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ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN
CAVING CLUB

JULY

NEWS LETTER

NO. 13

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To produce this newsletter every month requires a great deal of effort on the part of a few people to correct and correlate information. This is your club and newsletter, so if you have any information or an account of a trip, which would interest other members, please forward it, either verbally or in writing so that may be included in the newsletter.

General News

On the surface, it would appear that little caving has been in recent months but much activity has gone on concerning the club digs.

Similarly, little work has been done at the castle, except for pointing the fireplace surround, painting the fireplace and cleaning up the main room.

At present there are no ladders to make since the materials are on order and so we can concentrate on the headquarters. Over the past few months there have been as few as three and at the most, six club members at the Castle on any Wednesday evening. It seems strange that the numbers often increase two fold at the Butchers Arms afterwards.

If you have any time to spare on a Wednesday evening please come along and lend a hand. In the near future, it is intended to clear up the office and to put the club maps, records etc in there. It is hoped that we may soon have the use of a spray gun which will speed up the decorating of the rest of the headquarters. Jobs for which materials are available are :-

Filling and pointing cracks in stonework etc.

Painting the main room green up to the 6 ft level.

Painting the remainder of the walls white (5 gallons of white paint available for this) .

Building the kitchen sink support.

Secretaries Note

The preparation of this newsletter has been undertaken by Malcolm Sterry and it is hoped that this arrangement will result in regular monthly newsletters. All articles etc, to Malcolm therefore.

RECENT ACTIVITIES

South Wales

Since the last newsletter there have been three trips to Penwyllt. The first was a weekend in late April and interest was mainly focused on O F D 2. These trips are covered by articles later in the newsletter. The second, May 24th - 26th, Was a disappointing weekend, due to some extent to the adverse weather conditions. On the Saturday, a party went into Cwm Dwr with a view to looking around the Marble Showers series. The water in O F D 2, stream way was rather high and so the party taped off and photographed formations in the Smithy are. On the Sunday, there were two trips into O F D 1, one photographic trip, and the other, a trog around with Bruce Foster, visiting the less frequented parts of O F D 1.

On June 9th, a day trip particularly for the newer or less experienced members of the club was arranged. The turn out was committee members and two beginners not yet members of the club - disappointing . It is very disheartening for the committee, and in particular, for the secretary, who try to arrange trips for the club and see a miserable turn out. However, the trip itself was very good. The party of seven led by Jim found its way to the bottom of stream way, visited the Annex, and went up the stream passage, out at the traverse, across Loopways Jump, to the step, across the Beta Ledge Leap, up the Airy Faries traverse into Rocky Holes Chamber, across Maypole traverse and into the stream way again. Lunch was taken in Lows Passage after a brief excursion to Boulder Chamber (somehow Including the water fall traverse) .

A short cut to Bolt traverse was taken via Lows Chamber, Dons Crawl, Roundabout Chamber, Gypsum Passage, Broadway, Pi Chamber and Bolt Passage. After Bolt traverse, Laurence Bailey took two others to Column Chamber via the Dug-out whilst Jim Hay took two more to Column Pool via the little traverse to Column Passage. A short trip to the sump was made then out via Pluto's Bath.

In The Forest

Easter Dig :- The Easter dig in New Dun Iron Mine is Very promising indeed, illustrated by the fact that most club members have helped in the dig. The dig is through a clay fall which appears to have slid into the level from the top right hand side. A great deal of work has now been done in making the dig safe, and as a result, progress is good. At present time, a little bang is required - more information from John Elliott later in the newsletter.

NOTE :- It cannot be over emphasised that care must be taken in the shaky are just before the dig.

Wye Valley

Due to lack of time, and the attractive prospects in New Dun, Roger and Laurence Bailey have done little in Green Moss Pot except to inspect the joinery to make sure that the dig has not fallen in. They then covered the top of the rift with timber to prevent further unwanted material sliding into the rift. Time again has prevented further work in Coldwell Swallet but there is hope for the future.

