



web edition

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Founded 1954

The Old Curiosity Shop

A report on the ascent of the aven above Thief Chamber, Upper Flood Swallet, by Brian Snell and Peat Bennett on 05/12/08

by Brian Snell

I wasn't particularly looking forward to the big struggle, through the entrance series of Upper Flood Swallet, loaded with heavy tackle bags full of climbing gear. It was bad enough trying to get past those damned tight bits and you really don't need to be shoving, pulling and persuading heavy tackle bags at the same time. To top it off I was going to use my Oldham for lighting too. Another thing to take off and shove in front of me; I really must try and budget for a new set of lights. Fortunately, Keith Knight took pity on me and lent me his headset, bursting with LEDs. So Peat Bennett and I set off on a crisp morning, with thoughts of a fatigued return to a cottage smelling of Christmas Dinner.

As predicted, the bags were heavy and were very quickly water-logged when we went through the Lavatory Trap with two inches of air space. An hour later, we were at Plank Chamber and heading up into Trench Passage. To our concern the resurgence was flowing through Trench Passage and thoughts of another complete soaking went through our heads. Fortunately it wasn't too bad and we were soon stood at the ladder hanging out of The Old Curiosity Shop.

I started getting geared up with a harness and climbing gear while Peat went off up the ladder to establish a belay position. I followed, and after getting ourselves sorted out in a small alcove adjacent to the top of the ladder, I set off up the aven. I needed to cross the shaft to get to a promising-looking continuation about fifty feet above. The rock was very brittle on one wall, which didn't help for secure bridging out over the shaft. Then a slippery muddy slope didn't help progress. I managed to get to the base of a chimney and get a nut running-belay in, and a few cautious moves up from this enabled a bigger nut placement about eight feet above.

Feeling a little more secure, I considered the idea of continuing to climb free but the security of the rock around curtailed that idea. Above, there were some large blocks the size of bags of coal, cemented together with flowstone and forming a slight overhang. The only thing I could do was to get a bolt in. So, in a rather awkward and restricted position, I started banging away with a hammer and drill. A cordless drill would have been quicker, but Upper Flood Swallet is not drill-friendly and I wouldn't have had the room to use one anyway.

After about fifteen minutes, I finally sank the bolt home, screwed on a hanger and attached etriers to it. I moved up on these to the top most loops and surveyed the scene.

I figured another bolt may be necessary, but then spotted a vague, horizontal crack. I got out a piton and tried sending it home but the crack was blind. I tried again a little to the right and it started to sink home. It went in about 30mm and stopped. Attaching an etrier to it, I transferred my weight onto it. It bent a little worryingly, but seemed ok. I moved up as high as I could, and I could now see the passage sloped upward to an inviting continuation above.

Next to me, a large tottering pillar of blocks, again the size of sacks of coal, had toppled over from one wall and was now leaning against the other wall. Looking down I could see that this would crash down on Peat if it dislodged, and made a mental note to keep well away from it. It looked like a rift passage disappearing into the distance. I called down to Peat to tell him the promising news and warned him I was now going to climb up free.

From the Editor



A Happy New Year to you all (and a more prosperous one I hope).

2008 ended on a high note - 11 new members joined, bringing the total membership to 133.

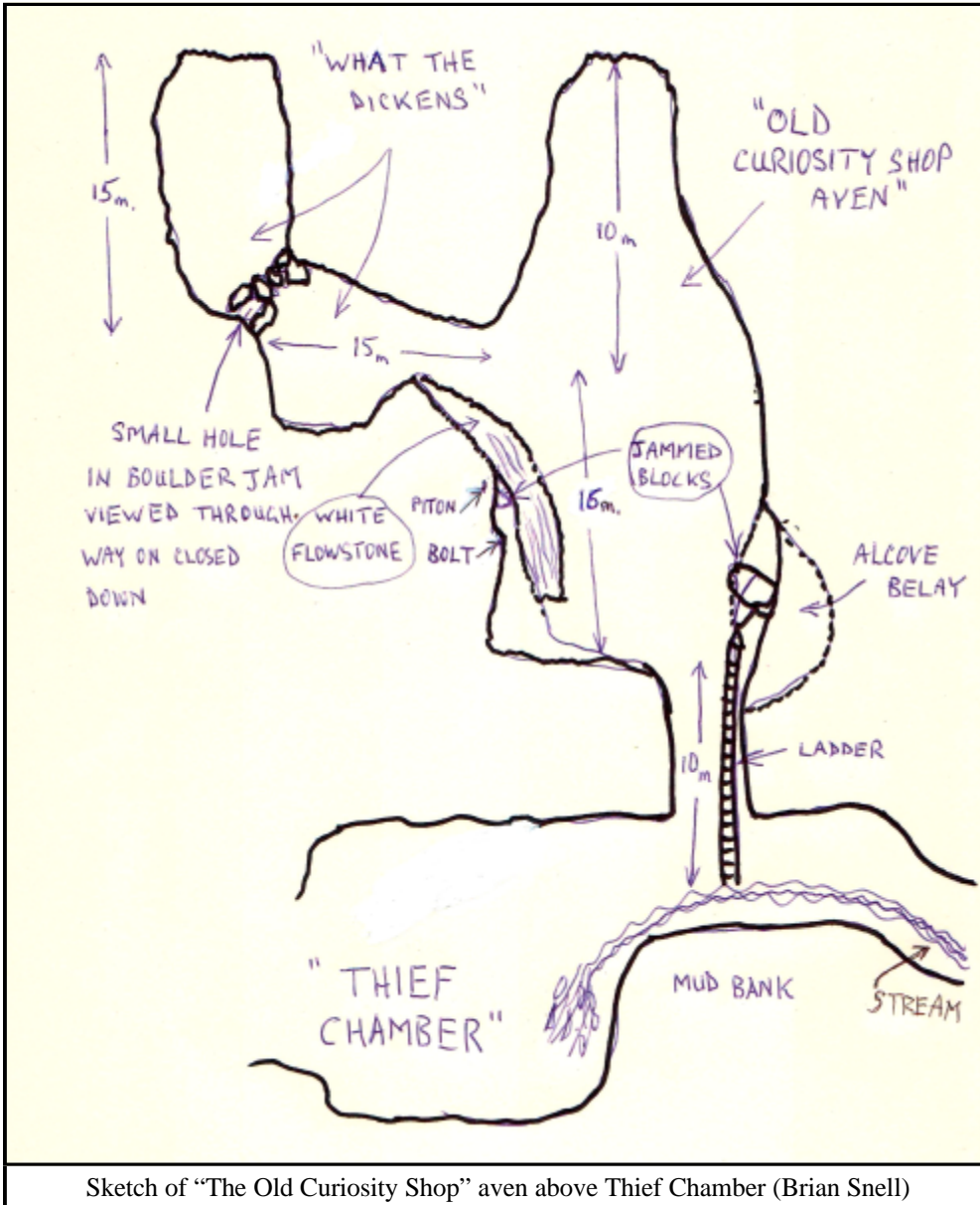
I had a moan at the last committee meeting about being editor but not having anything to edit - usual stuff: no articles, everything going on the newsgroup and difficult to sort, lack of time etc etc.

