

# **THE ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN CAVING CLUB**



**MAY 1969**

**NEWSLETTER No 17**

## CONTENTS

Editorial	Page 1.
General News :-	
Membership	1
Fund Raising	1
Club Meetings	1
Castle	1
Pyrean	1
B S A. Conference	2
Library	2
Recent Activities in the Forest	2
Meet List	3
The Political Scene	4
Reports on Mendip rescue 68.	5
Trip Accounts :-	
Bar Pot	6
Easgill Caverns	7
Swildons Hole	9
Agen Allwedd	10
Lamb Lear	12

---

## **Editorial**

This issue is a little late, or so we are told, but don't worry, things can't get worse. In defence of the newsletter, we produce it regularly, if infrequently. In view of the work involved, it seems likely that news sheets will replace some newsletters, ie, newsletters every three months with news sheets for the two months in between. This means that some of the material that we publish at the moment will be left out. Perhaps trip reports could be put in the book provided at The Butchers Arms. I make an appeal for everyone to put in the log book accounts of any trips, large or small.

## **General News**

Membership - This year, we have thirty five members to date, with another half a dozen pleading with the committee to be included in this select band of assorted bodies. What perhaps is more encouraging, we feel that we have more active people this year, than any previous year, although this does not reflect on the headquarters.

## **Fund Raising Activities**

Since the last newsletter, we have held two Barbeques in Old Ham ( British Mine ), and it is purely coincidental that we have made a small profit. Both events went very well - very enjoyable and pleasantly uneventful, with the exception of a minor incident, when the main power cable accidentally got severed in two.

I hope the persons responsible got a kick out of it. I will take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped on these two occasions. Special thanks must go to Jim, who organised both functions almost unaided.

## **Club Meetings**

As a small section of the club will know we hold monthly meetings where it is hoped, members can talk about their most recent caving trips, if they can remember that long ago. These meetings tend to be dominated by the same voices - those of the secretary and the treasurer - so please come along, bring some slides ( and your wife if you must ) and inject some life into these occasions.

## **Castle**

Having dealt with some of my usual moans, I must not forget to include the Castle. Work, although only done by the faithful few, has progressed well. Sinks and showers are near completion, and kitchen facilities are rapidly improving. We have beds for about twenty but alas the toilet still has no door. As you will see from the meet list, there is a weekend to work on the headquarters - hint. Note - correction to dates published in May news sheet,

In tradition with these days of beaurocracy, we have drawn up a set of Castle rules - posted on the notice board - please observe.

### **Pyrenean Trip**

This years club trip is to do some caving in the Pyrenees. There are three and a half members in the party

( we think that you'll get there alright Terry, but we are not so sure about the return journey ) .

The party consists of John Elliott, Roger Solari, Terry Gardner and myself. We are going for two weeks and hope to spend about eight days in the St. Girons area.

The account of last years trip to Ireland is available to members free - contact either R Solari, J Elliott or myself.

### **British Speleological Association Conference**

If it would prepare a paper and lecture on the iron mines of the Forest of Dean. Roger Bailey and Jim Hay are writing the paper which Jim will dispatch at the conference in September.

### **Library**

Roger Bailey has put in a good deal of time in re-organising the library. So now is the chance to reap the benefits of his work. A list will be published soon but if you tell him your subject, he will immediately consult his card index, and produce the required information.

### **Recent Activities in the Forest**

I do not intend to include a record of all trips over recent months, but just a few notes on some of the activities in the Forest. Roger and Laurence, with the help of others, have been doing a dig in Old Ham, with the hope of getting into fresh workings. Tony Day has surveyed to the dig to help them find their exact location. With the help of Ian Standing, a friend and his radio location device, it is hoped to confirm this location.

There is a very interesting natural stream passage near this dig, which is a fine example of the mines containing natural stuff. Its well worth a visit and I am sure Roger and Laurence could do with some willing helpers.

Its difficult to note everything that has been done in the mines, but I know that Phil Schwarz, Mike Howells and John Elliott have done some work in the Bream and Noxon Park areas. I believe that these three in particular are interested in compiling a map, with Scowels, shafts and levels marked on it. If you are interested in this scheme, I suggest you contact them.

