



MCG NEWS

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group

Number 371

July 2013

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- Bone Hole
- Reservoir Hole
- Upper Flood
- France

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Bone Hole Entrance by Tom Harrison

SUMMER 2013

EDITORIAL



Wells and
Mendip
Museum By TH

Hosting:
*The Nether-
world of Men-
dip* a new,
permanent
exhibition

Wow it's hot this month!

Regular highs over 30°C, the hottest July day in 7 years was recorded this month and the high pressure system causing this prolonged spell of fair weather looks like it is sticking around for a while yet!

What a perfect time to get underground and cool off!

The last few months have seen work continuing at all the usual MCG dig sites. In this issue, a look at Bone Hole in Cheddar Gorge. An MCG dig in the 1970s, and still being dug today.

Joan Goddard looks at the Geology of the Cutler's Green Sinkholes.

Reservoir Hole and the now famous Frozen Deep Chamber in Cheddar Gorge is now accessible to the wider caving community, see inside for access details, and MCG members, other than those involved early on, have now had the

chance to visit this spectacular Mendip attraction. Read their trip reports, and see the photos inside.

The club members have also been visiting various other sites across Mendip and beyond! The Yorkshire trips were a great success by all accounts.

In the next few months there are various trips planned, including the September trip to Spain.

The new Wells Museum exhibition; the Netherworld of Mendip has now opened and I was glad to have made the effort to get along to see it! From the cottage log-book, I can see that others have too! It was a very well put together, modern and informative addition to the Caving section of the museum, and if you are able to go there are lots of MCG members' photos, contributions and mentions to spot! Don't miss the Bone Hole section in Balch's room while you are there!

September is the Mendip Rocks Festival and on the 5th October there will be a club Barn Dance.

Further details and how to get tickets inside, and please don't forget to keep 26th April 2014 free for the MCG 60th Anniversary Celebration.

All constructive comments on the content, style of the newsletter welcome, and all articles, content, photos and ideas are even more welcome!

Time to go cool down in the Swildons Streamway, if it is still flowing!***

Tom Harrison

get2_tom@hotmail.com



Sump 1 Swildons—A duck in these conditions!

*** The streamway was flowing, just!

By TH

BONE HOLE

Recollections by Bernard Reeves



Bernard Reeves (author of this piece) excavating surface of boulder pile in old cave (note carbide lamp)

The boulders were dry but a short way down a damp cave earth contained numerous small bones (bat and rodent?) and numerous animal teeth and bone fragments. Against the rift wall in the region of flake dig Tony Ingold found a human skull; obviously not modern.



Greg Smith surveying at the head of flake dig in the old cave

Some time later I met with Arthur Cox with like interests and we looked for the land owners with a view to gaining permission for digging the cave to discover the layout and extent of its archaeology. Having gained permissions via our club secretary we started work. Discovering extensive beds of animal bones around large rock slabs set across the rift in a damp cave earth below the overlying boulder pile. The bones included; boar; small horse hooves; deer (including antler bosses); bovine; sheep and goat.

Flake dig, to a shored depth of 30 feet, revealed alternate wet dry layers with some bone layers. We could look sideways into numerous small/large cavities under the main boulder slopes. At the bottom of this dig was a very dry calcitic sand containing coprolites (dogs?) and bone pieces. Drafting through this layer obviously accounts for its aridity.

Whilst I dug down below Arthur called out a warning; i left the dig. The boulder pile in the cave was dropping like the sand in an egg-timer. However no sign of this displacement was visible in flake dig. Obviously there are large cavities under the main boulder pile which can be filled if drying out of cave earth removes any "stuction".

I started caving in the 60's because of my school friendship with Anthony Ingold and thus Philip Ingold also. We travelled to Mendip from London area by motor bike-sidecar and various cars and also my family minibus ,usually as a small group.

On Mendip we did various popular caves but eventually examining Cheddar Gorge revealed a cave called Bone Hole with its strange entrance and boulder slope.

Turning over boulders in the original old cave revealed a number of artefacts of various ages; willow pattern pottery shards; broken crab shells; Poopah ceramic jampot; the tail fins of a mortar bomb; a brass ferrule and iron hook as part of bat lifter pole; old lemonade bottle (possibly of marble in neck type) ;various picnic paraphernalia.



Cave earth with bone fragments underlying boulders in old cave (on first visit ~60's), my brother Ray's feet

After each trip to the cave the disturbed bones collected were washed, dried and transported to Arthur's flat to be perused, identified and catalogued the next Thursday night after the weekly club meeting.



Arthur Cox excavating at drop in cave floor into the boulder slope at the head of the way down to entry on to Skull Slope (notice the organic remains and tree roots)

Later with Arthur in attendance we removed boulders at this drop to go down under the initial boulders was an organic leaf debris layer containing tree roots. Under this layer rocks appeared in situ as if building a wall; many rocks had flattened faces. With increase of depth the rocks became progressively more wet with some mud stalactites on the underside of rocks. A single sheep skull was found against the rift wall half-way down. At a depth of 9 feet a level layer of orange cave earth was reached in which a set of dog jaws was soon uncovered, perhaps five in a line. It was clear that the cave was now cutting under the entrance rift.

On a trip to the cave without Arthur Cox I decided to dig where the rift width was smallest (ie near the entrance). I moved the whole of the boulder pile up and out of the entrance. After getting down many feet, to my surprise, a surface appeared composed of a large saw-tooth pattern of limestone with calcite crystal edging the teeth. A small orangey cave earth seam (2") was the only way straight down.

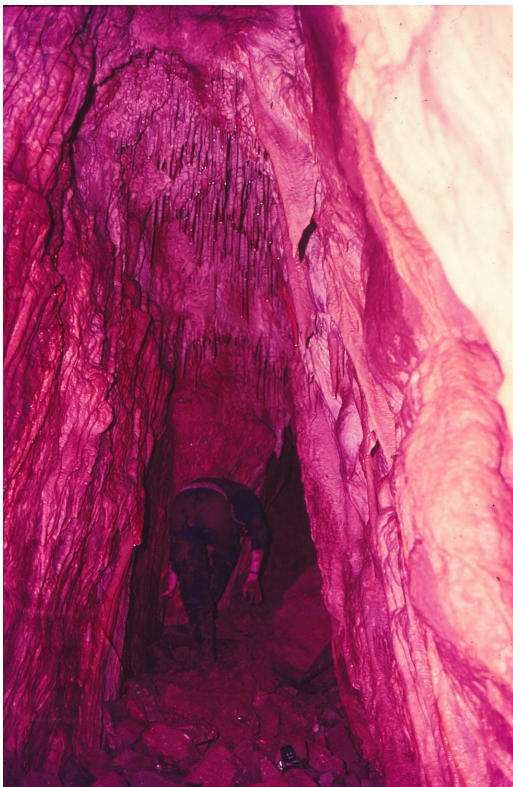
Gathering more caver support we chased the surface back into the cave. We noticed signs of shot hole sections in the wall (gunpowder?). It appeared that calcite crystal had been deliberately removed (to sell in Goughs Cave in the 1800's). We reached boulders sticking out of cave mud followed by a drop into the boulder pile.



