

**ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN
CAVING CLUB**



DECEMBER / JANUARY 1973 / 74

NEWS LETTER No 50

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FOREST NEWS

The AGM in November had the usual moderate attendance and after much discussion a new committee was elected , they are :-

Chairman
Jim Hay
Prospect House
Ruardean
Cinderford
Glos

Secretary
Sue Clark (Mrs)
Myrtle Cottage
Symonds Yat
Coleford
Glos

Treasurer
Andy Solari
Fir Tree Bungalow
Wigpool
Mitcheldean
Glos

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Roger Bailey
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Upper Lydbrook
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H Q Warden
Stuart Jones
Homelea
Marsh Lane
Ellwood
Coleford
Glos

Tackle Officer
Gordon Burch
12a Caravan Park
Coalway Cross
Coleford
Glos

TUFTS IRON MINE

Mike Howell together with Phil Schwartz , Gordon Burch and anyone else they can rope in are hard at work digging a fall in Tufts Level that blocks the main level . If the dig is successful a large and interesting area of workings should be accessible .

WATER LEVELS

These continue to drop and are probably the lowest that we have known them . Large areas of the later workings in New Dunn are dry , the pump house has long been exposed and a further drop in level may reveal an active stream way the wartime miners speak of .

In Wigpool the water is lower than when we first got in 1964 , but a lot of small perched bodies of water confuses things . The 1914 / 18 levels are certainly partly drained and what we saw of them on a recent trip by going down the large dipple east of the shaft it would be an interesting but rather muddy and hairy exploration .

The water under Columbus Pit does not seem to have altered at all there is quite a steady flow of water coming in and this must keep the area topped up .

All the mines need looking at in the deep areas now , we might not get such conditions for several years .

LIFE UNDERGROUND

Three or four years ago we found a rather transparent worm very active in a large pile of worm casts near the bottom of Red Pit , on a recent visit there , we checked up on him to see how he was getting on . To our surprise the worm was still there but in a very weak condition and rather yellow looking . It's possible that the dry season has reduced the moisture in the air and surrounding debris so that the creature is unable to process what food is available . A smaller worm was found near Columbus Pit bottom in a similar state of health .

However in Oakwood Mill Land Level there are bigger things , during a Wednesday trip last month Diana Court and Ian Standing were startled by a large eel which swam away across a flooded chamber .

NEW MEMBERS

David Brown
18 Coomb Drive
Buckshaft
Cinderford
Glos

Ian Frazer - Holland
94 Moselle Drive
Churchdown
Glos

Welcome to David and welcome back Ian .

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

SWCC News Letter No 73 August 1973 .
Plymouth Caving Group News Letter and Journal No 55 .
BCRA Bulletin No 2 Nov 1973 .

SUBSCRIPTIONS

These are now due :- Senior Membership £1.25
 Senior Family Membership £1.00
 Junior Membership £0.75
 Junior family membership £0.50

EQUIPMENT

The club has various items for sale :- rope , carbide lamps , helmets (small) NIFE cells , electrolyte , headlamp cable .

See the tackle officer , pay him direct or the secretary .

The tackle stores and headquarters room has had a good tidy up by Gordon and Stuart , please keep it so .

TRIPS

6th of January - Cave rescue practice in Old Ham , meet at 9.30 am .
20th of January - Wigpool Iron Mine .
7th of February - Club Meeting - A talk on Wig pool .
10th of February - Day trip to Ogof Ffynnon Ddu or Dan yr Ogof .
24th of February - Perseverance Buckshaft and Cursit's Cave .
7th of March - Club meeting - a talk on Buckshaft and Perseverance . Also in march a trip to Rhyd Sych and or Ogof y Cy . Plus a Wednesday evening trip , and a Westbury Brook expedition .
April - Oakwood Mill Deep Level .
Easter - camping at Porth yr Ogof .
Whitsun - North Wales .

