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EDITORIAL

When Wessex members returned from faraway comers of the globe, (Norway, France, Canada) with stories of good caving and finds, they found that people had been busy back in Britain too. In fact, the prize must go to the find in Ogof Hesp Alyn (North Wales) of over 2000ft of passage (see: 'In The Regions'). Accounts of some of this year's trips abroad are to appear in subsequent issues of the Journal. Meanwhile, here are some reports of the Club's lighter moments, and an important note on the care of ladder.

Erratum: Last issue contained not a new technique for rigging pitches horizontally, just evidence that if I rush things at the last minute, I make mistakes! The survey of WX23 on page 77 should read 'plan' for 'elevation' and vice versa.

CLUB NEWS

The barbeque last June was a great success. Preparations started weeks beforehand, with Alison preparing a superb buffet and Glyn defying the laws of dynamics with his construction of the Mk. 1 washing-machine-motor powered, bike-chain driven pig-roast spit. The best laid plans did not go to waste, and after a feast that should have left everybody helplessly full, some gentle games of jousting, mid-air caving and sofa rugby were enjoyed. To round off the evening, a few 'traditional' songs around the barrel. About one-hundred and forty people attended, representing various Mendip clubs and guests.

MENDIP NEWS

Pierre's Pot With the permission of the UBSS, Pete and Alison, and others blasted their way into Pierre's Pot in Burrington Coombe. After clearing the entrance to Tuska-size, some 200ft of passage were found. Most ways on are choked or too tight, but there is a promising draught.

Thrupe Lane Rich Whitcombe and Simon Meade-King, assisted by Clive North, have been digging in this cave now for over three years. After a recent breakthrough into 150ft of passage, the end of the dig is now not far off the top of Atlas Pot.

IN THE REGIONS

Ogof Hesp Alyn, North Wales. Chris Milne and Annie, with assistance from many others, have found about 2500ft of new passage in this cave that they have been working on for some time. After four long trips this summer, a point was reached where the main passage was blocked by boulders, through which there is a draught and water can be heard (the river?). This would be a long term dig but there are still side passages to be explored.

OBITUARY

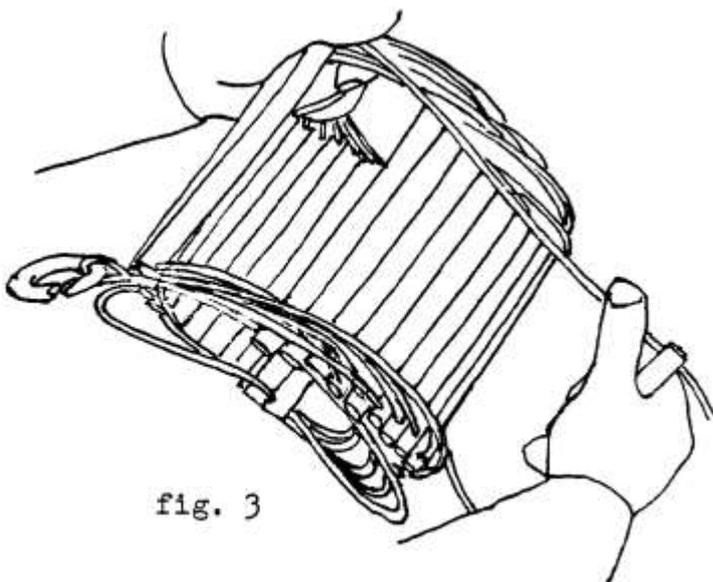
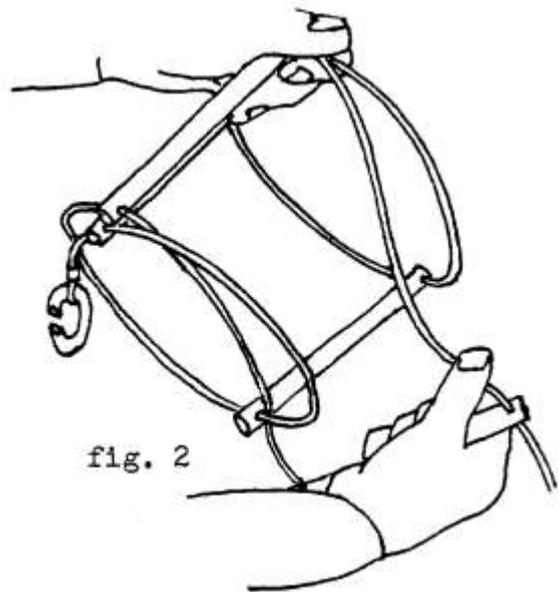
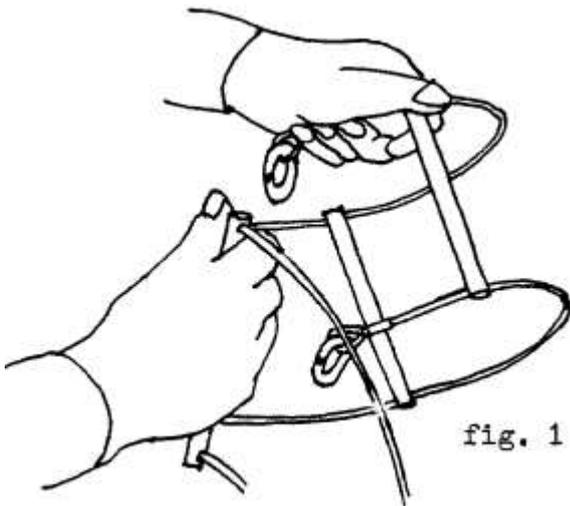
The Club is sad to report the death this summer of Jim Stem, who fell whilst climbing in Cornwall. Jim will be remembered for his -unassuming nature and congeniality.

