

ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN

CAVING CLUB



APRIL / MAY / JUNE 1973

NEWS LETTER No 47

CONTENTS

Page	2	Forest News New Members Equipment Headquarters Trips Additions to the Library
Page	3	Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group Cave Science
Page	4	Cwmystwyth Lead Mine
Page	5	Latest Discoveries In The Clearwell Area
Page	6	The Roman Iron Mine At Lydney
Page	7	Obituary

Hon Sec

Mrs Diana Court
The Cottage
The Mire
Joyford
Coleford
Glos

Hon Editor

R E Bailey
Rose Cottage
Aston Crews
Lea
Nr Ross on Wye
Herefordshire

FOREST NEWS

Nothing fantastic has happened over the last three months in the Forest area , dropping water levels are opening up some new ground especially in the Buckshaft area were the main scowl hole has been regularly visited on Wednesday evenings. The water is now well below the first level and given a dry summer it may be possible to get down to the second .

Great care has to be taken as the dip is about vertical and the workings are similar to stoping in the lead mines . False floors are particularly dangerous and the levels must be treated with caution .

Mr Mostin Watkins has sold the grazing rights to the fields around Old Bow and Lambsquay Mines , so far nothing has been said but the committee is making enquiries , if anyone is challenged in these fields please be diplomatic in your reply.

In the Clearwell area itself there has been quite a lot of vandalism and mess made both above and below ground . Old Ham seems to be suffering the most and a general clean up seems necessary again . A quantity of gear was stolen from a Land Rover parked outside Ham one Wednesday afternoon but this was recovered .

NEW MEMBERS

Pete Blake
6 Bath Place
Berryhill
Coleford
Glos

Stephen Potts
28 Woodgate Road
Coleford
Glos

Maurice Febry
Stowaway
Daisybank Rd
Leckhampton
Chelt
Glos

Stuart Jones
Homelea
Marsh Lane
Ellwood
Coleford
Glos

Welcome to the club .

EQUIPMENT

The ladder is finished at last ! Well nearly finished . All that needs doing is to stamp the first and last rungs with the clubs initials and some flash removed from some ferrules plus binding over cut ends of wires . Please make sure that when you borrow the ladder that it is booked out and back , we are still missing a length of the first batch we made .

HEADQUARTERS

When anyone goes fro the key held at the Butchers Arms would they please sign the book provided .

TRIPS

10th of June - Yorkshire camping at Horten in Ribblesdale caves - Marble Steps and Low Duck .
13th / 14th of October - Yorkshire Pippiken Pot on the Saturday - Poole Sink on the Sunday .

Trips on intermediate dates can be arranged through the meets Sec .

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

GSS News Letters for February and April 1973 .

Sub-Aqua Products list for 1973

Technical Aids in Caving Symposium

Caving Accidents - can They Be Prevented

CRG Transactions Vol- 15 No 1.

CRG News Letter No 133 - April 1973.

Orpheus Caving Club News Letter Vol 8 No's 11 and 12

Vol 9 No's 2 and 3.

South Wales Caving Club - News Letter No 71 b.

BSA Bulletin New Series No 9.

UIS Bulletin

Plymouth caving Group News Letter and Journal

Ex Government Iron Mine Plans - Scale 2 chains to the inch :-

Perseverance and Findall

Shakemantle Iron Mine

Perseverance and Buckshaft Iron Mine Workings

Robin Hood Iron Mine (includes Staunton)

Easter Iron Mine

Wigpool and part

GLOUCESTERSHIRE CAVE RESCUE GROUP

At the recent AGM a new committee was elected as follows :-

Chairman - Ian Standing .

Secretary - Diana Court .

Treasurer - John Court .

Info Officer - Roger Solari .

Tackle Officer - Rod Stewart .

Ordinary Members - John Elliott and Colin Graham .

Great things are expected .

CAVE SCIENCE

Courses arranged by the National Scout Caving Centre , Whernside Manor , Dent , Sedbergh .

Cave Life - 26 - 28 October .

Limestone Geology and Cave Formation 23 - 25 November .

In 1974 a further series of courses are proposed :-

The Ice Age and Yorkshire Caves

Underground Photography

Archaeology.

CWMYSTWYTH LEAD MINE 4th Feb

At 8.30am on the Sunday morning , Colin Mellor myself and Phil groped our way in the fog down to John Elliott's abode. We ended up carrying John , Heather and their gear out to the car and stowing 'em in the back seat ! Then after a ' grand tour ' of Lydbrook we were off .

