

MENDIP CAVING GROUP
NORDRACH COTTAGE
CHARTERHOUSE-ON-MENDIP
BLAGDON
BRISTOL BS18 6XW

THIS ITEM CAN BE BORROWED
FOR A SHORT TIME

Journal 8

Journal 1984



Mendip Caving Group



Above: MCG 1953. Tony Knibbs in upper Swildons Hole, Mendip.

Front Cover: MCG 1983. Geoff Barton by the ice column, Grotte Casteret, Pyrenees.

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Artwork: Yvonne Ward.

EDITOR'S COMMENT.

1983 saw the 30th anniversary of the MCG's birth in 1953. This occasion was celebrated in due style with the aid of beer, music, dancing, and even caving! It is perhaps fitting therefore to reflect for a moment on the group's status after 30 years existence, and what we hope to achieve over the next 30.

After a decline in caving activities during the 1970's, when the energies of the Group were channelled into the worthwhile task of cottage-building, we are now able to report a marked recovery. The regular Mendip meets and the monthly away meets are generally well attended, and an annual overseas expedition is becoming usual. Members are kept informed of club and caving news in a regular newsletter, supplemented by Thursday evenings at the Mawson Arms for those within reach of Chiswick. Membership has doubled since 1979 to 110, and it's fair to say that over 50% of these are regular cavers. Most important of all, the group has a good "atmosphere", and shows no sign of anything but improvement.

We have a full programme of meets arranged for 1985, including New Year in Majorca, and a return to the Reseau Trombe in the late summer. Club digs on Mendip are proceeding slowly; a concerted effort in Bone Hole, August, and Upper Flood provide some new passage in 1985. And in 1986 and onwards? Well, there is plenty of unexplored limestone in the world, and it doesn't all need a large investment of time and money. Let's get out and explore some!

This edition of the MCG journal marks the 30th Anniversary year with material from both 1953 and 1983. There has been no attempt to produce a complete "History of the MCG". Instead we have several pieces of nostalgia, in the form of Tony Knibbs' reminiscences, Joy Dyer's impressions of the club in 1959, and Jon Roberts' complete list of members past and present. The origins of the name "Nordrach" are given in an updated reprint from the Axbridge Local History Society's Journal. We have a history of the club's most recent "near-the-cottage" dig at Netherwood. There is a report on the 1983 Pyrenees expedition, which it is hoped will provide useful data for future trips. Bob Speleo, of course, has a word to say, and the Karst caverns of Yixing take us as far from the Mendips as possible!

Finally, thanks to Jill Towner and Gill Warren who did most of the typing, Paul Merron for the photographic work, Tony Knibbs and Yvonne Ward for artworks, and all others who contributed or otherwise assisted in producing this Journal.

Good Caving

Ian McKechnie.

Pyrenees 1983

THE 1983 MCG EXPEDITION TO RÉSEAU FELIX TROMBE.

By Neil Hutchinson, with material supplied by Martin Rowe, Tony Knibbs and others

Introduction

At the recent BCRA conference, one university caving club after another impressed the audience with descriptions of expeditions to far flung caving regions of the world. They would put miles of rope and tons of bolts in the back of a van, drive off, camp next to the hole, discover and survey vast systems and return with thousands of photographs. All without a single hitch.

It all sounded fairly simple, and thus the idea of a 1983 MCG Pyrenees expedition was born. Of course as always the reality proved rather different. With everyone leaving England in different vehicles on different dates, travelling by different routes, arriving on different days and staying for different lengths of time. Some stayed at a camp site, some in a gite. There was no leader, no one knew how much rope there was or whose car it was in, while the last person to arrive brought the survey and guide book, which were taken home by the first person to leave. Everyone brought carbide lamps, but no one bought any carbide etc..... !

Actually things were not quite that bad, and to be fair this was not billed as a full scale expedition, more a holiday with some serious caving for those that wanted it, and as such it was very successful.

The cave system chosen was the Réseau Trombe, easily within two days drive from London. It is situated near the village of Arbas in the Haute Garonne, Pyrenees. Many of the cave entrances are marked on sheet "Aspet 1/2" of the 1:25000 series maps produced by the IGNF; Arbas is on sheet "Aspet 3/4".

The optimistic intention of the expedition was to attempt a through trip of the system. This is described in "Grottes et Canyons" by Minvielle as "a very difficult sporting trip of 21-25 hours". It involves accurate route finding throughout the 10km route which is wet in sections and involves 28 pitches upto 80m deep.

Most of the group arrived in Arbas around 18 August 1983. This small village is the Priddy of the Haute Garonne and as such, the place where all cavers tend to congregate. It has two cafés, two small general stores, a post office, a butcher and a baker. There is even a caving club 'hut' over the town hall! It only lacks a caving shop (the nearest of which are at St Girons and St Gaudens).

There was a choice of two main places to camp in the area. The first was a large meadow at the top of the mountain close to all the higher entrances, the main facilities being provided by a small stream. The Whernside Manor team were already installed here on our arrival, although there was an equally pleasant but smaller clearing a few hundred meters back down the valley. The second site was situated about 1km north of Arbas in a large field next to a quiet river. Camping here was free although a small donation was suggested. The site boasted a primitive toilet which tended to seize up after a few days use, and there were public toilets in the village itself.

Rightly or wrongly we chose to camp at the Arbas site, which we shared for the first week with Durham University caving club, who provided us with masses of useful information. They had already completed 'the traverse' and gave us copies of their pitch list and survey notes. This proved invaluable and saved us a lot of time and effort.

After studying Durham's notes we realized that to complete the traverse from Coquille to Pène Blanche would require a high degree of organisation and planning. Food and carbide dumps would be needed, and several trips to each section of the route via intermediate entrances such as Pont de Gerbaud and Trou de Vent would be essential, in order to gain familiarity with the more complicated sections of the journey.

This seemed to be a very ambitious undertaking, so it was an apprehensive, but never the less keen, group which retired to the café on Saturday evening to discuss a plan for the next few weeks activities.

Expedition Members.

Arbas Camp

Roy and (Mandy) Kempston
John and (Helen) Miriam
Adrian Duckett
Mike Mintram
Ian Parry
Neil Hutchinson
Martin Rowe
Tony Knibbs
Denise Samuel
Steve Taylor
Dick Houseago and (Penny) and (Barbara)

Gite in Urau

Ian McKechnie
Geoff and (Morag) Barton
(Kathleen Gardner)
Clive Towner
Jill Attwood
Mick Lowe and (Sue) and (Lucy)

Gite in Urale

Arthur Spain and (family)
John Pudduck and (family)
Steve and (Kate) Taylor

Staying elsewhere

Pete Harvey and (Wendy)
Mike Haselden and (family)

Names shown in brackets were not caving. All stayed for different lengths of time between 1 and 2 weeks.

Diary: Main events of 21st August to 2nd September 1983.

SAT 20th AUG

Main party assembled at Arbas in brilliant sunshine,
set up camp and discuss tactics for next 2 weeks.

SUN 21st AUG Clear morning. Tackle transported to top of mountain, and stored close to Trou Mile entrance. Trou Mile to Trou de Vent exchange trip planned. Trou Mile party fail to pass vertical squeeze into Trou de Vent. Trou Mile party and all but 2 of Trou de Vent party exit via Trou Mile. Two remaining exit via Trou de Vent and de-rig. Both parties surface by 11.00pm in heavy rain.

MON 22nd AUG Fine morning, day spent sorting out gear and buying provisions. Evening - raining

TUES 23rd AUG Raining. One party to Gouffre Pierre, 1 party to Gouffre Raymonde and 1 party to Pène Blanque. Rains heavily during afternoon. Gouffre Pierre party exit to find rope on 80m pitch now hanging in waterfall. Pène Blanque party make way out to find previously dry passage sumped. Gouffre Pierre, Gouffre Raymonde parties arrive back at camp by 9.00pm, Pène Blanque party arrive back by 12.30am having free dived sump.

WED 24th AUG Fine. Decided to let water level in caves fall. More tackle transported to Trou Mile store, emergency shelter erected.

THUR 25th AUG Clear morning. Water level down. Two parties to Gouffre Raymonde stream way. One party risk Pène Blanque to find sump gone and passage almost dry. One party to Trou Mile with intention of rigging from the Grande Salle through to Réseau Bernadette. Rains again during afternoon. Trou Mile party get very wet, store gear at bottom of stream and exit vowing to spend the next day buying some waterproof gear! All back at camp by 8.00pm.

FRI 26th AUG Raining. Caving abandoned for day. Trips to various outlying areas show bad weather to be fairly localised - over Arbas. Discuss possibilities of caving in other areas with French cavers recently arrived.

SAT 27th AUG Clear morning. One party leave to cave further east for day. Two parties (soon becoming one due to general illness) to Pène Blanque find Dromadaire, many photographs taken. Back at camp by 11.00pm. Evening raining.

SUN 28th AUG Fine. Adrian Duckett's birthday, spent drying and sorting out gear. Birthday party for Adrian in evening at Gite. First and only time the entire party was in the same place at the same time! Evening raining.

MON 29th AUG Raining. General reluctance to go underground. One party to Trou Mile to bring out tackle left by previous party for descent to Réseau Bernadette. One party down Gouffre Raymonde stream to first tyrolienne. Cave de-rigged. Light rain. Some gear taken off mountain. Another party to Gavarnie to visit Grotte Casteret.

TUE 30th AUG Fine. One party investigates higher entrances and possible surface digs.
Evening light rain.
Gavarnie party returns after a night at a mountain refuge.

WED 31st AUG Cloudy. One party to Grande Salle via Trou Mile.
Meet party of French cavers in Grande Salle. All exit via Trou Mile and de-rig cave. Remaining tackle taken off the mountain.

THUR 1st SEP Fine. Day spent washing and packing gear.

FRI 2nd SEP Brilliant sunshine! Main group departs for England.

Cave Guides.

1. Trou Mile
2. Trou de Vent
3. Gouffre Raymonde
4. Gouffre Pierre
5. Pène Blanche
6. Pont de Gerbaut
7. Coquille
8. Duplessis
9. Sarrat
10. Foxeens
11. Henne Morte

Of the above caves, the first five were descended during our stay, the associated descriptions are, therefore, based on first hand knowledge and are as accurate as memory will allow.

The remaining caves were not descended by us, but information was obtained from other cavers in the area, and is listed here.

All of these descriptions are intended to be used in conjunction with the survey, which does contain a few errors in pitch lengths. Where a discrepancy is found between pitch lengths listed here and those on the survey, it would be wise to play safe and take sufficient rope to tackle the longest pitch indicated.

1. Trou Mile.

Trou Mile is an active Swildons-like stream cave, connecting at the upstream end, with Coquille and at the down-stream end, with Grande Salle. This is a very large chamber from which ways on lead up to the Trou de Vent System or down via a series of wet pitches to the Réseau Bernadette and continuation of the traverse route. Trou Mile also provides a possible starting point for the traverse.

Take the D13a from Arbas, south to Sarrat de Bouch, then the D136 west. The road climbs through a series of tight bends to a large leveled area. From here the road continues as a rough unmetalled track, finally emerging from the trees in a pleasant meadow close to the top of the mountain. The track is particularly hazardous in places, and is best negotiated by vehicles with good ground clearance. Follow the track back down hill for 600m to a series of tight bends; directly after the first of these, turn left down a path leading through the trees to a small stream. Cross over the stream, turn left, and follow the bank upstream through a clearing for about 200m. The entrance is situated in a clump of trees 5m up the right hand bank and is easily recognized by a large block of wood jammed across the entrance shaft.

This block of wood is used as a belay for a 15' ladder or rope (omit for fairly easy free climb). From the bottom of the entrance pitch descend two steep slopes to a small stream, and head of 1st pitch 6m (use 20' ladder) followed immediately by a 2nd pitch 8m (use 25' ladder). Then follows a long section of fine stream passage containing 2 tyroliennes around fairly shallow pools; these were rigged with fixed ropes in 83 but best check with local cavers whether they are still in place. A short cascade (may require a handline) leads to 3rd pitch 12m and wet (use 30' ladder and long belay) best rigged out on left so as to avoid most of the water. The passage continues over a short drop of 3m. (will require handline) and soon reaches a series of large mudbanks. At the top of the 3rd mudbank a small ascending muddy tube on the right leads through a small chamber to a narrow vertical rift. Climb up this rift to a broad ledge and continue up boulders on the left into a descending phreatic passage. Follow this to an obvious junction with a side passage on the left. Straight ahead the passage ends at a small eye hole 15m up the wall of Grande Salle. Turning left the descent continues over various bits of metal and old rope, finally emerging into Grande Salle at floor level.

Turning left on entry the aptly named 'Grande Salle' begins as a series of mudbanks, opening out into an immense chamber floored by huge boulders. This boulder slope can be climbed to a 'fixed' rope entering from a small crack in the ceiling 20m above - the Trou de Vent system -. Beyond a climb down boulders leads to some well decorated pools.

Turning right on entering Grande Salle follow the right hand wall to a small hole emitting a very strong draught. A flat-out crawl soon opens out at the top of a 22m pitch, and forms the connection via further pitches of 30m, 80m and 7m, with Réseau Bernadette.

These pitches become impassable in wet weather (especially the 30m which is in fact a very wet cascade), but form an important link in the traverse route. As such this section is one that would be best sorted out well in advance of any proposed traverse trip, especially as the climb up to the Réseau Bernadette and subsequent connection with Pont de Gerbaut streamway is very difficult to find.

This whole section would undoubtedly be best tackled using Trou de Vent as an entrance as once rigged this provides a quick, dry way into the system.

Tackle Summary: Trou Mile

PITCH	LENGTH	TACKLE
ENT	7m	15' ladder (optional)
1ST	6m	20' ladder
2ND	8m	25' ladder
1ST TYRO	-	F/R
2ND TYRO	-	F/R
CASCADE		20' handline (optional)
3RD	12m	30' ladder and long belay
(4TH)	3m	10' handline

2. Trou de Vent.

Trou de Vent is not a particularly long cave, consisting primarily of a series of vertical rifts, opening out eventually into the roof of Grande Salle. The cave takes little or no water, and according to the local cavers is a safe way into the system under any weather conditions.

From Trou Mile walk back down the main track for about 700m until a small grassy triangle on the left hand verge, just large enough to park two cars. Cross this and follow a small path down through the trees at an angle of about

30° to the main track, for about 250m, keeping right wherever possible. The entrance is situated at the base of a small rocky outcrop, and is easily identified by the letters TDV in red paint on the rockface.

Once inside, a short crawl leads directly to the 1st pitch 6m (use 20' ladder) followed after about 10m by the 2nd pitch 12m (use 40' ladder, belayed to a large chackstone across rift or via a short spreader to one of the many bolts on the right). At the bottom of the 2nd pitch a short but awkward crawl on the left leads directly to head of 3rd pitch 30m requiring a 10m traverse line down to the take off point.

The first 10m of the pitch lie against an inclined wall, with the last 20m dropping away free (use 100' ladder, 200' line and 35' traverse line or 50m rope, requiring a rebelay or deviation 10m down to avoid a nasty rubpoint).

From the bottom of 3rd pitch follow a vadose passage at a height of about 5m above floor level for about 15 or 20m. Way on is through two tight inclined squeezes down on the right at floor level, leading to head of 4th pitch 15m. The 4th pitch should not be confused with another similar size pitch at the same level, a little way to the left. The correct pitch is identified by a narrow inclined rift at the head (requiring a traverse line) followed after 5m by a sharp left hand turn and a more roomy free hang down to a walking size passage. The obvious way on soon leads to another tricky squeeze at the head of the 5th pitch 17m (requiring a short traverse line to main belay rigged as high as possible above the squeeze in order to simplify the return journey). The 5th pitch gives a fine free hanging descent out of the roof of the Grande Salle, and together with the 4th pitch was rigged with fixed ropes in 83, however, these were of unknown age and condition and poorly rigged and as such should be trusted at your peril!

