

MCG NEWS

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group

Departure Lounge, Upper Flood (by Charlie Allison)

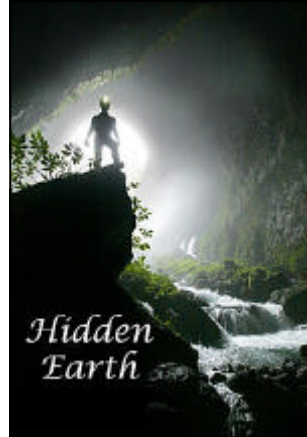
Number 343

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www.m-c-g.org.uk

Founded 1954

MCG, Upper Flood and Hidden Earth 2007



Hidden Earth is the UK's annual caving conference, hosted by the British Cave Research Association and the British Caving Association. This year's conference will be held at Tewkesbury School, Gloucestershire from 21-23 September, and MCG intend to have a major presence due to the interest in Upper Flood. This will involve a lot of preparation, and we need the help of as many members as possible to make it a success.

Hopefully Tim Francis will be giving a lecture and presentation on the latest discoveries and the continuing exploration. And there are lots of ways for other MCG members to be involved. Please contact a committee member if you can help with any of the following projects:

- **Creating and manning a club stand.** As well as ideas for the stand, we also need more display boards. Can anyone borrow these, or does anyone know a cheap source?
- **Putting together an audio/visual or video presentation.** Although we have photos by Charlie Allison, Mark Shinwell and others of the recent discoveries, we also need photos of the "old cave" from the entrance to the 2006 breakthrough. Can you help? Photos can be digital, prints or slides.
- **Organising a photo display**
- **Producing a hard-copy of the survey for display**
- **Designing a t-shirt**
- **Making a "squeeze box" for the Easysqueeze Challenge**

Full details of the conference can be found at <http://hidden-earth.org.uk/> Admission fee is £15 for one day or £25 for the weekend, with discounts for advance booking and for groups of more than five. The Saturday dinner is £14 and must be booked in advance. This year's after-dinner speaker is Dick Willis. Dick has caved since 1972 with UBSS and SLUGS and has participated in more than 20 major caving expeditions overseas. After the dinner there will be the usual Stomp and Bar. Once again, the bar will be run by cavers, so the beer won't run out; and the on-site camping means you won't have to stagger far afterwards. Camping is £5 per tent.

From the editor



The new committee is up and running and working very well. The new officers have slipped into their new roles quickly and efficiently. Our last committee meeting took 3+ hours, mostly because there were a lot of action points from the AGM to discuss. We also had to discuss extending the current Upper Flood Conservation and Access document to take in the new extensions, and discuss Group usage of the new computer with all its entails.

The novice weekend was very successful and the July members' weekend looks like being similar with more novices coming to try the caving experience. Could there be more new members in the offing... watch this space!

Yvonne

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MCG Doings

We welcome back two former members who have rejoined as Associates:

Helen Ingold

Richard Woollacott

And welcome to two Probationary members:

Max Symons

Bernadette Symons

Job vacancy

Mike Lovell announced that he is retiring from his job in September so will no longer be able to print the newsletter at a reduced rate. Can anyone take up the baton?

If you do not yet receive your Newsletter by email, please consider doing so as this saves on the cost of printing, enveloping and postage. Contact Yvonne for details.



Successful novice weekend – 5/6th June 2007

Seven people turned up for the novice weekend. Some had caved before at some time in the past so they were not all strictly novices. There were also a good number of members who volunteered their time to take the novices underground.

On the Saturday Richard Cary, Linda Milne and Mike Richardson led two of the newcomers down Hillier's Cave and here is Fern's log book write-up:

Hillier's Cave - Fern & Phil Labram, Linda, Richard and Mike

I panicked at the entrance! Found it very challenging physically and mentally, but really pleased I didn't chicken out! Thanks to the calm encouragement of MCG members. Fantastic grottos – very pretty – and good variety of formations and crystals. It felt really good to see them in a natural state rather than in a show cave. Lots of variety on the trip with crawling, climbing – a good workout. Thanks MCG.

Sadly Fern and Phil found the experience a bit challenging and didn't think they would cave again (they said they were more into climbing).

