

ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN

CAVING CLUB



MARCH / APRIL 1974

NEWS LETTER No 52

CONTENTS

Page	2	Forest News Mitcheldean Lime Kiln Trips Additions to the Library Equipment
Page	3	Caving Comments - Swildons Hole
Page	4	The Longest Stream Passage in the Forest
Page	6	Club Trips - Buckshaft
Page	7	“ “ - Westbury Brook
Page	7	Park Hill Stone Mine

Hon Sec

Mrs Sue Clark
Mrytle Cottage
Symonds Yat
Coleford
Glos

Hon Editor

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

FOREST NEWS

The sudden rise in water levels after the winters heavy rain has put a stop to exploration of the bottom workings of the Forest Mines , it will be many years before the water drops as low again .
Our main problem in the area is still litter , mainly in front of and inside Old Ham . Carbide has been scattered about where the cars park and Coca - Cola cans have been retrieved from railway churn , a spring clean is necessary once again .

MITCHELDEAN LIME KILN

During recent road works up the Stenders Hill at Mitcheldean the excavator exposed an ancient lime kiln . The age was shown by the kiln being well decorated with straws up to two feet long ! It was soon photographed by Messers Bailey and Roger Solari and is now believed to be obliterated , probably just as well as it was very rotten . The site was about 25 yards below the cement quarry and on the same side .

TRIPS

Sunday 7th April GCRG practice at Wigpool Iron Mine starting at 9.30 am .
Easter weekend camping around Porth Yr Ogof .
Sunday 28th April Devils Chapel .
Sunday 5th May Cymistwith and or Copper Hill Mine .
Manor Farm Swallet in the Mendips when an interesting party gets together .

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

SWCC News Letter No 74 .
PCG News Letter and Journal No 54 .
GSS News Letter for December 73 and Feb 74 .

EQUIPMENT

Electrolyte is now for sale , 20p - sufficient to make one pint .
Carbide lights both large and small .
TEXOLEX helmets , all sizes and also spare headbands .
NIFE cell cable .
Oldham lead acid cells and lamp .

Electrolyte from Jim Hay the remainder from Gordon Burch .
Please return all outstanding equipment (this means you too J B)

It's about time that we had another ' Who's Who ' isn't it ? If no squitter is forthcoming the editor may be forced into inventing some , then you could be reading things like " Who works a three day week " or " Who thinks that everyone should try living in sin ? Such like " Who after being fat and 'orrible is now thin and 'orrible " Or even " Who takes dirty books home from work " ?

CAVING COMMENTS - SWILDONS HOLE MENDIPS -Wednesday evening trip on 13th of March .

Members on the trip :- myself , Jim and Daph Hay , Colin Clements and Stephen Potts.

Having been chauffeured to Priddy by Colin in a nice warm comfortable car , everyone , except myself , had lost interest in getting out into the cold night air to go caving . Jim tried to inject some life into the car - bound lot , by suggesting we should return to the bright lights of Bristol to enjoy the delights of Ice Skating! ! However I managed to persuade 'em that the delights of Swildons would be more enjoyable ! Having changed we got to the entrance at about 8.40 pm where ignoring the oohs and ahhs about the little stream flowing down the entrance I set an example and led in ! Arriving at the Twin Pots Jim promptly fell in the last one ! Proving the point " that it's only knee deep " The main object was Blue Pencil Passage , which I did head first , doing my best to fall backwards out of the end of the passage which emerges about 8ft above a stream way . This passageway descends quite steeply and proves to be somewhat tiring to re-climb , as Colin found out , he had a half hours rest in the middle bit !

What they call the Greasy chimney was a laugh , Potts followed Jim up it and after a few minutes of frantic climbing , suddenly reappeared with a thud and a rush of air back in the passage below . After this the more sensible of us threw a rope up (far easier aint it ?)

The ducks proved to be a bit of a nuisance , the first one took about 10 minutes of bailing with a plastic bucket (left there for that purpose) and involved lying on your back with nose and eyes above water and just floating through the hole . Unfortunately , whether from exertion or the coldness of the water in me yer'oles I suffered a bad case of loss of balance . I really couldn't stand straight for a good five minutes , most alarming it was !! Both Colin and Daph also noticed a slight dizziness as well , anyone know the cause.

There followed another two ducks known as the Double Troubles , aptly named me thinks . The first required some 15 minutes bailing and about 200,000 gallons of water was chucked back behind the dam ! The second of these ducks was a sod . What water we bailed over the dam just ran straight back in and Daph having had a couple of duff attempts at getting through suffering with the cold . Quick action was called for so Jim went back a ways for a bucket of mud , this I then packed into the back of the dam and after five minutes of non-stop bailing we managed to get Daph and ourselves through .