Well, just to make a liar of me I suddenly have loads of stuff - thanks to all you who have contributed, there's a nice mix, even a lovely article and photos from Andy Brander's son, Thomas. I'll have to moan more often!

Yvonne

In this issue

- 1-2 Old Curiosity Shop
- 3 Goatchurch Cavern
- 4 Peak District
- 5 Training report
- 6 Battery Swallet
- 7 Yorkshire weekend
- 8 Xmas dinner
- 9 Nordrach security
- 10 New members
- 11 Mendip wardens
- 12 Group information



The way on was over some white flowstone, and I wasn't happy about the need to stand on it. I managed to get a sling around a white knob, and pulling on this, went up the slope for about ten feet to a point where it went back down into a section of rift passage.

I looked around to find somewhere to untie the rope and securely attach it. The thought of losing the rope back down the aven and trapping me here worried me. Now I had time to turn around and survey where I was.

I soon saw that the rift passage, which looked so promising, closed down after about fifty feet. Above, I could see through some insecure-looking boulders to a continuation of the aven.

There was a hole just big enough for me to put my helmet through and shine the beam up to see what lay beyond. Above, the aven went up another fifty feet. "DAMN IT!" It closed down everywhere I looked. I continued to look around hoping that I had missed something, but

nothing popped up. I went back to the head of the pitch and called down to Peat who had been stuck down there getting cold but buoyed up by the anticipation of a breakthrough. I let him know that it was a no-go and I was now about to reverse the pitch.

A little disconsolate, I started reversing the tricky moves back to the dodgy, bending peg. Then the thought of the impending Christmas Dinner about three hours away came into my head and lifted my spirits. I took another look up the main aven to see if there were any possibilities there, but it all seemed to close down.

After a cautious retreat, removing gear as I went, I was soon alongside Peat. He went back down the ladder and as there was little point in leaving the ladder there, I de-rigged it and let it drop. Using the jammed boulder it was attached to, to sling the rope over, I lowered myself back down the aven and into Thief Chamber. I de-kitted, we packed the gear and went back along Trench Passage to the resurgence where we could clean the gear and have a bite to eat.

We had thought of going down to East Passage to see how the others were getting on at their dig, but the bags were now heavier with the extra ladder in tow, and the return to the surface was going to be another ordeal. So we agreed to head out.

About an hour and a half later and a lot of struggling from me, we surfaced to a heavily frosted evening and a sky full of stars. My sternum hurt, thanks to "Easy Squeeze". We were getting cold but the thought of a hot cup of tea and Christmas Dinner beckoning stirred us both into a quick pace back to the cottage.

Later, I decided to call the passage I had climbed into "What the Dickens" in keeping with the nomenclature of that part of the cave. If it was ever deemed worth another look it would not take a lot to get back up there, but for now I have the honour of the being the first person to see What the Dickens, and probably the last.

Goatchurch Cavern

by Thomas Brander

On 15th November I went caving with Jenny, Ollie and Eva, which was nice, as I had only ever been caving with my Dad before. They are aged 8, 7 and 5 respectively – I was 4 last week, so I had to go fast to keep up!

We met at the MCG cottage, got changed and tried our helmets on, then drove to Burrington Combe – objective Goatchurch. I have been down Goatchurch twice before, but the first time was only to the top of Giants Stairs and the second time was to the Dining Room (to see the Tradesman's Entrance). Jenny and Ollie had been caving lots of times before and knew the cave very well (having been in there 200 times they said!). We played on the rocks while the adults got ready and then had our photo taken at the entrance. Don't we look nice and clean!

