

Royal Forest of Dean **Caving Club**



Members Handbook

2010

First of all, a warm welcome to the Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club.

This booklet is intended to give new and existing members a little information about the Club, how it works and some basic information. If you have any questions, please contact a member of the current Committee who should be able to help.

Contents

Page

About the Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club	3
The History of the Club	5
Membership	7
Constitution	8
The Caving Code and Safety Underground	11
Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group	13
How to Call Out Cave Rescue	14
Mine Gases	15
Weil's Disease	17
Bat information	19
FODCAG	20
Sites of Special Scientific Interest	23
General Access Agreements	24
Access to Specific Sites	25
Digging	30
Library	31
Equipment List	32
Useful Contacts	33
Current Committee Members	33

Attached: Current Members Contact List

About the Club

The Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club is a small sociable club open to anyone with an interest in caves or abandoned mines. The Club was founded in 1964 by a group of like minded friends and has a current membership of around 80 people from all walks of life. The administration of the Club lies in the hands of a Committee which is elected each year at the annual general meeting. The Club is affiliated with the regional and national caving bodies and is a member of the National Association of Mining History Organisation (NAMHO) Members are also encouraged to join the local Cave Rescue teams.

The Club organises activities for the benefit of it's members to encourage the exploration of caves and mines and joining the Club is the best way to learn about the local caves and mines in the Forest of Dean area.

The Club members have a wealth of knowledge and experience, and regular monthly trips are organised to explore local underground sites. Members of the Club benefit from access to some locations without the need for leaders or permits, and the Club holds keys to some sites for the benefit of it's members.

In addition to the local trips, the Club also organises weekend trips to places further afield every month. If there is anywhere you fancy visiting, just ask the meets secretary for a trip. The Club also holds a social evening on the first Monday of the month usually at the Rising Sun, Moseley Green. (see map) During the winter, these socials may have guest speakers, or a caving film, whilst in the summer they make take the form of an outdoor BBQ, a cycle ride or treasure hunt. The Socials are the best place to meet people and find out more information.

There is usually an organised walk on New Year's Day.

Details of events are distributed by email, and can also be found on the Club web-site at www.rfdcc.org.uk, although it is best to check with the Meets Secretary as changes may be made at the last minute. If you wish to be notified by email of events, please ensure that the Meets Secretary and the Club Secretary have your details.

The Club does not offer formal training for caving, but newcomers learn what skills and equipment are required from the more experienced members in the Club. Informal practice sessions for rope-work and SRT are run when there are people interested.

RFDCC Club Members are also invited to join any trips run by Gloucester Speleological Society and Hades Caving Club. (see contacts at end of booklet)

The Club has an equipment store for use by members and a library. Newsletters are produced on a regular basis for members and can also be found on the web-site together with the library contents. A selection of the library is usually brought to the Monday Socials, but if there is something in particular you wish to borrow, just contact the Club Librarian.

The Club has been involved with the opening or extending of most of the iron mines in the Forest. Early successes were Wych Elm Hole, helping in the opening of Wigpool and Oakwood Mill Deep Level amongst many others. Westbury Brook was opened in the early 70's and the Club was involved with extending and exploring the Clearwell Caves complex.

In the 1970's the discovery of Otter Hole brought the Forest area to national attention, and was followed by the breakthrough in Wetsink which is the tenth longest cave in the country. Recent discoveries include the Brinchcombe Level, massive extensions in Westbury Brook, Redhouse Lane Swallet, Miss Grace's Lane and Bigsink.

Club members are still involved in weekly digging in the hope of finding more new caves or opening up old mine workings. New members are very welcome to get stuck in. There is still lots of great potential for more significant discoveries in the Forest area.

The History of the Club

The Early Days by Roger Bailey (founder member):

It all started with a group of us who were employed in the Rank factory at Mitcheldean on the edge of the Forest of Dean. Through work we all had contact with each other, and one day in 1963 Ted Lewis mentioned that he had been down an old Iron Mine near Coleford and asked whether we were interested in having a look. Being an adventurous lot we said yes and several of us arranged to meet opposite the Lambsquay Hotel on the coming weekend.

With a wide assortment of crude caving gear and lights we parked opposite The Lambsquay Hotel near Coleford and made our way across the field to a depression having a large and very black hole under a shelf of rock. This is the entrance to "Old Bow".

Ted, who had only one working eye, pumped up his personal light which was a "Tilly Lamp" heater with a chromed reflector about 18" diameter with the heating unit swapped for a lighting fitment. This device has never been equaled for a portable floodlight!

Following Ted we made our way underground into an amazing world of passages and chambers that typifies the mine. "This is great" we thought and "we will soon come again!" We were down there for the following weekends. Soon we found out about Old Ham and British Mine (now Clearwell Caves).

The "Butchers Arms" in Clearwell made a good end to our now additional Wednesday evening trips. This ancient pub was then very old fashioned and kept in those days by Mr and Mrs Dovey, a great couple who supplied real cider and large portions of bread and cheese. There were occasionally finger marks on the cheese, and the salad could contain some wild life, but we didn't care and it all went down with no complaints.

Our digging exploits began when Ray Wright remembered an in filled entrance, known as Wych Elm Hole, close to his old home at Green Bottom near Littledean. It was said to lead into the Westbury Brook Iron Mine, and he thought it could be worth a dig. Foolishly we agreed and excavation commenced. After several sessions and the removal of large amounts of household rubbish, (some of which Ray recognised!) a small chamber was entered. Further work led us to the top of a very steep incline, with a miner's flat link climbing chain still in place. Stones thundered into the depths and we thought that we must be better prepared before we came back for further exploration.

Gathering our kit and courage together for a descent into the abyss we received startling news. A couple of prospecting Welsh cavers had come across our messy hole and left a message with Ray's dad – would we like to explore the new discovery WITH THEM! The cheek of it! It's the English who invade Wales not the other way round!

