

MCG News

Newsletter of the
Mendip Caving Group

Golden Chamber, Upper Flood Swallet

Number 338
December 2006

www.m-c-g.org.uk

Founded 1954

Cave Training Course, 4th and 5th November 2006

by Karen Fendley

This year's Cave Training course was once again held by John Crowsley with the added assistance of Kev West. This is a training course that John runs as a contribution to the MCG. It was held over two days and consisted of classroom activities, practical sessions and caving.

The beginning of the course was mainly an introduction session to find out who wanted what covered. It became clear quite quickly that there were a few popular topics. Rope work and rigging were popular as was SRT. This section of the course was interesting as it showed the different angles that the trainees were approaching the training from and showed the difference in experience around the room (something which is very hard to cater for in a training session). Some were almost complete beginners and others had quite a bit of experience.

Other items covered in this part were safety equipment (both for the group and as an individual), the need to address cave preservation and cave safety, the formation of caves, navigating through caves and finally the call out procedure.

The first practical session involved going outside (even though it was a bit chilly!) and learning how to rig ladders and how to life line. After some practice with knot tying it was then down to Goatchurch to put into practice what we had learnt so far!

Along the way there was the first geology lesson on how caves and the Cheddar Gorge in particular were formed. We were also asked to review the approach to the cave from the view of 'Does this cave flood?'

Once inside the cave, the trainees were split into two teams for ease of working. Many more areas for consideration were pointed out and a further practical with rope work undertaken by both teams.

Day two started with a review of the previous day's geology lesson, followed by a more involved look at the production of cave systems. This was followed in the afternoon by a trip to GB.

Again, the approach to the cave was discussed and the possible problem of flooding looked at. Once inside the cave, formations were explained; flood lines questioned and the evidence of flooding looked for. The trainees were again split into two groups and navigation through the cave was taken in turns by all the team members. Ropes were again used when needed.

As a new member of MCG and an inexperienced caver, I found this course invaluable. I had not done any rope work or navigation before. Both have encouraged me to go and explore! I found the geology really interesting as I had heard many terms used before and had no idea what they meant. Things were beginning to make sense! John and Kev were fascinating to listen to and were very able to gauge how long to spend on different subjects. John must also be very strong to have pulled me up through the Devils Elbow! Many thanks to both John and Kev for the course.



Karen Fendley in GB
- note the new gear!

From the editor



Things are quieter on the Upper Flood front, so I can catch up now with Group news and publish articles or snippets held over from the last newsletter. You will see that as well as the usual interesting social calendar, we have a very full and varied meet programme. Thanks to Bob Templeman for organising this and the members who make suggestions or volunteer to lead the meets. Cottage income has increased due to more member bednights and more guests groups staying. We have also had a steady trickle of new members and we've enjoyed having them along on members weekends to join in the social and caving meets.

2007 looks set to be a busy year!
YR

In this issue

- 1 Caver training
- 2 Hunters Hole
- 2 Velvet Bottom
- 3 Rescue dump
- 5 MCG leaders
- 6 Library additions
- 7 Hidden Earth 06
- 8 Group information

MCG Doings

Xmas dinner

Don't forget to get your names down for the Christmas dinner, it is always very popular and we have only so much seating/cooking space to play with! If you would like to donate any of last years Christmas crackers, or old decorations, festive candles, etc, we would be very pleased to have them

Appeal for expedition and holiday photos

In the publication which is currently under way it is hoped to feature some photos of MCG caving holidays and expeditions. Please will you look through your old photos and see what you can find? Some were provided for the 50th exhibition and some of those will be used, but there must be more out there! Mallorca seems to be poorly represented in the Group's photo archive, and also Madagascar, but photos will be welcomed from any holiday or expedition. Please send to Joan, on CD or as original prints (which will be scanned and returned to sender)

Hunter's Hole, 7th October 2006 – 'Better late than never'

by Linda Milne

This was my first ever SRT trip in a real cave. I have been a member of the MCG for about 20 years and I have never quite got round to it before now. I finally decided it was time to have a go when I saw some of our group abseil off a rather stunningly high limestone bridge while we were in Slovenia. Despite having a bit of a fear of heights (tempered somewhat after a few years of going up ladders to prune Wisteria and the like) I thought 'I want to do that'.