Pitch Summary: Trou de Vent

PITCH	LENGTH	TACKLE
1ST	6m	15m rope or 20' ladder
2ND	11m	20m rope or 40' ladder
3RD	30m	50m rope (including 10m for traverse line) or 100' ladder and 200' rope and 30' traverse line
4TH	15m	20m rope or 40' ladder
5TH	17m	25m rope or 60' ladder and 120' line

3. Gouffre Raymonde.

Gouffre Raymonde, although not part of the through trip, is in itself a very sporting cave and well worth a visit. The cave consists of a predominantly vertical entrance series leading via a fine streamway to a complex area of passages and pitches, the largest of which is Puits Delteil at 148m deep. The stream contains some very spectacular cascades and many deep pools which become tricky to negotiate in wet weather.

From Trou Mile entrance walk back down stream and cross the clearing to a large solitary tree. From here a path marked with yellow paint leads uphill (at right angles and on the opposite side of the clearing from the stream), for about 100m to a group of boulders in the centre of which is the entrance.

Three well positioned bolts on boulders provide a good 3 point hang for the 1st pitch; 30m (use 45' rope) which drops straight down from the surface to a rebelay 7m from bottom (requiring a pendulum manoeuvre) to land on a steep muddy boulder slope. Descend into a large chamber and follow an obvious path around to the left (may be marked with orange and white tape) to enter a vadose passage. Follow this for about 60m to a point where the floor gives way to an inclined rift.

A little way beyond, bolts give belays for a 10m abseil (2nd pitch), or more

simple, the inclined rift can be climbed down (12m hand or top jammer line is recommended) to head of next pitch. Third pitch 15m (where the poor bolts provide belay for 20m rope down side wall of a large chamber) to Salle Nède. Continue down the chamber in increasingly large passage to a bold step over a deep hole and traverse around a large boulder (10m traverse line required) to head of 4th pitch 35m (Puits Nède, a 35m free hang, wet for at least 10m). Use 55m rope to include traverse line. Small ledges 5m above the bottom are best free climbed down to stream.

On the left, dry oxbows can be followed for about 100m after which descent down to the stream is unavoidable. The stream continues at a gentle gradient apart from the Toboggan, a 15m noisy cascade; (20m line useful for return) and a traverse around a deep pool (20m traverse line recommended), to eventually reach a series of dry passages and pitches connecting at one point with Réseau Bernadette.

Pitch Summary: Gouffre Raymonde

PITCH	LENGTH	TACKLE
ENT	30m	40m rope - Rebelay 7m from bottom
2ND	10m	12m ahnd or top jammer rope
3RD	15m	20m rope
4TH	35m	55m rope - to include 10m traverse line
TOBOGGON	15m	15m hand line - (optional)
POOL	20m	20m traverse line - (optional)

4. Gouffre Pierre.

This cave again is not part of the traverse route, and being almost entirely vertical in nature is very much an SRT only trip. Most of the pitches are dry, although the 80m Puits Noir can become quite wet in bad weather.

Starting from the large and obvious clearing around the main track, just above La Fontaine de L'Ours, walk back downhill for about 100m to a smaller track cutting back on the left. Follow this down to a stile, cross over the stile and follow a path around to the left along roughly the same contour for about 500m. The path may still be marked with small pieces of polythene attached to trees. The entrance is situated in a small muddy depression and is not dissimilar in appearance to that of Trou de Vent.

The 1st pitch is just inside the entrance a 5m traverse line is rigged back to boulders and a short descent leads directly to the 2nd pitch 18m. A typically French piece of metal work is the take off point. A 25m rope belayed to bolts on the left and rebelayed a few metres down, landing after 18m on a narrow ledge. A traverse around the shaft allows placement of bolts to give a two point Y-hang for a further free hanging descent of 65m (3rd pitch) landing on a boulder strewn floor. Both the 2nd and 3rd pitches are in the same shaft and form Le Puits Noir, a total descent of 80m.

From the bottom of the 3rd pitch a small rift on the left is followed for about 25m or so to a sort of rock bridge between two large holes. On the left is Puits de Limon (68m). Ignore this and turn right to the head of the 4th pitch, Puits du Balcon (30m). Descend this pitch for about 20m where a pendulum across to the right gives a rebelay and a further 7m or so of descent against a sloping rockwall down to a large chamber. This rebelay is required so as to avoid continuing down the remaining 40m of Puits de Limon, which opens out at this point (especially inadvisable if you only have 10m of rope left!).

Follow the chamber down and descend two further pitches of 8m and 8m (5th and 6th pitch) to the head of the 25m Puits du Camp. This was the deepest point reached in 1983 at -150m. From here further pitches of 30m, 5m, 10m, 10m, 20m, 3m, 7m, and 35m lead to a gallery and Camp I, followed by pitches of 10m, 5m traverse, 10m

traverse and 10m to Camp II. Then pitches of 10m, 5m, 11m, 10m, 10m, 20m, 8m, 25m, and 25m ending finally at a sump.

As can be seen, a trip down to the sump requires a great deal of tackle; however, if the first 7 pitches are anything to go by then the trip can be highly recommended.

Pitch Summary: Gouffre Pierre

PITCH	LENGTH - (Not rope length)
1	6m
2 } PUIITS NOIR	18m
3 }	65m
4 PUIITS DUBALCON	30m
5	8m
6	8m
7 PUIITS DU CAMP	25m
8	30m
9	5m
10	10m
11	10m
12	20m
13	3m
14	7m
15	35m
CAMP I	
16	10m traverse and 5m pitch
17	10m traverse and 10m pitch
CAMP II	
18	10m
19	5m
20	11m
21	10m, 10m and 20m
22	10m
23	25m
24	25m

SUMP

5. Pène Blanche.

Pène Blanche consists in the main of dry horizontal walking size passages with few pitches and no active stream, leading to the impressive Salle du Dromadaire and subsequent connection with Pont de Gerbaut. The cave forms the final section of the traverse, and as such trips should be made to the cave in advance of any proposed traverse trip in order to gain familiarity with the route and rig the connection to Pont de Gerbaut.

As the cave requires little in the way of tackle it provides a good trip for anyone not familiar with vertical techniques, and a journey into Salle du Dromadaire is highly recommended.

One word of warning - a squeeze a few hundred meters before the first pitch can sump in very wet weather, the cave should, therefore, be treated with care during periods of prolonged heavy rain.

Take the D13a from Arbas to Sarrat de Bouch, then the D13b to La Baderque. Turn right just after the monument in La Baderque and follow the road (soon becoming a rough track) down to a turning circle at a small weather station. Turn around here and head back up the track for about 400m to a junction with a smaller track on the left. Walk down this track for about 100m to a smaller path on the left, follow this for about 500m to a stile and another left turn uphill through a dense forest for about 300m and 100m

of ascent to a junction. Straight ahead an overgrown path leads up to Pont de Gerbaut. Turning right the path continues uphill for a further 750m to a small clearing on a col. Turn right here and descend scree slopes to the base of a white cliff, about 500m to the right and 100m lower than the col.

A short climb up to the obvious entrances is made easier by a 5m line or a tape loop. A large, dusty, walking-size passage soon lowers down to a stoop. Follow the well worn path until just beyond a short traverse, where a steep slope, 10m slope, the t boggan, leads into a large rocky chamber. Follow the chamber down to the left, a down-hill tunnel leaving the passage on the right. In a small chamber painted with graffiti, climb 1.5m into a low crawl on the right. A short pitch may be bypassed in a slippery descending tube. Descend until the floor drops away steeply to the right, and follow an exposed traverse on the left wall, which had a fixed rope on our visit. Beyond the traverse, descend a steep muddy slope of 10m (fixed ladder on our visit) and keep descending to a low, damp, banged squeeze. This was found to sump in very wet conditions, with water entering from the entrance side. Attempts at damming and bailing were unsuccessful and in the end we dived it - not recommended for the faint hearted.

Beyond the squeeze, a traverse on the left wall followed by a short pitch requires a total of about 15m of hand line for protection. Descend stone slope to a narrow passage, then take a left turn down a narrow passage, then take a left turn down a small tunnel. This becomes low, and a hole on the right is the head of a 30m pitch (50m).

Belay rope at the head of the 45° tube, and descend until, on emerging from the tube, way ahead is blocked by a large boulder. Descend to left, to point overlooking a 30m free hang. Landing on the floor of a chamber free-climb up 10m over boulders to the route to Dromadaire. (Note: there are several such climbs from this chamber - make sure it's the well worn one!) The free hanging part of this pitch may be bypassed by climbing in the roof; easier to find on return, from top of boulder pile.

Continue through a seemingly unending succession of chambers mostly full of large boulders or rubble. One such is Salle de Bivouac, easily recognised by the piles of rusty cans and used carbide. Finally, the passage opens out into the sandy-floored Desert, where large stal bosses stand around like gaint cacti. This is the start of the magnificent Salle du Dromadaire, the largest chamber in the system. Even with the aid of magnesium flares, we were not able to see it all!

Turning right on entering and following the right-hand wall leads to a large passage and the way on to Pont de Gerbaut.

Pitch Summary: Pène Blanque

Traverse 1	10m handline
10m climb	25' ladder
Traverse 2	15m handline
30m pitch	50m rope or 20m handline and exposed free climb

6. Pont de Gerbaut.

Pont de Gerbaut is in many ways the key to the traverse route. It consists of a series of short but quite wet pitches down to a section of active stream passage joining at one end with Réseau Bernadette, and at the other with Pene Blanque. Once the entrance series is rigged trips in both directions can be undertaken in order to gain familiarity with the route and check that all the fixed aids are in place and in good condition. It would also be useful to rig the cave in advance of a traverse trip to act as an escape route should anything go amiss.

The entrance can be found by following the path to Pene Blanque up through the trees to the aforementioned junction, Pene Blanque is to the right while Pont de Gerbaut is straight ahead up a gently climbing path to a rocky outcrop in a clearing at the base of which is the entrance.

Pont de Gerbaut was not descended by us in 1983, but a reliable pitch list was obtained courtesy of DUSS (again!) who left the cave rigged during their entire stay.

Pitch summary: Pont de Gerbaut

PITCH	LENGTH	TACKLE
ENT	43m	65m rope
2	17m	2 x 25' ladder and 20' handline at top
3	10m	35' ladder
4	5m	15' ladder
5	5m	15' ladder
6	10m	30' ladder - easy but exposed free climb to right

7. Coquille.

Coquille is one of the highest possible entrances from which to start the traverse trip, and a journey from Coquille to Pène Blanque is a very serious undertaking. The cave connects at the bottom end with Trou Mile via 2 pitches. The first of these 48m Jolfre, connects upwards from Coquille into Gouffre Raymonde and consists of an 8m and 40m pitch separated by a 7m traverse - use 65m of rope. The second pitch 10m connects Gouffre Raymonde with Trou Mile in a downward direction - use 30' ladder.

Pitch Summary: Coquille

PITCH	LENGTH	TACKLE
ENT	8m	25' ladder
1	18m	25m rope
2	20m	30m rope
3	14m	25m rope
4- 7m climb	7m	25' ladder (optional)
5	28m	40m rope
6	11m	30' ladder
48 JOLFRE	48m	8m and 40m and 7m traverse - 65m rope
8	10m	30' ladder

8. Duplessis.

We did not visit this cave in 1983, and the following pitch list was based on study of the survey and discussion with other cavers in the area. Use these figures for guidance only.

Entrance No. 1 60m, 12m traverse. 20m down

or

Entrance No. 2 120m rope (lots of rebelay), then 25m, 20m, 4m, 16m, 14m, all rope lengths for SRT pitches. Then complicated traverse around ledges (18m rope) leads to Puits Deltiel (148m rope) in Gouffre Raymonde.

9. Sarrat

Not visited by MCG. Figures for guidance only based on survey and discussions: 12m, 18m, 19m, 18m, 21m, 30m, 26m, 65m, 45m, rope.

10. Foxeens.

Not visited by MCG. Figures for guidance only based on survey and discussions: 50m, 40m, 20m, 20m, 20m, 20m, rope.

11. Gouffre de la Henne Morte.

Not visited by MCG. Figures for guidance only based on survey and discussions: Either: 15m, 10m, 30m, 3x10m, 40m, 80m, 10m, 15m, 90m, 28m, 20m, 10m, 10m, 2x20m. Or: 2x80m, 30m, rope.

Our Visit; was it worthwhile?

Well, was the expedition a success? Unfortunately we did not achieve as much as we had hoped, and did not of course manage a traverse trip. On the other hand, a lot of time was spent underground, with many members undertaking a fairly long trip every other day. In all a total of five separate areas of the system were explored, and a great deal of information about both the cave system and the surrounding area was gathered.

Many of us came back a great deal wiser to the problems of caving abroad in an unfamiliar area, and I am sure everyone had an enjoyable 2 weeks. These facts alone must indicate a certain degree of success.

This was the first major MCG expedition for a number of years and for many, their first experience of caving abroad. Not surprisingly therefore, we had our fair share of problems, no the least of which was the almost constant rain, making life quite unpleasant for those who were camping. It was this fact, together with the higher degree of caving fitness required to undertake trips of this length, which was undoubtedly responsible for life falling into a regular pattern of one day underground followed by one day drying and sorting gear.

Having a comparatively long journey to get to the cave entrances meant that parties were rarely underground much before midday and consequently not back at camp before 10.00 or 11.00pm. This situation could certainly have been alleviated by camping on the mountain itself, but at the expense of further splitting an already disjointed group. This as much as anything else served to show that holidays, in the conventional sense, and caving of this type do not mix particularly well.

It is of course perfectly feasible for members to join an expedition for a few days caving and integrate this with a longer family holiday, provided the main caving nucleus works together as a group, staying in total control of the caving activities and its resources. This requires travelling to the chosen area as a coherent group, ideally in one vehicle together with all the tackle, and camping as close to the caves as comfortably possible. An elected leader to coordinate all caving activities and keep tabs on where all the tackle is going, plus some form of large communal cooking/tackle shelter, are two other items, the importance of which was emphasised during our stay in France.

So, although we made our fair share of mistakes, everyone learnt a great deal and gained valuable experience which will be put to good use in the organisation of future expeditions, hopefully now to become a regular feature of club activities.

Useful Information.

Maps

Maps of the area are produced by Institut géographique national.

The cave entrances are found on sheet Aspet 1/2 of the 1:25,000 series.

Arbas is on sheet Aspet 3/4 of the 1:25,000 series.

Alternatively the whole area is on sheet No. 1947 "Aspet" of the 1:50,000 series.

Cave Surveys etc

The main source of information about the system is a superb leather bound 350 page book entitled "La Coumo D'Hyouernedo", by Duchene de Drillat.

This book (in French) contains a detailed history of the exploration of the system with many photographs, together with a full survey of the known system, and is an essential item for any proposed visit to the cave.

Camping

Camping is available in a large field adjacent to a stream 500m north of Arbas on the D13. Alternatively in the large meadow at the top of the mountain, or the smaller clearing around Trou Mile entrance.

Arbas

Arbas has 2 general stores, a butcher, baker, 2 cafés, a caving 'hut', and public toilets (behind the town hall). The nearest bank is at St Giron.