Stalagmite pretties at bottom of Skull Slope

Arthur penetrated this layer, whereupon, I felt an immediate strong draught of air; I was 12 feet away! Being late on a Sunday digging session we covered up this entry and headed for home. We visited Malcolm Cotter at Heston on the way home to Ealing London area to reveal our good news of a possible break through.

The next weekend quite an MCG gathering at the cave; we measured for shoring the boulder pile and of gating of this entry. A small initial chamber was revealed with dry boulder floor but no immediate way on. Removing bucket loads of rocks; thinking of the urgently needed shoring; we arrived at a wet cave mud layer. Within the mud was evidenced numerous animal/human bones and a large fragmented block of charcoal, feet in length. Also found was orange Roman Samianware shards and additionally a large portion of an iron age cooking pot; slate-grey with surface dressed and evidence of external firing. Beneath the mud layer was yet more dry boulders-and it was getting late on Sunday again. A last desperate removal of boulders began to show cavities and we broke into the top of Skullslope. John Miriam and I ventured gingerly onto Skullslope revealing a well-decorated cave. The calcite was very dry looking (air Draught?) and the slope had numerous (animal/human) bones. Human skulls appeared to have rolled down the slope and a cattle skull was calcited to the wall of the rift. Another weekend beckoned.



Looking upwards to top of Skull Slope

At the bottom of skull slope a pretty well-stalled area rose. A skull was set at the bottom of the slope with its cranium removed and inside was full of ice-white crystals set in water (a drinking cup?). Also here was found liquifying human limb bones and pelvis. At the bottom of the slope on the right hand side an alcove contained a crouch-burial; opened sutures in the skull suggesting a youth. Nearby (accompanying) wonderful pot shards of a bronze age beaker pot were found. The bell-beaker was of dark chocolate colour with intricate dibbed out white (chalk) pattern covering much of the pot and also the inner rim. (circa 2800yearsBC?). The base of the pot was of very thick soft and liquifying material (under fired). The shards were dispersed in the loose boulder pile and over a period of time ¾ of the pot sides were recovered. It was taken to Wells Museum who originally reconstructed it incorrectly as a flared bowl. Taking further shards and my drawing (from my measurements of the parts) they finally reconstructed its correct bell-beaker shape. It is on display but its initial fine colour has degraded to a more flower-pot colour. The pot had a burnished shiny appearance. In our researches the dating of the pot was inferred by looking into a tome on ancient pottery (Clarke's Atlas?). A pattern originating in northern Holland showed similarity of a period 2800BC.



Bronze Age (2400 BC) pot shards



Iron age B cooking pot shards showing surface marking and fire burn marks

Check out MCG News 112 and MCG Journal No. 6 for more on Bone Hole



Negative of drawing of Bronze Age pot gained by measurement of shards

A British Association For The Advancement of Science (1838 Newcastle meeting) paper by a Mr Long describes a cave in Cheddar Gorge with similar situation but exaggerated dimension and finding a number of human skulls (their whereabouts unknown).

Also an UBSS publication of 1924 describes a dig in Bone. Basicly they did not find much.

After Skullslope was opened to the air the walls became wet (after a week or so) as the photographs (slides) testify, Ektochrome slide film ,Agfa diapositive B&W slide and Ektachrome High contrast (16ASA) slide film were used ;the brown and cream effect is from the High Contrast film.

Bernard Reeves

MCG continue to dig in Bone Hole, in a different part of the Cave; Perforation Choke. Speak to Ed Waters for more information

The Mendip Caving Group proudly present

A Barn Dance with
The Velvet Bottom Band
featuring Allan Marchant

Priddy Village Hall

5th October 2013 from 7.30pm till mid-
night

Buffet and Bar

Tickets £10 in advance from Richard Carey

richardmcarey@btinternet.com

CUTLER'S GREEN SINKHOLES AT THE OLD FOUNDRY

Geology By Joan Goddard

Last October Mike Moxon invited me along to have a look at the mysterious Cutler's Green Sinkholes where I was joined by local geologist Roy Vranich.



Photo 1—Boulder of Dolomitic Conglomerate

Twelve years ago, after the carp lake drained away down one of the holes, the whole area was mechanically stripped down by Kevin, the landowner, to expose the Carboniferous Oxwich Head Limestone platform (which appears to have been wave cut although no fossilised worm holes have been positively identified). To the northeast was a "gorge" containing cobbles and boulders of limestone, described as being sometimes loose and sometimes cemented. Some of these boulders had been moved to a position where they could be examined (see Photo 1) and are of Dolomitic Conglomerate. The gorge has been backfilled but was probably the base of a 'wadi' formed in early Triassic times when the area was above sea level. The vertical holes are at the SW end and are probably associated with it.