Also on the Saturday Biff Frith, Doug Harris, and Mick Norton led novices Mike Buchanan and Max and Bernadette Symons, all of whom had caved before, on a trip into GB Cavern. The log book entry for this trip reads:

GB Cavern round trip - Biff, Doug, Mick, Mike Buchanan, Max and Bernadette Symons.

All did OK. Mike B took many photos. Max and Bernadette have asked to join MCG.

Max and Bernadette have since joined MCG and we look forward to caving with them again.



On the Saturday morning a couple of students from Southampton University turned up at the cottage asking if they could have the key for Waterwheel Swallet. They initially had gone to the BEC who had sent them on to us, leaving behind four others awaiting news of a trip. We had to tell them that the key could only be given out to MCG members but they might be able to get one from the Charterhouse Centre. They looked so disappointed that Martin took pity on them

and volunteered to take them down Waterwheel (photo above). Even though there is more water than ever down Waterwheel due to all the extra damming, they all thoroughly enjoyed the trip and were very grateful. They were given membership forms so there maybe some more new members in the offing.

On Sunday Martin and Yvonne Rowe and Linda Milne took two complete novices, Nadia and Ian Midgely, down Swildon's Hole. Here: is Nadia's log book write-up:

Swildon's Upper Series – Martin & Yvonne Rowe, Linda Milne, Ian & Nadia Midgely (our FIRST EVER caving trip - photo, right).

And what a great adventure it was. We looked great, I have to say, in our oddly co-ordinate get-up – not exactly chic, but ready for anything. Joan and Bob came to see us off down the hole, and to take photos. I was in no danger of getting lost – red boots, pink gloves and yellow





stripes on Ian's black motorcycle rain gear which I wore! But enough about our clothes - how was the trip?

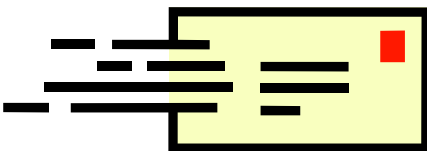
It was thrilling and a little scary – I couldn't believe I was supposed to jump into a dark hole with water and slippery rocks in it! Martin was leading (and an excellent reassuring leader he is too), I was next, then Linda (who was really good to have nearby), then my Ian and Yvonne. Mostly I tried to follow whatever Martin was doing. We went up, down, crawled, clambered – all sorts. And there were some tight squeezes too... Felt like Winnie the Poo each time I got stuck. The most memorable moments though were positive ones – we climbed down, with a rope, the old 40 foot – that was a REAL adventure, and definitely to be repeated. It would

be great to get good at that, and the water in the cave did feel nice actually!

*On the way back Martin let me lead (Me!!!) and I have to say, I did a fabulous job...! Until we got to the absolute end and I tried to lead everyone out through the vent. I'll be back to learn more and to experience the thrill again! **Nadia Midgely (photo left)***

They said they really enjoyed the trip and would like to do more caving so we hope to hear from them both again.

Thanks to Linda for organising the weekend and giving all the novices such a warm welcome; and thanks to all of you who gave up time to take them on caving trips.



Rhino Rift Bolts update

Statement from the Equipment & Techniques Committee, concerning Rhino Rift

Following a report of loss of resin from an anchor in Rhino Rift, an investigation was put in hand by the Equipment Committee. As a result, precautionary measures were taken where appropriate to restrict access to certain sites pending a full investigation of the problem.

As a result of this investigation the Equipment Committee have concluded that there is not a safety issue in the caves concerned.

The Equipment Committee have, however, identified some failings in the Eco Anchor program procedures and have agreed changes which are intended to prevent these problems re-occurring. It was also agreed that the disadvantages of using a puller as part of routine testing outweigh the advantages and as a result the Equipment Committee no longer recommend that Eco Anchors be pulled as part of routine testing.

Andy Pryke
Chairman Equipment & Techniques Committee
British Caving Association



MCG computer



This is the new computer (running the new Windows Vista OS) that has been set up and is now in use. There are teething troubles allied to the current problems with installing applications on Vista and at present the old printer and A4 scanner are not compatible until we can download the correct drivers.

