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ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN

CAVING CLUB

APRIL

NEWS LETTER

NO. 12

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WHO'S - WHO

Held over to next newsletter.

GENERAL NEWS

A short section this month as, although the month has been very busy as regards to caving, there has not been much on , of a general nature.

Caving is obviously picking up very well again after Foot Mouth and it is hoped that more of the members will participate in the numerous trips now taking place mid-week and at weekends. With caving picking up, it appears that work at the Castle is falling off and it becomes increasingly difficult to justify the expenditure of the rent - small as it may seem. A solid fuel stove and boiler has been obtained and is to be installed in the alcove opposite the main fireplace. In this way it is hoped to be able to have hot water waiting after a caving trip without having to light the main fire and having to leave somebody to look after it. The main sewer has been exposed under where the toilet is to be installed and a small bore pipe will connect the shower drain pipe to it. All this is very well but will come to nothing unless labour is available to do the work. A notice board has been made and a list of jobs will be posted on it - then there will be no excuse for those that say they would come but cannot find anything to do. White-washing may not be popular but it is always there to be done.

Digging is going well in the Wye Valley with the Baileys Green Moss Pot being timbered to stop the continuous slide of material into the hole and Coldwell Swallet temporarily abandoned in favour of the now, un-named swallet. The ladder practice was disappointing as the weather made it near impossible but the committee are determined that no one will be allowed to borrow the club ladder unless they have attended a ladder practice or are borrowing it for practice. The same goes for trips where ladder pitches are involved, as members wishing to go on these trips will have to show that they have at least a minimum of experience on ladders.

The past events section is larger this month as all known trips have been included instead of just the club arranged trips which tended to become a list of visitors trips. Following last months appeal for better records of trips, these trips could also be written up for the newsletter - especially where there is a trip of interest to other club members as with John Elliott's account of his weekend in South Wales. It is a good way of getting information around the other members and could very well result in larger groups on these trips. Water levels and stream levels are of great interest as the pumping by the Water Board (when it starts) may very well drop the levels in the mines to a point where we might get back into the areas we were able to get three years ago.

South Wales Weekend

March 16th -17th. John Elliott.

Saturday.

The day started bright and early as we set off across the Black Mountains at 11 o'clock in driving wind and rain. Between Carmarthen and Llandeilo lies Carreg Cennen Castle, and as our business lay in this area, we decided to take a look. As usual it has been built as far away from everything as possible and soldiers must have had to go miles out of their way just to have a fight.

On learning that the dungeon consisted of a natural cave, we immediately borrowed an oil lamp off the friendly Welsh guide and headed into the unknown. A narrow passage led steeply down into a chamber from which a well proportioned passage led off, terminating after about 100 ft. As Roger Solari frantically dug for an extension with our only light, Jean and Tony Day and I consumed a bar of chocolate. We eventually dragged Roger out and awarded him the C D U for his brave effort. We returned to the wind and rain commenting on the silly nuts who gated this cave with a castle. Nearly as bad as Mendip.

The object of our trip to this area was to visit Llygad Llwechr, a cave that has always fascinated me ever since I first tried to pronounce it. Unfortunately none of us knew exactly where it was. After driving right around the castle at a radius of about 10 miles, we slowly drove in ever decreasing circles until we finally located the area and continued to circle it. Suddenly we stopped at a ford and, braving the weather traversed upstream. Finding nothing, we drove round in another circle, stopped again at the same place and went downstream. A larger stream was finally joined which looked more promising, and as it was unlikely to resurge downstream, we went upstream. At last - we were there, lovely O F D / Dan-yr-Ogof type resurgence. Again we were getting giddy as we only 100 yards from where we parked the car. Why go underground when you can have fun like this on the surface (in pouring rain)

We entered the cave after exchanging wet clothes for dry caving and to get out of that wind and rain made it all worth while. The cave is described as easy but is far from un-interesting. It is complex and the formations are quite good and as four river chambers, these do nothing to ease the confusion. Even the blasted cave seems to go round in circles. The fourth river chamber is very impressive and entrance to it is gained by way of a 20 ft pitch. A lot fun could have been had if we'd worn our wet suits , as it was , my wellies made a poor substitute (my caving boots are unfit for dry caves) . After a couple of hours we left the cave with stomach trouble. We were hungry.

Sunday

The weather had steadied down to a gale as we trudged up over the hill to the entrance of Ogof Ffnonn 2. This time Roger Solari and myself had joined up with three West Midland caving club members. Our object was to take a look at the route towards O F D 3, Roger had been there once and thought he could probably remember the way.

I was to lead to Arete Chamber and Roger would take over from there. I took the usual wrong turning which brought us into Gnome Passage much quicker than the other routes and I was halfway down it before I even recognised it. A slight adjustment in direction, a quick look at the chasm and we were climbing down into Arete Chamber. Someone trod on my hand and I nearly found a quicker way down. (not recommended) Roger took over and we followed him through the vast network of passages. Memory plus trial and error finally brought us hot and sweating to the Crevice. Wet suits are not ideal in this territory.

It was decided not to continue any further, but to go back and look at some of the so many different passages that we had passed on route. Already the formations had more than impressed us and great care had to be taken in one passage to get by a cluster of erratic stals over two feet long. The first junction we came to involved a small climb and Roger, who was first, gave a wild shout as he peered over the top. Another fantastic bunch of formations had been met and even I, for once, was speechless. Further exploration continued and we could not hope to cover anywhere near what was to offer. A lot of passages were probably virgin territory but it is impossible to know what has been done and what hasn't. Eventually we were heading out and I used one of the routes that lead through the other enormous chamber even wider than Gnome Passage.