CARE OF LADDERS

Much damage has been caused to club ladders in the past by their being badly cared for in and after use. Now that we have, with much effort, built up a good stock again, it will help if members practice a few simple rules to preserve them.

Badly rolled ladders will snag in caves, are difficult to inspect for damage, but worst of all are prone to become tangled by one end passing through between rungs. If weight is then put on the ladder, the wires become permanently kinked. The method of rolling ladders adopted by the club seeks to minimise the possibility of tangling and looping, and, because they are neat, easier to inspect for dirt and damage. The method is not difficult, and only takes a little longer - even underground with cold fingers:

1. Start by placing the third rung just beyond the first, with the c-links outside (figs 1 and 2).
2. Continue with the next rung beyond the second, the next beyond the third, and so on, keeping the wires inside those already rolled, and the rungs close together (figs 2 and 3). It helps if each rung is turned to get the wires inside.
3. To finish, clip the first-end c-links together outside the roll, and the last ends inside the roll. On some earlier ladders, this may be difficult - do not force them but use a krab or even leave open if being carried in a tackle bag.



4. Finally, thoroughly wash and dry the ladders as soon as possible after use.

All this is quicker and easier than the making or rebuilding of them !

GOATCHURCH GOURMET'S A.G.M.

Phil Hendy

Midsummer madness struck Burrington again this year when the Goatchurch Gourmets provisional wing of the Friday Niters descended on the Combe and ascended to the aforementioned cave. The rough car park crudely hewn from the hillside by the vandals masquerading as the Avon Trust for Nature Conservation was noted as an eyesore, and one certainly not designed to conserve the suspensions of motor vehicles. Farther up the valley, Flange Swallet has been re-dug to a depth of around one and a half fathoms by the JCB Caving dub - one only hopes that the UBSS sanctioned this surface dig where other applications have failed. One also hopes that permission to continue this dig will be forthcoming, as the fair-sized stream is seen to sink in some inviting-looking fissures in the steeply-dipping limestone.

Perspiring gently, a motley crew containing what looked like an assortment of retired gardeners and two time-warped mine captains hauled its impedimenta to the cave entrance. Fortnum's had failed to deliver the hamper in time, but this was compensated for by the arrival of two crates of refreshment, one pale, one brown. Hard on our heels came a Party of grockles, sporting multi-coloured plastical 'ats, and illuminated by Mr. Oldham. Being gentlemen, we acceded the honour of being first to explore the mysteries which lay beyond the yawning portals of the cave, choosing instead to sample the wares of Messrs. Hall, Woodhouse, and Gibb.

Hearing more voices toiling up the goat track, we wiped the froth from our lips, ignited those most dependable of illuminants, and ventured with great joy etc. etc. We were led from near the rear by a Horringtonite swinging a pressure light, which only served to increase the gloom cast by our feeble tallow dips.

