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ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN
CAVING CLUB

NEWS LETTER

NO. 7

CONTENTS

PAGE No

Milkwall Tragedy.	1
Dunder Hole.	2
Easter Iron Mine.	2
Oakwood Mill Deep.	2
Old Ham	2
Subsidence at Bream	3
Mid & North Wales Trip	3
Cambrian Conference 1967	3
Gloucester C.R.O	4
H.Q. and Ladder Progress.	4
Surveying.	4
Visitors Programme.	4
Congratulations	5
Geological & Mineralogical	5
Photography	5
Our Sincere Thanks.	6
Future Events.	6
Finance.	6
Cornwall 1967.	7
Who's Who or Any Answers.	7

ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN CAVING CLUB

NEWSLETTER AUGUST 1967

Milkwall Tragedy.

To those who were present at the Turpin shaft on the evening of March 11th, not only had the impossible happened to one of our own founder members whilst he was fulfilling an ambition he had held for over twelve months, which was to abseil the Turpin shaft. This tragedy is still so fresh in everyone's minds, that I feel a full description is unnecessary, however we should consider the rope. Most of us were well aware that Rex had owned this rope something over three years and that he had tested it several times during this period. On the morning of March 11th four members stood in line abreast and passing both rope and ladder from hand to hand they inspected them for visible damage before lowering them on down the shaft. Graham commented on a joint in the ladder and was reassured by Rod as to its safety, so one can feel quite sure there was no obvious damage to either rope or ladder. Examining the broken ends of the rope after the accident a faint black stain was visible for about three eighths of an inch on the of the individual fibres. Suspecting alkaline attack from a NIFE cell Rod tasted the ends but could find no trace, so at our request the rope was sent to the forensic laboratories at Bristol, to identify, if possible, the cause of the black stains.

At the inquest, evidence from the Police ruled out chemical attack, and stated an experts opinion that the black areas on the rope were actually burns marks. We had another chance to examine the rope after the inquest and we found marked deterioration in the general condition, compared to our previous examination after the accident. One of the black areas of the rope had almost broken through, (during the Police examination) and opening the lay ourselves, on one of the blackened areas, we found the black stain had penetrated right through each strand, blacking. Also the fibres were extremely brittle, almost snapping off at the merest touch. Rex had travelled fast on occasions but he had never reported smoke issuing from the rope and it is difficult to understand how these black stains could penetrate right through each strand if they were caused whilst abseiling. We were hoping the Police would have tensile tested the rope, however it would appear that the labs were to busy to do this, so we hoping to do this ourselves :- tensile test an apparently good area, and then a blackened are. When new the rope should have withstood somewhere towards four tons. A microscopic examination X50 was made of some of the black fibres and also undamaged fibres which had been held on a hot a hot ring for several seconds, but the results of this were inconclusive. We now have the lower half of the rope in our possession and we will publish details as they are available.

Rex was quite experienced in abseiling techniques and had been experimenting with various designs of mechanical prissier. He was also experienced in radio location devices and was instrumental in obtaining underground maps of the Forest Iron Mines. His enthusiasm and cheerfulness inspired all who met him, and we can only say how sadly we mourn his loss.

DUNDER HOLE

Latest reports indicate a total length of 250ft with the stream disappearing down a narrow rift. Further progress will be slow, due to the time necessary to reach the end, lay a charge, and return to the entrance, being about two hours.

EASTER IRON MINE.

During March a party led by Rod again tackled the route through Old Bow towards the Red Pit, but were unsuccessful in finding a bypass to the roof falls mentioned in earlier newsletters. The roof above this fall was found to be safe, however the boulders in loose sand immediately beyond this fall are still just as dangerous as they were twelve months ago. After his visit to the Turpin shaft bottom Rod reported the workings in excellent condition with a small dram still on the rails and various tools left lying about exactly as the miners left them. Again with a view to gaining access via the outcrop Roger and Laurence have pushed a dig about seventy feet, and are encouraged by the strength of the draught encountered. We wish them luck.

OAKWOOD MILL DEEP LEVEL

The dig mentioned in our last newsletter has been very successful, and Mike Howell, B Names and P Swartz report many big churns, finally reaching the main level which appears to be completely flooded. Roger and Laurence report several feet of water in the main admit which could be lowered with a little digging through the several falls.

