

MCG NEWS

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group

Departure Lounge, Upper Flood (by Charlie Allison)

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The bones from Bone Hole, Cheddar Gorge

by Bob Williams

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Discovery and Excavations

This is the first part of the note I started to compile after reading the following snippet from the Somerset County Gazette, June 3rd, 1837, reproduced in Retrospect No. 249, for October 2002:

"The West Mendip Hounds lately ran a fox to earth in Cheddar Cliffs from whence it was dug out and, in the process of removing the earth, two human skeletons were found. This is most extraordinary, as it was full forty feet above the road. The skulls are in the possession of Mr Marshall of the Bath Arms, Cheddar."

I concluded that this must be the first report of the discovery of Bone Hole, Cheddar Gorge. The discovery, on a previously undisturbed ground was brought to the attention of the landowner, a Mr William Long, who lived in Wiltshire but is believed to have held the lordship of one the Cheddar manors. He directed an excavation in the cave and presented a report on "Description of a cave in Cheddar, Somersetshire, in which Human as well as Animal Bones have been lately found", to the Newcastle meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Science, August 1838, [Transactions, Section 8, pp85-86]. Mr Long mentions that: "The fissure by which the cave was entered is about thirty feet in length; a perpendicular descent, thence bearing to the West there is the opening which leads into the cave. ... On entering the cave from this opening, the visitor finds himself in a lofty, but not very large, chamber, about sixty to seventy feet in height; from this cave, there is an arched way into another smaller chamber, and from thence an ascending path leads towards the plain surface of the rock; this passage was undoubtedly the original entrance to the cave. The Human bones were found beneath Animal bones, so far as the cave had hitherto been searched; a few remains of foxes and sheep were found at the head of the cave, but the bones to which attraction was particularly drawn, were found in mass, in a quite separate part of the cave, and easily distinguished from those of a more recent date. In searching the cave I found some bones embedded in stalagmite, almost forming part of the rocky substance. ... In the first instance, there were about nine Human skulls (sic) found together, with a large quantity of Human bones; and with them were bones of bear, deer and horse."

There are a number of references to visitors to Bone Hole in the remaining years of the 19th century, some being eminent geologists including Professor William Boyd Dawkins who, according to Herbert Balch, did some digging in the cave. In the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, there is a human skull fragment marked as having come from Bone Hole, Cheddar, but the donor is not known [L. B. Dudley Burston. UBSS Proc. 2(2) for 1922-23, p115]. More frequent visitors were Richard Cox Gough, his sons and others, who used explosives to aid the removal of stalactite deposits that they sold as souvenirs. Shot holes and shattered rock show that their activities also removed most of the arched roof of the entrance passage creating a miniature gorge.

Between 1967 and 1976 members of the Mendip Caving Group carried out archaeological excavations in Bone Hole [Interim Report by Arthur Cox, MCG Journal 6, (1976), pp17-30]. After clearing the debris of previous digs and explosions, the extent of Long's excavations was determined. Two undisturbed areas in what is now called William Long's Chamber were excavated and fragments of bone were recovered. The human bones were generally at a lower

From the Editor



A while ago the committee felt that the Group needed someone specifically to take on the responsibility of ensuring new members were made to feel welcomed and wanted (which they certainly are) and to ensure that until they found their feet in the Group, caving trips and leaders would be organised for them.

Jeremy Gilson volunteered himself for this role and, after reading this newsletter, I think you'll agree that he is doing an excellent job, and this in addition to his committee post as tacklemaster. Well done Jeremy, and welcome to all the new members.
Yvonne

In this issue

- 1-3 Bone Hole
- 4 Upper Flood
- 4 Stainsby's Shaft
- 5 Roman Rake
- 6 Beginners
- 7 Upper Flood party
- 8 Library additions
- 9 Safety alert
- 10 Group information

level than the animal bones of boar, deer, ox and horse, which is in agreement with Long's observations except that boar is substituted for bear.

Whilst lifting the bones a subsidence in the floor was seen and after excavation in loose boulders access was gained to a small decorated chamber, beyond which was a steep unstable slope of a high rift passage. The front half of a child's skull and four other human skulls were found on the rocky floor of this slope thereafter called Skull Slope. The fragments of a decorated pot was found nearby which at that time was thought to be either dated to the later Bronze Age or earlier Iron Age. Despite searches by the excavators before 1976 of other archaeological reports and deposits in Museums no similar decorated pottery was identified. A Dr Juliet Rogers took possession of the human bones and promised to report on her findings but this was not forthcoming. I was unable at the time to locate what happened to the bones. I had hoped to continue my research but having other commitments I filed my research notes. I did not resume my research until 2007 and following an appeal by the Retrospect Editor this is the first part of my contribution.