Caving shops

The nearest caving shop is at St Gaudens, this has a fairly basic stock mainly of Petzl equipment. Toulouse however, has 2 caving shops, each of which is well stocked and should provide almost anything required.

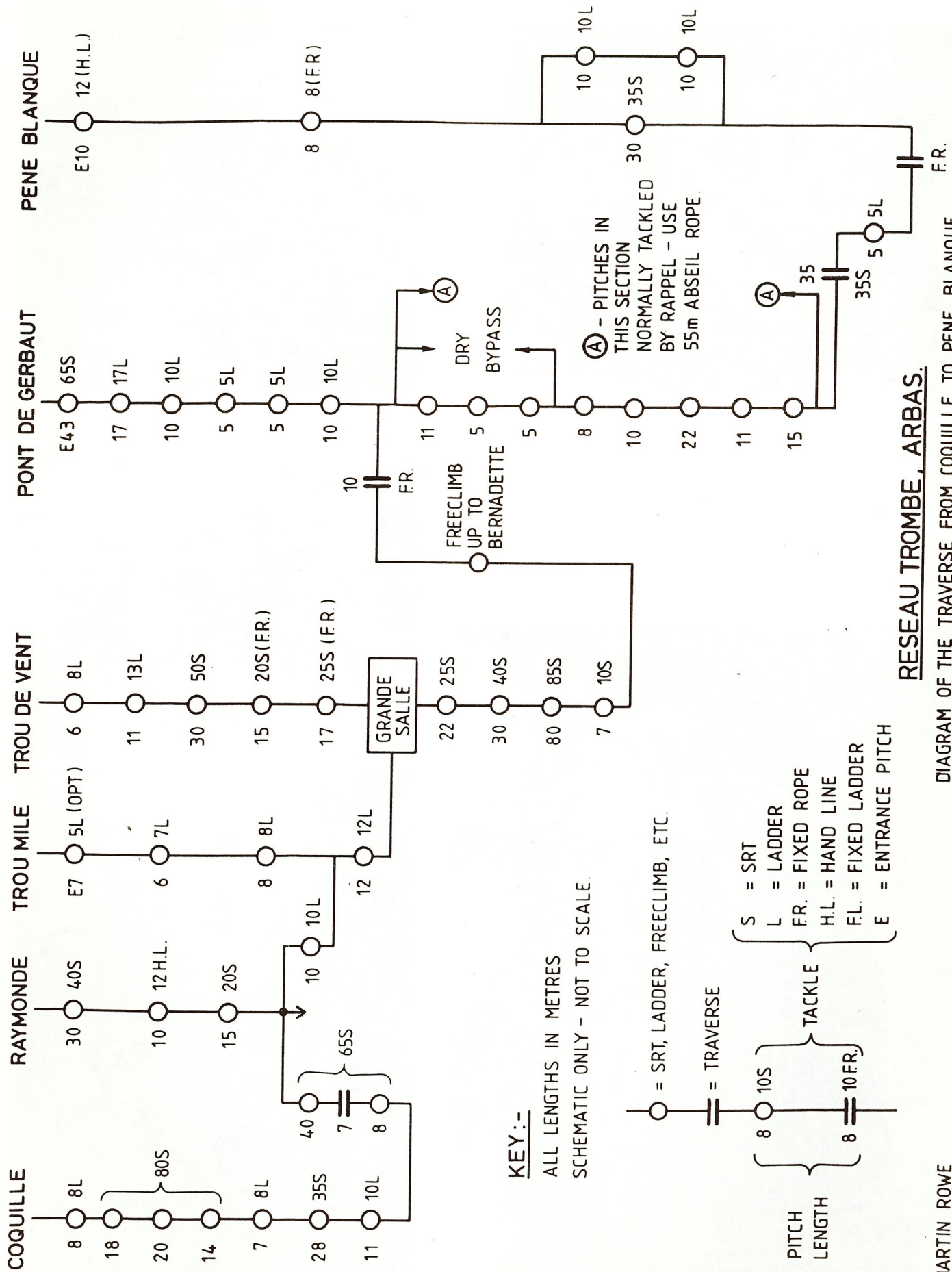
Weather

We were informed by locals that the last 2 weeks in August are almost always very wet (surprise, surprise!) while the periods either side are usually quite dry and hot.

Local weather forecasts can be obtained by phone from the following numbers:

TOULOUSE 710276 (1 Day)
TOULOUSE 711112 (4 day outlook)
ST GIRON 662822 (1 day outlook)

Finally - many thanks to Durham University SS and the Whernside Manor for their help and information provided during our stay.



1953.....



Preparing to descend Eastwater Cavern, 3rd June 1953, Tony Knibbs in foreground.



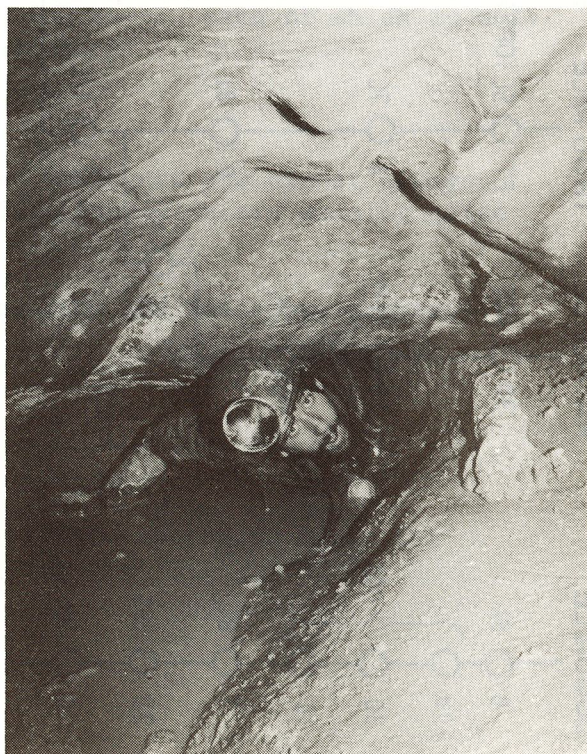
↑ Tony Knibbs with his transport.

↓ The Speed brothers, New Inn, Priddy.

1983.....



Pène Blanche; the 30m pitch.



Martin Rowe in Pène Blanche. Two days earlier, this passage had sumped to a level near the top of the picture.

Dim Recollections of 1953 and All That

by Tony Knibbs

A recent expedition into the family photograph album brought to light a picture of a scruffy crowd around a cave entrance. It shows a group of novice cavers, including me, waiting to enter Eastwater Swallet. It is Saturday July 3rd, 1953, about midday and only a few minutes from my first trip in a limestone cave. Up to this point my experience had been confined to chalk and hearth-stone mines within cycling distance of my home in Surrey.

But this was it - final confirmation of the magic world so lovingly described by C. H. D. Cullingford in his book "Exploring Caves". I remember finding that book in the children's section of my local library.

Nostalgic though it is to me, the real purpose of the photograph is to serve as a starting point for me to think back over thirty years to recount some impressions of caving at that time. Perhaps the place to start is in the caves themselves.

It must be appreciated that caving was quite a 'young' sport in those days; few of the caves were fully grown and many had not even seen the light of a carbide lamp. Although it was opened in 1901, Swildons Hole was only explored to just beyond Sump 2. The only known detours from the streamway below the Forty-foot Pot were Tratman's Temple and the Black Hole which was regarded as a hard trip. The deconsecration of Trat's Temple in early 1953 opened a new chapter in the cave's long history of exploration.

Indeed, looking back, it seems as if a whole new era of discovery was just beginning on Mendip. Excluding the five Bathstone mines, there are 61 sites described in "Mendip Underground". Almost half of these had not been discovered in early 1953, and these included some very important caves: St. Cuthberts Swallet, Manor Farm Swallet, Sludge Pit Hole, Tynings Barrows Swallet, Thrupe Lane Swallet, Reservoir Hole, Hillier's Cave, Withyhill Cave, Shatter Cave . . . mind you, we never found a shortage of caving trips to do. Just like today, the minority of really big systems provided most of the fun on Mendip.

Until one actually arrived in a caving area there was not easily available indication of what to wear or where to go. There were no suppliers of caving gear, indeed I cannot recall one single item of equipment which was sold purely for caving. Cullingford's was the only book to offer hints on clothing and equipment, and did so in a very avuncular, relaxed way.

The usual answer to the question of what to wear was, "Oh, any old clothes, with wool next to the skin". Heavy emphasis was always given to the wool aspect, making it sound as though death, or at least pneumonia, would result if anything else was worn. Old clothes came from two sources (once you had worn out your own), the jumble sale, or the ex-War Department surplus suppliers.

It is worth noting that some people simply went caving in whatever they stood up in. The queues of cavers above and below the forty-foot Pot in Swildons were good places to study standards of sartorial elegance. Committed cavers usually wore a boiler suit, or a sweater tucked into trousers. Casual visitors wore anything - three-piece suits and ties, Scout uniform, shorts and plimsolls, stockings and high-heeled shoes!

As they still do, jumble sales offered an amazingly cheap source of ill-fitting garments in quite unsuitable colours and often bearing the scars of previous

battles. If you were really unlucky you could (as I did) buy back your own sweater which a doting mother had given to a needy-looking member of the Scout movement. I thought the colour looked familiar!

Peace having broken out only eight years before, there was then a vast quantity of ex-WD surplus clothing to choose from. Submarine crew heavyweight woollen sweaters, socks and long johns were popular, and a variety of boiler suits could be found. There were more exotic items like tank crew suits, diving suits and electrically heated flying suits, but these were usually too rigid and heavy to do more than stand up in. Anyway, strength could be a disadvantage; I vividly remember climbing halfway up the Forty-foot ladder in Swildons to cut holes in the legs of a tank suit which was almost full of water, immobilising the wearer.

Keeping dry was a major problem. The yellow rubberised cotton "goon suit" had not quite arrived in sufficient numbers in 1953, neither had the green anti-kerosene suit. Fisherman's style oilskins were popular, so were cheap ex-WD anoraks, and cut-down raincoats were often seen. Most amusing were ex-army gas capes and ponchos. The former had a shape formed in the back to accommodate a shoulder pack, consequently every wearer took on a hunchbacked appearance. Ponchos were designed to serve both as a raincoat and as a groundsheet - it also had distinct possibilities as a makeshift tent or even as a burial sheet in extremis.

Until the Goon Suit there was no really satisfactory answer to keeping dry. Many bright ideas came to grief under the Forty-foot waterfall, and those that didn't had to admit defeat in Sump 1. Getting wet was part of the fun.

Leather ex-army boots were the common footwear. Some had several rows of single hobnails, or had their soles peppered with small brads, and metal screwed-on toe and heel plates. This hazardous combination produced a sensation of caving on ice skates, and could be relied upon to liven up any trip. My own favourites were the Australian "Russet" boots which come without nails and were therefore amenable to accepting any configuration of climbing boot nails.

Nails and nailing patterns varied considerably, as did opinion as to whether it was best to use nails harder or softer than the rock. Star muggers, muggers, tricounis, triple-hobs, dinkers - all were household words to cavers in the 'fifties. To apply a couple of pounds of iron nails to a pair of boots could take several hours, but the effort was rewarded by boots capable of striking sparks of the road when running to the pub, damaging ropes beyond belief and inflicting serious injury to caves and cavers.

The screeching and scraping of a party wearing nailed boots could be quite deafening. Boots with rubber Commando soles brought about an uncanny quietness to movement underground and afforded an unusual degree of comfort. Naturally, opinion was sharply divided over whether Commando soles were an improvement or simply a dangerous experiment. But wearing was believing.

Looking again at the photograph, it will be seen that few cavers apparently wore helmets. Being a mostly novice party, it is not truly representative; but helmets were not generally available outside mining areas, and not quite at the top of everyone's list of priorities.

There were many diehards (almost literally) who scorned helmets, preferring woollen caps, felt hats or the like. Surprisingly, it was in Yorkshire where resistance to helmets seemed to persist most strongly. When exposed to moisture

over long periods, the compressed cardboard (!) mining helmet softened and became pliable, so I suppose its protection was not really that much better than a tweed deer-stalker hat with a few pages of the News Chronicle crumpled into it.

One or two people tried ex-army steel helmets, but these proved too large and cumbersome - certainly in Mendip caves. Books by Casteret invariably featured photo's of speleos wearing tin hats of one type or another, but I think the French had a deeper, psychological reason for posing in them.

The subject of lighting cannot be addressed without airing that famous quote from H. E. Balch contained in "Mendip - Its Swallet Caves and Rock Shelters" (1937). With reference to the strong draught at the 12 foot pot in the upper streamway of Swildons, he wrote " . . . candles are by common consent the most dependable illuminant, as they cast no treacherous shadows . . . " To this the contemporary response was, "because they give no bloody light!!"

Although remembered in jokes and songs, candles had been relegated to emergency use only by the 1950's. Beginners normally carried a torch or front cycle lamp, hung around the neck on a piece of string. Glass lenses were usually removed or replaced with perspex; they never lasted very long and broken glass was very unwelcome in a narrow crawl.

The vogue amongst the Mendip cognoscenti was the faithful acetylene caplamp available from Caswells, in Midsomer Norton, for seven shillings and sixpence (about 40 pence). Alongside it on the helmet was usually mounted an electric lamp - often the front of the cycle lamp - with a battery box on the back. A Woolworth's switch and corroded wire completed the ensemble.

Recent experience with acetylene lamps in the Pyrenees reminded me of just how adept we all were at using the small Daylight or Premier caplamps. I recently quoted four hours as a fair duration for a "stinky" lamp; this was received with some suspicion, but this figure reflects a level of skill which neither I nor most other cavers now possess. We were also good at keeping lamps alight under waterfalls. Similar claims concerning Sump 1 were usually dismissed, but I do remember one caver telling a sceptical audience that, "if you duck under very quickly, the lamp will stay alight".

Both nickle/iron and lead/acid mining caplamps were readily available thirty years ago. The only reason I can see for their not being in more widespread use in caving is that of price; I have a note that a NIFE 113C caplamp cost seven pounds and five shillings in 1959. Prices moved but slowly in those days and this figure was probably equivalent, in the early 'fifties, to about £65 - £75 at current levels.

Tackle used in 1953 would horrify today's cavers. I do not have accurate data to hand, but suffice it to say that carrying a wet 20 foot ladder made from 3/4 inch diameter hemp rope and 12 inch long ash rungs was troublesome. Dragging it out of several hundred feet of occasionally narrow passage-way produced an acute dislike of the whole unmanageable, soggy, wet mess. And hemp lifelines brought on a similar feeling.

Yorkshire was the best place to "enjoy" rope ladders. I recall a trip down Bar Pot into Gaping Ghyll in 1956 where the effort of four of us carrying the tackle - onto the fell and into the cave - overshadowed the whole adventure. On a long pitch, the first few steps on the ascent merely served to take up the slack; it was like running up the steps of a downward-moving escalator.

While we were still struggling with our traditional heavy tackle, our cunning French colleagues had perfected lightweight wire and dural ladders, which were slowly gaining popularity in Britain.

On meeting his first "electron" ladder in 1954, a friend of mine decided to give up caving because it looked too fragile. There's gratitude for you. I wonder what he would have made of S.R.T.

Referring again to the photograph, the return trip to the bottom of Dolphin Chimney took four hours. The next day a trip to Barnes' Loop in Swildons took six hours with the same group of twenty odd novices.

