

ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN

CAVING CLUB



DECEMBER 1972 / JANUARY 1973

NEWS LETTER No 45

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FOREST NEWS

A quiet AGM was held in November , no business this year to chew over , probably a reflection of the last twelve months activity which , it was noted was less than that in recent years . This complaint seems to be general in the country's caving areas , perhaps its because of the lack of new discoveries over the last couple for years , most of the sizable caves must be open by now and the unknown has become a well trodden path . However this is just speculation on a well known theme. On to this years committee so far lacks a chairman. No one has come forward to fill the post , perhaps modesty holds the masses back , after all someone well liked a respected by the rest of the club was asked for !

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NIFE CELLS

There is a possibility that some of these cells are still available , if you are interested contact Diana Court.

A MYSTERIOUS SHAFT IN NEW DUNN

Mike Howell and Phil Schwarz chemically assisted by Rod Stewart have been investigating a vertical shaft in the depths of Dunn . The shaft is about 30 to 40 ft high but has a large boulder blocking the top past which can be seen ' A large Black Space ' of the kind always seen when the way on is blocked .

Cont.

The shaft is free climbable so far up the remainder is got to by wedging Mike's extension ladder across the shaft so far up . Several pounds of Irish diplomacy has been used on the rock but it still remains firmly in place . A quick survey has been done and the position is about 370ft south of NW of the main shaft . A bit far from Sling but it should come up in an interesting area.

DO'S AND DON'TS

Don't rub out the chalk written ' S T COOK 1880 ' in Old Bow , this is probably the surveyors assistant when the mines were first surveyed .

Don't block the gate to the farm near New Dunn entrance , and do use the foot path . The farmer has complained that cavers have parked in the farm entrance and have trampled across his field .

Do make sure that if you are liable to be very late back home after a Wednesday evening trip , that wifey or mummy knows what unearthly hour to expect you . The lack of such information led to the Law dragging John and Diana Court out of bed at 4 am one Thursday morning after a false alarm . It took a long time for them to see the funny side of it .

PHOTOGRAPHY

Roger , David and Jackie Bailey have started black and white photography in Old Bow . Multi flash techniques are being used in an effort to show the full passage and chamber shapes . This means that for large scale photo's four or more people are needed , one on the camera , one on the flash and at least two or more models to give scale and interest . Anyone interested will be welcome.

NEW MEMBERS

Alister Matheson and Tony Allen both of :-

22 Reysham Road
Cheltenham
Glos.

Welcome to the club.

Also a long overdue to Gordon Burch who should have been included in the last News Letter .

LOCAL FLOODS

Before Christmas there was a very heavy rainfall in the area but being midweek there was not much opportunity to get around the local sinks and risings , however John and Diana Court got over to Symonds Yat and had a look at the Slaughter resurgence . The Wye was very high and water had backed right up in the culvert from the resurgence . The water from the underground stream was coming up with such force that a mushroom was formed in the backed up waters around the rising .

Cont.

The sink and rising in Whippington Brook was also visited , the sink was taking a very large quantity of water , Roger Solari's dig was flooded but fortunately he had shored it up the weekend before and the floods only left a couple of feet of hard packed silt in the bottom . There was nothing like the same amount of water coming out of the rising , most of it comes out at the Slaughter.

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

Orpheus Caving Club . News letter Vol 8 . No . 9
Vol 8 No 10

Plymouth Caving Group News Letter and Journal No 47
CRG Transaction Volume 14 No 4
HMSO Geology of the Country around Monmouth and Chepstow.

TRIPS

Sun 7th Jan - Cave rescue practice , search in the Forest
Sun 14th Jan - Mendips trip to GB (6 only in the party)
Wed 24th Jan - Tufts Iron Mine Level
Sun 4th Feb - Mid Wales , the Cwmystwyth lead mine.
Wed 21st Feb - Bixslade Iron Mine , survey and photographic trip
Wed 21 March - Symonds Yat area , Diggers Hole and Ladypark Iron Mine.
Weekend 23rd / 25th South Wales , stay at SWCC
Sun 15th April - Aggen Alwedd , the round trip if it is open.
Wed 18th April - Aggen Alwedd (for the survivors of Sundays trip)
Weekend 10th June Yorkshire , camping at Horten in Ribblesdale caves : - Marble Steps and Low Douk.

John Elliott reports that the 4th boulder choke in Aggen Alwedd has fallen in again , this puts Aprils trip in doubt.

John is trying to get a trip to the Llanharry Iron Mine , which is a working mine . No date as yet but it would probably be on a Saturday.