It was quite slippery in the cave and we had to take lots of big steps between the boulders. Despite this, Jenny and Ollie bounced like Tigger all the way down the cave, closely followed by Eva! We found some nice smooth, sloping rocks and slid down them just like a muddy slide. I managed to fall over a few times, but soon recovered.



Once at the bottom of the cave we explored for a while; finding the waterfall and some other passages we had to crawl along. We turned off our lights and sat in the dark for a while - nearly impossible with 4 children; lights kept popping on again. It was very, very dark with the lights out – I could not even see my hand in front of my face. Then we had a picnic. Look at how dirty we are!

After our picnic, the real challenge came – climbing out; especially up the coffin lid. Everything took so long, mainly because there were so many other people going up and down that we had to keep waiting.

Quite exhausted after such a long caving trip, I still found the energy to play on the bunk beds at the cottage for an hour with Eva.

I have not stopped talking about the cave since I came home – I want to go again; how can we persuade Eva to catch a plane back here soon? Thanks to Buddy, Ed, Hayley and Julie for their help and a great time.



Upper Flood Swallet updates

Adapted form the MCG Newsgroup messages of Mike Richardson

15/11/08 Mike Richardson and 4 UBSS

On the way in, just before Easy Squeeze (at the corner with the rocking slab) a rock about 6x6x12 inches fell on the leg of the guy at the back. He may have caught it with his foot but he wasn't thrashing about so it must have been loose to start with and just waiting for a chance to make a bid for freedom. On the way back, Mike gently poked another loose rock (on the wall on the outside of the corner) behind the one that fell out, which promptly dropped. What is left is as stable as before, but people might want to eyeball it on the way in.

Over the next few trips we will take in some scaffold bars and clamps and store them somewhere around the boulder choke, so that there are some available when needed.

24/11/08 Mike Richardson, 2 Dutch guests. West & East Passages to sump at the end of East Passage

On the way out we climbed up at Walk the Plank, and went through to Thief's Chamber. The stream was resurging again, not as much as last December but enough to make the way through slightly less unappealing. The interesting thing was that the water flow was enough to show exactly where it sank without filling the hole in the middle of the chamber completely. We spent about 20 minutes pulling mud and rocks out by hand. Many thanks to Erik and Lisa! The water flows away quite easily into rocks and pebbles below the mud. It would be worth going in there sometime with a trowel to excavate the mud enough to get at the rocks below, it is about a foot thick and comes out easily, then we could see if there is anything more of interest.

I had a look up in the roof in the passage just before Walk the Plank, about a metre short of that really nice curtain that shows up well if a light is shone through it. I reckon it might be possible to climb right up at this point, the high rift stops here (or starts, if you are heading downstream) so its not quite as exposed as one might expect. This is the bit marked on the survey as "visible high level".

Giants, Oxlow & Icicle

by Geoff Rodwell

Members Debbie Lambert, Tony Smith and Geoff Rodwell enjoyed a superb extended weekend caving the Peak District, from the morning of Friday 7th to Sunday 9th November 2008.

With a kit-packed car and 3 people squeezed in for the 4 hour drive north, it proved a wet and windy weekend at Orpheus Caving Club, shared with a group of friendly students from Swansea University Hiking Club and most helpful Orpheus members, Ken and his wife, a great couple. The caving proved excellent.



Orpheus Cottage



Entrance to Giants

Friday afternoon – Giants

With £3 each dropped in the farmers 'Post Office' letter box (cheques are apparently preferred due to theft), we did Giants Hole 'round trip'.

Without survey or description to hand as I write, Giants 'round trip' involves nice heavily snaking stream passage just wide enough to rub around with seemingly endless 180 degree turns, a ladder and line down Garlands Pot, a gargling wet crawl through The Windpipe and a double roped SRT pull through, before back up Garlands to make our way in darkness to the car, to change from wet clothes in bitter cold wind. A nice cave for the first day, the Derbyshire equivalent of a Swildons trip, with something to suit all.

We retired to the warmth of the Orpheus cottage for a meal, chat and glass of wine in front of a raging fire and battering rain on the windows - perfect.

Saturday – Oxlow Cavern

The morning saw us up early to repeat the 30 minute drive to Castleton and its lay-by parking for Oxlow Cavern, after leaving money at the nearby farm (an experience in itself, with mass cats in the conservatory). Up the hillside to a pleasant day and the entrance and the start of the first pitch.

A surprise ! A good quality 40m rope was pre-rigged; Mammut Performance Static, 10mm, gold coloured, clearly marked MCG...What an absolute coincidence!

Having committed ourselves to Oxlow and not wanting an hours round trip back to the cottage for different ropes, we double rigged and descended wondering just who we would find below. SRTing into the West Chamber and down slope to our last planned 20m pitch, we bumped into Masson Caving Group (MCG) coming up. Photos have been emailed to them.

That evening we supped at the local family run pub and enjoyed excellent food, (booking recommended).



Oxlow and MCG rope !



Oxlow - getting off 'our' rope

Remembrance Sunday – Water Icicle

Sunday was to be a short trip as we all needed to get home. We chose Water Icicle Close Cavern with its simple 34m single drop straight down from an exposed hillside entrance, located just a couple of miles from the cottage. The final lane up retreated to muddy dirt track and off-roading in wet grass and potential engine sump-damaging ruts as we weaved precariously up track to dump our gear, with rain and wind howling.