Miscellaneous.

Roger Solari, John Elliott, Ken Faull and company have been mucking about with New Dun Bottom, details of which are supplied by John later in the newsletter.

Some club members have been doing some work at Bream - no details supplied ?

Oakwood Mill - Phil Schwarz and John Saunders found the water to be down to one foot on the main level.

Puzzle Wood - A number of club members enjoyed a joint social with G S S, members on Wednesday 12th June when Puzzle Wood was visited. The old scowle holes and crop workings have been made up as an interesting walk and semi maze and a fine one and a half hours was spent chasing the tail of the large column as it wound round in circles. Our member managed to get lost with his wife (?) and was suitably ambushed as they stumbled on the way out.

South Wales April Weekend - Saturday 20th April .

N Sterry.

On receiving the news that the Bailey brother were going to Foster in O F D 2, top entrance, it was decided that the other club members had to do some caving to uphold the name of R F D C C, Jim Hay, Roger Solari and John Berry decided to do the trip from Cwm Dwr to O F D 2, realising the graveness of the situation, John Elliott and Malcolm Sterry of the G S S, decided to join the inexperienced party in an effort to strengthen it.

At 12.15, Jim, John and Malcolm descended the entrance pitch by doubled rope and awaited the arrival of John Elliott and Roger. On their arrival, the former party left them at the bottom of the pitch to see what a mess John could make of recovering and coiling the rope. Jim and party made their way through Dim Dwr and the stormy crawl - slowly due to the excessive overloading of one of the pack animals (Malcolm).

On arriving in the Yama, Distant groans were heard from John worming his way through with 100 ft of nylon.

Jim, John B and Malcolm carried on to the choke where they patiently waited for the others. They waited and they waited. It was then decided to get through the choke and wait the other side. Malcolm plus ladder and bag started the choke and at the same time John and Roger arrived. The complete party then got through the choke.

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John, John and Roger took up comfortable positions and rested for half an hour while Jim and Malcolm untangled the rope and attempted to give it some definite shape. The reluctant heroes plodded on through Shack 1, and to the stream. As they made their way down the slope to the entrance, John B, Jim and Roger sang and shouted in an effort to drown the objections of John and Malcolm who were fed up with carrying the equipment. They made their way up the main stream until the first peasant revolted. Malcolm decided that he would not carry the ladder bag any further. The kind hearted Roger relieved him of his burden. John complained of his load but no one took any notice.

The party then left the stream way and made a brief half hour visit to the Marble Showers series where Jim and Roger made some interesting finds. They all then returned to the stream way and carried on up to it. John was still complaining about carrying the rope in one of the pots.

After reaching the Maypole, which was already laddered, they eventually found their way to bottom of the climb. The Baileys party could be heard above, and so Jim, Roger and Malcolm climbed the pitch and the two Johns followed with aid of a lifeline down from Laurence.

It was decided to have lunch and so Jim, John E, John B, Roger S, Roger B, Laurence B, Maureen Parker, Bob Saunders, Dave Tuffley and Malcolm Sterry sat down for a banquet of sardines and cheese. The smell of this delightful meal attracted other cavers in the vicinity and they were all invited to taste the revolting muck.

After lunch, everyone went up Salubrious Passage where all but Jim, John E, Roger S and Malcolm went out. The remainder went to look at the route to There via the short cut. They reached the Crevasse where John decided that his legs were just not long enough. At this the party turned back and decided to take Johns short cut from Gnome Passage to the entrance. It took 20 minutes to find the short cut but then only a few minutes to get out of the entrance, reached at 8.15 pm.

The group hurriedly changed and retired to the gin.

Sunday 21st April - Roger Solari.

Three members of the club and one Welsh caver set off from the S W C C, headquarters armed with an 80ft ladder, 100 ft of rope and two cameras with the intention of following the route to O F D 3, photographing on route.

