

# MCG NEWS

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group

Departure Lounge, Upper Flood (by Charlie Allison)

Web edition

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Founded 1954

## Bone Hole - the latest

by Ed Waters

Back in June a project was started to finish off some long overdue conservation work in Bone Hole, Cheddar Gorge. As part of the access agreement for the site, the MCG had agreed to protect the archaeologically important bone slope which lies just below the entrance shaft. For one reason or another no one had managed to get around to this. In addition the original wooden shoring in the entrance shaft had deteriorated severely and needed replacement.

Therefore in May a small group carried a series of heavy loads up the steep hill to the impressive entrance. The first task was to set about shoring up the entrance. This was achieved using a lot of scaffold. Unfortunately it was not possible to remove the original wood without the shaft collapsing, therefore it is now heavily

Photo Ed Waters

In order to reduce the risk of collapse further, it was decided to ensure that visiting cavers would not have to clamber up and down the shoring as had been the case. Thus the old chain "hand line" was removed. On investigation this was found to have worn alarmingly, down to only a couple of millimeters on several links. This wear was not immediately noticeable in the cave, and would surely have led to an accident in the very near future. The chain was then replaced with a VERY heavy fixed ladder. The ladder is actually slightly larger than the shaft and had to be hammered down, and probably does not require the bits of rope securing it to the scaffold!



Ed pictured on the new floor on the Bone Slope

Once the shaft was stabilised the serious work could begin. Over a series of visits a sloping floor of galvanised steel mesh was installed over the top of the Bone Slope. The mesh is supported on a scaffolding framework, about 6 inches (150mm) above the slope. As initially installed this produced something akin to the cresta run which allowed a lethally fast descent and all but prevented ascent! Therefore angle iron "rungs" were added to make the floorway safe and pleasant to use.

### From the guest Editor



Whilst we are waiting for our new Newsletter Editor to get into the saddle as it were I have volunteered to produce an update of the 'goings on' to use a phrase coined by Yvonne. If you haven't been on Mendip for a while you really should come and visit. The group is buzzing with activity and the cottage has seen some good improvements. This newsletter is mostly about keeping you up to date and hopefully the next issue will have a few more articles but in the mean time here's what's been happening...

*Linda*

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The walkway is now almost complete, and is safe to use. There does remain some more conservation work though, namely the removal of old timber and digging kit left by previous generations of cavers, and the calcite flows on the walls could do with a good clean - volunteers will be welcomed! Most of the work was carried out by myself and Buddy, with lots of help from Mark Ward, Russ Porter, Paul Ketcher, Doug Harris, Joan Goddard and Hayley (apologies to anyone I've missed). A very special thanks is required to Biff, especially for the provision of all the materials, as well as underground engineering expertise.

As a postscript, the opportunity was taken during the work to have a good look around the rest of the cave. The long fixed ladder down to the old dig could do with replacement, though that is not on the shortlist of jobs to do at present. I think all of us were impressed with the draft in the cave, and given its location it clearly has a lot of potential. After much deliberation a dig has been started in the part of the cave above the gate (i.e. away from the archaeologically sensitive areas). The aim is to work down the top of the choke, and hopefully enter the Cheddar river cave which must lie somewhere beneath. To date we have excavated down about 4m through boulders against a solid wall. Digging is almost unbelievably easy, and the draft is very encouraging. Even more exciting is that the new extensions in Charterhouse Cave have headed directly towards Bone Hole. It is so promising that the Charterhouse explorers have asked to come and have a look... Digging has become a regular event, and anyone interested in joining in please let me know.

*Ed*

## Hidden Earth 2009

Photo Martin Rowe

The MCG won the much coveted 1<sup>st</sup> prize in the stand competition. Much effort went into its preparation and thanks must go to Martin and Yvonne for achieving what may be a first for the MCG.