Unable to leave the car (or we would be firmly stuck) another walk took place for the driver while the open-field exposed entrance was rigged. Above ground it was bone chilling balaclava weather with lovely views as the rain cleared. Below, a careful flame test was carried out for potentially high CO₂ / low O₂, but all proved breathable, though not an ecstatic flame.

The bottom proved great, not just for the lack of wind and rain, but for unexpected interesting passageways, part natural, part mined and with a couple of recent digs in progress. A pleasing worthwhile trip and an excellent finish to our weekend.

We were sorry to leave; our sincere thanks to Orpheus for a most enjoyable and entertaining stay. We look forward to returning.



Icicle passages

Annual ladder and lifeline training

by Angela Clulow

Instructors - Jeremy Gilson & Kevin West

Victims - Adrian Bell, Angela Clulow, Arthur Munday, Jonathan Williams and Karen Fendley

On Saturday 8th November Jeremy & Kev ran a day's ladder and lifeline training for MCG members. The objective for the day was to cover technique, calls, safety, basic knots and rigging.

We assembled outside the cottage in the morning and after a few false starts due to some impromptu leaf clearing, a visit from Richard Whitcombe (selling Tony Jarratt's old stock of books to raise funds for Mendip Cave Registry and Archive) and branch clearing in the tree by Doug Harris, our day began above ground.

Jeremy & Kev ran through the basics of ladder climbing and how to lifeline a partner up and down a ladder rigged to the tree. 'Victims' took it in turns to climb the ladder and lifeline a partner using the correct calls. Kev pointed out the dangers of suspension trauma and Jonathan discovered how uncomfortable it can be when



Jonathan comes to the aid of Kev as he lifeline's Jeremy

the belt 'rides up' under your armpits making it hard to breathe and potentially cutting off your circulation if left hanging for too long!!

There was much laughter when Jeremy demonstrated falling off the ladder when Kev, who is lighter, was lifelining. They both ended up suspended from the tree until Jonathan stepped in to add more weight to the rope to balance things out.

Once everyone had taken a turn to climb and lifeline, we retired to the warmth of the cottage for lunch and some knot tying. We soon learnt that a 'tidy knot is a happy knot' and all became quite proficient at tying a figure of eight, a bowline and an Italian hitch.

After lunch we spent some more time outside the cottage while our instructors ran through various types of anchor points to use to rig a ladder. We discussed natural belays and how to check if they were suitable and also how to check how sound the rock is around pre fixed anchors as well as the metal work itself! Kevin had a set of spits and P bolts which he used to demonstrate the various types most commonly used and explained how they are set up.

We then moved on to Manor Farm and laddered the entrance, putting into practice all that had been learnt above ground. Everyone had the chance to climb the ladder and lifeline a partner. Kevin was able to demonstrate how to assist a tired climber by setting up a simple pulley system and using some extra manpower from other members of our party.

The day was informative and fun and extremely useful, even for those of us unable to take part in the practical side due to dodgy knees!! We all learnt something from the day and agreed that more of the same would be of huge benefit, after all, we never stop learning!

A huge thank you to Jeremy & Kev for taking the time and trouble to arrange and run the course.

Cottage fees

The Committee have decided that Cottage Fees for Nordrach Cottage will rise from 01/01/09. The only exception to this is for group bookings that have already been accepted.

The new fees are:

Members, Members children, SWCC £2.50 per night

Guests £5.00 per night

(Camping fees are charged at the same rate as Cottage fees)

The committee have also decided to abolish "season tickets" from 01/01/09.

Any questions regarding the need to increase fees should be directed to Mr G Brown, London SW1A 2AA

Martin Rowe

SRT training

I am organising an SRT training weekend, to be held at the February members weekend over two days. The weekend is for those who wish to learn SRT or would like the opportunity to learn more or build their confidence.

The weekend will be run by myself and new member Ross Hardy who has recently completed his CIC training. Kev West may also be able to help us.

If you are interested please let me know as we need to keep to a maximum of 5 and places will be on a first come first served basis. We don't have lots of spare SRT kit so if you can bring your own that would be helpful!

Jeremy Gilson

Dales 2009

I am organising another weekend in the Yorkshire Dales on the weekend of the 17/18/19th April

The weekend will be a similar format to the November meet with warmer weather and most of the organised trips will involve SRT.

We are open to suggestions on trips, although I am thinking of Gaping Ghyll (Wades and Bar Pot), Alum Pot or Lancaster Easegill.

All are welcome; at the last weekend members enjoyed some good walking as well as the caving. There is plenty to do from show-caves to pony trekking and I am keen to get as many members as possible to enjoy the weekend.

If you are interested please let me know, as I want to make a provisional booking for us. The cost of accommodation works out well at £5 per person per night.

Jeremy Gilson

Battery Swallet updates

adapted from the Newsgroup messages of Mark Ward

Any digging after dark must now be reported first to Duncan Massey of Swallet farm, on 01761 221909. Failing to do this could lose our right to park on his land.

08/11/08 A good team effort saw us dig out all the silt from the cave. Unfortunately this caused the cave to flood. The dig face can now be reached when the water recedes. The roof / floor will have to be dug out to allow room to dig. The air chisel will hopefully make light work of it.

19/11/08 With the help of drain rods, there was a gurgle, the water disappeared, another gurgle..... and it flooded! Meantime we're going to dig the floor and build a dam. You only have to look at the end and it floods! It's just a case of slow and painful digging until we can have far more room at the dig face.