So this year I forked out for all the gear and set off to get some practice. Firstly, up the tree at the cottage with much tuition from everyone at ground level. This was a tester for me – would I lose it? Nope. The knees were a bit wobbly, but those pruning sessions up the ladder had served me well. Then, the opportunity arose to have a go on Biffs scaffold tower. This was invaluable. You get to go up ropes, trying deviations and rebelayes as you go, fantastic. Thanks to Biff and Giles for my first 'technical' experience. I had another go a bit later and the time to have a go for real approached.

Mick and Biff had offered to take me, Karen (both of us new to SRT) and Adrian (not so new to SRT) down Hunters Hole. It felt a bit like a vertical rabbit warren with lots of bolts for rigging and a round trip 'route' in and out. This meant that we could split into two groups, and consequently weren't holding each other up (too much). Biff rigged one route and Mick the other and off we went. There were quite short stretches so we were always within sight or shouting distance from someone else, very reassuring. Having previously got used to doing everything whilst hanging off the rope, I now had to learn to take advantage of ledges and things to help take the weight off the rope and also to make sure the rope never rubbed against any rocks.

What a great trip. I learnt a lot without losing my nerve. Apparently Rhino Rift is the next trip. I think I may need to find some taller Wisteria.

Team: Mick Norton, Biff, Karen Fendley, Adrian Bell, Linda Milne

Early forays in Velvet Bottom

by Tony Knibbs

As an adjunct to what we already know about MCG's early forays in Velvet Bottom, here is a quote from my limited (1953 -1956) caving diary. It concerns Whitsun (5-13 June) 1954.

"On Wednesday, Malcolm Cotter and I went on a recce of Velvet Bottom right up to the main road. Interesting features of this trip were: a) the stream which disappears into a leat near the head of Velvet Bottom, b) the deserted cottage and windpump near Charterhouse, c) an excavated shaft at Charterhouse, which is taking a small stream.

This stream is probably dry in dry weather. The head of Velvet Bottom is riddled with odd cavities and curiosities; some of these 'odd cavities' might be worth digging out."

I remember that we clung on the unconnected shaft of the windpump to be alternately raised and lowered inside the pylon-type support structure just for fun (boys will be boys). If that Wednesday's date can be deduced, it marks the actual date from which MCG really got hooked on upper Velvet Bottom! (*Ed: The Wednesday between 5th and 13th June 1954 was 09/06/54*)



The cottage as it was in the 1980's (since demolished)

Rescue dump for Upper Flood

A trip to the far end of Upper Flood is now a serious undertaking. There are several tight squeezes as well as boulder ruckles which could be unstable, and it is not yet known if the low crawls flood in wet weather. There has been one roof fall, and Mike Richardson injured and ankle when he had a slight fall. Rescue could be difficult, or at least delayed.

We have therefore created a rescue dump which is located at the bottom of the Departure Lounge, to give short term shelter for anyone who finds themselves unexpectedly delayed in the cave.

There are 3 Darren Drums, with the following contents:

Box 1

- 1 x gas stove plus spares /accessories
- 2 x 100g gas (butane/propane)
- 2 x cigarette lighters (in with gas stove)
- 1 x box of waterproof matches (in with gas stove)
- 1 x box of chlorine tablets (in with gas stove)
- 1 x candle lantern
- 6 x tea-light candles (4 in lantern; 2 in stove)
- 4 x plastic spoons
- 4 x Mars bars (use by Jun 2007)
- 40 x tea bags (use by Mar 2008)
- 1 x 170g tube sweetened condensed milk (use by Aug 2007)
- 1 x 0.8 litre (1 ½ pints) saucepan
- 5 x beef & tomato cuppa soups (in saucepan)
- 5 x vegetable cuppa soups (in saucepan)
- 1 x swiss army type pen knife
- 2 x light sticks (use by 2010)
- 2 x packets tissues
- 3 x tea light candles (loose)
- 2 x garden refuse sacks (for waste!)

Box 2

- 1 x first aid kit
 - 4 x pairs gloves
 - 4 x balaclavas
 - 1 x garden refuse sack
 - 2 x mugs
 - 1 x meal : pasta in cheese sauce (veggi)
(use by Dec 2008)
 - 1 x meal : chicken risotto (use by Dec 2008)
 - 1 x beef : strogonoff (use by Dec 2008)
 - 1 x meal : ham and leek (use by Oct 2007)
- (All above meals: just add boiling water to pouches)*

Box 3

- 2 x double size orange survival bags
- 1 x 25m roll duck tape
- 1 x packet 15 fem-wipes (use as toilet paper)
- 1 x 1 litre water bottle
- 3 x garden refuse sacks (for waste!)