The final part, which will appear in the next issue, will include fresh information about the last excavation, the dating the decorated pot, how the missing human bones were located, where they are now, and hopefully encourage further research including radio carbon dating.

Locating the missing bones and other developments

The first part of this note dealt with the exploration and archaeological excavations in Bone Hole between 1837 and 1976 when, after ten years of excavation by members of the Mendip Caving Group, an Interim Report by Arthur Cox was published in the MCG Journal 6 (1976). It was noted that Dr Juliet Rogers has agreed to examine the human bones but a report on her findings was not forthcoming. A final excavation report has not been published and there were a number of loose ends; in particular what happened to the bones!

Dr Juliet Rogers, Department of Medicine, Bristol Royal Infirmary, was a world leader in skeletal palæopathology who helped bring scientific rigour to the study of bones recovered from archaeological sites. Soon after she received the bones from the Bone Hole excavations she developed a debilitating illness, and despite a steely determination to keep her work interests going she was not able to compete some of her commitments including the examination of the bones from Bone Hole. Sadly, she died in 2001 aged 61.

Various current members of the Mendip Caving Group have been most helpful; in particular Mrs Joan Goddard who searched the MCG hut and found a small collection of bones in a shoebox marked "Bone Hole". She told me that Arthur Cox had died a few years ago, but put me in touch with Bernard E. A. Reeves who was one of the regular excavators of Bone Hole. Mr Reeves sent me a report of his involvement. After explaining the further excavation of parts of the cave previously dug by Long and reaching a area of flat mud, he gives the following unedited account of the discovery of the previously unknown lower parts of the cave:

"Breaking through this mud yielded a blast of air felt 10 feet away out of this excavation by me. The cave then led back under the drop into this excavation into a small antechamber. Excavating the floor yielded soft mud and a few shards of Samian ware, an Iron Age-B cooking pot, it had fire marks on the outside fragments. A charcoaled log several foot long and of some width was also found in the mud. Removing more boulders opened at the top of at the top of Skull Slope. This boulder slope was under a well-decorated chamber had numerous animal bones, including a cattle skull, and up to nine human skulls. At the bottom of this slope is a raised stalagmite area against which an opened human skull, as were a cup, lay encrusted with clear calcite crystals. At the bottom of Skull Slope on the right hand side going down was found a crouched-burial, an individual with a skull with very pronounced sutured lines. Associated with this burial was a beaker pot, which had fallen apart and down through the boulder jumble. The pot was a burnished dark chocolate colour with fine and chalk white filled dot pattern. The pot was found in sections over a period of time. The pot image in the 1976 Journal was arrived at by measuring the fragments and is a good representation except for the bottom of the pot, which was very thick and partially liquefying when found. The pottery was very gritty inside the bottom was almost like crumbly mud. The finish inside and out was remarkable. Looking at Clarks tome on pots led us to believe the pot to be a bronze age beaker of almost unique pattern: a shard from northern Holland being the only one of similarity".

The potsherds were donated to Wells Museum where the beaker was reconstructed and placed on display. Bernard Reeves notes that "unfortunately the original pristine dark chocolate has given way to a dull almost flowerpot colour on drying out. As regards the disposition of the bones, on the advice of Dr Tratman and his associates, we took boxes and boxes of bones to Dr Juliet Rogers at the old Vicarage at Nempnet Thrubwell. This included lists of the numbered individual bones and a tentative identification of each. We heard no more on this matter"

Neither Mr Reeves nor anyone else from the MCG knew of the whereabouts of the bulk of the bones, and contact with colleagues of Dr Rogers at the Department of Medicine also proved fruitless. However, Chris Hawkes, of the UBSS and this society, has managed over a period of time to retrieve from various places what is believed to be most of missing bones and they are safely deposited at Wells Museum. Hannah Bell, a

graduate in archaeology who has specialised in human bones and ceramic petrology, has in the past year catalogued over 3500 bones in this collection. She is keen to analyse the bones and the beaker in more detail, and to write a paper for publication.