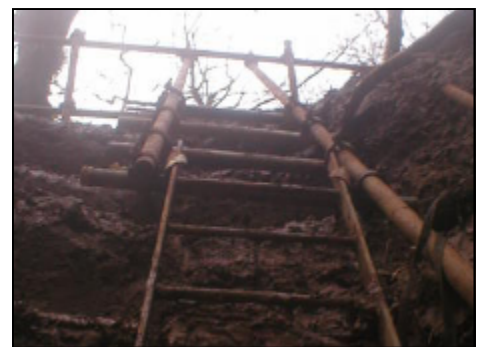
02/12/08 We bailed 200 litres last week and whooshed it down the plumbing (which now terminates at the dig face) in 25 litre drums. Although this flooded and refilled the pond, it did run away in 20 minutes. We cannot bail fast enough, so we will try a sludge pump next. I am going to try gingerly digging and hope there's no flooding. The pond is continually fed by a separate small inlet.



02/01/09 It was colder than you can imagine. I had to stand in the shower for 20 minutes to thaw out!! In saying that, because of the freeze we have finally dug out all the silt and reached the dig face proper. Plenty of room inside now. Lost the nail bar halfway up a hole, but I don't think it was 'the' hole, which was still underwater! It's going to be very exciting when we return and all the water should have gone? Pure cave now!



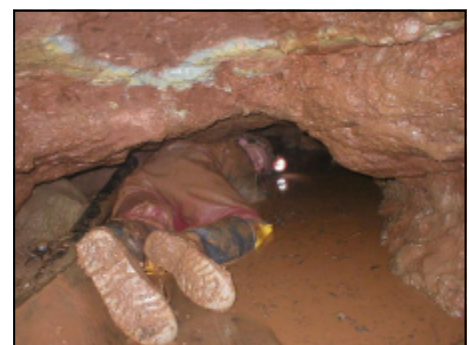
The entrance



Looking up



The water disposal system



The dig face

Yorkshire 21-23 November 2008

by Martin Rowe

The main MCG contingent were staying at the YSS hut at Helwith Bridge so Yvonne and I intended to meet up with them on the Saturday for a trip to White Scar. However our diabetic cat had other plans for us – he chose to have a "hypo" at 7.30am – so we missed the White Scar trip.

Instead we met up later with Linda and Alan Milne in the Helwith Bridge for an evening drink before joining the MCG contingent in the YSS to discuss Sunday's plans. SRT seemed to be the flavour of the following day but I was not sure if sitting in a harness is a good idea whilst I still have the remains of a blood clot in my leg. Linda and Yvonne also thought they needed some more practice before attempting an SRT trip, so the three of us decided to meet up at 10.00am on Sunday at the Hill Inn for a trip down Great Douk.

Overnight, the temperature dropped and when we arrived at the pub there was a light dusting of snow / frozen hail. Changing quickly, we arrived at the entrance to Great Douk about 10.30. A good-size stream was issuing from the mouth of the cave making for an interesting climb up the waterfall. Linda had not done this trip before, and when we soon arrived at the collapse at Low Douk we joked that the trip was complete and we should climb to the surface to meet Alan (who had taken the dogs for a jaunt up Ingleborough in the snow). Linda nearly fell for it!

We continued onwards in a sporting stream, traversing over the deeper pools to keep dry and noting signs that the water had fallen between 5 and 15cm very recently judging by the "tide marks" on the walls. More ominously though, after some 200m, we began to notice fresh vegetation on all the walls and the ceiling (which was up to 3m high). The cave had recently flooded to the roof; probably during the bad weather we had in October when there were several cave rescues on a single day. We also noted impact marks on the walls and much damaged stal presumably caused by large rocks being washed downstream. Many of these marks were over 1m above the floor of the cave - goodness knows what force is required to keep a cobble-size rock in suspension in a stream at this height!

Eventually, the roof lowered as we approached the end of the cave and the exit to Middle Washfold Sink. A wrong turn took us to a choke and a bitterly cold crawl in the water. I found the coldness to be quite painful, not at all like "normal" cave water. It was fresh snow melt and very close to 0° centigrade.

Retracing our route to the mainstream, we searched for the correct way on and found the wet route to Middle Washfold. It was not an attractive option – very low, very wet, and bitterly cold. We tried all the other possibilities in the hope that we could find a "dry" exit to Middle Washfold, but failed. Every way on involved crawling in bitterly cold snow-melt and I was beginning to suffer from the cold, despite wearing two layers of thermals plus a heavy duty furry suit and PVC oversuit.

Turning around, we set off back for the Great Douk entrance. By now, we were all quite wet, and cared not for trying to keep dry by traversing the deeper parts of the stream. Instead we waded quickly downstream and very soon we found ourselves at the entrance where we met a large party of Boy Scouts on a day's hike, complete with gas stoves, kettles and hot drinks. Despite dropping a heavy hint, they did not choose to share the beverage with us (what happened to "a good deed every day"?).

Back at the car, my fingers were so cold that I couldn't feel the keys I was holding to unlock the door to reach my dry clothes. A very quick change into warmer and drier clothing followed, and then we piled into the Hill Inn for a most welcome pot of coffee followed by bowls of steaming hot soup.

When we arrived home at Arnside two hours later and unpacked our wet gear, I found that the snow on our caving wellies and clothing hadn't even begun to melt. No wonder my hands had been so cold when we were changing – it must have been well below zero!

Thanks to Jeremy for arranging the weekend, and to Linda for making me commit to the trip.