Caving meets

Here are details of caving meets for both the December and February members' weekends. (I have nothing planned for January!)

Sat 2nd December:
Bath Stone Mines. We can decide which mine to visit on the day, i.e. Swan Mine, Brownes Folly or Box. Meet 11:00 hrs Quarreymans Arms carpark, grid reference: ST 83446 69319. Further details from Geoff Beale

Sun 3rd December:
Tynning's Barrow Swallet. The cave is stunningly easy for route finding so there should be something for everyone, only stipulation you must be able to climb three five metre ladders and not be over 20 stone. Cost £1.00 each. Further Details from Mick Norton.

February Members' weekend: It is planned to visit the newly found Loxton Cave. Leader Doug Harris plus 4. Arrangements to be firmed up nearer the weekend.

Bob Templeman
Caving Secretary

MCG library roof

I would like to announce that the Library Roof is now completed!

Doug Harris
Cottage Warden

The boxes are for **emergency only** and have tamperproof seals.

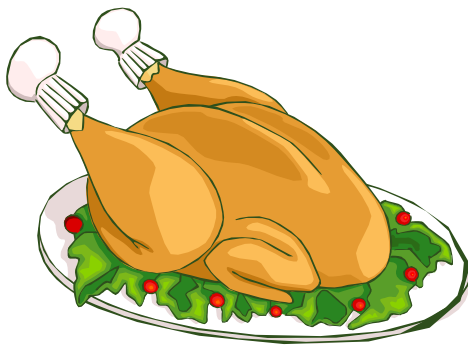
MENDIP CAVING GROUP



Christmas Dinner Saturday 2nd December

7.30pm

At Nordrach Cottage



2 course dinner with
all the trimmings



Please book in advance to be sure of a place. Final numbers will be needed Saturday morning. Veggies catered for. Cost is usually around £4.00

Contact Linda

Summary of Cave Leaders 2006

Upper Flood Swallet

Charlie Allison
 Peat Bennett
 Jean Paul Burch
 Mike Carson
 Ben Cooper
 Sonya Cotter
 John Crowsley
 Steve Eddy
 Tim Francis
 Lee Hawkswell
 Julie Hesketh
 Doug Harris
 Mike Richardson
 Adrian Thomas
 Dave Tooke
 Mark Ward
 Stephen Wyatt

Charterhouse Cave

Charlie Allison
 Martin Peck

Reservoir Hole

Geoff Beale
 Nick Gilson

Shute Shelve Cavern

Doug Harris

Loxton Cave

Tim Francis
 Doug Harris

Dan-yr-Ogof

Geoff Beale
 Martin Peck

OFD 1

Geoff Beale
 John Crowsley
 Martin Peck

SRT rope box - key holders

Peat Bennett	Lee Hawkswell	Reggie Pain
Ben Cooper	Julie Hesketh	Dave Tooke
Tim Francis	Mick Norton	Kevin West



Mike Richardson, right, with Peat Bennett in Upper Flood

Foot Loose.....

Commiserations to Mike Richardson who fell off a short climb (Foot Loose) in Upper Flood, hurting an ankle. He dragged himself back to the cottage to find his tackle sack with his clothes had been taken from the cottage.

Meanwhile, a party of MCG on a training trip with Kev West and John Crowsley were surprised to find, when they opened the rope bag to begin rigging a pitch, that it contained only underwear and a towel.....

Earwig in on the committee meeting 05/11/06

Fliers advertising the Group and its facilities are looking very professional - paper copies for people to take, and glossy on show at Tourist Information Centre, Harptree stores etc. **BCA insurance:** no change to the cost of insurance for 2007....

Wheelie bin: the Group is to get a bigger bin to take the extra rubbish produced by extra cottage usage. This will result in less 'lifts' and we are charged per lift....

Fire grate: Doug Harris has mended the big hole in the fire grate - many thanks.