The impudent pair turned out to be Mel Davies of BNS caving club and his mate Russell Sullivan. On a convenient Saturday we descended the depths, eventually reached the bottom and found water. There was no way on. However we had established good relations with Mel, and received an invite for a trip into Agen Allwedd in South Wales. This was our introduction into a "real" cave, and we thoroughly enjoyed it.

This intervention by outsiders convinced us that we had better form ourselves a caving club. Eight of us met in the "Foresters" at Mile End one evening in November 1964. Those present were Ted Lewis, Alan Paton, Rex Keane, Ray Wright, Jim Hay, my brother Laurence, myself and one other whose name I forget. Ted became chairman; I was secretary and Alan treasurer.

That was the early days. We got outside the Forest to South Wales, Mendips and Yorkshire etc. Sadly we have lost two members in tragic accidents, Rex Keane descending Turpin Shaft at Milkwall (1965) and Roger Solari diving in Agen Allwedd. (1974)

From the start the club has been very open minded on what interests us as long as it's underground and not a coal mine has been the qualifier. Natural holes take priority while the long and fascinating history of the iron mines and their supportive industries are a great attraction. As for the remainder, such as old railway tunnels and other holes you can be seriously disappointed as Laurence and I found when the "secret passage" we were examining turned out to be an old smelly sewer by the time by the time we had got to the end and were down on our hands and knees.

Our members have reopened more walk-in entrances to other iron mines such as Oakwood Mill Deep and Westbury Brook. Some of our mine discoveries have also become bat roosts of national importance.

Since those early days the Club has really got cracking - opening up the Forest of Dean as a significant speleological area. Otter Hole, Slaughter Stream Cave and Miss Graces Lane and the minor holes have made great additions to British caving and made our locality a true caving region. So keep at it gents and ladies, as there is much more to find in the Forest of Dean. (Roger Bailey)

Membership of the Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club.

Membership is open to any individual interested in caving or abandoned mine exploration. To become a member you will need to fill in the Membership Application form, which can be obtained from the Club Secretary or downloaded from the website. (www.rfdcc.org.uk)

The web-site also has details of Membership fees and insurance which is a requirement of joining the Club. All members of the Club MUST have either surface or underground insurance.

If you have other members in the family who would like to join, there is no additional fee for membership, only for insurance. RFDCC obtains insurance from the BCA (British Caving Association), but if you already have caving insurance from another association, then that is acceptable as long as it is current.

The insurance provides protection for members and officers in the event of any third party claim due to their activities. Non caving members of clubs also benefit from the insurance since it covers non-caving activities such as meetings, conferences, training and other activities. Non-caving club members are at just as much risk from a third party claim as caving members since in law they have joint and several liability for the club's actions. More information about insurance can be found on the BCA web-site (www.british-caving.org.uk)

Temporary membership is available for 17 consecutive days (ie. 3 weekends) It cannot be renewed. This should enable any potential member to sample the delights of the underground before deciding whether to become a full member.

Any prospective member will need to find two Club Members to propose and second the application.

Attending Club Socials is the ideal place to meet and get to know faces. These usually occur on the first Monday of the month, at the Rising Sun, Moseley Green, details should be posted on the website or announced at the previous social.

The completed form plus a cheque made out to RFDCC, should be handed to the Club Treasurer. If you prefer to post it, addresses can also be found on the website. Please supply an email address if you have one, as it's the easiest way to keep up to date with Club events.

Once the form has been received, it needs to be approved by the Committee; notification should be sent once this has been done.

Club Constitution

1. NAME.

The Club shall be called: Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club.

2. OBJECT.

The purpose of the Club shall be: The discovery, exploration and preservation of caves and mines, with special emphasis on the Forest of Dean.

3. MEMBERSHIP.

(a) There will be three classes of membership, 1) Ordinary, 2) Family and 3) Honorary.

(b) Membership is open to persons of all ages, but anyone under the age of 18 may only take part in Club activities when accompanied by a parent/guardian, or a person acting on the authority of the parent/guardian.

(c) Any application for membership of the Club must be approved by the committee on the presentation of a signed application form, which must also be signed by two members of the Club as proposer and seconder and be accompanied by the appropriate subscription.

(d) Honorary membership can be awarded to any person by the Committee. Honorary membership can be for any period from one year to life. Honorary membership shall not include insurance. Honorary Life Membership needs to be approved at a General meeting.

(e) Only family members who reside at the same address are eligible for Family Membership; except that family members who are away studying at college/university will be deemed to be residing at the family home for the purpose of this class of membership.

(f) Each and every member of the Club must be insured through the British Caving Association (BCA) Insurance Scheme, either as a "Club Individual Member" or a "Direct Individual Member".

(g) Member details will be kept on a computer for membership administration

(including mailing lists for newsletters and social activities etc.) and to provide a members contact list. This list may be distributed to caving clubs/societies, rescue groups, emergency services and to the Club's insurance company.

4. SUBSCRIPTION.

(a) Subscriptions shall be decided by the Membership at the A.G.M. Annual subscriptions/insurance for existing Members must be paid by December 1st at the latest. Any Member who has not paid by this date, shall be considered to have ceased Membership and shall only be re-elected at the

discretion of the Committee.

(b) Any member accepted as a member of the Club after 1st August shall be deemed to have paid for the following year.

5. COMMITTEE.

(a) The Club shall be managed by a Committee made up of eight members: - CHAIRMAN, SECRETARY, TREASURER, MEETS SECRETARY, EDITOR, EQUIPMENT OFFICER, LIBRARIAN and one ORDINARY MEMBER. All Committee Members shall be elected at the A.G.M. from amongst the members of the Club.

(b) The Committee shall have the power to co-opt extra members, if they feel necessary, for temporary or permanent duties. Where a member is co-opted to fill a vacant position on the Committee, that member shall have full voting rights on the Committee.