The stand was a reconstruction of the MCG cottage lounge, complete with call out board and photo board. 'As soon as the stand was set up it was obvious it would be a success. Members and visitors soon made themselves comfortable and we began serving tea (brewed up in my Landrover in the car park) and biscuits'. Yvonne's famous Boulder Choc Rock Cake went down very well with visitors. 'I think the judges were impressed by the atmosphere we created. It was genuinely like being in the MCG lounge'. The rest of Martin's report plus more photos are available on the web site:



The MCG stand was a mock up of the cottage lounge

[www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk/documents/HE09.pdf](http://www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk/documents/HE09.pdf)

## Cottage Update



Key fob (actual size)

The new **access system** is poised ready for 'go live' - hopefully over the November's members' weekend. If you haven't had your new key card or key fob then it will be posted to you shortly. The system is easy to use and gives us a lot more control over issuing cards by being programmed in house. They are also cheaper and the batteries never wear out! The system has been specified and installed using our own in house talent - which also saved the club a lot of money. Thanks to Ben, Miguel, Martin and everyone else involved.

The new **wooden double glazed windows** have been purchased and are at the cottage awaiting installation by, yes, yet more of our skilled members. The installation is planned to start over the November's member's weekend so be prepared for a draughty nights sleep!



## MCG trip to Andalucia, Spain 10<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> September 2010 caving and canyoning!

We are very lucky to have Miguel Tome who is organising a group overseas trip to Spain next year. Miguel has much knowledge of the area and has contacts with all the caving organisations and park authorities. He has caved in this area extensively and has himself been involved in exploring Sima GESM some 1100m deep.

The opportunity to cave with Miguel on his home turf should not be missed!

The caves will be mostly SRT apart from one, so those who have not yet got up to speed you better get started! (See training weekend below). Miguel has started collecting names and will need to apply for permits so it is important that he gets the names of people committed to the trip. Lots of information is available on the web site, an extract follows:

*'We are planning 10 caving trips and 2 canyoning trips during a period of about 15 days. We will*

*be caving in three different National Parks, namely [Grazalema](#), [Sierra de las Nieves](#) and [Torcal de Antequera](#)*

*SRT will be needed for most of the caves. Only one trip will be suitable for non-SRT cavers - [Cueva del Gato](#). This is a 5 kilometres through trip, with all fixed ropes, loads of swimming (wet suit required), SRT harness, helmet and Stop or Figure of 8. This cave will be treated like a canyoning trip (but obviously in the dark) because of the dimensions of passages, with lakes up to 1100 metres long (600 metres swimmable for us), 6 to 8 abseils (depending on the route) with a biggest drop of 30 metres, huge chambers like Plaza de Toros (the bull ring) where you actually could build a bull ring in the chamber, and a good variety of formations like the Great Stalagmite 4 metres wide and 5 metres high*

*Our accommodation will be in the village of [Villaluenga del Rosario](#), in the province of Cadiz but very close to Malaga province too; we will be caving in both provinces. Accommodation will be in a bunkhouse run by the [Andalusian Caving Federation](#), there are plenty of bunks, meeting rooms, a rear patio and porch and kitchen with staff cooking for us. Accommodation is 8 Euros per night and 8 Euros per meal*

*All the caves we are visiting require permits, and as the permits will be printed with the names of all members in the party, we need 100% commitment of those taking part. We also need conformation for booking the accommodation*

*All caves except Gato will be SRT, and one of the trips will be to [Sima GESM](#); as most of you know, this is a 1100m deep cave. An MCG team may be able to participate in the exploration which is taking place and still finding new passages and pitches. We will be working with the team that has been exploring Sima GESM since 2002 and who reached the new depth of 1100m. This trip is ONLY for hard cavers, as there is a 3 metre squeeze a short distance into the cave, called literally "the f\*\*\*\*\*g squeeze" on the survey*