General site geology

TRIASSIC	PENARTH GROUP	LANGPORT MEMBER	Yellow clay with layers of WHITE LIAS LIMESTONE	c.200 million years ago
		COTHAM MEMBER	9" (22cm) slab of mudstone	
		WESTBURY FORMATION	1m of black clay	
			Thin band of black/dark grey, hard mudstone	
			1m of black clay	
~~~~~ unconformity (wave -cut platform) ~~~~~				c.299 million years ago
<b>CARBONIFEROUS</b>	OXWICH HEAD LIMESTONE			

### Immediately above the holes

Kevin reported there was a continuous layer (c 1m thick) of dark grey to black clay immediately above the holes; above each hole there was a "cone" of orange material (clay and rocks) bulging up into the black layer. Teeth and fossilised wood were found in the black clay which can be identified as the Westbury Formation. There was no yellow clay or white Lias above the vertical holes, just the 1m of black clay. The pits appear to have been in-filled prior to the deposition of the black clay and it is odd that the infill is not the same in each pit.

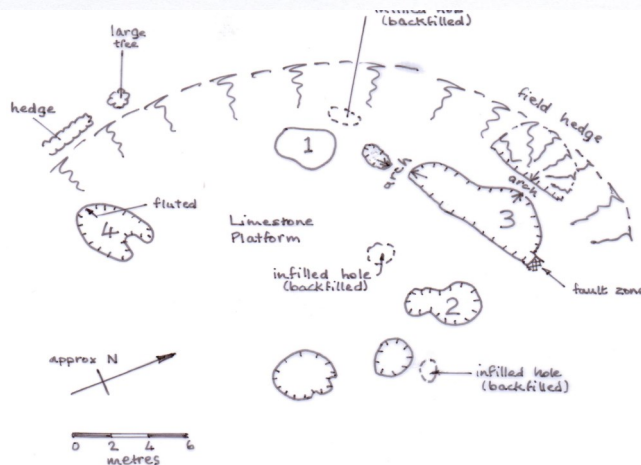




Photo 2—Infill from holes 2 and 3



Photo 3—The Largest Hole ( Hole 3 )

On 7th October the largest hole (Hole 3) yielded orange, clayey material with only a few rocks (seen on the right side of Photo 2) but the MCG hole' (Hole 2) contained grey clay with some limestone rocks (seen bottom left and centre of Photo 2).

If the black clay above the limestone containing the pits was continuous before it was scraped away, it would suggest that the pits were formed (and filled with sediment) before the clay was deposited and could possibly be of Triassic age. The reported protruding cone shape of clay and rocks above the holes is difficult to explain.

### **Fossils**

Kevin has collected together a large number of fossils although it is not always possible to say exactly where they came from. There are examples of Carboniferous corals, both solitary (probably *Dibunophyllum*) and colonies (*Lithostrotion*). Also Ichthyosaur and Plesiosaur vertebrae, fossilised wood, fish teeth, bone and ammonite moulds (Triassic or Jurassic).



Photo 4—Lithostrotion coral

Photo 5—Fossilised vertebrae.  
Ichthyosaur (top), Plesiosaur (bottom)





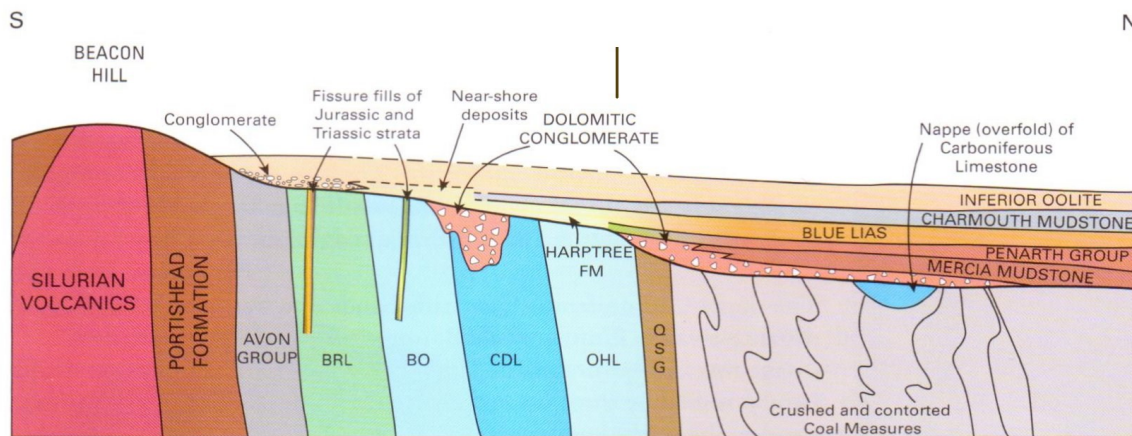
Photo 6—Fossilised Wood



Photo 7—Trace Fossils on bedding plane of mudstone & possible moulds of ammonites

**The wider context**

After the Carboniferous Limestone had been laid down c.325 million years ago there was a period of mountain building during which the previously horizontal strata were folded into a series of domes and valleys. The Carboniferous Limestone (Oxwich Head Limestone) at Cutler’s Green dips c.30° towards the NE as it lies on the northern edge of the Beacon Hill dome or pericline. During the Triassic period, when the rocks above the Carboniferous Limestone were being laid down, Mendip was an archipelago of islands formed from these domes and Triassic seas were lapping the coast.



*Generalised schematic geological cross-section across the northern flank of the Beacon Hill Pericline.*

**Geological cross-section. Cutler’s Green occurs near to the centre section**

The geological cross section (above) is reproduced from the British Geological Survey publication “A walkers’ guide to the geology and landscape of eastern Mendip” by Andy Farrant, with his kind permission. It does not pass exactly through Cutler’s Green site but it shows how, as the sea encroached on the coastline, the younger strata progressively overlapped the older ones. The vertical line shows roughly where Cutler’s Green lies.

The land mass during the Triassic period would have been a desert environment. Occasional flash floods would have created steep sided gorges or wadis with limestone scree slopes and outwash gravels which later became cemented to form what we know as Dolomitic Conglomerate. The A39 between Bathway and Chewton Mendip (c.600m NW of Cutler's Green) follows a partially exhumed gorge. The sea created a strongly planed surface of Carboniferous Limestone (wave-cut platform) which can still be recognised terminating in a relatively steep slope to the south west of Cutler's Green at Nedge Hill (possibly representing a coastal cliff during Triassic-Jurassic times).

The basal Triassic deposits at Cutler's Green are black or dark grey pyritic clays (Westbury Beds) which were deposited offshore possibly under deltaic conditions, the presence of fossilised wood providing evidence of nearby land. A thin bone bed occurs near the base in which fish teeth and bones occur. Occasional thin calcareous algal mudstones (Cotham beds) sometimes occur above the Westbury Beds but it is not known if they occur at Cutler's Green.

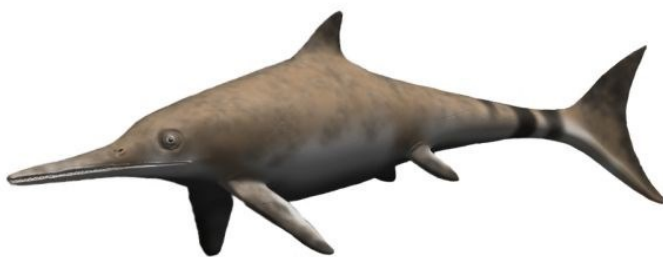
The Westbury and Cotham deposits were overstepped by the Lower Lias seas which resulted in white or cream-coloured calcite mudstones with buff marls and clays. These were not found immediately above the Cutler's Green pits but are visible in the soil on fields to the north.

According to the BGS map the Lower Lias limestones to the west and south of Cutler's Green pass laterally into the Harptree Beds where the limestone has been replaced by silica to form chert, probably a hydrothermal process related to the lead-zinc mineralisation.

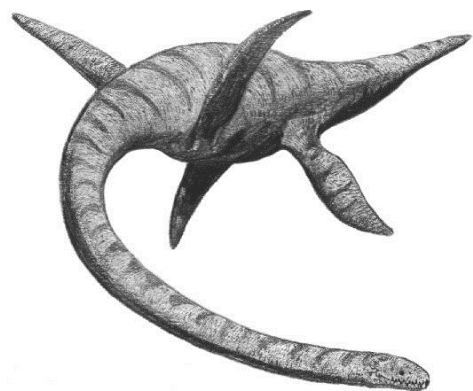
To summarise, Cutler's Green is on a fossil shoreline where the conditions alternated between onshore desert conditions and offshore variable depth seas. All this is very interesting (to me, at any rate) but . . . . . **it**

**still doesn't explain how the Cutler's Green Sinks were formed!**

Joan Goddard



Ichthyosaur - CGI Restoration by Nobu Tamura



Plesiosaurus dolichodeirus—drawing by Adam Stuart Smith

# MCG Digging

MCG Diggers continue their work at **Bone Hole** (Perforation Choke ) and at **Cutler's Green Sinkholes**, (<http://mendipdigs.blogspot.co.uk/>)

By all accounts **Grebe Swallet** continues in the same squalid muddy vein, with "levitating boulders," thrown in for extra excitement!

Here are some other digging reports from the logbook.

**Please respect the hard work of the diggers. If you wish to visit the dig sites or offer your help, then please contact the diggers themselves.**  
**TH**

## Battery Swallet — The push continues....

From the logbook

"Hard to go underground on such a lush day, but we cleared back the bang from a fortnight ago.

One snapper in a large block took care of that, but clearing back with just two in such confines was very awkward.

We both squirmed around the tight

left turn for 2 metres of open natural passage.

We can see the right turn of the zig zag, but much too tight for us!

The whole place is much too tight and awkward to work in, so much work will be needed to open it up some!

We left, very wet and muddy, but happy with our days work after

placing a small charge around the left turn, the hardest, most awkward charge, I've ever placed!"

**Mark Ward** 25/05/2013

*Video Tour of Battery*