(c) All Committee members shall retire at the A.G.M. and are eligible for re-election.

(d) Five elected Committee members shall form a quorum at a Committee meeting.

(e) All Committee members shall be eligible to vote on any matter. In the event of a tied vote, the Chairman shall have an additional casting vote, which shall be used to maintain the status-quo.

6. GENERAL MEETINGS.

This term describes any meeting to which all Members are invited i.e. Extra-Ordinary, Annual General and Monthly Social Meetings.

(a) The A.G.M. of the Club shall be held in October at that months General Meeting to:-

1. Receive the Officers reports.
2. Consider any amendments to the Constitution.
3. Effect the election of Officers.
4. Discuss and decide on any matters affecting the Club.

(b) Nominations for Committee member must be given with the consent of the nominee.

(c) Extra-Ordinary General Meetings shall be convened at the request of the Committee or at the request of at least 10 members. Notice of such a meeting must be circulated to members, in writing, at least 21 days before the meeting. At an E.G.M. The meeting shall only discuss the points within that agenda.

(d) The Constitution can only be amended at a General Meeting. Notice of proposed amendments, to the Constitution, must be circulated to the members at least 21 days before the General Meeting at which it is proposed to consider them.

(e) Non-receipt of the required noticed by any member shall not invalidate

the proceedings of the meeting.

(f) At an A.G.M. any proposal of motion signed by 2 or more members, received by the Secretary at least 10 days before the meeting must be included in the agenda. Proposals, other than those affecting the Constitution, can also be made directly at a General Meeting.

(g) At a General Meeting, decisions on Constitution changes and Honorary Life Membership may only be carried by a 2/3rds majority. Other decisions shall only require a simple majority. The Chairman shall have an additional casting vote if needed.

(h) All members shall have full voting rights.

7. FINANCE AND PROPERTY.

(a) Approval of at least 5/8ths of the elected Committee shall be necessary for any purpose for which Club funds are required.

(b) The Treasurer shall record all income, from any source, and all expenditure that the Club may incur, and that these records be checked prior to the A.G.M. and at any other time as directed by the Committee.

8. DISCIPLINE.

The Committee shall have the power to request the resignation of any member for any breach of Club rules or for any other reason. Should the member refuse to resign, the Committee shall have the power to suspend or expel said member.

9. DISSOLUTION.

(a) The Club may only be dissolved at an Extra-Ordinary General Meeting convened to discuss the matter, and only if 2/3rds of the votes cast are in favour of the dissolution.

(b) In the event of dissolution, the assets of the Club shall be disposed as decided by a 2/3rds majority at the same Extra-Ordinary Meeting as at 9a above.

Safety Underground

Make sure you have permission to visit the cave or mine. All entrances are owned by somebody, and goodwill between landowners and cavers is vital for maintaining access to underground sites.

The rights of the landowner should be observed at all times. If in doubt, ask!

Caves are a special and rare environment, some more so than others, and parts of some more so than others.

Active stream passages and potholes with fast moving water may have very little that can be accidentally damaged by the passage of a caver.

On the other hand, fossil cave passages where streams never flow are likely to contain all sorts of delicate remains that could be easily damaged by the passage of a single thoughtless caver. Where there is a risk of accidental damage, whilst passing delicate straw stalactites, or sand banks, approaching close to a crystal pools, for example, you should slow down, look carefully around you and take extreme care.

All these features are easily damaged and cannot be repaired. The following is a carefully considered CODE intended to minimise damage to caves and mines.

Please read it and try to follow it whenever you go caving. Thank you.

CAVE WITH CAUTION and WITHIN YOUR OWN ABILITY and EXPERIENCE

If you are the leader/organiser always be aware of the abilities/limitations of ALL of the members of the party. The 'Weakest Link' must dictate the speed and extent of your trip – not the strongest! Tired cavers will not only damage themselves, they will damage the cave as well!

KEEP PARTY SIZE

Appropriate to the particular cave that you are visiting. (4 is an ideal minimum number)

OBSERVE and KEEP TO TAPED ROUTES

In taped-off sections follow the path and do not cross the tapes. They are there for good reason.

DO NOT TOUCH FORMATIONS OR OTHER DELICATE ITEMS

These are easily broken or muddied – they must NEVER be touched.

KEEP AWAY FROM BATS OR OTHER LIFE

Bats are endangered species – please keep away from all of them. You must not disturb them. All bats are protected by law.

NEVER DIG WITHOUT PROPER CONSENT

Sand/mud banks are valuable sources of information about the cave and its surroundings, and might also contain archaeological remains. Do not dig or disturb without proper consent.

NEVER INTERFERE WITH SCIENTIFIC EQUIPMENT

Dedicated cave scientists put a lot of time, funding and effort into their research. Never touch any such equipment that you find in a cave.

LEAVE NO LITTER OR POLLUTION

Carbide lighting should be avoided and never used where bats are present. Where it is used take with you a suitable container for its safe removal from the cave.

TAKE NOTHING OUT OF A CAVE

Do not remove anything from a cave except your own or others' rubbish.

TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS WITH CARE

Do not be tempted to break any of these guidelines.

You are responsible for any damage you may do!

ALWAYS

Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group

History / background:

The Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group (GCRG) was formed in 1962 by local cavers who recognised the need for cave rescue facilities in an area that was fast growing in popularity. Cave rescue still is a service provided for and by cavers and every caver, if they are able to, should support their local rescue team. You never know when you might need them!

The Group has been 'called out' a number of times since its formation, to rescues in the Caves and Iron Mines of the Forest of Dean, and the Stone Mines of the Cotswolds. Assistance to cave rescue teams from South Wales with extended duration rescues in their area has also been provided. The Group also has a support role in assisting the Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA) and acts as a valuable manpower resource for the Police & Fire and Rescue Service.