We are still looking at using an offer from Plus.net at £10 per month for a broadband if the payphone doesn't cause a connection problem. It was agreed that we should go ahead with this for a trial period and the resulting line check would identify whether it can be used for broadband.

The computer is password-protected, so is not yet available for use by all members.

Charnel Shaft

What we thought was the lost shaft of Charnel has turned out to be something else altogether.

On hearing the news, a member exclaimed "I can't believe it's not Charnel."

Henceforth it shall be known as ICBINC Shaft.

Upper Flood Trip Reports

24/03/07 Mike Richardson (writer), Linda Milne, Brian Snell and Keith Knight took four lengths of scaffold bar and a half-dozen clamps with the intention of shoring up the slump in Golden Chamber. Keith got stuck at Sludge Duck, Brian went up and down the canal twice to ferry the gear, so it all arrived in Golden Chamber.

The slump in the way in was OK, a bit more constricted than before, but nothing problematic to anyone who gets that far. It still looks a tad loose though.

Linda and Mike installed three of the bars to make a frame round the jammed block in the climb down out of Golden Chamber so if it does decide to tip it will rest against the bars. The back wall is pretty loose, Mike knocked some lumps of mud down, so another trip is needed to try and clean it back to solid rock, which will mean either shifting the spoil back through the boulder choke to the Red Room, or passing it through the rift and ferrying it down to the pile at the end of the passage by 3D Squeeze. The false floor that you go over to get to the climb could do with some support.

14/04/07 Tim Francis (writer) Mike Moxton, Mike Richardson, Richard Carey, Bill Chadwick, looking at some of the remaining leads. Nothing exciting to report but worth noting for the record. Survey attached with red circles highlighting the two areas.

1. Pretty rift off on the left of Royal Icing Passage, just before the 'up and over'. I did a strip down to furries job and went for a look. There's a strong draft here but everything closes down. In the floor it just pinches out into rocks and flowstone. So I shimmed up into the roof for about 25ft - a challenging vertical squeeze a bit like doing multiple slots in Pierre's Pot. Nothing doing at the top I'm afraid despite the strong cold and damp draft. There must be an air connection to something beyond but we won't be going through this way. [Note that just before the rift Mike M. spotted a lovely cluster of helictites hidden away up a crack in the roof].

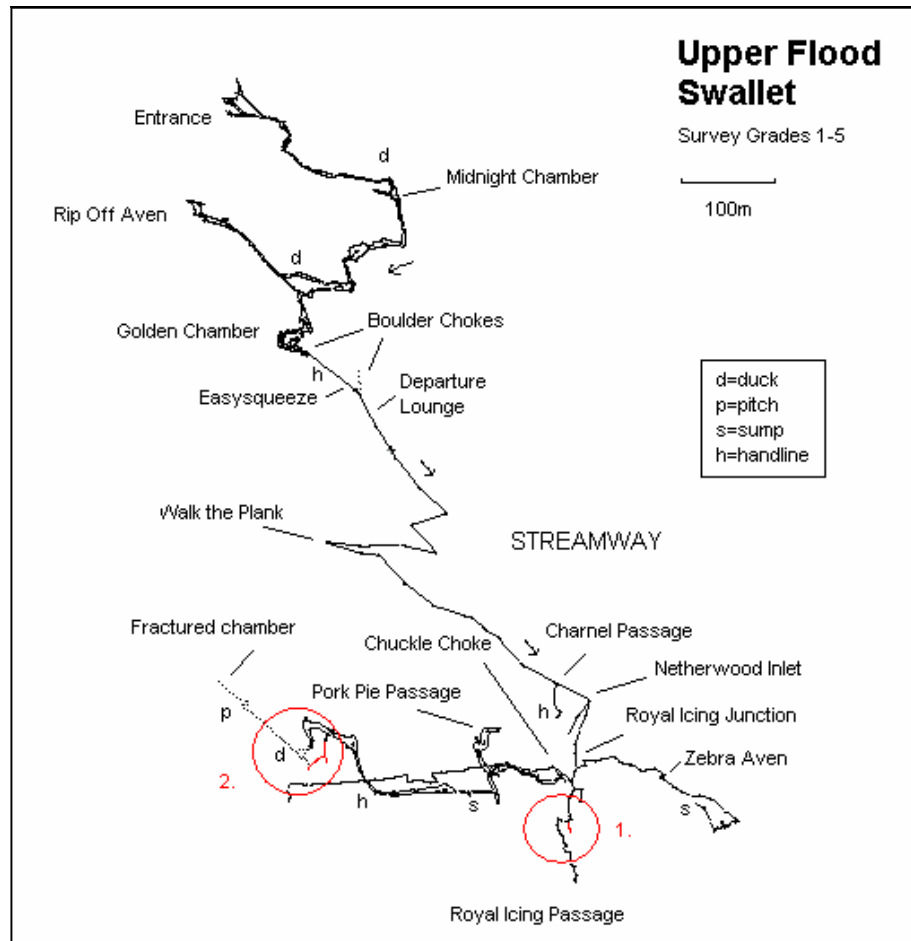
2. Neverland below the pitch. As Ben predicted the low crawl on the left below the pitch does connect with the pot found at the end of that muddy crawl further back. You can't technically make the connection as it pops out high up on the right hand wall of the pot at the top of a mud wall. It would be a very nasty climb. To make the connection I dug through the drafting crawl and dropped out into a pool of wading depth. Bizarrely this is only held back from draining into the pot below by 5 feet of mud. From the top you can peer down 20ft to the floor with your toes still in the water. A quick chat and eyeball with Mike M. on the other side confirmed the link.