A new policy is evident , that of more trips in the Forest . Due to our changed pattern of membership away weekend trips over the last two years have not been very successful , however should the need for more weekends arise they will be arranged .

CLEARWELL CAVES

Or British Mine (incorrect) or Ray Wright's Mine (factual) properly it is part of Old ham . A connection between Rays' mine and the main Ham workings has been found and has apparently been known to a few for some time , this hadn't mattered until samples and other items started to go missing from the show mine . Now the connection is generally known Ray has no objection to people going through , it is hoped that the route will be eventually gated rather than blown in .

THE CINDERFORD EXHIBITION

The teachers training centre at Cinderford recently held an exhibition of local history , the club were approached for help and we ie Sue and Diana got a collection of relics and samples together . Also the centre was able to provide an automatic projector which together with a taped commentary by Sue made up a very good exhibit which was much appreciated by the visitors .

PIPLICAN POT

On Leck Fell in Yorkshire there are some fine Potholes and a few years ago Piplican Pot was extended and around 4 ½ miles of passage have been mapped, giving yet another very sporting trip for cavers. During exploration by Northern clubs the Pot was left with tackle in it and it was at this time that some stalwart Forest heroes visited Piplican as guests of the Bolton Speleo Club. For me however a night's drinking in the Crown had left its mark and it was all I could do to stagger over the moor and watch the descent.

Never liking to be beaten so openly I deliberately criticised the meets Sec' and duly got elected to the committee. (This method caught me as well for the 1973 AGM)

Carefully I booked Piplican for October the 13th and bided my time doing nothing until the great day arrived. It was a pity, I thought, that nobody else wanted to do it. I was looking at the seven ladders I would have to carry. Still undaunted I turned up at the Solari Hamlet on time (IJS please note) only to find it was rather like a modern Marie Celest, You Know, lights on, doors open etc. For an hour I hung around freezing listening to the constant ring of the telephone until eventually I answered it and spent the next five minutes trying to calm some bloke down who had no cover note and was just off somewhere on holiday.

Then Mrs Solari arrived with Roger who'd had to abandon his car in Chepstow. The phone instantly rang and Andy Hall plus another BUSS demanded to know why we weren't in Birmingham picking them up. This meant a snap decision and in an uncertain second I agreed to going in my Land Rover.

After buying a gallon of oil and checking the petrol we pulled onto the M50 and headed north. Five minutes later I was explaining patiently to a motorway policeman that my No 3 cylinder often oiled up and I had just had to stop and clean. Another five minutes motoring and it did it again, so patience flagging just a little I did my little routine again. Now there is, I believe, only one spot on the M50 where there is no hard shoulder so our next few miles progress had to end there. A loud crash from Rogers side shattered our now frayed nerves. Nothing serious this time, I had left my tool box on the bonnet.

The next " N " miles were spent with bated breath and sure enough after just overtaking a lorry which had just overtaken me the engine cut out.

Some two hours later it was raining hard and we were in the same place. Roger suggested that towing rates went up after midnight and I then admitted a quick defeat. We sprinted off to the nearest phone.

A major accident nearby meant a long wait before some unhappy man in his best togs towed us off. By the time we reached his garage in Worcester his Transit was boiling just because my brakes were binding a little bit. He finally found a petrol pump and I was given the task of fitting it. The only thing was it didn't work either. It was while we were gazing at this in disbelief that Roger refitted my old pump (old ?? I had only bought it after my meeting with the milk lorry in Wales) It of course worked. The garage man triumphant with his now working pump was greatly saddened to hear what we thought he should do with it. He shut his garage and drove off with a roar. Some difficulty, actually followed, the battery was flat and the brakes binding, Roger isn't a strong lad either.

In Worcester we found a phone box to phone Andy and debate whether to go on. Our only 2p was bent so we drove off in disgust. I was clean out of money after paying for the tow so that ended the quickest Yorkshire weekend I've ever had. Avoiding the motorway like the plague we arrived home at 4 o'clock.

