

ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN CAVING CLUB

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EDITOR - T. LEWIS.

History was made recently when some eight members attended an inaugural meeting of the Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club . Some fifteen friends have been meeting regularly over the past twelve months and wishing to widen our field of activities we felt it time to place ourselves on a more solid basis . As many members reside in the Dean area we felt fully entitled to name the club as above .

Mr Roger Bailey , Rose Cottage , Aston Crews , Lea , Nr Ross - on - Wye , Herefordshire . Was elected as Hon' Secretary .

Mr Alan Paton , 8 Orchard Close , Mitcheldean , Glos . Elected as the Treasurer .

Mr Ted Lewis , Springfield , Mansons Cross , Monmouth . Tel - No 2856 . Elected as the chairman .

In order to gain experience , activities have been mainly limited to the old iron mines in the Dean area and everyone agreed that a most useful and enjoyable twelve months of progress had been made .Special thanks are due to R . Keen for information from H. M . Crown Office and also to R . S . for the loan of Franklin Sibly's memoir on the Iron Ores of the Forest of Dean .

Early trips consisted of visits to Old Bow and Old Ham with members gradually acquiring more equipment ; fourteen enjoyed a visit to Old Ham on Good Friday . Interest switched eastwards and several stiff trips were enjoyed in Buckshaft , however members realized that more equipment was needed to cover this fully , so another switch was made to Edge Hills . After a fair amount of exploratory work , several digs were made and the water level reached some 300 feet down . More on this later from Ray Wright . Old Bow and Old Ham continue to provide interest and members are contemplating a rough survey in certain parts of Old Bow . The roof here is dodgy in places and on a recent trip members were careful not to cough whilst passing under some faulty once wedged (but now rotten) blocks in the White-head Limestone .

A keen technical interest is being shown by members in the field of crystallography and here we must congratulate Roger and Lawrence Bailey on the first to find calcite twins in New Dun . Roger has also obtained an ultra-violet lamp for the detection of calcite and other minerals , but this has proved to be happily disappointing ; the crystals we expect to be calcite prove to be as dead as dumped carbide whilst a dirty lump of nothing special will glow like Rudolph's nose . Roger covers this later . Whilst on the subject of crystals I would like to mention the most valuable crystal ever found :- the famous CULLINAN Diamond . It was found in 1905 in the yellow ground of the Premier Mine near Pretoria , and was named after Sir Cullinan the chairman of the company . The rough specimen as found weighed 3,106 metric carats or nearly 11b 6ozs and was apparently only part of a crystal . It was presented in 1907 to King Edward VII and was then cut by the firm of Ascher and Co . Amsterdam . Two large magnificent brilliants , one of them being a pendulous or drop shaped brilliant , seven smaller stones and ninety-six still smaller brilliants were the result of this undertaking and this equal to about 34% of the original specimen . The pendulous weighs 530 carats and is the largest cut diamond in the world . For the great grandfather of all crystals we go to the Black Hills of Dakota where a crystal of Spodumene hardness 7-6.5 was found - six feet wide and forty-two feet long .

CALCITE UNDER ULTRA VIOLET LIGHT.

An article in a National Geographical Magazine on the effects of ultra violet light on certain minerals prompted myself and my brother Lawrence to purchase an ex WD U/V bulb . We had collected a variety of samples from different places , such as limestone lumps of haematite , pieces of broken straws and flow stone , also crystals in the form of rhombohedra (squashed squares) ranging in size from minute to about a quarter of an inch long faces and also a piece of crystal spar about thumb size . All these can be found on the floor of many of the mines we have visited . We placed these samples on a bench in the darkest part of the garage and switched on the the U/V light . Much to our surprise there was no reaction from the straws , flowstone , or crystals but a thin coating on some of the samples glowed a bright red . We had expected to see the crystals glow “fiery red” similar to the illustration we had seen . At first we thought our light was defective , but as other objects fluoresced such as our shirts , fingernails and teeth we knew it was working correctly . We then started making enquiries about the type of limestone in the Forest of Dean and purchased “Rutleys Elements of Mineralogy” . With further study we arrived at the conclusion that the rhombohedra were dolomite and not calcite . On a later visit to New Dun we found some calcite scalenohedron twins or dogs tooth (two twelve sided pyramids , base to base) growing on dolomite rhombohedra and of course these did glow under U/V light . We would greatly appreciate information and exchange of correspondence from other clubs on crystals in general .

Roger Bailey .

In our next news letter we will publish information relating to the Forest of Dean , crystal-wise , from the Geological Museum , south Kent . Does anyone know of a Petrological microscope that we could slip some samples under ?

Editor.

Wych Elm Hole.

Last winter we decided to open an old shaft at Edge Hills , very close to Yew Tree Cottage , one of many in the old Trow Ditch iron ore workings . It had been filled to the with household rubbish and dead animals with a horse for good measure . After moving several tons of rubbish we broke through and discovered our first chain shaft . This was almost vertical , about 75ft deep with a chain hanging down it made of flat links anchored at the top by a large staple . From the bottom of the shaft ran a large crevasse , at a steep angle , meeting water at about 200ft down . Two S. Wales members , M. Davies and R. Sullivan who had joined our party passed through the water and ducking under a rock discovered a way continuing upwards . However we decided to leave this for another day . Jim Hay , one of our party insisted there must be a way through a boulder choke near the entrance , so one evening several weeks later the honour fell to Jim of discovering our second chain shaft . This penetrated some very rough country to almost the depth of our previous shaft and leaves us with the impression there is still much to be discovered in this old mine area .

