

MCG News

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Mendip Caving Group

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Founded 1954

Big Roman Dig: arsenic and red face

by Martin Rowe

One of the main events of Time Team's Big Roman Dig, around the weekend of 8th and 9th July, was meant to be the excavation of the settlement adjacent to the Charterhouse lead mine, known as Town Field or Rains Batch. As the settlement had not been previously excavated using modern methods, little is known about how the site was used, to exactly what period it dates, and why it was completely abandoned after the Roman period. Hopes were high that Time Team might discover some spectacular archaeological remains.

Together with Yvonne, I strolled over on the Saturday morning to watch the dig in progress. Immediately, it was clear that something wasn't quite right. Spectators were being kept well back from the dig. There appeared to be little activity amongst the film crew and presenters, and the faces we could see were downcast. A passing German motorist had stopped to see what was happening, and looked shocked by what he had seen—hordes of people in white protective suits and face masks, digging in the middle of a field, with camera crews and white tents at a safe distance. It must have looked like a murder scene to him! He took some photos before hurriedly leaving. I wonder if he ever found out what had really happened?

In opening up several trenches in Town Field and Rains Batch, the archaeologists had disturbed lead, arsenic and other toxins in the sub-soil. Hence the protective white suits and masks, and the mobile decontamination unit.

As the weekend progressed, the level of the toxins increased, resulting in some red faces. The dig had to be ended early for health and safety reasons. The film crews and presenters decamped, and went off to look for another site to dig, leaving the local community archaeology project (CHERT—Charterhouse Environs Research Team) to tidy up the site.

Before closing down the dig, CHERT and Time Team did find some archaeology—two short lengths of roughly constructed walls, which bounded an industrial or workshop area with a compacted floor. Towards the centre was an area, which contained the high level of pollution, suggesting that this could be where lead ore was being smelted as a first step in the process of extracting the lead and silver.

More impressive were the results from the geophysical survey which showed highly magnetic areas reflecting industrial activity in Upper & Lower Rains Batch and adjacent Cow Leaze fields, showing that this part of the Charterhouse settlement was industrial, probably consisting of a spread of workshops whose output was consolidated to produce the lead 'pigs' that were exported from the site. Any silver would have been closely protected and despatched separately to the Imperial treasury—hence the importance of the strong-point earthwork ('fortlet') nearby.

'Finds' included pottery sherds of the Roman period, including fragments of a late 1st century flagon rim (shown in Sunday's programme). The flagon fragments came from the bank of the square feature. The material for the bank would have been thrown up from the surrounding ditch. The pottery fragments could have been within the material that was dug out and this could have happened at any time after the late 1st century. (This is about the same date as the nearby Limekiln Dig, which is known to be a late 1st century mine—see MCG News 328.)

The early closure of Time Team's dig due to the presence of lead and arsenic hints at why the site was abandoned in the 5th century. Whilst the Romans may have been determined to extract the lead and silver despite the atrocious working

From the Editor



Here you are—a full 10 page newsletter but a little different to usual. Lots about Time Team's Big Roman Dig at Charterhouse, which I hope you find as interesting as I did. Lots of caving stuff from far flung places in Britain and abroad, but not much written by members.

I suppose it is the time of year, with holidays and lethargy induced by the heat, that causes the lack of MCG caving trip write-ups. It's usually the same at this time and as a result there is not normally a newsletter in August. As we are off to the Hebrides for a while very soon, there will not be another newsletter until September, but it gives you all time to put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboards, and write something up for the next issue.

I look forward to a full inbox

In this issue

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MCG Doings

On the move

Phil Elliot
 Alan Mellon
 Simon Stevens

Email changes

Bill Chadwick
 Mark Ward
 Cara Allison

Membership

Stephan Natynczuk has been accepted as a full member.
 Natalie Field has applied for probationary membership.
 Fiona Crozier has rejoined the Group.

Congratulations

To Bill Richards and Lynn Ferneaux who are to be married on 24th September

Getting well soon

John Roberts is out of hospital now and making his recovery at home in Frome, following his recent car accident. We wish him well.

Happy birthday

Congratulations to Fiona Kempson who recently celebrated her 21st birthday (Ed: you owe me a pint, Roy).

conditions (and the short life expectancy for those undertaking the extraction) the locals were less determined After all, with lead available for scavenging in every Roman town and villa after the Romans departed, why kill yourself to extract something of that was now of little value?