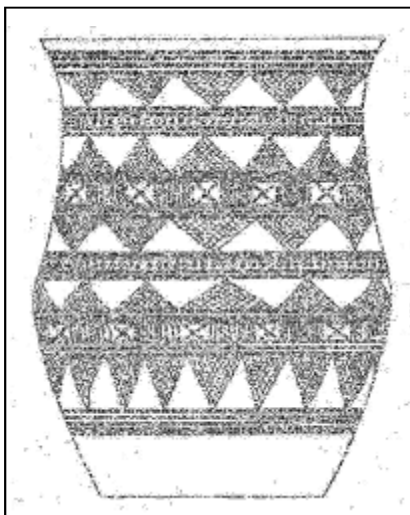
The beaker from Bone Hole has very similar shape; fabric and decoration as the beaker found in the entrance shaft of Charterhouse Warren Farm Swallet [CWFS], which is situated only 1300 metres to the east. See the map of the area and illustrations of both beakers reproduced at the same scale. The CWFS beaker was found in a stratified level during excavation of the shaft, and in the same level was a human scapula that which has a radiocarbon calibrated date range of 2460-2240 BC. I have also contacted Dr Jodie Lewis, University of Worcester, who has a particular interest in the human presence in vertical caves on Mendip during the Neolithic and early Bronze Age. She has recently been involved in the excavations at Brimble Pit, Priddy, where a human skull was dated to a period slightly earlier than CWFS but the same Late Neolithic period generally.

I hope that this note will stimulate interest in the Bone Hole deposits so that the long and strenuous excavations by the MCG stalwarts have not been in vain.

Below left: Bone Hole beaker

Below right: Charterhouse Warren Farm Swallet beaker

Bottom: Location map



Broadband

Broadband is now installed and working in the cottage. The wireless router is in the library, on the middle shelf just in front of you as you enter; currently it is connected to a socket to the left of the window. Please turn off before leaving the cottage (we don't really want live electrical equipment in the library when the cottage is unoccupied).

The wireless is configured with no security (so you don't need a security key). We are on a bargain basement deal and only get 1GB/month so be economical with your downloads - no movies or live streaming please.

The group computer now has a wireless network card. You **may** need to disconnect / reconnect the wireless to get it to work properly. The computer has been updated with the ClamWin & AVG Free anti-virus software.

CSCC website

The CSCC has a new website at:

www.csc.org.uk/wiki

It will be under test for a little while yet before it replaces the old site. Your comments and feedback are welcome.

Cookie

Beer and skittles evening

Sat 4/10/08, 7 30pm

New Inn, Priddy Green

Tickets not required.

Bar food can be ordered in advance.

Menu option to follow.

Further info from Linda Milne:

Bat Products

Tony Jarrett has said that Bat Products will close by 31/08/08 or as soon as his stock is sold.

Trading has been difficult in recent years. Foot and mouth, the price of petrol, closure of University caving clubs and competition from online caving shops has finally proved too much.

Bone Hole

Doug Harris and Mark Ward have replaced the missing lock on the cave. They have used the old Upper Flood padlock on Bone Hole as a temporary measure. The key is in the tackle store.

It must be left in the padlock to open and close it, before removing.

It has had a good dose of lubricating fluid.

Upper Flood Swallet updates

(adapted from MCG Newsgroup messages of Mike Richardson and Ben Cooper)

On **19/07/08 Tim Francis and Mike Richardson** paid a visit to **Picket Pot**. The pool had cleared but was no lower, and it was not obvious where the water runs away to. They report that prospects are not promising. They had a look down **Birthday Surprise**, and made a vocal connection from the end back to the slot behind the boulder at Royal Icing, so that doesn't look promising either.

At the start of the new dig in **Rift Series** they excavated a lot of soil, following the highest point in the passage for some three metres in, with enough height to kneel or squat down, before the floor started to come up. To the right there is a space between the infill and the ceiling (the passage is some 2m wide and they were digging along the left hand side). Opposite here, the open passage goes back toward Zebra Aven and it appears they have dug into a pocket on the left hand wall.

Unlike their previous visit the air was fine. Digging is really pleasant (as digging goes), the soil infill stays as soil (and doesn't turn to gloopy mud), though there is enough airflow at the start to get cold if you sit around.

On the way out they recovered the two rescue drums so that out-of-date food items can be replaced.

On 02/08/08 **Brian Snell, Peat Bennett and Mike Richardson** returned to the dig in **Rift Series**. They made about 3m of progress, still following the left hand wall. There is less height now, maybe a couple of feet, but the digging is still fairly easy.

Survey update. At **27/07/08** the total surveyed length is 3415m. In addition, 200m of passage remains to be surveyed, giving a total about 3600m. It is important to remember that this figure is not absolute, but depends on the route the survey centreline takes. The more it cuts across the passage, the longer the cave will appear. The survey length data quoted includes all avens and side passages that have had survey legs taken into them.

Stainsby's Shaft updates

(adapted from MCG Newsgroup messages of Biff and Tony Knibbs)

Paul Ketcher and Biff spent most of the day **21/06/06** fitting a lot more scaffolding to the bottom of the dig. On **22/06/06** they were joined by **Ed Waters, Buddy (Mark Williams) and Hayley Clark** who helped removed all the spoil created the previous day. They then dug down another 3ft regaining the rift **Peat Bennett** had squeezed into. At the far end of this (not as big as it looked) rift, almost under where Peat squeezed in, a draft was coming in through small loose boulders. Biff enlarged this to about head size and he could see down another 12-15ft. Rocks dropped down from here go a bit further but it was all very loose and constricted (but free of buddle mud.)