A recent expansion of the Group's activities, in collaboration with The Mines Rescue Team and the local HSE Mines Inspector, has been the formation of a 'Mines Response Team' for the 'Free Mines' (Coal Mines) within the Forest of Dean.

With the growth in caving as a sport and as an activity for youth / adventure groups, combined with the discovery and exploration of more cave systems (the area now boasts the 10th longest cave in the UK at 14km in length), unfortunately the need for a cave rescue group grows.

Today the Group has some of the most up to date rescue equipment available, all stored at it's Headquarters located near to Cinderford, along with the group's Land Rover. The Group's direct response area has grown over the years to cover the Forest of Dean; the Wye Valley; the Cotswolds; and parts of the Thames Valley extending to the Reading area.

The Group, from rescue members to wardens / committee members are entirely voluntary and has no subscriptions. A small grant is received each year and support is also provided by the Mountain Rescue Council. Primary funding is achieved through donations to the group, combined with fund raising activities organised by the members. The Group has Charitable status. Membership currently stands at approx. 100 people, all of whom are primarily sport cavers.

The Group has a training program which aims to ensure that all members reach a minimum level of cave rescue knowledge and experience. Those who wish may expand their knowledge and expertise to specialise in certain areas

of rescue and take a more active role within the Group. Training takes place throughout the year on a quarterly basis and this can involve both Surface and Underground sessions. Combined Training with other cave rescue teams also takes place. Recent developments have seen a major increase in training with the other Emergency Services (Police, Fire & Rescue, Ambulance and Mines Rescue). Training is also co-ordinated through the local caving clubs during the periods between the quarterly sessions.

The Group has recently undertaken to support the South and Mid Wales Cave Rescue Team as they absorb the duties of the former Gwent team.

HOW TO INITIATE A CAVE RESCUE:

CALL 999 (or 112 from a mobile)

ASK FOR THE LOCAL POLICE

When you are through to the local police force,

Be prepared to stay by the phone until contact is made with a cave rescue warden, who will try to ascertain as much detail of the incident as possible in order to determine what action is required.

Mine Gases found in Forest of Dean Mines

The following information is to be used as a general guide to the effects of gases that may be found in the mines of the Forest of Dean.

Having read this you are strongly warned that access into coal mines in the Forest of Dean could prove fatal.

Carbonic Acid Gas or “Black damp” or “Choke damp”

This is common to coal mines but can also be found in iron mines workings. This gas is still a mixture of oxygen, nitrogen and carbon dioxide but the normal ratios of oxygen and carbon dioxide to each other have changed. The change is due to oxidation of minerals or organic material. The oxygen is generally replaced by the carbon dioxide.

This gas is odourless, tasteless and colourless. It is heavier than air and so gathers in pockets, depressions and behind falls. The only way to disperse this gas is with adequate ventilation. Black damp **is tested for by means of a candle or flame safety lamp flame**. There are recorded fatalities of local miners suffocating from Black damp and this gas is not to be dismissed lightly.

Carbide lamp flames are never to be used as the following conditions do not accurately apply to the acetylene flame:-

- ◆ At 17% oxygen the flame burns with difficulty and may rise from the wick.
- ◆ At 16% Oxygen the flame is extinguished and **you must withdraw immediately into a fresh atmosphere.**
- ◆ At 12% Oxygen breathing is laboured and difficult.
- ◆ **At 5% Oxygen loss of consciousness and death**

- ◆ At 1% Carbon Dioxide deep breathing and dulling of flame.
- ◆ At 2% Carbon Dioxide panting and headache, flame sooty and dull.
- ◆ At 3% Carbon Dioxide difficulty in breathing, **flame is extinguished.**
- ◆ At 5% Carbon Dioxide severe panting and bad headache.

Nitrous Fumes or “After damp”

This is the name given to the fumes given off after initiating an explosive charge. The effects can be counteracted by the placing of a wet cloth around the nose and mouth, in order to get to a safe atmosphere. Ventilation with fresh air is the easiest method of dispersing the fumes.

- ◆ At 0.01% there is irritation to the nose lining, eyes, throat and lungs. It can cause violent and painful coughing.
- ◆ At 0.015% **victim can become dangerously ill if atmosphere is**

breathed for than 20 minutes.

- ◆ At 0.025% causes death in a very short time.

Hydrogen Sulphide Gas or “Stink damp”

Can be found in both coal and iron mines. This gas is given off due to the oxidisation and breakdown of organic matter. It has the characteristic “bad egg smell” and is colourless and tasteless and **is very poisonous**. It has the debilitating effect of suppressing the human sense of smell, which then gives a false sense of security.

- ◆ At 0.07% in atmosphere it can permanently weaken the heart
- ◆ At 1% in atmosphere results in headache, dizziness, pain in the eyes, **death in a very short time.**
- ◆ **At 3% in atmosphere – INSTANT DEATH!!!**

Methane Gas or “Firedamp”

Although the Forest of Dean coal mines come under the national mining laws which state that **all coal mines are not to be entered with a naked flame, and only approved flame safety lamps and cap lamps are to worn or used**. The Forest of Dean coal mines are unique in containing no perceptible methane gas in their workings. The risk of ignition or explosion is nil although this will never be officially stated.

The Deputy Gaveller was asked what the legal situation was on entering local coal mines, and listed below is his reply:-

“This is not straight forward. There is a duty for coal mine owners to fence or otherwise protect mine entries to prevent accidental entry. Any entry not protected is a nuisance under the Environmental Act 1990 & that is enforced by the Local Authority. So every entry should be fenced & the moving or breaking down of such protection is a breach of law. If it is not fenced or it has been destroyed then the permission of the owner would still be required. i.e. the Coal Authority or other galee. The advice is keep out unless you have permission & then proceed under a strict entry protocol”
(John Harvey, Deputy Gaveller)

Mines that are owned by private mine-owners must not be entered unless it is with the express permission of the mine owner. Un-permitted entry is

trespass.

