

MCG NEWS

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group

Departure Lounge, Upper Flood (by Charlie Allison)

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www.m-c-g.org.uk
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Las Leñas: MCG in Argentina 2006

by Tim Francis

What with all the excitement surrounding the Upper Flood discoveries it seems an absolute eternity since our last jaunt to Argentina - our sixth so far. This year's team in Malargüe in February 2006 was just the usual three of us from the UK – Peat Bennett, Richard Carey and I – plus our friends from INAE. Again we had less than two weeks in the field so our focus was to really crack open the potential of the caves at Las Leñas. On the previous trip in 2004 (newsletter 320), we had only cursorily looked at the valley but had noted more than 15 sites of interest including Cueva Naranja, Cueva Langosta, and Cueva de la Nieve.

Valle de Las Leñas

Not a lot has been written about the cave potential of the gypsum at Monte Leñas except for the exploration and survey (1997) of a very small cave, Cueva de Los Tundques. This can be seen clearly from the road although you do need to get your feet wet to get to the entrance. It was considered that there was not much else to be had.



Monte Las Lenas

I looked back at our original field notes from 2001: *“Due to the atrocious weather we virtually did not leave the car but did note one cave by the roadside [Actually just an undercut where water resurges]. The road was poor so we did not drive much beyond the resort. With hindsight I think this area would be worth further investigation.”*



Las Lenas

almost 3000m and 16 sites of spelaeological potential, not bad for an area considered to have no caves. The main discoveries were a big resurgence below

But in 2004 it was readily apparent that there was huge potential. The depth of the gypsum is significantly greater than that at Poti Malal, and with the mountains soaring to over 4000m it really was worth a proper look. We only had a few days at Las Leñas as our focus was to complete the survey of Cueva Miranda over at Poti Malal. But we noted resurgences at

From the editor



Again, I have not had room to publish everything in this issue that I have been sent. I am not complaining, but I am aware that if you *have* sent in articles or snippets, you might be a bit miffed at them not being included. They will be in the next issue, I promise. Amongst other things, there will be an update of the goings-on in Upper Flood – and there is still a lot going on.

With summer coming (or has it come?) it will be nice to change / hose down in the warm, and the light evenings mean we can have the odd impromptu barbecue. I love the brief, perfume-like smell when exiting a cave in the summer.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to warmly welcome the new committee members.

Yvonne

In this issue

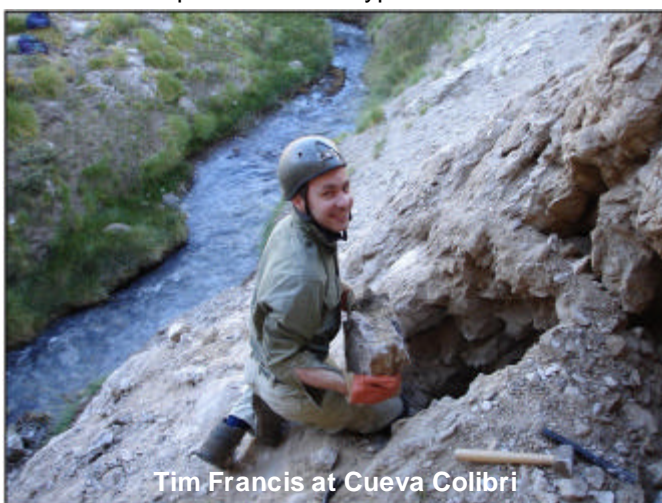
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Monte Leñas, Cueva Naranja and Rio Naranja, Cueva Langosta and Dead Colibri Cave. None of which are particularly long but there is a hell of a lot of water coming out of the mountains. The problem we've found with gypsum is that you just can't seem to follow the water very far before the cave closes down or collapses. So in 2006 we were absolutely determined to focus on Las Leñas. Indeed we had muttered that we probably would not have time to visit Poti Malal which is almost sacrilege in these parts. Carlos lined us up some extremely cheap off-season accommodation at the ski resort – beds, a shower, an electric hob, a shop. This was true luxury compared to the usual cold and dusty camping. Indeed from our room's window we had a fantastic view of the gypsum mountains, 'Cerro Yeseras', in the distance. Peat had a good pair of binoculars so we were even able to indulge in some armchair cave spotting.

The Resurgences of Las Leñas The appeal of cave exploration in the valley is that you can do day trips from the end of the tarmac road. Indeed the furthest reaches of the gypsum are only 3-4 hours walk away so there was no need for camping. Mind you, day after day of high-altitude walking can get rather tiring. The caves are 500-1000m higher than at Poti Malal so they can be very cold. Mendip kit is definitely advisable for anything other than a quick recce.