A minor injury was sustained by my spouse, who kindly cushioned the contact of my boot on the unyielding limestone of the Giants' Stairs by interposing a digit. Nil desperandum! We moved on, noticing with interest a hibernating speleo in an alcove. This led to speculation on the success of the caver-ringing project, but as this subject is still sub-judice, no more of this here. A moment of panic occurred when slipping gently down a widening crack, your scribe was unable to espy a floor beneath. The drop was estimated at one and a half fathoms, and a hurried and undignified retreat was called for. Subsequent examination from below showed the gulf to be no more than half a fathom in depth, but not having the gift of foresight, it was deemed best to heed the maxim concerning discretion and valour.

The party assembled in the Chambre Bouldereux, and was amazed to see a never-ending stream of youthful speleos wend past them, and slide joyfully to the halls below. After a while, their passage ceased, and cries from below caused us to realise that there was a solid line of cavers through to the far reaches of the cave. We prepared our retreat, for time was passing, and the resulting miasma in the nether parts of the cavern would have ill suited our illumination. Progress to the sweet scents and airs of the luxuriantly foliated hillside was slow, and by various routes. Our attempts to bottom the Goatchurch system had failed, though honour was satisfied.

The remainder of the balmy evening was pleasantly spent, in preparing and devouring a repast al fresco. What tales were told as the wine and ale freely flowed, and the mouth-watering sizzle filled the air! To amuse the crowd, I demonstrated a backward somersault down the hillside into a thick and spiteful clump of Urtica dioica (Stinging Nettle - Ed.), which caused great mirth. Seeking relief from the ensuing tingling rash, I sought the advice of our well-respected and experienced sawbones, who was quaffing wine whilst sat upon a rocky eminence. What pharmaceutical wonders, what mystery of leechdom would he prescribe? "Rub it with, dock leaves." he said!

As the sun sank, bird song was quenched, and myriad gnats took to the air in whining profusion. Smoke from a grass-fire inadvertently ignited by a wayward charcoal grill could only hold them at bay temporarily, so we decamped, and descended the hill through the dympsy light to our vehicles and then

to the ale-house, there to recount past deeds of heroism and derring-do.

MENDIP GOES TO BATH

Bath's hot natural springs, which flow into the renowned King's and Roman Baths there, have been shown by a group of British scientists to have their source in the Mendip Hills. In the first full scientific study of the springs,¹ the group found that it takes about four thousand years for Mendip rainwater to travel underground through the limestone syncline and re-emerge at Bath.

The scientists say that the system could be seriously affected by any attempt to tamper with it. Their warning came just as Bath City Council prepared to select plans for the redevelopment of the city as a major spa centre - proposals could involve tapping of up to an extra 100,000 gallons of spring water every day for use in new thermal bathing centres.

The springs, which show evidence of human use dating back to the Iron Age, were used by the Romans as an important religious centre that remains the most remarkable and extensive Roman site in Britain. Last year, it attracted over half a million visitors and was a principle source of tourism for the city.

During its passage from Mendip, the water picks up the special mineral properties for which it has become so famous. At depths of up to -2500m, rich quantities of minerals are dissolved, and the water is heated, emerging in Bath at a temperature of about 45°C. Whether these properties are sufficient to account for the remarkable curative reputation - they were even claimed to induce pregnancy - is the subject of a different scientific debate.

Constructed from an article by Robin McKie²,
with kind permission of Observer Newspapers Ltd.

Makes you think what cavers got up to 4000 years ago! - and think of the consequences of banging, digging, and doing whatever else you do underground, in four millenea time! (A pint for the best publishable cartoon). Ed.

Refs

1. The Thermal Springs of Bath; Andrews, Burgess, Edmunds, Kay & Lee; Nature (letter) V298 22 July 1982 pp 339-343.
2. 2 Threat to King' Spring in Bath; McKie; The Observer 1 Aug 1982 p4.



THE WESSEX CAVE CLUB CHARABANC OUTING TO DEVON

Nigel Graham

Being an Account of the Club Day Out to the Show-Caves of Devon, in which Fifteen Members and Guests partook, going underground to avoid the rain. Present were: Bob and Mary Drake, Andy and Pam Watson, Nichola ?, Jackie Westcott, Julie Wootton, Glyn Bolt, A1 Keen, Phil Hendy, John Scott, Rich Warman, Jeff Price, Doug Adams, Nigel Graham. The Organiser was Bob Drake, who hired the Transit Mini-Charabanc and did all the driving. Date: 21st April 1983.

"Stop! " wailed the Company as we sailed past the Hunter's: better that way than through the village, where people may have jumped to the wrong conclusion had they realised it was the Wessex in a Transit... First on the venue was Kent's Cavern, Torquay.