(This article relies heavily on info taken from www.channel4.com/history/microsites/B/bigromandig/database/2_31.jsp?activityId=361)



Charterhouse gets underway
 Members of CHERT (the Charterhouse Environs Research Team) congregate for their first briefing from Time Team and Oxford Archaeology before going on site. (Channel4.com)



Men in white
 The presence of lead and arsenic means everyone going onto the dig site has to be kitted up in personal protective equipment including suits, gloves and face-masks. (Y Rowe)



The wash unit awaits
 Those leaving the site need to ensure that they clean the soles of their boots and their hands. (Channel4.com)



All dressed up and nowhere to go
 Time Team's Francis Pryor patiently waits for anything to be found but progress is slow. (Y Rowe)



Rim fragments of 1st century flagon
 Two pieces of the rim of a late 1st Century flagon. Other finds await post-excavation assessment (Cannel4.com)



Earlier finds
 Vince Russett, CHERT Project Director, discusses some of the finds brought along by members of the public. (Channel4.com)

It was fun while it lasted! - The Big Roman Dig at Charterhouse

by Joan Goddard

Soon after moving to Mendip (well, the very edge of Mendip) I joined a group of local people who meet once a week to record and research the history of the Charterhouse area – the Group is called CHERT (Charterhouse Environs Research Team). We work under the guidance of the County Archaeologist and spend our time surveying and recording features which are thought to be archaeologically significant. We also record existing features which are under threat (e.g. ruined buildings**, field boundaries, gateposts, stiles) and consult old maps, photographs and documents.

CHERT members have spent a lot of time studying the fields to the north of Charterhouse Centre and were relishing the opportunity to excavate in the area of the Roman township - we are not allowed to dig (only non-invasive methods to be used) but the Channel 4 Big Roman Dig team somehow managed to get permission for two trenches. The plan was to start on Monday 27th June but.....



Guess which is the MCG member?
Photo by Jack Foord (CHERT)

For two days nothing happened due to a series of delays, mishaps to vehicles, non delivery of equipment etc etc..... Health and Safety was a major consideration as a soil sampling programme carried out earlier had flagged high levels of lead with some arsenic and zinc - we had to wear white hooded overalls, gloves, boots and face masks and were required to pass through a decontamination unit when leaving site. (The strange thing was that 'site' was one field whereas 'off-site' was just over the wall in the next

field). Passers-by could be forgiven for assuming there was a murder investigation going on, especially when the TV crew turned up to film the white-suited team digging up the field.

On Day 3 we started the trenches which meant stripping turf and topsoil, using hand tools as machinery was not permitted (a total area of 10m x 12m!). This was VERY hot work in blazing sunshine encased, as we were, in protective gear. I worked for a while in Trench 2 at the top of the field and on Day 4 we reached the depth where we could expect some archaeology. We could just make out traces of a wall - but then the portable X-ray Fluorescence (XRF) machine detected a 'hot-spot' with undesirably high levels of arse-



Moving topsoil in Trench 2
Photo J Goddard

*Footnote: ** When I first joined CHERT I heard that they had surveyed the ruins of The Gardener's Cottage in Netherwood. I eventually realised this was the old cottage which MCG rented in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but no-one had heard of us being there. Anxious to put the record straight I collected together photos taken of the cottage by members who were around at the time and, having got permission from the photographers, I presented them to the CHERT archive. So now our tenure there is recorded for posterity!*

Caving Meets

August 6th Due to the priority of the work weekend, no caving activity has been pre-arranged. However, dependant on progress, a spontaneous trip maybe possible.

September 2nd A slow moving photographic meet is planned to enable all to take photographs. Use of tripods will be encouraged and participants are asked to bring along stand - alone flash units to pool lighting capability. I also propose to experiment with light painting. On request, I can forward a HTML document file on subterranean photo techniques. Remember, even simple flash cameras will take reasonable pictures, especially of formations and of people in small passages.

Future events Future meets are planned for Rods Pot, Reeds, Banwell Bone Cave, Reservoir Hole and Templeton's Pot. I would appreciate some feedback as to what members would like arranged. Again, those planning major expeditions and want others to join in and or act as sherpas please let me advertise the event and or post on the Yahoo newsgroup.

Bob Templeman
Caving Secretary

For sale

Canon AE1 in good working order with three Canon lenses, 50mm F1.4, 28mm F2.8, 70-210mm zoom F4 all in a padded Camera bag.