At 12.15 pm we entered the top entrance and soon passed through Gnome Passage to the Chasm. We decided to follow the chasm instead of the short route. This necessitated descending a 20 ft ladder pitch onto a very slippery, muddy bank, Nontmorillonto Clay, continued for some way, making this route more awkward. After a 10 ft climb on a knotted rope, the junction to 3, was soon reached. Already our noble secretary was complaining of the heat and was looking for water. We were back on familiar ground, having passed these passages on Saturday. With a little delay we reached the first junction on the route. As there is a small flow here, photographs were taken. Malcolm had some difficulty with his camera when the shutter stuck open after taking his first shot. After Jim had released it, he had no further trouble and photo's in a small chamber were taken. We then moved on to Bhorni Junction where there are some excellent formations. While Malcolm and Jim took photo's of these and some other formations further down the passage, Bob and I explored the passage to the left. The passage was a high rift and we were traversing at about 50 ft for most of the way. After about 150 ft the rift widened and a small stream fell into the rift. After a further traverse a large chamber was reached. Skirting a boulder choke, we passed through some boulders, moving one accidentally that was pivoted precariously in our route, and into a large rift. This soon ended in a boulder choke so we returned to Bhowani Junction after ¾ hr away. The party was reunited at the Crevasse. After Bob had posed for some photo's half way across, we all managed the Crevasse easily and agreed that it was much easier than it appeared at first glance. A 30 ft ladder pitch followed and, as this was into a very high chamber, flash powder was used to take what should be a good picture. The party then made a quick trip through the boulder chambers, down a couple of climbs and a very long rift, to a rather awkward climb (which Malcolm and I managed to avoid by traversing - our long legs help at times like these) and hence to the Shambles - a tottering pile of shattered rock overlooking a large chamber. Immediately after this, the traverse was met. A rather exposed traverse along a wide flake starts this section and the far wall is just too far for comfort. The rest of the traverse might be called easier except for where the ledges peter out and a 3 ft descent at a height of at least 60 ft is necessary. After 200 ft a pile of boulders is reached. Beyond this the rift is very wide, Malcolm and I managed the traverse, Bob descending 10 ft to a lower set of ledges and Jim deciding that he had seen enough and would wait for us - that's his excuse anyway. Shortly after this the boulder choke is reached, a descent through boulders leads to a lower rift where a squeeze can be passed into O F D 3. While Bob tried to retrieve a sling he left on a previous trip and Malcolm decided that he wouldn't make the squeeze with his NIFE cells on and wouldn't take them off, I passed through the squeeze and descended past several good formations to the stream. We soon reached Jim again who took some photo's of us in the traverse. After regaining the crevasse, we paused to take some more photo's while the ladders were rolled up. The party then made a rather hasty retreat to the entrance passage where Jim was so impressed with the formations that he took more photo's. The S W C C - HQ was reached at 7.30 pm.

Recent Work in Old Ham / New Dun Iron Mines.

John Elliott.

The focus of interest in the last couple of months have been the effort to force a connection through between New Dun and the old Turpin workings. These workings should lead into the extension of Easter Mine. Since the end April, over 45 hours have been recorded digging a clay fall at the for end of the 320 ft deep second landing. At first the dig was very unstable and caused some unhappiness among the dibbers, but slowly it has settled down. Work is hard and large parties are desirable although not always possible to get. Why do we keep at it ? This fall blocks a fair size drivage which was worked from the other direction ie, not from New Dun. This can be proved by looking at the shot holes and also the obvious age of the surrounding workings.

The present state of the dig is good and the top of the fall has been reached. This is in the form of the usual bell chamber. It is proving harder to go down the other side than we at first thought and blasting will probably be necessary to break up some large rocks. We are confident of beating this but it won't be without a lot more work.

