

MCG News

Newsletter of the
Mendip Caving Group

Golden Chamber, Upper Flood Swallet

Number 332
February 2006

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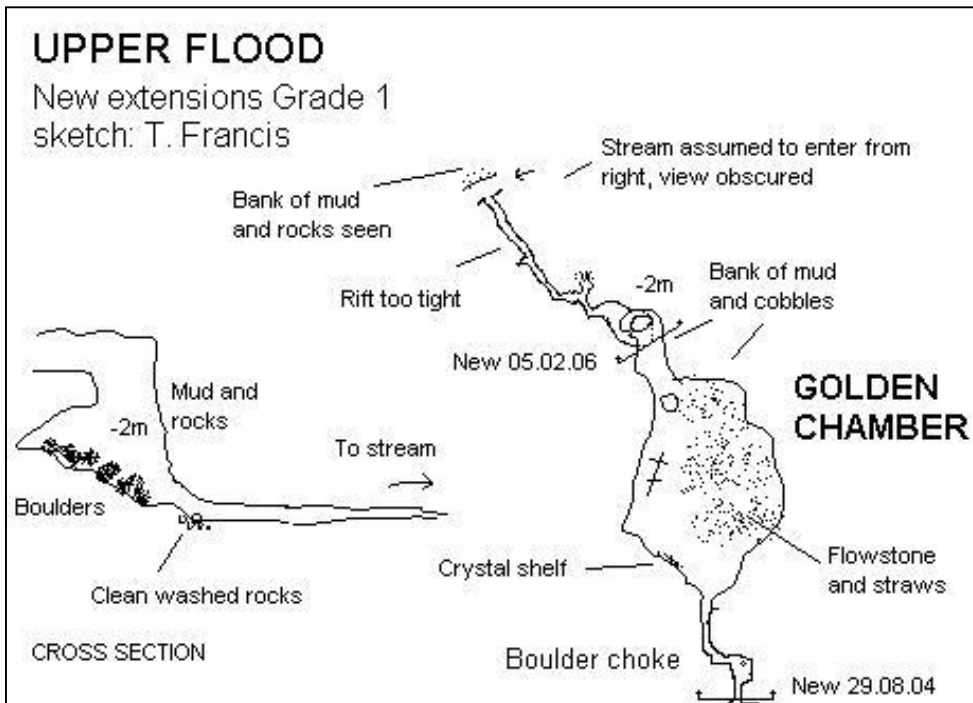
Upper Flood: beyond Golden Chamber

by Mike Richardson

(Hot off the press, Mike fired off an update to Yahoo Groups on digging at the end of Upper Flood with exciting tales of a promising new extension beyond Golden Chamber, 5th February 2006.)

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

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



At this point Peat was able to move from the low point in the boulder choke where he was dumping spoil and wondering what was going on and the rocks were passed back into the chamber. There is now a large pile which will need dealing with in the near future. Tim excavated a second Tim-height down. As this progressed, the sound of the stream increased, and Tim was able to get into a narrow rift in clean rock. A few moments later an expletive indicated that he had become stuck, and was followed by some minutes scrabbling before he reappeared, so it's pretty small in there! However, it looks like the rift is amenable to chemical or manual persuasion. The descent is reasonably stable, in my

From the Editor



Gosh! The newsletter's gone from 8 pages to 12! Thanks to all who have sent articles, information and snippets. It's all very newsy and 'clubby'. There's lots going on in the group which will get better as we head towards spring and summer. The secret is having a project – or lots of projects. There is something for every age and ability. Even us older members can get involved and do our bit which makes us feel a more useful part of the team. Makes for interesting reading too, I think you'll agree. Keep up the good work.

Yvonne Rowe

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MCG Doings

Welcome
to the following Probationary Member:
Richard Perry

Prospective Member
Owen Clements

inexpert opinion, but needs some cleaning up. We seem to be down at the level of the stream again so there are lots to go for. Malcolm was in fact really pleased to hear all this so I guess he's not too annoyed. If anyone is stupid enough to be interested in a spoil removal trip...

Return to Cow Hole – access report

by Tim Francis



Ubley (Hill Pot) and Cow Hole. The pipe and nettles, in a field to the north, proved to be a red herring

Since the filling in and re-piping of Cow Hole in 1990 it has always been assumed by the Mendip caving fraternity that the cave was inaccessible. Reports of a huge collapse and dangerously unstable boulder choke just below the entrance have resulted in no trips into the cave for over 15 years. Certainly the last MCG visit was way back in 1989 when a small amount of dodgy 'passage' was found off the roof climbs near the bottom. When talking to MCG members

who had visited in the past we were given mixed views as to the appeal of the cave: "the cave has a great pitch", "the second most dangerous cave on the Mendips after Tankard Hole, now thankfully filled in and forgotten". So we have never been that excited about exploring the cave despite the appeal of a 60 foot pitch.

Over the years we have tried to dig open Ubley Hill, also filled in and re-piped in 1990, but we never bothered to look at Cow Hole. But after some serious badgering from Mick Norton a few of us finally got around to relocating Cow Hole and going for a look ourselves.



Locating the entrance took us two weekends. On each occasion we were told that the entrance had been filled in recently so we needed to really convince ourselves that the cave was still really there. The pipe is at now at ground level so we walked right passed it the first time and ended up in the next field north where we found an old pipe surrounded by nettles. Last year Mick reported the entrance as being half a foot above field level, and this fitted his description, but a quick examination ruled it out as Cow Hole. On the second visit, the lid was located level with the ground surface, so perhaps the ground has settled a bit since the original hymac session. The original agreement was that the pipes would be at ground level so that the farmer, Mr Lovell, could drive machinery over it unimpeded. Because of the settling ground the farmer has cut the top off and re-fixed the lid although the metalwork is now not actually attached to the top of the pipe. The bits of broken pipe are at the bottom of the entrance pitch but you can still crawl past and into the cave. The lid is very difficult to lever open and you need an adjustable spanner to undo the bolt. It is actually only finger tight at the moment because Mick ran off to the car with the spanner – it was too cold to hang around!