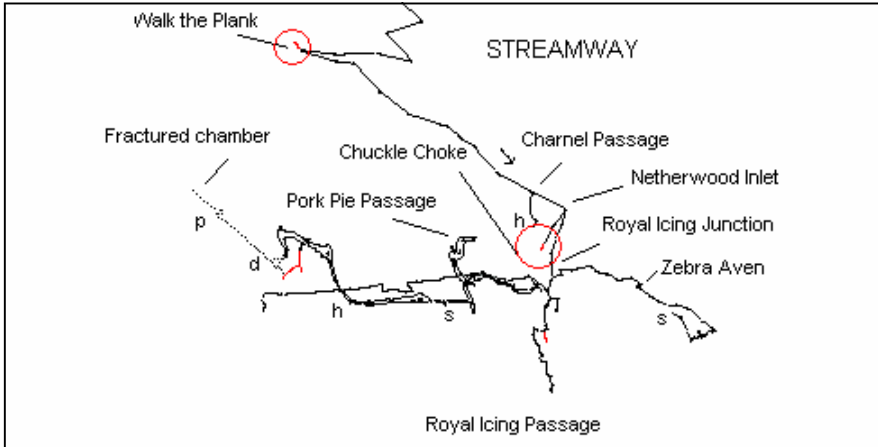
So for the moment we don't have much to play with in Neverland. In the longer term it would be worth putting a handline down the pot and having a proper look in the floor. A lot of water drains down here which must be going somewhere. Also off to the left before the pot (straight on in the crawl) is a tight airspace over mud that might repay some attention.

Next stop for us is the downstream sink in the main streamway. A spot of hammering and hiltling should see us through the obstruction in no time at all. Following the stream might be the best thing after all...

Next stop for us is the downstream sink in the main streamway. A spot of hammering and hiltling should see us through the obstruction in no time at all. Following the stream might be the best thing after all...

05/05/07 Tim Francis (writer), Peat Bennett. Peat and I did some digging where the streamway disappears (see opposite for location). Its horribly constricted just before the end but we dug over the boulders in the roof so that larger persons can now get to the end. The passage at the end was low and too tight. So we hilt'ed off the





left hand wall. There is now one more pinch point before larger space can be seen beyond, but I have to say it doesn't look very hopeful. The water seems to all pond up with plenty of foam and silt-coated rock and it has the impression of being a sump. However it does draft well so perhaps there is a narrow continuation at a higher level? One more trip should with the drill should do it although we're not rushing back. Its cold, wet and miserable down there. If it is a sump it must be perched as where you can

hear water at Chuckle Choke is further downstream. So the latter increasingly looks a better option.