Our destination was a Lead mine somewhere near Aberystwyth . We arrived at the site at 11 am and a few minutes later we were joined by Andy and Tony with Diana and John complete with Ian and Cliff arriving a little later . After an exchange we suddenly found ourselves on a ' John Elliotts walk-about ' I.e. a bleeding girt great climb of what seemed like three thousand feet . This was to enable us to look at the mouth of the main shaft somewhere up above . Needless to say , we couldn't see it when we reached the top ! Heather was still only halfway up the climb when ' Guess who ' shouted " right lads back down " and immediately set off on a 2 mile like across the mountainside ! I protested violently at this and in between strangled gasps for air croaked " I thought we'd come caving not bloody rock climbing "

Ian and Tony being the most sensible and perhaps the oldest ? Members of the party stayed below and strolled gently around . It may be true of the old saying ' The older you get the wiser etc - '

Back at base camp 1 we consumed about half a hundred weight of scoff before donning the customary uniforms and fairy lights (shut that door) A few photo's were taken for the sake of posterity and one of Elliott's posterior for the sake of the more backward minded ?

Anyway , with one last look at the beautiful sunshine we set off into the mine. Entry was by a nice stone built adit , and once inside a short wade in knee deep water was the order of the day . Upon reaching the end we split up to explore various passages . Colin and I walked one passage to a dead end , after what must have been well over a third of a mile , altogether very expensive tunnelling . The main shaft was very impressive being around 1400ft deep . The level on which we intersected it would probably be about the 300ft deep mark . The timbering was still in excellent condition as were the rails leading off into the darkness below . It was the first shaft of this type that I had seen , it was sunk at a very steep angle and presumably tubs of ore were winched up the rails to be taken out at higher levels .

A feature of this shaft was that it had a ladder-way that zig-zagged its way down alongside the rails , unfortunately it was in a bad state and so could not be used . However ' dauntless Diana ' ventured down the shaft by legging it from timber to timber and also used the rail to slide down (which could have nasty results if you'r a bloke)

Thirty minutes later Diana reappeared and stated that every passage tried just went on and on , although no depth could be reached because of water .

A water operated bell that could be heard clanging throughout the mine at one minute intervals was very interesting . One could imagine the ghostly figure of an old miner , wandering around ringing a large hand bell !

After a few hours we decided to revisit the great outdoors and so we waded back along the adit with cries of " Christ it's cold " etc . John Court had a funny tum and lay down so that the cold water could run up his trouser legs .

The rest of the afternoon was spent following the stream up the valley and visiting small copper mines (still with the original water in them by the queer smells) False flooring in some made steady footwork and keen eyesight .

As a grand finale it was decided to climb what appeared to be all of four thousand feet , walk back along the top and then down the mountainside back to base camp . Another great John Elliott promotion ! So myself , Colin and Cliff with many mutterings of " daft buggers " " silly sods " and " pig that for a lark " we took the easy ? Way back and had to wait about an hour for the rest to turn up . We finally took off for home at 5.30 pm . The journey back was only spoilt by loud rasping snores from the back seat . Altogether a grand day out weather and scenery wise .

Gordon Burch (Caver extraordinaire)

P.S Who scoffed a huge Christmas cake and took the remains home for work the next day ?

LATEST DISCOVERIES IN THE CLEARWELL AREA

Back in January Mike Howell and Phil Schwartz were exploring the left hand series of Old Ham . A low crawl was dug open leading to about 100ft of low well decorated passage . I spent a few evenings digging with Phil in which we excavated the end draughting choke . Progress was halted by large blocks in the roof . Further back a crawl was completely dug out and a very tight squeeze passed into a very low but well decorated chamber . All ways on were blocked with large rocks . The direction of this series is away from the road towards the scowls in the next field . We know ' The Hearth ' area of Lambsquay Mine lead under here so a route through would give a very shallow , fast route to Old Bow .

Cont.

In February Mike and Phil accompanied by chemical man Rod Stewart decided to work on the mysterious shaft (in the roof) situated behind Pit Bottom . Several weeks of banging cleared a way open at the top . To work at this an extension ladder was carried down the mine . This was erected from a ledge 15ft up and it had to be removed before each bang .

On March the 6th my timely arrival was made just as Rod ascended through the hole some 45ft above the floor level . And after an awkward move rod was in the chamber of some instability . In fact I think he wished he hadn't bothered . For a while rocks rained down as Rod " gardened " the top . During this time a boulder , which proved to be solid iron ore and very large in size , decided to press for a closer relationship with Rod . From the shaky voice that reached us it appeared that Rod was not amused by friendly lumps of iron .

Eventually Rod explored and found a draughting level that he didn't push . A hand line was fixed and a return made . The next week another ladder was carried down and tied to the top of the extension ladder .