In terms of the entrance series I don't know what it used to look like but certainly it is not up to heavy caver traffic. We were able to squeeze under the dodgy bits, the highlights being lots of rotting timber and dexion from the 1960s. Time has added a good layer of calcite onto some of the shoring but it still doesn't look that stable. It's hard to tell what collapse the guidebook refers to but certainly the whole area is rather suspect as you are in a continuous choke from the base of the pipe to the pitch head. At the pitch head one needs to carefully squeeze through an A frame that doesn't seem to be bolted to the wall! To add an extra pinch of spice anyone rolling around in the choke tends to knock stuff down on to the riggers and lifeliners below.

The pitch head is solid on two sides. Fixed aids are an 8mm spit (thread gone) and a small rawl bolt with a tiny hole (10.5mm). We threaded a rope sling through it as a long maillon isn't long enough to do up and a krab won't fit. There is also a bulge of rock that can be used as a natural once you've located a thread around the back. I wouldn't recommend anyone to use the shoring in the roof as the guidebook suggests. However I thought the main 60ft pitch was fantastic, a real Mendip classic that it would be a shame to lose. The cave itself is actually much more extensive than you might imagine – a bit like a large Pinetree Pot.

Team: Peat Bennett, Tim Francis, Doug Harris, Mick Norton

So where do we go from here?

Don't worry, I'm not suggesting that the MCG takes this on as a project but perhaps we could help with manpower and financials? The following is roughly what needs doing based upon my untrained eye so someone who knows about this sort of stuff should do a more thorough report.

1. Entrance lid - the surround needs refixing to the pipe and the lid made easier to open. With sheep in the field you don't want to leave the lid open but it would be very difficult to open from below. I would also suggest that a bar or bolt is added to rig off. The welds on the small eye holes won't last forever.
2. Entrance boulder choke. This needs a serious rethink. At the base of the pipe is a narrow mine-type tunnel constructed of dexion and timber. This will need rebuilding at some stage as it is too narrow to build within. Of greater urgency is the roof of the entrance 'chamber' which has rotting timbers and dexion. I think this is big enough to build a bomb-proof cage inside, a bit like the Eastwater entrance.
3. Pitch approach. This is made of loose rocks, nasty looking timbers and dexion that you have to slide under. This looks harder to sort as the roof has probably dropped at this point and it is also very low. I'm not sure what to suggest here.
4. Pitch head. The current metal shoring and psychological wooden supports need redoing. The A frame is right in the way of where you drop into the hole and I don't think it will take lots of heavy cavers boots. Some serious RSJ shoring in the roof would do the trick. Two side walls are made up of concreted walling. It looks ok-ish but probably needs checking and re-pointing.
5. Pitch rigging. There are two nice solid walls that would take DMM's to replace the old metal bolt and knackered spit. The natural is fine although not obvious so I can imagine you would want a third bolt. For SRT a rebelay would be needed further down. If all the above was done it would make a storming SRT pitch but for the moment I would not want to be wearing an SRT kit in the choke in case anything catches!

There is no restriction on access but please ask the farmer for permission to visit either Ubley Hill or Cow Hole. Enjoy but take care!

Ubley Hill Pot

During the search for Cow Hole, we had a look at Ubley Hill Pot. Although it is possible to descend, the cave remains blocked just below the pipe. The mud has slumped down and blocked the way on. It will probably need some sort of shoring. The air quality is still horrendous and has been for years.



John Cornwell

John Cornwell died of a heart attack on the morning of Saturday 28th Jan aged 72. We were extremely saddened to hear of his death, particularly as he had been so encouraging of our efforts at Lime Kiln dig. He will be sorely missed on Mendip. The funeral took place at Haycombe Crematorium on Saturday, February 11th. Donations can be made to Miner's Welfare.

CSCC discussion forum

With the aid of the technological marvel that is the Internet, Cookie has set up a wonderful new facility for the CSCC that is the discussion forum.

Those of you who are familiar with the UKCaving Forums will recognise it. It allows discussion of the burning topics of the day without the disinterested being swamped by emails that they do not want to read. Have a look here:

<http://www.british-caving.org.uk/phpbb2/viewforum.php?f=17>

So ask a few questions and stir it up a bit ...

Cookie

**Annual Dinner
1st April 2006
The City Arms, Wells**

Menu

Warm smoked bacon and parmesan salad served on a bed of mixed leaves

Homemade cream of carrot and coriander soup, crusty roll and butter

Filo parcels filled with nutmeg, spinach and cream cheese

Supreme of chicken in a white wine, cream and mushroom sauce

Topside of beef served with a red wine sauce

Supreme of fresh salmon with a herb crust, with lemon and ginger sauce

Above dishes served with new potatoes and fresh seasonal vegetables

Aubergine & stilton bake with a rich tomato sauce, rustic salad bowl and crusty bread