The 1942 Geological Memoir by F.M. Trotter, D.Sc. Reports, Altitude of admit mouth 332 ft above O.D Altitude at the end of the 3000 ft main level is 350 ft above O.D. We shall try and obtain more information from H.M.Crown, office Coleford concerning this mine and also in the same area :- China Engine, Parkhill Level, Park Mine Level and Tufts Level. May we say how pleased we are to see members taking an interest in this corner of the Forest. Further news has come to hand - the main level is not flooded as we reported but dry throughout most of the distance so far explored until it meets the water backed up from the entrance level.

This main level is also double width to accommodate two way dram lines, although no rails have been found yet, obviously due to salvage work at the time of closure. The 1927 report (Sibly's) states that the cross measure Adit was driven and large quantities of ore won, long before 1841, but with very little record of the tonnage of ore removed. This mine may very well hold some pleasant surprises. May we congratulate the members concerned for adding another large mine to our growing list of successes.

OLD HAM

Tony reports another attack by the subversive element. An attempt has been made to smash up the petrified bucket near the Niagra Series and a muddy foot placed squarely on the cave pearls. Rod surprised a party carrying out the gong from New Dun, and asked them to leave it where it was, however on his return later, the gong had been taken, thereby robbing New Dun of one of its principle museum pieces. Also missing from Railway Churn is a dram axle with two wheels attached and we have news that this was seen in a cavers garden in Gloucester, possibly finishing up in the dustbin. It is not fair to blame the caver who owns the garden but to blame the person who carried the axle and the wheels out and then dumped them on them on his friend. If my source of information is correct (I have no reason to believe it otherwise) then this particular person once enjoyed a night's hospitality under my roof. I shall not make so welcome a second time.

SUBSIDENCE AT BREAM

We have been contacted by the Forestry Commission to investigate the disappearance of a small stream at Bream, so a small party of members met recently to decide on a plan of action. Very rarely are cavers able to demonstrate their usefulness in a manner such as this, and I strongly feel we should pull out all the stops to provide as much information as possible. I have met the landowner Mr Wilding, discussed the subsidence with him, and he has given permission for all Club members to prospect on his land at will, provided we close any gates after us.

MID & NORTH WALES TRIP

Intending primarily to recover museum items, a small party under Rod's guidance, visited Mid and North Wales on the second of April and although due to unforeseen difficulties, no items were recovered, everyone had a very enjoyable weekend. Extraordinary "rubber" formations were seen, bendable between the fingers, coloured brown to black, and Rod supposes these may be due to decomposing pyrite and manganese. Also encountered were bright copper carbonate formations and I am hoping that someone will have photographed these. Among the most fascinating underground discoveries of recent years are the "rust oysters" (Rod's terminology) found growing on iron pipes. Outside the field of geology and mineralogy these may even present problems for the bacteriologist.

Rod would like me to stress a warning concerning the mines of Mid and North Wales. Whilst we are able to move underground in the Forest of Dean in comparative safety, the reverse of this applies to the Welsh mines. Being in the main lead and zinc mines, the ores were deposited in a very different manner to the iron ones in the Dean, necessitating different methods of working. False floors, and even levels constructed, with timber support underneath, now sometimes rotten, and the unwary might find themselves taking the quick way, to anything up to 600 ft deep. Those false floors may appear quite normal with rocks and machinery, and even water looking quite natural, yet one false step may result in disaster. On occasions timber will be found to be perfectly preserved, whilst iron may disintegrate on touch. You will agree with Rod when he says, "this area demands the greatest caution and respect from those who visit it".

CAMBRIAN CONFERENCE 1967

Daisy and myself were fortunate to be able to attend the 1967 Cambrian Conference recently, where under Paddy O'Reilly's able chairmanship the conference went quite smoothly with a varied assortment of items being raised for discussion. The minutes of the 1966 Conference were read and these included a statement to the effect that, "The warden's permission was necessary to visit the Forest of Dean" needless to say we corrected this mistaken impression. S.S.S.I's were discussed, and it was stated that having had a cave or mine declared a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its own protection, this could sometimes backfire in that only people with that particular interest would be allowed access. Also on the agenda was, "policy regarding youth training courses" and the South Wales Club delegate, J. Osbourne, Stated that after much discussion the S.W.C. had decided to stop all initiation trips for Scouts and the like, chiefly due to the tremendous increase in request for such trips.