Normal caving ladder was rigged to the ledge and with the now extended ladder a safer ascent could be had . Three of us ascended (Rod had taken refuge in his coal mine) and gazed at a very unstable chamber . Above the shaft were huge pieces of pure iron ore , the only examples I think known in the mine . We found Rod's way off and the level . Everything was very unstable . The draughting direction was followed but soon fell in .

The area gave no confidence for digging . Going out I noticed a passage but didn't explore it . On the next trip I had a quick look , crawling through an unstable passage I reached a huge black space . A massive passage led off into the distance . Unfortunately I recognised it from previous exploration behind Pit Bottom . The shaft had been bypassed . After a disbelieving Mike and Phil had been shown it was looked for further routes but nothing of note was found . The draughting choke looked very dangerous although a way could be seen . The draught in one place blew out a candle . It was either that or Phil's supper !

At the end of March Phil and I rechecked a square concrete lined coal shaft situated in the woods near Lightmoor Colliery . This time it proved free of gas , so we planned a descent , However it was the 17th of April that Phil , Mike and myself returned . Fortunately it was still free of Phil's (the onions) sewage gas so we shoved 55ft of ladder down . I descended to the bottom which unfortunately was blocked with wood etc. 15ft up a level came in but this was blocked almost immediately . It couldn't be dug by some expendable hero . The others had a look and we exited back to the pub .

Three years ago Colin Graham took me to a mine in Stock Wood . We explored a lot of it and found a hole so designed that one couldn't see down it . On the 10th of April Phil and I arrived with rope and ladder . I don't think Phil believed that there was a mine let alone a pitch . However after some jungle bashing we found both . The 25ft ladder was dropped over and Phil life-lined me over . The shaft was larger than expected and it soon became apparent that the ladder was hanging in space . I descended to the last few rungs and gazed at the bottom some 10ft below . There appeared to be no way on . Phil descended and confirmed this . The mine appears to be a complex of low crop workings . We never explored it all . It is situated on the opposite side of the road to the so called " Clearwell Caves " at an approx grid reference of 576084 .

John Elliott .

THE ROMAN IRON MINE AT LYDNEY

The most famous and probably the smallest of the Forest iron mines is found in the midst of a Roman Temple dedicated to the God Nodens . Not the usual mining scenery of old engine houses and spoil heaps but sacred temples and hypocausts .

The site lies in the Lydney Park Estate behind the very large mansion house situated on the right-hand side of the road at the Chepstow side of Lydney .

Cont.

We approached by the 'Tradesman Entrance' which led us through out-buildings and a market garden area before we got to the Park itself. The track up to the temple lies in the bottom of two steep sided converging valleys the sides of which are scattered a variety of mature trees. A magnificent sight and a pleasant change from the raw materials for matchsticks that most of the Forest has degenerated into.

Climbing over the edge of the scarp we came upon the remains of the Temple of Nodens a small herd of deer who after gazing at us for a moment sped off into the woods. There was another short diversion while we sorted out what a thing was on the opposite bank. It turned out to be one of a pair of Wallaby's, which interested the children, little and big. After inspecting the ruins especially the Hypocaust we consulted the map and found the mine entrance which was covered by a large trap door.

The mine is very small little more than a pocket of ore collected in a narrow rift. The roof is surprisingly earthy in many places and has many small pick marks in it, not the sort of material one would expect to remain in place for well over a thousand years. No calcite was seen even though the age of the place and shallow depth, unlike many scowl holes Britain's oldest mine looks disappointingly ageless.

References :-

Report on the excavation of the prehistoric, Roman, and post-roman site in Lydney Park, Glos -
By R E M Wheeler.

History of the British Iron and Steel Industry - By - H R Schubert.

Please note that access to the site must be obtained through Lydney Park Estate Office.

Roger Bailey.

OBITUARY- SID COOPER

Those of us who have caved in the Forest for some years were saddened to hear of the death of Sid Cooper, an older member of GSS, earlier this year. Sid had not been active in the last two to three years due to a heart complaint but he still retained a great interest in the Forest and its mine's. He was one of the first to get off the beaten track in Old Ham and Old Bow and most of this original exploration was done alone, though with very large safety margins in lighting. Several NIFES as a rule and a collection of candles, matches in waterproof containers were carried on various parts of his kit.

I think I first met Sid on either my first or second trip underground, it was in Old Bow, when, after coming upon a lighted candle we found him around the next corner. He was very ready to show us around and we found him a great help in the early days.

My great regret is that Sid was not able to do the 'through trip' from Bow to Ham, he had certainly been to either end of it and he was hoping that his health would improve enough for him to do a little work underground again no doubt he had that trip in mind.

Roger Bailey.