Fruit Salad in Malibu
Lemon torte
Chocolate fudge cake

£16.50

Tea or coffee £1.25 extra payable on the night

Cheques and menu choices to **Linda Milne** by 24th March 2006



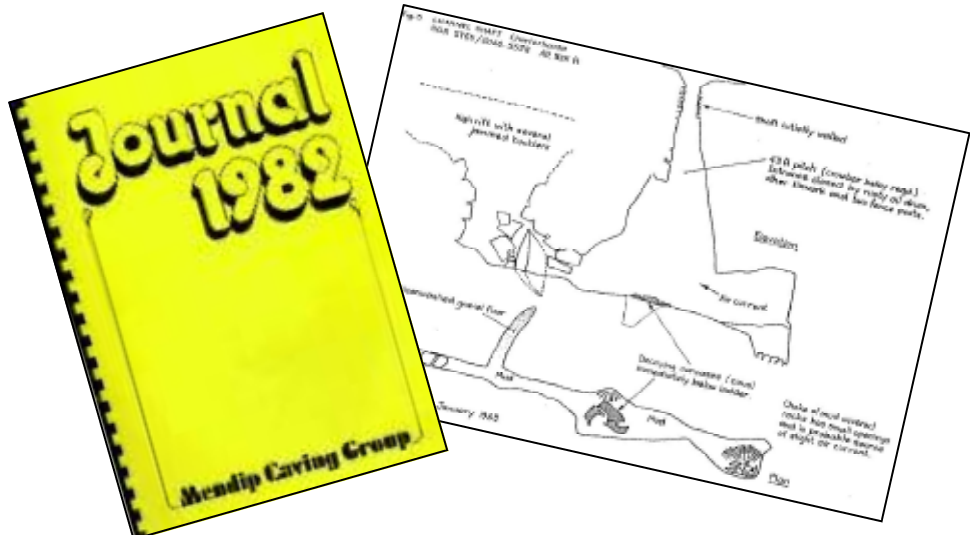
The rediscovery of Charnel Shaft

by Martin Rowe

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

"Forty foot pitch to charnel slope in high rift. Many animals litter the floor and care is needed in stepping off ladder. The delineation of the rift is north to south. Passage goes for 20 feet south to another rising rift. Passage here goes west and downwards for 15 feet to mud and rock choke. Below ladder landing a small hole descends for some five to six feet to choke of mud and rocks with some old fence posts. Northern extension of rift chokes up after 12 feet or so but an air current can be felt coming from somewhere here."

The blowhole may have been obvious in the snow, but once the thaw set in the exact location was soon lost. A survey of Charnel Shaft was published in MCG Journal Number 7 1982 and gave the grid reference as ST55 / 50665528 but



searches around this point have always proved fruitless. It was assumed the entrance had been lost for good. However, on a walk across Mendip in 2005, Tony was surprised to come across the shaft once again and wrote it up in the MCG Logbook. Using his description, a party of MCG members returned to the shaft on 07/01/06 and emailed photos of the entrance to Tony to confirm we had the right location, and his reply is below.

"Yes, that looks a lot like Charnel Shaft! I only saw it under conditions of deep snow, but the hole is in the right position vis-à-vis the little groove in which it occurs. How strange to see it again after 41 years! It was by the greatest stroke of luck that I walked past the spot on one of my quite frequent sorties trying to relocate it. I had given up regretting that we (Geoff Davies and I) had not placed a durable marker at the spot. Our calculation of NGR was not made any more accurate by the winter conditions; everything was white as far as the eye could see. I must have walked within 10m of the spot so many times. Perhaps someone could place some form of marker if the descent proves that the hole cor-



Tim Francis, Mick Norton and Yvonne Rowe at Charnel Shaft



responds with my crude survey - a decent survey wouldn't come amiss would it? Perhaps it would be more interesting if the hole turned out to be something else; if there's a crock of gold remember a share for me! Don't expect a stunning discovery, Charnel Shaft was only remarkable for the dead animal remains at the foot of the pitch."

It appears that the shaft has been infilled at some-time, which is why it could not be found. However, the fill appears to have subsided a little recently to reveal the entrance. No doubt Mick Norton will soon be organising a digging party to excavate the shaft!

Box Mines

by Bob Templeman

On Saturday 4th February, local members of the MCG made a two and a half hour trip to the Box Freestone Mines, led by Paul and Garth Weston. We entered the Southern Series via Jack's Workings and the circular route taken took in all the major points of interest such as the Picture Gallery; REM's crawl; the B Wells; Brewers Drift; O2 passage; the Wind Tunnel; the Tank; Clift entrance (now closed); the WO route; the Cathedral, O route and exiting via the Back Door entrance. During the short trip we were able to admire both the Militia and other graffiti, and understand how the quarrymen worked and removed the stone. Additionally, we saw the floor to ceiling dry-stone walls, built to protect the Box Tunnel ventilation shafts. The GWR railway tunnel runs below the quarry workings and a number of shafts were built for both ventilation and access purpose during its building. And lastly, not to be forgotten, the free standing brick robots.

A number of artefacts are still to be found in situ, though a good collection can be seen in the nearby Quarryman's Arms Public House.

Thanks to Arthur Spain for arranging the trip, our guides Paul and Garth Weston and Joan Goddard for the photographs.

Team: Bob Templeman, Geoff Beale, Arthur Spain, Joan Goddard, Phil Eliot, Don Vosper (all MCG); Paul and Garth Weston.



Bob, Geoff, Arthur, Phil, Paul, Don and Garth



The free-standing brick robots

MCG meets pro-gram 2006

March 3/4/5th

Tynning's Barrow
(Leader: Mick Norton)

31st Mar, 1/2nd April

AGM and Dinner

May 5/6/7th

Cottage work weekend
11-30 Sunday, Ave-
line's Hole (beyond the
gate)

Leader: Linda Wilson

June 2/3/4th

Upper Flood open day.
Grebe Swallet (party of
3 inclusive of leader,
Chris Binding)
or Cheddar cliff caves/
Gough's Cave – Chris
Castle

July 7/8/9th

Nostalgic 1980's style
weekend and BBQ.
Details to be finalised

August 4/5/6th

Photographic weekend
for beginners – Bob
Templeman

September 1/2/3rd

Novices Weekend –
details to be finalised

October 6/7/8th

Cheddar cliff caves or
Grebe Swallet (party of
3 inclusive of leader)

November 3/4/5th

Reservoir Hole (After
dusk GMT timings
only) – leader: Geoff
Beale

December 1/2/3rd

Christmas Dinner

For details of any meet
contact Bob **Temple-**
man (see page 12)

Nordrach Cottage

Nordrach Cottage will be closed to all overnight visitors (including Members) from Mon 20/02/06 to Thur 02/03/06, and from Mon 06/03/06 for up to 4 weeks. It will reopen before 31/03/06 for the AGM.

The cottage is closing to allow work to be carried out to repair the Lounge floor.

The Tacklestore, Changing-room and Showers **will remain accessible** but the Library, Lounge, Kitchen and all Bedrooms will be out of use.

Group booking

A party of 25 from 1st Bookham Scouts are booked in for 17th-19th Feb and they require three dormitories. Any members going to the cottage will need to sleep in whichever room the scout leader asks them to.

Cotag correction

In MCG Newsletter 331 it was stated that members may renew their cotag keyfobs at a cost of £5 each. This is incorrect. The £5 is an increase in the deposit from the original £10 to £15, and if the member leaves the club and returns their cotag, they will be refunded the full £15.