Suitable for cave photography!

£60 the lot, contact Graham Old

Geoff Davies

Sadly, I have to report that **Geoff Davies** passed away on 18/07/05. Geoff had been a member of MCG since July 1961.

Geoff had been suffering from heart problems for many years and had been in hospital since the beginning of the month.

Half yearly

As Hidden Earth is being held in late September, it was felt that having MCG's half yearly meet at the beginning of October was not ideal. Members who cannot get to Mendip frequently would be faced with the choice of attending one event or the other.

The Committee have therefore agreed to move the MCG half yearly meeting to 5th November.

Wanted - trip reports

Are you a mid-week caver? If so, we would like to hear about you caving trips.

Ideally, you will write up your trips in the MCG Log at the cottage and eventually it will appear in the Newsletter. In practice, you may find the allure of the Hunters (or your favourite watering hole) prevents you from writing up your trip in the Log. If this is the case, why not write your trip report and send it to me by email or post, so I can print it in the Newsletter? I understand there is a lot of midweek caving, especially by the newer members, so come on, lets hear what you are all up to!

Yvonne

nic and we were ordered off site. Trench 1 continued for a while but as they dug deeper they, too, encountered high contamination levels and on Sunday the whole operation was closed down.

What a disappointment! However, not all was lost - a magnetometer survey carried out as part of the programme has extended our knowledge of the area and some pieces of pottery were identified as the rim of a late first century flagon. The high arsenic levels encountered are thought to have been concentrated by the smelting process so the Big Roman Dig has provided evidence that the lead ore, Galena, would have been transported from where it was mined to the settlement rather than being smelted where it was mined.

I nipped home on Saturday evening to watch the TV programme and was suitably impressed – the presenters managed to make a good story out of very little. The final broadcast explained that time and nature have 'healed' the scars of the Roman industrial landscape - soil and vegetation has covered the old hearths and smelting areas and the countryside is now safe to be enjoyed by all.

Vale Geoff Davies

It was sad news to learn on Tuesday (19 July) evening of this week that Geoff Davies had passed away in hospital the previous day at the tender age of 65. Geoff joined the Group in July 1961. At that time he lived with his parents near Dollis Hill and worked for the GPO. I can well remember starting many a trip to Mendip by making a wide detour eastwards to pick up Geoff before pointing the Landrover back down the North Circular Road to take the A4 westbound; next stop, the Golden Arrow Café en route for Mendip.

Geoff was an irrepressible optimist, always ready to smile at some minor misfortune. He and his wife Ann joined the 1962 expedition to Eire; our interest lay chiefly in Counties Sligo and Leitrim. The first campsite was near Ballinacfad (Sligo) beside Lough Arrow where we explored and surveyed Lecarrow Swallet. We shared a field with a herd of cows, and a highlight of the camp was watching Geoff trying to get the cows to play a game of bullfighting: one or two began to enter into the spirit of the game but things cooled down before anyone got hurt or (more likely) tents got trampled.



Later on we broadened our area of interest towards the east where we found some deep potholes at Agnahaha above the Glenaniff Valley. It was very reassuring to have Geoff operating the lifeline in his usual calmly methodical way because there were numerous doubtful boulders around the upper parts of the 150ft deep shafts; the floors were impressive jumbles of boulders through which no way was found.

On Mendip in January 1963, Geoff and I found a mine shaft above Blackmoor – a blowhole in the snow indicated its presence and it did not take long to open an entrance, fetching tools from the old Cottage in Netherwood. The top few feet were walled around with rocks, then the shaft developed into a rift; the pitch was only about 20ft deep, but it had an interesting landing. It felt like stepping down through dead bracken before a solid mud floor was felt. The "bracken" was, in fact the ribs of a cow carcass. Geoff followed me down and I had decided to allow him the same landing that I had had. The look on his face as he realised what he had stepped into would have made a good photo.

Geoff gave us all a fright towards the end of the 1960s by having a heart attack. This changed his life but never removed the smile from his face. Our deepest sympathy goes to his wife, Ann and their two children, Paul and Elizabeth.