On Saturday 8th June, Ken Faull, Roger Solari and myself entered Old Ham with the intention of doing some work at New Dun Pit Bottom. On the way down I checked certain depths from the entrance with an altimeter borrowed from a friend at work. The results were :- Railway Churn 150 ft - New Dun Pit Bottom 300 ft, Water levels 375 ft. Margin of error plus or minus 10 ft.

We were interested in a hole in the roof next to the filled in main shaft. It had been timbered over by the miners and for some time we had made attempts to dislodge them. Then we did, the fact that the miners had piled rocks on them only just escaped us. At last we had pierced a hole large enough to get through and this was our intention. Ken produced some clamps (taken from his wife's washing line under protest) and proceeded to join two iron poles found conveniently nearby. We then hoisted it in position after first attaching our ladder to the top. Those who know the area will realise that this was a messy job due to the used lorry oil poured down the shaft from Fred Watkins yard above. My two rotten mates made me climb first, just to see if it was safe. The pole bent nicely at the clamps which I tried ignore. Holding my breath, I went through the timbers and grabbed an iron bar which provided the only secure point. Easing myself up, I looked, To the left a pile of boulders which looked most insecure, so I quickly looked right. I seemed to be in a circular chamber about 25 ft in diameter. The walls were decorated with flows of calcite but it was in a very rotten state. To the farthest point the shaft had broken in, spilling rubbish and oil in, an untidy heap. I had the impression that the chamber was natural but it is difficult to tell. Thankfully I descended, Roger then went up and reported much the same as me. Ken didn't seem keen but we gave him a little encouragement. Muttering and cursing at the bending pole, he ascended into the mess of rotten timbers, rocks and oil. On reaching the ground he then told us that the obvious way on was behind the unfriendly looking boulder pile. One of us would just have to go and have a better look. Roger volunteered and after kicking Ken up the rear, he reclaimed. This time he managed to climb upon our support bar but he was still shaking when he came down. It didn't go.

To get revenge we decided to visit the Old Sling dig and we were amazed to find that it had not fallen in. After a comforting walk over fallen timbers and under hanging rods, we emerged with Ken somewhat paler and very quite.

An area of Old Ham well worthy of a mention was found by Mike Howells and Phil Schwarz and lies in the Submarine Hatch area. By digging around a large fall, they entered some very interesting workings.

It was back in March that Phil introduced Malcolm Sterry, Ken Faull, Roger Solari and myself to the system.

Con't

Several trips were made exploring and the only obvious extension was where the main drivage had collapsed in very large proportions. A little digging and by pushing some rotten timbers aside brought us into a horrible passage with a hanging roof. The miners had used it like this as there were wedges in the roof. Roger dug the next fall and he and I squeezed through without our helmets and NIFE cells. These we had to drag through behind us. A junction was met and I took one he the other. The ground I was in soon became unsuitable for human habitation and Roger had continued until it again had fallen in. As he turned round, a pile of deads fell on him, shattering our already nervous state. We got out of there fast.

Throughout the system a good draft prevails. The direction may be towards Old Sing but we are not sure. Sometime we will go back there - maybe.

FUTURE TRIPS

In view of the fact that the holidays will soon be with us, few trips have been arranged outside of the area, but we may have a trip to Lamb Lear, Mendip which will be good practice for laddering. This cave consists mainly of a large chamber entered by a mine passage. The entrance pitch is fitted with a 60 ft fixed metal ladder and there is a further 70 ft ladder pitch into the main chamber. For those that think that they are up to it, there may be a good trip to St, Cuthberts Swallet, Mendip.

As usual, G S S. have invited us on their arranged trips which are as follows :-

July 13th / 14th Camping in the Little Neath Valley with the intention of doing Little Neath River Cave on the Sunday.

August 25th Agen Allwed - probably Summertime Series.

Sept 14th / 15th (provisional) Swilden Hole - August Longwood. This promises to be an exhilarating weekend.

Note :- Any technical articles would be very welcome for next months newsletter. Any volunteers.