R .Wright .

THE STONE WALL IN OLD BOW

Members of the Forest of Dean Club and members of several other clubs have long been puzzled by a solid dry stone wall in Old Bow , built from the floor to the roof , about 12ft , and completely blocking the way . Curiosity reached boiling point one recent Sunday afternoon when several members spent half an hour breaking a way through .The wall was about five feet thick at the top , extremely well built with many of the stones weighing more than half a hundred weight .

We have found in the past that old miners only built stone walls for one of two main purposes ; either to support the roof or to get rid of their deads (waste stone) where perhaps the passage was narrow and there was little room to work . Neither case would seem to apply here for the roof is practically self-supporting and there is ample room for waste stone , in fact the area has been scoured for loose stone to build the wall . Scratching our heads other ideas sprung to mind one of them being carbon dioxide , there is an excellent draught here and C.O.2 is practically unknown in the iron mines . The view has been expressed that perhaps it was to prevent access to the Lambsquay Gale , however if one drops twelve or fifteen feet to a lower level , workings will be found extending a fair distance , probably well into the Lambsquay Gale . Water can be discounted for this is in one of the driest areas we have meet .

These were some of the thoughts chasing through our minds when the four members of the party clambered over the wall and found their blocked by a huge fall . This fall was about 25ft high with several hefty slabs of rock poised on the top at an angle of about 40 degrees so climbing very gingerly R . Keene and R .S passed over the top and found a small chamber beyond with apparently no outlet . Which came first - the fall or the wall ? There are falls in other places , none of them blocked by a stone wall . The only sensible suggestion we have been able to think of so far is that perhaps one or more of the old miners was buried by the fall and sooner than risk the lives of their comrades on what might have been a hopeless task the wall was built to seal it off as a tomb .

A pretty theory you may say ; well if you think of an alternative or happen to know the genuine reason for what seems to us as still a mystery we shall be more than pleased to hear from you .

E.D .

Old Bow has recently suffered a nasty attack of vandalism . An excellent nest of eight cave pearls has been reduced to three , however we know of another nest equally as good in a more difficult position so perhaps these will remain undisturbed .

E .D.

We must congratulate Alison Brown on her entry to Birmingham University , also Caroline Pateman more affectionately known as “pudding” who has gained admittance to London University . Alison has been fortunate in joining the local caving group and has promised us an article for a future newsletter on a visit to Goatchurch Cavern and also the Dudley Mines .

We must thank Roger and Lawrence for discovering a source of Nife Cells and headlamps . These appear to be functioning quite well and provide a welcome change from the ever faithful “Stinkies” .

Rex has obtained some stainless wire samples and prices and we hope to debate the making of an electron ladder , and possibly a winch at the next meeting . Rex has also purchased a liquid filled compass and range-finder ; Forward the surveying party .

Subsequent to the visit of M . Davies and R . Sullivan to Edge Hills , M. Davies has kindly offered to act as guide on a reciprocal trip to a lead mine in South Wales . Roger will be contacting all who may be interested in order to arrange a time and date.

The uninitiated will appreciate from the foregoing that there is far more to caving (or more technically speleology) than meets the eye. There is a vast range of scientific interest from calcite formations to hydrology or if you have an engineering background we may appreciate your help in the construction of equipment . You may say we are risking our lives ; well we think we are risking our lives every time we cross the street .

Our subscription is purely nominal , mainly to purchase equipment and prospective members enjoy at least three trips underground before being given the chance to join the club . If you think you could be interested contact any one of the above mentioned officers , you will be more than welcome.

We welcome articles for the newsletter , if you have had an interesting experience or wish to air your knowledge on any particular subject , double spacing and reasonable handwriting please , our typist has been underground but she is not yet expert in deciphering speleological terms .

T . Lewis . ED .

LITERATURE IN THE POSSESSION OF CLUB MEMBERS.

Memoirs of the Geological Survey of Great Britain :-

A special report on the haematites of the Forest of Dean and South Wales -Sir T . Franklin Sibly D.O.C 1927 .

1942 version of the above on the Forest only .

Geology of the country around Monmouth and Chepstow (this includes the Forest) .

“Rutleys” Elements of Mineralogy .

Maps of various iron mines .

Report on the Green-bottom water supply (1903).

Geology and scenery in England and Wales - A.E. Trueman .

British Geology - Observer series .

Minerals in Industry - W.R. Jones .

A Guide to the Collection of Gemstones in the Geological Museum .

The British Caver 1964 .

WANTED A JUNE 1964 copy of the National Geographic Magazine .

P.S Members will be pleased to hear that another three pairs of knee pads have just arrived . We would like to take the opportunity of sincerely thanking the kind friends who have gone to so much trouble to send them .