Symonds Yat Swallet is the site of further excavations. Some members have been working with members from Birmingham University Speleolgical Society on this dig, which is going very well if a little unstable. It is hoped to dye test this sink as soon as possible.

On the following page is the meet list for the rest of the year. Please make a special note of this list as the one published in the much hurried news sheet was very much in error. Particular note should be made that the Lancaster - Easgill trip is on 20<sup>th</sup> Sept and not in June as stated. This is of great importance as the fells are closed for grouse breeding

## MEET LIST

- May 31<sup>st</sup> June** First working weekend at the castle
- Sat 31<sup>st</sup> May** A G M of the Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group
- Sun 8<sup>th</sup> June** Ogof Rhyd Sych. For those that chicken out, there is an easy cave nearby - Ogof-y-ci.
- June 21<sup>st</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup>** Yorkshire weekend. Sat, Ireby Fell Cavern. Sun, Disappointment Pot. We will be staying at the Bolton speleological society cottage, Winkskill.
- July 12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup>** Weekend at Llangattock. Sat, Ogof-y-Darren Cilau. Sun, Agen Allwed.

On the Aggy trip, it is hoped that there will be two parties, one to do Southern Stream Passage ( described later in the newsletter ) and the other to do the summertime series.

- Sat 26<sup>th</sup> July** Pyrenean trip.
- Sept 6<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup>** Weekend at Penwyllt, South Wales. Sat, Tunnel Cave. Sun, Pant Mawr Pothole. We are staying at South Wales Caving Club H Q.
- Sept 20<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup>** Yorkshire weekend. Sat, Lancaster Easgill. Sun, Grange Rig Pothole. We will be staying at Winkskill again.
- Oct 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup>** South Wales weekend. Little Neath River Cave and / or Llygad Llwhchr.

Besides the above trips, there may be other trips arranged at short notice. Members are encouraged to make up their own parties for trips and to contact the secretary if they need arrangements to be made. After August, it is hoped to try to introduce the training scheme again.

A special word about cave rescue - In the words of our rescue warden, cave rescue practice is an extension of good caving. So I appeal to every one to support the Cave Rescue Group - particularly the A G M.

There appears to have been quite a lot of criticism of the present system, so if you have any feelings on the subject either way, please put them forward, and also any suggestions for improvements.

Here's what everyone has been waiting for :-

### **Political Scene**

The club is now a member of the Cambrian Caving Council, formed in May of this year. Together with the Council of Northern Caving Clubs, Council of the Southern Caving Clubs, Derbyshire Caving Association, British Speleological Association, Cave Research Group of Great Britain, Pengelly Cave Studies Association, Cave Research Council, and the Grampian Caving Association, it forms the National Caving Association.

These constituent bodies of the National Caving Association are called Regional Councils, which in turn are made up of autonomous Clubs, which are resident or have an interest in that area.

The work of the regional councils is mainly to collect, disseminate and distribute information for the benefit of its member clubs. It is also felt they have more weight than individual clubs, and it is felt that this additional weight may be helpful when pressure or similar assistance is required in obtaining or retaining access etc. The councils have no control over their member clubs and will not arbitrate in inter club disputes.

Similarly, the National Caving Association has no authority. It will perform similar functions to the Regional Councils, on a national level. With more weight than the Regional Councils, it is designed to represent cavers in this country.

The National Caving Association will be meeting later this year the delegates from the Regional Councils will be meeting later this year at Clearwell Castle, where we will probably provide accommodation for delegates, if required.

There is an International Conference of Speleologist, where delegates from the Scientific Bodies - British Speleological Association, Cave Research Group of Great Britain, and the various research organisation - send delegates to this purely scientific conference.

Here again the emphasis is on the distribution of information.

The club is a member of the British Speleological Association and the Cave Research Group of Great Britain, both of which produce publications on various scientific aspects of the sport. If you are interested in these publications, there are some in the library. Ask Roger.

To complete the list of caving bodies, I must not forget to mention the cave rescue organisations which meet annually to discuss techniques and other subject of common interest. The last conference was held in Cheltenham last year.

## **Extracts from the report by the Mendip Rescue Organisation on Mendip rescues in 1968**

Last year, there were six incidents involving call outs on Mendip, two of which were for Swildons Hole, and only one was of a very serious nature.