Under the Rock – caves of Gibraltar

by Tim Francis

Gibraltar has always appealed to me as an intriguing weekend break but I'd never really had an excuse to go there. I knew that the place was riddled with Napoleonic tunnels and indeed at home I have nice framed etching of one of the better known passages. But a perusal of caving literature one afternoon revealed that there are actually a few caves there. Indeed the rock itself is all Jurassic limestone and large enough to have its own show cave "St. Michael's Cave". Further information was gleaned from tourist leaflets picked up by my parents whilst on a winter sojourn in southern Spain. So Louisa and I popped over there for a weekend in June to see for ourselves. There is just enough to keep one amused for a weekend but probably not more than that without nipping over to Spain.

Gibraltar is one of those unusual "pink bits" left over from the Empire and even today still has a military feel to the place. There are loads of historic walls, gun emplacements, tunnels, an RAF base and modern-day listening posts whilst at the same time the whole place has a surreal Spanglish feel to it. But the Spanglish residents are more British than the British which is odd. You land on a runway that runs parallel to the Spanish border, and the strip of land is so narrow that the runway juts out into the Med. Apparently the rock creates some nasty turbulence so taking off and landing can be quite a challenge to pilots on even the calmest of days.

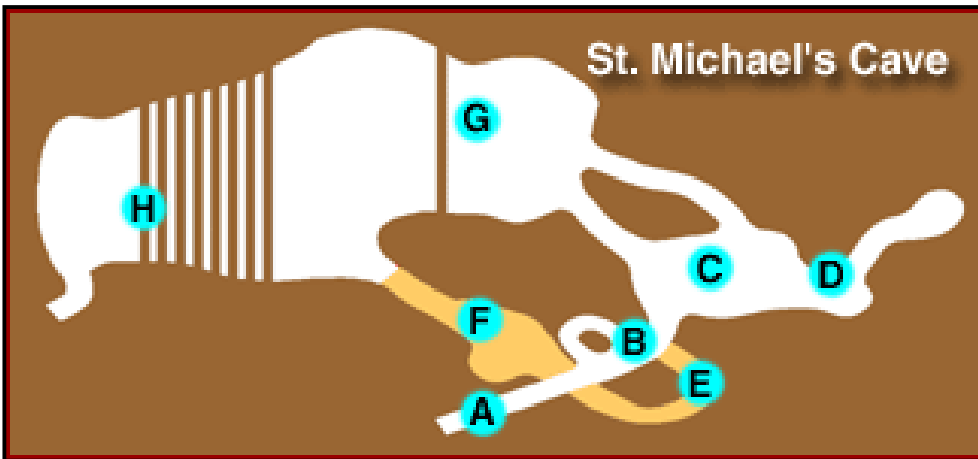
We decided to walk into town rather than take the bus, and this involved walking back across the runway you've landed on. It's quite an odd experience rushing quickly across a runway, tugging your case behind you, and hoping that the barriers don't come down before you get to the other side. There are in fact plenty of buses into town so you don't need to bother with this bit but walking does mean that you can take in the whole of Main Street as well and check out the duty free shops. Unfortunately for me the only second hand bookshop on the rock was closed for refurbishment but there was still plenty of tourist tat, fluffy apes and the like, for us to peruse. We stayed at The Queen's Hotel, just outside the town walls to the east but there are plenty of hotels to choose from. The owner was a Mr Francis but I don't think we got a discount.

Above ground the Rock of course is the highlight, and away from the hussle and bussle of the town it is surprisingly quiet up on top. We went for a pleasant stroll all along the Upper Rock which has that scrubby vegetation typical of limestone hills in the Med. Highlights are the fantastic views along the ridge and watching aircraft take off below you. You can also see right across the Straights of Gibraltar to Morocco and Ceuta. The whole of the Upper Rock is a nature reserve so is great for plant and insect spotting particularly away from the tourist spots - Apes' Den, Great Siege Tunnels and St. Michael's Cave. And yes acquainting yourself with the local simian residents. The top tip is to not buy an ice cream as the apes will want some too. Unfortunately they hang around in the three tourist spots which are exactly where you'd want an ice cream. The apes are Barbary Macaques, and apparently as long as they exist on Gibraltar the territory will remain under British rule.

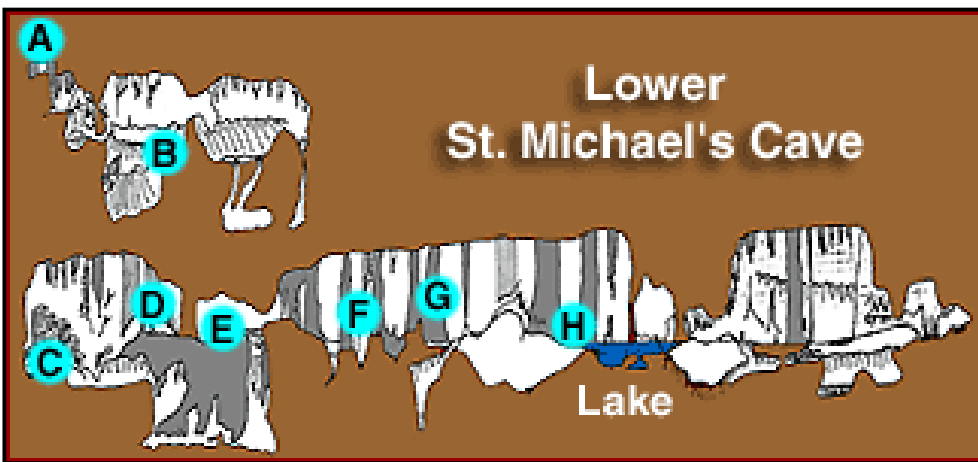
Underground sites are both spelaeological and military. The rock is riddled with tunnels of different ages some of which are open to the public. I'm assuming that with a bit of research you could probably get access to some of the other stuff as well. There are also a few lime kilns which we wandered past en route. Lime was used to whitewash buildings and to paint water cisterns so that the water was free of bacteria. But also they used it to pour over dead bodies in mass graves to prevent further spread of the plague. Delightful. The most famous tunnels are at the Northern End, which were dug as a defence system during the Great Siege of 1779-1783. There is quite a long section that you can visit which includes fantastic views of the airport and Spain beyond.