Dales weekend

A big thank you to Steve, Giles, Angus, Debbie, Dangerous Jon, Bego, Russ P, Russ H and Angela for such a great weekend in the Dales.

We had such a good laugh, beer, caving, wine and a great Spanish meal on Saturday night thanks to Bego!

We got underground on Friday in Sell Gill with both the Fossil Route and Goblin Shaft rigged. Saturday we went to the spectacular Straw Chamber in White Scar, a trip that included a swim in icy snow melt and changing in a biting wind. On Sunday we did Yordas Pot which was another opportunity to hang on rope and get soaked in cold water.

Some of the team did the Ingleton Waterfalls Walk on Sunday afternoon and then Jonathan and Bego went up to Gaping Ghyll on Monday.

Angela and I are still in the Dales and were underground again today, tomorrow I am off to Juniper Gulf with a friend for my first trip to this Yorkshire Classic.

A great time was had by all.....!

Jeremy

MCG rope

The new dynamic rope that we purchased has been soaked, measured, cut and labelled and is in the tacklestore. The 2001 ropes have been removed and the 2004 ropes re-labelled to the new system which is shown on the noticeboard in the tacklestore.

Members are reminded that they are responsible for checking tackle before use. If there are any concerns please record these on the tackle log sheet and let me know. *Jeremy*

Eh-oh! Isn't that....



Teletubbies Laalaa,
Dipsy and
Tinky Winky

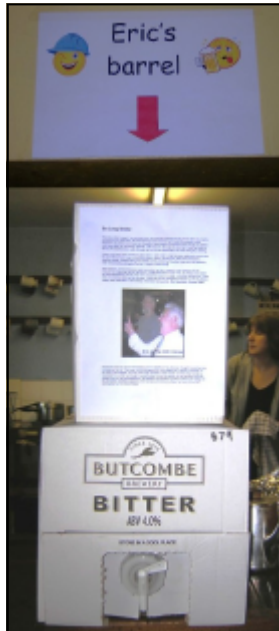
... and isn't that....



MCG members
Biff, Mick Norton
and Mike Richardson

Xmas dinner

Yep, we managed to pull off another Christmas Feast. Mountains of food were squeezed onto the long table (made up of all the tables in the cottage strung together, dressed in festive table cloths, napkins, crackers, party poppers and candles). We cooked two 8kg turkeys, 10kgs of potatoes, and loads more veg, homemade bread sauce, cranberry sauce, gravy, stuffing - phew! The first turkey went in the oven at 9.30am and the cooking continued until 8pm.



Eric's barrel

There was loads left over; some got eaten the next day and some taken to various homes to be reincarnated as a curry... The Committee finished off the mince pies during the meeting on Sunday morning.

And of course we also had Eric's barrel of Butcombe, kindly donated by Joan Dowley. This was a most appropriate way to celebrate the memory of Eric 'Smiler' Dowley and not surprisingly it was drunk down to the dregs before the evening was out!

It didn't all go smoothly though, the turkey was still frozen on Friday night, we ran out of gravy mix for the veggie gravy and (did anyone notice?) I forgot to bring the Christmas tree.

Lots of people helped out but I would particularly like to thank Yvonne (peeling and cooking), Mary and Mary (cooking and loads of washing up), JP (Turkey), Caroline (Veggie sauces) and Biff (for the extra oven). Well done folks, another successful Christmas Dinner! *Linda*



Biff's portable oven was installed under the stairs for the second turkey

Mendip Caving Group subs, 2009

It's time to pay your MCG and BCA subs. I posted the renewal forms out on 02/01/09 by second class post, so they should have arrived by now (normally I would have done this in mid December but I didn't have a computer and had to wait for the new one to arrive).

Your 2009 MCG membership card and CCC permit have been included in the letter and your BCA card will follow when I receive your subs.

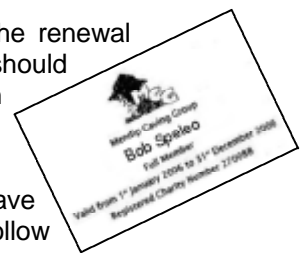
I have to pass on the BCA element by 31/01/09 in order to obtain public liability insurance for the group as a whole. I don't want to have to process all 133 renewals in the last week of January, so please help me by paying as soon as you receive your renewal paperwork.

To make it easier for you, I have included a s.a.e and I have even pre-folded your renewal form and CCC permit copy so that they fit the envelope!

I have included a Gift Aid form this year. Please fill this in even if you have already agreed to Gift Aid your subs. Karen Fendley will be taking over as Gift Aid administrator and I want everything to be in good order when I hand over to her.

Finally, a reminder. Cottage fees are now £2.50 per night (£5.00 for guests) and there will be no season tickets this year.

Best wishes for 2009



Martin Rowe

Nordrach Cottage security

On entering the cottage on 02/01/09 Doug Harris found:

THE LIBRARY DOOR WAS WIDE OPEN!
 THE BROADBAND HAD BEEN LEFT ON!
 THE GAS TAP WAS ON IN THE KITCHEN!
 THE BACKDOOR WAS UNLOCKED!!



According to the Booking Sheets, MCG members were present on 31/12/08 and departed on 01/01/09, so the Cottage may have been left unlocked since early on 01/01/09. We are lucky that nothing was stolen!



Please remember to secure the Cottage every time you leave. Don't assume someone else will do it!