### 1. Cuckoo Cleeves

A party of juvenile novices could not ascend a 13 ft pot on a knotted rope. They were helped out by another party in the cave .

### 2. Sidcot Swallet

A caver got stuck - extricated by M R O within an hour.

### 3. Sump rescue call out - false alarm.

### 4. Nine Barrows Swallet

A caver, climbing, fell and broke his tibia and fibula in one leg. His leg was splinted and he was given morphia. He was brought to the surface just over an hour and a half after the call out.

### 5. Swildons Hole

A novice without a wet suit, on returning from a trip through Sump I was too cold to climb the forty foot pot. He was pulled up with the aid of the pulley in Suicides Leap.

### 6. Swildons Hole

False alarm.

More notes from the editor - As you will have noticed the quality of this newsletter is not up to the usual high standards set by the treasurer. As many of you will know when the secretary puts his fingers to the keys of a type writer, the results leave something to be desired. This can be extended to when he puts his hand to the handle of the duplicator also . I regret this, but by my standards, if you can discern the contents, then its good enough.

M Sterry, Hon Sec, and Editor ( for this issue )

## **Recent Activities**

Here are a few accounts of recent trips. As you will no doubt notice, it's always the same few that write anything. Would everyone put their trip accounts in the log book, where they may be extracted by the editor if necessary.

### **Bar Pot - Yorkshire - Friday 27<sup>th</sup> December 1968 - J Elliott.**

Party - Malcolm Sterry, Roger Solari, Terry Gardner, John Elliott.

We got up eventually and had combined breakfast with dinner. Braving the cold, we headed for Clapham to see if Bar Pot was booked. It wasn't so off we went. The others decided that to save a walk of 2.5 miles, I would have to drive them in the Land Rover. Somewhat reluctantly, I followed Rogers directions and set off up a steep bumpy track. The way ahead was blocked by a lorry, but as the keys were in it this proved little trouble. At last we were on open moorland and the fun started. Eventually we reached the top having not turned over or sunk in the mud, although it was close.

Having sat through a blizzard, we eventually changed, sorted tackle and got going. Having gone off course slightly, we had a longer walk than we thought. We entered the shake-hole and left Roger to rig the pitch whilst we went over to look at Gaping Ghyll Pot Hole.

The first pitch of 45 ft was very awkward at the top but we emerged into a chamber giving the rest free hanging. A rope was used to descend further into a large chamber and a climb led us into a big black hole, the last pitch. We put over 105 ft of ladder and Roger descended followed by Terry. My turn, a quick prayer and off. What a fine pitch. About half way down the 30 ft diameter shaft it bolls out into a huge chamber. Malcolm rigged a double life line and followed down. We trotted off into another huge chamber and explored some passages. Returning we entered a narrow rift and continued to another hole into which water tumbled from a high aven. At last I recognised where we were from previous trip and we traversed around the hole and on towards the Main Chamber. On arrival, I was pleased to see the others were as impressed as I had been. The chamber is 500 ft long, 110 ft high and 90 ft wide. Coming down the Main 365 ft shaft was much water, but we could not resist staring up at the darkening sky.

We wandered around to touch all four walls and as time was pressing, headed back towards Bar Pot.

Con't

We laboured our way back up the pitch and as they wouldn't pull me up, I was forced to climb. The next pitch was alright until you tried to get off the ladder. We emerged to find that more snow had fallen and then tried to find the Land Rover. To my great surprise, the drive back down went almost without incident.

We had spent just over 5 hours underground and it was 10.15 pm before we rushed into the nearest pub, drank beer, cursed because there was no grub and ogled the barmaid. To our great disgust she threw us out on closing time and our faith in a pretty face was once more shattered.

Off we went again, heading for Bolton Caving Club cottage where we were staying. Just as we were about to negotiate a very steep hill, a car pulled up and one of the Bolton lads informed us that his mates were "somewhere in Dowler Gill" and that the Upper Wharfedale Rescue Team had been called out. We agreed to come out as soon as we had eaten. The night was apparently not over.