The digging shaft is now 45ft (13metres) deep. Biff has removed the electron ladder to inspect it for any damage or corrosion and it will be replaced by a fixed steel ladder making it safer and easier to descend.

On **05/07/08 Geoff Beale, Mick Norton, Keith Knight, Adrian Bell, Alan Grey, Mike ?? and Biff** continued to make good steady progress down the shaft. On **06/07/08**, with help from **4 diggers from SMCC** they dug for about 4½hours, gaining a total of 6ft over the weekend. There is still another 9-15ft to get to the first level.

Tony Knibbs adds: Quite early (around 1957) when MCG first started exploring the upper reaches of Velvet Bottom, we began to meet the locals in the Nordrach area. During a discussion with an old chap, he informed us that the miners had claimed to have found a beautiful cave during their work on Blackmoor. Soon after learning of this old story we (about twelve of us) spent a fruitless session lasting many hours furling around in all the interesting-looking holes in the rakes area. It didn't seem to us unreasonable that the miners might have broken into something interesting. Hence my interest in the draughting Charnel Shaft. The

original spur to digging Stainsby's Shaft was that a small boulder-filled 'grotto' (Don's Chamber) in the side of the shaft emitted a slight air current and had a few small stal. decorations. It is also possible that the miners simply discovered an isolated void with some crystalline decoration! However, miners tended to leave traces of their passing. Since nothing of this nature has been reported in Upper Flood Swallet, we should remain sceptical about a possible prior visit by miners. I was relieved when it became apparent that Walk the Plank had nothing to do with a wooden plank.

Roman Rake updates

(adapted from MCG Newsgroup messages of Mark Ward)

On **05/07/08**, after **Biff** had split a large rock using "snappers", **Doug Harris and Mark Ward** poked around in the shattered rock until some of the wall in the West Rift fell down, narrowly missing Mark. Mark had wanted to shift all the rocks and spoil from 2006, so they set about clearing it. Unfortunately, this littered the bottom of the cave with mud and rocks again. So on **08/07/08 Mark Ward and his son** went back. After shifting many barrels out of the West Rift, Mark removed a small rock and could see 20ft vertically down the rift, into a Peat-sized hole with a small draught. After removing much spoil to open it up (it had filled to about 5 feet) he found a stemple (now in the Llibrary). The rift appeared to have been dug from the surface maybe as far as the tree and then backfilled. He managed to squeeze down head first into the rift which is about 18" wide opening up to 2 feet.

On **26/07/08 Mark Ward** reached the bottom of the hole and the west Rift was entered, with help from **Biff, Paul Ketcher, Mick Norton and Carl Ruxton**. Unfortunately, the rift pinched in to about 12-18 inches and solid rock was met. Further investigation found this to be the cave floor! Mark decided to remove the hanging death that had been above him as he lay sideways in the hole, but the whole roof came down like a coal shute. The rift is almost full again. The higher part of West rift is full large boulders and the whole place is on the move. No way forward can really be seen and geologically the odds of finding cave were always stacked anyway? The dig has been therefore been abandoned.

Access to Nordrach Cottage

The COTAG keyfob system on the front door of the cottage has been disabled. This is because we can no longer purchase COTAG keyfobs at a reasonable price, and our stock of keyfobs has run out.

This means that you MUST lock the cottage using your yale-type key ("M" key or "G" key).

The "active" COTAG fobs are powered by an internal battery - when this runs out a new fob had to be purchased. We will be installing a new system shortly to replace the COTAG system. This new system will have "passive" keyfobs, ie fobs without batteries. These fobs do not have a shelf-life. The new "passive" fobs are much cheaper and last "for ever".

When the new system is installed, the old COTAG system will be enabled again and the "active" and "passive" systems can run side by side. This means all the COTAGs currently in circulation can continue to be used until they expire, at which point the keyholder will need to acquire a new "passive" fob running on the new system. When all the COTAGs have expired, the "active" system will finally be removed and everyone will be on the "passive" system.

Doug Harris has a few yale-type keys available. If you do not have a "members" key (or, for probationary members, a "guest" key) please contact him. As we only have a few keys, please don't ask for a key if your next visit to the cottage is a long way off!

Finally, please remember: **THE FRONT DOOR MUST BE LOCKED USING THE YALE-TYPE KEY** until the new system is installed.