At the AGM Roger announced that BUSS had Leck Fell booked on November 17th and 18th and that various pots were to be attempted including Piplican. This was probably the only words worth listening to all night, apart from of course Gordon's attempts to change the name of news letter to the Beano.

Personally I thought ' Dandy ' to be more suitable for our mate.

Cont.

So on a very cold Friday night Roger and I left via a devious route for Yorkshire . The night was spent in Leeds where we picked up two BUSS members and proceeded towards the Fells .

We met more BUSS at a draughty barn on Leck Fell where we were to sleep . Here it was decided on a plan . Four to rig Piplican everyone else to the pub .

Later that day I joined a group on a trip from Short Drop Cave to Gavel Pot and back .

A cold night in the barn in the company of rats and chickens is not good for an early keen start , and hours later only five of us had changed , the sensible ones were clucking with the chickens .

Roger , Dave Underhill and myself plus two Mikes made up the gallant band and in wind and rain we staggered off to the Shakehole .

From the surface a 25ft pitch leads to a comfortable chamber and then the fun starts . Crawling over a blind pot a tight section and 29ft pitch leads to awkward climbs and rifts . A fine 50ft pitch followed by a small tight one . A series of rifts had to be traversed , crossing a pitch then descending to the floor with the aid of a sling . The last pitch was descended and a major inlet on the right noted . A windy narrow stream way was followed until a boulder choke , through which access to an extremely large ' Aggie ' type chamber was given . From the relatively immature entrance series a cave system of grand proportions had been reached. We had reached this in 55 mins , far better than expected and so plenty of time to explore.

We chose the larger way off and followed this gallery until it again got bigger . Descending a liquid mud slope knee deep is all the fun it seems , but the way on eluded us . Mike No 1 (with beard) found a hole and I followed him liquid mud oozing over me . Unexpectedly we were in a stream way with refreshing deep water and to our excitement we could hear the thunder of a waterfall . We had found " Cigalair " the major inlet of the system . We found a series of magnificent cascades to climb , deep pools and clean brown rock .

A stream way like this is what its all about .

At a low well decorated spot we stopped and the others caught us up . After the crawl an icy canal with swimming or traversing depending on your luck . After 700ft we met a cascade of magnificent proportions 60ft high and as wet as they come . Above this is a further 3,400ft of stream way . Some hero had pegged up this and even our ladder man Dave chose to ignore the one that hung in this deluge . We returned to the hall of mud exploring a side passage with good formations en route .

We wanted to find Gour Hall and split up to look . I finally noted an obvious crawl and indicated my desire to explore to Mike No 2 (clean shaven) I proceeded alone and soon it became obvious it went . I thought Dave was in front of me for some reason so I hurried to catch him up . Low crawls connected quiet dead chambers . Tall stalagmites became profuse . Sombre , silent , vast halls full of silent people , watching me alone and vulnerable . After a long and memorable journey I reached the end . Gour Hall , again abundantly decorated and very quiet . I messed around a bit and then returned checking a few side passages . Roger appeared , slightly puffed and put out . I explained I was looking for Dave and returned with him and Dave No 1 to Gour Hall .

We started out de-rigging , all went well but it was hard work with the squeezes all up hill . The surface is more alien than the cave . Dark , driving rain and dense cloud . Mike No1 and I headed back . I explained how my unnerving sense of direction had led me down from Disappointment Pot once , when we fell into a drainage ditch . From then on I fell into at least every other one . We then reached a fence , unfortunately we were looking for a wall .

Unerringly I guessed to the right and of course we found the wall (Phew) Staggering back to the cars with their frozen occupants was a nightmare and changing even worse . I was pleased to hear that Dave had fallen down a nice deep shake hole on the way back .

We had been underground some five hours and I can recommend Piplican Pot as a fine addition to Leck Fell.

John Elliott

PYRANEES 1973 (Continued)

Monday 30th July .