Such long times are not explained merely as the result of caving with so many novices; trips simply took longer in those days. It was all rather leisurely - almost a though the trip duration extended to fill the time available. On another trip to Barnes' Loop, my two Orpheus C.C. companions produced thermos flasks of rum-laced tea, and bags of cheese sandwiches which we consumed before getting out the flashpowder to take some photos on a folding camera. They don't make caving trips like that any more.

I also have a note of a 24-hour trip into St.Cuthberts in 1954. Some new exploration was involved, but the whole thing would now be done in no more than eight hours. Mind you, the Dining Room lived up to its name in those days and we spent several happy hours over cups of hot tea or soup between excursions in the system. The pace may have been slow, but I do recall being very tired afterwards, and very wrinkled in hands and feet from long exposure to water.

Travelling was also slower. Hitch-hiking was cheap but could take about twelve hours out of a weekend. Few cavers owned cars and there were very few cavers living in London and the Home Counties. Motorcycles were the most popular form of transport - the 120 mile journey was rather long for cycling unless the visit was for a week or more to allow recovery from the exertion.

The journey to Mendip by motorcycle, stopping at the Golden Arrow on the A4 for egg and chips, took about four hours. Winter journeys could be very cold and miserable indeed, ice and such adding immensely to the problems and providing talking points for discussing long afterwards. However, given a bright and dry summer evening, no pillion passenger and a light load, the westward journey was a real pleasure.

Six or seven years ago, I rode a motorcycle to Mendip again. It was awful. Mechanical problems dogged the outward journey and the return was made in thick snow and with failing lights; I was glad when they finally packed up at Andover allowing me to retire to an hotel.

Before I had my own transport, the best journey that I made was to South Wales in 1954 to spend a week's caving with Malcolm Cotter. He was in the RAF and I was waiting to go into the army. My journey started by coach from London, meeting Malcolm at Gloucester, continuing to Merthyr Tydfil where we caught a train at about 5.30 am as the miners were going on shift. It was a gorgeous morning and the journey via Pontsticill, Brecon and Sonnybridge to reach Penwyllt was enchanting. Of course, that was when SWCC had their H.Q. down in the valley, and the walk downhill brought us back to reality.

I have never repeated the "pleasures" of sleeping in the hayloft at Manor Farm, Priddy. To shack-up there was to join a scruffy but elite bunch of itinerant cavers; it was the original "of no fixed abode". They hailed from many different places, arrived by different means, and were as individual as rocks in a wall. But they happily shared the squalor of Main's Barn, coarse caving and a taste for rough cider (alias "screech") at eight old pence per earthenware

potted pint at the New Inn. Regardless of the slow service by Emily, Sylvester or Oliver Speed, one could become remarkably ill for two shillings. The shared hangover was also quite popular.

For no extra expenses, the Hunter's offered a sore throat in addition to a hangover. Now the most famous cavers pub in the world, the Hunter's boasted the finest free cabaret - run by cavers, for cavers. It played to a packed singing room every single Saturday night.

And it was here that one made the acquaintance of Eskimo Nell, Angeline, the Lobster, Lilian, a Lady from Winnepeg and another called Blackbird, the Vicar of Dockside Church, Sally Hawkins, and a whole host of utterly charming fairytale debauchees. It was a miracle that the participants survived the pleasure, let alone went caving on Sunday.

I don't know how Ben Dors put up with it all. He had the most remarkable knack of opening the door into the singing room just as, in song you understand, the blacksmith was giving Angeline" bloody, f*****g hell". His mock-scolding comment, "they words, they words" were themselves enshrined in song.

The carousing was in decline by the early'sixties, and I often wonder what it was that unified and animated us in that way. Maybe it was an exorcism of the last shadows of the war, or the spiritual upsurge of new-found peace, or perhaps it was the common bond of National Service which fostered such a spirit of enjoyment.

Whatever it was has passed and will not return. No more, the Sunday morning hoarseness, the splitting headache, the queasy stomach. No need, now, to wander bleary-eyed around Priddy Green in search of one's motorcycle, inadvertently ridden into a grassy oblivion the night before.

My recollections have now moved from the photograph via various huts, several hundred caving trips and countless good friends, to return to the present day. There is no doubt in my mind that, thirty years ago, caving was very demanding of its devotees; it was not more enjoyable - just harder.

So many developments have taken place, over the years, which have made caving easier or more enjoyable. In order of importance, I would place the wetsuit at the top of my list of benefits, followed closely by lightweight ladders and nylon rope. Then I would add the motorcar and the motorway.

It is a curious thing, that, in spite of my advancing years, improvements in equipment, techniques and easier travelling, are enabling me to achieve as much, or more, than I ever did thirty years ago. If this is all a dream, for God's sake don't wake me up for another thirty years!!

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A Voice from the Past

Among the items passed on to me when I took over as Editor, was a "Pending" file containing various items awaiting publication. One item warranted a second look - a pair of typed sheets, slightly yellowing, which it appears had closely escaped destruction by burning. It was clear on reading the article that it was a beginner's impressions of the old cottage; not the 1960 wooden cottage, but the original M.C.G. cottage in Nether Wood. Further research in the archives by Jon Roberts (see elsewhere in this publication) brought to light the first reference to a Joy(ce) Dyer, in June 1959, and it is assumed that the piece was written at about this time.

Now here it is, published at last, after only 25 years in the "Pending" file

CAVING IMPRESSIONS

I have been asked by certain members to give an account of my first impressions of the Club, so they themselves are to blame for the following.

The trouble all started the last weekend of June. I had journeyed down to Cheddar by train and there met Malcolm who took me to the cottage. To my surprise Malcolm suddenly turned off the road and took a tortuous, bumpy route along Velvet Bottom. As we approached a copse he pointed to the right and proudly announced that we had reached the cottage.

I considered this a bit of an exaggeration, but the brass plaque on the door confirmed that this was indeed the notorious 'Cottage'.

The door was thrown open and I surveyed a large room that seemed a cross-breed between a kitchen, a ranch and a junk shop - the junk shop taking predominance. Boiler suits and helmets were shrewn around in an unartistic manner, and propped up on one window sill was a large beer barrel. I had heard of a certain 'house warming party' that had been recently held at the Cottage and wondered whether this barrel was the origin of the orgie.

We then passed into another smaller room which had been reserved as the 'ladies bedroom'. This was admittedly much tidier except for two gaudy posters, warning me of the Club's feelings towards women!

However, the 'junk-shop-look' persisted in the last room which held the title of the men's bedroom.

Later I was introduced to an old black gramophone and 'Peter' the tea chest which I later found out to constitute the Cottage Orchestra.

I must admit after seeing the Cottage I wondered what the members would be like - at least I had one consolation namely that they couldn't be as untidy as the Cottage. Later that evening, peace was disturbed by an invasion of tramps. The whole cottage was suddenly filled with noise as they stalked through the dining room to the bedroom; shouted instructions from one end of the cottage to the other, whilst others congregated round four poor little primuses and persisted pumping the living daylights out of them as though they were having a 'hate session'.

Whilst 'feeding time' was in progress nobody noticed me so I was able to study them in peace. The garb would have done justice to a fancy dress parade - First Prize undoubtedly being awarded to a certain member dressed in a cowboy outfit.

Later that evening there was a sudden exodus to pay a social call on Mrs. Speed; I believe it is a custom of the Club. When we returned we all sat round the fire, drinking coffee and playing the gramophone, and when I retired about 1.30 they were still trying to talk over the blare of the 'music' - no doubt another Club custom.

In case I have discouraged any other prospective covers please let me assure you you will soon find yourself at home with Club - my friends even consider I look like a tramp now!

Joy Dyer.



Above: Nether Wood Cottage as it was in the late 1950's.

Nordrach - the History of a Name

The MCG has, almost since its foundation, been associated with the area on Mendip known as Nordrach. When, therefore, the Post Office would not recognise "Nordrach" as the postal address for our new cottage, it seemed appropriate to name it "Nordrach Cottage" thereby continuing our links with the name.

But how many members know the origin of the name "Nordrach"? In the 1967 MCG Journal an "Etymology of Central Mendip Place Names" gives the "possible or probably derivation" as "Noro, Old English, (?); drag, Old Norse, a hill", and for some time that has remained our best information on the subject.

Recently, however, I came upon a copy of the 1978 Journal of the Axbridge Archeological and Local History Society, in which was printed the results of research into the history of Nordrach. With the kind permission of the author, Mr. R. L. Burgess, the article is reproduced here; corrections to the original text were provided by the author.

Nordrach-on-Mendip

The name Nordrach-on-Mendip can only be correctly applied to sixty five acres of the enclosed hill lands in the parish of Ubley. In early perambulations it was called Sweet Hill and the nearby road junction was Pains Cross. The land became known as Willoughby's when it was enclosed and shortly after, Willoughby's Farm was built. The lands include part of the Blackmoor Valley, in which lie the remains of the Mendip Mineries lead smelting works.

William Wood, M.D., of Harley Street and Roehampton, purchased the property around 1874. He was one of the directors of the company engaged in reworking the old lead slags and was subsequently appointed liquidator when the company ceased operations in 1874. During Dr. Wood's occupation the house was used as a summer holiday home for mentally handicapped patients from London. On his death, the property passed to Dr. Wood's wife, who sold it in 1898.

At about this time two, young, British doctors were receiving treatment for Tuberculosis in Germany. This disease, which accounted for about one-sixth of the deaths in this country, had recently been studied in Germany and was found to be caused by milk and meat from infected animals. The disease affected both the wealthy and under privileged classes alike but those with money could travel to the healthy atmosphere of the Black Forest to receive treatment from Dr. Otto Walther. This treatment was basically, plenty of fresh air, away from towns and cities and wholesome food including milk which had been pasteurised. This new process of sterilisation was first applied to milk by Professor Kock who had studied Tuberculosis and tried to develop a vaccine to fight the disease. In London the Brompton Hospital was treating the disease but was unable to cope fully with the large numbers of patients.

The two doctors, Rowland Thurnam and Neville Gwynn, having been cured by Dr. Walther, decided to open their own Sanatorium in England and, with Dr. Walther's approval, use his methods. They toured the countryside in search of a suitable location and finally found it on Mendip. In January 1899 the former Willoughby's Farm was opened as a Sanatorium and named Nordrach on Mendip in honour of Dr. Otto Walther and his establishment at Nordrach in the Black Forest.

It was reported at the time, that the demand for their services was so great, even at £20 per week, that they opened before the alterations had been completed. The Western Daily Press reporter who visited Nordrach

soon after the opening drove across the moor from Cheddar in a rainstorm, but found the buildings well sheltered by the surrounding trees. Even so, he noted most of the windows were open, allowing a full circulation of air. The furniture had been specially designed by Dr. Thurnam and could easily be wiped over with a damp cloth and did not harbour dust, at that time judged to be responsible for the spread of the disease.

A Pasteurising plant had been installed and the processing and cooking of all the food was personally supervised by the doctor. The milk, meat and vegetables were obtained from local farms. The meat and milk were served in large quantities at every meal and a special effort was made by the staff to ensure that the plates were cleared of food. At Christmas they would have the full traditional lunch and in the evening would be served Irish Stew or something similar.

The doctors lived and ate with their patients in order to observe them closely and regulate their exercise and rest periods. This was probably necessary as the form of treatment was relatively new. One patient was 'observed' leaving the nearby Wellsway Inn, on returning to Nordrach he was told that a carriage had been ordered and that he was to pack his belongings and leave. Alcohol was not part of the treatment.

Dr. Thurnam had a very strong personality but was very fair with staff and patients. He was a brilliant musician and frequently gave concerts in the Music Room which was a dominant feature of his house which he named 'Wahnfried' possibly after Richard Wagner's 'Villa Wahnfried' in Bayreuth. This is the house in the grounds, now known as 'Swiss Cottage'. The nearby 'Stirrup Cup' was then an inn, the meeting place of the hunt, Dr. Thurnam, a vinophobe, called it 'Finckenzeller'. The lodge was built for Mr. Frank King, the Engineer, who took over the job from his father and remained until the closure.

In 1940 Nordrach hospital was used by Bristol Corporation to house the patients of the Children's Hospital during the bombing of the city. At the same time the Corporation used the old lead smelting flues for storage purposes, probably accounting for their good state of preservation. On the introduction of the National Health Service, Nordrach Hospital was allocated to the Ham Green Hospital Group and reverted to the treatment of T.B., but, due to its remoteness and the decline of the disease, it was closed in 1956, but was, however, maintained in case of an epidemic. A few months after closure it was reopened as a hostel for the refugees of the Hungarian Uprising.

Since the premises were sold in 1958, several attempts have been made to open it as a Country Club. This has only been possible on a limited scale, the main problem being planning permission as the sewage disposal system is inadequate and the cost of connection to the main at Ubley would be prohibitive.

The name Nordrach does not appear on the new series 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey maps. The Post Office post box still bears the name, although the Postal District is Blagdon, Bristol, BS18. It would be a pity if the name Nordrach became obsolete as have Pains Cross and Sweet Hill.

Nordrach - Germany

Situated about 45 Km. south-east of Kehl, in the sheltered valley of the Talbach, the town of Nordrach is an ideal situation for a Sanatorium. The valley was originally called Norderah, later Nordbach (North Brook)

which became Nordrach in about 1139. The land was cleared by the tenant farmers of the Monastery of Gengenbach who paid not taxes nor owed service to the king.

About the year 1700, Abbot Augustinus Müller founded a glass factory, the raw materials being to hand in the locality with potash and plenty of timber for firing. After the timber had been used up in a particular area the factory was moved. The third and last move was to Talshle next to a dye works which used cobalt from nearby Wittichen and elsewhere. The Napoleonic Wars put an end to these two enterprises by cutting off the export trade.

After several attempts to re-establish industry, in the form of brush making and later pottery, the two factories were left derelict until about 1890 when Dr. Otto Walther visited friends in the neighbourhood. He decided to fulfil a dream and open a Sanatorium, the factory buildings being suitable for conversion. The 'Nordrach Kolonie' opened in 1891 and consumptives came from Germany and many other countries, especially England.

Nordrach is still a popular health resort, or 'Luftkurort' with fine modern clinics and hotels. The modern sanatorium is called a 'Kurhaus' described as 'an hotel with residential consultants' where it is not necessary to see doctors. There are several other hospitals here, including one for nervous diseases. The town now stretches for 'two hours walk' along the valley, where a dozen or so sawmills use the power of the two fast flowing streams.