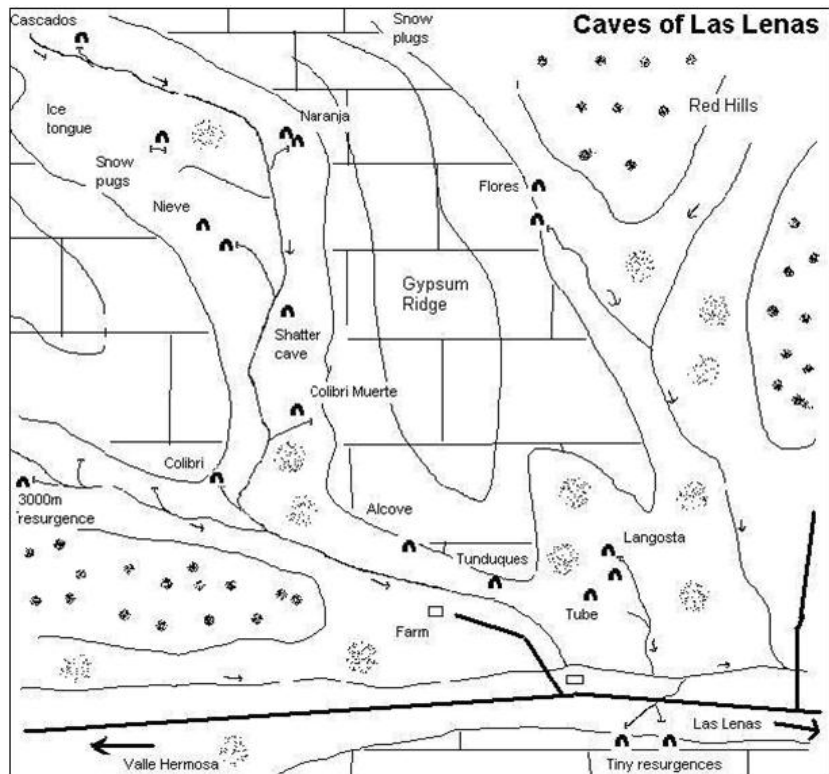
Cueva del Colibri (A Colibri is a small brightly coloured hummingbird, indigenous to this area.) On the first day we thought we'd go for an evening's stroll to look at the main resurgence. Just follow the main river from the farmhouse at the end of the valley and you can't miss it. The others went up to Tunduques instead for a spot of tourist caving. Things had changed since 2004. The cliff face above the entrance had collapsed and there is now a nasty overhang. Not ideal. So instead I had a rummage in a scree slope on the left of the resurgence.

Unbelievably I opened up a drafting hole within a matter of minutes. Another hour's digging on the following day and we were in. A couple of rubbly squeezes dropped us back down to stream level – the entrance collapse had been bypassed. The cave is low and wet and small. Despite our best efforts we couldn't



Tim Francis at Cueva Colibri

keep out of the water which is essentially just snowmelt. It opens into a small section of walking-sized streamway before closing down at a grizzly-looking bedding plane and boulder choke. We tried to dig around the choke on the left but this looked long term. On the surveying trip Peat spotted that the main streamway was actually coming out of a low scoop on the right-hand side. We duly surveyed into this but the streamway got lower and lower. Peat commented "this turned out to be a surveyor's hell involving crawling in freezing cold water. Enough was enough when I could hardly move my limbs due to the cold." We left it at a flat-out hypothermic bedding plane that twisted out of sight. On the final day, Peat and Rubèn did a mad dash to the end in full Mendip kit to see if they could push it. Again they were beaten back by the cold. It looks very unpromising but possibly in a thick wetsuit further progress might be possible. The current length stands at 125m.



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Richard Carey in Cueva Colibri



Tim at the Naranja dig

Cueva Naranja The object of the visit to this site was to see if we could dig out the large resurgence below the fossil cave entrance. We enthusiastically dug out the mud and rocks in the floor to try and lower the water level. This worked a treat but rather than the duck we'd hoped for it was revealed that the water flows out of a tiny bedding plane. Defeated again. The mud here has a high iron content so both the shivering team of diggers and the river in the valley were now bright orange. Intriguingly the resurgence at Colibri Muerte was flowing orange suggesting a connection somewhere to one of the meanders of the surface river.

Colibri Muerte This was a small site we'd found in 2004 and so named because of a dead bird at the entrance. It's an unpromising gravel in the scree of gypsum on the left hand side of the huge resurgence on the other side of the valley from Colibri Cave. Towards the end of the trip Peat and I nosed around in every hole looking for a way past the huge tumble of boulders blocking the main resurgence. There really is nothing here but the nature of the gypsum means that it is worth checking every few years just in case. Just for the hell of it we looked at Colibri Muerte. This time there was a stream running down the cave whereas it had been bone dry in 2004.