IMPORTANT: Please remember the COTAG on the front door is not operating. The door has to be locked with the yale-type key. There is no night-latch on this door so simply closing the door as you leave will not secure the cottage. **YOU MUST LOCK THE FRONT DOOR USING YOUR YALE KEY** to turn the mortice lock.

Editing can be a real Ed-ache!

by Yvonne Rowe



I have been the Group's editor on and off since the early 1980s interspersed by Bryan Pittman, Charlie Alison, Letti Pate and Jane Baldwin who did a year each. Things change and evolve and I must try to keep up with things (not always easy when you're a wrinkly!).

I *have* changed how I have produced the newsletter over the years, especially with the advent of the computer. I initially typed articles etc on a Brother typewriter, literally cutting and pasting with scissors and glue; then came the BBC computer which sped things up a bit, but I still needed to type everything up from hand-written submissions; then followed the 286, 386 and 486 computers which were good when things went well, but a nightmare when things didn't, especially with viruses which weren't so easy to detect and prevent then, and I was still typing everything up from hand-written submissions; then about 3 years ago I got an all singing, all dancing laptop which made producing a newsletter very quick and easy. People could send in articles and snippets via email, and with photos, so all I had to do was 'edit'! I could now produce a newsletter in a weekend. This was the best it had ever been for me.

Now, with the advent of the Newsgroup, everything has changed and gone back to the bad old days. Because hardly anyone writes news articles any more (current contributors excepted), I now have to sift through the disjointed Newsgroup entries for relevant bits and pieces to extract and turn into news articles myself. This can take a week or more and is very laborious. I don't want to knock the Newsgroup – it's great and keeps people like Martin and me, who live miles away, up-to-date with Group goings-on. It's like a big communal conversation where anybody can chip in, but not so good from an editor's point of view.

So... I have to get to grips with it and respond accordingly. To that end, and after discussions at the December committee meeting, it was agreed that I will now only produce a full newsletter when I have enough time and material to do so. In between I may send out regular single-leaf Bulletins which will contain current Group and membership news, dates, and urgent cave information. I had to do this many years ago due to complicated Group politics at the time, but it worked well and kept the membership up-to-date with important and current information.

I hope this compromise will satisfy the membership, if not.....!

10 years ago

from the Cheddar Valley Gazette, 18/12/08

The secrets of filming one of the oldest homes in the country, which could have sheltered a Stone Age family, are being revealed.

Channel 4's intrepid Time Team, led by Tony Robinson and Mick Aston, descended upon Cooper's Hole, Cheddar Gorge, last April, sparking a furore of excitement among archaeologists, villagers, Cheddar Showcaves staff and the Press.

Lord Bath, of Longleat Estates, who owns the south side of the gorge, even paid a personal visit to see the archaeological dig in progress for himself.

(Ed: Coopers Hole was an MCG dig in the 1960's and the then Lord Bath, an Honorary member of MCG, visited the dig on occasions)

OFD tickets

We have been asked by the SWCC to put "Mendip Caving Group" on trip tickets rather than just the initials MCG.

There is more than one group with the same initials!!! (see page 4)

Archaeology Walk

We now hope to have the walk on the Sunday after the AGM. We will be visiting some or all of:

Burrington Iron Age Camp (hill fort)
 Bos Swallet Bronze Age occupation site
 Read's Cavern Iron Age occupation site
 Dolebury Warren Iron Age field system
 Dolebury Iron Age Hill Fort
 Dolebury Levvy (Iron Age pottery)
 Rowberrow Barrow Bronze Age burial site
 Rowberrow Cavern Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British site
 Rowberrow Earthworks (Iron Age cross ridge dykes)
 Uphill to Charterhouse Roman Road
 Rowberrow Camp Iron Age hillslope fort
 Hollow Way (Sunken Way) section of a Medieval route
 Tynning's Farm Bronze Age barrow cemetery
 Tynning's gate Bronze Age burial site
 WW II military remains (anti aircraft battery)
 West Twin bank and earthworks Bronze / Iron Age
 Aveline's Hole Palaeolithic site

It is a circular walk of about 9 miles, but for those of us who might tire before the end we will have a vehicle waiting at Tynning's Farm. From here the route for those who want to continue on foot is down to West Twin Valley to Aveline's Hole, the last site (we can meet there). Then back to the Burrington Café car park.

Bring a packed lunch, and a headset for Rowberrow Cavern, Read's Cavern and Aveline's Hole.

Congratulations...

...to the following who have completed a Training Trip and are now Full Members:

Andrew Brander
Deborah Lambert
Angus Leat
Geoffrey Rodwell
Keith Thomas

Welcome to...

...11 new Probationary members:

Gabriel Best
Tim Brown
Hayley Clark
Steven Clarke
Adam Etherington
Ross Hardy
Louise Stone
Ed Waters
Mike Waterworth
Jonathan Williams
Paul Williams

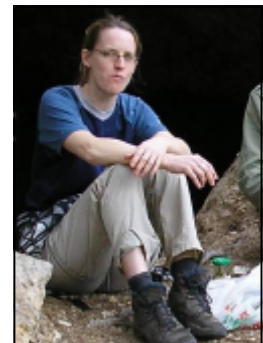
Congratulations to...

Pat and Mary Newman who are expecting their third child in April

Mike and Julia Pittman on the birth of their daughter Melissa in December

Vale

We are sad to have to record that former member Kirsty Stroud has died following an accident in the Lake District. Kirsty was one of the Royal Holloway members who joined MCG in the 1990's and caved with us until recently.