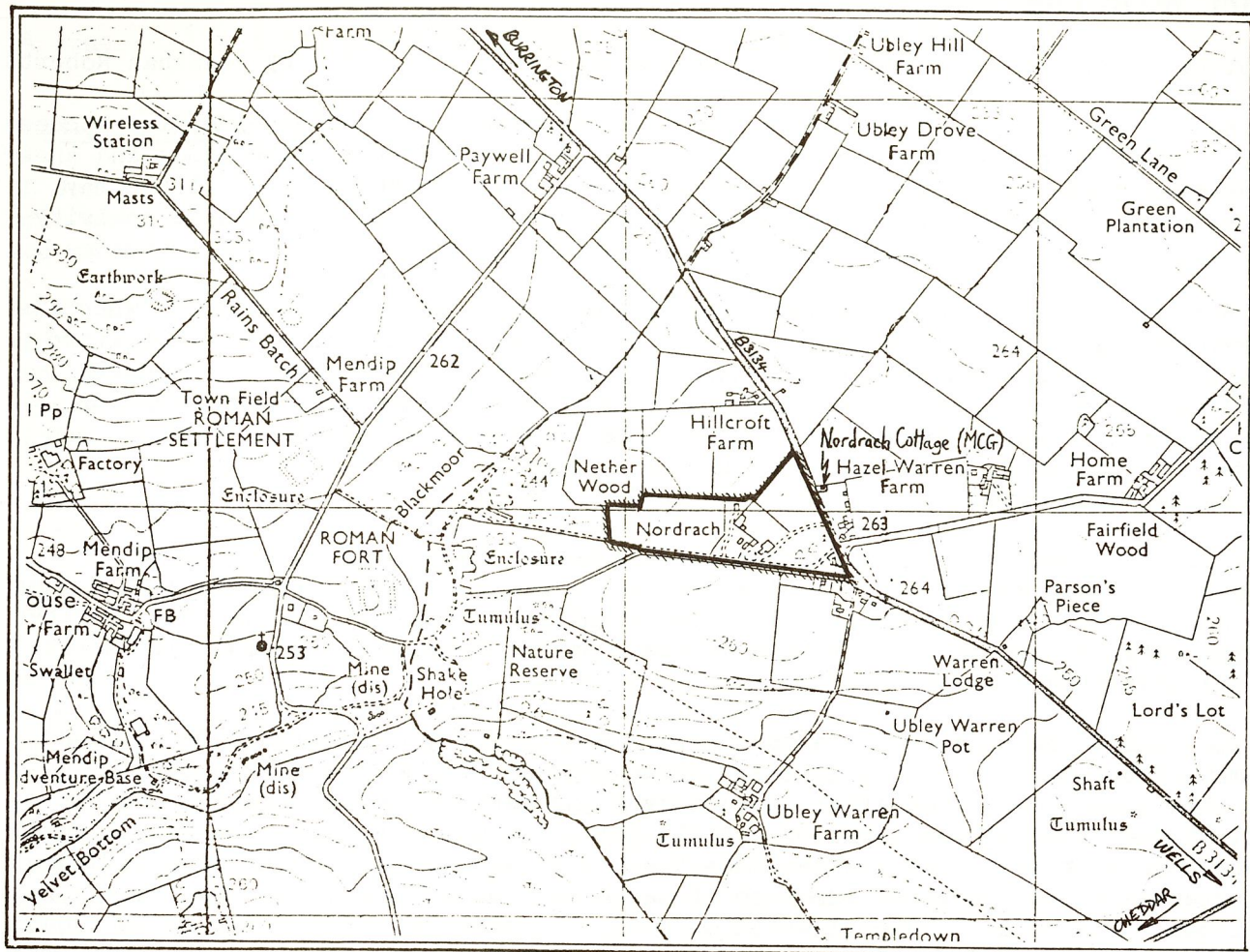
Footnote

This research project was followed in an effort to trace the origin of the name Nordrach and to prove a possible link with Richard Nordraak, a Danish composer who died in 1866 from Tuberculosis. This, however, was pure coincidence and has no connection with either Germany or Britain.

I am grateful to the many people who have taken the trouble to answer my letters of enquiry with helpful suggestions and especially Heilbaderverband Baden-Württemberg, the administrators of the Spas who passed my letter on to Dr. Gerda Walther, the only surviving daughter of Dr. Otto Walther. This lady sent me an interesting letter of political and family history during the latter part of the 19th century. Kurt Spitzmuller forwarded brochures of the Luftkurort. Thanks are also due to Mr. C. D. Pennington of Southmead Hospital, Mr. Frank King, former Engineer of Nordrach and Ham Green Hospitals (now retired) and Mrs. Inge Ulrich who translated the German documents.

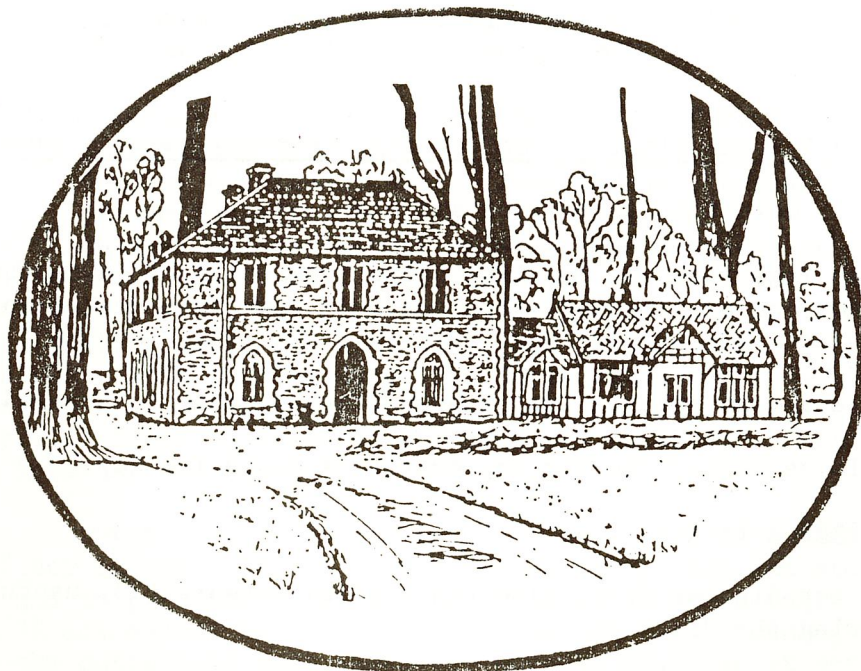
My Collection of notes will be deposited in the Society's Library at King John's Hunting Lodge Museum, Axbridge.

The above article was reprinted with the permission of the author, Mr. R. L. Burgess, and the Axbridge Archeological and Local History Society. It first appeared in the Society's 1978 journal.



Above: A map of the Charterhouse area, showing Nordrach and the MCG Cottage.

Below: A pen sketch of the Nordrach sanatorium in 1983, as the Charterhouse Manor Country Club.



Nether Wood Dig

A HISTORY OF NETHER WOOD SWALLET DIG, to October 1983

by Jonathan Roberts

Digging has opened most of the caves and cave extensions on Mendip. Some digs succeed after a brief effort, others go on... and on... and depend on willing hands and sheer bloody-mindedness before either the cavers or cave concede the battle. Little may happen for many weeks on Mendip digs, suddenly there is a bout of physical activity which may be kept at an intense pace, or it may die away allowing quiet to resume...

When not underground, most diggers' favourite occupation is to speculate on 'when are we next down on Mendip', 'perhaps we'd better push in that direction', 'what if we break through', 'what other digs are there' and 'if only there were more diggers'. Individual spasms of industry do not generally show much impression, the feeling being of back-breaking labour for little reward. Yet over a number of months, progress is achieved, which accumulates dug passage and, finally, the joy of discovering open cave.

The following 'diary' is based on records for Nether Wood Swallet, and gives an impression of one Mendip dig. The description is based on Tony Jarratt's caving diary (for which many thanks to Tony) and edited highlights from the MCG log book. Further digging details are published in the Axbridge Caving Group & Archaeological Society (ACGAS) newsletters for 1969.

For the record the depression in the field, at national grid reference CM 50935589, is part of Ubley Warren Farm. Malcolm Cotter writes: "The site was inspected by me some time around 1960 soon after we took over the cottage in the corner of Nether Wood. At that time it consisted of a small irregular shallow depression with a small deeper portion towards the centre. This inner hole showed indications of subsidence as there was a near vertical exposure of earth some 0.5m high on the west side. The total depth was about 1.75m below field level. The shake hole was quite conspicuous from the track by the gate leading into Nether Wood."

A collapse occurred as a consequence of the July 1968 floods, and was dug briefly by the MCG in August 1968 (Roger Wallington, Greg Smith, Vic Ingraham).

The ACGAS were the first to dig purposely at Nether Wood, in 1969, but their enthusiasm was then redirected to Nettle Pot/Ubley Warren Pot. 'The Complete Caves of Mendip' notes that by May 1970 the shoring had partly given way, and that by 1971 little trace remained. The MCG gained permission in 1982 to work on the site; 1983 sees the first concrete results. The dig hasn't yet 'gone', though hopes remain high.

Axbridge Caving Group & Archaeological Society dig, February to June 1969

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 2 February | Dug 4' down into loose rock and clay. |
| 14-16 February | Sheer legs erected. Dug into solid rock walls 7' down. Found a short passage in clay, bored out by flooding. Also dug 5-6' down in a nearby collapse, with no useful result. |
| 21-22 February | Dug clay and snow ! The sides collapsed owing to the bad weather. |
| 1 March | Collapse buried the digging gear ! A festering day. |
| 20 April | A digging trip. |
| 26 April | Another digging trip. Also fence posts appeared(?), useful for shoring the dig. |
| 3 May | Dug to 'solid wall' on left, widened the working space, and erected shoring. |
| 22-25 May | Much digging, down to solid rift. Shored the sides further. |

8 June Still going down.

14 June Still going down. (No further digging by ACGAS.)

Mendip Caving Group dig, 1983 to date

16 January Site cleared, debris removed and put to one side. Digging commenced - main area of shaft gradually taking shape. Suggest concentrating on old shaft debris. More spades needed. Fencing to be carried out in spring/summer. (Arthur Spain)

14 March Sunday. Sheer legs erected. Dug loose earth and clay down to about 10' alongside original sheet of corrugated iron. Object, to loosen sheet and remove, and dig area to about 6' diameter as a good working area. Either the area must be fenced off or the hole capped this year. (6 on working party: Adrian Duckett, Gordon Lister, Martin Rowe, Arthur Spain, Peter Spain, Clive Towner)

2 April Removed three sheets of iron and dug down a further 4' exposing a large rock on left, with a small slot behind. Still plenty of mud and clay to shift from the middle area. This seems the way down. (Adrian Duckett, Gordon Lister, Alan Mellon, Jon Roberts)

8 May Removed material run in since previous visit. After about an hour, JR noticed a small crack against one side of the depression. This was gradually extended to produce a large boulder weighing 350lbs or so. By using a pulley on the tripod, and putting foot loops in the rope, the combined weight of three people was just enough to raise the boulder off the bottom of the depression. The only problem then was what to do with three people and a boulder all suspended from one karabiner. There was only one answer - take a photograph ! After further gymnastic efforts involving an 8' steel pole the boulder finally reached the top. One more boulder was raised and then we called it a day and covered the hole in metal sheeting. This should be removed before continuing digging as it hides a shaft about 150' deep (well, 10' deep anyway). (Peter Bulling, Jon Roberts, Martin Rowe, Arthur Spain)

15 May Started digging at 11.30am removing earth slumped in from last weekend. A very large and impressive rock was hit, and in trying to dig round it we found it to be one side of a 2' wide slot. Dug down into the slot 3' and probed left and right (towards the north) finding the right hand side most promising. Removed two largish rocks (causing the tripod to collapse). AD could feel a good draught and hear trickling water. We pushed on following a rock wall. The slot now needs deepening, finished at 4.30pm. (Andy Beare, Adrian Duckett, Mike Mintram, Ian Parry, Martin Rowe)

28-30 May Saturday: continued work. (Malcolm Cotter, Bernard Reeves, Graham Sutcliffe)
Sunday: continuous work. (Joan Goddard, Bernard Reeves, Jon Roberts, Graham Sutcliffe)
Monday: All-day attack on dig. Tape measured at end of day, 6m below field level, 5m below top of hole. Rift enlarged and deepened, it trends 345 degrees, towards Netherwood itself. Mud floor needs deepening to simplify work at face - rift appears to be angling under the R.H. wall, but digging now involves a semi-prone position (thinks - it's getting more like Upper Flood every day !) Small tube goes further than the arm can stretch, with possible draught. Quote by Malcolm: "Ah ! A great cavity...at least compared to the previous cavities". (Malcolm Cotter, Bernard Reeves, Jon Roberts, Graham Sutcliffe)

5 June Set to again. AD impressed by last weekend's efforts. Targets were to deepen the floor in the rift, to create more working area and stop having to crouch doubled up, and to push the face. Two hours later an exceedingly muddy Adrian emerged and a clean JR descended. Another two hours and JR (or something that might probably be JR under the coating of mud) ascended. Current position at Netherwood: depth about 21'. Rift with bedrock walls about 1-2' wide, descending below the 15' level and trending 345 degrees. Dipping shallowly towards the wood. The next party may have to bail some water. (Later comment: Don't be daft - we all know there's a huge cave system beneath to drain the water away.) (Adrian Duckett, Jon Roberts)

- 15 June Lots of fun extracting large boulders from rift. MR fell down hole head first but was saved by landing on BR. Looks promising but water still ponds at bottom. (Adrian Duckett, Bernard Reeves, Dave Punter, Martin Rowe, Jon Roberts, Arthur Spain)
- 19 June 100g of plaster to bedrock on right (looking north). (Malcolm Cotter)
Later: Cleared out spoil from bang. (Malcolm Cotter, Dave Punter, Bernard Reeves, Martin Rowe, Arthur Spain)
- 25-26 June Dig continued. Excavations at cross-rift suspended, pushed at R.H. cavity where GS had originally seen water flow. Easyish digging in mud/gravel fill, hole surprised us by turning approx 180 degrees, with bedrock on R.H. side, into what is presumably another N-S rift mostly filled with mud/gravel but with small water-worn passage still continuing, and draughting outwards. The passage dips down slightly. (Jon Roberts, Graham Sutcliffe)
- 17 July More boulders and fill removed from parallel passage. (Bernard Reeves, Jon Roberts)
- 6 August Pipes arrived for Netherwood. Many pairs of hands pushed three 1000lbs pipes to the shakehole. The rest of the morning was spent preparing the foundations; beautiful piece of artwork. After welcome break at Charterhouse Manor, lowering the first pipe proved a mammoth task until MR came up with brain wave solution which placed the pipe nicely. The second pipe went down as though we were experts. Two-thirds of the job done! (Many people helped, including visiting Decca party)
- 7 August Began filling hole, and base for pouring concrete. (Bernard Reeves, Jon Roberts, Martin Rowe, Arthur Spain, Lyn Spain)
- 29 August BR well ahead of everyone else, and tidied up the face. Eye hole giving slight outward air current, with tantalising view ahead. It looked as if there was a slight enlargement after about 4'. ML and DV - putative site foreman - came to assist at Netherwood. Hectic digging and removal of spoil, leading to a constriction (temporary) and sight of PASSAGE beyond - body sized and blocked by a large boulder. The roof is perhaps 3-4' high; clean washed rock can be seen to the right. Passage continues for at least 3-4', downslope, leading to a lip with a hole of unknown size and depth beyond. (Malcolm Cotter, Mike Lovell, Bernard Reeves, Jon Roberts, Don Vosper)
- 3 September AD took first shift, finally removing the large rock. Rift entered and drop reached. Way on blocked by more mud and rocks. This drop is formed by a very narrow rift, the near side of which has a stream bed and the far side goes out of view. (Malcolm Cotter, Adrian Duckett)
- 4 September Further excavation. (Malcolm Cotter, Adrian Duckett, Jon Roberts, Andy Tizzard)
- 25 September JR and MR went over early to dig at face. However, three large boulders had fallen out of the roof near the foot of the pipe and these had to be removed first, along with about ten buckets of mud. The others arrived to finish capping the entrance; JR made a valiant attempt to continue digging as a ton of concrete was poured into the depression above him, but he finally conceded defeat and joined the grouting party. All the spoil - mud and boulders - was used to bring the level up to that of the pipe, and a third section of pipe was added (well, if you can't find a cave, build one!) MR, AS, PB returned later to tidy up. Most of spoil supporting pipe, remainder 'landscaped'. Room left around top of pipe for future spoil. (Pete Bulling, Bill Ducklin, Peter Dymont, Chris Martin, Pat Newman, Jon Roberts, Martin Rowe, Arthur Spain, Bob Varley)
- 23 October Removed the large boulder which had fallen out of the roof. Work continued towards face. JM said he wouldn't write up anything in the log "until I've found at least 1000' of passage". (Malcolm Cotter, John Miriam, Bernard Reeves, Arthur Spain)

29 December Bernard and JR dug at Netherwood for 3 hrs. Moved one of the massive boulders towards the entrance, shifted large quantities of crud, exposing the huge dimensions of the other two boulders lying on the chamber floor and blocking the way to the rift. What with these two, and the other two poised in the roof ready to fall, we need some bang.