LIBRARY

Our collection of books , maps etc continue to grow and is somewhat untidy , Sue Clark would be glad of some bright ideas on storing the mass of flimsy material that we have .

THE NOVEMBER SOUTH WALES WEEKEND

On the last club trip to south Wales six of us arrived for the Saturdays trip . Roger Solari was also there and as his diving plans had gone wrong he decided to join us . The water levels appeared high but we managed to get into Dan yr Ogof . Our aim was to get to the far north and back . It must be noted that it is a record for this cave to be open when our club visits south Wales . It is an extremely rare event.

The lakes were not particularly high but there were signs of severe flooding , apparently on the Tuesday after heavy rain on the previous weekend .

It wasn't long before several of us realised how unfit we were and we had our doubts about completing the trip , but hoping that we would soon get back into the swing as we followed our intrepid leader John V Elliott .

We split up and took two routes to the rising . John E , Roger and myself took the bypass to the Green Canal , the others going the usual route . Again we saw evidence of pretty high floods along the bypass and joined the others at the rising just as they had reached the top of the climb . We had no problems on the climb , traverse or pitch , and stopped for nosh at Pinnacle Chamber . We then missed the junction and found ourselves at the end of the Great North Road , but there were some interesting sand banks and drip formations which were well worth seeing . Re - tracing our steps John found the correct route and we arrived at the last climb up to the Far North . Roger free climbed but we did have some difficulty about half way up so he dropped a rope down for the rest of us and we life-lined each other up. It certainly was a bit tricky with more and more exposure as you climb .

Once at the top we all rushed off in different directions , there appeared to be the main route which I followed and a fairly large passage . The main route was long and straight , similar to the Great North Road but much larger . We were most impressed by the size and length of this end of the cave . John Berry and myself eventually joined up and went to what appeared to be the final boulder choke where we could hear the stream below us quite clearly . We then made our way back to the climb and when we were all there we made our way out.

Although some of us were again beginning to feel fairly tired towards the entrance we made the trip out in three hours , it had taken five to get in . I did however make the mistake of returning via the Green Canal (the bypass took 15 minutes longer on the way in) and discovered that two NIFE cells were enough to counteract the buoyancy of my wet suit . John E came to the rescue , he didn't really have much choice as I tried to pull him under with me . Afterwards Roger said he also found himself sinking as he had two cells , a ladder and a very thin wet suit .

As we were late coming out , it was 9 o'clock we had a quick pint at the Gwyne then returned to the cottage to find a hot meal awaiting us . There was a 'do' on as SWCC had held a rescue practice that day .

On Sunday Colin Clements and Cliff Seymour came down , John E took them to top waterfall in OFD II . As it was a wet miserable day the rest decided to return home , feeling very pleased to have seen the Far North at last .

Diana Court.

BOX STONE MINES (NEAR BATH)

On Sunday the 17th December Heather and I left the Forest to meet a GSS party lead by Mike Collins , a founder member of GSS .

Our party numbered 12 but two stood out in tidy trousers and sports jackets . These proved to be a Mr Hopkins and friend who was able to impart a lot of information to us .

The stone mines of this area are very complex . The Government uses many of them for purposes best known to themselves and all are gated . The one we entered had a gate , most cavers use it and trample over it on the way in .

We all entered and from the start the route grew complex . Mike explained that there were around 60 miles of passage in this mine although a lot had been lost due to back-filling . Pillar and stall was the mining method , and the stone is now so valuable that open cast working has been started to take out the pillars . After some wanderings we entered a huge hall known (strangely enough) as the Cathedral . Light entered from a surface shaft . The interesting feature was however a hole in the roof which was once somebody's well . A corresponding hole in the floor still had water in the bottom .

We continued on until more modern levels were reached (the mine was worked until 9 years ago) We followed these into an interesting area which we had a good look around .

Returning Mike gingerly led us through a very grotty fall . Behind this however to our delight was some of the old cranes . Lots of goodies lay around and also many hand saws . Mr Hopkins , who I have forgotten to add is a stone mason , gave us a demonstration and also explained many points that puzzled us .

We also found a smaller winch which was fixed to a truck and this proved to be the means to move the cranes . A working face was also studied giving good examples of the method of stone removal .

On the way out we picked up some goodies for the future Forest museum . I persuaded Colin Anderson to carry the heaviest crow bar that I have ever seen . Another lad took a drill and I had a 10ft long hand chisel .

Most sensible people kept well clear of me . I think 12 came out but anyway those who did agreed on a very fine trip .

John Elliott .