We were all satisfied with the trip which had lasted nearly seven hours and it made an impressive start to one of the other lads who hadn't been in a Welsh cave before.

PAST EVENTS

Friday 8th March.

Saturday really - as a small group who set out to dig Coldwell Swallet all night didn't manage to get underground until 1 am in the morning. A vast amount of silt was shifted but the cold slowly penetrated and the group gave up around 4 am.

Saturday 9th March.

Another of the now common Saturday evening trips forced on club members by a certain self-employed member that won't go underground during daylight when the public is prepared to part with its money.

Sunday 10th March.

A coal level recently uncovered by excavation near Symonds Yat was looked at - from the outside by all but one member - he got so dirty that he had to walk down to the stream half a mile to get clean. The level had collapsed about 60 feet in but is apparently to be reworked. A small was put in Coldwell Swallet but the results not yet seen and some suitable cliffs for laddering were looked at.

Wednesday 13th March

An evening trip down through Old Ham - New Dun to have a fresh look at the area where the connection with Easter Iron Mine is thought to be.

Sat 16th - Sun 17th March

A south Wales weekend by some of the members (see general news section).

Sunday 17th March

A party of 26 Ilford Scouts was given 5 hours in Old Ham and New Dun and had their lunch in Railway Churn. Exchange trips were done to New Dun bottom via the normal and the shafts routes.

Monday 16th March

Phil and a friend George did a short trip into Oakwood Mill in the evening to give a trip and to look at the water levels.

Tuesday 19th March

An evening trip into Wigpool with some beginners and some that hadn't seen much of it before. Down Sway Hole and up Steam Hole after a winding route taking in some passages not on the normal route.

Friday 22nd March

An evening trip through Old Ham and New Dun via the shafts route to have another look at the roads towards Easter.

Sunday 24th March

A proposed club laddering practice at Symonds Yat near Coldwell Swallet never got really started due to bad weather. Some members did attempt to ladder the cliffs but gave up after a few climbs had been done.

Green Moss Pot was timbered by the Baileys with some help from the opposition group and some bang was let off in a promising looking swallet about 400 yards away.

Following the disappointing morning, a group went into Old Ham in the afternoon and covered some of the extensions.

Saturday 30th March

A small group trip into Old Ham.

Roger and Malcolm attempted to get down Dunder Hole but found that the sink hole in the stream had unblocked itself and the dry section was very wet. Roger got as far as the stream but then turned back. The stream underground was virtually dry.

Sunday 31st March

The Baileys continued in Green Moss Pot while the Coldwell group dug in the new swallet 400 yards away. Some very satisfactory echoes were produced in the Wye Valley but the swallet didn't go and the water still disappears down small rifts in the sandstone overlying the limestone. Judging on the thickness of the sandstone at Green Moss Pot, there is around 12 feet to get down to the limestone where it might open up.

FUTURE EVENTS

Easter Weekend. 12th - 15th April

A number of members intend to camp at Porth-yr-Ogof over the weekend and to cave in the area. Some diving might be done but the main object is to have a weekend of wet caves and to possibly visit Dinas Mine. All members are welcome as there is plenty of dry caving to be done as well.

For those that stay at home over easter G S S is holding a barbeque at their H Q at Bottom Cottage and all R F D C C members are welcome provided they bring 2/-d for food and their own drink. The barbeque is on Saturday night and starts around 8 pm.

Friday 19th to 21st April

Ten beds booked at Penwylt for the weekend. It is hoped that we can do an exchange trip through O F D 2 - Cwm Dwr on one day and use the second day for Dan-yr-Ogof or O F D 3. The weekend is likely to be fairly energetic but suits will not be a necessity - only very desirable. O F D 2 means ladder pitches of over 80 ft total, so be sure you are happy about it as the trip back through Cwm Dwr is very long.

Friday 24th to 26th May

Advanced notice of another South Wales weekend - nothing planned in the way of caves for that weekend but a trip for beginners will be included.

From the Past Events section it can be seen that there is plenty of activity mid-week and at weekends during the month. If you want a trip, you only have to ask around and you will find someone going. Or how about helping on one or the digs or starting one of your own ?

Wednesday evenings at the Castle are still on, although it is difficult to believe at times. Surely some of you fancy yourselves as carpenters, painters or plumbers.

LATE NEWS

Apologies to club members for the lateness of the April newsletter - the May edition is nearly completed and will be issued as soon as printing difficulties allow.

So that members will be up to date with planned activities, here is a list :-

Sunday 5th May

G S S trip to Lamb Leer.

Sunday 12th May

Club ladder practice at Symonds Yat below Coldwell Swallet.

Saturday 18th May

Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group A G M at the Butchers Arms Clearwell. Starts at 8 pm.

Sunday 19th May

All day visitors trips in Wigpool for Wolverhampton School children.

Friday 24th - 26th May

Weekend at Penwylt. Book early for Dan-yr-Ogof and Ogof Ffynnon Ddu.

Trips planned for June include a weekend camping on the Gower coast for swimming, canoeing and caving (spring bank holiday ?) and a day trip to Mendip - Possibly St - Cuthbert's.