<http://vimeo.com/60332863>

## Upper Flood — Website update and Promising Progress in East Passage

**Bill Chadwick** has done an excellent job in updating the MCG website.

This includes a collection of **Tomas Leung's** photos of upper flood and can be found at

<http://mendipcavinggroup.org.uk/sections/upperflood/ufphotos.html#tomas>

These are believed to include the first photos of 'Far Neverland', taken on a trip in April while prospecting for the second Neverland link beyond Curtain Climb.

The page <http://www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk/sections/upperflood/UfPhotos.htm>

has also been updated with new photos pinned to the December 2012 survey.

**Tim Francis** reports on the East Passage Dig.

From the logbook

".....after scaffolding, we did a couple of hours digging in the floor. The draft here is huge—cold and blowing out. We dug down to the stream bed and then under a huge slab. Digging was wet, tight and awkward. But there is definitely a way on here. The main stream was far too low for us to hear any rumbles. Next trip we will need a couple of hiltis to make life easier!"

Tim 08/06/2013



**Attic Ladder By Tomas Leung**

## Reservoir Hole - The Frozen Deep

This spectacular find opened for access recently and MCG Members have taken full advantage.

These are the current access arrangements from Martin Grass:

*The cave is open from 1st April until the 31st October each year.*

*All trips are accompanied by a conservation warden. Many of the major Mendip caving clubs have their own wardens.*

*The MCGs' wardens are Mike Moxon, Chris Binding and Jeremy Gilson. (If Mike and Chris are unavailable)*

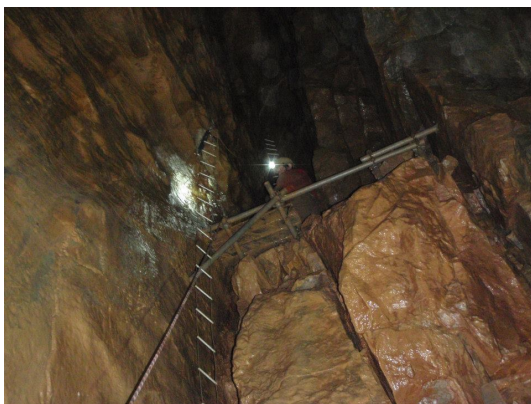
*Alternatively, please contact Martin Grass on [m.grass@btinternet.com](mailto:m.grass@btinternet.com) or 01934-742710 giving as much notice as possible of the dates you would like to visit the cave.*

*To preserve the cave the following regulations apply:*

- No novices.
- No carbide lights.
- Clean over suits please.
- All cavers must have adequate insurance cover.
- Maximum of three cavers per leader.
- One trip per day.
- All groups to supply their own tackle for the pitches.
- A minimum £2 per person conservation donation is requested.

*As a rough indication a trip to the Frozen Deep to see the chamber, tackle and detackle the pitch is approximately 3 1/2 hours. Photography and visiting other parts of the cave add considerably to this time.*

Below and on the next page are the trip reports from MCG members, **Bill Chadwick**, **Brian Snell** and **Kev Speight**

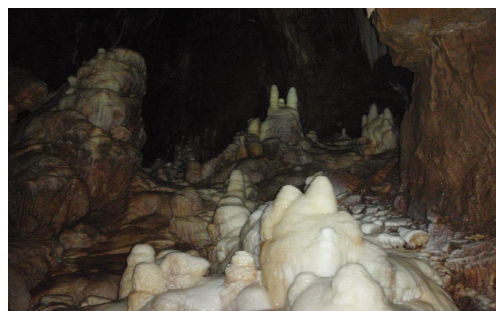


**Biff on the TFD chamber entrance ladders at "Wish you were here" By Carl Ruxton**



**The biggest column in TFD - there are three this height, all close together. By Carl Ruxton**

"On Friday 21st June Mike Moxon led a trip into the Frozen Deep of Reservoir Hole for Biff Frith, Bill Chadwick and Carl Ruxton. The trip starts off very much in the traditional Mendip style of crawling and stooping for around 40-50 minutes. Then, when the ladder pitch is reached, there is a dramatic change of scale to quite continental proportions ! The tour around The Frozen Deep chamber takes around an hour. It is unbelievably huge by Mendip standards, dwarfing anything we have found in Upper Flood. There are huge vertical walls disappearing up into blackness, enormous rock arches, 5m columns ... The formations are mostly creamy coloured in contrast to Upper Flood's ice white. Carl took some great photos (The Photos on this and the following page are all Carl's, from this trip.)" **Bill Chadwick**



**Stunningly large decorated section to the North East (taped off)**

**By Carl Ruxton**

“Keith Knight and I were free of work for a while, so I suggested we go to Nordrach on Friday morning and get into Bone Hole around early afternoon to see what damage had been done by Graham Price’s previous chemically persuasive movement of rock. I put out a mail to say what we had planned and Mike Moxon replied saying that he was free to join us for a session. So that was the plan made, until I got another mail from Mike offering an alternative. The mail said something like ‘Alternatively, I may be able to get hold of the key for Reservoir on Friday’. The best laid plans of mice and men so the quote goes and for Keith and me, no hand wringing to be made. Muddy Bone Hole or a chance to view the latest great find on Mendip????? No decision to be made really was there? I replied to Mike saying ‘Oh all right, if you want to go to Reservoir we will reluctantly follow’.



Calcite rivulets on the wall  
By Carl Ruxton

We arrived at Nordrach just after lunch with Mike waiting. After sorting gear out and a quick bite to eat, we drove off to Martin Grass’ place to pick up the key, then on to Cheddar Gorge. With the sun burning down out of a clear blue sky it was stifling hot getting changed into fleeces at the car park. It reminded me of diving on a hot day, pulling on a wetsuit with the sweat running off of your brow and every where else. The only thing you want to do at such times is to hurry up and get into the water, to feel that cool liquid filling your suit and bring your temperature back down to something approaching normal. Mike had said that it was a warm cave but I thought well most caves maintain a steady temperature once you’re well inside it. Not completely true when in Reservoir. With sweat stinging my eyes, I was in a hurry to get into the entrance out of the heat. So was only too happy to get on and get down the passage a way.

Once all in, we continued on down the steep well dug passage past other ways off and pretty bits, until eventually we arrived at the newly dug section which had led to the new discovery. I had to keep stopping to drag the tee shirt I was wearing up from under the fleece to wipe my face. I was rather warm still! Then at last it opened up into a large rift chamber and a climb up past two nice stalagmites, to the head of the two ladder pitches. Mike rigged it and went down followed by Keith and I. We were in a continuation of the rift passage which was now bigger and reminded me a little of Spider Hole. The roof was about 80 feet above and the floor sloped down to where it got wider. Mike beckoned me on and I went on down to the bottom of the slope to where I could now see that the widening passage was actually a large void. Out of my mouth without thinking about it came the word, “Wow”. In front of me my lamp picked out a perfect white 15 foot column about nine inches in diameter joining the ceiling to a large white boulder on the floor of the chamber. I realised we were now in ‘The Frozen Deep’. Alongside the white column was another one about twenty feet long. It tapered in the middle where the two section of stal met. Looking beyond these my light could barely see much further into the void. Mike took us around the chamber, which has been well taped by Alison Moody I believe, to see