Something else a few of us have been thinking about is where the likes of Blackmoor Swallet or MM mine might come in. The healthy inlet above Walk the Plank at the back of the chamber looks the best bet (other red circle on the map above). Mike and I looked at this last year and it will go further with some effort. Perhaps worth a furtle on the next trip. A handline might be advisable for the climb up out of the stream over the flowstone boss as it's a bit 'challenging!' The inlet is very small and wet but full of lead tailings. That of course means that there is some sort of connection to surface swallets. Elsewhere in the Flood extensions you don't see lead tailings except for in the low sumpy inlet a little further upstream.

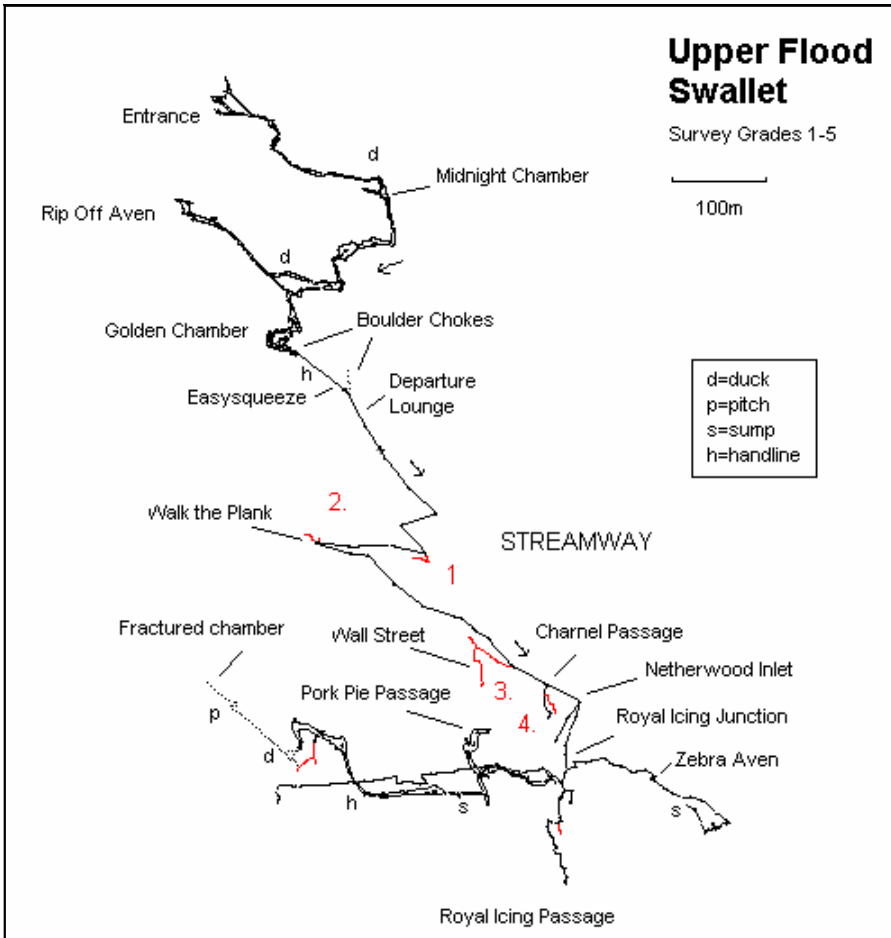
02/06/07 Tim Francis (writer), Richard Carey, Ben Cooper. Whilst the others were surveying the main streamway ("550m way"?) Richard and I went for a wander around a few points of interest with a few bits of digging kit and no drill. The plan was to push the Walk the Plank inlet. (See over for survey)

1. Duck under boss - High level gour. The first stop was to finally look at that unclimbed hole above that big flowstone slope you meet in the streamway. The one you have to duck under which we have avoided climbing because of how pretty it looks. Richard and I de-kitted and cautiously climbed the flowstone. At the top is a small grotto leading to a low body length crawl. At the end is an exceptionally pretty gour pool. It is chest deep and 4m long. I wasn't expecting a cold dunking this early on the trip and in just a furry it was very cold! At the end of the gour the flowstone rises to the ceiling and completely blocks the passage so there is definitely no way on. This is the last hole to be climbed above the stream, or at least the last one that can be free climbed. So it does seem that all the places where flowstone emerges from the roof close down.