Progress on the Cave Registry was apparently slow, which makes us wonder, how is the Glos Cave Registry progressing ? After the conference closed Bill Little, Inet Holmes, John Osbourne, Paddy, Sue, Daisy and myself went out to Gower Cliffs and had a look at the Minchin Hole. As Inet said, "it can be very impressive if the sun is low, shining straight in to illuminate the cave.

CAVE RESCUE ORGANISATION

The annual general meeting was held on May 25th and was well attended with Dr Lloyd of Mendip taking the chair. In his excellent opening remarks, Dr Lloyd gave us a stern warning about, "The Sin of Pride, It couldn't happen to us", or "It couldn't happen in our Club". Unfortunately the events of the recent months have proved that it can happen to any member of any club at any time. I feel that Dr Lloyd was referring not only to accidents, but to all the things that irritate the genuine caver, such as Carbide dumping, litter spreading and vandalism, etc. Our warden, D Appling, apologises to all those who turned up on May 14th for the rescue practise which was cancelled without our knowledge.

H.Q. PROGRESS

Due to the ladder building programme progress has temporarily halted, however with the club gathering momentum after the holidays we hope to hold an opening celebration party before Christmas. The ladders are progressing well but slowly, and might well repay a little streamlining in production.

From the trade comes news of a new colour film, 500 ASA by Anscochrome also a similar new one by Kodak Ltd. Being a higher price it would probably be better to use these ultra fast colour films in places that justify the speed. David Baily has taken some excellent shots of underground machinery and linkages in one of the North Wales mines so perhaps we shall see these at the next general meeting.

SURVEYING

The Club has at long last purchased a prismatic compass complete with case at a cost of £8. 15s 0d, and this is now in the care of Laurence our equipment officer. Any club member may borrow it providing he takes reasonable care in its use. Mr Howell of the H.M. Crown Office Coleford was kind enough to lend us plans of Oakwood Mill Deep level and China Engine, and these were passed on to Tony for tracing. This will greatly extend our map coverage of the Forest of Dean underground. Tony's maps 1-3 of the Old Ham - New Dun main route are now available, and any member can have copies for a few shillings, the cost of printing. A word of warning - just beyond Prop Churn, Tony has a note OLD HAM - NEW DUN JUNCTION. This of course is in error, and Tony agrees that the boundary between Ham and Dun is beyond the Railway Churn to Ham Shaft level. Tony and his colleagues have put a lot of effort into this survey and we must congratulate him on his persistence in such a self appointed task. Very few of us will realise the number of hours involved to produce a survey of this quality.

VISITORS PROGRAMME

Well over two hundred people, mostly under forty, so far this year, have enjoyed a visit to Old Ham under the guidance of leaders from the club. Most notable amongst them was Paul, a patrol leader with a group of scouts who spent a holiday at How Caple. Paul, now nineteen years of age, lost a leg at the age of eight and has since adapted himself remarkably well to life, displaying the courage and fortitude one discovers in people in similar circumstances. Requiring no help from the leaders Paul saw almost everything normally included in the visitors tour, including football roof and the Blue Pool. He enjoyed himself so much that he has written to me especially to thank us and to ask if we could take him down again, later on in the year. Unfortunately Paul will be on holiday when we hold the next general meetings. On Friday evening the 25th August we were privileged to show some twenty members of the Ross Round Table including the National Conference Organiser who appeared at the Butchers Arms later clad in a kilt. This gentleman later remarked that it was the first he had seen so and so's rear floodlight, an example of the joviality enjoyed throughout the evening. We thank them, not only for their contribution to club funds but the entertainment provided later in the evening, which included an excellent rendering of the "counting the Goats" sung in Welsh. Our sincere thanks to Mrs Dovey of the Butcher's Arms for looking after us so well.