30 December Netherwood. Bernard Reeves and Pete Moody. "BANG"!!

1 January 1984 First trip/dig of 1984 - Nether Wood to see the effects of Pete Moody's bang. Massive boulder near entrance was hoisted out using scaffolding as a windlass. Situation down below is frustrating; two boulders have been smithereened, but one of the ceiling boulders has fallen, blocking the passage (partially). The other ceiling boulder is in large pieces. We have a solid right-hand wall in the digging area, but no left-hand wall worth its name. Luckily there is a roof, though it cannot be very thick.

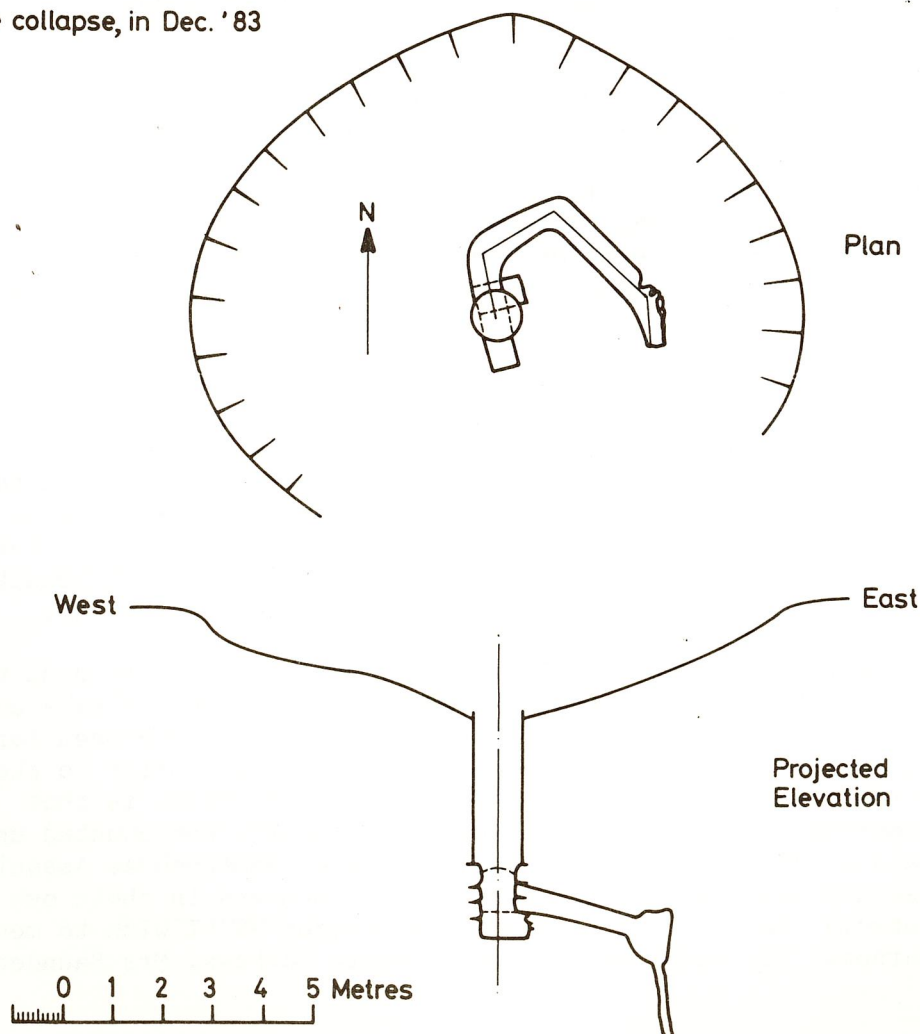
29 January Netherwood dig has collapsed! The drainpipes are still vertical, but the bank to the right above the tunnel has caved in. Digging was resumed but vertically down into the rift biased slightly to the right to pick up the 90° rift. Shoring is necessary if we attempt the former direction.

THE FINAL WORD?

2 November It was reported that the landowner has removed the entrance pipes from Netherwood Swallet, and filled the hole with rubble.

NETHER WOOD SWALLET

Before the collapse, in Dec. '83



MCG Membership 1953 - 1983

by Jonathan Roberts

'WE'RE THREE members of the MCG' goes our song. Fine, but where's your membership card ? And what does it prove ? Some guests are more active cavers than some members. Some do cross that great divide and become privileged to pay member's rates for a night's board and lodging at Nordrach Cottage, but does it really matter that one day another favoured guest becomes a member ?

The short answer is yes, it does, if only to define a baseline from which to assess our collective caving achievements. Strength through numbers, and all that. For the achievements underground are made not by a nebulous entity called the MCG, still less by a motley collection of overworked and unpaid representatives called the MCG committee, but through the corporate activities of individual members.

An historical overview of membership is however almost impossible for any group, by definition. A caving group exists primarily to further caving by and for its members and is concerned with the activity of caving, in contrast to a speleological institution which exists primarily to further the facts of caves and caving. A caving group's Recorder/Librarian exists to bring the speleological dimension into that group, but recorded facts about the group can be in short supply if it is busy caving rather than recording - especially for the formative years before the group's own bureaucracy gets firmly entrenched. There is however one happy corollary - an Hon Recorder/Librarian is never short of a ready excuse not to go underground !

Information about MCG members comes from personal memories and diaries, newsletters and journals, cottage logs, and internal records such as application forms, minutes of committee and general meetings, and the Treasurer's account books. The membership list which follows is based on a wide trawl for facts (and thanks to those who have put up with strange requests from me). But there are facts and facts. Some conflict, some are anecdotal and subjective. Details are especially hazy prior to the 1960s, when most committee records begin; information on individual payment of subs is not explicit until the 1970s. What facts to accept, and how to present them, have been my headaches. So please do regard the list as an interim, fallible attempt at the almost impossible.

There is a superficial value in providing a raw list of names and dates of acceptance into categories of membership. But it is the individual's physical presence, whether member or not, whether paid up or not, which contributes to the Group's achievements. The lengthy task has been to accumulate information on how many years people have been around even though they may not have been members. Information is also listed for categories of membership, and for significant personal contributions to Group administration such as serving on the committee or as auditor.

The requirements for membership - eligibility, nominations, training trips - have varied over the years. To accommodate these changes, I have adopted as a basic definition of membership that the person must have been formally admitted by committee approval, or by general involvement prior to the existence of the committee. The defect with this definition is that Members' Spouses or equivalent categories are generally not counted until 1982, when paid-up MS were formally adopted by the committee as Associates.

(Though those who had been probationary or full members in their own right would be counted.) So to avoid harassment by former MS, I wish to mention here: Pam Charnock, Mrs Gibb, Anne Hiscox, Tricia Mathews, Mrs Saunders,

Maureen Taylor, Patricia Wallington and Rosemary Wicks. No doubt there have been others, including the only male MS in the Group's history, Jess Carson (cf Jane Kirby !)

Honorable mentions must also be made of: some famous guests who had more than a passing involvement with the Group - Dave Judson, and Dick Smith who is now an Australian electronics multi-millionaire; those who didn't quite make membership, for example Colin Carson, and Norman Townsend who was refused because, it appears, he had to break into the cottage to use it (!); and the only person to refuse Honorary Membership - Bryan Ellis.

Right, that's enough preamble, now for a brief history of the MCG so far. Once upon a time late in 1953, two persons went underground. Thirty years later we have a keen membership of over 100 with a spanking new cottage we are all proud of. Great idea, and thank you, Malcolm and Dillan. End of history...the future's up to all of us.

KEY TO CODING OF MEMBERSHIP DETAILS

MEMBERS - those persons formally admitted to the Mendip Caving Group by committee approval, or involved as part of the Group prior to the formation of the committee:

- m A PROBATIONARY or FULL member of the MCG, probably (pre-1970) or definitely (post-1970) fully paid up, or subs paid in kind. The first calendar year of membership is counted in, whether paid up or not, as members admitted late in the year may pay their subs in the first full (second calendar) year. Probationary membership was introduced some time after August 1954, and was at first called associate membership, not to be confused with the present category of associate members.
- a Others formally admitted to existing or past non-caving categories of membership - ASSOCIATE, OVERSEAS, PUBLICATIONS.
- h HONORARY members, who have given outstanding service to the Group. These require the unanimous approval of the whole MCG committee.

Other presence by current or past members:

- : In MCG records, cottage logs, etc, but not recorded as fully paid up, or not a member that year. A past or present member, or an 'active guest' associating with caving activities who subsequently joins the Group.
- ? No recorded presence, but some likelihood. Also indicates where precise dates are unclear, such as when someone ceased to participate in the Group.
- . No recorded presence.

MCG MEMBERSHIP 1953-83

Date of membership

Member=m, Associate=a, Honorary=h

Trustee=T, Committee=C, Auditor=A

Period with MCG

5555556666 6666667777 7777778888

4567890123 4567890123 4567890123

(first known mention=f)

Member

Probtn.

member

Full

member

Nltr/
Hon

member

0 The Marquess of Bath Patron - [2.59]
First 'MCG' cave visit 15.11.53,.....hhhhh hhhhhhhhhh hhhhhhhhhh
by Malcolm Cotter & Dillan Evans1 Malcolm Cotter (A,T) Founder 1.54, 3.64,
?.65, 5.71,
? [3.83]

CCCMmCmmCm mmmmmmmmmmm mmmCCCCmmh

2 Dillan Evans Founder 1.54 -

m?.....

3 Dennis Hemmings Founder 1.54 -

CCC?.....

4 Tony Windale Founder 1.54 -

m.....

5 F Maguire - 2.54f -

m.....

6 Mike Perrins - 2.54f -

m?.....

7 Mike Burbidge - 2.54f -

C?.....

8 Miss B Timpkin - 2.54f -

m.....

9 Tony Crawford - 4.54f -

CCCCCCCmCC C?.....

10 Tony Knibbs (A) - 4.54f .

mmmmCmmmmCCC CCCCCmmmmmm mmmCCCmCCC

11 Geoff Wingrove - 4.54f -

CC?.....

12 George Pape - 6.54f -

mm?:.:.....

13 Diana Crandon - 8.54f -

m?.....

14 Mike Gladstone - 8.54f -

mmmm?.....

15 David Harle - 8.54f -

mmmmCCCCC??

16 Derek Holmes - 8.54f -

mCCC?.....

17 Chris Reynolds - 8.54f, -

2.59 6.60 3.64

m?...:mmmmmm ??a??.....

18 Alec Ruddick - 8.54f -

m?.....

19 Loraine Sandercock - 8.54f -

m?.....

20 Austin Sanders - 8.54f -

mmmmC?.....

21 Ant Taylor - 8.54f -

m?.....

22 Noel Dilly ? 10.54f -

mCCmm?.....

23 Ken Wastie ? 10.54f -

m?.....

24 Don Searle ? ?5.4f .

mCCmmmmmmmm mmmmmmmmmmm mmmmmmmmmmm

25 Leslie James ? 1.55f -

.CCC.....

26 Mr Ball - [3.55f]

.hhhh?.....

27 Tony Davies ? 3.55f -

.CCmm?.....

28 Steve Hunt ? 3.55f -

.mCm?.....

29 John Russell ? 3.55f -

.m?.....

30 Mr Saye - [3.55f]

:hhhh?.....

31 Mike Small ? 3.55f -

.m?.....

32 Brian Stewart ? 3.55f -

.m?.....

33 Bob Towler ? 3.55f -

.m?.....

34 J Thompson ? ?8.55 -

.C?.....

35 Ian Lancaster ? 11.55f -

.mm?.....

36 Max Bacon ? ?5.55 -

.mm?.....

37 Miss J Dodds ? ?5.55 -

.mm?.....

38 Tony Dodds ? ?5.55 -

.mm?.....

39 Julie de Gory ? ?5.55 -

.mm?.....

40 Terry Noble ? ?5.55 -

.mm?.....

41 Hugh Pritchard ? ?5.55f -

.mmmm?.....

42 Robbie Charnock (A) 6.56 ?5.7, 11.68

.mmCCCCCm mmmmmmaaaam mmmmmmmmmmm

43 Richard Woollacott (A) 7.56 8.57, 2.64

.mmCCCCC aaaaaaaa.. ..mmmm

44 Brian Robertson 8.56f ? -

.m?.....

45 Tony Clements 6.57f ? -

.m?.....

46 Gerald Green 6.57f ? -

.m?.....

47 Jack Green 6.57 6.58 -

.mmmmCCCm ?.....

48 Paul Green 6.57 6.58 -

.mmmmmm?.....

49 Reg Johnston ?6.57 ? -

.mm?.....

50 Bob Knott (A) 6.57 6.58, 12.61,

.mm?.....

? 5.71

...mCCCCaa ???mmmaaa.. ..