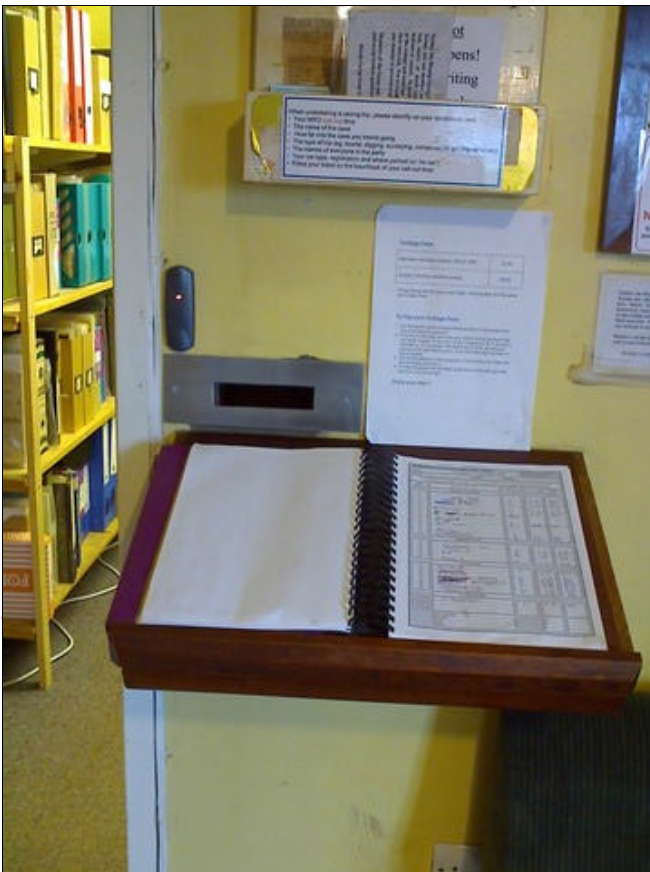
*Our caving trips will be taking place in the National Parks of Andalucia, and the park authority issues permits not the clubs or the Caving Federation. The authorities are concerned with the big risk of fire and this is why we need to put names on permits. At least one local caving club has been fined for taking caving gear off the cars without a caving permit. We are already in contact with National Parks, Andalusian Caving Federation and Local Clubs. Sima GESM and Cueva del Gato (5Km through trip) will be pre-rigged and there will be tackle available to rig other caves if needed.'*

There is much more information on the website including a comprehensive powerpoint presentation (downloadable version: [www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk/documents/spain2010.pdf](http://www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk/documents/spain2010.pdf)).



## Cottage Work Weekend

The September members weekend was the 2nd work weekend of the year and resulted in the completion of some important cottage work. The jobs included: installation of a more secure hut fees box, continuation of the installation of the access system, installation of a secure glass cabinet for the log books, removal of scrub from the verge, chopping and stacking the remaining beech wood, levelling off some of the car park to allow more parking space, a big bonfire, painting the toilets, painting the kitchen windows, cleaning the kitchen (again) clearing out sheds, and many more. Such good progress was made that there was time to do some caving the next day! In the evening we had a splendid take away curry organised by JP and Mary. Thanks to them and to everyone else who helped with cottage work.



New hut fees letter box with new access reader above

## Call out board

Please remember to fill in your call out cards. It is important that all trips are posted on the board, particularly now that there are multiple trips going on during busy weekends. Please also remember to fill in the log books. They are the only lasting evidence of the caving activities of MCG members. Our history. You never know how important the information will be in 50 years time!

## A Newbie's Perspective

Well hello! For those who haven't met me, I'm a new member called Kev Speight. I'm an exiled Lancastrian living in Wiltshire, who recently unearthed a passion for inventing new ways to hurt himself under the Mendips!

To date, I've been privileged enough to be dragged along on trips down GB, Waterwheel Swallet, St Cuthbert's Swallet, Longwood Swallet and of course the obligatory Swildon's forays. I'm forever in the debt of the guys who've organised and led these trips (Particularly Mr Porter, who endured my company for my first few 'proper' trips!), as they've all been challenging in their own way and the guys have always been happy to answer my endless stream of questions.

At the October member's weekend, the missus and I were made to feel instantly welcome by everyone present, despite my somewhat 'distinctive' bluetooth nickname. (Probably not printable in such an esteemed publication as this!) Okay, we were both mentally scarred by some of the cottage games we witnessed, (Even the people at our local S&M club's eyes were watering when we told them!) but we survived to tell the tale and in truth, had a fantastic time in great company. We're both really looking forward to the next opportunity to damage our bodies with hacksaws, tables and alcohol!

So thanks again to everyone for indulging my newfound interest. I look forward to meeting and of course caving with you all soon.

Winner winner, chicken dinner!