Mines that come under the jurisdiction of the Deputy Gaveler can only be entered with the Deputy Gaveler's express permission. Un-permitted entry is trespass.

Entry by RFDCC members into iron ore mines and stone mines that are not owned privately, is covered by the Forest of Dean Cave Conservation and Access Group's agreement with the Forestry Commission. This agreement is renewed every year

WEIL'S DISEASE

The national rat population is increasing and between 50% and 60% of rats carry and excrete the organism *Leptospira ictero-haemorrhagiae* in their urine. Infection of humans with this organism causes an illness (commonly called Weil's disease), which has been known to result in death in 10% of cases. Two deaths were reported in England and Wales during 2008.

Salt water kills off the organism but there is a significant risk in tidal waters such as the lower parts of the Wye in the Forest of Dean and other rivers. The risk increases upstream and is greatest in canals, ponds or areas of slowly draining water; thus there is a significant risk in caves carrying drainage from farm land, stables or quarries.

ABOUT THE ILLNESS

The organism enters the body through breaks in the skin such as cuts, blisters and abrasions, or via the lining of the nose, throat or alimentary tract. The incubation period is 7-13 days and the disease starts with a fever, muscular aches and pains, loss of appetite and vomiting with prostration. Subsequent bruising of the skin, sore eyes, nose bleeds and jaundice may occur.

The fever lasts about five days and may be followed by significant deterioration.

It is vital that the doctor be told that the patient may have been in contact with a source of infection.

The symptoms can easily be mistaken for those of flu and, if the patient has a

clean occupation, the possibility of Weil's Disease may be overlooked in the early stages.

Laboratory testing of blood will confirm diagnosis but this may take undue time in an ordinary hospital lab. If Weil's Disease is suspected the samples should be sent to:

Leptospira Reference Unit (LRU)
Department of Microbiology and Immunology
County Hospital
Hereford HR1 2ERT
Tel: 01432 277707
Fax: 01432 351396
Email: leptospira.lru@hhtr.nhs.uk

where they will be tested within 24 hours.
Treatment is usually by Penicillin Antibiotic.

BE AWARE

The disease is curable if recognised in time, but many doctors in urban areas will never have encountered it. If you have any reason to suspect that you have been infected, you may need to draw your doctor's attention to the possibility that the symptoms could be Weil's Disease.

Bat Information

The Forest of Dean is home to most of the species of bats in this country and has some of the largest populations of Lesser Horseshoe Bats in the UK.

Practically every underground site we are likely to visit will be used by bats at some time during the year. Most of this use is in the winter/early spring months when the bats are hibernating. In late spring, summer and early autumn use is mostly as temporary roosts and number seen when caving will be low. Some of the larger iron mines are used as “swarming sites” in late summer/early autumn when large numbers of active bats can be observed around and just inside the entrances. The winter months see large numbers of bats using the underground sites for hibernation. The major iron mine complexes have counts in the mid to high hundreds of Lesser Horseshoe Bats. The other easily recognised species likely to be seen is the Greater Horseshoe Bats. They are easily told apart by their size difference, like a plum to a pear. Both these species hang on the rocks in full view. Both Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats are very rare species in the UK. Nearly all the other species (the furry ones) encountered tend to hide themselves away in cracks and crevices.

Bats are protected by the Wildlife Countryside Act 1981. It is illegal to kill, injure or remove bats, or to damage, destroy or to obstruct any place used by bats. Most of the major iron mine complexes are SSSIs (Site of Special Scientific Interest) notified under UK legislation and SACs (Special Area of Conservation) notified under European legislation. Members of the Club regularly monitor the mines (on behalf of Natural England) to check numbers of bats and if interested in helping please ask the committee to point you in the right direction. Bats can easily, if unintentionally, be disturbed during caving activities. Care should be taken not to dislodge bats when moving through the underground environment. Shining your light on a bat for any length of time will disturb it and in a hibernating bat may trigger a waking up response which once started they cannot stop. We need to be aware that digging may alter the micro climate around bats and fumes from explosives can cause them harm and so should be restricted to the summer months in known bat roosts. We hope that this helps you to appreciate the important role that the underground sites have in the conservation of these endangered mammals.

THE FOREST OF DEAN CAVE CONSERVATION AND ACCESS GROUP

A Brief History

The Forest of Dean Cave Conservation and Access Group (FoDCCAG) initially arose out of a specific need for a local access agreement to be generated on behalf of cavers. This highlighted a wider need for a single representative body in the area to liaise with statutory bodies and organisations, both to represent the views of cavers and to be a recognised point of contact.

The four caving clubs most active in the area traditionally had close links and worked together on many projects as well as holding joint social activities. Details were sent to the members of these clubs and after much discussion it was agreed that the way forward was to form a group to co-ordinate matters relating to the access and conservation issues of the caves and metalliferous mines in the Forest of Dean area. The group was established in January 1998 and since then has become recognised by the main local and regional organisations as the representative group for caving in the area.

Why Have A Group?

Increased legislation and greater fears over liability have prompted concern among landowners with entrances to underground sites on their land. A responsible organisation able to allay fears, administer issues that arise and work with landowners is preferable to a ban on access and the filling in of entrances that has so often happened in the past. In recent years there has been a greater awareness of the need for conservation among both the caving fraternity and the wider public.

There are a number of sites in the area, which hold particular interest with regard to: cave formations; bats and industrial archaeology. There are a number of sensitive sites, which are given the designation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and are covered by statutory legislation.

The ability of the Group to liaise with bodies such as English Nature to ensure that sensible access not only benefits cavers but also emphasises that they are able to offer assistance with projects such as bat counts and underground surveying. The need for a central body which is aware of both local and national policies is clearly evident and as more caves are 'discovered' this becomes increasingly important.