Cueva de la Nieve We had decided to traverse the whole of the valley side on the left and up into the upper valley. This took us past the small valley that Peat and Rubèn had looked at briefly in 2004. They'd found Cueva de la Nieve and spotted a couple of other possible locations before thunderstorms had cut short the day. Nieve is a delightful little cave with the roof festooned with gypsum crystals. It's also rather wet and loose. The entrance looks like it's going to collapse sooner rather than later so we didn't tarry too long.

Anything above 2500m in this area seemed to be snow-plugged. We did come across a tiny resurgence and sink in a doline but not much else. The highlight of this tour of the hills was a natural rock arch carved out of glacial debris by a melt-water stream. This lay right at the foot of a tongue of ice and afterwards we realised that we could actually see it through the binoculars all the way from the ski resort.



Formations - Cueva de la Nieve



Snow plug - Cueva de la Nieve



Rubble Arch - Cueva de la Nieve

Cueva de Las Cascados This was found on day two of the trip and I think it's the best cave in the province of Malargüe. And it really is a classic. After the end of our tour of the hills around Cueva de la Nieve we stomped all the way up to the head of the side valley and peered over the lip to the continuation of the main valley. On the far side just before the end of the gypsum we could see a large resurgence that chucked out a large proportion of the river. Clearly this was going to be a primary target of the trip and we returned the following day. It takes on average about three hours to reach the entrance so days spent up at Cascados were long ones. Indeed on the last surveying trip Peat and I were almost benighted despite clocking up record breaking walk-in and walk-out times. The cave is so-named because of a fine crashing cascade at the end of the cave. This is the only large streamway and waterfall that we've come across in Argentina. The cave's length is around 400m.

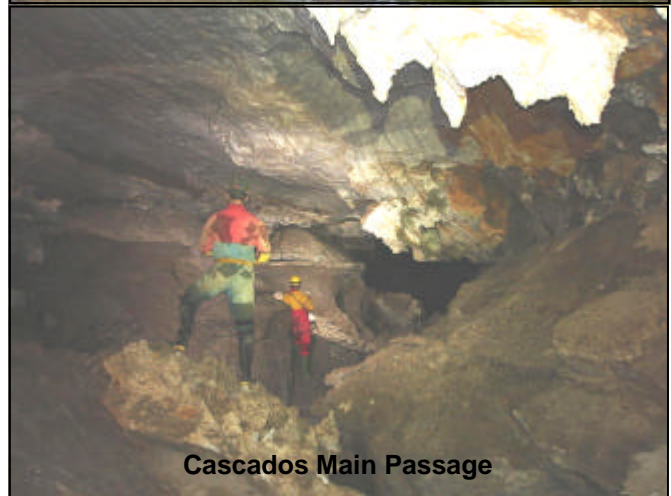
The cave starts as a very low crawl in ice cold melt-water. Thank God we'd brought Mendip kit. Our friends from INAE really felt the pain in this section. Luckily it soon popped out into large stomping passage. To the right closes down but to the left is a fine stream passage, something that is highly unusual in the gypsum of Argentina. We got some excellent shots in this section.

Another junction was met. Straight ahead, Sulphur Passage runs for 50m or so until it closes down at a dry choke. The passage smelled heavily of sulphur, hence the name. It does draft though and we know from the survey that it lies close to the cascades at the end of the cave. The main streamway twists off to the left into a Yorkshire-style series of meanders. The gypsum is extremely hard here so the water has scoured a delightful series of twists and turns. This section of meanders emerges via a chossy choke into a very large boulder slope with a streamway crashing down from above. This was really exciting stuff. At the top of the slope it all closes down in the inevitable boulder choke. I pushed this along the solid left wall as far as I felt was prudent but it does continue. That's one for someone of a less nervous disposition, I can tell you. Above the meanders is a second, but smaller, series of passages we named The Tubes. These phreatic wriggles meet up with the meanders at the choke at the base of the cascade which makes for a pleasant, if cold, round trip. They are also unusual in that there is a small grotto of straws. You don't tend to see much active stal at this altitude.

Side valley rambles As well as looking at the main valley we wanted to look around the back of the gypsum ridge to see if there were caves on the side and round the back. There is a tributary valley that starts a little bit closer to Las Leñas with a broad flat floor at its mouth. We had looked at the lower levels of this valley briefly in 2004 and found Cueva Langosta and another flood-prone-looking crack. We knew that there wouldn't be much gypsum to traverse as in flood the river runs orange rather than grey. So we walked



Cascados entrance



Cascados Main Passage



Richard Carey in the Meanders, Cueva Cascados

up the valley one day, hugging the gypsum on our left and checking out every nook and cranny. For a laugh we climbed up over 3000m to peer over into the main valley and onwards to Cascados in the distance. It was no surprise that all the depressions at this height were filled with snow. Peat and Rubèn, our mountain goat duo, climbed up even higher for some fantastic views of the Andes all around.