After a never ending drive we came across rescue vans, police and journalists all assembled around Providence Pot where the party had been expected out many hours ago. One of them had got out and called help but the others had been unable to follow. We were delegated for surface work ( hoorah ) and set off to get their dry clothes from their Land Rover parked near the Dowber Gill entrance.

Needless to say, without a guide, we would never have found it.

Eventually they were helped out having got lost and exhausted and were duly interviewed and photographed like all good victims should be.

It had been a very cold night.

### **Easgill Caverns - County Pot Entrance - Yorks - M Sterry**

**Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> December 1969.**

Party :- John Elliott, Roger Solari, Terry Gardner, Malcolm Sterry and a member of Bolton Speleological Society.

It was freezing hard, the ground was solid and the moors were littered with dead brass monkeys, when the above party slid and skated across Casterton Fell to County Pot. A large party from Birmingham University

Speleological Society ( hereafter called BUSS ) were also doing the cave by the same entrance and so we tactfully let them enter first. This is in no way connected with the fact that the first party in, had to ladder the pitches which are fifteen and twenty feet respectively .

We descended the ten foot entrance shaft and found our way to the head of the first Pitch. Route finding easy as there is but one narrow passage. We all descended this innocuous looking pitch after leaving our tackle at the top.

Con't

The route on was larger and we gained access to Broadway, a large quite interesting passage with a small in it, by way of an unorthodox traverse. We turned sharp right through Showerbath passage and Spout Hall until we realised our first error.

We had grossly misjudged our timing and had met the BUSS party on the entrance side of the second pitch. At this point there is an awkward climb out of the passage. The BUSS party was moving at a fairly sedate pace and offered to let us by. We accepted their offer and negotiated the awkward climb into Poetic Justice, whilst a ladder was hung for some of the BUSS party. Poetic Justice is a well named passage - it is a low crawl, flat out in parts, with a multitude of small stalagmites about four inches high, protruding from the floor of the passage - pain-full.

Immediately after the crawl, was the second pitch which we were obliged to ladder. We all descended the pitch and carried on down stream towards the Master Cave. On arrival in the master cave, we made our way at a rapid pace to climb up in to Easter Grotto, on route visiting Stop Pot, the connection with Lancaster Hole. In Easter Grotto, the formations were very beautiful and we sat and studied them until the BUSS party arrived. This was BUSS party one, we had already met BUSS party two had entered the cave by Oxford Pot entrance.

At this point, we made our second mistake - following Roger who was attempting to show the rest of the party some fantastic grotty hole, the name of which escapes me. Eventually, after fifteen minutes of suicidal traversing, in circles, Roger too admitted that he did not know where he was going.

Everyone had enjoyed themselves and it was decided to go out, and so by ones and twos, the party made its way back along the master cave - a more disorganised party you have yet to see.

There was panic at one stage, when momentarily the party united, but Mr John Elliott got lost in a climb through boulders in the stream way. He may be five feet tall and two feet six in circumference, but we couldn't find him anywhere. However he started to sing a sweet lament ( or something similar ) to me and he was soon located with mouth frothing and a bright red suntan.

John, our friend from Bolton and I set off in pursuit of Terry and Roger, who by this time we believed would be out of the cave and half way back to the Forest of Dean. I was rather keen to catch up Roger to pass on some of Johns wrath and indignation, since I felt guilty of leaving John lost in the boulders, but with mitigating circumstances - I was trying to keep up with Roger and Terry.

The rear guard moved quickly and quietly towards the County Pot entrance. The silence was occasionally broken by John who was complaining. His complaint was that he had shorter legs than the remainder of the party, and hence relatively speaking, he had to run faster. This he claimed used up more energy.

We caught up Roger and Terry at the bottom of the twenty foot pitch, where Roger exchanged our ladders for BUSS's, whilst I carried on with the tackle. Roger followed.

Roger and I were at the top of the fifteen foot pitch and Terry was climbing. Then the expected happened, yes, Terry fell off the ladder at the top of the pitch. For those with musical ear, there was a clatter, clashing of the cymbals as Terry and the ladder parted company and a thump on the brass drum as he landed flat on his back at the bottom of the pitch.

Con't

By this time the leading members of the BUSS party had arrived at the bottom of the pitch just in time to see this fantastic aeronautical display by Terry. After a few minutes Terry could stand, but in pain and the long haul of the life-lining everyone up the pitch began. The party at the bottom of the pitch were, to say the least, startled, especially John who had to retreat rapidly to avoid Terry's fall.