various displays of white stal, which are fabulous. At the far side of the chamber, drops of water fall into a bucket used for cleaning up, and alongside it, a drop hits a thin flake of rock making a pleasant ‘tink’ sound. We continued to follow the taped trail around the chamber, eventually making our way past some SRT gear hanging off a rope that disappears up into the ceiling. After an hour we arrived back at the point where we had entered the chamber. We had now cooled down and needed to zip up our fleeces to warm up. This was short lived though, as I soon heated back up again on the scramble back up to the ladder pitches. So back through the sweaty crawls and steep sections with convenient steps laid, as was Willie Stanton’s trade mark, and back out to a blast of heat again. I didn’t wait for the others and shot off down to the car so that I could tear off the oversuit and fleece, and cool off in what was now a shaded car park. A little dehydrated I didn’t really care about the temperature of the bottle of water I had left in the car and greedily drank down the hot water. The others arrived and equally went through the same ritual of being in a hurry to pull off their suits and fleeces and, like me, not care about drinking hot water out of bottles left in the car.

We thanked Mike for a good trip and after dropping off the key, made our way back to the cottage for a clean up and cook a nice chicken curry washed down with a bottle of wine. I recommend anybody else thinking of going there to get something organised and see for yourselves what a great find those guys made.”

**Brian Snell** Friday 5th July



Mike admiring the roof in the South East

By Carl Ruxton

“Probably my last trip before an enforced 4 month lay-off during my trip to the Falklands. What a trip though. I lost count of the amount of times I said ‘Majestic.’!

I haven’t been caving all that much of late – other things and new interests have been keeping me busy – but today shows me that the fire still burns bright and that I’ll be back with a bang in September! Good luck to everyone with on-going projects.”

**Kev Speight** Friday 3rd May

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## PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE FROZEN DEEP WITH ROBBIE SHONE

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By **Chris Binding** May 2013

Trying to capture the impressiveness of large chambers is often a frustrating experience for many “cave snappers” and an opportunity arose to lead professional cave photographer, Robbie Shone, into the newly discovered (2012) Frozen Deep in Reservoir Hole, Cheddar Gorge, to hopefully see how it gets done by someone who knows a thing or two about this dark art...

Robbie has a good eye for a shot, even in chambers into which he has never previously visited, most likely due to his background in Fine Art but also because he has travelled the world photographing some of the biggest caves yet discovered. Here was a chance to see the man in action.

Our working team of five included Gina Moseley, Sarah Payne and Carmen Smith – to take a photograph in a chamber this big was going to require a lot of thought, a lot of light and some walkie-talkies...

Sherpa-ing the gear was relatively straightforward and warmed us up nicely before setting down the bags and doing a tour of the chamber along the pathways so that a good sight line could be found which ticked Robbie's boxes – he doesn't just point and press you know. Within two hours of entering the cave the shot was formulated and then an hour of communication and direction and a large number of flash bulbs were used to get a satisfying shot in the can.

In all, three photos were taken over the course of a five hour trip and we used up about a hundred bulbs – the pictures are high-resolution (22Mb each) (reduced for this publication—TH) and do justice to this awesome place. Here's one of them to be getting on with (the others will be published in due course).



# MANGLE HOLE



The top of the awkward entrance pitch, Paul about to descend

By Tom Harrison

Paul and I decided on a midweek jaunt into Mangle. Parking at the Ski Centre we trekked up the hill, wading through wild garlic into the woods on Sandford hill.



Looking out for the tape which had been marking the entrance, I spotted something cave entrance like and a worn path heading towards it, with no tape in sight!

Paul anchored a 45 m rope on the tree and the scaffold pole and descended the tight entrance pitch through the Mozzies into Mangle. I followed him down having way too much friction on the rope through my Simple ( any tips anyone??) making for a very slow descent!

Paul rigged the traverse to a rebelay at an anchor above the window and I again followed him down through the window, while he rigged the Main chamber pitch with the 2nd rope.

Rigging By TH

We descend down passing some of the biggest boulders I've seen in a cave before and we climbed down into the lower part of the cave to find the mass of mud, Barely able to stay upright on mud which was grease like, we climbed a small rift and down a very rusted ladder at slug passage into Chapman's Pincher, the entrance to Aldermaston Chamber. The mud in slug passage was awful here and a dive into the mud filled puddle to take us into Aldermaston Chamber coated us both completely in a thick syrupy layer.

There we found diving gear, and a steep slope, slick with the slippery mud preventing us from safely getting to see the lake below.

Definitely a worthwhile trip, and good practice of my beginner level SRT!

**Tom Harrison**



Paul coated in mud

By TH

## Le Congrès National de la Fédération Française de Spéléologie, Millau, May 2013

Chris and Carmen went to Millau, sharing a week with three Wessex members, John Hurst, Francois Tollemmer and Noel Cleave. This French caving congress was significantly different from the amazing Vercors event in 2008, although numerous favourite local caves were rigged. The central organisation, ostensibly based in Millau in the Parc de la Victoire was non-existent for the first week, and the only "Organisers" we saw were on Saturday 11th May and Sunday 12th, at caves we visited then. The Vercors acquired wisdom to "get to the cave before 10am and you'll have it to yourselves" didn't apply when we did finally meet the French cavers though, as on both occasions it looked suspiciously like we were the last to arrive! On the up-side the Congress website provided excellent and comprehensive details of each cave and directions to it from Millau, e.g. overview, route description, rigging topo. Satnav and surface walking directions – all very handy and easy to use.



Chris and Noel ready to rock



### Morning planning session.

Left to right: Noel, Carmen, Francois, John