Tony Knibbs



Cavers smash world depth record

Cavers have ventured deeper into the Earth than anyone has been before. A Ukrainian team has reached a record depth of 2,080m (6,822ft), passing the elusive 2,000m mark at Krubera, the world's deepest known cave. The nine-strong group were part of a project that has made breaking the 2,000m depth its goal for four years. They built on records set by a previous expedition, which blasted through blocked passages in the cave, within Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia. Even now, we don't know whether we've reached the limit - or if it will go on. We're pretty sure we'll eventually go even lower," said Alexander Klimchouk, the veteran caver who organised the mission. The Ukrainian Speleological Association's Call of the Abyss project is funded by the US National Geographic Society. During an expedition from August to September 2004, a team of 56 cavers (45 men and 11 women) representing seven countries explored Kubera, deep below the Arabika mountain massif of the western Caucasus.



Carrying about five tonnes of equipment, they had to negotiate vertical drops and freezing torrents of water. They were also forced to blast rubble from passages that were critically narrowed or blocked by "boulder chokes". They set camps at depths of 700m, 1,215m, 1,410m and 1,640m, where they cooked meals, slept up to six people to a tent and worked for up to 20 hours at a stretch. They kept in touch with the surface base camp by rigging nearly 3km (two miles) of rope strung with a telephone wire. But the August-September expedition encountered many obstacles. By the third week, a sump (cold pond in the cave) blocked the team's downward progress. When team member Sergio Garcia-Dils de la Vega investigated if there was a way through, he survived a cascade of near-freezing water but was forced to retreat after discovering his waterproof dry suit had holes in it.

Finally, colleagues Denis Kurta and Dmitry Fedotov squeezed through a narrow, 100m-long passage, which successfully bypassed the sump and pointed steeply down. In October, a team of nine cavers was sent back to Krubera to pick up where the previous group left off. They examined all unexplored leads in the cave's lowest section until they broke through to a new series of passages and vertical pits. On 19 October 2004, team leader Yuri Kasjan dropped down a pit and discovered from his altimeter that he had passed 2,000m. More pits and passages brought the explorers to a sandy chamber at 2,080m, the deepest to date any human has ventured below ground. The cavers christened the chamber Game Over. But team members now want to return to the cave to see whether it leads even deeper.

The record is announced in this April's National Geographic magazine.

DEEPEST KNOWN CAVES	
Krubera, Georgia (Abkhazia)	2,080m (6,822ft)
Lamprechtsofen, Austria	1,631m (5,354 ft)
Gouffre Mirolda, France	1,626m (5,335 ft)
Reseau Jean Bernard, France	1,602m (5,256 ft)
Torca del Cerro, Spain	1,589m (5,213 ft)
Sarma, Georgia (Abkhazia)	1,542m (5,062 ft)
Cehi 2, Slovenia	1,533m (5,030 ft)

Little Neath River Cave, Bridge Cave & Upper Nedd Valley

An access agreement has been reached between the Cambrian Caving Council and the landowners of the above caves, on behalf of all cavers both recreational and professional.

Parking for these sites will be at the Bridge Cave car park only. As before, cavers will be expected to pay the agreed parking fee to the landowners, the Lewis family of Blaen Nedd Isaf. There will probably be some form of secure collecting box at the car park in the future but for now, a quick trip to the farm by one member of the group to ensure continuing good relationships would be in order. Sporting cavers are asked to have suitable 3rd party liability insurance. Further pre-requisites of access are; that each member of the group is entering the cave of their own free will; that each knows the nature of the difficulties they will encounter and that each caver accepts that they are entering a potentially dangerous environment at their own risk.

Should anyone wish to dig or conduct a scientific project within LNRC, please contact the CCC beforehand. The cave and the land above and around the area are a designated SSSI which carries special protection at law. No dig or project will be refused if they are carried out in an acceptable manner.

Access for professional groups will depend on their demonstrating to the CCC that they have appropriate insurance cover, have carried out the necessary risk assessments and have paid their appropriate fee to the landowners.

Caves of the Peak District

We (Iain Barker, Bob Dearman and John Beck of the DCA) have started work on bringing out a new edition of Caves of the Peak District. It's 14 years since the last one and several new discoveries have been made in that period. We aim to get the completed book at the printers in the early spring of 2006 and to have any hope of achieving this we need all the help we can get. In order for the new book to be as up-to-date as possible we need as much information as we can possibly get from every individual and club who has worked in the area since 1991. Everything from a one metre extension to a known cave, to a brand new hole, to maintain the information available to cavers of the future as well as the present, it all needs to go into print or much will be forgotten. If your club, or any individual cavers you know of have made even the smallest dig or advance please can we have the details? Even abortive digs need to be recorded to maintain the record.