Cueva de Las Flores One reasonably-sized resurgence was spotted but the water runs out of a too-tight crack. Elsewhere, all the depressions in the gypsum are blind apart from one small, and very pretty cave. It's only 25m in length, but very pretty at the back. There does seem to be very little potential on this side of the mountain. A longer-term plan would be to walk / ride into the mountains to get to the gypsum right around the back. This would be quite an epic in this terrain and would definitely involve camping.



San Agustín

astounded to see that a completely new sink had opened up on the right hand side of the valley. Even more astounding was that we were able to dig our way into the cave. It only went for a few metres but is definitely diggable. I've said this many times but if someone put in the effort here you could have a cracking through-trip and create the longest gypsum cave in Argentina.

Back to Cueva Miranda, Poti Malal Yes, despite our good intentions, we did end up back at Miranda after all. However, there was a good reason for this. There had been some pretty serious floods a few months before and Carlos was keen to check out the effects. San Agustín had really taken a battering with several large boulders crashing down the entrance slope. There is now a large trench in the scree slope.

Top sink, Cueva Miranda Of more interest was what has happened to the streamway in the side valley above Miranda. In the many years we have been visiting this has changed the position at which it sinks. This year we were



Flood sink, Cueva Miranda. Ruben Cepeda and Tim

Malargüe Hills and Valenciana Round the back of Malargüe are some low scrubby gypsum hills, Barda Blanca. We spent a frustrating and extremely hot afternoon looking for caves here. But there is nothing. Also in the foothills off the main road at El Chacey we had heard about an abandoned gypsum quarry. We were stopped by some farmers at a gate who said that we would need to speak to the landowner. So something to set up for the future perhaps? Finally we had an idea about trying to get onto the gypsum on the horizon beyond Valenciana. We'd seen and photographed this many years ago but never visited the area. It is of interest because it forms the northerly end of the limestone / gypsum ridge that you see at Brujas further to the south. Unfortunately, they've re-opened the gypsum quarries in the area so everything was fenced off and strictly off-limits to itinerant cavers. That's one for the future.

Outstanding projects After six trips to Malargüe we have now exhausted all the obvious caving areas in the area. There are of course pockets of gypsum scattered about in the Andean foothills between Brujas and Las Leñas. But without any tarmac roads or public access these will be extremely tricky to explore. On several occasions we have come across verbal references, spoken to local farmers, hearsay and notes on maps that indicate the potential for cave. But these will require considerable effort to follow up without any guarantee of new cave, and would be best reced first by our friends in INAE. Our remaining medium term leads, without resorting to bang, are as follows:

Las Leñas: Cueva de las Cascados - pushing the boulder choke upstream of the cascades, and digging through the drafting choke at the end of Sulphur Passage with a potential connection to the cascades; **Cueva del Colibri** - confirming that the stream crawl doesn't go (a thick wetsuit and low water will be required for this) and digging the upstream choke on the left; **Colibri Muerte** - climbing up the tufa wall above the resurgence; **Cueva Langosta** - digs at the far end of the main chamber and right-hand passage.

Poti Malal: Cueva Miranda - dig top sink to connect to the main cave.

If we return again we will be looking to explore a completely new region but we have no firm plans yet.

Team: Peat Bennett, Ariel Benedetto, Carlos Benedetto, Richard Carey, Rubèn Cepeda, Ricardo Fernández, Gaston, Tim Francis

Hanover mine - the day the world came crashing down

Voiceover: "Reading: January 2000. And for some the world has just come crashing down. The cause - a hidden chalk mine which reappeared with devastating consequences. Experts say they've now found more than 30 mines across the town. I went to see one of only two mines that can actually be entered"

It seems every BBC region has suddenly discovered caving, with recent programs on Titan in Derbyshire, and our own Upper Flood featuring on Points West. Not to be outdone, the BBC's Chris Packham paid a visit to Hanover Mine in Reading for Inside Out South on 09/02/2007, guided by Geoff Beale, Graham Old and Biff.

Chris explained how the abandoned mine was rediscovered in the 1970s when a bulldozer ploughed into the 60ft entrance shaft. Geoff is seen liflining him down the shaft and guiding him around the mine as he highlights old candle holders and graffiti. Chris points out that a thick cap of clay has kept the mine free of water making it less likely to erode and collapse - although Geoff helpfully guides him to a major collapse (well, it did happen 100 years ago!). Back on the surface, Chris is able to reassure a householder that the mine looked remarkably solid - to him.