What Are the Aims of the Group?

These can be summarised as:

- ◆ Maintain and implement a Conservation Plan for all underground sites in the Forest of Dean
- ◆ Maintain Present Access and Negotiate future access if required
- ◆ Record all Exploration and Scientific work
- ◆ To act as a local medium through which all relevant matters may be discussed.

How Does The Group Fit Into The National Caving Scene?

The FoDCCAG is not a Regional Council. Under the umbrella of the Cambrian Caving Council are several management groups responsible for specific areas within the Cambrian Region.

The FoDCCAG is one of these. It is not set up as an organisation to which clubs are required to affiliate but consists of the member clubs that are most active in the area. However, the group is not only concerned with the interests of its members but those of the caving community generally and the caves themselves. The intention is that those at grass roots level with the relevant local knowledge are involved in the decisions regarding their area.

What Does the Group Do?

In accordance with its aims, the Group is actively involved in conservation of environments and access to sites. This includes pollution monitoring and taking action where necessary by involving the appropriate authorities. It has been, and continues to be, involved in working with English Nature in connection with bats in the area and the SSSI's. It is able to become involved in negotiations with landowners where an individual or single club might be less successful. The Group has also been involved in Recording Data by establishing a database of information relating to the area as well as projects including Radon Surveys.

The Access Agreement with the Forestry Commission

An example of the role of the Group is the access agreement entered into with the Forestry Commission regarding sites on the land they manage. This grants access to these sites subject to certain conditions. The Group runs a permit system similar to that in other caving areas and Groups wishing to go underground on the Forestry Commission's land apply to the Access Group for permission. With the confirmation of the suitability of the applicant regarding issues like insurance, permission is granted either for a single trip or a period of time.

The requirements of the Forestry Commission, such as access routes to the

site can then be passed on with the permit. This takes the administration difficulties away from the landowner and ensures that they are covered by the necessary insurances and indemnities. It also can be seen as taking reasonable steps to ensure that caving is carried out safely and competently whilst also conserving the environment both above and below ground. In this way the aims of the FoDCCAG are met, cavers have access to go caving and the landlords' requirements are satisfied.

If you are a member of the Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club, and as long as everyone in your caving party are members, you do not require a FoDCCAG permit to visit sites. You may however still need a key, and abide by the rules listed under "General Access"

If you have further queries regarding conservation and access within the Forest of Dean area, please contact:

FoDCCAG Hon. Secretary, John Hine, 2 Cullis Lane, Mile End, Coleford, GL16 7QF. tel: 01594 833217

Email: mole@grottage.fsworld.co.uk or secretary@fodccag.co.uk

To apply for access permits, please contact: David Tuffley, 30 Coombe Drive, Buckshaft, Cinderford, GL14 3EF. (If making requests by post, please include an SAE. email: FoDCCAG-Permits@redhousefod.freeseve.co.uk - marked for the attention of David Tuffley. Or permits@fodccag.co.uk

Dave Tuffley holds the Club keys for:

Robin Hood mine

Redhouse Lane Cave

Big Sink Cave

Buckshaft Mine

Westbury Brook Mine

Oakwood Mill Deep Scowle Mine and shaft

Itton North Cave

Wigpool Iron Mine

FoDCCAG also have a few access arrangements with private landowners.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

The Forest of Dean contains 5 underground Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) These are:

Westbury Brook Iron Mine

Wigpool Iron Mine (No. 5 entrance and one passage in Sway Hole are closed in winter.

Old Ham, Lambsquay and Old Bow Iron Mines

Devil's Chapel / Shraves Wood Iron Mines

Buckshaft Iron Mine – closed in winter

General Access

The caves and mines of the Forest of Dean have lots of different access

agreements. Some are gated, some are locked, some are closed in winter due to roosting bat colonies. This may all seem a bit confusing, but just ask at the Monday social, or email the Committee and someone will be able to help.

There are 2 very informative guide books which detail the sites and the access permissions required:

"The Caves of the Forest of Dean" published by:

Paul Taylor
9 Massey road
Gloucestershire GL1 4LG

and "The Mines of the Forest of Dean and Surrounding Areas" published by :

Tony Oldham
Riverside Mews
Cardigan SA43 1DH

Much of the local area is The Forestry Commission's land to which there are specific access requirements (see FoDCCAG above).

These are:

Vehicle access is not permitted. DO – NOT be tempted to take your vehicles through any open gates other than those to gain access to car parks. You could find them locked on your return and you will then need to contact the Forestry Commission / Police to arrange for somebody to come and unlock the gate. This could take many hours especially at weekends and in the evenings.

The Coldwell Rocks cliffs are a breeding / nesting ground for Peregrine Falcons. Exploration of the cliffs is not advised. Please contact FoDCCAG for information.

There are also extensive areas of farm land on which many sites are located. Local cavers have excellent relationships with these farmers which have been built up over the years.

Please respect any specific access arrangements. If you have any doubts, please get in touch with someone on the committee who may be able to help.

All Members on entering land on which caves are situated must heed the Country Code, making sure gates are left in the position as found, no damage to flora or fauna occurs and no fires are lit.

Members are also reminded that land owners accept no responsibility to

Members for any accident or injury that occurs.

Members shall restrict their movements to the areas marked on the maps kept with the access agreements.

No obstruction shall be made by visiting Members vehicles.

Access to Specific Sites:

Some of the more frequently visited sites or sites with specific access agreements are detailed below:

Ban-y-Gor

The Ban-y-Gor resurgence discharges 1.5 million gallons of water a day into the River Wye. It is a tight cave and not for the faint hearted, but there is surely a big cave system awaiting discovery in this area. The cave is gated but not locked.