Number one sump proved very easy but at first sight filled me with dismay , I went through followed by Colin , Steve and then Daph . I stood ready to help haul her out the other side , spotted her light , made a grab , but she didn't follow ! Apparently she bumped her head and pulled back . The second attempt was OK , Jim sat on her to keep her down !

It was then just a matter of climbing all the way out finally reaching the frosty night air at 2.45 am . Time for trip , six hours .

After changing and a bite of scoff we set off for home , I rolled in with the milk at 5.10 am and was woken by the kids at 6.50 am so I did get to work on time .

Verdict - Great trip and thanks to Colin for taking us and Jim for leading .

P.S . Try stuffing Mars Bar wrappers in your er'oles to keep the water out it really works !

Cheers - Gordon Burch.

THE LONGEST STEAM PASSAGE IN THE FOREST

Now , there aren't many of you that really will appreciate the above fact as being particularly relevant , but just for a change I'm not writing about the apathetic Forest nor even anything connected with its caves , this a story concerning an iron mine .

On my side of the Forest is a small affair more commonly known as Wigpool Iron mine and over the years it has attracted steady attention . It has not seen any notable extensions since its initial exploration until recently when the pit shaft bottom was first seen by cavers (due to the lowering of the water levels) now , another extension that the majority of you will not be seeing .

Streams in the mine are somewhat rare and to my knowledge Wigpool boasts only one (although bottom levels flow quite steadily in wet weather) , the one that conglomerates below Columbus Cross to enter and leave sumps quite regularly until disappearing into a final sump . It is presumed to be the one found in that complex area at the far end of Bottom Levels beyond the winch (no name seems to cover the area , I'm going to refer to it as ' Back of Columbus Pit ' Here the stream issues from a choke, attacked in the old days by Rex Keane , to flow down a small passage to enter a flooded level where old car inner tubes were used to traverse the five feet of water for a hundred feet . Hence , when Colin Anderson asked for a bit of training at cave diving , two sites needing attention offered themselves (Westbury Brook , the other) the down stream sump below Columbus Cross became the site .

Kit consisted of an effing heavy 50 (lasting approx 1 hour) 121lb lead weight , ammo box , valve , mask and line reel and fins . For two in Wigpool that was not particularly amusing and on Saturday 9th Feb we chickened out . Sunday perhaps a hangover is a tonic for caving , we were underground and (tragically missing the fact that 5 cavers were changing outside Short bush) found things not too bad . After a short delay at Columbus (couldn't find the way) we assembled at the site . A large stream was flowing out of a sump on the right , flowing across the floor for 15 ft dropping 6 ft in the process , to the down stream sump. I was the first to dive .

In order to keep ahead of the mud cloud that would inevitably follow I dived in rapidly and after 3 ft hit the end wall of the sump pool - the passage was then seen to turn sharply right immediately on sumping . In poor vis . (8ft when undisturbed , nil when the mud was) the left hand wall was followed . Three air bells were passed , the first two simply being bells , the third was the base of a shaft which is probably the one found at the end of the level with wooden water channels in Back of Columbus Pit . The stream could be heard flowing away somewhere and a further short dive saw me to the end of the sump - measured at 135ft (tagged line) but at no point more than 10ft deep .

At the far end there is a large chamber with the stream flowing over a large mud bank (creating the sump) into a continuation of the level . The floor is covered by about 2 ft of soft mud (making walking in wet - socks fun) The passage descends steadily for 150 ft before the stream disappears through a narrow slot , which is easily by-passed only to reach another sump . A further dive is pointless , the way on is less than 1 ft high and narrow .

There are numerous side passages and looking down stream , all the ones on the left (ie towards the bulk of the mine) ended after about 30ft in major falls . Those to the right were considerably more extensive . Directly above the sump pool . A passage leads up dip for around 50ft , while a similar passage continues for over 100 ft (two forks) and the obvious level 50ft from the sump leads gradually uphill for around 120 ft . All the passages on the right end in blank walls .

Of more interest were the relics :-

- a) Shovel - found near end of level on right . Handle in poor state , rusted .
- b) Three tin cans and water carrier (metal) in second right hand passage , all rusty but otherwise completely intact .
- c) Drill bit - junction of main passage with level , rusty approx 18 inches long , half circle in cross section with small key in lower end - heavily hammered at top end . Now at Butchers Arms .

Cont

d) Two bottles - one broken , found with drill bit , pale green - approx 3 inches dia only pieces of lower half, moulded . Not intensely inspected one intact containing some foul smelling liquid , approx 9 inches high and only just over 2 inches dia , dark green with pale flecks and very thick glass , separately added lip , rounded base (flat bit only 1 inch dia) no makers name apparent , no mould lines noted . Looks very old!

e) Sleepers - rarity in mines , typical railway sleeper nearly totally embedded in mud just below mud bank - looks very new !