Kent's Hole, as it was originally known, is an important archaeological site which was thoroughly excavated in the 19th Century, destroying masses of formations in the process. The Rev. J MacEnery in 1828 and Mr. Goodwin-Austen in 1840 were the first to investigate the site, the latter realising that relics found under the thick stal floor pre-dated that floor. Earlier researchers had suggested that ancient man had cut through the stal, allowing lost flints to penetrate the silt below. In 1864 the British Association appointed a committee to excavate Kent's Cavern. The work started the following year. The undisturbed floor was of fallen blocks, between which a Black Mould deposit contained Neolithic to present relics and remains. The thick stal floor lay beneath this, and contained boulders. The layers below were excavated to a depth of four feet, revealing many human relics including hearths.

Fauna found included sabre-toothed tiger, rhinoceros and cave-bear. A few remains of bears may be inspected in a patch of conglomerate in the roof, the guide indicating them with his hand-lamp. (They are the bones from both an adult and a cub; "Ahhh !" we dutifully chorused - but only after the guide had despairingly prompted us.

The cave itself provides a round-trip of about half a mile, along two parallel galleries cross-linked by labyrinths. Two entrances are open (one used as the exit), the third is blocked, entering a low-level series. The galleries are mainly spacious, with heavily sculpted walls and good formations in places. A short detour to a chamber with a deeply-etched "egg-box" roof reaches the deepest part of the cave and a view into the Organ Chamber, possibly the best formations. A favourite statistic used by show-cave guides is the theoretical growth-rate of formations; "an inch per thousand years boggles the mind somewhat. In Kent's Cavern, stalagmite growth is estimated from an inscription, 'Robert Hedges of Ireland. Feb 20 1688'. (Not the Irish Ireland, but a farm of that name some miles away). The inscription is on a stal boss, and the date is now almost filled.

Out into the sunshine and the charabanc, and off to Brixham Cavern. Ours was the first party to visit it for six years, and that group were all cavers from the International Congress. Brixham Cavern consists of a few short rifts to a small chamber about 180ft from the entrance, a doorway leading directly from the street pavement and a flight of steps down under a house. The cave was found by quarrymen in 1858. By usual show-cave standards it is not very inspiring, being small with few formations. Visitors made their own way around, with leaflets describing points of interest, nature-trail style. The cave was an important archaeological site and was extensively excavated, revealing bones of twenty-two species but few human relics. A representative collection is displayed in the cave. We emerged to find we had escaped a heavy shower. After thanking our guide for her hospitality we were away to Yealmpton, near Plymouth, to inspect the Kitley Caves, situated in the Yealm valley in the Kitley Estate.

At Kitley we were guests of the Devon Karst Research Society, who are investigating the caves they maintain as a serious speleological exhibition rather than as the more typical subterranean wonderland. Their aim is that of explaining to the lay visitor the development of caves and their formations and to show something of the research carried out in the caves. I visited the caves a couple of years ago as a tourist. Not realising at the time how the caves were being managed, I was surprised to find that one wanders around at one's own pace, finding not fanciful names but information boards explaining various features. A considerable amount of work has been put in since that visit, and we were able to inspect things at close quarters (Bob had advised us to take basic kit).

We were guided around, our host seeming rather apologetic about this until he discovered our mutual interest in digging into very loose boulders. The upward dig in question is in a large ruckle smoke-tested to a recent find higher in the quarry which had exposed the caves. The long-disused burning-lime quarry had fragmented the caves, the largest remnant being now the main show-cave. It is a compact little system of passages radiating from a central chamber, two giving entrance and exit. Various digs are in progress both in the main cave and in the other quarry caves. One crawl soon found itself chock full of Wessex members eager to find glory beyond the floodlights. Bones are being found in some of the digs, necessitating archaeological advice.

About six smaller caves are located around the quarry walls, including the one found to be linked via the boulder choke. In addition, a dig has been started in one of a long line of dolines on the hillside above ("What's a doline?" asked one of the party, causing a reaction rather like that to burping in chapel). One recent find we were invited to enter proved problematical for two of us, one finding the entrance too tight, and the other spotting a large spider. Our host was most amused: "Are you men or mice?" he chortled, apparently failing to notice that the arachnophobe happened to be an attractive young lady!

