

**ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN  
CAVING CLUB**



**OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 1973**

**NEWS LETTER No 49**

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## **FOREST NEWS**

### **Crows Nest Iron Mine**

The two shafts of this Mine have recently been filled in unless there are any connections through the outcrop the mine will have been lost , the first since caving began in the Forest . The mine lies about 1 mile north west of Coleford and was worked from 1863 to 1874 and again from 1883 to 1901 . A small quantity of ore was won from the outcrop in 1905 and 1906 . Total ore output was 44,000 tons . Sibly states the Opencast workings in Crows Nest Wood , west and north west of the southern pit , were active during and after the operation of the pits . This may be an area for investigation .

### **Old Ham**

Micky and Phil have been digging there short cut ( to bypass the Balcony passage area ) but have come upon a problem - a 15ft deep hole has appeared beneath them , the next move is being chewed over to go down the hole , which is under the fall and which also has a tempting draught , or to fill it in .

Another clean up has been made of Ham upper series , many thanks to all those who took part in what is becoming a regular chore .

### **Old Bow**

Laurence and myself recently escaped from house building one evening to investigate an area of the mine that can be reached either by turning off right half way down the Red Pit road or , by going down dip in the far reaches past the wet patch . We looked , it doesn't go now but might with digging . But the whole area is very unhealthy and you'd probably end up in the existing Red Pit anyway .

While down there we were ourselves investigating by a pair of ( Lesser Horseshoe bats ) . They would come within a couple of feet of our faces before abruptly turning away . They were however very sensitive to movement , for if we sat still and waited till they began a strafing run at us we found that a sudden arm movement would cause them to do a very quick turn yards away , a good demonstration of bats sonar and reflexes . Coming out we thought that we had found a dead bat but on a closer inspection this turned out to be a very mouldy rat , this was a couple of hundred feet in .

### **Swine Vesicular Disease**

Gloucester Market got involved in this infection over the last few months and some farms in the area placed under restriction because of possible , watch out for large red notices on farm gates , you wouldn't be welcome .

## **EQUIPMENT**

Please report in what kit you may be holding , we wish to have a stock check .

## **FOR SALE**

Nine carbide cap lamps and one Deputy's lamp , see Diana Court .  
130ft of rope .  
Helmets .  
NIFE electrolyte .

## **ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY**

GSS News Letter for May , July and September 1973 .  
The British Caver - July 1973 Vol 60  
BSA Cave Science No's 50 and 51.  
Orpheus Caving Cumb - News Letter Vol 9 No's 4 and 5 .  
The Reyfader No 1 .  
NCA Circular No 6 July 1973 .  
Speleologia Emiliana - Notiziario  
Speleo Scientia Informatia  
CRG Transactions Vol 15 No 3 September 1973 .  
Plymouth Caving Group News Letter and Journal No 52 .

## **CAMBRIAN CAVING COUNCIL**

The council is host for the NCA dinner besides the AGM venue is Ysguborwen County Club , Aberdare at 7pm Nov 24<sup>th</sup> . Cost £1.80 inc VAT.

## **THE AUGUST LONGWOOD TRIP - SUNDAY THE 23<sup>RD</sup> SEPTEMBER**

Chris ( the legs ) Clark and I arrived at the 'Café ' near Burrington Combe on the misty Mendips at 11am sharp . ( wot an ungodly hour for a Sunday )

There we met five other lads who were doing the trip with us , then Chris and I set off to Priddy in search of the key ! After looking for the bloke who had it , we came to the conclusion that he was harder to find than

Biggs the Train Robber . Anyway with visions of doing Swildons instead I asked a chap on Priddy Green if he knew where we could pick the key up . His laconic reply was " You won't need the F-----G key 'cos I've got the remains of the F-----G padlock in my F-----G boot " ! charming fellow thought I , what a funny place to keep it , I was just about to ask him if it made him limp when he pointed to his car boot , wonder no more thought I . So we dived off to Longwood to find the others who were thinking we had gorn wum . Out of seven only the four of us had wet suits , so we gleefully pointed out the goods points of a boiler suit in a WET ! Cave .

At the entrance at 12.25pm we found no trace of water much to our disgust , it also cheered the boiler-suit brigade up no end . The 42ft entrance rift was roped for the return and there followed a flat out squeeze through a Z bend which ' legs ' Clark on account of his 46 inch chest found bloody tight ( his Words ) he really aint built for caving that fella !

Two ten foot drops were negotiated and we later came to the 33ft drop into Great Chamber then climbed up into a high rift which then gave us access to the descent towards main stream passage .