The way to report your activities/discoveries is simple; just write it up in the same format as an entry in the current Caves of the Peak District and e-mail or post it to:

DCA Access Officer
Iain Barker

The Herald

Scotland's top-selling
quality broadsheet

Journey to a hidden world

ABIGAIL WILD July 08 2005

The two women had finished their walk in the hills. It had been a good day, decent weather, nice scenery. Then one of them spotted a man taking off his caving gear by his car. He took off his helmet, his arm pads, knee pads and gloves. Then his body suit. Then, his jumper. "Right," said one woman, "next weekend, we're going caving."

Julie Hesketh, 33, a caver from Edinburgh, doesn't see the sport as being quite so glamorous as all that. Today, *The Descent*, a British film scripted and directed by Neil Marshall, about six women who embark on a caving trip, goes on general release. Each character looks incredibly good in a ripped, muddy wet T-shirt. Hesketh doesn't think that fiction, in this case, imitates reality.

"There are some really good women cavers in Britain, and they're very professional. It's very physical: it's not very attractive, you wear loads of gear, it's not sexy. You also get quite muddy, but then I enjoy that. It's not got a racy image like diving or climbing," she says.

Hesketh tried caving on a whim, and grew to like it very much, because, she says, "it's a head rush, exhilarating and exhausting. In Scotland, it's wet, more like canyoning in a way". That there were big, strong men in her university caving club was an added incentive to join – for the competition, not the sight of the sturdy bodies.

"It was hyped up to be a very macho sport for tough guys, so I, of course, decided to have a crack," she says. "As it turns out, it's not that macho at all. There are definitely more men but there are women who are seriously involved. The bonus is that it's not the kind of sport that only men are good at. I've taken women on their first trips and they've always thoroughly enjoyed it."

As is the case with women's football, where they can't match the men in strength they can compensate for by being nifty and nimble. "Men aren't better than women, they're just good at different things," says Hesketh. "It is all about size, strength and build. Scottish caves are small and wet, Yorkshire caves are vertical so you need good rope work and the Mendips are small and tight. I'm small so I can get through places a fit 6ft bloke can't. But he'll be able to get out of a place with muscle that I might get through with skill."

Hesketh tends to go on caving ventures in mixed groups from the Grampian Spe-



THE DESCENT FILM REVIEW

An all-female caving expedition goes horribly wrong, as the explorers become trapped and ultimately pursued by a strange breed of predators. "I told you I saw someone." "Well it's not a human being." It certainly isn't, it's a caveman, a humanoid, evolved to live perfectly in the dark. So, claustrophobia - check. Scares - check. Gore - check. Cast picked off one by one - check. This is very much by-the-numbers filmmaking, but it's built on a strong premise (comparable to 2005's other subterranean horror *The Cave*) that is highly effective.

leological Group, but she occasionally hears of women grouping together for week-ends away, not because they can't hack the pace but so they can have a good gossip while they explore. While she goes caving, her husband stays at home babysitting. As a hillwalker, he isn't interested in the least.

The one advantage men do have, she admits, is that everything's much easier for them if they get caught short in a cave. "Women have to strip off their kit, their elbow pads, all the protective gear. If the cave has a wet stream, you do it in the stream; if it has not, you wait," she says.

"If you're down there for days, you put it in a pot and carry it with you, which is not pleasant. But if you respect the cave, then you will. It's fairly well organised, and in the places where you can camp under the surface there is generally an agreed plan on where you go to the toilet, where you cook and where you put your rubbish. In the UK, caving is very conservation conscious, so people tend to be good."

Tess Smyth, a caver from York, regrets that university clubs are now close to closing down owing to lack of funding. "People focus on the negative aspects, but there is the social side of it, for a start," she says. "Then there's the fact you get to see bits of the world that nobody else sees. It's like a secret haven, with no advertising hoardings or clutter."

Fiona Ware, who, along with Hesketh caves with the GSG, finds it hard to sum up exactly what the pull is. "I guess it's about the adventure."

In certain areas of Yorkshire and South Wales, where there are caves tens of kilometres in length, it is possible to camp under the surface for several days. Without natural light, cavers lose all track of time. Some cavers specialise in single rope technique (SRT), which is used for ascending and descending in caves; others prefer digging for new passages, and some enjoy a spot of cave diving, which involves ducking under water in short flooded sections. There are cavers who prefer to avoid too many antics and like to just hang around, admiring the stalactites, painting, sketching or taking pictures.