2. Walk the Plank Inlet. Two things of note here. We started to dig out the inlet at the back of the huge flowstone slope. This emits quite a decent stream and is floored with lead tailings. This makes for some rather grim digging I can assure you. It is of interest because of the proximity to MM Mine, Barwell's Shaft, Blackmoor Swallet and Waterwheel. Anyhow we made some progress but the narrow crawl is blocked with flowstone on the right hand side. The air is very fresh and you can see for another two or three metres into slightly bigger stuff. A couple of uncomfortable hilti sessions should see us through. We've installed a fixed handline to help the climb out of the streamway. As you know it was quite an 'edgy' scramble previously. Please use the rope and keep to the right hand wall. Everything across the flowstone slope to the left is off limits because of the delicate floor and it doesn't go anywhere anyway.

Secondly Brian spotted a possible climb on the left hand side wall, looking upstream, just where the Walk the Plank flowstone starts. I skirted around the edge to take a look but the climb looks nasty. It'll need protection to get up there.

3. Wall Street - A new find!!! Just upstream, say 30m, from Charnel inlet, is a rubble slope on the left, down which a healthy stream runs in wet weather. I've been meaning to check this out properly for some time although I know that Mike, Doug or Mark had been up there to the end one occasion. It has not been surveyed yet. Up-slope starts large but then you have to duck under some boulders to get to the final chamber. There are loads of interesting looking avens here and the stream comes out of one of them. All look serious undertakings. Richard went for a look at a fractured bit of passage on the left hand side. This was blocked by a wall of shattered rocks that looked like it was man made. On a second inspection, as we were heading back out, we realised that in fact a passage could be seen to continue beyond the wall. Three minutes (!) of digging and Richard was squeezing over the wall into the new stuff. We followed 30-40m of nicely decorated passage that is somewhat reminiscent of Neverland. You've got the same fossil gour lines and at the far end are some more pom poms. Quite a find. You can see a way on at the end but we need to dig out the last gour. I have strong suspicion that this passage will connect with the area around Pork Pie Passage and thus giving us a bypass to the further reaches. Here's hoping.



4. Charnel Inlet - A new find!!

On the way in I thought I'd squeeze to the end of that small descending passage on the left that was looked at on the third or fourth trip in. I'd not been there before so imagine my surprise when it kept going and going! Its all small crawly stuff with little tubes going off here and there. After a while the passage starts to ascend and I got as far as a tight flowstone squeeze. I pulled back a couple of rocks but thought it was best to go and get Richard. Unfortunately he couldn't get beyond the initial squeeze that had stopped the original explorers. A hammer should do the job. The air didn't seem too good so I left it for the day. I'll go back to continue the push with a small team and a drill - Peat? We've probably added 20-30m. This whole area between the streamway and West Passage / Neverland now seems quite complex. The lower levels of Charnel inlet might connect to that passage hidden behind Chuckle Sump..

Richard and I then did some miserable digging at the end of Charnel Inlet. Remember the muddy but dry bedding plane? In wet weather a stream runs into this so it was really really grim. With just a trowel to hand we wallowed around for an hour or two getting soaked to the skin and resembling mud men. I forced the dig into bigger stuff beyond but it almost certainly closes down. Someone can go and look again when its dry but I think the top end of Charnel Inlet is a no-go.

Next plans are to hilti the end of Wall Street and also Chuckle Choke. Walk the Plank might have to wait for a few weeks. But there's plenty to play for yet. I reckon we are well over 3km once all the loose ends and flyovers have been surveyed.

Upper Flood Leaders meeting

There will be an Upper Flood Leaders meeting at 10am on Sunday 8th July at Nordrach Cottage.

All Leaders are encouraged to attend this important meeting, if possible. Basically, we need to discuss access, surveying, photography and conservation (and anything else anyone thinks of).

We also need to update our Conservation Policy document last reviewed in Sep 1998.

UPPER FLOODSWALLET CAVE CONSERVATION PLAN

INDEX

PAGE NO.

