.

Karren: Yugoslavian geologist's girlfriend's name, now applied to bleak expanses of cave-bearing limestone

Pitch: Vertical drop, pitch black when peered over

Pothole: Vertical type of cave (see cave, above).

Resurgence: Spring where underground water re-emerges into day-light except at night.

Rift: Tall thin passage with or without a floor; a disagreement between members of the expedition.

Wetsuit: Rubber suit that keeps you warm by a thin layer of water next to the skin, and also keeps you cool by a large number of holes.

GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY FOR MCG

THE Mendip Caving Group has celebrated its fiftieth anniversary this year. The main event took place in March with a weekend of activities culminating in a formal dinner held in the grand Jacobean surroundings of Coombe Lodge, Blagdon. Formed by four cavers in 1954, the club started its life as a London-based group. Fifty years on, the club owns a cottage at Charterhouse-on-Mendip and has members from throughout the UK, as well as abroad. A lot of effort went into tracking down early members, many of whom attended the dinner; among the 140 guests present were cavers who had not met for more than thirty years, with some coming from as far afield as Brazil and Canada. Malcolm Cotter, one of the founders and still an active member, took part in a 1950s-style trip down Swildon's Hole. Fifteen cavers donned the gear of the time - carbide lamps, woolly jumpers, boilersuits, hobnailed boots, rope belts and some original paper helmets - to re-enact a



The MCG in Priddy for the 50th anniversary trip to Swildon's Hole
Photo: Ross Laird

Julie Hesketh and Cara Allison with a Slovenian guide during the Mendip CG 2004 trip
Photo: Yvonne Rowe



caving trip the way it used to be. The day after, the action continued with a light-hearted challenge to locate the cave entrances of Burrington Coombe — over 43 in total. Celebrations resumed in the summer, with family events including a barbecue, quiz, walking, cycling and a barn dance at Chewton Mendip Village Hall. The final organised occasion was a club trip to Slovenia to sample the delights of caving in this classical karst. The trip catered for all abilities and was the perfect choice for cavers young and old as the region offers wild, guided and tourist caves, all within an hour's drive of our base camp at Laze near Ljubljana. Although the formal celebrations have now concluded, a special publication is planned and sales of commemorative mugs and T-shirts are available as a lasting reminder. The year has been an extremely successful one for the MCG and has resulted in renewed friendships — some past members have even rejoined the club. The MCG, 1954—2004, welcomes enquiries from cavers and the clubhouse remains available to non-members. Further information can be found at: www.m-c-g.fsnet.co.uk Report: Linda Milne (Article from *Descent*)

Divers plunge to new depths in Wookey Hole

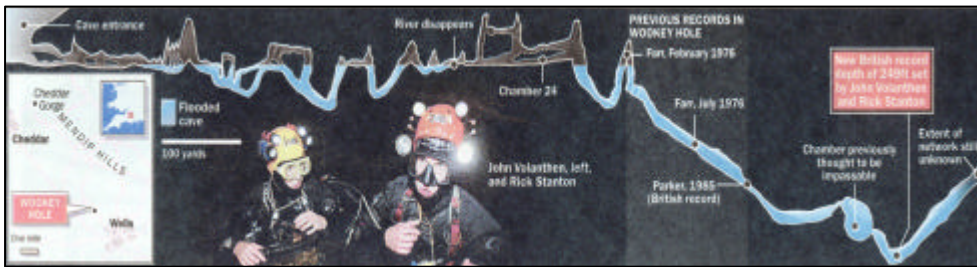
by Simon de Bruxelles, *The Times*, 30 September, 2004



Two cave divers have set a new British depth record after moving teacheast-sized boulders blocking a passage at Wookey Hole in Somerset. John Volanthen and Rick Stanton ventured more than a mile into the caverns to a depth of 249ft (75.9m), 18ft deeper than the previous record, which was set in Speedwell Cavern in Derbyshire last year. The divers used a slimline re-breathing system of their own design to break the record. They plan more expeditions in their attempt to discover the elusive "Chamber 26" beyond those that they have already explored. Mr Stanton, a 43-year-old firefighter from Coventry who was involved in the rescue of 13 British cavers in Mexico last March, said: "This is not really about the depth, it's about finding the chamber. We are already planning our next dives to see how far we can take it."