Kirsty in the entrance to Cova de Mabre, Mallorca, 2005

Mendip Wardens service under threat?

adapted from various internet sources

It has been announced that Les Davies will be taking early retirement at the end of March 2009 and at the same time Tina Bath is being made redundant. It is expected that complete management of Blackmoor will revert to Charterhouse Centre and the landowners Somerset County Council. The news that Les and Tina's posts are being lost, has been met with opposition on Mendip.

Nigel Taylor (BEC), was said to be furious when he heard that the two Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB) wardens could be forced out of their jobs. Nigel, who also serves as a Cheddar Parish councillor, was appalled to hear a shake-up of the Mendip Hills AONB Service – funded by Natural England, Somerset County Council, and others – could leave the service with a number of officers but no hands-on staff to install gates and stiles, mend fences, do dry stonewalling or negotiate with landowners.



Les Davies, MBE



Assistant Warden, Tina Bath

The warden posts have been such a success, senior warden Les Davies was recognised with an MBE for his contribution to the environment and deputy Tina Bath was named best lady hedge-layer in this year's national championships. However, a service review could see the former take early retirement and leave the latter redundant.

"Recently the AONB sought approval for a 10-year plan and at no point did it propose axing these wardens," said Mr Taylor. "I think it's disingenuous. The AONB employs something like seven posts with names such as development officer and people and place officer, but the wardens do the work on the ground. They have actively cut back on facilities for the wardens. They used to have a vehicle each to carry chainsaws and tools. Then they had one between them. My family has had a small holding on the Mendips, I have walked over them and caved under them and been very grateful to Les and Tina."

He believes volunteers would be relied on to maintain the hills and that several had spoken to him about giving up their duties over the treatment of the two wardens.

Requests for petitions to Save Our Wardens Service at <http://www.sows-on-mendip.com/> have flooded in and been set up in the Hunter's Lodge and New Inn in Priddy and camping shop Gorge Outdoors in Cheddar Gorge.

An on-line petition has been set up at <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/sows-on-Mendip/>

The Western Daily Press are due to carry this story next week and a further petition. BBC Radio Somerset ran a live interview, available on their website

Somerset County Council have listed this as an Agenda Item for Thursday, 8th. January.



Typical of the problems Les can deal with - an abandoned boat at Blackmoor, 11/11/08 (photo M Ward)

Committee doings

Cabinet for "rare" library books It was agreed to fit doors to part of the shelving in order to create a lockable section.

Upper Flood T-shirts Agreed that the last few shirts can be sold at £7.50 each

Upper Flood Swallet The missing key has been returned anonymously

Storage Heaters The lounge heater cannot be turned off as it is on the same circuit as the water heater (which is 'always on') and therefore needs an isolator switch.

External Storage Space needs to be found for the digging tools as they cannot stay in the gas store due to fire regulations and the shed is full. A shipping container is being considered, price £800-£1000

Gas Store We need to make the necessary changes (including new regulators) to the gas store set up

Cottage booking sheets These now have the facility to show group bookings without allocating specific bunks.

Key safe for guest groups This will allow CCC permits and keys to be made available to Guest groups without a member having to drive up to the cottage on a Saturday morning. Only to be used by prior arrangement.



Group Headquarters

Nordrach Cottage,
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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

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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 £ 2.50
 per night: Guest clubs and member's guests £ 5.00
Camping Fees As for Cottage Fees: MCG, SWCC, NPC: £ 2.50. Guests: £ 5.00
MCG Subs 2009 Full or Probationary member: £30.00. Associate member: £15.00
BCA Subs 2009 Club Caver £16.00, Club Non-caver £5.00, DIM £pay to BCA

Caving and social calendar 2009

Date	Area	Event	Contact
There are also Upper Flood trips on most weekends - check the MCG Newsgroup for details			
Feb 6/7/8th	Mendip	Members Weekend	
Feb 7th	Mendip	SRT training	Jeremy Gilson
Feb 7th	Mendip	Jacket spud night	Linda Milne
Feb 21st	S Wales	Ogof Ffynnon Ddu	Geoff Beale
Mar 6/7/8th	Mendip	Members Weekend	
Mar 7/8th	Mendip	Cottage work weekend	Doug Harris
Mar 7th	Mendip	Pub meal	
Mar 27/28/29th	Mendip	Members weekend	
Mar 28th	Mendip	AGM	Mike Richardson
Mar 28th	Mendip	Annual Dinner	Linda Milne
Mar 29th	Mendip	Archaeology walk	Yvonne Rowe
Apr 4th	Mendip	Loxton Cave and Shute Shelve	Doug Harris

The 2009 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

When under-18s are present, members should co-operate with teachers / scout leaders with respect to sleeping arrangements

For latest updates go to www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk/sections/cottage/availability.html

Group	Day of arrival	Day of departure	Nights	Beds	Rooms
Teasdale	Fri 09/01/09	Sun 11/01/09	2	10	2
Wilts Scouts	Fri 16/01/09	Sun 18/01/09	2	26	3
Liz Jones	Fri 23/01/09	Sun 25/01/09	2	24	2
Marie&Tony F	Fri 30/01/09	Sun 01/02/09	2	20	2
Hades	Fri 20/02/09	Sun 22/02/09	2	20	2
SSCC Scouts	Fri 27/02/09	Sun 01/03/09	2	18	2
Majendie-Steep Scout	Fri 20/03/09	Sun 22/03/09	2	12	2