St. Michael's Cave was our main objective of the weekend and actually is quite a good show cave as they go. The entrance is at the Southern End of the Upper Rock and a nice spot for taking in the vista. You are free to wander around and see the sights rather than the usual guide which makes for a pleasant change.

The formations are typically Mediterranean and the highlight is a huge stalagmite, sliced through and polished in 1972 so that you can see all the rings. The light brown rings are related to periods of high rainfall and darker rings were formed during periods of less rain. Two thin lines of a crumbly white substance are thought to represent glacial periods. There is also one large chamber which I believe they use for concerts and such like although it was quite quiet when we were there. We found out later that this was because it was a Gibraltar bank holiday and everyone was down on the beach at Catalan Bay which we visited the next day.



There is also another section of cave called Lower St. Michael's Cave which can be visited by prior arrangement. It's a sort of adventure caving type affair but was closed when we were there. We rang round a few of the local cavers but they were either out or over in the UK. Well it was a bank holiday.



Other caves Apparently there are over 140 documented caves in Gibraltar, although you won't find much in the way of references, so presumably these must be small. Most would appear to be archaeological but there are also voids intercepted by tunnels and some sea caves. One which we didn't visit which I think is reasonably accessible if you don't mind a cliff walk is Martin's Cave which is below O'Hara's Battery. Apparently at certain times of the day a shaft of sunlight lights up most of the interior. As with most underground sites on Gibraltar it has been used extensively by the military.

So I'm thinking that perhaps we could organise an MCG visit and try and arrange a trip well in advance. We have all the necessary contact details. Anyone interested?

MCG'ers: Tim Francis, Louisa Minahan

Ash trash bin

It has always been a bit of a problem wondering where to dispose of the ash from the fire. It has been dumped all over the place and has sometimes ended up being spread over the car-park. As we often burn wood with nails and other ironmongery attached this could result in your tyres being punctured - not what you want to find just as you are ready to leave for home at the end of a weekend.

However, help is at hand; there is now a metal dustbin outside the back door specifically for disposing of ash. Please empty the contents into the wheely bin every now and again - when they are cold and before the ash bin gets too heavy to lift.



Lost property

An FX charger was found in the charging area before Xmas. It has not been reclaimed so far, and has been put in the Library for safe keeping.

Does anyone know who it may belong to?

Loose bolts

Further to the warning issued on Dec 5th of a possible loose hanger on "the main y-hang on the first pitch in Rhino Rift", and contrary to other reports we have subsequently received from recent visitors to the cave, the CSCC advises that the second hanger for the y-hang is indeed loose (to both a pull and a twist) and that the rock in the immediate vicinity is cracked. (Whether or not the hanger shows movement appears to depend on the method and direction of loading). A warning sign has been attached to the bolt pending further examination or replacement.

The CSCC has also received information that on the Slither Pot route in Thrupe Lane Swallet "the two spits for the "Y" hang down onto Atlas Ledge both have completely stripped threads and are unusable".

Thrupe Lane was already one of the CSCC's priorities for further P-bolting on Mendip as many of the existing spits have been in place for some time and/or have experienced a lot of use. The programme of replacement is ongoing.

**Steve King, Secretary,
CSCC**

Logbook Extracts 2nd October 2005 – 23rd January 2006

Joan Goddard writes: The last Logbook extracts published were up to the 10th April 2005. Unfortunately the backlog has become so great that I have had to miss out almost 6 months of reports including trips to Carcass, East Twin, East-water Cavern, Fairy Cave, G.B., Hanover Chalk Mine (Reading), Loxton Cave, Ludwell Cave, (?) Limekiln dig, Ogof Draenen and OFD (Wales), Pridhamsleigh (Devon), Allt nan Uamh Stream Cave and Uamh an Claonite (Scotland), Shute Shelve, Swildon's, Templeton Pot, Tynings Barrow Swallet, Upper Flood (7 trips), Waterwheel Swallet, Yorkshire (New Rift and Simpson's Pot). Sorry if your trip report has been missed.

Some trips which are always missed are the ones which aren't written up in the logbook at all. Almost certainly there are members who are caving, especially mid-week, but who don't share their experiences with the rest of the club via the logbook or newsletter. We would love to know about your trips – and it is a shame that we are not able to archive a complete description of the club's activities.

02.10.2005 Tatham Wife Hole, Yorkshire (Julie Hesketh + 2 GSG). A day trip from Edinburgh to the Dales. Hideously early start and breakfast in Bernies. Not too wet for Tatty Hole and the first time I had done it on rope. Fun, straightforward trip to the final sump – though the last duck to the sump was deep and chilly. Ugh! Fun and games on the way out – the deviation at the 3rd pitch was very short and I got hung up so some reverse prussicking and assistance was needed. The next man up got hung up too! Good trip! [JH]

08.10.2005 Fairy Cave (Tim F, Louisa M, Stefan Schmid). Great cave! Flat part uneventful until the water crawl and subsequent squeeze – after being told that the water section would only be a crouch ended up being a completely wet crawl – fantastic fun. Then came the squeeze – Tim and Louisa through but I struggled – got a bit worried but after much coaxing and removal of battery pack and helmet got through. (felt like being reborn). Rest of cave very good challenge and great fun. Lot of good formations. Exit tricky. Had a blast. More please. [SS]

09.10.2005 Upper Flood (Tim F, Mike Richardson, Louisa M, Malcolm C). Low water levels. Shifted loads out of the dig with Mike and Louisa at the front. The false floor looks like a roof line that can be followed but the problem is that the whole right hand side is an interlocking jumble of rocks and sediment. Quite disconcerting when it's towering above you. Water 10.5° Puddle Lake. [TF]

30.10.2005 Notts II, Yorkshire (Julie Hesketh, Milch (BEC/GSG), Trevor Faulkner (BEC/GSG), Goon (GSG)). The morning after the Grampian Speleological Group annual dinner and it was pouring down. Changed in absolutely torrential rain and dashed to the cave. What an entrance! A very "well-equipped" entrance shaft is full of scaffolding and breeze blocks – makes the Draenen entrance scaffolding look like a practice run! A really good fun trip – lots of climbs, excellent stomping streamway to deep sumps and some very good formations indeed. A superb Sunday trip. Turned back eventually due to high water levels (and the fact that the cave was filling up with hordes of other GSG members – about 20 in total). Would very much recommend Notts II to all as a good 3+ hours trip. [JH]

05.11.2005 Ubley Hill inspection (Tim F, Martin R, Louisa M, Peat, Linda M). Wandered around looking for Cow Hole – no sign of the entrance where it's supposed to be. So we then went down Ubley Hill to see the state of the collapse and the air quality. Last visited in the late 1990s. The air was OK, particularly when the gusts of wind sucked the air up the pipes.