No pipes were found despite a fairly thorough search .

Having spent probably $\frac{3}{4}$ hour beyond the sump I dived back in nearly nil vis . (It obviously doesn't clear very fast) and after letting Colin know of likely obstacles (pit prop approx 15 ft in) he went through in nil vis (his first introduction thereto) and after a reasonable look round he returned to tell the tale. The line was left in situ but under NO CIRCUMSTANCES IS THE SUMP TO BE FREE DIVED THE LINE DOES NOT GO TO THE AIR BELLS.

Still having some air left , the other neighbouring sumps were looked at . The upstream sump was found to be a canal which sumped after 50 ft . A dive showed the sump to reach a very low squeeze some 12 ft in , back mounted gear made it impossible to pass . Vis was so bad that for most of the dive a total black out was experienced (not even a faint glow could be seen reflected from the helmet mounted light)

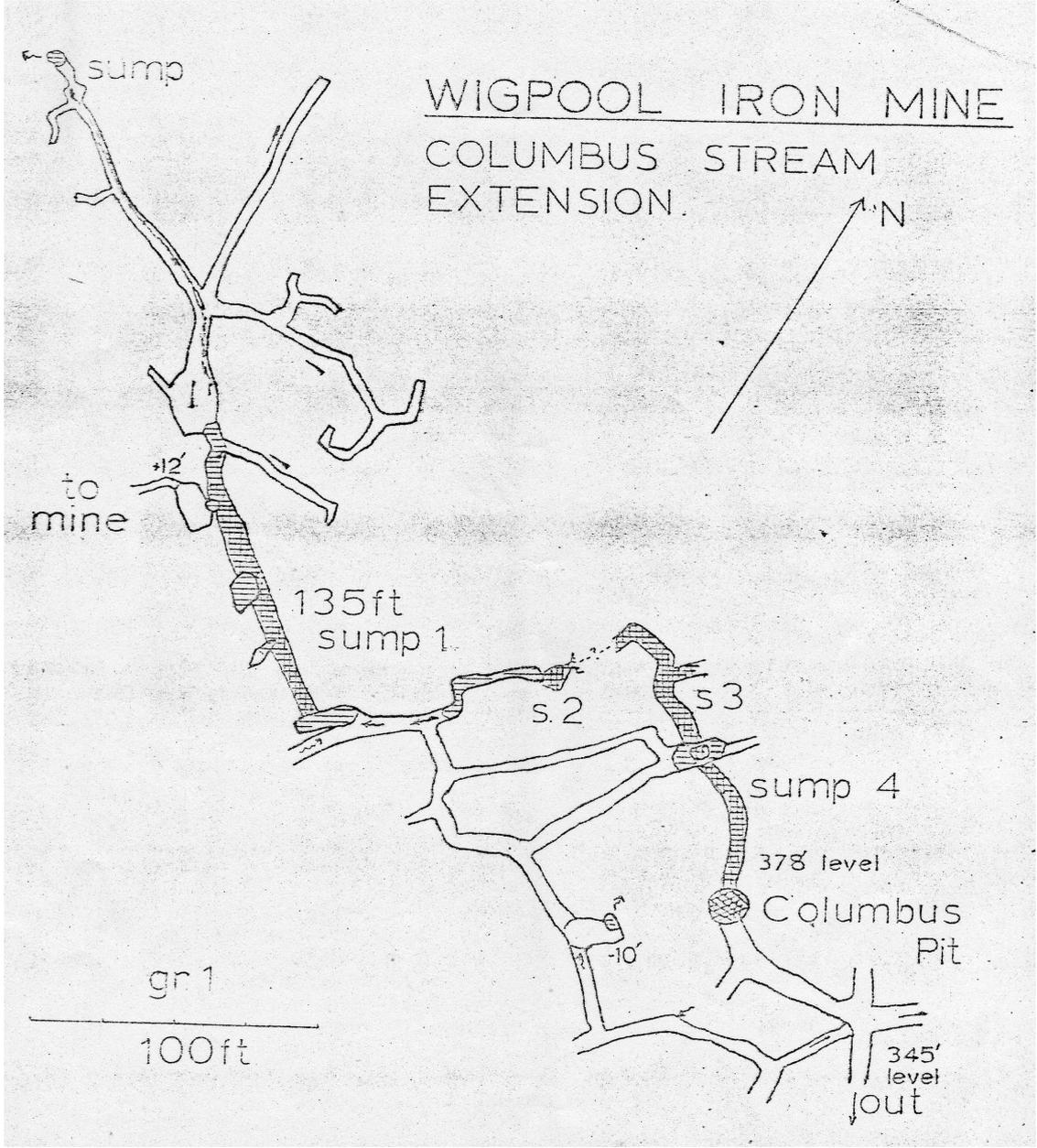
Some 70 ft away a small pool has an underwater shaft with a pit prop (removed to descend) this was the final site . After dropping down vertical for 10 ft a large level was reached . Finning upstream ie towards Columbus Pit < the level was followed for about 50ft to a mud bank which completely blocked the level . This could well be Columbus Pit at the lower level (378 ft landing) approached from the far side .