Alan Jeffreys founded the GSG, the oldest and largest caving club in Scotland, in 1961, by which time men-only clubs were an oddity. He thinks women cavers are likely to roll their eyes at the hysteria in *The Descent*. "They're used to their sport being perceived in a certain way, and the film reinforces it. When people – men and women – actually try it, they find all their preconceived ideas are contradicted," he says.

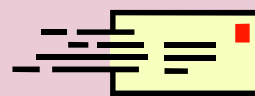
"There is a spiritual, majestic beauty to caves. There's no frost down there to shatter the rock and wear it down, so it's all beautiful, natural sculptures. You wouldn't believe the beauty down there. Contrary to public opinion, we don't all crawl around on our bellies as if we're in rabbit holes. There are narrow bits but, by and large, the caves are actually big. I'd take exception to crawling in a cave for four hours. I'd rather walk for four hours."

During an expedition to northern India several years ago, Jeffreys and his fellow cavers discovered 40km of new below-the-ground territory. At Christmas, his group found a new cave in Sutherland.

"The attraction is the unknown. It's like going to the moon," he says. "You can find a cave and nobody has been there before. It's just as virginal as the surface of other planets. That's the drive. The curiosity about what's round the corner. And the sheer physical entertainment. Scrambling, climbing, clinging – it's a refreshing contrast to your everyday life. It's raw nature. We're talking rock, water and mud, gravel."

Like any place that's trodden on by humans, the caves – for all their non-gender specific appeal – hardly provide a subterranean utopia. "Sadly, there is evidence of vandalism," says Jeffreys. "The stalactites, which take thousands of years to form, get snapped off as souvenirs. Coke bottles float down the streams. Farmers in upland areas might just stuff a dead animal down a hole, near where the local drinking water is sourced. You can go to the Antarctic and find pollution; sadly, the same goes for caves."

The Descent is on general release from 8th July.



From: Fiona Place
Sent: 24 May 2005
Subject: Scientific Exploration Society

OPERATION ZEMBE
2-22nd October 2005
£2800 + flight

Following the success of "Operation Zembe" Monty Halls will once lead a second expedition from 2-22 October 2005 to Cape Town to further the story behind one of the most exciting archaeological discoveries in decades.

In November 2004 a dive team exploring marine cave systems off the Cape of Good Hope, made a number of remarkable finds. Most exciting of all was a large cave system that could well reveal traces of pre-historic occupation.

Operation Zembe was prompted by the discovery of three stone hand axes by Dr Bruno Werz in 1995. These artefacts, located on the seabed in False Bay, were thought to be ten times older than anything else ever discovered beneath the sea. Dr Werz approached the Dorset based SES (the Scientific Exploration Society) for further investigation.

We are seeking enthusiastic cavers, divers and underwater cameramen PADI Advanced Open Water or above to join the team. No previous experience of underwater surveying is required, training will be given.

Fiona Place
 Expedition Manager
 Scientific Exploration Society

BCA cards

Those green insurance cards have finally arrived from the BCA. Only seven months into the year!!!! I'll try and post them out in the next week or so. But if anyone needs one urgently for a specific trip I can prioritise. *Tim Francis*

BBC Lechuguilla film

A cooperative high definition video project between the BBC and NPS supported by volunteer cavers took place from November 9-19 2004.

The video crew spent ten days in the Big Sky Camp videoing in the southwest branch. Support crews of cavers entered the cave each day bringing in video equipment, food, fresh batteries and video tapes and exited with spent batteries full tapes etc.

Video was obtained at Lake Chandalar, LaBarge Borehole, Yellow Brick Road, Land of Awes, Chandelier Ballroom, Prickly Ice-cube Room, Hoodoo Hall and the Dilithium Crystal Pool.

The BBC is producing an hour long show on caves where the Lechuguilla segment will appear. Look for the finished product to be aired in the spring of 2006.

Personnel on the trip were: Huw Cordey (producer), Paul Stewart (cameraman), Gavin Newman (lights and still images), Justin Anderson (researcher), Stan Allison (NPS representative).



Huw Cordey examines fabulous gypsum crystals in the Chandelier Ballroom. Photo Gavin Newman

For sale - beech tree, one careful owner

It took more than a week to fell our beech tree and on inspection of the rings it looks like the tree may have been around 150 years old.