Wookey Hole was carved through the Mendips by the River Axe. The previous depth record for the cave was set by Robert Parker in 1985. He got to 220ft before his way was blocked. Mr Stanton and Mr Volanthen, an IT engineer from Bristol, developed a rebreather unit to enable them to stay under water longer. Such units add oxygen to exhaled air to re-cycle it and are usually bulky backpacks, so the divers developed a body-hugging version, essential for tight passages. This extended their dive time to five hours, long enough to find a way around the obstacles that had stopped Mr Parker. Last Tuesday, during their sixth dive into the cave since June, they moved several large boulders using inflatable bags. Mr Stanton said: "I managed to find a very small tunnel which basically led past the blockage. Once we passed it a tunnel opened up and we were able to go another 20ft." Mr Volenthen said: "We hope now that the tunnel will start going back up towards the surface. There is a chance then that Chamber 26 will be a dry, air-filled cavern."

Wookey Hole was the scene of Britain's first cave dive in 1935. The dive, using an old-fashioned copper helmet and full deep-sea diving gear, was also the first live outside broad-cast by the BBC. As the diver, a man called Balcombe, ran short of air, he shouted at the men operating the pump above: "Pump, you bastards, pump!" His outburst caused the BBC to pull the plug on the broadcast, leaving listeners wondering what had happened.



Rabies found in bat

A bat found in Surrey has tested positive for a strain of rabies which can infect animals and people. The animal carried European Bat Lyssavirus, which is closely linked to the classic rabies virus. Three people known to have handled the bat are now receiving medical treatment.

The bat was found by a member of the public in Staines last month and tested at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency in Weybridge, Surrey.

The EBLV virus is common in bats across Northern Europe but only two other cases had previously been discovered in the UK - in 1996 and 2002 when David McRae, from Angus, Scotland, died after contracting rabies from a bat bite.

Initial tests showed that the strain of virus in the new case was closely linked to the previous examples, according to the Health Protection Agency and DEFRA.

In February, scientists found bats posed only a minor threat of passing rabies on to humans. A study by the Scottish Executive, Scottish Natural Heritage and Defra found it is rare to contract the killer disease from the mammals. The report revealed just 2% of one species of bat - the Daubenton - could carry the rabies disease after antibodies were found in its blood.

Deaths from bat rabies are extremely rare—since 1977 there have been three deaths in Europe attributed to EBVL infections. In Europe, between 1977 and 2003, more than 700 confirmed EBVL cases were found in animals - mainly in Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, France, Spain and Germany. A spokesman for Defra said anyone who found a sick or ailing bat should not approach or handle the animal but seek advice from the Bat Conservation Trust. Anyone bitten or scratched by a bat should seek medical attention.

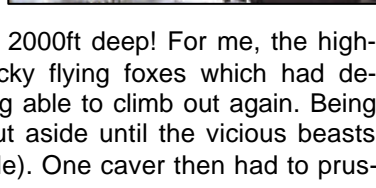
Source: BBC News, 28/09/04
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3697490.stm>

Hidden Earth 2004

by Martin Rowe

For me, this year's venue for **Hidden Earth** was ideal—I live only 12 miles from Kendal. So while everyone else was stuck in a traffic jam on the M6 on Friday night, Yvonne and I settled into the theatre to enjoy the **China Caves** lecture. Andy Eavis reviewed the project and had some spectacular 3d images of the caves. Gavin Newman's new film was, as ever, well worth the £5 admission fee (the proceeds went to the China Caves Project). Shot mostly on the surface, it was no less interesting with some scary rock climbs and traverses over drops of thousands of feet. It is hard to convey the immense size of the karst features in China—one doline is big enough to contain Mendip twice over (or is that under?) as it is 2000ft deep! For me, the highlight of the film was the discovery of 2 very lucky flying foxes which had descended into a surface shaft with no hope of being able to climb out again. Being British, all thought of new cave passages was put aside until the vicious beasts could be captured (but not without a fierce struggle). One caver then had to prus-sick out with a tackle-bag full of wild animals on his back so that they could be released in a more suitable location.

One thing I find frustrating about Hidden Earth is the running of 3 lecture programs in parallel. So at 10.30 on Saturday, after the opening audiovisual presentation, I found myself having to choose between either Pete Collings-Wells on



Cave diving section?