Upper Flood

We are putting together an archive of photos of Upper Flood Swallet and Blackmoor Swallet / Valley from 1950's to the present. I have located many photos taken AFTER the 2006 breakthrough in Upper Flood Swallet, but I would especially like to find more photos taken before this date. If anyone has photos of the following subjects taken before 2006 I would be very pleased to hear about them:

The Blackmoor valley; Blackmoor Shaft, now known as Stainsby's Shaft; Blackmoor Swallet (the dig in the valley floor directly below Blackmoor Shaft, now infilled); Grebe Swallet entrance; Waterwheel Swallet entrance; Upper Flood Swallet (Blackmoor Flood Swallet) especially photos of the cave taken before 1985, or of the various digs Midnight Chamber (the 1985 breakthrough), the Great Flood of 1968 (especially of the Blackmoor Valley and Velvet Bottom area)

In fact, it would be nice to hear about any photos not already on the MCG website - see mendipcavinggroup.org.uk/sections/photos/photos_index.html#flood

Thanks. Martin Rowe

MCG doings

Welcome to ...9 new
Probationary members:
Begoña Chamorro-Ramos

Jonathan Williams

Robert Fountain

Richard Martin

Arthur Munday

James O'Brien

Kjell Anderton

Alun Williams

Mark Williams

Congratulations...

... to the following who
have completed a Train-
ing Trip and are now Full
members:

Karen Fendley and
Biff Frith

Beginners and new members

Every caving club needs new members to secure its long term future. As announced in the last Newsletter, I have taken over responsibility from Linda for new membership. This role will be to respond to enquiries from potential new members, organise beginners weekends, coordinate novice trips, ensure cavers looking to join have the opportunity to get underground and encourage those who attend these events to join the group. Also as part of the role I will look to 'mentor' probationary members and encourage them to partake in group trips and social activities and on completion of their six months probationary period, to organise their training trip and become a full member of the group.

As part of this process it is important to have good communication and a structured approach. To help with this we now have 'standard' replies to membership enquiries which can be tailored to answer their questions, this will enable a quick response and ensure that all relevant information is passed on. We have also introduced new members 'packs' that are now sent to all probationary members when they pay their subscription. The pack includes their cottage key, CCC permit, information on using the cottage, cave conservation leaflet, latest newsletter and other useful information.

I will be organising beginner's weekends and trips to take potential new members underground. We will be charging £15 per person, payable up front; this payment will cover use of equipment, lamp batteries, any 'good will' fee and their cottage fee. Should the new person join the group we will deduct the money paid from their first membership fee, all they need to do is get their form signed and pay the difference as their first subscription payment.

So what can you do to help? Firstly we need donations of equipment in reasonable condition. In this modern age people taking on a new sport have a higher expectation on the gear they will have provided (sadly boiler suits, cardboard helmets and candles are out!). In particular we need more fleece suits in usable condition, although any donations of suitable gear will be greatly received!!! So far we have had an oversuit and a fleece suit donated by Joan, and a fleece donated by Bob, thank you very much for these, they will be used by grateful beginners

Secondly we need people who are willing to support novice caving trips; although I enjoy taking beginners and will take trips I will not do this on every member's weekend! We also need support to take probationary members caving once they join and then on their training trips so they can get full membership.

I am pleased to report that we have 9 people who have joined the MCG as probationary members recently, (a big thank you to Mick, Mark and Russ for their support on the July weekend). We also have a further four who I am hopeful will be joining us soon. If anyone can help out with a trip on the Saturday of the September members weekend that would be really helpful. The new members are up to a reasonable trip such as GB, Eastwater, Swildons (although they have just been down), Tynings, or Longwood? Please let me know if you can help out. We may also need some help with an easier beginners trip, something like the top of Swildons or Goatchurch, again if you can help please let me know.

Please help where you can, we need new cavers (and diggers!) to secure the future for the group. Thank you for your support. **Jeremy Gilson**

Tacklestore

The 'new' 200M drum of 10mm SRT rope has now been measured, checked, cut and marked and is stored in the SRT cupboard. The rope lengths are 35M, 25M, 40M, 20M, 15M, 25M and 24M. The ropes are all slightly longer than the stated length to take into account further shrinkage, also we all know how 'tight' rope lengths are that are quoted for caves so that extra bit can be handy!

The SRT rope dated 2000 will shortly be removed, I plan to use two lengths of this, one for making rope slings to replace those in the tacklestore and the second as a practice rope for use on the Beech Tree. The remainder of the 2000 SRT rope will be disposed of (we have a lot of old rope already for digging). If anyone thinks of a use for this please let me know by next weekend.