The brushwood was chipped and was shipped off to the ski slope at Churchill, the main boughs and branches have been sliced and stacked around the outside of the cottage. In a year's time, if they haven't been used for other purposes they will be logged and burnt on the fire. The main trunks have been planked (see picture alongside) and are currently being seasoned in my garden. There are also a few slices of the main trunk, some 4 ft across with fantastic growth rings and shaped like a huge flower!



All the wood from the tree is available to members in exchange for a donation so that we may recoup some of the cost of felling it. The main trunks have been sliced into 8' x 1½" pieces of varying widths and would be ideal for table tops. There are also a limited number of 2" slices and 4"x4" posts. The spalting, resulting from the fungal infection, has given the wood grain a beautiful marbling effect. If you would like some more information please contact me or Doug Harris.

It would be useful if we could get a more precise age of the tree so if there are any dendrologists amongst the membership we would appreciate your input.

Linda Milne

Cottage work weekend and barbecue 6th & 7th August

Everyone welcome! Tools provided (but you're welcome to bring your own). Lots of jobs to do and the more people we have the better.....



Essential work includes attending to the rot in the bargeboards and dormer windows



BBQ starts 7pm (workers and non-workers welcome)



Bring your own meat and drink. Extras provided (small charge).



Hidden Earth 2005

The UK's annual caving conference, hosted by the British Cave Research Association for the benefit of all cavers, will be held on the weekend of 23rd-25th September. For 2005, the national caving conference returns to Mendip, to a new venue at Churchill Community School, Churchill Green, Churchill, at the foot of the northern side of the Mendip Hills. For cavers, the description "a couple of miles west of Burrington Coombe" should give you an idea of the location.

Mendip Caving Group presence at the conference, especially as we based so close to the venue. If you would like to help with MCG's club stand at the conference, please contact any committee member.

Nordrach cottage lost property

If you wish to claim any of these items, please contact Joan Goddard or Doug Harris. Any unclaimed items will be auctioned for club funds on the November Half Yearly weekend.

Item	Details
Boiler suit	Cotton, blue, dirty to fit tall person - complete with emergency choc bars
Boiler suit	Cotton, navy, dirty (? size 132)
Jeans	Denim - a bit too small for me! (JG)
Shirt	Blue check, long sleeved, padded material
Shirt	Tartan, long sleeved (Berkatex) - or is it a nightshirt?
T-shirt	Grey 'George'
T-shirt	Black
Fleecy jacket	Grey
Fleecy jacket	Navy/dark green with ribbed weave, 'Oxford Blue'
Underpants	1 red, 1 black
Woolly Hat	Black, 'Russell Athletic'
Swimming trunks	Men's, black with patterned panels
Swim-suit	Ladies, black
Gloves	Pair, black (nametape Giles Robertson)
Phone charger	
Tent bag	Green
Ptezl 'Rapide' harness	White(ish)
Knee pads	One pair
Elbow pad	One only
Gloves	Pair, red, plastic, for digging
Gloves	Odd, red, plastic, for digging
Lady's black jacket	Has been in 8-room for ages. Fits Mick Norton!
Black scarf	
Pair of spectacles	Pink frames

Cooper's Hole

I've had an interesting enquiry asking about the origins of the Cooper's Hole name:

"Dear Tim,

I currently work part time as a guide at Cheddar Caves, and am frequently being asked if Coopers Hole, just up the Gorge from Goughs Cave, is named after my step-father, Dr Norman Cooper who lived in Winscombe and was very active in the caving community in the 1930's-1970's. The reason this has arisen is that I have donated part of his flint implement collection to the new exhibition centre at the caves and his name appears there.

Any ideas?

Michael Dearden"

Here's what I've gleaned so far. His step father was a well know caver in the UBSS and a contemporary of Herbert Balch. There was an archaeological excavation of the cave done in the 1930s which he was involved with but apparently none of Balch's writings link Norman Cooper with the naming of the cave. So it may be a coincidence and certainly the cave entrance was known from much earlier times. Dave Irwin's opinion is that the name comes from the 19th century and relates to a local man called Cooper who kept carts in the entrance. So I suggested that he try speaking to Dave Irwin and perhaps the office of the Marquess of Bath at Longleat.

Any other ideas?

Tim Francis