Re - reeling the line , then swimming below the entry point (to regain the rapidly and it was thought that a further level branched right after 40 ft before the line ran out at 70 ft . Although the roof could not be seen no air space was entered and I returned to base , probably having reached a point very close to the squeeze in the upstream sump .

The pool at the bottom of the shaft with the rail was not dived , air was running short and I didn't fancy my chances of climbing back out having jumped down ! So we left after 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours underground . I'll tell you , carting very much out of Wigpool is simply no joke . Next time the bottles will be smaller !

Roger Solari

WIGPOOL IRON MINE COLUMBUS STREAM EXTENSION.



CLUB TRIPS - Sunday 24th February - BUCHSHAFT

The club trip to Buckshaft was supported only by myself, John and Diana Court . Phil Schwartz arrived late and unfortunately couldn't find us .

After being shown some new scowls by a local contact we decided to descend new collapse in the woods . (Hole No 23)

I rec'd and with minimal digging entered a loose steeply descending passage . A couple of climbs and I was stopped by a pitch which didn't seem very deep .

I returned and the other two changed and sorted more tackle . We left our local contact convinced that he'd never see us alive again and descended the hole .

We 'd slung 100ft of ladder down and this got us down the next pitch , a beautiful calcite shaft of about 20ft. The way on through a draughting muddy tube led directly to the chambers below the blocked entrances of hole No 24 . These were large and well decorated , We found a route down leading via 15ft of ladder to a huge descending chamber which terminated about 200ft depth . No way to water level could be found .

SUNDAY 24th MARCH - WESTBURY BROOK

I didn't think support could get any worse after Buckshaft but I was proved wrong . Only Alan Garmen turned up , but we proceeded to have a most enjoyable trip .

After the heavy rain of the last few months the dangerous boulder slope in the entrance had collapsed leaving everything in an even more unstable state .

I decided to try my new (and untested) route down the three dimensional complex into the back of Echo Churn . In the process of not finding the way we descended a muddy rift to where all previous prints disappeared . We explored on through a series of rifts to a large terminal chamber . Climbing high into the roof by Alan and some devious prodding by me in the blocked rift yielded only a draughting 6 inch hole in suicidal digging conditions .

When we regained the main route we were fairly clapped and so we abandoned our rather muddy rope .

We climbed down into Echo Churn (Alan had not visited the mine before) to see the sights !!! Thought we might plod on to Boulder Chamber but on the muddy rope pitch we came to an abrupt halt . A new flow of liquid mud had flowed down the pitch rendering it impassable , certainly without tackle . This we traced to a mud floor above that had collapsed and washed down . Enough for us and we headed back for the surface .

If support for the Devils Chapel trip continues to deteriorate in the present way then I may find myself wandering alone and dazed in the grip of its labyrinths . Perhaps I won't go .

John Elliott
Meets Sec

PARK HILL STONE MINE Nr BATH

Heather and myself joined contingent of GSS on a visit to this working stone mine . Opened some 90 years the mine had reached very large proportions , including old workings some 83 acres had been cleared of stone .

Modern cutting methods were now employed , employing nine men at the working face some 80 ft wide . This compares with the old method of mining which employed 60 men at the working face . It was this comparison I was most interested in .

The manager took us to both old and new faces and demonstrated the various methods . From the old face stone was cut by hand .

The area of stone in this case was some 12 ft wide and the area above it had to be picked out by hand using a variety of picks of varying lengths up to 6ft long . This was two weeks work for one man . A modern machine , perhaps half a day .

This space then enabled a very long hand saw to be used to cut the stone into sections , three minutes a cut by machine . Wedging is then used to raise and sheer off the stone and either old or new cranes then pulled out the blocks weighing up to 5 tons . Someone had to then bet in the space left and chip out the remaining rock (apparently not a popular job) and saw across the next one for it to be pulled out .

All this on home made oil lamps compared to full electric lighting .

However the hazards of modern methods regarding working conditions have changed . Gone are the quite solitudes where one had chance to get away from a talkative missus . Now a huge compressor blasts away all day and anyone who works below continually slowly losses their hearing . (This of course has an obvious advantage when confronting the missus) Labour is apparently difficult to get .

A very interesting and informative trip .

John Elliott