1. BRIEF HISTORY
3. CAVE DESCRIPTION
7. CURRENT CONSERVATION MEASURES
9. USAGE OF THE CAVE
11. ASSESSMENT OF SCIENTIFIC IMPORTANCE/INTEREST
12. FUTURE CONSERVATION MEASURES
13. TAPPING
16. CLEANING
18. FIXED POINT PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY

ATTACHMENTS

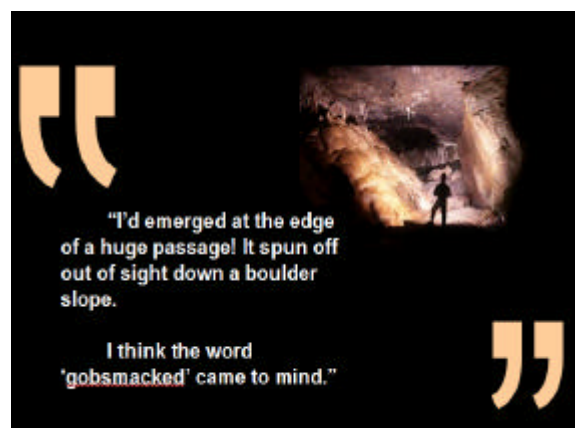
1. UPPER FLOOD SWALLET - CAVE SURVEY SHOWING CURRENT CONSERVATION MEASURES
2. UPPER FLOOD SWALLET - CAVE SURVEY SHOWING FUTURE CONSERVATION MEASURES AND FIXED POINT PHOTOGRAPH LOCATIONS

PRODUCED BY MEMBIP CAVING GROUP

"The best trip ever" - Upper Flood discoveries '05-'07

Thanks to Mike Richardson, Tim's Upper Flood slide show (as seen at BCA and in the Hunter's Lodge) is now available to download at <http://www.upperflood.a-i-s.co.uk/Documents/>

Click on cscv1.zip and when prompted, save the zip file to your PC, eg in My Documents. When the file is saved, locate the folder in My Documents then unzip the file to open the PowerPoint presentation. But be prepared if you don't have broadband as it is a 40MB file!



Have you lost a food box?

When checking his carving kit recently, Geoff Beale found a blue plastic box that looks like it may be someone's food or storage box, mixed up with his stuff. He has not been to the cottage since about February, so has any body reported the loss of this box? If so, let him know and he will return it ASAP.

Kitchen hygiene

Food is increasingly being left in the fridge and on the breakfast bar area for long periods, sometimes from one members' weekend to the next.

Please - will members (and guests) take all their food home at the end of their visit. Otherwise, it is encouraging a potential rodent problem.



The committee have agreed that some items can be useful e.g., sugar, salt, oil but the bar area will be purged of old items.

A suitable mouse-proof container will be provided for putting the remaining items in and a notice is to be made for the fridge requesting food is taken home.

Cottage work weekend, March 2007

At least 15 members (old and new) and 1 guest turned up to do what they could over the weekend. Those who had the skills tackled the technical stuff; the rest of us did general repairs or cleaned. Between us all we:-

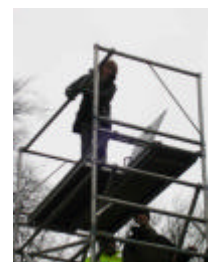
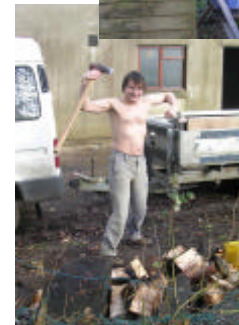
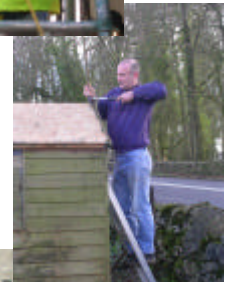
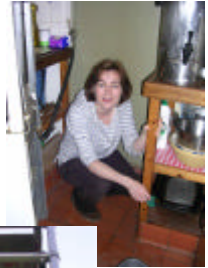
- Completed a fire safety risk assessment
- Re-felted the log shed roof
- Installed a louder phone bell
- Cleaned the kitchen extractor
- Split the firewood and stacked it in the log shed
- Cleaned out the hosing-down gully
- Cleared out the gutters
- Cemented the gully on the library roof
- Distributed sand over the lawn
- Replaced the fascia boards on car-park side apex
- Sanded down the kitchen window
- Installed a new sink in the Foremen's lounge
- Put up tiles above new sink in foremen's lounge
- Grouted the tiles
- Cleaned the showers
- Moved wood away from outside the lounge wall
- Behind the cooker cleaned
- Cooker cleaned
- Removed and fitted fablon to tackle store window
- Re-pointed end ridge tile
- Looked at and reviewed rescue bags in stairwell
- Fitted isolation valves to sinks