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MCG MEMBERSHIP 1953-83

Date of membership

Member=m, Associate=a, Honorary=h

(first known mention=f)

Assoc/Oseas/

Trustee=T, Committee=C, Auditor=A

Period with MCG

Member	Probtn. member	Full member	Nitr/ Hon member	5555556666	6666667777	7777778888
4567890123	4567890123	4567890123	4567890123			
51 V Law	6.57f	?	-	...m?.....	.....	.....
52 Brian Robinson	?6.57	?	-	...mm?.....	.....	.....
53 Mike Wills	6.57f	?	-	...m?.....	.....	.....
54 Les Dawes	8.57f	?	-	...m?.....	.....	.....
55 Gerald Pape	8.57f	?	-	...m?.....	.....	.....
56 Ann Leadbetter	1.58f	?	-	...mmm?..	.....	.....
57 Brian Cheyney	4.58	4.59	? .63	...:mmm??a	.....	.....
58 Pete Goddard (A)	5.58	8.59	.	...mmmmmmC	CmCCCCmmmmmm	mmmmmmmmmmmm
59 Brian Haywood	?5.58	2.59	-	...:mm?...	.....	.....
60 Mike Butterfield	8.58f	-	-	...m?.....	.....	.....
61 Bob Johnson	8.58f	-	-	...m??:..	.....	.....
62 John Coles	10.58	1.60	-	...mmm...	.....	.....
63 Fred Lyons	10.58	1.60	-	...mmmmmm	.....	.....
64 Barry Jackson	? .58	-	-	...m??...	.....	.....
65 Robin Goddard	? .58	-	-	...mm?...	.....	.....
66 Martin Adams	? .59	-	-	...mmm?	.....	.....
67 Margaret Openshaw (Fieldhouse)	6.59	6.60	3.64	...mmmm? a?	.....	.....
68 Frank Atkinson	?	-	-	...mm?..	.....	.....
69 Joyce Dyer	8.59	8.60	-	...mmmm?	.....	.....
70 Barrie Ottewill	8.59	8.60	-	...mmmmC	C.....	.....
71 Don Dovaston	9.59	9.60	-	...mmCCC	?.....	.....
72 Pete Dyer	9.59	9.60	3.63	...mmmma	?.....	.....
73 John Barker (A)	10.59	10.60	3.64	...mmCCC	aa?.....	.....
74 Arthur Cox (A)	10.59	10.60	-	...mmmmmm	CCmmmmmmmmmm	mmmmmmmmmm..
75 Mike Rennie (A)	10.59	10.60	-	...mmCCC	Cm?.....	.....
76 Arthur Spain (A)	10.59	10.60,	4.65	.....	mmmmmmmmmm	mmmmmmmmmmCC
77 Pauline Venn (Knibbs)	10.59	10.60	-	...mmmmmm	mmmmmmmmmm	.....
78 Steve Dixon	?	-	-	...:mm?	.....	.....
79 Simon Knight	8.60	11.61	.	...:mmmm	CCCCmmmmmmmm	mmmmmmmmmmmm
80 Ted Gabb	10.60	11.61	2.64	...:mmmm	a.....	.....
81 Ian Leake (A)	10.60	11.61	2.67	...mmmmC	CCma??a?..	.....
82 Bob Templeman	10.60	11.61	4.65	...mmmm	?a?a?.....	.....
83 Sonya Carruthers (Elliott)	12.60	12.61	2.64	.....mm??	a?.....	.....
84 Pat Walsh (T)	1.61	1.62,	7.67	.....	:mmmm	CCCC??mmmm
85 John Rutherford	5.61	-	-	.....	:mmmm	.....
86 Geoff Davies	7.61	6.62	.	.....	:mmmm	mmmmmmmmmmmm
87 Dave Mitchell	7.61	6.62	-	.....	:mmmm	mmmmmmmmmmmm
88 Len Arnold	9.61	10.63	-	.....	:mmmm	mmmm?mmmm..
89 Vic Bragger	? .61	-	-	.....	:mmmm	m?.....
90 Fred Young	-	-	-	.....	:mmmm	.....
91 Alan Cowley	12.61	10.63	-	.....	:mmmm	hhhhhhhhhhh
92 James Gibb (A)	12.61	4.63	-	.....	:mmmm	?.....
93 John Jackson	1.62	-	-	.....	:mmmm	m?m??mm?
94 Charlie Brown	3.62	10.63	-	.....	:mmmm	.....
95 Eric Catherine	3.62	-	3.64	.....	:mmmm	?m?
96 Bryan Pittman	3.62	10.63	.	.....	:mmmm	a????a...
97 Norma Hurst (Cotter)	7.62	10.63,	3.64,	.....	:mmmm	mmmmCCmmmmC
98 George Savage	-	-	8.62	.....	:mmmm	mmmm?mm?m.
99 John Heald	?	-	-	.....	:mmmm	mmmm?mm?m.
100 Barrie Musgrave	?	-	-	.....	:mmmm	mmmm?mm?m.
101 Brian Mee	10.62	10.63	3.74	.....	:mmmm	mmmm?mm?m.
102 Peter Moors	10.62	10.63	-	:mmmm	mmmm?mm?m.
103 Peter Munt	10.62	10.63	? .70	:mmmm	mmmm?mm?m.

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MCG MEMBERSHIP 1953-83

Date of membership

Member=m, Associate=a, Honorary=h
 Trustee=T, Committee=C, Auditor=A
 Period with MCG

MCG MEMBERSHIP 1955-6				Trustee=T, Committee=C, Auditor=A		
		Assoc/Oseas/ Nltr/ Full member	Hon member	Period with MCG		
Member	Probtn. member	Full member	Hon member	5555556666 4567890123	6666667777 4567890123	7777778888 4567890123
104 Ian Chandler	11.62	-	-	.....m?	.....	.....
105 Len Claremont	11.62	-	-	.....mm ?	.....	.....
106 Brian Kelly	11.62	2.64	-	.....mm a?	.....	.....
107 Richard Spain	11.62	-	-	.....mm ?	.....	.....
108 Trevor Westoll	11.62	-	-	.....mm ?	.....	.....
109 Charles Burn	12.62	-	-	.....mm ?	.....	.....
110 Mike Brace	6.63	5.64	-	.....:m mmmCCmmmmmm	:mmmmmmmmmm	
111 Paul Dye	7.63	5.64	-	.....:m m?m?	.....	.....
112 Tony Fitzgibbon	9.63	5.64	5.71	.....:m mCCCCC?a..	.....	.....
113 Bob Hill	9.63	5.64	-	.....:m ?	.....	.....
114 Arthur Becker	?	-	-	.....:m ?	.....	.....
115 Steve Hogan	?	-	-	.....: m??m?	.....	.....
116 Christine Bazzard	5.64	-	-	.....: m?	.....	.....
117 Joan Robinson (Goddard) (A)	5.64	1.65, ?.80	?.75, .	.....: mCCcmCCCCm	maaaaaammmmm	
118 Penny Munt	6.64	-	-	.....: mmm?	.....	.....
119 Lew Pearson	6.64	-	-	.....: m?	.....	.....
120 Alan Waters	6.64	-	-	.....: m?	.....	.....
121 Ron Hogston	9.64	-	-	.....: mm?	.....	.....
122 Pete Mathews (T)	2.65	9.65	.	.....: ?mCCCCCCCC	CCCCCCCCmm	
123 Geoff Baynes	6.65	-	-	.....: .m?	.....	.....
124 Tony Ingold	11.65	4.66, ?.82	5.71, .	.....: .mmm?mma?a	?aaaaaaamm	
125 Derek Allwood	11.65	4.66	-	.....: .mmm?	.....	.....
126 Mike Quartermain	11.65	9.66	-	.....: .mmmm?	.....	.....
127 Roy Townshend	11.65	4.66	-	.....: .mm?	.....	.....
128 Barry Milner	2.66	-	-	.....: .:mmmm?	.....	.....
129 June Seath (Walsh)	2.66	4.68	?	.....: .:mm??m?	.....aaaa	
130 Allan Wicks	3.66	6.67	.	.....: .mmmmmmmmmm	:mmmm:mmmm	
131 John Evans	4.66	-	9.66, 6.70 ?	.....: .m??mmmm:	: :maaaa...	
132 Fred Davies	6.66	6.67	-	.....: .mmmm?mm:	.....	.....
133 Philip Ebbage	6.66	-	-	.....: .m?	.....	.....
134 Greg Smith (A)	6.66	2.67	.	.....: .mCCcmCC	CCCCmmCCCm	
135 Linda Green	8.66	-	-	.....: .m?	.....	.....
136 David Hankin	8.66	2.67	-	.....: .mmmm?	.....	.....
137 Mike Lovell (A)	8.66	7.67	.	.....: .mmmmmmmmmm	:mmmmmmmmmm	
138 Trevor Parker	8.66	-	-	.....: .:m?	.....	.....
139 Sarah Worgan (Parker)	8.66	-	-	.....: .m?	.....	.....
140 John Virgo	8.66	7.67	-	.....: .mmmm?mm?m	.....	.....
141 Pete Virgo	8.66	7.67	-	.....: .mmmmmmmmmm	:mmmmmmmmmm	
142 Roger Wallington	8.66	7.67	.	.....: .mmmmmmmmCC	: :mmmmmmmmmm	
143 Dave Hill	9.66	6.67	3.72	.....: .mmCm..aa	aaa.....	.....
144 Mike Nightingale	9.66	8.67	-	.....: .mmmm?	.....	.....
145 Brian Hillman	11.66	9.67	-	.....: .mmCCmmmm	:m.....	.....
146 David Oliver	11.66	-	-	.....: .mm?	.....	.....
147 Julia Thrift (Fitzgibbon)	11.66	-	-	.....: .mmmm?	.....	.....
148 Michael Helsdon	1.67	-	-	.....: .:m.....	.....	.....
149 Peter Meadley	1.67	-	-	.....: .:m.....	.....	.....
150 Richard Peat	4.67	-	-	.....: .:mm?	.....	.....
151 David Bacon	5.67	4.68	-	.....: .:mm?	.....	.....
152 Peter Johnson	5.67	1.69	-	.....: .:mm?	.....	.....
153 Don Pickrell	6.67	-	-	.....: .m?	.....	.....
154 John Bryant	9.67	-	-: .mm?
155 Phil Ingold	9.67	4.68: .:mmmmCCm	mmmmCCCCC	
156 Brian Hammond	9.67	-	-: .mm?
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MCG MEMBERSHIP 1953-83

Date of membership

Assoc/Oseas/

Nltr/

Hon

Member=m, Associate=a, Honorary=h

Trustee=T, Committee=C, Auditor=A

Period with MCG

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Member	Probtn. member	Full member	Hon member			
157 Ken Newcomb	9.67	6.68	-mCCm...
158 Jim Fortey	10.67	-	-m?.....
159 Jock Glover	10.67	6.69	-	.....	...mmm.....	.....
160 Derek Hancock	10.67	-	-	.....	...mm?m??m	m.....
161 John Miriam	10.67	7.68	.	.....	...mmCCCCC	CCCCmmCCCC
162 Barry Squibb	10.67	-	-	.....	...mmmmmm?m	.....
163 Leslie Taylor	10.67	-	-	.....	...mm?.....	.....
164 Don Vosper	10.67	8.68	.	.....	...mmmmmmmm	:mmmmmmmmmm
165 Bill Jones	12.67	5.69	.	.....	...mmmmmmmm	CCCCmm:mmmm
166 Bryn Davies	1.68	10.68	-	.....	...:mmmm.:..	.....
167 Sion Hookins	1.68	6.68	-	.....	...mmmmmm..	.....
168 Mary Brown	2.68	-	-	.....	...:m?.....	.....
169 Sheila Killingback (Hillman)	2.68	-	-	.....	...::mm...::	:.....
170 Tony Buchan	4.68	5.69	-	.....	...:mCCCmm	.....
171 Dave Hodby	4.68	6.69	.	.....	...:mmmmmmmm	mmmmmmmmmmmm
172 Julian Lash	4.68	-	-	.....	...:m.m...	.....
173 Dave Heddon	8.68	-	-	.....	...:mmm:..	.....
174 Ron Saunders (T)	8.68	6.69	.	.....	...mCCCCC	CCCCCmmmm
175 Stephen Dean	10.68	-	-	.....	...m?.....	.....
176 Roy Stephens	1.69	-	5.71	.....	...::mmaaa	a.....
177 Ian Graham	2.69	-	-	.....	...:m.....	.....
178 David Graves	2.69	-	-	.....	...:mmmmmm	m.....
179 Carl Ruxton	2.69	-	-	.....	...:mmmmmm	mmmm.....
180 Brian Finch	?.69	-	-	.....	...:mmmmmm	mmmm.....
181 Alan Jackson	3.69	-	-	.....	...:m?...	.....
182 Trevor Knief	4.69	-	-	.....	...:m?...	.....
183 John Sheahan	4.69	-	-	.....	...:mmmm..	.....
184 Peter Eldridge	5.69	-	-	.....	...:m.....	.....
185 Gina Sharp	5.69	-	-	.....	...:m.....	.....
186 Vic Ingraham	6.69	-	-	.....	...:m...:	.....
187 John MacMillan	6.69	2.70	.	.....	...:mCCCC	mmmmCCCCmmmm
188 Helen Saunders (Ingold)	8.69	1.71	.	.....	...:mmmmmm	mmmmmmmmmmmm
189 Elizabeth Barrett	10.69	-	-	.....	...:m.....	.....
190 Peter Peirce	10.69	-	-	.....	...:mm...	.....
191 Bernard Reeves	10.69	6.73	.	.....	...:mmmmmm	mmmmmmmmmmmm
192 Charles Benedetto	11.69	-	-	.....	...:mm...	.....
193 Bernard Williams	11.69	-	-	.....	...:m.....	.....
194 Roger Saunders	1.70	1.71	.	.....	...:mmmmmm	mmmmmmmmmmmm
195 Clive Wheatley	6.70	-	-	.....	...:mmmmmm	mmmmmm.....
196 Dave Shipman	-	-	?.70	.....	...aa...	.....
197 Nicholas Herrick	10.70	-	-	.....	...:mmmm..	.....
198 Chris Wheatley	10.70	-	-	.....	...:mmmmmm	m.....
199 Len Eley	1.71	-	-	.....	...:m:m	mm..m.....
200 Wayne Hiscox	1.71	1.72	.	.....	...:mCC	CCCCCCCCCm
201 John Pudduck	1.71	4.78	.	.....	...:m:m	:mmmmmmmmmm
202 David Stanford	1.71	5.74	-	.....	...:m:m	mm.....
203 Richard Norris	9.71	-	-	.....	...:m:m	:mmmmmmmm..
204 Gillian Squibb	-	-	10.71	.....	...aaa	.....
205 Graham Gregory	1.72	-	?	.....	...:m?...	a.....
206 Bruce Dean	3.72	.	.	.....	...:mm	mmmmmmmmmmmm
207 Bryan Terry	3.72	5.73	.	.....	...:mm	CCCmmmmmmmm
208 Andy Moll	4.72	-	-	.....	...:mm	mm.....
209 Barbara Dowley	10.72	-	-mm
210 Eric Dowley	10.72	7.77mm	mmmmmmCCCCmm
211 Roger Bowdon	11.72	-	-m:.....
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MCG MEMBERSHIP 1953-83

Date of membership

Member=m, Associate=a, Honorary=h

Trustee=T, Committee=C, Auditor=A

Period with MCG

		Assoc/Oseas/ Full	Nltr/ Hon	Trustee=T, Committee=C, Auditor=A
	Probtn.			Period with MCG
	member	member	member	5555556666 6666667777 7777778888
Member				4567890123 4567890123 4567890123
212 Michael Chambers	11.72	-	-	.....mm m.....
213 David Humphrey	11.72	-	-	.....m: :.....
214 Steve Melliar-Smith	2.73	-	-	.....:m:
215 Ian Bramble	6.73	-	-	.....:m:
216 Penny Bramble	6.73	-	-	.....:m:
217 Rob Penn	6.73	3.77	.	.....:m mmmmmmmmmmm
218 David Welton	9.73	-	-	.....:m m.m.....
219 Doug Anderson	2.74	7.77	.	.....: mmmmmmmmmmm
220 Steve Conquest	2.74	1.75	.	.....: mmCCmmmmmmmm
221 Pete Lingwood	2.74	1.75	.	.....: mmmmmmmmmmm
222 Peter Spain (A)	2.74	10.81	.	.....: mmmmmmmmmmm
223 Neil Brooker	12.74	9.76	-	.....: mmmmmmmmmmm
224 Fred Burton	1.75	11.76	.	.....: mmmmmmmmmmm
225 Charlie Ruddick	6.75	10.81	.	.....: mmmmmmmmmmm
226 Martin Phillips	3.76	-	-	.....: m.....
227 Jonathan Roberts	11.76	11.80	.	.....: mmmmmmmCCC
228 Jane Kirby (Carson)	1.77	12.77	-	.....: mmmmmmmmm
229 Judy MacMillan	2.78	10.78	?	.....: mmmmmmmmm
230 Glenn Fletcher	10.78	-	-	.....mmmmmmmmmm
231 Alan Rarity	10.78	-	-	.....mmmmmmmmmm
232 Martin Rowe	10.78	10.79	.	.....: mCCmmmmmm
233 Graham Sutcliffe	10.78	.	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
234 David Baxter	2.79	.	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
235 Quentin Cowen	2.79	-	-	.....mmmmmmmmmm
236 Paul Phipps	2.79	.	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
237 Denise Samuel	2.79	4.81	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
238 Chris Whittle	2.79	10.81	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
239 Mike Mintram	6.79	6.81	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
240 Linda Yeats	10.79	-	-	.....mmmmmmmmmm
241 Ian McKechnie	4.80	4.81	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
242 Mick Lowe	5.80	4.81	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
243 Geoff Barton (A)	11.80	6.81	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
244 Mike Bygrave	9.81	5.82	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
245 Bill Ducklin	9.81	.	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
246 Dik Houseago	9.81	.	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
247 Dave Howe	9.81	3.82	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
248 Steve Taylor	9.81	3.82	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
249 Bob Varley	9.81	5.82	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
250 Derek Walsh	9.81	3.82	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
251 Adrian Duckett	1.82	5.82	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
252 Phil Eliot	1.82	3.82	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
253 Roy Kempston	1.82	5.82	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
254 Paul Merron	1.82	9.82	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
255 Jean-Paul Burch	2.82	9.82	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
256 Julie Spain	2.82	.	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
257 Carol Nunn	3.82	.	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
258 Clive Towner	3.82	7.82	.	.....mmmmmmmmmm
259 Kathy Baxter	.	.	3.82	.....aa
260 Julie Burton	.	.	3.82	.....aa
261 Anne Gibb (Davies)	.	.	3.82	.....aa
262 Barbara Dewdney (A)	.	.	3.82	.....aa
263 Joan Fair (Dowley)	.	.	3.82	.....aa
264 Val Newton (Knight) (A)	.	.	3.82	.....aa
265 Joy Merron	.	.	3.82	.....aa
266 Ann Pittman	.	.	3.82aa
267 Lynda Hathaway (Spain)	.	.	3.82aa
268 Kate Taylor	.	.	3.82aa