Surveyors are using ground penetrating radar to map the extent of the mines although there are no plans to do anything about them. Reading has the second largest number of chalk mines in the south of England and it would take tens of millions of pounds to carry out all the safety work needed. In the meantime, its down to Geoff, Graham and Biff to look out for signs of the town's hidden past breaking through to the surface!

From: Jess Hartley
Sent: 19 March 2007
To: MCG secretary
Subject: Caving

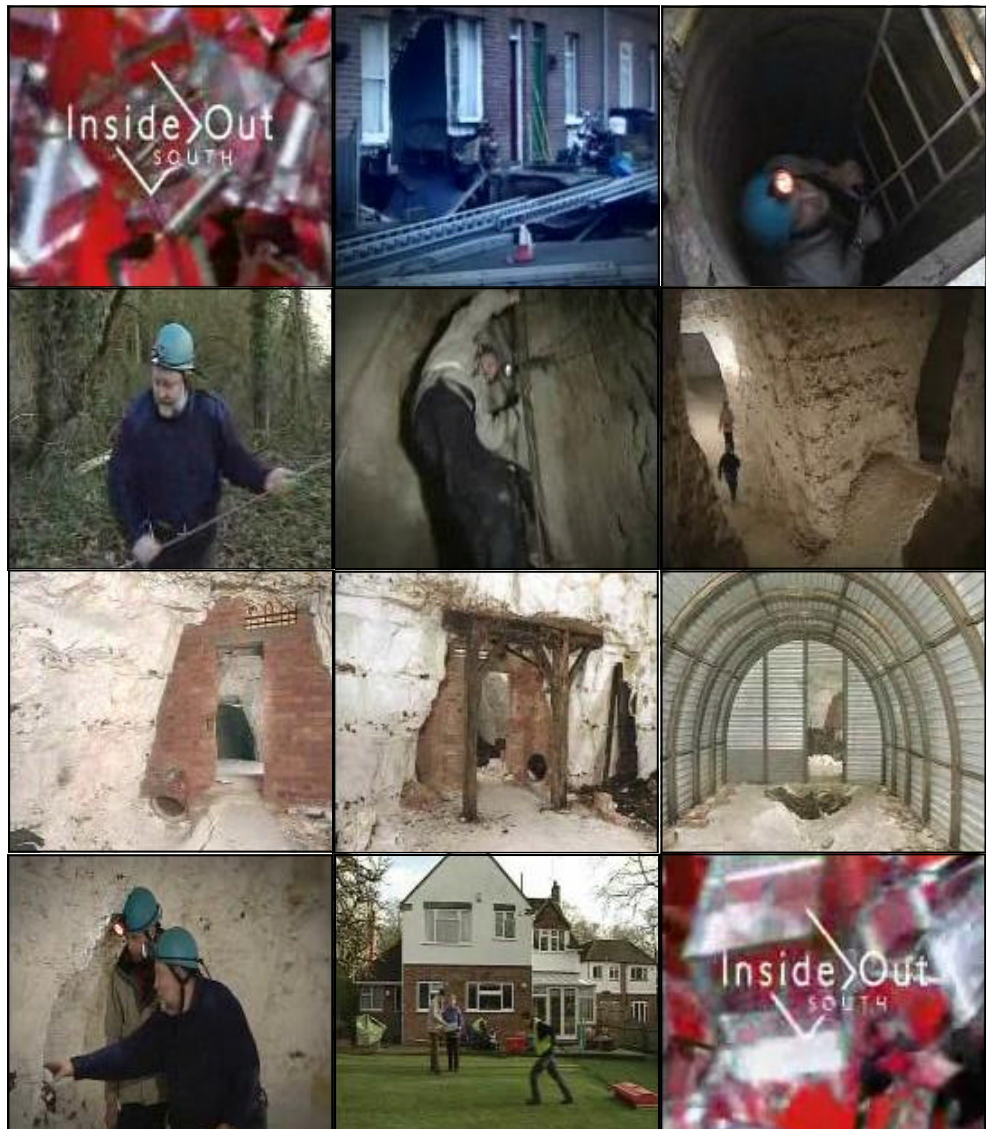
Hi there,

My name is Jessica Hartley and I work for a TV Production company in London called Liberty Bell.

We are hoping to make a programme about 'daredevils' who are over the age of 65 and who are doing exciting and adventurous things like caving. I was wondering if you could tell me if you have anyone over the age of 65 at your club?

If you've got any questions and would rather get in contact by phone my number is 0207 5987251.