Fiona Crozier, despite being only a probationary member of MCG, seems to be doing a phenomenal amount of cave diving at the moment. She writes:

“Hi all. Just had a great weekend down on Mendip. I dived in Swildons Hole with a friend from Leeds. I have also started digging in slop 3 in Hunters Lodge Sink — it was an old dig that had been abandoned as it is sumped for most of the year. It goes down about 2m and there seems to be a passage going on but it shuts down. This is where I am digging—on air with 3litre bottles. Any other divers that might fancy helping me with the dig, give me a ring on 07832 141902. I am up most weekends.”

Are there any offers from MCG members to join her; it sounds like a fun place to be digging?

In the meantime, here are some of Fiona’s photos of the recent rescue practice she was involved in with the Welsh section at the NDC in Chepstow last month. For those who get the newsletter only in black and white, Fiona is the one in the red



Digital Photography, or the **Northern Round Up** or **Tasmania** — all three interested me, but I decided on **Tasmania** as it is somewhere I will probably never get to. Phil Rowsell gave an interesting talk about the difficulties of caving in an area where not only is access difficult (because of nature conservation) but the difficulty is compounded by local cavers not sharing their knowledge and information. As a result, previously known caves have been lost and much work is being done to re-find them.

After only one lecture, the event was already running 30 minutes late, so it was off to the another theatre to catch a diving video. However, the video was being shown later than advertised, but it was too late to catch the lecture on **Western Australia** in the theatre I had just left. My disappointment was soon dispelled by a gem



of a video. **Waters Journey—the Hidden Rivers of Florida** by Wes Skiles of **Karst Productions, Inc.** As divers explore one of Florida’s flooded caves, a surface team plots their route using something similar to a Heyphone. As the divers progress, the surface team follow them along a freeway, through parking lots, across a golf course, around a fast food outlet, through shops and even across gardens and through a private house! Humour aside, this is also educational, illustrating the pollution being done to ground water in Florida. The video encourages viewers to visit a related website at <http://www.floridasprings.org/>

Mendip Round Up was a quick review of news from our area, so it was good to have Tim Francis on hand to give his own account of Golden Chamber in Upper Flood. Tim was the only Mendip digger to speak, and most of the other news had been gleaned from the web.



Saturday lunchtime was dedicated to the, now traditional, **Hidden Earth Show** which this year had a pantomime theme involving beans, a cow, a magic rope, a (mythical?) caving-shop proprietor played to great applause by Tim Francis, cavers (of course!) and the CRO. Some good one-liners too! Andy Sparrow was cajoled into taking part; not knowing what to expect, he had to read from a script. When the cavers’ rope became detached leaving them trapped at the foot of the pitch, one of the team asked “Where did you learn to rig like that?” to which AS replied “I learnt it from Cavesafe 2”.

Caving in the Abode of the Clouds by Simon Brooks was an account of the 2004 expedition to Megalayha, India, where 17km of new cave passage were explored. The Shnongrim Ridge area is proving to have a very dense concentration of caves and since exploration began in February 2000 it has yielded 99.5kms of cave passage in an area barely 10km by 3km. This year’s finds included Krem Krang Wah which lay almost immediately down slope from the 2004 camp, and started with an impressive 93m deep entrance shaft christened “The Tigers Mouth” due to its awesome nature. Also discovered for the first time was an underground route right under the Shnongrim Ridge itself, providing valuable information on the hydrology and cave development of the area.

Although Yvonne and I went to the **BCRA Dinner**, we didn’t stay for the **Stomp**, so it was back to Arnside for the night. On the Sunday, the first lecture was by Martin Farr, who described various dive sites in the **Llygad Llywchr** area near Swansea. Although there are several huge resurgences here, he thinks some examination of the surface could result in dry cave being discovered. Only trouble is, he’s a diver, not a digger..... He did however describe one digging exploit on a cave dive involving a 70lb pipe bomb which went off with a huge explosion resulting in.... no progress! Martin Farr also described some of his diving exploits in **Doolin** and the area, between Loughs Corrib and Mask. Corrib is 27 miles long and 7 miles wide but very shallow, hardly exceeding 30 ft. in depth at any point, only 29 feet above sea-level, and drains by the short river Corrib to Galway Bay.

Lough Mask is situated to the north of Lough Corrib and is approximately 10 miles long and 4 miles wide. They are connected by a man-made waterway, the Cong Canal. This ill-fated canal was constructed between the loughs in a broad valley entirely in limestone. The valley has the greatest number of caves and potholes in the area - a fact which should have warned the canal's promoters of the cavernous quality of the limestone. It didn't and consequently the canal is high and dry! As with Llygad Llywchr, this is another area that would repay some attention to surface exploration.