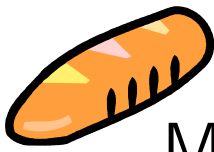


Thanks to everyone who gave up time to do a job. Some of the jobs would have cost the Group dear if we had to get contractors in to do them so a special thanks to those who did some of the more specialised jobs. Doug and Biff spent two days up a scaffold tower replacing the fascia boards, the second day being extremely cold, wet and windy. Brian and Keith installed a wash basin (with accompanying plumbing) in the Foremen's Lounge, with a tiled splash-back above.



It was worth all the hard work and effort as Yvonne and Martin provided a barrel and a wine-box, and JP and Mary cooked three different strengths of chilli for us all. Finally, Joan provided some delicious trifles. At about 10.30pm, when we were completely fed and watered(!), most of us went outside to watch the eclipse of the moon by the earth - quite a sight.

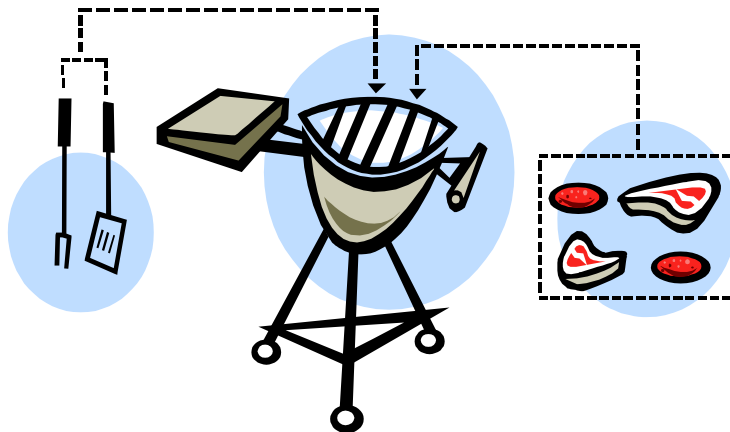




Mendip Caving Group

Summer BBQ

**Sat 7th
July, 6pm**



Bring your own meat. Salad, bread and condiments supplied (for a small charge)

Yv'sdroppings

RC: Who's that bloke who comes down from Scotland?
BT: Julie

TF: I'm bored with Upper Flood

MN: What's wrong with burning incense?
Anon: It's Popery?
MN: What - pot pourri?

GM: What type of battery is it?
LM: An orange one!

LM: I need to manure my bed.

KK: Nine inches is all I can manage.

TF: The quality of thrown away rope is not up to scratch.

RK: You should look after your own krabs.
MR: Yes, you know where your own krabs have been.

Swildons, Blue Pencil

About 10 years ago, MCG offered to replace the chain in Blue Pencil passage which was known to be badly worn. A suitable chain was purchased and left with a local caver, to be fitted asap.

I am pleased to report that Les Williams (WCC) recently took charge of the chain, and he has now put it in place!

Mendip Rescue Organisation Rescue Practice

Saturday June 23rd, St Cuthbert's Swallet
Meet at the Shepton Hut 9.30 am



All active cavers welcome - bring appropriate personal caving gear. All interested parties welcome for surface activities. Exercise will include:

1. A small team doing a 'search' to Sump 2 with the Heyphone (testing the Heyphone locations in the process).
2. A carry from Mud Hall to the bottom of Arrete (and, for new wardens, identifying appropriate belay points).
3. Pitch haul using weights not casualty on Arrete (establishing suitability of belays in the process).
4. A demonstration (viewed from the head of the pitch only) of pitch rigging for rescue on Pulpit.
5. A debrief later in the Hunters Lodge