We were close to the entrance, and Terry was able to make his way to the entrance with very little help from us.

However, there is little doubt that this fall, rather than the numerous tumbles on the ice walking back across the fell, was the major cause of his unrealised ruptured lung and cracked pelvis. His sentence from the doctor - no caving for two months. Perhaps there is a lesson in this for everyone.

Everyone retreated to the pub and enjoyed a glass of beer, except Terry who complained of bruises.

### **Swildons Hole Mendip - Feb 9<sup>th</sup> 1969 - John Elliott.**

This particular weekend was supposed to be a club trip to Derbyshire, but trying to get members out of the nice warm iron mines proved to be too great a job for our poor club secretary.

We therefore decided to join the Birmingham University S S. on Mendip. We met them Saturday evening in the Hunters and a slight accommodation mix up drove us to seek sanctuary at the Bellfry. Many thanks for the hospitality of the B E C lads.

Sunday morning dawned cold and clear and eventually we arrived at Swildons. A reluctant change and off we trogged across the frozen fields.

Once underground we warned up and moved quickly downstream. A change was noted on the water rift, some large boulders had disappeared giving an easier walk down to the remains of the 40 ft pot. This was descended and on the 20 ft pot which was already laddered. About 200 ft past the inclined rift a 50 ft climb led into Tratmans Temple with many pretties. Some squeezes led into St. Pauls series giving about 900 ft of passages and there we stopped and gazed into a mud sump.

One of the BUSS members didn't fancy it without a wet suit and Margaret ( Mattie ) wanted to dive sump I.

Malcolm therefore elected to return to the stream way and descend to sump I with them.

This left Roger Solari, myself and two other BUSS members who had been as far as Blue Pencil passage before. We negotiated the sump trying to use the small amount of air space available and spent the next five minutes trying to wash our lamps in a muddy pool so that we could see again.

Con't

We continued into a complex system of muddy passages passing Shatter Pot, up the greasy chimney, which is a slippery ten foot climb and on to the beginning of Blue Pencil Passage, Which appears as a deep groove in the floor. Eventually we were squeezed out 12 ft above the floor in Swildons IV. A fixed chain was positioned nicely so that you fell out before you could grab it, But one way or the other you got down. We were now in 850 ft of roomy stream passage and so we splashed off to visit the upstream, and down stream sumps. After a climb round in which a certain lad ( I can't remember his name ) got stuck high in the roof, we returned to the head of Blue Pencil Passage and gobbled very muddy chocolate. Roger had found a plastic torch somewhere that worked.

A very slippery traverse led to the Double Troubles Series and after twenty minutes bailing of the two mud sumps, there was a little air space and so we struggled through. Another 500 ft of pretty passage with numerous tight squeezes and were staring at yet another muddy pool. However once you lay in this, there is air space so we splashed and gurgled our way through. Roger and I were now in familiar territory as we were in Vicarage Passage, which is 75 ft above main stream. We descended through a squeeze, slippery climbs and finally down a fixed rope until we could wash off in the stream way of Swildons II. One light had packed up by now, so I lent out my spare. Rogers was also useless and so he produced his new found plastic torch, and mine was fading fast. We were now a typical Swildons party.

Undaunted, we splashed upstream through Creep I, swam through Duck I and contemplated Sump I. Roger dived first tightly clutching his torch, followed by me and the other two were close behind. We quickly set off up stream again and were pleased to see our ladder hanging from the 20 ft Pot. There was no hand-line on the remains of the 40 ft Pot either but it didn't even slow us down. A short time later and we emerged onto the surface, well pleased with our round trip that had taken us five and a half hours.

It was getting dark and very cold, but some kind soul had left a bucket of warm water and lit a fire in the barn, for which we were very grateful. We then discussed the quickest way to the nearest pub.

**Agen Allwedd - South Wales - Sunday April 20<sup>th</sup>**

**John Elliott**

**Party - Malcolm Sterry, Roger Solari and John Elliott.**

“Very pretty” I couldn't help but comment, even for 'Aggie' Muttered Roger. So there we were, gazing at some not very spectacular formations at the fifth Boulder Choke, which we had reached by way of the notorious Southern Stream Passage. We climbed back down into the main passage which gurgled out of the boulders. It had taken us three and a half hours to reach this point so we had a good return journey in front of us.