Many thanks in advance,
 Jessica Hartley
 jessh "at" avalonuk.com



Some notes on Hanover Mine

by Geoff Beale

The mine was re-discovered in 1977, when shrubbery was being cleared by a small mechanical digger in the corner of a large garden in Emmer Green, Reading. As the top soil and mainly overgrown Rhododendron bushes were being cleared, the digger nosed into a brick-lined shaft that at first was thought to be an abandoned well shaft. Baulks of timber had been placed over the shaft head and simply covered over. Nature then sealed off what was later discovered to be part of a chalk mine complex. At the time of discovery the land above was a building site on what had been, pre WW2, a thriving brick and tile works. The land, being quite clayey, retained a lot of surface water which was conveniently pumped down the shaft. Inspection showed that water did not pool at the shaft bottom, but flowed away, and this was intriguing.

A young builder from the site joined two building ladders together and descended to discover a previously unknown chalk mine complex. No records have been found in any archives to show when the mine was worked, or by whom or when it ceased production. It is known that chalk was being dug for liming the fields (marling) to break up the clay cap of the Chiltern Hills, also for making into lime mortar and whitewash for walls. It was found that adding chalk to the local brick clay produced a lighter fired brick and as the local brick clay held a lot of impurities in its core, added chalk reduced the wastage costs when bricks cracked during the firing process and were discarded. The flint material removed was also used for adding to walls of cottages and boundary walls in brick and flint wall panels. The land above, stretching several hundred metres from this entrance, contained a flourishing brick and tile manufacturing works with a history of production over 300 years.

Two other deep chalk mines nearby, which do not connect with this mine, have always been known to exist to local residents. In fact there is a reference to growing mushrooms in one tunnel in 1903 and during WW2 this mine was taken over by Reading Council and used as a place of storage and safety for local government documents, archive material and art works in case of German bombing or invasion.

The shaft of Hanover mine is approximately 60 ft deep and leads to mined passages that are up to 20ft x 20ft. The mine drops down a gradient of about 20 ft over the mine workings, and has a length of approx 1500 ft. It is thought that the mine today is a remnant; the rest is lost to either collapse or is on the other side of blocked adits. The mine was dug by hand using a pick with a spike at one end and a broad adze head at the other. Pick spike and flat marks on the walls show how laborious mining was and also the direction in which the mine passage was being dug.



The mine was dug by candlelight. Small flint ledges left behind show where candles stood or were placed in small chalk candle holders. Smoke trails from old candles adorn the walls and the remains of old tallow candles show where the candles dripped. On the gallery wall, opposite a list of names and dates, is a carving of an owl. Walking around the mine the original floor of the mine is rarely seen, having been covered up by stacking waste or unwanted chalk spoil. By climbing up one obviously collapsed passage the interface between the chalk strata and the clay above can be seen in stark contrast. It is interesting to see the remains of holes made by small marine worms that have burrowed into the chalk when it was once part of some tropical sea.

The mine has no recorded history, but there is a list of names with a date of April 1834, which was thought to be when the mine stopped working. When the mine was operational there may have been no obligation by the owners/operators to keep records about their activities. The land was transferred to Reading / Berkshire in 1974. Prior to this the land was part of Oxfordshire. If any records exist, then they may well be found in some dusty archive in Oxford.

In 1990 Wimpey Geotech were contracted to spray the ceiling of parts of the mine with a 4mm shotcrete material before a massive road building plan, similar to the Hangar Lane Gyrotary System in West London. This was for an unwanted third bridge across the River Thames to help alleviate Reading's traffic problems, and to extend the M3 / M4 up to the M40. Happily, this has not happened, but at least we can gain easy access to the mine by a fixed steel ladder.

Dave Irwin

Members will be saddened to hear of the loss of Dave Irwin who has died suddenly.



A member of the BEC, he was perhaps best known in general caving circles for his contribution to the 'Mendip Underground' guidebook, but he was also one of Mendip's greatest historians.

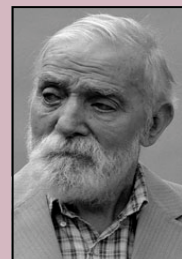
Dave's funeral took place on Friday 13th April.

There is a tribute to Dave on the BEC website:

<http://www.bec-cave.org.uk/content/view/651/1/>

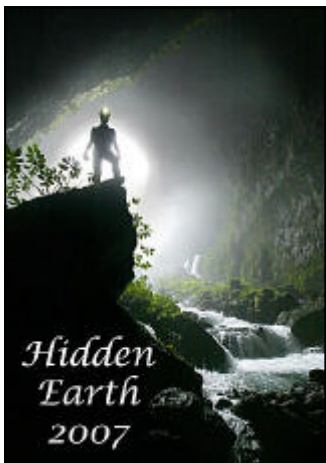
Frank Baguley

Long standing SWCC member Frank Baguley has died aged 91.