There was a tricky little 12ft drop which was laddered and then " SHH " Quiet please , we could hear the sound of the stream , which was surprisingly really , as it was no more than a trickle .

In desperation Les found a small pool 2ft by 1ft and all of 1 inch deep and promptly tried to lie down in it . We were disgusted at the lack of water and thought of all having a pee over the boiler suited brigade who seemed comfortable . However a halt was called for a snack and later our four intrepid wet suited heroes battled on down the almost dry passage stopping to sit , lie or generally wallow in every little pool we saw . The sides and floor of the passages were very sharp in places due to a huge amount of razor sharp sea shells embedded in the rocks . We eventually got to within 20ft or so of the sump and returned via the August series , hopping against hope that the boiler suited brigade would at least get wet , there we had to climb directly up through a waterfall . But alas when we got there, no water , not one solitary dribble , so after much dry thrutching we eventually got back to the entrance where Chris followed somebody up a wrong 'ole and got slightly skinned in the process ( he'll have a go at anything that lad ) then up the last 42 weary feet of the entrance rift out to daylight .

Time underground 6 hours approx , result a very good physical trip and more experience gained in the art of rigging and life lining . No formations to speak of , the whole cave seems to be one big thrutchy rift .

Well worth a trip to the Mendips though , and I did go to work the day after . Question . Where has all that water gone ?

Gordon Burch .

### **CAVING COMMENTS ( or more griping from Gordon )**

Since I've been in the club ( caving that is ) I've done a fair amount of caving , mine exploring and a lesser proportion of digging , and I find that I've become fairly interested in the latter . One prospective dig that I could use some help on is at South Oakwood and it involves digging in through the roof of an adit , the idea being to break in the other side of a fall that has blocked the adit off . This dig was started by the Mine-finders union , namely Mike and Phil , but was abandoned temporarily because bad weather caused a minor subsidence at the dig .

It really entails digging loose infill out again and shoring up properly to stop a recurrence of the same problem . I believe they had actually broken into the top of the adit brickwork , so it shouldn't take a lot more effort to succeed . “ I've heard that before “ you'll say , well no doubt you have but that won't solve my problem ( I don't have birthdays every week ) of not being able to get a reliable digging partner . By reliable I mean someone who will stick at it and see the project through , although anyone who would lend a hand would be most welcome . How about some of you girls lending a hand ? ( for digging I mean ) I've also been doing a spot of digging in the Devil's Chapel area recently and I think it could have possibilities , but would welcome some gen from the more expert diggers as to whether its worth pushing any further .

And now for something entirely different . I was told the other day by a friend that somewhere in the Forest there lies a shaft with 700 Indians down it - when I heard this astounding bit of news I thought “ my god the buggers will buy any sort of property “ And then the friend of a , by now not so trusted friend , said that the Indians were American motor cycles dumped by the Yanks after the war . Seven I can believe but not 700 - I've also heard that John Elliott has definitely given up drinking , and that Colin Clements has got too old for anything and has definitely decided to give IT up !

Gordon Burch

### **PYRENEES 1973**

Party :- Diana Court , John Elliott and John Court .

In a fit of extravagance we had decided that a trip to France / Spain would be a useful way of spending our summer holidays , and Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> July saw us struggling to load caving , walking and climbing gear etc plus food for about 5000 people for a year , into the Land Rover . We wound up the elastic band and set off for Newhaven and the ferry .

Having failed to find a ' chippy ' we settled for a rather decrepit café for our last real food ( egg and chips ) for three weeks . We then smiled at the nice British customs men and went aboard the BR ferry for a millpond like three hour crossing to Dieppe .

We docked at about 3.15am and set off into the depths of France . Slight navigational problems were experienced at each of the numerous junctions that we met , particularly at Rouen where we explored most of the city before finding the right road .

A hard days driving found us at the town of Rocamadour at 7pm . An impressive chateau perched on top of a vertical cliff overlooks the town of narrow streets and tourist shops . We were too tired to really appreciate the beauty of the place , so we started to look for a campsite . An empty field at the foot of the town looked most attractive so we went there and parked . It was very quickly apparent why the field was empty, the smell of an open sewer from the town camping site half a mile away was revolting so we shut the windows and followed a forestry type track for some miles . Finding a wide part of the track we stopped and pitched tent , and after eating and then ignoring strange grunting and rustlings etc we slept .

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> :- We returned to Rocamadour to join the growing number of tourists in photographing and looking around , then on to Paderac .