Big Sink

A fairly recent find, this cave is fairly sustained in terms of obstacles, including a 200m narrow rift, and a 15m pitch. Not a great cave for the larger caver! The cave comes under the FoDCCAG administration and is gated and locked. The Club has keys.

Bixhead Stone Quarry Mine

The stone mine represents an underground version of the quarry within which it sits. Inside some chambers are huge, and in places steelwork has been fixed across joints in the rock to help support the roof. Mine is not gated.

Blakeney Hill Stone Quarry Mine

The agreement is with Mr. Mike Thomas of Rock Cottage, Blakeney Hill, Blakeney, Glos. GL15 4BF. tel: 01594 510593
Dates and times of any proposed visit shall be by prior agreement with Mr. Thomas.

Buckshaft Iron Mine

The Cave is administered by FoDCCAG and is gated and locked. The Mine is closed in winter.

Clearwell Cave System and Wigpool

The agreement is with Mr. R. & Mr. J. Wright owners of gales and rights to work on or enter caves

and mines in the Clearwell and Wigpool areas.

Collection of keys to be arranged prior to proposed visit with Mr. J. Wright at Clearwell Caves.

The agreement covers

Clearwell Caves: Old Ham, Old Bow, Lambsquay Main, Lambsquay Slot, Old Bow SSSI's and Drybrook Mine Level.

The Clearwell system is very complex, and several through trips can be made if one knows the way. Certain levels are out of bounds due to the possibility of bad air. Make sure you go with someone experienced.

Wigpool: Meeks Hole, No. 5, Fox Hole, Steam Hole, Sway Hole, Gold Hole and Bailey Level.

Wigpool Iron Mine SSSI

There are at least 5 entrances that connect to the deeper levels, the main ones being Sway and Steam Holes. The Upper workings are fairly complex and routefinding can cause problems. Mining artifacts can be found throughout the mine, especially in the lower levels, which can be flooded at times of high water levels. Throughout the mine are also good examples of calcite formations.

Clinker Bottom

The Cave is administered by FoDCCAG and is gated and locked.

Coldwell Swallet

Another good potential dig site. The Cave is administered by FoDCCAG and is gated but not locked.

Cross Joints Swallet

Single passage and a 10m pitch to a chamber. Not gated

Hole in the Hedge

The Cave is administered by FoDCCAG and is gated and locked.

Lord's Wood Cave No. 16

The Cave is administered by FoDCCAG and is gated and locked. Only open in the summer months.

Lydney Park Estate

Negotiations are being undertaken by FoDCCAG. Until an agreement is reached, there is no access to this area.

The Devil's Chapel area has a large number of surface workings, possibly going back to the Iron Age. The area is also known as "The Bream Scowles"

Merlin's Cave

The Cave is administered by FoDCCAG and is gated and locked.

Mirey Stock Railway Tunnel

The site is administered by FoDCCAG and is gated and locked. No access in winter due to roosting bats.

Miss Grace's Lane

With a 30m entrance shaft, this is currently the second longest cave in the Forest of Dean, being 4km long. It is a multi-level development, so route finding can be quite complex. The cave comes under the FoDCCAG administration and is gated and locked. See Jan Karvik for keys.

Noxon Park Iron Mine

The Cave is administered by FoDCCAG. The fenced enclosures are gated and locked.

The Noxon Park area consists of numerous surface workings and scowles. Considerable parts of the mine are flooded and can only be accessed by divers. In very dry periods, the water levels drop, allowing access to explore some of these flooded levels.

Oakwood Mill Deep Level

The Mine is administered by FoDCCAG and is gated and locked.

The Level is only accessible during extended dry periods when water levels drop.

Due to the occasional occurrence of serious bad air, trips have to be lead by either Dave Tuffley or John Hine. The Shaft is for emergency use only.

Otter Hole

The Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club administer the access to the cave on behalf of the landowner, Chepstow Racecourse.

Otter Hole runs right below the racecourse and contains some of the County's finest cave formations. The entrance lies beside the banks of the River Wye and the entrance series is affected by tidal rises and falls. The cave is only safely accessed during the summer months.

Trips for outside groups must be organised with the Otter Hole secretary whose details can be found under the Committee and on the RFDCC website. It is not necessary for members of the Club to be accompanied by a guide, but please notify the Otter Hole Secretary of your intent, and remember to sign in the book at the entrance.

The cave is gated and locked. Keys are held by the Club.

Redhouse Lane Swallet

This 1.6km long cave carries a stream that has been dye tested to the Slaughter Rising down in the River Wye. Can be quite a wet trip, and floods to the roof, but there's probably still a lot more to find. The cave comes under FoDCCAG administration and is gated and locked. The Club has keys.

Robin Hood Iron Mine

A deep entrance shaft (65m / 212 ft) for practicing SRT. The Mine is administered by FoDCCAG and is gated and locked.

Seymour's Swallet & Hoarthorns Wood Swallet

The agreement is with the Seymour Family of 5 Berryfield Rise, Osbaston, Monmouth. WP25 3DU, though Hoarthorns Farm, Edge End, Coleford the property on which the caves lie no longer belongs to the Seymour Family. The Cave is administered by FoDCCAG and is gated but not locked.

Symonds Yat Swallet

The Cave is administered by FoDCCAG and is gated and locked.

Westbury Brook Iron Mine

The Mine is administered by FoDCCAG and is gated and locked. A very varied mine with lots to see if you can find the way.

Wet Sink (Slaughter Stream Cave)

The agreement is with the owner of the land at Wetsink Joyford, Mr. P. Gwilliam of Drysdale Farm, English Bicknor, Nr Coleford. To arrange a visit contact the Wet Sink Secretary. The cave is gated and locked. The Club holds the keys.

This 11km long cave has a mixture of pitches, streamways, sumps, fossil passages, formations and dig sites, as well as pre-historic animal bones. There is surely more to find in here, especially in the remoter parts of the

cave which have had very few visitors.