Dug for a couple of hours but the final squeeze still remains blocked with mud. A return trip needed with spades and more serious digging kit to make the connection. [TF]

R.I.P Cow Hole. Born 1947. Seriously injured in 1990s. Following attempted infilling, resuscitated, but later expired. Died peacefully but unnoticed. No flow-ers. [MR]

N.B. Cow Hole was dreadfully loose over most of its depth, i.e. just plain dangerous. It probably committed suicide to take the honourable way out. My advice? Leave it be, young Master! *[Tony K]*

06.11.2005 Upper Flood - to the Lavatory Trap (Peat, Tim F, Mike R). Braved the elements to check out the conditions in Upper Flood (see Newsletter 331).

11.11.2005 Charterhouse Rakes (Tony Knibbs). Weather less than desperate so went for a walk around Charterhouse Rakes. I note that a new rock-lined mineshaft entrance is opening (probably due to recent torrential rain). It is about 1m diameter. Walk to head of Velvet Bottom, turn left on grassy track going uphill, take first right fork towards skyline beech trees (Bleak House area), go through trees SE direction parallel to stone wall which is southern boundary of biggest rakes, go over stile in dry-stone wall and follow broad grassy track for about 200m. Hole is on left - three rocks placed on short grass adjacent to track close to hole. This may well be Charnel Shaft which we found through a blowhole in snow in 1963 - explored it, plugged the entrance and never found it again. This was a pity because there were some interesting aspects to it. *[TK]*

12.11.2005 Draenen (Peat, Tim F, Julie H). This was to be a breakthrough trip but things didn't turn out as hoped. After removing 30 skips of spoil did a spot of furling to see where we had got to. Got underneath a pendant to see about 2ft of air space onwards. Way on seems to be bearing a bit to the right so we will probably straighten out the dig on the next trip. Made it out to the pub for a few pints with the Oxford/BEC lot then set off back to the MCG. *[Peat]*

03.12.2005 Cow Hole (again) (Martin & Yvonne R, Linda M, Bob T). Walked over to check that Cow Hole really had ceased to be. Walked to where we thought it should be. The bottom of the depression was flooded, with water about 12" deep. Turning round and facing the direction of Ubley Drove, the capped entrance was immediately obvious, on the side of the depression about 20 yards away! (we don't understand how this was overlooked last month). Standing on the lid we could hear water flowing - this may be entering the shaft from the pool in the bottom of the depression. So, the announcement of the demise of Cow Hole was premature. Don't tell Mick Norton, or he will have us all digging there soon.

03.12.2005 G.B.Cave (Giles Martin, Paul, Doug H). Heavy rain all week, a lot of water in the Gorge; Paul and Giles climbed up into East Extension, looked at the waterfall from above and below. A lake had formed below entrance of Ladder Dig, froth higher than entrance into Ladder Dig. *[DH]*

03.12.2005 Excellent Xmas Dinner in the cottage, with Mary Cox as guest.

04.12.2005 - 08.12.2005 Mallorca 2005 (Tim F, Louisa M, Kirsty Stroud, Peat, Mike Richardson) Full write up to follow.

26.12.2005 G.B. Cave, Bat Passage (Mark Ward, Billy Ward, Mark Ward (Jnr)) Water levels low. Lit up Main Chamber with 5,000,000 candle power torch. Awsome! Bit tight up Ladder Dig! My first into G.B. - fantastic! *[MW (Jnr)]*

01.01.2006 G.B.Cave (Sonya & Malcolm C). Warm up and photo trip. Good stream but not unusual for time of year. *[MOC]*

02.01.2006 Brean Down (Mark W, Mark W (Jnr)). Bimble around the caves and many holes of Brean Down. Seriously not worth the effort!? *[MW]*

07.01.2006 Search for "Charnel Shaft" (Tim F, Louisa M, Martin & Yvonne R, Doug H, Mick N). Ed: See article on page 4 of this newsletter for an update.

07.01.2006 Charterhouse Rakes (Mick N, Doug H). Whilst we were searching for Charnel Shaft over the Charterhouse Rakes, I saw a small depression S.E. of the rakes at approximately NGR 5100 5490, in the 'pig field'. Altitude about 255m.

On walking over Mick and Doug found a depression 7m in diameter. It has a concrete block shaft, fitted with a windlass. Mick descended 25ft to the bottom of the shaft on the fixed ladder, then came back up for a light and down again. The bottom, just off ladder, is flooded to a depth of 0.25m. Mattock and digging buckets, but cave only about 10ft diameter - no tunnel or way on other than digging down.

Manor Farm

Manor Farm Swallet has had something of a reputation for a number of years because of its location in the environs of a working farm, and the susceptibility of the swallet stream to "farmyard contamination"; indeed the farmer has regularly closed the cave in the summer/autumn months.

More recently, however, disturbing reports have started to circulate in internet newsgroups and in the caving press, of skin and eye irritations suffered by cavers following trips in the cave.

These reports, and the possible causes, are being investigated. In the meantime cavers intending to visit Manor Farm Swallet should be aware of this potential problem and take steps to minimise their exposure of skin (eg, by wearing rubber gloves). It goes without saying that the cave water should not be drunk.