A revised inventory of MCG tackle is now on the noticeboard in the tacklestore, this will be updated shortly to show the new SRT ropes. I have also updated and reprinted the leaders list, if you are on the list please can you check your details. Finally there is an information sheet on the noticeboard with notes on lending keys to callers at the cottage, this also has some other general information below.

Please can everyone keep the tacklestore clean and replace gear where you found it. If anyone has any suggestions for improvement please let me know. **Jeremy Gilson**



Upper Flood Swallet party, 05/07/08

Well, you would have expected our summer BBQ to be all washed out - and it was....almost. Fate tried its best but we were not thwarted.

The roof of the Marquee was broken (a connector was missing) but Biff came to the rescue with some tape and strapping and with all fingers crossed up it went and we hoped it would survive the evening.

Then the rain and wind came which threatened to blow the whole thing into Farmer Brown's field, but the stones from the wall were used to anchor the guy ropes to the ground, very resourceful.

Then the BBQ disintegrated into rust-dust before our very eyes. Never say never - John and Alan leapt into action and disappeared off to Weston to return with some bits of grate and proceeded to create a masterpiece of a BBQ complete with fence panel roof - it was still smouldering the next morning!

With no CD player in sight the possibility of the sounds of the 60s was looking slim, but Mike (closet hi fi buff) unloaded his genuine vintage record deck and cool speakers, Yvonne dusted off her vinyl and Peat got into the DJ vibe and hey presto, we had ourselves a nostalgic 60s evening.

Thanks to: Birthday boy Bob for the beer. Yvonne, Agine (have I spelt that correctly?) and Mary - the Kitchen ladies; Joan for the fruit salad; Yvonne for the splendid cake; the washer-uppers (I'm sure I saw Bill getting stuck in); the BBQ team - Alan, John, Adrian, Keith, and gang; Caroline and Peat on the deck (as it were).

Thanks to everyone who dressed up and everyone who turned up! Peat and Caroline won a bottle of wine for the best 60s outfit. **Linda**



HYGM

Last year we had an autumn EGM to discuss the Newsletter. Please note that there are no plans to hold a Half Yearly or EGM either this October or November. The next meeting is the 09 AGM

Training

The November member's weekend is the annual training weekend and fireworks. This year John Crowsley will be running a Mine course which will probably involve a trip to the Forest of Dean on Saturday and a Mendip based trip on Sunday.

More details are available from Linda Milne

Ex-rescue bags

I have collected the rescue sacks from above the stairs. I think something had been eating the red sleeping bag inner as it was full of holes and the rubber on the ski mask had perished.

I have thrown these away and will offer the rope (dated 1991!!!) to anyone for digging. The oversuit and very thick fleece can go in the shed for beginners to borrow. The rope sacks have been put in the tackle store.

Once we have an answer from Mendip Cave Rescue we may restock the rescue bags.
Jeremy

What's in a name?

Mendip Rescue Organisation has been renamed Mendip Cave Rescue.

The Mendip Cave Registry has also changed its name to the Mendip Cave Registry and Archive.

There are currently no plans however to change the name of the Mendip Caving Group.

MCRA Registry Search

Library additions

Surrey's Ancient Stone Mines by Peter Burgess, 2008. An enormous amount of work has gone into this book and Peter acknowledges the inspiration gained from earlier research by Paul Sowen. The book is divided into two parts, Stone Quarries and Hearthstone Mines. Within the two sections each chapter describes one of the mines in detail, including the history, finds, features and plans. The book is well illustrated with black and white photographs and line drawings, and each chapter ends with a comprehensive list of references. The book is not a guide book, but of great interest to anyone living near the mines and interested in their origin and development.

Cheltenham Stone: the Whittington Quarries by Arthur J Price (2007.) This book brings together a wealth of original material relating to three underground quarries. There are numerous photographs and comprehensive references. The book probably comes into the category of local history but there is much to read about finds and working methods and those of us who enjoy Box Mines will find this book of interest

Caving Logbook, 1950-1959 Tony Knibbs has very kindly donated a typed version of his handwritten log. It makes interesting reading, not least for the transport used to get to Mendip which ranged from a bicycle to a three ton truck. **Are there any other members out there who kept personal caving logs and who would be prepared to type them up for the club?**

Cave Art, a guide to the decorated Ice Age caves of Europe by Paul Bahn, 2007. This book is in a convenient guidebook format (A5). After the introductory chapter on cave art, there are maps showing locations of the featured caves which are then described by country. - England (Cresswell Caves), France, Spain, Portugal and Italy. Each cave has a short description, bibliography, address, website, opening times, admission prices, reservations, access, fitness required, café, and much more. Geriatric cavers with an interest in archaeology, holidaying in Europe, should have a look at this book. It is a quality production with plenty of glossy photos.