CONGRATULATIONS

To Terry Hems and Malcolm on obtaining an honours degree in engineering at Bristol university. This is the sort of wisdom the club should be able to make use of.

GEOLOGICAL & MINERALOGICAL

Some members have enjoyed the recent series of geological trips under the guidance of W Dreghorn. B,Sc but whether we can repeat the information imparted is a difficult question, geology is certainly a deep subject. Deeper than expected are the Bixhead Stone Mines where the party was glad to escape from the rain, pouring down like stair rods. The miners experienced difficulty with the extremely smooth vertical joints, so plates of iron were bolted to the roof to hold it up. Awre beach was very interesting with its massive amenities which defy all attempts to work them out, although several loaded cars were seen heading back into the Forest.

Of interest to those who like to cut and polish specimens will be the diamond saws of various sizes and prices offered for sale by Clive Jones of South Wales, who is an agent for the American manufacturers. A four inch diameter blade costs somewhere around four pounds, shop around " said someone so I contacted Impregnated Diamond Products Ltd, Gloucester and was informed that a six inch geological grade blade would cost twenty six pounds :- in this case I cannot see any member buying British. These diamond blades are made from artificial diamonds and must be run wet with a constant feed, when they will give an excellent finish, easily polished. A complete cutting machine costs about twenty eight pounds imported, however it would be fairly easy to build such a machine, if there was sufficient interest. Should anyone feel like having a go at grinding and polishing faces on their samples I can let them have Carborundum powder grade 80 free of charge.

Whilst in Cornwall this holiday I was very lucky to meet a Mr Nash, a retired private collector, who although he has only been collecting minerals for the past six years has one of the finest collections in the country. Mr Nash has covered a very wide field in his quest for varieties, he is acquainted with Mr Davison of Penrith and informed me of a Mr Botley who has apparently captured the market by offering high prices to all the mines that are likely to turn out good specimens. Mr Nash's most valued specimen is the top of a Celestine geode about eighteen inches in diameter with a large crystal in the centre, obtained from the quarry at Yate near Bristol. Mr Nash also presented me with some unusual samples and in return I promised him some of our local dolomite, or is it calcite ?

During the winter of 1966 the University of Bristol identified our local crystals with curved striated faces as dolomite yet because of their reaction with dilute hydrochloric acid Mr Dreghorn says these crystals must be calcite. I am indebted to Mr D P Price of Cardiff University for details of a staining test which should settle the question. Although quite common locally I have not seen these crystals in a museum or a collection anywhere else in the country, unless perhaps they are not considered of sufficient interest.

PHOTOGRAPHY

We congratulate members on the higher standard of slides shown at the meetings over the last twelve months, obviously an indication of the increasing interest being shown in this rewarding branch of speleology. Quite good results have been obtained using flash powder, although one cannot help wishing that artificial light film had been used instead of daylight, in order to get more correct colour rendering. The rock walls underground, in places, present such a feast of colour that it seems a pity not to use the correct film and illumination. Incidentally, one can use artificial light film in daylight with the appropriate filter.

OUR SINCERE THANKS.

To Mr Wrigley for practical help with the headquarters. In our present financial position the headquarters programme would have been almost impossible without the help of Mr Wrigely. Also to Carol, who has flown to Canada. Very much in the background, she has typed all our newsletters except one, and the migratory season being almost upon us, she has decided to leave the parental wing and see something of the world, starting in Calgary Canada. I am sure you will join me in wishing her every success in her new life. As for future newsletters, a friend of Carols Miss Barbara Breakwell, Hadnock Court Farm, has agreed to type them for us, providing she can have a trip underground, and this we shall arrange as soon as possible. Also to Ray and Andy for obtaining furniture for the headquarters.

FUTURE EVENTS.

September 7th General meeting, upstairs at the Butchers Arms, Clearwell. Bring tour holiday slides. Nomination forms for the election of Club officers and committee will be handed out and
Must be completed and returned at the next general meeting on Thursday 5th October.

September 10th Second visit to Old Ham by members of the Piers Ploughman Club, Malvern.

September 17th Visit to Old Ham by Brian Barker and a coach load of secondary school children from
Wolverhampton. This is largely experimental, and leaders will be required. Starts possibly at 10 am.