If you experience any such problems it would be helpful if you could send details to CSCC

Chris Binding, Conservation and Access Officer, CSCC

Loxton Cavern

CSCC organised a Leaders' Induction Day at Loxton Cavern on 7th January. You can find a [report](#) of the leaders day on the UK Caving Forum, written under the alias of Cap'n Chris (Chris Binding?). The article includes a description of the cave and excellent photos. The link <http://ukcaving.com/board/viewtopic.php?t=1718> is difficult to reproduce here but if you are receiving this newsletter by email, clicking on the following link should take you to the article: [Loxton Cavern report](#). The BEC have a [survey](#) on their website http://www.bec-cave.org.uk/component/option,com_gallery2/Itemid,26/?g2_view=core.ShowItem&g2_itemId=632 or follow this link: [Loxton Cavern survey](#)

The cave was known to 18th century miners who left behind the evidence of their visits: tally marks, scratched drawings, knee imprints, boot imprints, soot marks & graffiti, all of which have to be preserved. Because of this, a leader system has been put in place. MCG's leaders will be Tim Francis and Doug Harris. I expect they will be busy over the coming months!

No very recent spoil on surface. I should say it hasn't been dug for 18 months or so. Who knows what it is? [MN]

07.01.2006 Loxton Cavern (Tim F, Doug H) CSCC Leadership trip. Cave familiarity trip with Nick Richards and Nick Harding for two members of each Mendip club.

09.01.2006 Cow Hole (Doug H, Mick N). Cow Hole was located in thick fog. We had with us WD40, a rail bar, club hammer, adjustable spanner, also 2 krabs, wire belay, 25ft ladder and lifeline. Sprayed the bolt and hinges with WD40, and with some difficulty opened the lid. It was so tight it took nearly all Doug and Mick's strength so obviously it has not been opened that often. Doug rigged the ladder and lifeline and Mick descended the very new looking concrete piped shaft. About 15ft from bottom, the ladder we had taken ended, and we had to walk back to the cottage for a second ladder. So a 40ft ladder, 2 krabs and wire belay are needed for the concrete piped shaft. Mick descended to the bottom, then through steel frame along 5ft into a small chamber with much steel shoring. A descent of 6 feet led to the floor of small chamber. A crawl through a small downward opening led to an easy climb down open passage for 16 feet or so, then another drop. That was all we could do today as Doug was not equipped for caving.

After all we have heard about Cow Hole! - it has been open and caveable all this time!!! We must have a proper club trip into this cave, and then supply a report to the CSCC. [MN & DH]

09.01.2006 Templeton Pot (Mick N). Digging with the Axbridge at Templeton. Now four platforms installed, 5th platform going in this week at 120-125ft below field level. Very narrow 5 ft at widest place, length of easily accessible rift at bottom 20ft. Very loose floor, against east vertical wall; this is where drips sink. A very exciting dig [MN]

10.01.2006 Gibbet's Brow shaft (Mick N). Cycle to Castle [of Comfort], then past Lamb Lair. Located Gibbets Brow dig - very easy to find, just 4m from road behind stone wall.

[Back at cottage] spent 3hrs clearing land behind shed in preparation for the creosote substitute that I bought that is in the shed, but as it's been raining for days until this morning - shed too wet. [MN]

22.01.2006 G.B.Cave (Sonya & Lorna Cotter) Pleasant trip. [LC]

23.01.2006 Sandford Levvy (Joan G + 3 members of CHERT). Just a walk along the main passage, together with a detour along the passage to the west, off the first crossroads, to see the zinc blende/calcite vein. Lots of moths near entrance. Took some photos. [JG]

Advance Notice of Annual General Meeting 2006

The AGM of the Mendip Caving Group will be held at the Hunters Lodge Inn on Saturday 1st April 2005 at 10.30am.

Nominations for Office and proposals to change the Constitution and Rules must be submitted in writing by first class post to the Hon. Secretary's home address with the signatures of full members proposing and seconding at least 25 days before the meeting (7th March). A nomination for Office must be accompanied by a signed agreement to stand for election by the nominee. Nominations are sought for all posts. **Tim Francis, MCG Secretary.**



MCG Library additions

Wookey Exposed, 2005 - filmed and produced by Gavin Newman and presented by Roger Whitehead. (DVD 55 mins): "**More men have been to the moon than have reached the end of Wookey Hole**". You, too, can see what's at the end when you watch this superb film, winner of the best adventure film at Kendal International Mountain Film Festival in 2003. It follows the exploration of Wookey from the first cave dive in the 1930s, through Rob Parker's 1985 expedition, to Gavin's recent filming project - updated to include Rick Stanton's 2005 dives which have pushed the cave still further. As a bonus, Rob Parker's 1985 expedition film (by Leo Dickinson) has also been included on this DVD, together with clips from Gavin's China Caves film which is in progress

Cueva de Villa Luz Caves, Mexico – Video (donation)

Chelsea Speleological Society Newsletter Vol 47(12), Dec 2005 has two very readable descriptions of the digging and discovery of Iles Inlet in Agen Allwedd, accompanied by photographs of the superb formations which were found – helictites, 'urchins' and 'corkscrew' formations (apparently some of the best in the country).

Yorkshire Caves and Potholes: Volume 1 – North Ribblesdale (1937) and **Yorkshire Caves and Potholes: Volume 2 – Under Ingleborough** (1948) (donation). These two books by Albert Mitchell are classics of caving literature and we are fortunate to have acquired them. Vol 2 was donated by a very early MCG member, Tony Crawford, who sent it (and some other useful publications) all the way from New Zealand where he now lives.

Craven Pothole Club Jubilee 1929-2004 - this publication had excellent reviews in Descend and at Hidden Earth 2005. The founder member of CPC was Albert Mitchell and it is a coincidence that we have just acquired his two books (above). The Jubilee publication is based on photographs in the belief that a "picture tells a thousand words" but they are linked by very readable descriptions and anecdotes.

Speleology, Issue 5 December 2005 (Bulletin of BCRA) contains expedition reports on Matienzo, Tian Xing and Ethiopia and some other articles. Speleology has a new editor, Erin Lynch, and this issue contains a great deal of information if you can persevere with the small print. Towards the end is a section on Special Interest Groups such as Cave Surveying, Cave Radio and Electronics and Speleological Art.; Speleohistory and Cave Photography Groups haven't fared so well and both have disbanded – a shame as they both started off so well; to some extent they failed simply because they are specialised and there were insufficient people available to keep them going. Also received with Speleology is the **British Caving Association Newsletter No.5**.