Con't

We plodded off down stream for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile in a very large passage. The journey was only marred by going for an occasional unintentional swim or trying to boot more life into some bodies Nife cell. Passing

S S P , we splashed on down to the terminal sump and stood up to our necks in water gazing at the roof which now barred our progress ( thank god ) . We returned again to S S P.

It wasn't that we had anything against this passage. About 6000 ft of horrible tight passage meant nothing to us. At least that's what we told each other coming in. A traverse is negotiated and then Malcolm started his "lets run out" campaign, and off he went. I was in second place until I got stuck, Roger trampled over me into second place.

After a difficult extraction, I didn't see anyone till the half wat mark, which is a difficult 6 ft waterfall. Here they made sure I received my fair share of water when climbing it.

Off we went again for the worst stage of the journey and eventually Malcolm took the inevitable wrong route. Watching the uneven struggle of Malcolm against rock. Some time later, Roger did the same thing and so began the non-willing exchange rota for leading.

At last we reached the bottom of the 20 ft Pot which we had hopes of climbing. A hot grunting Malcolm arrived and we shared out the shredded remains of chocolate. After scaling the Pot, only 600 ft of tight gruelling passage remained. Somewhere along this, some cries from Malcolm gave us the impression that his light had gone out. Well we weren't going back. Either he got it going again or he reached us in the dark, anyway, he did not seem too happy about the situation.

The crux of this section is crossing a hold-less rift. I dived in and missed the only hand hold which I hadn't noticed anyway. A valiant fight later and I was across minus half the arm of my wet suit. Long legged Solari gave a perfect example of how to cross using the hand-hold and much to my disgust so did Malcolm.

Soon we were plodding down main passage in what may be described as luxury surroundings. Bloody great passage. In the middle of the boulder choke, Malcolm said that he could go no further with two useless lights. Just so that he could get out, we lent him one of our spares. The remainder of the cave to the entrance is a mere nuisance and was negotiated with our rear guard complaining about his knees. Some kind person had piled rocks against the gate but that couldn't keep us in. The trip had taken us 7 hours 40 minutes and was described adequately on route. But I will speak for all of us when I may say it was a very fine trip.

Party - Jim Hay, Malcolm Sterry, John Berry, G Broadman and A Solari.

The entrance is a permanently laddered 45 ft pitch. After watching Geoff disappearing down this rather small perpendicular hole I wondered if I could claim a sudden bout of Flu and go home. I decided against this as we had come in Jim's car. Once I was on the way down I felt really happy. At the bottom of the pitch, a sloping passage leads downwards to the Beehive, a massive calcite dome on the floor of a fairly large chamber. Here a passage to the right leads steeply down hill to approximately the same level as that of Main chamber. We went past the Beehive and soon reached the top of the Pitch. The pitch is caused by our passage coming into the top of the main chamber I was strangely reminded of the Aven Armand in France, Which is descended by a railway, and I wished then that I was in France or anywhere else for that matter. The main pitch is 70 ft and looks it, it's a free hanging pitch apart from the first 6 ft or so, and at the bottom, the ladder is a good 30 ft away from the wall. However, once on the ladder I was happier.

To my relief, I reached the bottom ( you are bound to ) Jim took what we hoped are some good photo's. We climbed a fixed ladder on the opposite wall which led into a lovely clay crawl. John was disappointed that no-one would follow him in. Then we did another climb to reach the cave of the falling waters.

After waiting at the bottom of the pitch for the earlier party to withdraw, Malcolm used their ladder to climb up, and as we fixed our kit, they removed theirs.

We climbed out more or less successfully and on the way out explored the already mentioned passage leading downwards from the Beehive. We went up the entrance pitch and were out by about 4.30 pm. Geoffrey brewed up his brew machine - a welcome cup of tea.

I forgot to mention that on the way down, as senior members were present, the conversation drifted from ignorant nonsense about birds to ignorant nonsense about higher matters.

Sec - senior members have some funny ideas about birds.