This is a show cave in the grand style , and while JVE sun bathed J and DC joined the queue to enter . Caving Club cards produced a 2 Franc reduction each of the 8 Fr ( 60 p ) admission fee , and we used two lifts and a number of steps to bottom the 100m entrance shaft .

We disembarked in the chamber of the rains - we should have brought a brolly , and proceeded to look at lake 2 - a big wet passage disappearing into darkness with a boat waiting for us , but no , for us a climb up masses of stal to the top of an aven then back to the boat . A very pretty cave well worth a visit if you're passing by .

Back to the Land Rover and onwards south , through Lourdes to camp ( 7 Fr.20c - 72p ) per night with good facilities .

Friday 27<sup>th</sup> :- A short drive and we finally reached Gavarnie to be greeted by ponies , steaming piles of shhh you know what and ragged boys jumping in front of us and shouting " looy un chevo " - foreign for hire a horse .

Gavarnie is about three km from a semi circle of mountains called Cirque de Gavarnie and one of the attractions of the town is a 2km pony ride to a restaurant at the foot of the Cirque at £2 a trip , if you've got a pony to spare there's a fortune to be made .

We could not find anywhere to camp other than at the top of a mountain or in a couple of fields attached to a café . We chose the café , 80p per night with the use of the café bog - complete with hosepipe for flushing .

We walked to the base of the Cirque , about 5400 ft with a waterfall 1300ft high falling onto debris , then through a short ice cave under a snow field . We had a look at the cave , admired the mountains then climbed to about 6700ft on the east side of the Cirque and looked at possible climbing routes .

Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> :- After examining various maps we determined the best route to the Refuge de la Breche de Roland and drove up a toll road to approx 7000ft . The toll was 3 Fr each -vehicle free - 90 p but well worth it to save a days walking . Coach loads of tourists at the top , but we soon lost them as we walked towards the Refuge . A large warning about not passing this point unless equipped for the mountains , past a number of potholes plugged with ice and then we crossed the first of a number of snow fields .

Just before the Refuge ( which is a quite modern looking place ) we had a good view of the waterfall into the bottom of the Cirque , also an interesting row of plastic bag rubbish - presumably waiting for an avalanche to dispose of it . A steady climb up two snowfalls brought us to the Breche de Roland . This is a square notch cut out of the mountain wall about 300ft square , and was the highest point we reached at approx 8680ft . The Franco Spanish border follows the ridge of the Cirque and for the next few hours we were in Spain . The contrast between the French side of the mountains , green , well watered and the Spanish , dry scrubby trees in the distance and barren , was apparent .

We could see a cave about a mile away , so we dropped down one side of a snow filled valley and teetered up the other side . Since this couldn't be the Grotte de Casterat that we wanted we pressed on around the shoulder of the mountain spending the next two hours in blazing sunshine traversing a very steep and very loose mountain side . We looked at some promising ( from a distance ) holes which closed down within 10ft and since time , and our energy was pressing we decided to return and have a closer look at the big cave which might just be the Grotto de Casteret , it was .

A fairly large entrance , with a pond of ice having about 3 inches of water on top crossed by stepping stones led to an island of guano ( Ravens nesting in the roof ) Just out of daylight the cave is completely floored with ice , and ice axes are very useful . Two 29ft high ice columns of interesting shape are about 200ft from the entrance . A frozen river goes down a side passage about 100ft in but we did not follow this. On returning to the entrance we met a group of French chaps who turned out to be cavers , “ of course you have no caves in Angletere “ One of these was amused by the historical map we were using ( by courtesy of a well known local dentist )

Seeing mist forming in the Brech we got a move on back to more small snow fields to a traverse that we had noted on our way down . A 1 inch wire rope was fixed as an aid , but no sooner had JVE got out of sight than he called out “ Er I think , that you should Er only use the rope for confidence “ A six foot length of rope was missing at the worst part of the traverse with both ends very badly frayed , presumably a rock fall had caused the damage .

At about 7.30 we were again at the Brecht - with thick mist on the French side and sunshine on the Spanish. Keeping fairly close together we descended to the Refuge with a Frenchman calling at intervals to guide us, and others , in the right direction - the alternative was an extremely fast 2000ft descent into the valley . Still in mist and in decreasing light we returned to the Rover at about 9 pm . The drive down the mountain was atrocious . With the side window off I could just see the side of the road about 6ft away , with JVE watching the other verge and Diana looking straight in front . It took us an hour to descend about 10 km - we nearly left the road on a number of occasions and would have run into some ponies if Diana hadn't been alert, and this was in low second gear ! Fortunately the campsite was clear of mist so we cooked supper and retired to bed .