He joined SWCC in 1963 and took part in both SWCC expeditions to Balinka Pit in 1964 and 1966, developing much of the equipment that lead to the retrieval of partisans' bones from the bottom of the 950ft pit. He served as secretary of Cambrian Caving Council, secretary of the National Caving Association (now BCA) and represented the caving world with many outside organisations.

<http://www.swcc.org.uk/news/article.php?id=66>



This year's caving conference will be at Tewkesbury School, Gloucestershire on **21-23 September**.

Tewkesbury is very close to junction 9 of the M5, and is situated near to Gloucester, Cheltenham and Worcester, and within easy reach of the caving areas of South Wales, Mendip and Forest of Dean.

Further information will appear at <http://hidden-earth.org.uk>

Cambrian Caving Council Vertical Skills Workshop

Cambrian Caving Council will be holding a vertical skills workshop on Saturday 26th May and Sunday 27th May dealing with ladder and lifeline, intro to SRT, intro to SRT rigging and SRT rescue practice.

Cost will be £10/head to cover expenses.

To book places, or for further information, contact the Training Officer, Richard Hill on 07876193745 or email to Rickahill "at" yahoo.com

Library additions

Mendip Times, Vol 2 Issue 8 (Jan 2007). Dave Irwin's caving page is given over to Upper Flood. (JG)

Grampian Speleological Group Bulletin, Fourth Series, Vol.3 No.1 (Oct 2006). Contains a varied selection of articles. One that I found interesting was by Rachel Huggins on *Cave Microbiology – an under-explored realm*. (JG)

Cave Formation in Northern England by Brian Hindle, published by Lyon Ladders in 1980. 35pp. A useful little booklet which provides a clear introduction to the formation of caves. It explains very clearly the influence of rock type/structure on underground drainage, which is applicable to areas other than Northern England. (JG)

Axbridge Caving Group Occasional Publication No. 5 (August 2006). This is a ground-breaking publication because two DVDs are slotted into the back cover. One contains ACG documents and photographs (log books, old photos, newsletters, journals, etc) with a database to facilitate searching. The second contains three early films – "Netherworld Journey [1951] (GB Cavern), "Axbridge Ochre Cavern [1952] and "Discovering Mendip" [1970]. The latter, filmed by Clive North and narrated by John Craven, features caves and cavers many of us will recognise. The sequences shot in Swildons I found particularly interesting. (JG)

Cave and Karst Science, Vol 33 No.1 (2006) contains articles on the history of cave exploration in Nidderdale and on the dating of bones from Hunters' Lodge Inn Sink. (JG)

Lifting the Lid on Box Hill – Central Ammunition Depot, Tunnel Quarry, Corsham (DVD) Running for over an hour, this video is aimed at people interested in the military rather than cavers/mine explorers. It is interesting in parts, but does become a little tedious for the likes of me. (JG)

Deep Dark and Dusty – the Story of Bathstone, its Quarries and Quarrymen (Video) This is of more general interest, although it is a while since I viewed it so I can't remember any details! (donated) (JG)

Mendip from the Air – a Changing Landscape by Hannah Firth, 2007. Produced by the Somerset County Council Historic Environment Service, this book is the result of a joint venture between the Somerset Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, the Mendip Hills AONB Service and English Heritage to investigate the archaeology and history of Mendip. So --- nothing on caves, but some good recent air photos of places such as Priddy Circles, Velvet Bottom and even Upper Flood Entrance. (JG)

Two DVDs have been donated, both concerned with **Emmer Green chalk mine** near Reading, featuring MCG members Geoff Beale, Graham Old, Bill Chadwick and Biff Frith. (JG)



Not for the Faint-Hearted – 50 harder caving trips in Yorkshire by Mike Cooper, 2007 This is a detailed and practical guide to a selection of 50 harder caving trips in Yorkshire. Each trip has its own location map; tackle list and detailed route description. Pages are arranged to allow easy photocopying of descriptions which can then be laminated before taking underground. Each trip has a brief exploration history to acknowledge the achievements of the original explorers and a selected reading list to assist cavers who want to do more research. (MR)

EASE GILL TRAVERSE

Link Pot	Reach	Time (hrs)	Signage	Notes
Emmer Green	10	1.5	None	Emmer Green
Emmer Green	20	2.5	None	Emmer Green
Emmer Green	30	3.5	None	Emmer Green

ROPPIN POT

Top Sink	17	1 hour 1 hour		
Emmer Green	18	1 hour		
Top Sink	28	1 hour		
Emmer Green	32	1 hour		
Emmer Green	38	1 hour		
Emmer Green	42	1 hour		
Emmer Green	48	1 hour		
Emmer Green	52	1 hour		

TOP SINK

Emmer Green	10	1.5	None	
Emmer Green	20	2.5	None	

STAKE POT SERIES

Emmer Green	40	1.5	None	Access to this area is by off-road.
Emmer Green	45	1.5	None	
Emmer Green	50	1.5	None	
Emmer Green	55	1.5	None	

LANCASTER HOLE

Emmer Green	40	1.5	None	
Emmer Green	45	1.5	None	
Emmer Green	50	1.5	None	
Emmer Green	55	1.5	None	

PRE-RIGGING IN LINK POT

The Ease Gill Traverse (The Sink to Popple Pot) requires a short trip via Link Pot to Emmer Green. For the sake of the Traverse, it is nice to visit the Link Pot. It provides an additional escape route. Allow 1 1/2 hours for this pre-rigging trip.