DUDLEY STONE MINES (15th NOVEMBER)

On this trip were Diana Court , Heather Macdonald , Daph Hay , Ian Standing , Gordon Burch , John Elliott and myself .

We were met in Dudley by Brian ? Of the Birmingham Karabiner Club who brought two friends along to join us .

The Stone Mines are located alongside a residential area . The local residents must get a lot of amusement out of the sight of shivering cavers struggling in and out of caving gear in the middle of the road .

Having done our good deed for the day by giving frustrated motorists a push start , Brian took us in all the main entrances to the Mines - the first being very large and impressive as it had been started on a higher level and continued lower down , making the whole entrance very large indeed . At the end of a short passage on either side of the main driveway were two vertical water-filled shafts up which I believe the stone was brought to the surface .

In another passage off the first entrance Brian pointed out the submerged hull of an old boat shortly to be excavated and resurrected from its protecting coating of mud and silt .

Cont.

Then through the frost to the second entrance which led us down into a huge chamber through which runs one of the many canals linking the different workings in the mines . This chamber is about ¼ mile long and about 300yds wide at its largest points and the whole section is supported by 29 vast pillars of limestone . The layers of limestone are sloping downwards and alternate with thin layers of shale on which they are slowly slipping . However , the miners had thoughtfully knocked in small wooden wedges to prevent the sliding . In other places brick or stone walls had been built for the same purpose .

The canals were used to transport the excavated limestone out of the mines and connected up with the main canal systems of the Midlands . In the last century boat trips round the mines could be enjoyed by the general public . Some parts are still navigable in a small boat . Had we been in wet suits we could have seen much more of the mines , spending up to 4 hrs exploring without visiting the same place twice . I'll certainly be back there when I've got a wet suit .

In 1851 for the great exhibition , a most spectacular event was staged in this part of the mine - a candlelight orchestral concert . A long staircase was built specially to seat the orchestra and this has been uncovered by the Karabiner Club after much hard work . It was obliterated by one of the many roof falls which have covered the floor of this vast chamber with huge boulders of limestone and have broken down the stone lined sides of the canal and filled it too with boulders .

After this we carried on to visit the canal basin where three canals emerge into the open air . Barges loaded with stone were collected here before being taken out through one of the tunnels into the main canal systems.

The other navigable entrance leads into the mines we had been in and a third canal has been bricked off as it leads into a series of mine workings which have become unsafe due to subsidence and have been filled in with slurry . Again much hard work has been done by enthusiasts who have dredged the basin and uncovered the original line of the jetty .

We then visited three more entrances to the mines , one only recently opened up by the Karabiner Club and containing an interesting brick lined passage where the bricks bulged downwards resisting , to the last , the pressure of the rock above and the pull of gravity below - a quite bizarre sight . We had to paddle through this passage and the rest of the trip was made feeling rather damp , fortunately we did not have far to travel or I'd have had icicles on my legs !

Finally we entered yet another entrance at the rear of the bear enclosure , this finished in a squeeze leading back into the second chamber I had described earlier where we rejoined Heather and John who had been making a photographic record of the vast proportions of the place .

We were all glad to get back to Ian's Land Rover , get dry and have some much needed refreshments . The drive back to Coleford was without incident but a member of the force was waiting for us by the clock tower . Had they been informed of our nocturnal exploits ? However we were not taken into custody after all even our chauffeur was rather vague about his registration number and had no driving licence about his person . Perhaps the constable is used to meeting Land Rover loads of rather grimy looking caving types circling the clock tower at two in the morning !

In conclusion : - a most interesting and enjoyable trip , many thanks to the Karabiner Club for providing our guide.

Sue Clark.

MEETS IN THE FOREST

A newer club policy now in force , mainly for the newer members is one Wednesday evening a month devoted to visiting the less frequented spots of the Forest . If anyone has a mine or cave they wish to see and feel it can't be tackled by themselves then catch a committee member or the meet-Sec and tell him. Devils Chapel and Westbury Brook have been successfully visited so far and some interesting sights seen . In Devils Chapel a flow which must be the biggest in the Forest was admired and in Westbury Brook I showed off my free fall technique down the mud slope . This was also admired , but I am going to repeat it (I Hope) A future program has been mapped out but suggestions are more than welcome .

John Elliott .

NOTICE!

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE!

SENIOR MEMBERSHIP £1.25

SENIOR FAMILY MEMBERSHIP £1.00

JUNIOR MEMBERSHIP £0.75

JUNIOR FAMILY MEMBERSHIP £0.50

HON. TREASURER:-

ANDY SOLARI

FIR TREE BUNGALOW

WIGPOOL

MITCHELDEAN

GLOS.