Whittington stone Mines

Contact the Meets Secretary for the current access procedure.

There are currently NO ACCESS AGREEMENTS TO:

Ladypark Wood Mines

Trowditch Iron Mine Level

Oakwood Mill Deep Level Shaft (emergency exit only)

Minetrain Quarry Iron Mine

Tufts Iron Mine Level

South Oakwood Levels

Old Park Wood

Devil's Chapel

Area to the South of Devil's Chapel

Trafalgar Colliery Railway Tunnel

Coal Mines

Digging

Digging for new caves, or to extend existing ones, is an important and integral part of caving. It is especially important when it is realised that there would be very few accessible caves for people to visit if it were not for a number of cavers who dedicate much of their time to this activity.

As with most clubs the Society is active in this field, and members are currently working at various sites including. Most digs are labour intensive and involve a considerable amount of work. Members are encouraged to take an interest in club digs and offer their assistance whenever possible. There are regular digging trips evenings midweek and also at weekends. There are several extremely good digging sites that are currently vacant if you fancy starting a new project. Enquire for further details.

Digging is taking place at the following digs:

CabSav

Kelly's Lane

Miss Grace's Lane

Wetsink / Slaughter Stream Cave

The Dropper

Hole in the Hedge

Cowhill Farm Dig

Piccadilly Pot

Tingles Mine

For up to date information on any of the digs or to become part of a digging team, ask other members or contact a member of the Committee.

Roger Bailey's Digging Days:

“Jim Hay had been told of running water being heard at the bottom of an abandoned attempt to dig a well at New House farm on the side of May Hill. Ignoring the fact that if water could be heard why give up digging the well, Jim got a team together and began re-digging the hole. After several weekends they got to the bottom of the previous excavation. No noise of running water was audible and all they discovered was a pile of very large sticks of soggy gelignite. The local policeman was informed who after desperately trying to prove the hole was not on his beat passed the buck to his superiors who informed the army's Bomb Disposal squad.

Some days afterwards an enormous “Bang” was heard over a very large area. After this the dig was abandoned and filled in.

Our next dig was the Wigpool Iron mine, which we got into without much

effort through Fox Hole and were highly delighted with what we found. Many trips were made, and still are, exploring its passageways.

Rod Stewart dug out through Steam Hole one evening and crashing his way through the undergrowth to find a path came face to face with a couple of local hunters with shotguns at the ready: some rabbit they were expecting?

A later trip with a gang of us exploring upwards from the bottom levels eventually came upon a large long chamber disappearing into the distance and at our nearest end a cascade of old tins and household rubbish. This was obviously another entrance and not fancying the long grovel back we decided to have a go at digging our way out. Prodding up with a piece of old bed iron the infill gradually tumbled down. A large avalanche of refuse revealed that we were at the bottom of a short small square shaft with empty socket holes in the sides and the welcoming sky above.

One of the team decided to climb up and soon reached the top. Through the trees he could see a dwelling and called back down to the expectant followers "I can see a house with blue doors". He was replied to by young Roger Solari, a Wigpool resident, "There is No house with blue doors on Wigpool!" It was his home of course. We all climbed out and Sway Hole was open. Our first cave dig was at Hawthorns Wood Swallet below Mile End. Now possessing a license for chemical persuasion (they were easy to get then) progress was soon made and we reached the top of a vertical rift about seventy feet deep. We squirmed our way down to a gravel and mud filled bottom but could get no further than this as everything tightened up and it was not practical to blast our way on down a very small side passage. "

(Roger Bailey)

Library

The Club has built up quite a comprehensive library, this includes many books, magazines, DVDs as well as copies of old Club newsletters. The library contents can be found on the Club web-site. If there is anything you wish to borrow, please contact the Club Librarian.

A selection of the library is usually brought along to the Club Socials, where you can peruse and borrow any of the selection.

Club Equipment

The Club has a good array of equipment for use by Members.
Loan of equipment can be arranged with the Tackle Officer.

Brief List of Tackle:-

There are a fairly comprehensive range of static ropes for Belaying and Single Rope Technique (SRT)

A specific set of kit for Wet Sink Stream Cave.(Designed for laddering & belaying)

Two ready made up SRT harness kits .

Various length electron (flexible) ladders.

Bolting kit including hammer.

Various spreaders and hangers.

Makita SDS rechargeable drill with various sizes of bits.

Surveying compass, inclinometer and tape

Conditions :-

All tackle is the responsibility of the person who has signed for it - and their responsibility for its return, within a reasonable time.

All ropes/equipment are to be stored and transported in their respective bags or containers kept well away from any excessive temperature sources and any hazardous fluids or chemicals and used only for the purpose they are designed for.

All tackle should be inspected by the designated person before and after use and any incidental / accidental occurrence be reported to the tackle officer.

All tackle to be returned in as clean a condition as possible. Example :-
Ropes and Harnesses to be submerged in an appropriate container which is clean in itself and filled with clean cold water only.

No detergents used of any kind. Do not power wash as this forces dirt and grit into ropes etc.

For tackle officers contact details - Please see latest news letter or Club Website at :-
www.rfdcc.org.uk

email: tackleofficer@rfdcc.org.uk

Useful Contacts:

Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club website www.rfdcc.org.uk
Gloucester Speleological Society website www.gloucester-speleo.org
Hades Caving Club website www.hadesccl.org.uk
the British Caving Association www.british-caving.org.uk
the Cambrian Caving Council www.cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk
National Association of Mining Heritage Organisation
www.vmine.net/namho-2010

Forest of Dean Cave Conservation and Access Group John Hine (Mole) /
Paul Taylor

Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group www.gcrg.org.uk
The Cave Diving Group www.cavedivinggroup.org.uk
Descent Magazine: www.wildplaces.co.uk
lots of useful information www.sat.dundee.ac.uk/arb/speleo.html

Committee 2010

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