Mendip Times, June and July 2008. The July issue has a number of articles on the Great Flood of 1968 accompanied by some good photos including one of the breached road across Blackmoor valley. Phil Hendy's page concentrates on the cave entrances that were opened up - Upper Flood, Waterwheel, Grebe Swallet, Manor Farm and the changes to GB and the Forty Foot in Swildons. His page in the June issue is devoted to the recent extension to Charterhouse Cave and gives a brief resumé of the cave's history.

Lifelines; The Vital Dry Stone Walls of the Mendip Hills AONB, 2008. Edited by Jim Hardcastle and Merryn Nisbet Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, this reports on a project to survey the condition, natural history and in some cases the age of walls in the Mendip Hills AONB – so not about caving but nevertheless an interesting publication for those who appreciate surface Mendip as well as its underground delights.

Caves of Applecross and Kishorn, Grampian Speleological Group Occasional Publication No. 8 (2007) by Richard Simpson and Dave Morrison. One for Julie?

OUCG Proceedings 14 (1992 – 1997) Published 2007 by Lulu. This substantial publication, edited by Hilary Greaves, Tim Guildford, John Pybus and Pauline Rigby, contains an enormous amount of information beginning with 30 pages on Oxford University's contribution to the exploration of Draenen. The next 100 pages describes their annual visits to Picos de Europa, penned (or should I say 'word processed') by expedition members in a variety of very readable styles. The publication concludes with a selection of miscellaneous articles including a one on 'Safety and Caving' by Tim Guildford, which is more about risk assessment than Elf and Safety and makes thoughtful and sensible reading.

Hong Meigui Yunnan Resurgences 2004 Expeditions, edited by Hilary Greaves in conjunction with the Hong Meigui Cave Exploration Society, March 2005. A well produced fairly standard expedition report with over 30pp of grid referenced cave and resurgence locations followed by 23 pages of 'Stories' and some surveys.

Dead Man's Cave by Conan Fraser, 1954, reprinted 2008. The background to the reissue of this children's adventure book appeared in Descent No 200 and was interesting enough to tempt me to purchase a copy. Four teenagers go caving in the Mendips, staying in the attic of a barn beside the triangular shaped village green in "Manton". Sounds familiar? Well, as you read on there are a number of other familiar scenes and the book is worth reading just for the fun of identifying the caves even though the names have been changed. (donated)

Crow Stone by Jenni Mills (2007) This is a novel set (loosely) in Bath stone mines; if you want to know what it's about, ask Tim!

Adventure Activities Licensing Authority

Safety Alert Number 1 – Mine Exploration, Gas Hazards

Issued: 24 July 2008



Background On 17 July 2008, an adult caver became unconscious, apparently due to a lack of oxygen, soon after entering a disused coal mine shaft. Despite prompt efforts by his companion on the surface and the rescue services, he died in hospital three days later.

This alert has been issued to remind adventure activity providers who offer mine exploration of the gas hazards that may be present in old workings. Others who participate in mine exploration may find this information useful.

Gas Hazards Old mine workings are poorly ventilated and may well contain atmospheres that are very low in oxygen. This is most likely in unventilated blind ends, shafts and other dipping workings. Variations in atmospheric pressure can affect any natural ventilation and the distribution of gasses in the workings. Oxygen deficient air can kill very quickly after entry and, if not immediately fatal, can impair the victim's judgement and physical ability to escape this hazard.

The risk of encountering oxygen deficient air is particularly high in old coal mine workings since oxygen reacts with coal to reduce the oxygen and increase the carbon dioxide content of the air. A similar effect can occur in some other mines, notably those that worked ironstone.

In coal mines, there is also the risk of methane; producing flammable and potentially explosive atmospheres.

Other Hazards There are also the more obvious hazards of unstable ground, hidden voids and shafts as well as flooding. Coal measures strata is unlikely to remain stable without support for long after the mine's abandonment.

Action by Activity Providers In accordance with advice from the Coal Authority and HSE's Mines Inspectorate activity providers should not be taking groups into old coal mine workings as they are inherently too dangerous.

Where other abandoned mines are used, providers should review their risk assessments to ensure that gas hazards are considered. Where appropriate, providers may need to make use of portable gas monitoring equipment. The users need to be trained in its correct use and the monitors need to be calibrated and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Useful References

Coal Authority – deals with surface hazards arising from past coal mining activities such as open mine entries or ground collapse. 24 hour emergency number – 01623 646 333. Web - www.coal.gov.uk .

Mines Rescue Service Limited – can provide training on testing for gas in mines.

Providers should direct enquiries about this alert to their AALS inspector.