### Wednesday May 8 2013

We started actually caving in the Cabanes St. Paul. There was some confusion over the uniqueness of this "Cheese Cave". Common sense confirms that more than one cool dark natural cave would have been used for cheese production. The access description was fine as far as it went, which was to the brink of a serious cirque cliff. Carmen's GPS, and lots of red-and-white FSS tapes brought us to the entrance. The entrance passages were littered with cheese production relics, and walled off into various rooms on two levels. Past the

last of these the natural cave was a very fine, large, passage. This shrank quite suddenly into a long canal stoop.

It was worth getting a bit wet because from there on, upstream, it develops into a sporting river passage with deep lakes and multiple handline traverses. Sadly, we were halted by a 4 metre drop. It was roped, but we lacked SRT kit (the cave continues for another 1k or so but the description on this particular occasion managed to omit mention of SRT). Exploring outwards we found the flood exit - a magnificent cleft at the foot of the cliffs. Beer-o-Clock was setting in as we climbed back to the car, reflecting that our mobile home had both cold beverages and a coolie-bag. Just for future reference.....

### Thursday May 9 2013

The description notes on Bramabiau cave suggested that entry was tightly controlled and needed pre-booking. Francois got onto the telephone and discovered that neither restriction was correct. So we went there. Bramabiau is an unlikely looking place with a river punching directly through a hillside. The exit is a tourist attraction, more for drama than beauty (no formations at all). We went downstream to this, via a massive entrance. Initially there were alternative and confusing routes, but it soon settled into a long series of water-



Francois in the large main passage of Cabanes St. Paul



falls and floats down the river in a very high rift. 'Way above us the roof was decorated with logs jammed by earlier floods. No place to be in one of those! Not having seen the exit, and knowing that the final waterfall was "No-Go" we struggled to get out of the river canyon onto the show-cave path, high above us. Some interesting climbing and an extremely bold step put us up on to the tourist trail. *Note to audience: Chris is not a fan of bold steps. Bramabiau, being a tourist cave, boasted a pleasant café so beer-dehydration and hunger were easily avoided.*

Homebound we diverted to the Grotte de Dargilan show-cave. This was fabulous; better than either Demoiselles or Chamouse. It's on the side-wall of a sensational gorge. It was also raining with considerable enthusiasm, so we went home.

Friday May 10 2013

John departed early (by bus) to Montpellier to fly home. To cheer ourselves up we did the Traverse de la Grotte de Suèges. This is situated in the most extraordinary outcrop of limestone, surrounded by blue slate and shale lahars - a sort of miniature Mesa. We changed in a bitter gale but warmed up climbing to the entrance. The entrance pitch was awkwardly rigged and Francois added to his excitements when his main "Omni" carabiner opened. At the foot of the crystal-lined entrance shaft there was a Mendip-worthy squeeze: definitely a de-kit number. Various up and down pitches, plus a splendid traverse and tyrolean over a sea of mud led to the icing on the cake: an open-air exit pitch down the cliff face.

Suèges was 2 hours of very good fun. As were leaving we met a party of German cavers and discovered that they, too, were camping at Côté Sud. We guessed (correctly) that two of them were more than squeeze sized!

Beer at the car staved off our hard-won thirst before we went on to Aven Valat Negro. This boasted an enormous steel "I" beam belay for elephants to safely SRT down the entrance pitch; it was about 8 feet long and must have taken a crane to position. Below it was a splendid 65m shaft, mostly free-hanging and opening into a huge chamber. Some clown had rigged the sloping last section with a knotted rope just for added manoeuvrings. The formations were magnificent but some of the more accessible ones had been vandalised with mud.



Francois abseiling out of the cave exit

Saturday May 11 2013

Francois decided that he could do the Brise Traverse with us before driving home. Despite an unsociably early start we found 12 cars and dozens of French cavers already there. One of the rigging organisers informed us that Brise 1 bottom pitch was not rigged.... yet. So we quickly changed plans and went to Brise 2. This has a grotty little entrance dug out and a flat-out crawl which led to Faust shaft. Faust was not grotty. It is an awe-inspiring, echoing, straight 133 metres shaft featuring four (badly rigged) flying re-belays and numerous deviations. Once down, the streamway was sporting, with lots of progress "In opposition", hand-line traverses and climbs. The rock was razor sharp, a dream for grip and holds but a slip and subsequent injuries didn't bear too much contemplation. There was some slightly tricky route finding through boulder ruckle squeezes, where Carmen did her "uman Ferret" act, before we reached the downstream sump. There was no sight or sound of the French riggers; just a tantalising whiff of Gauloise on the draught. After a while we retreated up-stream to Faust, finding the upstream journey far easier. 133 metres of continuous ascent topped off this nice 4 hour trip. Francois left late - much later than he had planned for the long drive back to Caen.



Noel admiring some of the impressive formations in Aven Valat Negro

Sunday May 12 2013

We arrived "early" (see note above) at the Aven de Portalerie to find a cast of thousands preparing for a reverse rescue... taking two disabled people down into the cave, wheelchairs and all! Got ourselves quickly geared up and into the gloom ahead of the following circus. Ropes everywhere. Not a

wheelchair-friendly inch in sight, but a natty space-blanket tent being established for warming and, we guessed, comfort stops. Lots of interesting traverse rigging and handlines down to the Grande Salle which was grand indeed with wonderful formations, even though the mud vandalism was appalling, and glorious curtains had been stoned – how can cavers do this? (Mind you, Pridhamsleigh Cavern exhibits masses of mud-fighting evidence in the Lake Chamber). We looked, oohed and aaahed, and did some photography. As we started out we encountered a novice struggling on her first ascent and traverse, which was, admittedly, badly rigged. She lacked any arm power at all, but her companion gradually got her across – despite being keen to help we deigned to interfere and in any case the stance above them was shortly packed with “Rescue” teams. We rocketed up, rightly receiving much praise as Tarzans. Rocketing was a no-go after than as we encountered a descending wheel-chair, so Noel was persuaded to pose in it (resulting photo is classified as being too amusing). Shortly after than an extra-friendly local showed Noel and Chris a long wallowy canal which allowed them to bypass the descending circus.