*Kevin Speight*

## Yorkshire 16/17/18 April '10

We will be heading up the M6 again to the Yorkshire Dales for a weekend of caving 16/17/18 April 2010, going underground on all three days. I am going to book the YSS hut as before and I also need to get permits organised for the caves that we wish to visit. If you have any preference on what sort of caving you would like or specific caves please let me know. My thoughts at the moment include; Lost Johns, Lancaster/Easegill, Gaping Gill.

I am also looking to organise SRT training for beginners or those who would like a complete refresher, this would start with over ground practice and move underground for days 2 and 3. If you can help with the training for this please let me know, I am considering the option of getting professional tuition organised for the first day for which there would be a cost of around £40 per person. If you would like to put your name down for the weekend please let me know, places will be limited by the number of bunks I can book.

*Jeremy.*



# Beer and Skittles night...and cottage games for afters

Photos by Jenny Plumb



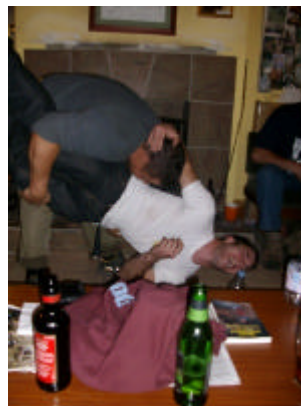
Free style bowling at the New Inn



From left: Miguel, Linda, Dawn, Mike, Biff and Ed



Miguel, Mike, Ed, Biff, Jenny and Hayley



Ed assisting Matt



Adrian walking the cans



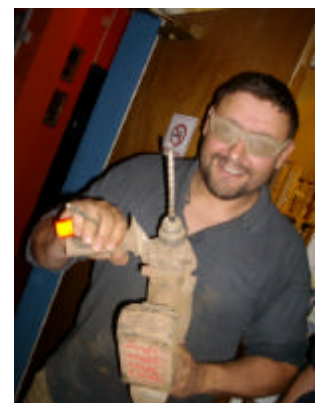
Mike attempting the impossible, unless of course your names are Tim or Peat



Miguel, ably assisted by Michelle



Miguel doing it lengthways!



Ed 'I'll show you how to get through the squeeze box'

## LIBRARY ADDITIONS

**Bone Hole photos-** Bernard Reeves has donated a series of photos taken during MCG's 1967-1974 excavations. (Currently there is an exhibition of bones from Bone Hole and Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink in Wells Museum)

**Mallorca Caves** by Des Marshall, 1999.

**Speleology (Bulletin of British Caving) Issue 14 August 2009** includes a description and rigging topo for Scialet du Combeau : the first echo-anchor SRT route in the Vercors. Articles on Ethiopia, Asturias etc.

**W jaskiniach** by Bohuslav Kortman & Christian Parma, 1990. I couldn't resist this lavishly illustrated hardback coffee-table book when I saw it at Hidden Earth. It is written in Polish but contains photos of caves in most European countries (not Britain!) as well a few from South East Asia.. Appended are translations of the captions into English, French, German and Greek.

**Eli Simpson and the BSA** by Davis Judson, BCRA Cave Studies Series No, 18, 2009. (64 pp, 94 photos ). This publication came about as a result of the BCRA Simpson Archive, a mass of documents collected by Eli Simpson (1884-1962) and rediscovered from BCRA's archives. It will appeal to cavers who are interested in the early development of caving and in the numerous old photographs, surveys and assorted documents.

**Purbeck Underground.** A VHS Video produced by Trilith (a charity which collects and makes available archive films of Dorset and Somerset). It shows a short 1960s film of two old stoneworkers exploring a disused underground working; new footage brings us up to date with the history of the Purbeck stone industry (donated).

**Redcliffe Caves Guide** published by Axbridge Caving Group in 1996. Six page pamphlet about the "caves" which are in the centre of Bristol. Visits can be arranged via Alan Gray of Axbridge Caving Group (donated).



A new cabinet for the log books

### Please note:

Having completed an audit of the library issues book, I will be shortly contacting those individual members who have apparently had books etc out for over 6 months, to both verify that they still have them and respectfully ask for their return. 6 months, is more than sufficient time to both read and digest.

**Bob Templeman Recorder Librarian**