Mendip Cave Bibliography & Newspaper Catalogue, 2nd edition, 2005, compiled by Dave Irwin. What can I say! This is the long awaited 2nd edition of the bibliography and is an essential source for Mendip cavers and researchers. It contains so much information that it fills two volumes. Part A is an alphabetical listing of cave sites listed by cave name, author of article and date. Part B deals with cave topics (hydrology, mining etc) and Part C is the newspaper catalogue listed by newspaper name and date. Part D provides a selected bibliography, list of caves in standard guidebooks and abbreviations. The bibliography is kept in the library with all the other bibliographies of which we have a good selection – please use it in the library and don't borrow it for home use. It needs to be on Mendip so that it is accessible at short notice. Copies can be bought for £25 + £3 p&p

The Mendip Hills Landscape, 1998, prepared for the Countryside Commission by Blandford Associates. Another glossy publication describing the Mendip Hills AONB. There seems to be a limitless amount of cash available for this sort of publication but, having said that, this one does provide a clear and very readable description of the various landscapes together with maps and photos. I found a section entitled 'Perceptions of the Mendip Hills' quite enlightening. It illustrates the appreciation (or otherwise) of writers about the area; do you think this poem by E.B.Burrow (1849), written allegedly in celebration of the Mendips, still rings true?

*"Witness ye driving mists; ye drenching rains;
Ye sultry beams, that parch the thirsty plains;
Ye crumbling huts, the shepherd's rude abodes;
Ye treeless, hedgeless lanes; ye houseless roads,
That stretch, interminably straight, across
Curse of the weary wight, and stumbling horse"*

Caves and Caving in the Forest of Dean, June 2005, edited by Dave Appleing. A comprehensive overview of the geology, exploration history and caves of the area. In addition there are articles on dowsing, the Gloucestershire Cave Registry, conservation and water tracing. I found this publication interesting in the way it approached its subject – it isn't just cave descriptions but by including the programme and organiser's perspective of the 1994 Forest of Dean Symposium it begins to convey a 'feel' for caving in the Forest. **J Goddard**

Cottage Work

The Lounge floor isn't the only cottage work we must do this year. The cottage is beginning to show it's age (it is 25 years old this year) and **May 6th & 7th 2006** has been set aside as a Work Weekend. The following list shows some of the jobs which need doing:

Remove fascia boards on gable end facing the washing-down area and replace with treated timber.

Clear brambles from behind shed.

Paint the shed.

Clean out the gas store.

Sweep the chimney.

Clean out behind cooker and fridge.

Cut the grass and re-seed patches.

Dig over and seed the corner section if possible.

Cut up firewood.

Tidy up tackle store.

Paint MCG sign.

Locate the stopcock in the layby.

Continue treating the outside of the upstairs windows.

Level car park area to help water drainage situation by front door.

And lots more.

Please, please, please make a note in your diary and help out with this work. As an incentive, there will be a barbeque and a barrel, so get those overalls out and come along.

**Group Headquarters**

Nordrach Cottage,
Charterhouse-on-
Mendip, Blagdon,
Bristol BS40 7XW
☎ 01761 462797
Grid Ref ST51475606

**Custodian Trustees**

Pat Walsh
Malcolm Cotter
Jon Roberts
Pete Matthews

Rescue Warden

Keith Knight

Conservation Officer

Lee Hawkswell

Examiners

Fiona Kempston
(MCG member)
Anne Pittman
(External)

Gift Aid Administrator

Malcolm Cotter

Booking the Cottage

Please make bookings
for Groups (whether MCG
or Guests) through [Joan
Goddard](#) to avoid double
bookings.

**GROUP INFORMATION**

Weekly Meeting	At The Hunters Lodge, Somerset, Tuesdays at about 10pm	
Monthly Meeting	At the Group HQ on the first Fri/Sat/Sunday of the month	
On-line Meeting	http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/mendip-caving-group/	
Accommodation	Available at the Group HQ (for members and guests)	
Cottage Fees	MCG members, members' children, SWCC, NPC	£ 2.00
(per night)	Guest clubs and member's guests	£ 3.00
Camping Fees	MCG members, members' children, SWCC, NPC	£ 2.00
(per night)	Guest clubs and member's guests	£ 3.00
Season Ticket	Available to members only	£40.00
Subscription 2006	Full and Probationary (excluding BCA insurance)	£30.00
	Associate Members (excluding BCA insurance)	£15.00
BCA Insurance	Cavers £15.00 Non-cavers £5.00 (all members must have cover)	
Reciprocal rights	MCG members have reciprocal rights with SWCC and NPC	

CAVING AND SOCIAL CALENDAR 2006

DATE	AREA	EVENT	CONTACT	TEL
Mar 3/4/5th	Mendip	Members weekend		
Mar 4th	Mendip	Tynings Barrow	Mick Norton	
Mar 31st to Apr 2nd	Mendip	Members weekend		
Apr 1st	Mendip	AGM	Tim Francis	
Apr 1st	Mendip	Annual dinner	Linda Milne	
May 5/6/7th	Mendip	Cottage Work	Doug Harris	
May 7th	Mendip	Avelines Hole (archaeology)	Bob Templeman	
Jun 2/3/4th	Mendip	Members weekend		

THE 2005—2006 MCG COMMITTEE

Secretary	Tim Francis
Tacklemaster	Peat Bennett
Recorder/Librarian	Louisa Minahan
Cottage Warden	Doug Harris
Editor	Yvonne Rowe
Caving Secretary	Bob Templeman
Social Secretary	Linda Milne

COTTAGE BOOKINGS Latest updates at <http://www.caver.plus.com/MCG/>

Who	Date Arrive	Date Leave	Nights	Beds
Bookham Scouts	Fri 17/02/06	Sun 19/02/06	2	24 (3 rooms)
COTTAGE CLOSED	Mon 20/02/06-	Thu 02/03/06	COTTAGE CLOSED	
COTTAGE CLOSED	Mon 06/03/06-	Thur 30/03/06	COTTAGE CLOSED	
Essex Scouts	Fri 07/04/06	Sun 09/04/06	2	14 (2 rooms)
M Pittman	Fri 21/07/06	Sun 23/07/06	2	20