Back on the surface again, we inspected la Cavalerie for its Knights Templars heritage for a while; the fortress village looks a bit touristy where it has been over-restored, but is undeniably pretty. The Pizza place at the village entrance told us that we were too late for lunch (A fine Gallic “Sod-Off, we can’t be bothered” if ever we heard one) so we went instead to the café built into the ancient fortress walls, took cures against alcohol deprivation and had delicious Galettes. It was warm and cosy, Noel went into enthusiasm failure mode, but the MCG stalwarts steeled themselves to tackle the rigours of the uninspiringly named Aven Bob. 1600 metres of windy walk in poor weather was followed by 100 vertical metres of vertiginous path down to the entrance where numerous Frenchmen were clustered. The real question is how on earth had Bob found this aven in the first place - it’s small and obscure, part way down a featureless and overgrown, nearly vertical cliff face. There was only a small delay before Chris and Carm vanished downwards. Noel hiked back to the car for a snooze anticipating a 2 hour wait, but the two Cs reappeared after an hour, having exhausted the exceptionally limited charms of Aven Bob. For those interested, it is a 43m entrance pitch into a large chamber comprising significant scree slopes but with a small “secret passage” off in a side rift which descends to a corkscrew route between boulders and the wall down a 3m pitch into a chuffin’ enormous chamber with vast boulders and dry gours.



Monday May 13 2013

Sunshine and a forecast of +18°C. Carmen announced early that she wanted a sunshine day. In short order and with little discussion, first Noel and then Chris agreed! The morning was sightseeing; first Compeyre, then the Millau viaduct with coffee-and-sticky-cake break. On to Navascelles for sipping some refreshing wine etc. and lunch at the belvedere café, before we drove down into the hameau, which was delightful and had a lovely looking restaurant for another visit. We came home via Caylar for fuel, so the entire week had only used less than a tankful. Did most of the packing. The evening was warm, so fired up the BBQ and had fillet steaks and more of Chris’ wonderful salads, not to mention Asparagus and hyper-Garlic butter over everything.

#### Progression on a wire traverse

Tuesday May 14 2013

BooHoo. Go home day. Cleared the mobile home, packed the car, did the inventory check with Madame who refused payment for one chipped mug. Set off in nice time for the drive and a lunch. Captain Chris chose a village close to Montpellier and we had an excellent pizza/beers/vino. Chris was watching the clock for the flight times, but we left as planned and arrived at the airport, as planned, at exactly 1330. Bye Bye to the aces, Chris and Carmen. 8 caves in 6 days; for all sorts of reasons, a perfectly excellent week.

**Noel/Chris/Carmen**

## Upcoming Trips



**Formations in Hillier's Cave**  
By Tom Harrison

2/3/4	August	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage
3	August	St Cuthbert's Swallet	Contact Jeremy Gilson <a href="mailto:mendipcaver@googlemail.com">mendipcaver@googlemail.com</a>
3	August	Hillier's Cave	Contact Andrea Russe <a href="mailto:andrearusse@rocketmail.com">andrearusse@rocketmail.com</a>
17	August	Longwood Swallet	Contact Richard Carey <a href="mailto:richardmcarey@btinternet.com">richardmcarey@btinternet.com</a>
1-15	Sept	<b>Andalucia 2013</b>	Contact Miguel Tome <a href="mailto:miguel.tome@ymail.com">miguel.tome@ymail.com</a>
6/7/8	Sept	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage
7	Sept	TBC	Contact Andrea Russe <a href="mailto:andrearusse@rocketmail.com">andrearusse@rocketmail.com</a>
21	Sept	Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink	Contact Richard Carey <a href="mailto:richardmcarey@btinternet.com">richardmcarey@btinternet.com</a>
4/5/6	Oct	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage
5	Oct	<b>Barn Dance at Priddy Village Hall</b> <b>The Velvet Bottom Band</b>	Contact Richard Carey <a href="mailto:richardmcarey@btinternet.com">richardmcarey@btinternet.com</a>
5	Oct	<b>Cottage Work Weekend</b>	Contact Richard Carey <a href="mailto:richardmcarey@btinternet.com">richardmcarey@btinternet.com</a>
19	Oct	Manor Farm Swallet	Contact Richard Carey <a href="mailto:richardmcarey@btinternet.com">richardmcarey@btinternet.com</a>

Above, are the upcoming trips for the next 3 months. Please contact the trip leader in advance to reserve your place on the trip.

A more comprehensive list of trips, digs and

events can be found at [www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk](http://www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk)

Don't forget to record your trips in the logbook at the cottage, especially with the logbook prizes now on offer!

And any trip reports, photos or even videos that you have, I would gratefully receive for future editions of the news letter!

[Get2_Tom@Hotmail.com](mailto:Get2_Tom@Hotmail.com)

*The MCG Newsgroup is another place to hear about future trips:*

<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/mendip-caving-group/>



**Fairy Cave Quarry**

By TH

## Gear Review



New Warmbac PVC suit:

Many Mendip cavers will be familiar with the quaint Northern tradition of wearing yellow PVC caving oversuits; these are highly popular in windy and wet environments because they protect very well against these elements but recent production by Warmbac now means you get buy local and enjoy the best of both worlds – PVC and Mendip!

Having been involved in the early trials of this suit it has now gone into production proper and is available for £93.41 including VAT. The stitching style on the production suit has changed from the original trial suits so that it is not exposed to undue abrasion and the rear seam has been doubly reinforced with a neoprene-filled tubular seam overstitched onto it as a wear-surface.

The New Warmbac PVC Suit

"It's rather yellow!" CB

The suit comes with neoprene cuffs and collar, wide velcro fastening, an internal pocket and external arm-mounted pocket (not shown on the photo since it is a no-frills version); if you have a bespoke requirement it can surely be catered for on request.

*"Ideal for Swildon's Hole and muddy digging trips, I'm now a convert to PVC"*

Ideal for Swildon's Hole and muddy digging trips, I'm now a convert to PVC but for a very long time just stuck with cordura, despite owning a Petzl PVC suit as early as 2000 but not getting on with it due to it being too hot!

It's rather yellow.

**Chris Binding**

## Queens Jubilee Medals for MCG members!

**Congratulations to Biff Frith and Geoff Beale who were both recently awarded the Queens Jubilee Medal for their service to SECRO , South East Cave Rescue Organisation.**

Also included in the medal award was ex-member **Graham Old.**