In March 2003, Rick Stanton visited Mexico's Cueva Cheve, **The Remotest Place on Earth**, to push a sump at 5½ miles beyond the entrance in a system with depth potential of 1½ miles. Water entering the terminal sump resurges eight days later and 8,284 feet lower, 11 miles north, so there is great potential for this system.

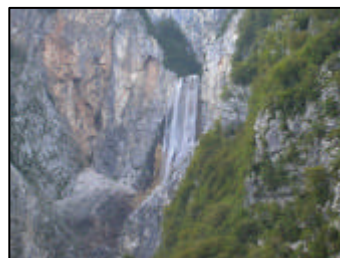
Deep Down and Dirty—Cuetzalan 2204 was John Simms and Steve Whitlock's account of the Combined Services Caving Association (i.e. British Army) expedition to Mexico. The lecture theatre was packed for this talk which reviewed many years of expeditions to the system. But what we all wanted to hear about was their own account of the dramatic final days of the 2004 expedition when 6 members became trapped by flood waters. The expedition was very well planned and every possible eventuality had been considered. Flooding of the cave was anticipated, and a camp had been established just in case flood waters took longer than usual to recede. A Heyphone had been installed, and a "dive line" laid through the flood-prone section. Two UK cavers had agreed to be on-call in case of long term flooding (although only one of the divers was aware of this!). So, when a major flood event occurred, it should have been a case of just sitting it out and waiting for the UK divers to arrive a week later. Unfortunately, the world's press found out that 6 members of UK Forces were involved, the Mexican authorities behaved irrationally, and the rest is "history", or a version of it. However, it is clear that these guys acted in a professional manner throughout their rescue. There was rigorous planning and pre-expedition training for expedition members. Full risk assessments had been made to minimise the dangers, with good contingency planning. When they first became cut-off, they took their only, but necessary, risk— to fight against the power of the river to reach the safety of the camp. Once at the camp, they conserved energy by staying as still as possible. When it became clear the sump would not be falling any time soon, they went onto half rations to eke out their meagre food supplies. Luckily, they had carbides so they could have a make-shift stove to heat water (hot half-rations are better than cold half-rations). They divided into 3 groups— experienced divers (=scuba diving in open water), intermediate divers (=used a snorkel) and non divers(=the rest). They then trained in preparation for their rescue. One non-diver was convinced he couldn't breath through his mouth without breathing through his nose as well (crucial if you are using a mouthpiece for diving). He was encouraged to lie face down with his nose in a mug of water, breathing through his mouth, until he could do this for 2 hours! Eventually, the UK divers arrived, and everyone was brought through the sump to the surface. They had to endure the press (some 400 reporters had gathered at the cave!) and then the Mexican bureaucracy, but from what was suggested, I think they gave back as good as they got! Finally, they were expelled for having the wrong kind of visa and banned from Mexico for 2 years. They can appeal, but have to be present in Mexico to do this! And to rub salt into a wound, the insurance won't pay out for the £13,000 rescue costs because they were there without permission (despite having a permit!). A thoroughly good lecture.



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To finish off, we then went to **Gardeners World** - the Imperial College expedition to Slovenia 2004. For MCG members who were with me when we saw this huge waterfall (right) in Triglav National park, I can confirm that it is indeed a resurgence.



So, that was Hidden Earth. Next year, conveniently, it's on Mendip, - see you there? **MR**

Hidden Earth 2005

Next year's BCRA **Hidden Earth** conference is to be held on Mendip.

The venue will be Churchill school, and the event will take place on the weekend of 23/24/25 September 2005.

Now, we can't have Hidden Earth on Mendip without MCG putting in a good showing, can we? There are photo and video competitions, the t-shirt design competition, the srt races and the art competition. With a whole 12 months notice, hopefully MCG members can give some thought to entering the competitions? Lots of people have digital cameras now, so how about some of you entering the photo salon? Even if you don't win, you will help to raise the club's profile at the conference.

As a major Mendip club, MCG really must have a club stand for 2005. Martin Rowe has offered to co-ordinate our efforts. That means we need volunteers to help with a stand, and also a theme. Any ideas? If so please contact him

Caption Competition



Here's a picture of JR and Tony Knibbs from Slovenia. But what is going on? A suitable prize is offered for the best caption submitted to the **Editor**.