John C got me up at 6.30 am to take some photo's of the peaks and the waterfall which poured from them . Under a clear sky we broke camp and started our drive westwards . We crossed the Col Du Soulour at 4,500ft but cloud had now obscured the peaks and spoiled any chance of some descent climbs .

So we continued drawing towards our next target , the British camp at the Gouffre De La Pierre St Martin . As we approached the area a sign post indicated the required Gouffre so we followed it . We drove through impressive karst hills gaining height in a multitude of Z bends . Soon we were above cloud line and could see nothing . After gaining much height we found a car park . We were obviously in a fine karst area with holes everywhere but no Pierre . Then we found a customs post . Obviously the road had been extended and now went into Spain . We re-found the Land Rover and drove on into Spain . Another car park and we found a big deep shaft which a tourist told us was the Pierre told us was the Pierre . In actual fact we found out that this was just another deep shaft which litter the area , but in thick cloud we were glad to see something . There didn't seem to be a British camp here so we decided to try nearer the resurgence .

This proved to be a long drive with more than enough Z bends . At last we drove into the remote village of St Engrace which apparently was (or is) known as the " the end of the world " Believe me the are right . We eventually found the English camped in a valley infested with lots of nasties . As we were putting up our tents our old friends 'fish' arrived with his wife and Mike Wooding with his bird .

Tuesday 31st July .

A clear sky again so we decided to go up to the limestone plateau again this time on foot . We did a complete trip round the valley seeing a lot more of the plateau en route , and very impressive it was too being dominated by the two peaks of nearly 7,000ft . The plateau is placed 5,000ft camp was about 2000ft . Apart from getting caught in a thunderstorm and getting lost , our 14 mile walk went quite well .

Wednesday 1st August .

Now I had forget to mention that all was not well at the camp ie the British had been in situ for two weeks and due to politics with the French Speleo's had not yet opened up the gate to the EDF tunnel , the easy way into this system with the deepest vertical range in the world , some 3,850ft . Some cavers had to go home without entering the system .

Rumour was spreading that the gate was open and many a Yorkshire man was off up the mountain at some speed . We decided to follow at a leisurely pace . A rather rough 4 mile walk up an impressive valley brought us to a wooden hut and a gate which was still very locked . Two French Speleo's were contentedly sipping their wine in the sun , sort of surrounded by many very evil looking Yorkshire men . We joined them and learnt how unpopular French cavers really are when they stop English caving . After throwing a few rocks around they eventually went up the valley to a dig which they assured us would bypass the rotten gate.

What would we do ? Could we walk over to the Gorges of Hakoueltics from here ? We decided to ask the French who seemed in a very good mood . They showed us a map and it appeared we couldn't walk to the Gorges . However one (a handsome chap , ask Di) spoke some English and we had a long and interesting chat . The first thing we learnt was that his partner was one of the hardest cavers in France and from some cuttings he showed us I believe hi m .

We also learnt they were going caving soon and we (for a laugh) pestered them for a quick trip . They were exploring a new passage they said and tourist caving in the Pierre was just not allowed . The passage they were exploring was very tight and difficult they said . We leapt on that and told them tight passages were our speciality . Non , was the relentless reply .

Cont

We gave up and started muttering to ourselves . “ We will take one “ our friend suddenly announced , to our intense surprise . John and Diana (I think kindly) said I could go and so it was decided .

About 2 hours later clad in my normal dry caving gear which the French had criticised somewhat . (My boots could be first to be banned from the Pierre)

The gate was opened with a shrieking of wind which constituted faces of more Yorkshire men I had some difficulty with explaining how I was caving with the dreaded French .

As I plodded down the mined tunnel I pondered on a few problems . All I knew about the Pierre was what I had read in books . Where the French had told me they weren't going to the Pierre anyway . Where were we going ?