Correction

I take issue concerning Martin's obituary of Eric Dowley as the facts are wrong. I was Treasurer for nigh on 10 years when the Group was very poor and struggling to save funds to buy the original site [and to] complete our first new cottage during which time I paid some of the merchants bills out of my own pocket - I was reimbursed when funds allowed! Numerous members made interest free loans or pledges. When the cottage was all but complete, I handed over the Treasurership to Eric - then we blew it up. I went to view the ruins (as solicitor to the Group) concluded the building was a total loss, arranged a site meeting with the insurance assessor.... and it was agreed we should be paid the full insured value. Shortly after I went to the insurers offices in Reading, collected the cheque... and placed it on the money market. I do not write this to denigrate Eric who was my good friend but ... to present sufficient facts to correct Martin's assertions. Maybe Eric will smile about this.

Ron Saunders

Library additions

National Geographic Magazine Vol 210 No.3 September 2006 – contains an article “Raging Danger” about an expedition in January/February 2006 to the Ora Doline on the island of New Britain, (off the coast of Papua New Guinea). Plenty of good photographs and a sketch section through the Ora cave system.

CREG Journal No. 64 Sept 2006 – “A robotic surveying vehicle” - but you’ll need to enlarge the tight bits in Upper Flood first!

NSS News, published monthly – The August 2006 issue includes “A Cave trip in Casteret Country”. The NSS News always has some brilliant photos of caves and recent issues are no exception.

British Caving Association Handbook 2006-2007 –

Nice little A5 booklet packed full of useful information. Will be filed in the library under BCA.

Journal of the Wessex Cave Club Vol 28 No 301, September 2006 . The Wessex have also kindly provided us with a couple of back issues which were missing from the library (– not signed out!). We now have a full run which will be bound as our latest volume of Wessex journals

Shepton Mallet CC Occasional Publication No 10 – Caves of the Nam Nao National Park, Thailand. Expeditions between 2000 and 2006 with colour photos and surveys. Unfortunately the print quality on some of the pages is poor.

Bradford Pothole Club Bulletin, Vol 7 No 2 , February 2006 – 84 pages of varied and interesting articles, including trips to the Pyrenees 2003 and 2004.

Speleologia Vol 26 Vol 53 (December 2006) Italian Speleological Society – beautifully produced with excellent photos. This issue has an article on Bemaraha in Madagascar (pp 48-55) which may interest those who went there a few years ago.

Speleology, Issue 7, August 2006 - contains expedition reports (Matienzo and Asturias (Spain), India, Pakistan and Laos). Also an interesting account of field trip to S W China to visit massive tienkengs, huge holes with vertical cliffs, formed by the collapse of large chambers in rivers.

Video: Clay and tin mines in Cornwall, Coal mines in Forest of Dean and Somerset. 25mins. (donated)

Also the latest editions of **Belfry Bulletin**, **MNRC**, **Chelsea S.S.** and **Westminster S.G.**

Remember to let me (Joan Goddard) know if there are any books or publications which you would like purchased for the library.



Hidden Earth 2006 – Leek, Staffs

by Yvonne Rowe

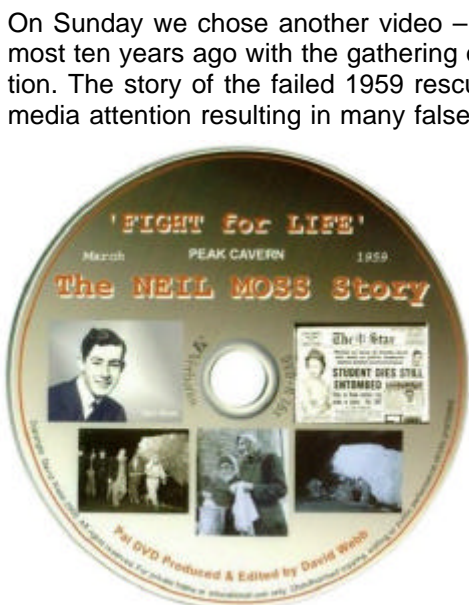
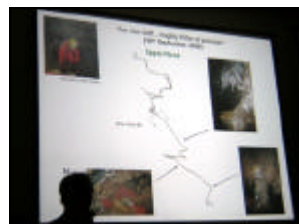
The caving conference this year was held over the weekend of 22-24 September in Leek High School, a good venue in all ways except for parking. It was a bit of a scramble for places on local residential streets and we were guiltily aware that we were probably taking up locals' parking places. There were good facilities for lectures and trade stands, with excellent hot breakfasts and lunches laid on in the school canteen.