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> : - We drove to the Cirque de Toureuse and had a quiet stroll round , then returned to Gavarnie. We went up the west side of a valley to look for a rising . This was fairly quickly found but it was issuing from a very large boulder collapse , although it might go if it was dug hard . We decided to traverse south to find a path we had seen at the bottom just above our camp site .

After about an hour of pushing through trees , night began to fall with no sign of a path , we were becoming a little concerned as we knew that there were small cliffs not so far from us , so we reversed to reach the normal path . After passing half a dozen ponies going to feed we regained the river . ( The next morning we found that the path we were looking for joined the path we used about 50 yds from the river - so we could have searched in vain all night )

Broke camp early and headed for St Ergrace via “ Difficile et dangereuse “ roads over the Col du Souloir where we saw a few eagles , and other tourists .

John Court .

To be continued in the next news letter.

## DUDELY STONE MINES - Wednesday The 3<sup>rd</sup> October

Party :- Chris Clark , Marg Hay , Stew-pot ( Stephen Potts ) and the author .

Arriving at Dudley we passed the Zoo entrance with thoughts of donating Margaret to the head keeper but the Zoo was closed so we carried on to the rendezvous point ( that's French ) where we teamed up with half a dozen Brum Lads , and after the usual chatter ( half of which I couldn't understand ) we got changed . As only five of us had wet suits we decided to split into two parties one half doing the canals and the others meeting us at various points on the way round .

This mine was worked for the limestone and consists of two levels connected to the surface by two shafts one nicely brick lined the other rough hewn . The bottom 90ft of the shafts are water filled as are all the lower levels and from the upper level it's about 60ft of shaft to the surface .

The Cave and Crag Club have explored the lower levels using diving gear and they have recovered numerous mining relics most of which are on show at the local museum . The remains of a narrow boat are being preserved by immersion in water , silt and stones until such time as the museum bods can get time to restore it . It is apparently the only one in existence and is at 30ft long , classed as a short boat and was I'm told , capable of carrying up to 35 tons . The Long Boat was 70ft long and could carry up to 70 - 80 tons , both boats being extremely shallow draught .

This mine boasts the longest canal tunnel in the country and at 1 ¼ miles long is , I think , longer than the famous Harecastle Tunnel in Staffordshire . I have helped to Back and Foot a narrow through the Harecastle which is around 1 mile long . This technique involves lying on your back on top of the boat then ' walking ' with your feet on the roof of the tunnel , the faster you walk the faster the boat moves .

I believe the local term used for this is ' legging ' . Total lengths of canals in Dudley is about 3 miles .

I was also informed that the powers that be in the Dudley area have plans to build a museum , which will be built into part of the mine , so enabling the relics to be displayed in natural surroundings .

Its sad to think that no Forest museum exists as I personally think there is a great need for one , anyway maybe I'm to nostalgic . Anyway back to the mine .

In one place there is what appears to be a large flight of steps , in fact they are not steps they're stone orchestra seats . Many years ago a big ' do ' for the gentry was put on , boat rides , refreshments etc and an orchestra laid on to provide music . " Ah those were the days "

Throughout the mine huge pillars were left to support the roof but one could see the evidence of pillar robbing , apparently , if a gang were short on tonnage worked they would hack some off a pillar to make up their quota and where the surface water trickled through in places one could see traces of iron and coal deposits .

We took a look inside the 1850 tunnel , 1850 presumably being the date it was built , it is a brick lined tunnel blocked after some 50 yds by a fall , which is being dug at to open up new ground . I didn't find out the approx length of it but as it was only 6-8ft across and therefore not big enough for boats I assumed it was drainage or water diversion tunnel of sorts . The roof brickwork was in a very dangerous state - YEUK !

In all the wetsuit brigade did about 150 yds of waist deep water so I don't think the trip warranted wearing suits ? After about 2 hours underground we set off up topside to find the pub , and friends , let me tell you it's the first bleeding time I've walked into a public bar in a bleeding wringing wet -wet suit . Can you imagine the public sat sitting supping , suddenly shocked into sublime silence when we arrived on the scene like Batman and Robin plus their cronies . Apparently the landlord and customers must like cavers and Batman cos we didn't get throwe'd out till closing time . Long live the British landlord .

Our little band arrived back home at around 1.30 am just in time for an hour or two shuteye , or beauty sleep as Colin Clements calls it , and my god he's ugly .

Gordon Burch

( Please note , the Editor is not responsible for Gordon )