Location: Link Pot is about 20 minutes walk from Bull Pot Farm (or 25 minutes from Leach Farm House). It is a small, shallow, open, dry, chalk stream. The Sink is about 10 minutes walk from Leach Farm House and is a small, shallow, open, dry, chalk stream. The Sink is about 10 minutes walk from Leach Farm House and is a small, shallow, open, dry, chalk stream. The Sink is about 10 minutes walk from Leach Farm House and is a small, shallow, open, dry, chalk stream.

MCG caving and social meets

DATE	CAVING MEETS	SOCIAL EVENTS
May 4/5/6th	Beginner's weekend	tba
May 25/26/27th	National Try Caving weekend	
Jun 1/2/3rd	Lost Cave of Loxton and Shute Shelve Cavern	tba
Jul 6/7/8th	St Cuthbert's Swallet	Summer barbecue
Aug 3/4/5th	Tyning's Barrow Swallet	tba
Sep 1st to 9th	Ardeche (BDCC, spaces may be available for MCG)	
Sep 7/8/9th	Waterwheel Swallet	Curry night
Sep 21/22/23rd	BCRA Hidden Earth	
Oct 5/6/7th	Gough's Cave	Half-yearly social
Nov 2/3/4th	Charterhouse Cave	Priddy fireworks
Dec 7/8/9th	Swildon's Hole	Christmas dinner

In addition, and subject to interest, Bob Templeman will arrange mid-week or evening trips to Hanover chalk mine (Reading) and Bedlams Bank stone mine, (Merstham). Expressions of interest to Bob Templeman please.



The Ardeche trip is organised by BDCC but may be open to MCG if spaces are available. The gite will sleep 30 and costs 7 euros per person per night with a minimum of 8 persons per night (56 euros). There are plenty showers and toilets, a big kitchen, and lots of dining space. Indoor sleeping is one downstairs room for 6 and an upstairs loft with mattresses on the floor. With 12 people, a few tents would be good for sleeping. The gite is an easy 20 minute walk from Vallons Pont d'Arc and close to the gorge. Most of the caves require simple SRT but there are some walk-ins, one of which is huge. See <http://www.photobox.co.uk/album/3980312> for Bill Chadwick's photos.

No smoking at the cottage

Smoking is already discouraged in the MCG cottage, but from July will be illegal.

England will become smokefree on Sunday, 1 July 2007. The new law is being introduced to protect the public from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke. The new law applies to anything that can be smoked. This includes cigarettes, pipes, cigars and herbal cigarettes. Members' clubs that provide sleeping accommodation including dormitories and other shared accommodation must be smokefree at all times (so there can be no exemption for MCG).



Failure to comply with the new law will be a criminal offence - **Smoking in smokefree premises:** a maximum fine of £200; **Failure to display no-smoking signs:** a maximum fine of £1000; **Failing to prevent smoking in a smokefree place:** a maximum fine of £2500 imposed on whoever manages or controls the smokefree premises.

As the Committee and Trustees will not want to be fined up to £2500, members can expect to see a rash of no-smoking signs next time you visit the cottage.

From: Graham Mullan
Sent: 28 March 2007
To: MCG secretary
Subject: Rhino Rift

Last weekend a caver experienced an alarming incident whilst rigging the first pitch; some of the resin mortar fixing one of the P-bolts came away in a chunk. The individual involved was unharmed, and the bolt is still in place. However, it failed a subsequent load test. A crack in the resin affixing one of the other bolts was also reported. These bolts were last tested on January 15 and passed.

Having discussed the matter of the unsafe bolt in Rhino Rift with Nick Williams, in his role as BCA Insurance Officer, it is his recommendation that we should effectively shut the cave whilst the situation is evaluated.

This will take a matter of a few weeks. Hopefully no longer. I have relayed this to Linda, our legal adviser, and she concurs with Nick's advice.

I shall therefore arrange for a replacement padlock to go on the cave tomorrow morning. Anyone with a strong wish to go down the cave during this period would then need to come to me for a key and a detailed description of the problems inherent in undertaking a trip.

Nick agreed that this was the best compromise that we could put in place immediately.