Martin and I drove down early but by the time we found a parking place we only had time to quickly scan the programme of events, choose a lecture then go straight in.

We chose a film by Gavin Newman entitled 'Maybe China, maybe not!'. A superbly shot film, as you would expect from Gavin, which was supposed to follow a planned mega-trip into one of China's huge systems. However, the team were foiled by constant bad weather which flooded the cave enough to make it too dangerous to enter. Instead they searched for lesser known, but no less spectacular caves and filmed these. It was not disappointing.



Later followed the Mendip round-up. Tim Francis told a packed audience about our (then) very recent 800 metre breakthrough in Upper Flood. His PowerPoint presentation (now available on the MCG Yahoo website) included a survey of where we were up to plus a few photos taken with a throw-away camera – such was the last-minute rush to get something together in time for the conference. When we got home that evening we had a phone-call from Doug Harris to say he and Mike Richardson had been down Upper Flood again that day and had discovered a further 100 metres!



On Sunday we chose another video – the Neil Moss Story by David Webb. This video project was started almost ten years ago with the gathering of video footage (much of it in older formats), interviews and documentation. The story of the failed 1959 rescue attempt of Neil from Peak Cavern in Derbyshire attracted world-wide media attention resulting in many false accounts, and the object of the film was to present a factual account of the rescue attempt, told by those who were there. The accounts from the rescuers from that time were quite harrowing and the whole video, although fascinating, was very emotional, even tear jerking (for me anyway). There were tales from the rescuers of how they tried all ways they could think of to extract Neil from the deep, narrow shaft he was stuck in. Because the shaft was so tight, and Neil so tall, he could not bend his legs enough to make use of the ladder (with far-spaced rungs in those days) to climb out. Nor could the rescuers get close enough to him to help with things like tying ropes round him for hauling, or to use the ladder to pull him out as it too had become stuck. After his mammoth efforts to get up out of the shaft, Neil soon became too weak to help himself and he was drifting in and out of consciousness due to the build up of bad air. Hundreds of oxygen cylinders were taken down to give both rescuers and Neil some fresh air, but to no avail. The rescuers told how they and the attending doctors could hear Neil's breathing getting shallower, then erratic, then finally stop. The lecture hall was full

to overflowing, but you could have heard a pin drop!

Another of Gavin Newman's films was 'Filming Planet Earth – from OFD to Lechuguilla!' This was a behind-the-scenes look at filming for the BBC Planet Earth Caves programme shown earlier this year. Gavin was one of twelve cameramen who worked on the series and he filmed all the UK based underground sequences. He also spent ten days underground (eating, sleeping and sh**ing under strict access conditions) in Lechuguilla cave in New Mexico in charge of lighting the world's most beautiful cave. This, amongst other things, highlighted the extraordinary lengths they took to rig zip wires and ropes in the cave on which cameras were attached so they could move through the cave smoothly, filming as they went. Gavin was told there was to be no still photography at all – no lingering shots of stal or cave fauna. When they were to film, say, a beautiful cluster of contorted helictites, a rig would be built allowing a stills camera to be moved a few degrees between each shot and the whole sequence later animated to give the impression the camera was moving more quickly. As a result, scenes lasting only 30 seconds on screen could take 6 hours to film. Gavin said that in ten days working in Lechuguilla they got about nine minutes-worth of film! It was interesting to learn all the secrets of filming the caves for this series, but, fortunately, it didn't shatter any illusions we got from seeing the final result on TV.



Finally, we went to a lecture on cave exploration in Laos – 'Caving in the land of the Mekong' by Joerg Dreybrodt. Northern Laos is virtually unknown to speleology. Five expeditions were undertaken from 2000-2006 to achieve an overview of the caving regions. The areas searched were Muang Ngoy, Luang Prabang, Phoukhoun and Vieng Phouka where caves with a total length of 25km were discovered. In Vieng Phouka they discovered the largest cave, the river cave system of Tham Eng. It consists of a 3.1km long upper fossil system and a 3.5km long lower active river system. Other expeditions focussed on caves used as hiding places by communist resistance fighters in the area around Sam Neua.

As usual it was hard to choose which lectures to attend, and, as always, there were some we wanted to see but were running at the same time as others. The choices were many and varied – from cave photography to rescues; from caving expeditions all over the world to caving at 'home'; from cave diving to dowsing for caves; from caving electrics to filming Planet Earth, and much more.