September 24th Cave rescue meet, on the common above Barbecue Churn. If wet the headquarters. On
the agenda will be shock treatment, first aid, stretchering and communication techniques.

October 4th General meeting at the Butchers Arms, Clearwell. Nomination forms for committee members for 1967 - 68 must be returned at this meeting or they will not be considered
valid.

November 2nd Annual general meeting, again at the Butchers Arms, Clearwell. Election of Chairman
And Committee for the coming year. Subscriptions will fall due as from November 1st.

FINANCE

Due to the generosity of the visitors we have had the pleasure of escorting this season, our financial position is healthier than at this same time last year, however no caving club should have to rely on donations from the public. The committee after much deliberation has decided a slight increase in subscriptions this is necessary if we are to continue as a successful club, so legislation to effect this, will be introduced at the general meeting on September 7th.

CORNWALL 1967

More members than might be expected found their way to Cornwall for a holiday this season, some complete with diving gear and tents, while others were content to pay the exorbitant peak season prices at various hotels and guest houses. The usual visits were paid to the County Museum at Truro, where Mr Douch the Curator and Mr Penhallurick greeted us as old friends. Wanting to improve my collection of slides, I wandered round the mineral collection wondering what to have a go at, when I suddenly realised that I would need hours to do justice to any of the magnificent single specimens, so I decided to postpone photography there, until I could spare the time these specimens deserve. Mr Penhallurick thanked us for donating a beautiful specimen of brush ore with lumps of crystals, and promised to display it as soon as possible.

On Sunday 30th July, Jim and family, David, John, Sue, Rod and yours truly and family met on the rocks at the St, Ives surfing beach where an exiting few hours were spent snorkelling and diving to an old wreck just off the beach. Nothing of very great interest was found, however Rod reported the brass work of the wreck was quite shiny, presumably due to drifting sea weed.

A new member has applied to join the club, Mark Broderick of Roughlea Guest House, Pothtown, and we welcome this chance of a contact in such an interesting area. Marks farther extends a very sincere a welcome to any caver from the Forest who might like to drop in for a chat and a cuppa.

ANY ANSWERS OR WHO'S WHO.

Those members who work at Ranks will be familiar with the back page of the Rank House Magazine called "Vision" where pertinent questions are put to those who might know the answers. We have decided to run a similar page, and we would welcome contributions. Let it be fully understood that nothing personal is intended, and we hope the originators of the various questions will laugh with us.

Who was smothered in "cowsh" helping to push out a vehicle ?

Who, on seeing a "fair cleavage" disappear into the café kitchen shouted to his friends, "do you think she will bend down if I drop a penny", only to turn around and see another

waitress

Smiling sweetly at him over the counter ? (was his face red ?)

Who lost a pint over a crinoid ?

Who decided to find a new route out of New Dun with half a party of visitors ?

Who took quite a few wonderful shots of the mountains somewhere on the continent, without

any

Film in the camera ? Or was it laced incorrectly ?

Who likes using the explosives, the sort that doesn't need det's ?

Who packed in caving for a while, after a trip in Dunder Hole ?

Who said he came out from Pit Bottom in ten minutes ? The record going in supposed to be twelve and a half, or was he on a bicycle ?

William Dreghorn D.Sc. F.R.G.S. has been spending most weekends tramping the Forest for material for his latest book. He sent me this true story, I hope he will not mind my repeating.

"I came out of the Forest to a pub called the Severn View near Primrose Hill. Too crowded inside so I sat out on the concrete outside as there was no chair, my stick and bag on the ground. A well dressed gent rolled out and threw me 6d. I doffed and said "Thank you sir".

Do you know any "who's who" or a story as good as the above ? If you do keep it under you helmet until you can pass it on for the newsletter.

Happy caving,

John E Lewis
Hon. Chairman

P.S. Yet again this newsletter has been a one man effort. Can I appeal to any member with something interesting to describe to put it on paper and let me have it. I have been holding several articles for a journal but perhaps it would be better to include them in the next newsletter.

J.E.Lewis

P.P.S. Please note our Hon. Secretary's new address is :-

J.Hay,
10 Park Walk,
Chase Walk,
Ross-on-Wye,
Herefordshire.