Ref.: 47 Published: 28 Jul 2008

http://www.aals.org.uk/guidance_details.php/pArticleHeadingID=174

MCRA database

The Mendip Cave Registry and Archive has a new website providing a searchable version of the entire Mendip Cave Registry database of Sites of Spelaeological Interest, available at the following location:

www.mcra.org.uk/registry

The database contains entries for 1,800 sites across Mendip and the surrounding areas, including details such as length, depth, hydrology and alternate names. At the moment the website offers searches by both name and location, with interactive Google and Ordnance Survey mapping used to display geographic search results.

There are plans to enhance it over the coming months with the addition of more advanced search options, site photos etc.

Ruby Cavern

We have a copper plate negative mounted on a wooden block labelled "Ruby Cavern". We have no idea where this image was photographed. If anyone has any knowledge of a cavern with such a name please contact me:

Simon Jones

Acting Registrar
Somerset County Museums Service
Castle Green
TAUNTON
Somerset
TA1 4AA



Group Headquarters

Nordrach Cottage,
Charterhouse-on-
Mendip, Blagdon,
Bristol BS40 7XW
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Cottage Bookings All Groups (MCG or Guests) should be booked via Mike Richardson

The Mendip Caving Group (MCG) is a UK registered charity number 270088

MCG News. Published by [MCG](#), Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse, Blagdon, Bristol BS407XW. Original material © 2008 MCG and / or the authors.

Group information

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Weekly Meeting | At The Hunters Lodge, Somerset, first Friday of month from 9pm |
| Monthly Meeting | At the Group HQ usually on the first Fri/Sat/Sunday of the month |
| On-line Meeting | http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/mendip-caving-group/ |
| Group websites | www.m-c-g.org.uk and www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk |
| Cottage Fees | per night: MCG members, members' children, SWCC, NPC £ 2.00 per night: Guest clubs and member's guests £ 4.00 |
| Camping Fees | As for Cottage Fees: MCG, SWCC, NPC: £ 2.00. Guests: £ 4.00 |
| Season Ticket | For 12 month's cottage fees - Available to members only £40.00 |
| MCG Subs 2008 | Full or Probationary member: £30.00. Associate member: £15.00 |
| BCA Subs 2008 | Club Caver £16.00, Club Non-caver £5.00, DIM £pay to BCA |

Caving and social calendar 2008

| Date | Area | Event | Contact |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Sep 7/8/9th | Mendip | Members Weekend | |
| Sep 8th | Mendip | Longwood August System | Peat Bennett |
| Sep 8th | Mendip | Curry night | JP Burch |
| Sep 26-28th | Yorks | Hidden Earth | Mike Richardson |
| Oct 3/4/5th | Mendip | Members Weekend | |
| Oct 4th | Mendip | St Cuthbert's Swallet | Bob Templeman |
| Oct 4th | Mendip | Archaeology walk | Yvonne Rowe |
| Oct 4th | Mendip | Beer and skittles evening | Linda Milne |
| Nov 7/8/9th | Mendip | Members Weekend | |
| Nov 8th | Mendip | Pinetree Pot | Bob Templeman |
| Nov 8/9th | Mendip | Training days (TBC) | Linda Milne |
| Nov 8th | Mendip | Priddy fireworks | Linda Milne |
| Dec 5/6/7th | Mendip | Members Weekend | |
| Dec 6th | Mendip | Eastwater Cavern | Bob Templeman |
| Dec 6th | Mendip | GB Cave | Bob Templeman |
| Dec 6th | Mendip | Xmas dinner at cottage | Linda Milne |

The 2008 committee

| | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Secretary: | Mike Richardson |
| Treasurer: | Martin Rowe |
| Tacklemaster: | Jeremy Gilson |
| Recorder/Librarian: | Brian Snell |
| Cottage Warden: | Doug Harris |
| Editor: | Yvonne Rowe |
| Caving Secretary: | Bob Templeman |
| Social Secretary: | Linda Milne |

Cottage bookings

For latest updates go to

www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk/sections/cottage/availability.html

| Group | Day of arrival | Day of departure | Nights | Beds | Rooms |
|----------------|----------------|------------------|--------|------|-------|
| Lost World CC | Fri 29/08/08 | Sun 31/08/08 | 2 | 4 | |
| M Woods | Wed 24/09/08 | Tue 30/09/08 | 6 | 16 | 2 |
| Cardiff Uni CC | Fri 10/10/08 | Sun 12/10/08 | 2 | 22 | 2 |
| Marie & Tony F | Fri 30/01/09 | Sun 01/02/09 | 2 | 20 | 2 |

*Members should co-operate with teachers / scout leaders with respect to sleeping arrangements