After 1,000ft we came to a junction of three passages . We turned left and kept walking till the tunnel ended and natural cave began . Apparently this system was broken into instead of the Pierre and was the Gouffre D' Arphidia , a very deep system . We climbed in and entered a large stream passage carrying only a small stream . We proceeded upstream at a very fast rate , a bit of climbing and traversing ensued and the passage became more fractured in nature . Hard man up front kept up a fast pace and it soon became obvious his mate just wasn't up to it . He was sweating hard and messing up a few of the climbs and the odd squeeze or two . A vertical climb took us out of the stream and another climb of an exposed 50ft , took us to a large chamber . Matey very nearly fell off this as it was very thin at the top . I didn't like it much either . By the time we reached the chamber our friend had rigged a show for us . He was trying to gain a higher chamber by lassoing a flake some 25ft up . We watched his efforts for half an hour when he decided his mate ought to try . I think even he admitted he'd made a right mess of the attempt . Now the way they were both looking at me made me wonder whether they thought I was as mad as them , they did .

My first throw went up the wrong side of the chamber and I then proceeded to coil the rope wrongly . Muttering darkly I changed position and balanced over the edge of the 50ft climb clinging gamely to a hand hold . I threw and the rope scored a direct hit to my intense amazement . There was a gable of excited chatter featuring “ anglaise “ something or other and our circus hero was prussiking up the rope which involved swinging out over the void and a few rather dodgy moves at the top . He returned abseiled down and I never did learn what happened up there .

After some food we proceeded into the cave which involved some interesting traversing . Soon our hero was climbing vertically up a rather exposed face . Now looking down I couldn't see the bottom of the large rift we were in so it was with some reluctance I followed . After 30ft or so the rift widened and the climbing became very difficult .

Matey was giving a good example of how to kill himself off and my interest in self preservation was getting the better of me . However I noticed a rather tight chimney that was really just my style . I was up this like a shot and reached the top before our other hero who nearly fell off (again) when he saw me there in front of him . Non plussed our hard mate stood up on the pinnacle of rock we were on (some 6 inches wide) and balanced across it stepping over fresh air into another passage .

Without having permission from my mind my legs followed and I was across . More climbing followed until we reached a point where we could climb no further . In front of us was a huge shaft and to cap it all matey was tipping out his bag of circus gear .

Cont

Now I was puzzled , where was this crawl that I was going to push . I decided to ask “ that was yesterday “ I was told . “ Today we enter a new chamber across this shaft “ (70ft deep) I didn't like the “ we “ bit at all . Hero features was by now climbing across life-lined by ‘ clumsy ‘ He came to a tricky bit and once more burst into song , a habit I was beginning to dislike . He got on an entrier and with a shout of joy reached the new chamber . Both ends of the rope were fastened and we were to climb by crabbing on . I also didn't go much on having to carry a heavy bag of equipment across either .

We explored some 400ft of new chambers , some well decorated . Great excitement (which I did not share) was shown by the French when they consulted their compass . What I did not realise was that a very short distance separates the Aphidia from the Pierre and to join these systems would increase the world depth record by 1000ft , I just might have started singing had I realised that . Prospects were still good when we left but time and the fact that both French lights were now pretty dead meant we had to retreat . My NIFE cell which had been much criticised for only lasting eight hours was still burning bright and succeeded in getting us out .

The trip out could be called uneventful if it had been . Instead we got lost , did many wrong climbs , lost matey (Hero was all for leaving him behind) and they couldn't even find the tunnel we had come in by . Eventually we staggered out and entered the hut . I would have stayed but there was no sleeping gear or food . As it was 12.15 am the four mile descent to camp was preferable , but only just .

I said goodbye , they were amazed that I was going down although I had little choice . We left good friends having shared in a fine adventure not without its near mishaps . Some of the climbs on one lamp had proved a bit trying .

The trip down was as bad as I expected and near camp an idiot Polish caver loomed out of the bushes and succeeded in scaring me to death . Dropping into my tent I noticed darling Diana had left food on the stove and this I did full justice to before crawling into my bag .

John Elliott .