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MCG MEMBERSHIP 1953-83

Date of membership

Member=m, Associate=a, Honorary=h

Trustee=T, Committee=C, Auditor=A

Period with MCG

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Member

Probtn.
memberFull
memberAssoc/Oseas/
Nltr/
Hon
member

269 Pat Terry	.	.	3.82:aa
270 Pete Bulling	5.82	.	.	.....	.....	.....mm
271 Steve Lane	5.82	.	.	.....	.....	.....mm
272 Gordon Lister	5.82	11.83	.	.....	.....	.....mm
273 Alan Mellon (A)	5.82	4.83	.	.....	.....	.....mm
274 Ian Parry	5.82	1.83	.	.....	.....	.....mm
275 Lesley Robbins	5.82	1.83	.	.....	.....	.....mm
276 Jerry Roberts	5.82	.	.	.....	.....	.....mm
277 Graeme Tozer	5.82	-	-	.....	.....	.....m.
278 Mike Dean	6.82	.	.	.....	.....	.....mm
279 John Felton	7.82	11.82	.	.....	.....	.....mm
280 Neil Hutchinson	7.82	9.82	.	.....	.....	.....mm
281 Andy Wynn	7.82	-	-	.....	.....	.....m.
282 Stephen Bedford	9.82	.	.	.....	.....	.....mm
283 Helen Booker (Miriam)	.	.	9.82	.....	.....	.....aa
284 Richard Dominey	10.82	.	.	.....	.....	.....mm
285 Pat Newman	10.82	.	.	.....	.....	.....mm
286 Peter Turcan	10.82	.	.	.....	.....	.....mm
287 Peter Harvey	1.83	7.83	.	.....	.....	.....m
288 Peter Whittle	1.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....m
289 Peter Dymment	2.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....m
290 Christine Martin	2.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....m
291 Andy Beare	3.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....m
292 Louise Curley	3.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....m
293 Dave Higginson	3.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....m
294 Fiona Picton	3.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....m
295 Andy Tizzard	3.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....m
296 Gillian Attwood	5.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....m
297 Dave Corr	9.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....m
298 Peter Collings-Wells	10.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....m
299 James Davies	10.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....m
300 Mike Haselden	11.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....m
301 Darren Bartlett	12.83	.	.	.....	.....	.....X
302 Jarrod Bartlett	12.83X
303 David Forrow	12.83X
				5555556666	6666667777	7777778888
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1984 Update.

Bill Ducklin and Pat Newman were made full members during 12.83.

The following were accepted as probationary members during 1984: Alan Dougherty, Peter Haynes, David Punter, James Chubb, Chris Scrase, Dave Edwards, Yvonne Ward, Peter Johnson, Linda Gates, Gill Warren, Steve Thompson, Karen Lewis, Victoria Arbizu Sabater, Andrew Paterson, Jo Davies.

The following were made full members during 1984: Chris Martin, Pete Dymment, Peter Collings-Wells, Dick Houseago, Mike Hasledene, Andy Beare, John Beauchamp, Dave Baxter.

During 1984, Jill Attwood became Jill Towner.

Bob Speleo's History of the MCG

3

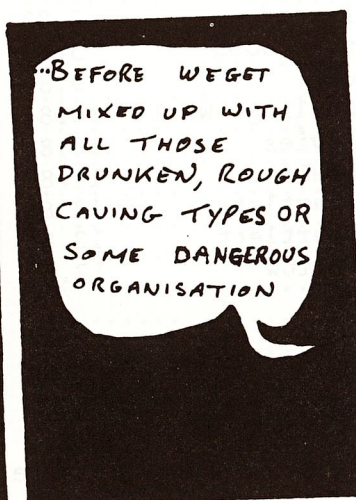
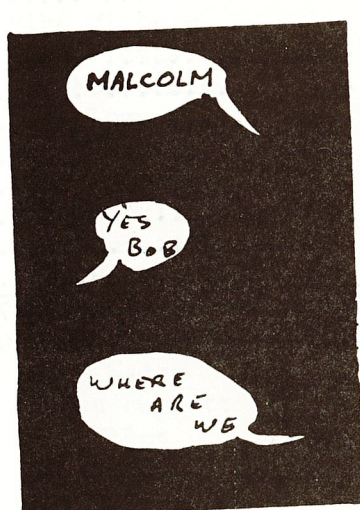
At 8.30 p.m. on the 14th of November, 1953, a certain scruffy little L.A.C. (2548646) of uncertain habits arrived at Priddy for a weekend.

This seemingly insignificant incident was the start of many things, most notably the financial recovery of Fuller's brewery.

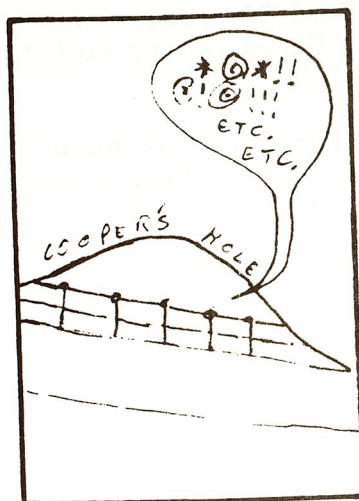
All this happened in the dark, where the M.C.G. has remained ever since, but includes a long list of battle honours, most notably, the first airbourne accomodation in the history of caving.

Now some people may think that our Bob Speleo is a new member. They're wrong, he's been on every trip in the history of the club, it's just that you didn't notice.

From his scrapbook, here are a few moments in the history of the M.C.G.



In the beginning

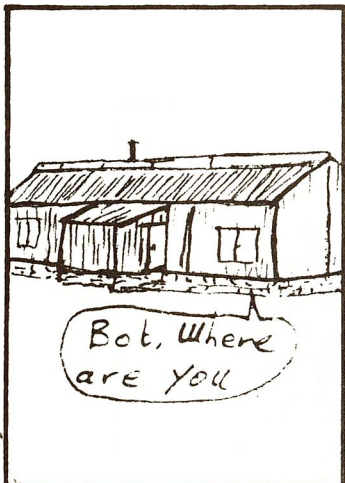


Patronage

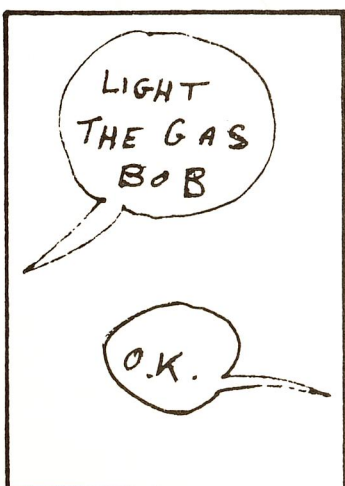
As far back as Charterhouse cottage, the new cottage was the subject of conversation:-



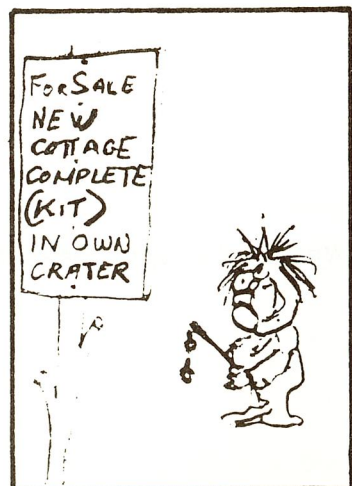
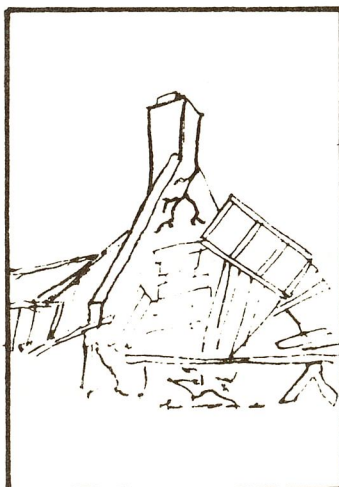
COTTAGE 1



COTTAGE 2



COTTAGE 3



Having led the way in flying bedsteads, Bob turned his attention to:-

New ground and cave exploration
in the countryside around the
cottage.



Perfecting new techniques in
caving and testing new equipment



Who is this Bob Speke bloke anyway?

The Karst Caverns of Yixing

submitted by Don Vosper

Connoisseurs of chinaware generally associate the name Yixing with famous red stone-ware teapots made in the city, sometimes called China's "pottery capital". Yixing has another claim to interest - its wonderful karst caverns formed by water washing and dripping against soft rock over eons of time.

The southern most city in Jiangsu province, Yixing lies on the west shore of Taiku Lake on the lower reaches of the Changjiang (Yangtze) River. It is bordered on three sides by fertile lake-dotted plains. To the south west rises a chain of hills. The caverns are at their feet.

Best known are the Shanjuan and Zhangjong Caverns. The former, situated in Mount Luayan some 25 kilometers from the town, is the subject of many legends, the chief one about the poet called Shanguan for whom it is named. Four to five thousand years when the legendary Huanghe River valley rulers Yao, Shun and Yu were transferring their kingship to one another, Yao abdicated in favour of Shun and Shun in turn tried to give the position to the poet Shanjuan. "I am free to go wherever I please between heaven and earth! So what do I want with the throne?" Feeling that Shun's words had sullied his ears Shanjuan washed them in a river, then went south to live in seclusion in this cavern.

More reliable historical records place the discovery of these caverns some 2,000 years ago in the Spring and Autumn period (770 - 476 B.C.). Totalling about 5,000 square metres in area, the Shanjuan Caverns are in three tiers, and consist of the upper cavern and middle, lower and water caverns. Deep mysterious recesses, winding galleries, booming cataracts and an assortment of fantastic stalactites and stalagmites combine to create an exquisite fairyland.

Entrance is through the middle cavern. First to strike the eye is a massive seven metre high stalagmite called "the foundation pillar". It is thought to have taken 35 thousand years to reach its present size

On the walls flanking the entrance carved inscriptions can be made out, the earliest, a poem by a sixth century scholar. As the cave widens further inward, one reaches a chamber known as the Lion and Elephant area. Fifty metres deep and twenty wide, it can accommodate about 1,800 visitors at a time. On either side are big natural rocks, one strikingly resembling a lion and the other an elephant, when viewed from the right angle.

The upper cavern is shaped like a snail shell. It is cool in summer and warm in winter, maintaining a temperature of about 23 degrees centigrade the year round. From the ceiling droop weird stalactites many resembling such real and imaginary animals as horses and dragons. Spring water seeping out here and there along the walls collects in pools of all shapes and sizes. The two largest are named after Wa Huang and Pan Gu, two figures in Chinese mythology, who are supposed to have bathed here. The goddess Wa Huang was said to have melted rocks to repair a crack in the sky caused by spirits fighting with each other. Pan Gu was the god credited with creating the universe.

A winding tunnel leads from the upper to the lower cavern, down stone stairs passing through four stone "gates". After a heavy rain strange sounds can be heard as one traverses this course. First comes a sound like distant waves and breakers, gradually changing to one of muted wind and thunder, then of rolling war drums and finally of a herd of galloping horses - hence the names of the four gates - Breaker Gate, Wind and Thunder Gate, War Drum Gate and Ten-Thousand Horses Gate. The

source of these effects is a waterfall at the end of the tunnel and in front of the lower cavern. After a downpour it crashes down in a foaming torrent, whose reverberations are subtly modified by the acoustics of each stretch of tunnel.

The lower cavern is narrow and about 180 metres long with stalactites of all shapes and sizes, suspended from the vault. On the right side a swirl of water plunges from a spring, flowing through twists and turns into a waterway at the bottom, known as the Water Cavern. Roughly 120 metres long, and two to five metres deep, it is long enough for rowboats which are available.

The Zhangjiong Caverns, equally famous, lie some 22 kilometres to the southwest of Yixing. They are entirely different in layout, comprising an interlocking maze of 72 caverns, some within others and each providing a different visual delight.

The total area of the Zhangjiong Caverns comes to roughly 3,000 square metres. They can be toured by a kilometre long route. Entering, one comes first to a spacious "hall" adorned with bizarre boulders, stalagmites, natural pillars, screens and "flowers" of rock. Upward along a spiral stone staircase one reaches a still larger hall called The Hall of the Sea God. From the vault of the cave perpetually hidden in mist, hang many oddly shaped rocks reminiscent of garlands or tassels. Two hoary stalagmites tower up like pillars and a brace of enormous hanging boulders look like palace lanterns. A 12 square metre pool in the centre of the hall duplicates the scene in its mirror-smooth waters.

Many smaller caves lead off from the Hall of the Sea God, each a little world in itself, with its own legends and fables. One such cave, noted for its network of tunnels and galleries, has a rock several metres square projecting from its roof. On this rock are faintly discernible lines like those on a chess board, thus the cave is named Chessboard Cavern. Here, says a legend, the gods came to play chess, and the following story is part of Yixing country lore: In the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618 - 907) a young scholar visited the Zhangjiong Caverns. After wandering about, candle in hand, for a dozen hours he came upon two Taoist monks playing chess. Seeing that the scholar was tired and hungry one of the monks pointed to some black mud nearby and told him it could be eaten. The scholar put some in the mouth and found it very tasty. The monk told him that after he left he should take care not to tell any human being about this incident. The scholar bowed his thanks and departed. Hidden in his bosom, however, was a handful of black mud, which he intended to show to the people in the city. But when he emerged from the cave the mud had become as hard as stone.

After leaving the cave, a short walk brings one to the mountain tip. On a rock wall four characters carved there in the Yuan dynasty (1279 - 1368) read: Hai Nei Qi Guan. (One of the most marvelous scenes in China). Looking into the distance, one is not disappointed. Taihu Lake's broad waters, dotted here and there with sails, ripple away into the hazy distance, and blue skies are met by rolling green mountains covered with groves of bamboo, terraced fields and tea plantations - all facets in the sparkling beauty of Yixing.

The above description was provided by Don Vosper, following a recent visit to China. The text was translated from a tourist guidebook by Mr. Tso, of the Tchi Shu Yen Railway Institute.