The medal was awarded for over 5 years continuous service to cave rescue in the South East area of England. About 400 medals were awarded to cavers throughout the UK in all of the individual Rescue Organisations. Other recipients of this medal were for - Fire Rescue and Mountain Rescue and Rescue with dog teams.

SECRO generally have two organised meetings a year in the Redhill/Reigate area.

One is generally a classroom type meeting where rescue techniques are discussed and practised in disused sand mines in the Redhill area and the other meeting generally takes place in one of the many sandstone or ragstone mines in the locality and is usually in the form of a search and rescue/carry out by stretch-er.

If any local members to the SE area are interested and would like to participate , then contact Biff or Geoff.



## Book Review

### CAVING TECHNICAL GUIDE, French Caving Federation

ISBN-10: 2900894263

256 Pages, softback glossy cover folding slips

Published, May 2013

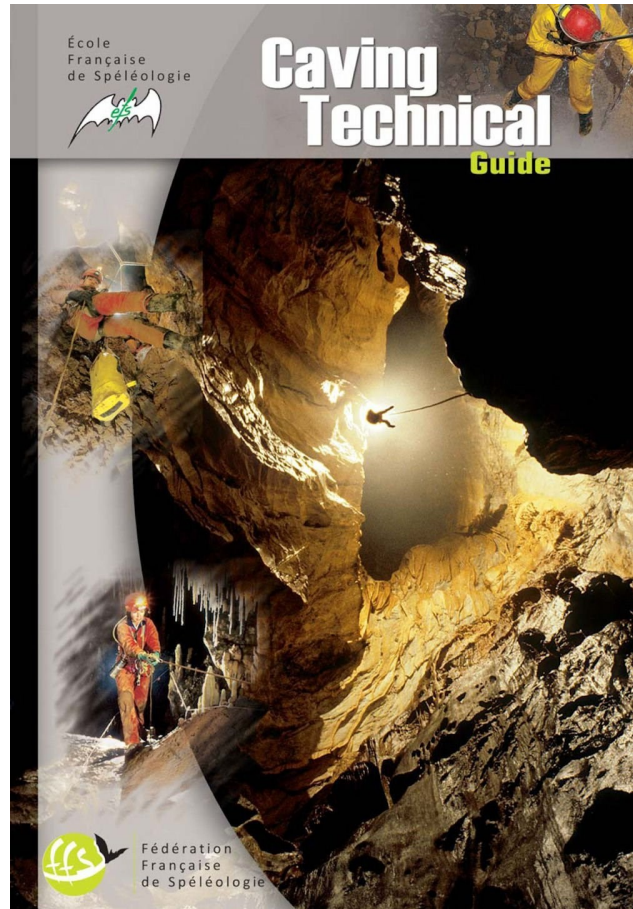
£25 from Amazon or caving stockists

The newly published (translated into English) French caving manual “the Caving Technical Guide” is THE instructional publication from the French School of Caving, in association with the French Caving Federation – this version of the original best-selling French edition is in full colour and describes the various techniques and equipment you would expect as an experienced caver and is an excellent addition to the bookshelf of any budding speleologist because it is not just a catalogue of instruction but also a guide to progression, how to overcome situations which crop up and includes chapters on general recommendations, safety and preventative measures on novice trips, protecting the underground environment, organising a trip, personal equipment, non-technical progression, group equipment, control and management of personal protective equipment, rigging progression, rope types (A, B & L), 30 pages of rescue and self-rescue methods, supervising and instructing roped progression, specialisms such as climbing, pull-throughs, winter, extended trips, serious and unexpected situations, accidents and flooding.

This book is the first major caving techniques publication since the excellent Alpine Caving Techniques of Marbach and Tourte was translated into English and published TEN YEARS ago!

Anyone new to caving or looking to advance their technical abilities would do well to get themselves a copy, or add it to their Christmas list for 2013!

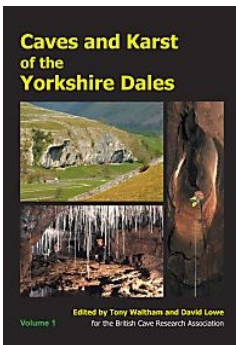
**Chris Binding**



Caving Technical Guide  
French Caving Federation

*“an excellent addition to the bookshelf of any budding speleologist”*

## Library Additions



**Caves and Karst of the Yorkshire Dales, edited by Tony Waltham and David Lowe** is the successor to BCRA's earlier volume 'Limestones and Caves of North-West England'.

Volume 1 (2013) is A4 format, clearly laid out with numerous colour photos, maps and sections and covers the descriptive and scientific aspects of caves and karst landforms of the Dales. The detailed contents list runs to two A4 pages and at the end of the book is a useful index to localities with National Grid References and page numbers. Chapters describe the geology of the limestones, geomorphology, geological and glacial influence on the caves, hydrogeology, palaeoclimates & speleothem dating, and the biology, palaeontology and archaeology of caves. So ..... lots and lots to read. Our library copy is the paperback edition (hardback costs £70!) so needs careful handling. Yorkshire enthusiasts would do well to purchase their own copy as they are likely to refer to it over and over again.

**Caves and Karst of the Yorkshire Dales, edited by Tony Waltham and David Lowe**

Volume 1 (2013)

Volume 2 will provide descriptions of individual caves and will be published chapter by chapter on-line. A paper edition is to be produced when all component chapters are completed.

*“ Yorkshire enthusiasts would do well to purchase their own copy as they are likely to refer to it over and over again ”*

**The Netherworld of Mendip; a geological overview, by Jim Hanwell & Andy Farrant (2013).** This eight page A5 booklet has been published to coincide with the new caving exhibition at Wells Museum. It does what it says, gives a brief description of the geological history of Mendip (illustrated using a block diagram for each period).

**Wessex (No 327)** - contains a comprehensive article on Read's Cavern 1919-2013

Joan Goddard

## Mendip Rocks 2013

**The Rushing Waters and The Frozen Deep** - an illustrated talk on Cheddar Catchment caves by Peter Glanvill at Wells and Mendip Museum on Friday 6th September at 7.30pm

This is part of “Mendip Rocks, 2013”, a festival to celebrate the geology of the Mendip Hills, which runs from 1st August to 11th September. See Somerset Wildlife website for the full programme ([http://www.somersetwildlife.org/mendip_rocks_2013.html](http://www.somersetwildlife.org/mendip_rocks_2013.html)).

Joan Goddard

## MENDIP CAVING GROUP

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Thanks to all the contributors.

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**Kev Speight**  
**Geoff Beale**  
**Tim Francis**  
**Mark Ward**

And to all the photographers contributions, as acknowledged.

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[Mendipcavinggroup.org.uk](http://Mendipcavinggroup.org.uk)

**Founded 1954**

The Mendip Caving Group consists of some 120+ members of all abilities who have banded together to share resources such as ladders, ropes, caving library and accommodation on Mendip.

The Group is registered as a charity in the UK, and our objectives are: For the benefit of the public, the furtherance of all aspects of the scientific study and conservation of caves and their related features.

Membership is open to anyone over the age of 18 years with an interest in the objects of the Group.

Members have use of the Group's cottage at reduced rates, free use of Group equipment and free access to the library. They also receive the newsletter of the MCG and Occasional Publications (a journal-type document published infrequently.)

***Mendip Caving Group***  
***60 Year Anniversary***  
***AGM Dinner***

***The Batch Country House***  
***Lympsham***  
***Near Weston Super Mare***  
***Somerset***  
***BS24 0EX***

***On Saturday the 26th***  
***April 2014***

2014 brings the 60th Anniversary of the formation of the Mendip Caving Group. From humble beginnings of 8 members on the first membership list, the club now has 122 members and has been pivotal in the extension and exploration of many famous Mendip caves.

With the first recorded trip to Swildon's taking place in Feb '54 and the first dig recorded as being Timber Hole in April '54.

To celebrate this auspicious occasion, the MCG will be holding the 60th Anniversary AGM dinner at The Batch Country House, Lympsham, on the 26th April 2014.

All members past and present will be very welcome, **please make a note in your diaries now!**