As we took our leave, the Society members recommended the better pub in Yealmpton. However, when we reached the main road, a chorus of "To the Seaside!" resulted in the Hon. Chairman donning the requisite knotted handkerchief and navigating us to an obscure hamlet of a few houses, an hotel, and the local grockle-trap - a bar attached to a structure so artificial as to be hilarious. Within a steel-framed shed was an incredibly twee fibre-glass 'street' with plastic trees, fairy lights and an overall effect so bizarre that we promptly dubbed it 'Toytown' and shot off inland to a far better pub and restaurant which had previously been located by Jeff and 'Kermit' (Richard).

Much later, a familiar cattle-grid rattled us awake, and we were back at Upper Pitts to find a beer-and doughnut party under way. All agreed it had been a highly successful and enjoyable day out.

Note: Historical etc. details of the caves were derived were derived from the show-cave brochures.

FROM THE LOG

18 Sep 82 Swildons Watergate/Fault Chamber Round Trip. Tony Jennings, Dave Cave-Ayland, Greg Samways, Brian Woodward, Chris Milne, Mark Madden, Paul Whybro to Lower Fault Chamber and Pete and Alison, Dave, Dave Walker to Watergate. It took a couple of hours hard digging from both ends to open the link by which time, with such a big party, the CO₂ had built up again. The Watergate Party came out in Fault Chamber - there were no takers for going out the other way. We cleared all the gear out of Watergate abandoned on the 4th but a lot of work is going to be needed to clean up the Fault Chamber end. Now we've got the link, we should be able to push on through the next upstream sump in Watergate, although much work will have to be done on the link to stop it from flooding. P.M.

24 Oct Charterhouse Pete Hann, Mark Madden, Annie, Pete and Alison. Maypoled the climb out of Splatter Chamber. Pete Hann made the very delicate transfer from the maypole to a crumbling, muddy ledge. The way on just led up into boulders. 30 Oct. Brian Woodward, Pete and Alison began work at the bottom clearing a route bypassing the end grotto. P.M.

7 November Swildons Lower Fault Chamber. Chris and Annie, Pete and two QMC. The QMC were recruited to help take a hose down to the Shepton's dig. The 60ft length of 2" dia. black hose caused a bit of a stir amongst the weege, and the QMC couldn't keep up with us. At the dig, one end was at the sump, and the other at the top of the climb. We bailed the dig into Watergate until the dam was full, then dived (with kit) the ten foot sump into Watergate and took the end of the hose down into the stream way. The idea is that the sump can now be emptied by pouring the water in the dam and then it flows through the hose into Watergate. P.M.

29 Nov Swildons Renascence. Chris Milne, Rich Whittington, Pete and Alison. Sidcot U Tube has not slumped but it has sumped - an easy free dive. Went on up towards the top aven, the squeeze (Andy Sparrow's nose grater) however defeated Rich and Chris. Alison and I went on to the aven where a running rope has been left. The ladder unfortunately jammed about 30ft up so we abandoned the trip. On the way out, we put some more bang in the passage banged on the 11th Sep. Before doing this, Alison pushed the furthest point to reach a choke 15ft further on. This may be worth digging - the passage is 3ft wide with a 6" air space over the fill. P.M.

4 Dec Swildons Nine. Mark Maddon, Pete and Alison, Mark Faulkner and Brian Woodward (Shepton). Alison pushed the last remaining lead in Badlands, Smeagle Pot. It is 'easily' negotiable for 25ft, then a squeeze stopped all but Alison. She got through and down another 10ft to a level floor. A small passage went on and she could look around an impossibly tight right-angled bend and see another clean-washed pot going down. The site is intriguing in that it is a long way from the main stream way - where is it going? P.M.

8 January 83 Singing River Mine Mike Wise, Paul Whybro, Chris and Annie, Alison. Mike and Paul dived in the 'Blue Holes' in the West Series, using Chris as adviser and portable belay. Alison and Annie were poking around with a crowbar and managed to unearth an infilled level. After removing some large boulders, access was gained to a wet crawl in about a feet of water. After fifteen feet it was possible to stand up in a small chamber. Ahead, a low arch led to a small shelf in which it was possible to stand in neck deep water. On the way out, another short dig and a squeeze led into 15' of large passage ending in a chamber 10x30ft. A 3ft drop led to a lovely green lake.

On investigation, this proved to be about ten feet deep. A short dive along the right-hand wall failed to find any other outlet below water - no way on above. Anon

Note re scanned image – done from bound volume so bottom text missing:
Ground floor plan with proposed internal alterations.

Kevin D Clarke. June 83

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